Research Article

Developing English Majors' Comprehension of Literary Texts and Online Self-Regulated Language Learning Skills via Literature Circles 2.0

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To cope with the virtual learning mode that the COVID-19 pandemic has posed and driven by the desire to enhance students' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their online learning, the current study sought to digitalize the Literature Circles model and investigate its effect on developing English majors' comprehension skills of literary texts and online self-regulated language learning skills in an EFL context. Literature Circles 2.0 was adopted to teach the Literary Reading course that includes five short stories and a one-act play. To achieve the purpose of the study, two tools were implemented: Test of Literary Reading Comprehension Skills and Online Self-Regulated Language Learning Skills Questionnaire (Barnard et al., 2009). Sixty English majors, divided into two equivalent groups, participated in the study. The control group studied the course using the traditional teaching method, teacher-centered, which relies on lecturing, whereas the experimental group studied the same course using the Literature Circles 2.0, whereby students worked autonomously in an online virtual environment. The study results revealed the significant effect of Literature Circles 2.0 on developing the students' comprehension of literary texts as they were demonstrated to be involved personally and emotionally in the active learning process of the course. Meanwhile, the students of the experimental group displayed a significant mastery of the online self-regulated language learning skills. Based on the students' significant improvement in processing, comprehending, and extracting the meaning of literary texts, the study concluded that the Literature Circles 2.0 proved to be an effective approach to promoting students' comprehension of literary texts. Therefore, the study conclusively recommends the use of Literature Circles 2.0 in teaching such texts.

1. Introduction

Studying literary texts lies at the heart of English language programs, especially in the EFL context with a view to developing the students' overall language proficiency. Advocates of teaching literary texts as an integral and inevitable component of English language programs glorify its merits, particularly in helping students maintain the intended goals of such programs. The value of teaching literary texts is not limited to fostering students' linguistic knowledge but also exposing them to the target-language culture and providing ample space to master the skill of self-expression. Indeed, literary texts provide students with aesthetic models of learning the cultural dimensions and encourage them to use standard language effectively. Moreover, research has indicated that reading and responding to literary texts improve students' communication and achievement and equip them with the finest examples of English usage [1].

Van [2] called for teaching literary texts intensively in EFL classrooms as they create a meaningful context for language use and sustain students' acquisition of a rich repertoire of vocabulary. In addition, it advocates the students' communicative competence. Moreover, Dewi and Theresia [3] emphasized the value of teaching literary texts

for several reasons: (1) encouraging students to reflect on their identities and interact not only with their peers but also with story characters, (2) developing students' critical thinking as they have the chance to evaluate the ideas and concepts presented in text, and (3) using literature as a means to develop students' language skills.

Despite the abovementioned merits of studying literary texts, the current status quo denotes that EFL students face tremendous challenges in studying the assigned literary texts. Moreover, most literary texts are seen by a large number of students as a vague and erudite domain of the English language. Research indicated several reasons for the difficulty with studying literary texts. First, the cultural aspect of literary works is the main source of difficulty with its reference to social values, the type of relationships that exists among people, religious beliefs, and ideologies with which EFL students are not acquainted. Second, the historical background of the literary texts represents another difficulty as EFL students are not always fully aware of such a background. Third, students' inadequate linguistic ability hinders them from achieving genuine comprehension of literature. Added to the previous difficulties is the lack of consensus regarding how to teach EFL students literary texts.

A major criticism of the traditional approach to teaching literary texts is its being a teacher-centered approach that deprives students of perceptible and significant interaction and contribution. According to this prevailing teaching approach, most of the work is done by the teacher, while students are passive recipients of knowledge. Also, it limits students' discussion, development of high-order thinking processes, and appreciation of literary texts [4]. On the contrary, student-centered literature instruction approaches have recently gained remarkable recognition as they enable students to explore the different interpretations of literary texts and to activate critical, creative, and imaginative thinking [5]. In response to such criticism, Literature Circles emerge as a promising model for teaching literary texts. It is not only a student-centered model but also based on the concept of cooperative learning.

In face-to-face Literature Circles, students form small groups to discuss a text. A Literature Circle group comprises four to six students with each member assigned a role of a moderator, a presenter, or a discussion director. This ensures balanced participation and equal opportunities for all to share ideas and express interpretations of texts and respond to the ideas of other members of the group. Due to the proactive and authentic nature of Literature Circles, along with a nonthreatening environment, unmotivated and passive students are transformed into ones who are able to form discussion groups and take the initiative in reading varied texts. They become more self-confident and more capable of evaluating their progress in attaining the learning outcomes. Literature Circles sessions have been considered a valuable tool in reducing students' anxiety and creating a more natural and smoother learning process. With the increased use of online instruction mode, Literature Circles 2.0 came into existence as a digital version where discussion sessions are conducted online.

Another aspect of the present study is related to the adoption of an online mode of instruction which has created a new learning environment where barriers of time, place, and physical materials are eliminated. In this environment, students are given the chance to control the learning process. To a great extent, they decide what, when, and how to study. It should be clear that the online learning mode requires autonomy on the part of students, which would in turn entail the development of self-regulation. Consequently, students' self-regulation has become a significant variable and a prerequisite for success in such a prominent learning environment. Research has shown the positive impact of self-regulation on students' academic performance in traditional face-to-face classes [6]. According to Little [7], students who possess self-regulatory learning skills are expected to assume more responsibility for their learning, participate actively in learning tasks, monitor and assess their own progress, and eventually achieve the learning outcomes successfully. Also, Vu [8] considers self-regulated learning skills a ubiquitous part of teaching literature as students are supposed to be cognitively and emotionally involved in constructing the meaning of literary works. Similarly, self-regulation in an online environment is expected to play a vital role in the learning process. Unexpectedly, developing online self-regulatory learning skills has not received adequate attention. This reveals the necessity to explore a new methodology that would enable teachers to teach literary texts appropriately in order to achieve the intended objectives and foster students' online self-regulated language learning skills at the same time.

1.1. Problem of the Study. It has been observed that a large number of English majors at Prince Sattam bin Abdul Aziz University consider studying literary texts a real burden beyond their capabilities as they get low scores in exams. It would not be an exaggeration to say that these students have not been given the opportunity to develop skills that would enable them to study literary texts successfully and independently. Based on analyzing the current teaching practices and interviewing both students and instructors, a number of remarks have been elicited: (1) insufficient class time, spent mainly in explaining the historical background of the literary work and providing a literal explanation of each sentence, forces teachers to neglect some important aspects of literary analysis and to adhere to one single interpretation of literary works without giving the students any opportunity to express their own thoughts, (2) discussing various ideas and answering students' inquiries are seen as luxury that cannot be afforded, (3) students are seen as passive recipients of information who blindly accept and memorize the teacher's sole interpretation without exerting efforts to learn independently, (4) information-based approach is widely adopted by instructors who do not devise sufficient hands-on learning activities, and eventually, (5) students, adopting online learning mode, are unable to set learning objectives, monitor their progress, and evaluate their understanding. They cannot identify what information they seek, nor are they able to obtain information effectively or act

autonomously. Therefore, there is an urgent need to adopt a different teaching approach that could address these issues of enhancing comprehension, increasing motivation level, and developing online self-regulated language learning skills among students. LCs 2.0 model was chosen to fill this gap.

2. Significance of the Study

The present study contributes to the existing knowledge and the development of teaching literary texts practices in an EFL context as it aims to

(1) Present a newly established method of literature instruction that may cope with the recent challenging learning modes in the educational environment.

(2) Increase university instructors' understanding of the significance and potentialities of online self-regulated language learning skills, which have been neglected in the Saudi EFL context.

(3) Enable students to become independent learners who can set their learning objectives, monitor their progress, and evaluate their performance.

(4) Change the students' negative attitude towards the study of literary texts.

3. Statement of the Problem

English majors at Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University suffer from poor literary reading comprehension skills. Meanwhile, they display a low level of online self-regulated language learning skills.

4. Questions of the Study

The present study sought to answer the following two questions:

(1) What is the effect of using Literature Circles 2.0 on developing English majors' comprehension of literary texts?

(2) What is the effect of using Literature Circles 2.0 on developing English majors' online self-regulated language learning skills?

5. Hypotheses of the Study

The study sought to verify the following two hypotheses:

(1) There would be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in the posttest of reading comprehension of literary texts in favor of the experimental group.

(2) There would be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in the postapplication of students' online self-regulated learning skills questionnaire in favor of the experimental group.

6. Research Objectives

The current study aimed to

(1) Investigate the effect of using Literature Circles 2.0 on developing English majors' comprehension of literary texts.

(2) Investigate the effect of using Literature Circles 2.0 on developing English majors' online self-regulated language learning skills.

(3) Explore the students' attitudes towards the integration of technology and online resources in literature classes.

7. Review of Literature

7.1. Literature Circles 2.0. Literature Circles model, whether traditional or online, enjoys several interactive features and receives common acceptance among reading instructors. Having various reading activities such as analyzing a literary text, identifying new vocabulary, drawing conclusions, raising critical questions, presenting a summary, relating the text to readers' real-life experiences, and practicing independent reading enable students to learn within a collaborative social atmosphere and help them implement successful cognitive reading comprehension strategies as well [9]. Also, the model is based on reader-response theory that gives students ample opportunities to express opinions, make inferences, raise questions, make personal connections to the text, expand concepts, and summarize and synthesize the text. Adherence to this theory motivates independent reading, collaboration among group members, and personal responses in a vocabulary-rich environment.

Developing learners' autonomy as a result of personal involvement represents an essential feature of the Literature Circles model, whether in a face-to-face or online environment. In this regard, research has indicated that learners, as meaning-makers, can be classified into two categories: efferent and aesthetic [4]. Traditional teaching approaches promote the efferent stance where students are required to gather and retain information presented in literary texts. Consequently, literature teaching aims at enabling students to construct structured knowledge. Arguably, teaching literature should not be confined to efferent stance but also embrace the aesthetic stance where students are encouraged to reflect and incorporate their emotions, perceptions, and attitudes about literature and life as well. Literature Circles offer students the chance to attain the two stances at the same time. Being free to explore the different interpretations of literary texts, manage the learning process, and participate actively in meaningful discussions, students are intrinsically motivated to read, process, and comprehend.

Collaboration is another crucial social aspect of Literature Circles model. Arguably, students' involvement in group discussions positively affects their social development as individuals who are able to establish interpersonal relationships with classmates [10]. Furthermore, students are given the chance to assume the role of the teacher. They lead the discussions and exchange information, opinions, ideas,

and feelings about the texts. In this way, they create a community of learners who collaborate to maintain problem-solving skills, accept disagreement, and socialize in friendly discourse. In this regard, Hadjioannou [11] exaggerated the effect of such social interactive discussions on the students who grow as mature citizens willing to participate in all social and political interests of their community.

Another distinct feature of Literature Circles is the social interaction that promotes students' reflective practices and, in turn, transfers them from personal to critical stance. According to Masry and Alzaanin [12], students' reflections on their social experiences help them construct identity positively and encourage cooperation. They become independent learners who are responsible for managing group discussions, raising questions, giving appropriate feedback, and evaluating their progress through reflection and reasoning. This feature distinguishes LCs compared to traditional teaching models where students are passive receptive of knowledge with no real chance to express personal involvement and critical reflections on literary texts.

Scaffolding, helping students in their learning endeavor to achieve the intended learning outcomes, is another attribute that distinguishes the Literature Circles model. In this context, students' discussions, responses, peer interaction, and the use of online resources scaffold the students to adopt positive attitudes towards reading, overcome the reading difficulties and challenges, increase their interest, and finally better comprehend texts [13]. Additionally, creating a safe environment, apart from the teacher's constant control, supports the students' self-confidence and their willingness to take the initiative to interact fearlessly in their reading classes.

In the present study, Literature Circles 2.0 model is defined as a virtual or online social activity where students form small groups to discuss a literary text in order to improve their overall reading comprehension. It shares the same features of the traditional Literature Circles. Moreover, it has some distinctive features because of its digital nature. Firstly, students' use of multimodal responses: unlike the traditional circles where students depend solely on oral response, students in Literature Circles 2.0 class can respond in written or oral formats. They can write comments or postpictures, links, and videos. Secondly, maximizing the benefits of both synchronous and asynchronous discussions: due to the affordances of the second generation of technology, students can discuss and interact with their peers at their own convenience [14]. Students' use of synchronous discussions has several benefits such as instant feedback and excitement, whereas asynchronous discussions give students an ample chance to think and organize their thoughts and comments. These two different types of discussion were utilized in Literature Circles 2.0. Thirdly, the Literature Circles 2.0 model enables students to overcome the space and time barriers. Students are able to negotiate, reflect, and collaborate virtually apart from the time restrictions of the traditional class. Eventually, the automatic recording of students' discussions: nowadays, most applications offer this feature that enables students to reconsider the discussions at any time for more deep analysis.

Literature Circles 2.0 model is based on two strong theories in education. First, the model is an embodiment of John Dewey's philosophy that calls for empowering students to learn, self-regulate their behavior, take responsibility for their own learning, learn by doing, and consider learning as a social experience. Dewey emphasized the importance of creating a learning community where teachers facilitate, not control, the learning process, and students are given the chance to progress on their own pace. Second, the model is significantly influenced by Rosenblatt's transactional theory that considers reading a transaction between the reader and the text. It is a process where the reader evokes his/her experiences to the text and, in turn, the text provides a structure to lead the reader. Rosenblatt was a strong supporter of Dewey's pragmatist epistemological propositions [15]. She believed that the text has no meaning until the reader gives his/her own interpretation. Earlier educators believed that reading and meaning-making process depend solely on either the text or the reader. Thus, teaching literary texts focuses on analyzing the author's intention and the explicit meaning of the text under a close guidance and direction of the instructors. As a result, the student's role was completely ignored. However, a gradual acceptance of the transactional theory has taken place among educators who realized the importance of students' role in the reading process and gave it an equal significant status as the text.

Several studies have investigated the effect of the model on students' reading comprehension. In 2008, Melissa Bernier reported the positive effect of Literature Circles on students' ability to go beyond the text and create countless chances for reaching a real understanding. In this regard, Avci & Yuksel [16] indicated a significant improvement in fourth-grade students' reading comprehension as a result of implementing the traditional Literature Circles. In addition, students' participation in Literature Circles enables them to achieve a deep comprehension that, in turn, enables them to discuss the various aspects of the text with their classmates. Similarly, Chen [17] conducted a similar study to investigate the effectiveness of Literature Circles in developing the general reading skills of thirty-eight students. Chen assured the positive impact of Literature Circles model in enabling students to set their learning goals, use varied strategies, and evaluate their comprehension. In these discussions, students are provided with an ample opportunity to take part in real-life discussions that succeeded eventually in increasing students' comprehension.

Literature Circles were used in teaching the famous play Hamlet by William Shakespeare to sixty-two first-year ESL students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia [18]. Analyzing the students' Literature Circles discussions thematically, role sheets, and students' responses to a survey revealed the students' positive perceptions of Literature Circles. In addition, they were intensively involved in all aspects of the learning process. Also, results indicated a significant improvement in students' academic achievement. Recently, Mu-Hsuan [19] conducted a study to investigate the effect of using LCs on developing reading strategies of sixty EFL university students in Taiwan. To achieve the objective of the study, a questionnaire and reading comprehension tests

were conducted. Results revealed that the experimental group students outperformed the control group. The use of Literature Circles led to a significant improvement in students' use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. In turn, students' reading comprehension was significantly improved as indicated in the results of reading comprehension tests. In conclusion, it is obvious that previous studies have not investigated the use of Literature Circles 2.0 in developing literary reading comprehension skills. Therefore, the current study is urgently needed.

7.2. Self-Regulated Language Learning. Research has indicated that self-regulated learning refers to those active and voluntary behavior carried by students to attain the learning outcomes. Individuals who are self-regulated in their learning are expected to employ varied skills and strategies such as goal setting, time management, task strategies, and so on. In this regard, research has indicated that self-regulation is not an inherent trait but a learned skill. It can be acquired and reinforced through the adoption of teaching models that focus on practicing self-regulation strategies in a supportive learning environment. According to Pintrich [20], self-regulation refers to students' ability to identify learning goals and to control varied learning activities in their endeavor to regulate their cognition, motivation, and behavior.

Usher and Schunk [21] defined self-regulation as the systematic process of combining student's thoughts, feelings, and conscious behavior to accomplish the assigned learning tasks. According to the social cognitive perspective, self-regulation is the outcome of interaction among three factors: learner's beliefs, autonomous behavior, and the surrounding learning environment. Moreover, self-regulation encompasses three dimensions: self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-reaction. As self-regulated learning is viewed as a reflection of students' will and skill, it is considered a valid means not only of justifying the students' achievement differences but also of improving their overall achievement [22]. Therefore, the current study assumes a positive relationship between students' achievement and their self-regulated learning skills.

Several approaches and models have been proposed to establish a theoretical basis for the development of self-regulated learning skills and strategies. For example, Zimmerman's model (see Figure 1) presents three stages that correspond to the self-regulated learning skills and strategies (1998). Firstly, the *forethought* stage takes place prior to the learning process and refers to skills and strategies that are related to goal setting, attribution, and internal motivation to proceed in the learning process. The first two skills of self-regulated learning, goal setting and environment structuring, are represented in this stage. Secondly, the *performance control* stage refers to the skills and strategies utilized by students during the learning process. Thus, the self-regulated learning skills of time management, task strategies, and help-seeking are associated with this stage. Finally, students are expected to reflect on their progress and evaluate their performance and attainment of the learning outcomes in the

reflection stage. In this final stage, students run comparisons with their peers and take decisions regarding the implementation of skills and strategies used in the first two stages. Self-evaluation, the last self-regulated learning skill, is associated with the last stage.

Another comprehensive model was presented by Pintrich [20] to offer an intersecting oversight on self-regulated learning. Pintrich's model includes four stages: (1) planning and goal setting, (2) self-monitoring, (3) controlling, and (4) reflecting. An important component, context, was added to the model to enable both teachers and researchers to define and observe self-regulation within technology-enhanced learning environments [24]. Both social and environmental contexts are incorporated. The remaining components of the interactive model are cognition that refers to learning processes such as gathering information and problem-solving, motivation that refers to the student's internal feeling of confidence in task accomplishment, and eventually behavior that refers to the dimensions that students consider in selecting the proper strategies that aim to optimize learning. These components help students go through the overlapping stages and accordingly to carry out a set of learning tasks. Despite the slightly different terms used to describe the phases and strategies incorporated in self-regulated learning, there is a consensus, as indicated by relevant literature, on the core components and processes of self-regulated learning. This in turn paves the way for better understanding of self-regulated learning interventions.

The significance of self-regulation learning skills has been emphasized as a result of adopting student-centered online learning environments. Self-regulation learning skills have become a major prerequisite for success in online courses. According to Kizilcec et al. [25], achieving students' academic and personal objectives in online courses depends on their ability to self-regulate the learning process. Goal setting and strategic planning are increasingly considered significant indicators of students' ability to attain their goals. In this regard, Littlejohn et al. [26] indicated some successful online practices used by students with high self-regulated learning skills: setting goals for learning, making wise choices that suit their learning needs, active discussion of all details, effective use of time-management skills, watching video lectures several times, accurate adherence to the dates of submitting home assignments and tests, displaying deep motivation to attain all objectives successfully, and finally evaluating their learning experience and relating it to their personal needs.

Online learning environment has emphasized the active and essential role of students in the learning process. Students are responsible for formulating learning objectives, employing adequate strategies to carry out learning tasks, and reflecting on their progress. To address such responsibilities, students should possess self-regulated learning skills that enable them not only to access in-depth knowledge but also to employ behavioral skills, motivation, and self-reflection needed to effectively gain that knowledge. In addition, students' use of self-regulated learning skills improves their perceptions of interaction and cooperation practices within online courses [27].
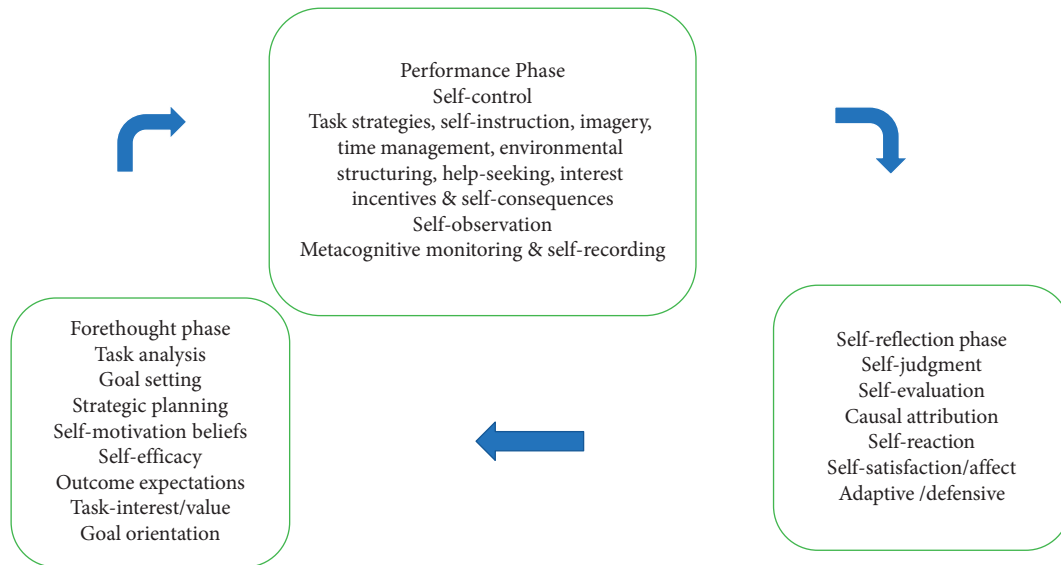
FIGURE 1: Phases and processes of self-regulation according to Zimmerman and Moylan [23].

The last two decades have witnessed a growing interest in investigating students' use of online self-regulated skills. For instance, Barnard-Brak et al. [28] conducted a study to investigate students' profiles or types of self-regulated learning in the online learning environment. They used two different samples of university students who were enrolled in online degree programs. To achieve the purpose of the study, the OLSQ was administered to 516 students to measure their performance in the six subscales. Results assured the positive significant correlation between OSRS and academic achievement. Students who possess higher self-regulated learning skills achieve better academic achievement. The study called for conducting more studies to investigate such a relationship in different domains and learning environment as self-regulated learning is significantly context-dependent. On the contrary, the results of Tran and Phan Tran's study (2021) claimed that the academic achievement does influence the use of self-regulated learning skills.

In the EFL context, Sahin-Kizil and Savran [29] investigated university students' use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) tools to self-regulate their language learning efforts beyond the formal boundaries of classrooms. Results, collected through a questionnaire, indicated the students' active engagement in the utilization of ICT tools in enhancing their self-regulated language learning skills. The current study shares two points in general with Sahin-Kizil and Savran's study: firstly, the use of questionnaire in collecting data; secondly, the development of students' SRL skills as an outcome of the utilization of a digital teaching method. In the same vein, Tran and Phan Tran [30] investigated Vietnamese high school students' use of self-regulated learning skills for project-based learning. Both quantitative and qualitative data indicated the significant role of students' utilization of self-regulated learning skills in attaining the learning outcomes of the learning process.

8. Research Methodology

8.1. Method. The quasiexperimental design will be adopted in the proposed study. Sixty students from the Dept. of English, College of Science & Humanities, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, were randomly chosen and divided into two equivalent groups. The first one, the control group, studied the Literary Reading course according to the traditional method, whereas the second one, the experimental group, studied the same course using the Literature Circles 2.0.

8.2. Tools of the Study

8.2.1. Test of Literary Reading Comprehension Skills. Based on the objectives of the course and a review of previous studies, a list of literary reading comprehension skills was prepared and submitted to jury members to decide its suitability for the 1st year students. The final version of the list included fifteen skills. Then, a test was prepared to assess students' literary reading comprehension skills. The test score was out of 100 points. It includes three literary texts followed by a number of questions. The test was submitted to the jury members to decide its validity. Feedback covered several points such as the consistency of the questions with the aim of the test, the appropriateness of test items to measure the target comprehension skills, and the suitability of the linguistic level of the literary reading texts to the population of the study. The jury members reported the validity of the test to measure the intended literary reading comprehension skills. To estimate the reliability and the optimal time of the test, a pilot study was conducted on a sample of forty students who represented the target population. They were excluded from the sample of the study. Test-retest method and Pearson product moment correlation formula were used to estimate the coefficient of stability ($r = .79$) of the test. This

indicates that the test is reliable. Moreover, two hours was found to be the optimal test time.

8.2.2. Online Self-Regulated Language Learning Skills Questionnaire (OSLQ).

In the present study, the OSLQ was validated and administered to assess the students' use of online self-regulated learning skills. The OSLQ was developed by Barnard et al. [31]. The first draft, which included eighty-six items, was validated using internal consistency and confirmatory factor analysis. Results indicated an adequate internal consistency of scores with $\alpha = .90$, which is a highly acceptable level of reliability in basic social science studies. The final version of the questionnaire includes twenty-four statements. Recently, the OSLQ has become the most used tool to assess students' self-regulated learning skills in online instruction. It was utilized in both longitudinal [32] and cross-sectional [33] studies. In addition, it was used in assessing students' self-regulated learning skills in all courses, including language courses. The OSLQ covers six main domains: goal setting, environment structuring, task strategies, time management, help-seeking, and self-evaluation. Students' responses receive values ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Students' higher scores on this scale denote better mastery of online self-regulated learning skills. To assess the internal consistency of each domain or subscale, the researcher administered Cronbach alpha on the data collected from the pilot study. The values of Cronbach alpha ranged from 0.82 to 0.94 demonstrating high reliability on the subscale level (Table 1). To avoid any misinterpretations of the items, an Arabic version of the questionnaire was provided. Two professional translators were requested to review the questionnaire using back-translation procedures to guarantee clarity and accuracy.

8.2.3. Teacher's Guide.

It was designed to provide the instructor with adequate information about the concept and fundamental features of the model, the expected practical procedures in Literature Circles 2.0 classes, activities and tasks, objectives of the course, various roles assigned to students, introduction to the literary reading texts, evaluation techniques, and forms that would reveal the extent of the students' literary reading comprehension skills improvement as a result of adopting the model.

8.3. Procedures of the Study.

Selecting the sample of the study was the first step. Sixty students (60) were selected based on purposive sampling among a population of 120 first-year English majors. The sample was a homogenous group with similar age, linguistic competence, educational level, and cultural background. They registered for an Intensive Literary Reading course that was conducted online during the first semester of the academic year 2021-2022.

To guarantee a smooth implementation of the teaching model and provide proper guidance, the researcher illustrated what is expected from the students before they start this social experience of communication and devised a systematic implantation plan where students were fully

TABLE 1: Internal consistencies for each subscale: students' attitude questionnaire.

Subscale	α
Environment structuring	94
Goal setting	87
Time management	84
Help-seeking	82
Task strategies	85
Self-evaluation	90

aware of the procedures and the assigned role of every participant. Accordingly, the students were introduced to the Literature Circles 2.0 concept, roles, structure, and strategies at the beginning of the experiment. To foster students' understanding of the model, some online Literature Circles discussions were displayed, and students were given the chance to raise questions and comments. Meanwhile, the instructor was keen to provide the students with an adequate response. Then, the students were divided into groups of six students. Each student has a specific role. Students were encouraged to rotate or exchange roles in the discussions. Every student had the chance to act the different roles. Changing students' roles were conducted to maximize the students' learning experience in exploring meaning. Also, they were asked to complete the role sheets prepared by the researcher to guide them in reading and planning the online Literature Circles.

Implementing Literature Circles 2.0 went through four stages. The first stage was the preparation stage, where the discussion groups were formed, and literary texts were chosen, whether by the teacher or students. Then, the teacher explained the reading tasks and assigned a role to each student. The second stage was the individual stage, where students were given enough time to read, comprehend the literary text, and carry out the assigned reading task. For example, the *graphic designer*, formerly known as the illustrator in traditional Literature Circles, used the Internet resources to create graphics or nonlinguistic interpretations to connect the events of the plot and the characters of the story. The third stage was a discussion where students spent most of the lecture time sharing their feelings and ideas about the text. The *bias detective*, questioner, played a vital role in the stage as he raises several questions about the central theme, the author's purpose, tone, and style. All students were given an equal chance to participate in the discussion. In the last stage, students were encouraged to share their presentations with their partners and exchange feedback.

It is worth mentioning that the instructor uploaded and shared all the teaching material such as literary texts, notes, and links to instructional resources. The students participated in online discussions through the Learning Management System, Black Board, provided by the university. Fortunately, all students' online Literature Circles discussions were recorded automatically. This enabled the researcher to investigate the students' participation and involvement. In this regard, the instructor carried out the facilitator's role, not a participant in any group, who was in charge of monitoring students' progress.

Monitoring students' progress and addressing any difficulty were considered seriously. Therefore, a questionnaire was prepared and conducted after four weeks. It included two sections. The first section was devoted to the challenges that may encounter the students in carrying out the Literature Circles 2.0 sessions. The following table (Table 2) illustrates the students' responses.

Responses revealed that 10% of the students still face a problem in understanding their roles. In response to this problem, a teaching session, focusing on modeling the different roles associated with Literature Circles 2.0, was conducted. By the end of the session, students displayed a real understanding of their roles. Moreover, two students (6.4%) reported a difficulty in dealing with the Learning Management System. They were advised to attend an online session, presented by IT Deanship, that explains in detail all the options and potentialities of the system.

The second section of the questionnaire tackled the students' self-evaluation of their performance and contribution to Literature Circles 2.0 sessions. This section included seven statements that cover the most important aspects of the online discussions. Students' responses are displayed in the following table (Table 3).

Students' responses revealed their positive perceptions of their performance and significant participation in the discussions. Moreover, the students displayed self-confidence in speaking and answering all the questions. Students' responses revealed the cooperative and supportive learning environment, which may lead to significant effects by the end of the experiment.

The instructor was keen to make all reading/discussion sessions interactive and effective in making use of the potentialities of the Learning Management System. Based on close observation of classroom environment and interaction, it was claimed that the successful incorporation of technology in LCs practices and activities, particularly in reading the literary texts, developed more confidence in students and increased their motivation level and learning self-regulatory skills as well. Also, it was observed that most of the students were very active participants. However, few students were reluctant to post a comment or reply to a question. To address this problem, the instructor decided to use some strategies to motivate those students. Eventually, students read enthusiastically the literary texts and attempted to answer all the questions. They were encouraged to express their understanding in English, but sometimes they could use their mother tongue to convey the real meaning. A few words were also translated into Arabic to scaffold in understanding of the meaning of some abstract words.

At the end of the course, the Literary Reading Comprehension Skills Test and the Online Self-Regulated Language Learning Questionnaire were conducted to assess the effects of using the Literature Circles 2.0 teaching model.

9. Results and Discussion

9.1. Testing the First Hypothesis. The first hypothesis of the study predicted statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the postapplication of the Literary Reading Comprehension Skills Test in favor of the experimental group. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the postapplication of the test. The results, displayed in Table 4, showed statistically significant differences in the scores for the experimental group ($M = 73.87$, SD = 12.7) and the control group ($M = 62.33$, SD = 13.97); $t(58) = 3.35$, $p = 0.01$ in favor of the experimental group. These findings affirmed the first hypothesis and indicated that the superiority of the experimental group over the control group is attributed to the positive effect of using Literature Circles 2.0.

To achieve a better understanding of the students' performance, the researcher decided to investigate the students' perceptions about the use of Literature Circles 2.0 in studying literary texts. To achieve this objective, a questionnaire was constructed and conducted on the experimental group students by the end of the semester. The questionnaire was submitted to a panel of specialists to decide its validity. It included six statements (Table 5). Students were requested to respond to each statement by selecting one option on a three-point Likert scale: agree, neutral, or disagree.

It was crystal clear that Literature Circles 2.0 has helped the students better analyze and comprehend literary texts. Students developed their literary reading comprehension skills and became able to identify the genre of the text, the sequence of events, the characters, the author's tone, facts and opinions, the author's purpose, and the meaning of new words from context. In addition, students were able to appreciate the different points of view, determine setting, evaluate arguments and identify bias, compare and contrast characters, understand figurative language, and make inferences based on available information.

Having been empirically validated, the Literature Circles 2.0 model proves to be effective in creating a rich and motivational virtual learning environment which cannot be achieved in traditional learning. Apparently, students were not only able to read and learn literary texts at their own pace but also able to participate in meaningful discussions where they collaborate to construct meaning and to present various interpretations. The model enabled the students to overcome the boundaries of time and place. Moreover, they were free to share ideas and practice different ways of thinking. Reading a literary text is seen as a social activity where students negotiate their understanding in a fearless context.

9.2. Testing the Second Hypothesis. The second hypothesis of the study predicted statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the postapplication of the OSLQ in favor of the experimental group. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the postapplication of the questionnaire. The results, displayed in Table 6, showed statistically significant differences in the scores for the experimental group ($M = 88.56$, SD = 0.696) and the control

TABLE 2: Students' responses to the difficulties encountered in applying Literature Circles 2.0.

Challenge/difficulty	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
1. Students' roles in Literature Circles 2.0 are confusing	10	0	90
2. Lack or poor technological skills	3.2	0	96.8
3. Insufficient time to carry out all the assigned tasks	0	0	100
4. Poor Internet connection	3.2	0	96.8
5. Inadequate supplementary learning materials	3.2	0	96.8
6. Inability to achieve learning objectives	0	0	100

TABLE 3: Students' self-evaluation of their performance and contribution in Literature Circles 2.0 sessions.

Item	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
1. I share my ideas successfully with my peers	96.8	0	3.2
2. I speak clearly and confidently	96.8	0	3.2
3. I answer all the questions	100	0	0
4. I participate actively in the discussions	96.8	0	3.2
5. I justify my opinions and interpretations	96.8	0	3.2
6. I enjoy listening to my peers	100	0	0
7. I encourage my classmates to participate in the discussions	100	0	0

TABLE 4: Independent-samples t-test results for the differences in the mean scores between the control group.

Group	N	Mean	Std. deviation	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control	30	62.33	13.971	3.356	58	0.01*
Experimental	30	73.87	12.613			

Note. *$P < 0.01$ and the experimental group on the postapplication of the Literary Reading Comprehension Skills Test.

TABLE 5: Frequencies and percentages of students' responses to the use of Literature Circles 2.0 in studying literary texts.

	Statement	Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Participating in online Literature Circle discussions improved my literary reading comprehension.	(28)	93.3	(1)	3.3	(1)	3.3
2	Assuming different roles in online Literature Circles discussions developed my ability to express my feelings and ideas more easily and confidently.	(27)	90	(2)	6.6	(1)	3.3
3	I think that Literature Circles provide an authentic, cooperative, and nonthreatening environment for reading and comprehending literary texts.	(28)	93.3	(2)	6.6	(0)	0
4	Literature Circles motivated me to participate in the discussions and to read the literary texts.	(28)	93.3	(1)	3.3	(1)	3.3
5	I enjoy studying literary texts using Literature Circles model.	(27)	90	(1)	3.3	(2)	6.6
6	Literature Circles are much better than the traditional teaching approach.	(28)	93.3	(1)	3.3	(1)	3.3

group ($M = 52.81$, SD = 0.789); t (58) = 6.84, and $p = 0.01$ in favor of the experimental group. These findings affirmed the second hypothesis and indicated that the superiority of the experimental group over the control group is attributed to the positive effect of using Literature Circles 2.0.

Based on the results displayed in Table 7, the experimental group students had a higher mean in all six subscales of OSLQ: goal setting, environmental structuring, task strategies, time management, help-seeking, and self-evaluation. Among the six domains of OSLQ, the students showed the greatest improvement in carrying out the help-seeking strategies (M difference = 6.39) and the least improvement in learner's self-evaluation (M difference = 5.61). All in all, the overall results indicated that using Literature Circles 2.0 led to a significant improvement in all subscales of OSLQ.

TABLE 6: Independent-samples t-test results for the differences in the mean scores between the control group and the experimental group on the postapplication of OSLQ.

Group	N	Mean	Std. deviation	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control	30	52.81	0.789	6.84	58	0.01
Experimental	30	88.56	0.696			

Students' significant development of self-regulated language learning strategies may be due to the tasks and practices of the Literature Circles 2.0 model. For example, assigning a specific role for each student in the group and reading a literary text at a specific time, usually before the start of the lesson, allowed the students to set realistic and achievable goals. In addition, students are required to read,

TABLE 7: Independent-samples *t*-test results for the differences in the mean scores between the control group and the experimental group on the postapplication of OSLQ in terms of its six subscales.

Subscales of OSLQ	Item number in the OSLQ	Control group		Experimental group			
		M	SD	M	SD	t	p
Goal setting	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	8.32	0.786	14.60	0.563	4.21	0.01*
Environmental structuring	6, 7, 8, 9	8.93	0.821	14.78	0.598	4.41	0.01*
Task strategies	10, 11, 12, 13	9.22	0.854	15.32	0.651	5.22	0.01*
Time management	14, 15, 16	7.43	0.745	12.95	0.822	3.64	0.01*
Help-seeking	17, 18, 19, 20	9.50	0.786	15.89	0.698	5.74	0.01*
Self-evaluation	21, 22, 23, 24	9.41	0.743	15.02	0.844	5.26	0.01*

Note. $^*p < 0.01$.

study, and analyze the literary texts according to a clear schedule. This should take place in a quiet and comfortable place to avoid distractions. In doing this, students learn how to cope with the environmental structuring and to stick to time boundaries. Students' practice of summarizing by the end of each lesson is believed to help them evaluate their progress and to reflect on their achievement of the learning goals.

10. Discussion

Analyzing the students' online Literature Circles discussions revealed a real improvement in the students' autonomy. The students have become more independent readers who successfully expanded their meaning-making capabilities. This observation is consistent with the claim that using online Literature Circles motivates students to control their learning [34]. It is believed that students' group reading and discussions represent a more enjoyable learning experience compared to traditional individual reading, where many students are reluctant to participate. Moreover, the students were wholly engaged in social interactions as they had to raise questions, exchange comments, think and respond carefully, and consider the various perspectives about the literary texts.

The significant effect of online Literature Circles on developing the students' literary reading comprehension skills may be due to the social learning atmosphere where the students had the chance to develop their interpersonal communication skills and to participate actively in hands-on activities that represented a unique visible learning experience. In other words, Literature Circles 2.0 provided the students with an ample opportunity to discuss in depth the literary texts, voice their opinions confidently, learn from each other, and progress at their own pace by assuming the different roles in a more comfortable manner.

Unlike traditional reading class where students are passive and face time-limit, students, in online LCs, are given more time to achieve a real reading comprehension, craft their questions, participate in class discussion, respond to peers, and collaborate actively. This creates an engaged reading process and multimodal presentations. Moreover, assuming various roles, creating positive group dynamics, and scaffolding students in their efforts to achieve comprehension provided EFL students with a solid structured framework to appreciate literary texts from various perspectives. In LCs 2.0 sessions, reading became an active and

autonomous process where students are entirely involved in meaning-negotiation with peers.

Being a student-centered model may justify its positive effect on developing the students' reading comprehension skills of literary texts and online self-regulated language learning skills. In a typical Literature Circles 2.0 class, students are encouraged to devise a plan to carry out the assigned reading tasks; they form groups according to their preferences; they lead the discussions with the least interference from the instructor who assumes the role of moderator; they use time-management strategies to allocate a particular time to complete a given task within a timeframe; they implement, consciously or unconsciously, help-seeking strategies to identify the meaning of new vocabulary; they self-evaluate their learning progress via a summary that is presented by the end of the class; and eventually, they reflect on their achievement of the learning goals. As a result, the students succeed in providing open and natural discussions where individual perspectives are presented, personal relationships are established, social consciousness is raised, sense of responsibility is grown, and peer interaction is significantly maintained.

The significant development of self-regulated language learning skills may be due to several attributes that distinguish the Literature Circles 2.0 such as modeling, which plays a vital role in supporting students' efforts to learn how to carry out their roles, how to form critical questions and find answers, how to set objectives, and how to use adequate time-management skills until they are independently able to run authentic peer discussions. Personalization—addressing needs, interests, and strengths of each student—is another successful attribute of Literature Circles 2.0. According to this model, students learn in various ways at various paces. Also, students were engaged in deciding their own learning. Thus, they had the chance to reflect on learning activities. Meanwhile, the effects of adopting Literature Circles 2.0 are not limited to the development of students' self-regulated language learning skills but also their personal control, which is considered a fundamental source of students' motivation. Arguably, students' control of the learning process enhanced their academic success and facilitated the learning process.

10.1. Limitations and Recommendations. Few challenges faced some students in using Literature Circles 2.0. The first is rare Internet connection problems and some difficulty in

understanding the nature and the assigned duties of each role. Therefore, teachers are advised to conduct remedial sessions to bridge the gap in the students' understanding of the assigned roles. Also, conducting conversation in English was a challenging task, especially for first-year students. Consequently, the students sought help from the instructor, who acted as a language expert. In this context, translating some abstract words into the students' mother tongue is not prohibited. Moreover, selecting literary texts should be based on students' language level and interests. Time management is another challenge that teachers should consider before conducting LCs 2.0 as it is time-consuming. Therefore, teachers should devote a specific time to each procedure.

According to the results of the study, LCs 2.0 proves to be a promising model for developing students' reading comprehension of literary texts and their online self-regulated language learning skills. However, a valid and successful implementation of the model necessitates the instructor's technological knowledge, expertise, training, and, most importantly, enthusiasm to create a supportive and collaborative reading environment that enables students to make use of the potentialities of the model and online resources. Considering the growing pedagogical support of individualized learning concept and learning as a continuing process, tailoring programs that aim to raise both teachers' and students' awareness and use of online SRLL skills are recommended to be an essential component of the English language programs.

11. Conclusion

The results of the study revealed the significant effect of using Literature Circles 2.0 model on developing the students' comprehension skills of literary texts as they were personally and emotionally involved in the active learning process of the course. Meanwhile, the students of the experimental group displayed a significant development of the online self-regulated language learning skills. Based on the students' significant improvement in processing, then comprehending, and extracting the meaning of literary texts, the study affirms the positive effect of Literature Circles 2.0 on developing the students' comprehension of literary texts. Eventually, utilizing Literature Circles 2.0 has proved to significantly improve the students' attitude towards the study of literary texts.

11.1. Suggestions for Further Research. In accordance with the findings of the present study, a number of topics may be suggested for further investigation: firstly, investigating the effect of using Literature Circles 2.0 on developing EFL students' speaking and communication skills; secondly, examining the impact of using the model on different categories of students such as high academic achievers, low academic achievers, and gifted; thirdly, exploring the potential effects of using different ICT tools on developing students' online self-regulated language learning skills, especially, in the EFL context. Eventually, further, there are

promising prospects for extending the effect of using Literature Circles 2.0 towards developing higher thinking skills and the 21st century skills [35, 36].

Data Availability

The data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon a reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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