

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

This study is concerned with the improvements of the students' written responses in Literature Circles program at a state high school of Demak. In this section the background of the study is elaborated. It also clarifies the purposes of the study. It is expected that the study will benefit to not only the teachers of English but also the theory of Literature Circles.

1.2. Background of the Study

This study was a program evaluation of Literature Circles in improving students' written responses at one state high school in Demak. In addition, it tried to figure out types of students' written responses produced in the Literature Circles program.

Literature circles provide rich and complex learning experiences to the students (Daniels, 2002). By doing Literature Circles students are expected to love reading and be critical readers. In addition, the activities in Literature Circles are intended to develop students' cognitive competences, affective competences and social skills (Daniels, 2002). Those developments are possible since Literature Circles incorporate student-centered learning, collaborative learning and reader response theories. The notion of the theories can be seen from the principles of conducting Literature Circles.

Practically, Daniels (2002) has mentioned eleven principles of Literature Circles implementation in a classroom. The principles can be categorized into three main points: the students' roles, the teachers' roles and the program procedures. Doing literature Circles the students independently choose a text, read, prepare the discussion topics and assess their own progress. The teacher serves as facilitator in the class. And the program procedures include the grouping techniques and routines which make the Literature Circles work.

Besides promoting the students' reading abilities, it is believed that the circles are potential in developing the other language skills such as the students' writing abilities (Daniels, 2002. See also Dowson & FitzGerald, 1999). Therefore, this study focused on the investigation of the improvement in the students' written response. In fact, the studies of Literature Circles in relation to the students' reading interests and abilities had been vastly conducted. Literature circles have been proven to be an effective way to increase students' interests in reading and texts comprehensions (Daniels, 2002. See also Dowson & FitzGerald, 1999; Hill, Noe & King, 2003; Hill, 2007; Kathrin & Nancy, 1999; King, 2001; Noe & Johnson, 1999; Victor & Mark, 2007; Faye, 2005). While the studies of Literature Circles in relation to the students' writing abilities are still rare, the study was expected to enrich and narrow the gap.

It is suggested that one of possible text forms, which can be used for the written works in the Literature Circles (Daniels, 2002), is reader response, proposed by Louise Rosenblatt (1995). Rosenblatt explores the idea that reading is a transactional process. According to her, the meaning of a text is not inherent in

the words of the author, but it comes as a result of the interaction of the reader with the text. The reader brings a set of previous experiences that influence understanding of the text (Rosenblatt, 1995). In Literature Circles, the focus is not on answering predetermined questions, but on the reader's own questions and thoughts about the texts. In this case, readers' responses may refer to their personal experiences or just bunches of their points of views analysis (Daniels, 2002). In relation to this, Daniels (2002) stated that Literature Circles integrate the notion of Bloom taxonomy in that analysis is a higher level of thinking than comprehension. Therefore Literature Circles' activities, responding to literatures, are aimed at developing the students' critical thinking capacities (short stories, novels or movies).

The study was conducted based on several underlying thoughts. Firstly, as a result of observation, the students of high schools in Demak commonly have difficulties in expressing their ideas. They also lack experiences in group process learning so that they need dynamic experience of learning. This is in accordance with Dawson & FitzGerald's (1999: 5) statement that Literature Circles are needed by the students with such problems.

Secondly, the teaching of English in high school includes the four major language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking (Tim, 2004). However, not all the teachers are aware of the objectives so that those skills are not included in their teaching. Whether or not the teachers purposively do so, it is assumed that high school teachers in Demak tend to stand in front of the class for the purpose of reading comprehension. Not knowing how to stimulate students' writing abilities

and inadequate believes towards of the students' competences seem to be the major consideration of their decision making. The condition shows that there is a need to suggest teachers with new horizon of teaching models which integrate the four language skills in a time. Therefore, the study offered practical guidance to the teachers in conducting Literature Circles. In fact, it can be integrated with English teaching in high school and prepared as reading activity before writing (Daniels, 2002). In this case, the students wrote their responses towards literary works.

Thirdly, the teaching of literature in English class gives holistic advantages. Some of the advantages can be that the Literatures provide authentic language uses of a foreign language. In addition, the content can motivate the students to read more when the topics relate to the students' concerns. Also, Literatures may enrich and promote the students' experiences as well as thinking abilities by connecting the story with the students' lives (Rosenblatt, 1995; Kroll, 2003). In order to know the feeling of sadness, the students do not need to experience the sadness by themselves. Learning from others experience can be done by reading literatures. The students' thinking abilities may also develop (Daniels, 2002; Rosenblatt, 1995) and it can be seen from their writings they produced (Probst, 1994), e.g. thinking aloud. Thus, it is obvious that literatures teaching give benefit to the students' life skills.

Lastly, UNESCO has pledged the target not only in rising the percentage of adult literacy up to 50%, but also in promoting learning and life skills for the adults by 2015 (UNESCO, 2010). In particularly of Demak, the focus of the

literacy development has been educating the illiterate people. That is training the old generations to read. Further task can be educating the adult generation who are already able to read and write in becoming critical members of the society. Moreover, the current curriculum also mentions that life skills development is one of the education objectives (Tim, 2004). Therefore schools and their programs are expected to promote the students' critical literacy and life skills. The study was conducted to support the movement.

From the description above, it shows that there is a need to gain the effectiveness of Literature circles, as well as exploration to what it contributes to students writing. And it is believed as essential to conduct a program evaluation.

1.3.Purpose of the Study

The study is aimed at gaining insight on Literature Circles program. This specifically is designed to:

1. Investigate the improvement of the students' written responses in English through Literature Circles.
2. Describe the types of written responses the students produced after doing Literature Circles.
3. Evaluate the students' perspectives towards Literature Circles program implementation in their classroom.

1.4.Research Question

The study is designed to address the following research questions:

- 1) Can Literature Circles program improve the students' written responses?

- 2) What types of written responses do the students produce after doing Literature Circles?
- 3) What are the students' opinions about the Literature Circles program in their EFL classroom?

1.5.The Scope of the Study

This study was conducted at one state high School in Demak, from 28 April to 28 May of 2010. The participants of this study were a group of XI-grade students. The exploration focused on Literature circles program implementation and students' writings, in this case, students' written responses.

1.6.Significance of the Study

The study reported here has sought to address problems of teaching English in a secondary context in Demak and to investigate the possibilities and values of Literature Circles implementation in a classroom. It was conducted to reveal the students' perceptions of the Literature Circles program, as well as the contributions of the Literature Circles program to the students' written response improvements.

The studies in relation to the students' reading abilities and interests have been vastly explored. However, there is still lack of research which seeks to understand the students' developments in their writing skills. This research enriches the theory and the practices of Literature Circles in English teaching for secondary contexts.

Lastly, the knowledge from the findings might provide the teachers with a practical source of information to innovate their teaching. The students'

perceptions of the Literature Circles and their suggestions for appropriate conduct of teaching it can benefit those who are willing to do Literature Circles in the classroom.

1.7. Definition of Terms

To avoid possible misunderstanding and misinterpretation in order to clarify variables involved in the study, the definitions are put forward:

Literature circles

Literature Circles are small, flexible discussion groups that support readers in thinking critically about texts. The participants read and then come together to talk about what they have read to extend and deepen each participant's understanding by sharing thoughts and ideas that might not have otherwise been explored (Daniels, 2002).

Role Sheets

The tools, adapted from standard collaborative learning practice, give the group member of Literature Circles temporarily jobs; Discussion Director / Discussion Director, Summarizer, Literary Luminary, Connector and Word Wizard, Illustrator, Scene Setter, Researcher (Daniels, 2002).

Reading / Response Logs

It is a space where students capture and save responses while they read (Daniels, 2002).

Reader Response Writing

In this study Reader Response writing is referred as written response. The written response is students' writing about the response of their personal experience or just a bunch of their points of view analysis to the text (Daniels, 2002).

Stance

The purpose or the focus of attention of the reader during the act of reading.

Aesthetic Stance

The focus of the reader is on "what is being created during the actual reading (Rosenblatt: 1995)

Efferent Stance

The focus of attention of the reader is on what is being created away at the end of the reading (Rosenblatt, 1995)

Transactional Theory

It is a reader response theory introduced by Louise Rosenblatt in which she stresses the unique relationship between the reader and the text – meaning making process.

A Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is the use of research procedures to systematically investigate the effectiveness of a program.

1.8. Organization of the paper

This paper is divided into six chapters. The first chapter contains an introduction of the study including the background of the study, research objectives, research questions, the purpose followed by the significance of the study and definition of term.

Chapter two consists of the review of related literature. It presents the detailed information of Literature circles teaching in high school, and the relevant theoretical foundation of reader response writing.

Chapter three, it deals with the methodology used in this study. It presents the details of the research design that incorporate qualitative methods. The participants selected methods, the inquiry methods, and data analysis methods are described to allow for possible replication of the study.

Chapter four outlines the program implementation. It describes the schedule and arrangement of the program in overall.

Chapter five presents the discussion of students' text analysis. Chapter Six gives a discussion on interview data. And Chapter seven proposes conclusion, limitation of the study and recommendation for further research arising from research finding and implication for future research.