

## Interaction Effects of LCS and Gender on Tenth Graders' English Achievements

**Chuzaimah Dahlan Diem and Pratiwi Lestari**  
Sriwijaya University, South Sumatra, Indonesia

### Abstract

This study investigated interaction effects of Literature Circles Strategy (LCS) and gender on senior high school students' English as a foreign language (EFL) achievements as measured by English tests before and after the intervention. Forty-two 10<sup>th</sup> graders (23 boys and 19 girls) were selected to be involved in the intervention using LCS for three months. The results of ANOVA showed that there were significant interaction effects of LCS and gender on (1) *listening* as a whole ( $p < .007$ ,  $d = .17$ ) and its *detail* aspect ( $p < .001$ ,  $d = .92$ ), (2) *reading* as a whole ( $p < .006$ ,  $d = .04$ ), and (3) *vocal expression* aspect of speaking ( $p < .026$ ,  $d = .73$ ). Moreover, the independent sample t-test revealed that boys significantly outperformed girls in *vocal expression* aspect ( $p < .031$ ) of speaking skill and in *detail* aspect of listening skill ( $p < .009$ ). Both of these two aspects have influenced the students' EFL achievements for 84% and 3.5% respectively. It can be concluded that in general LCS could effectively be used to develop students' EFL skills, and in particular trigger the willingness of boys to express themselves more than girls in addition to their prior listening capacity.

**Keywords:** EFL literacy achievement, gender, literature circles, senior high school students

## Introduction

The emergence of English as a global language since 19<sup>th</sup> century has required more people to be equipped with good command of English. English has become even more important in which it is learned by almost everybody living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As predicted by Graddol (2000), “English would enjoy a special position in the multilingual society as it would be the only language to appear in the language mix in every part of the world ... (p. 63).”

English is the language used in education, communication, media, and many other aspects of life. It is not only essential for adults but also for young adults who are still in the secondary level of education. Therefore, helping them to become literate in English is one of the main goals in this time of 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy which is in line with the second goal of Millennium Development Goals, that is, achieving universal primary education by 2015 (United Nation, 2002). In Indonesia, primary schooling would terminate when the students graduate from their junior high school or 9<sup>th</sup> grade as it is stated in the Indonesian Act number 20, year 2003 (Kantor Pemerintahan Republik Indonesia, 2003). During that time, all students learn English as a foreign language and it is continued to be taught until they finish high school. It is one of the subjects to be tested in the National Examination in both junior high and senior high schools. The idea that English should be taught as a school subject has been clearly stated in the Indonesian curriculums, such as Competence-based Curriculum (KBK) 2004 and School-based Curriculum (KTSP) 2006 (Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2004; 2006).

Furthermore, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Free Trade Area (AFTA) and ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) established in 2015 are becoming the triggers for people living in ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Brunei) to learn English receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing) competitively well more than ever before. In facing this challenge, Indonesian students who have learned English as a foreign language (EFL) must make a great effort in order to be literate in English so that they could communicate with those from other countries in the world.

## Literature Review

Concerning the aforementioned information, unfortunately, Indonesian students still find it hard to have the competency of good English literacy because the results of some surveys reveal that the English literacy achievement of Indonesians is still low. For example, the data from the Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI, 2013) on adult English proficiency among 60 countries shows that Indonesia is in the 25<sup>th</sup> rank. Even though this proficiency level is considered moderate, it is still inconvincing for world communication. The same thing happens to the students' reading literacy. A survey conducted every three years by the Program of International Students' Assessment (PISA), which assesses reading literacy in native language, mathematics, and science of 15-year-old students, shows that in the five-period of assessments, Indonesian students' reading literacy scores are all below the OECD average scores of those years (Read five-period results of PISA). For example, the results of PISA 2012 database showed that Indonesian students' reading literacy mean score was 396 while that of OECD's was 496. This fact had ranked Indonesia 60<sup>th</sup> of 65 countries assessed (OECD, 2013).

The low achievement of Indonesian students in the National language reading literacy had led us to the assumption that the Indonesian students' EFL literacy (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) might have been lower than that of the existing data, especially reading. It is believed that, if someone is good at receptive skills, that she/he may also be good at productive skills. It is through listening that learners can build an awareness of the inter-workings of

language systems at various levels and thus establish a base for more fluent productive skills (Peterson, 2001). It is through reading that learners can improve language abilities (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). In brief, those receptive skills of English become the prerequisite for productive skills.

To minimize this problem, some effective strategies were believed to be highly needed to be implemented in English language teaching because strategy has been one of the key factors which determine the learning outcomes (Fischer, 2004, Tompkins, 2009). The study, Literature Circles Strategy (LCS), was believed to be an effective strategy which could make a difference in students' English literacy achievement. Daniels (2002) defines LCS as small, student-led discussion groups in which members read the same book or reading materials. This strategy provides opportunities for the students to actively participate in the learning process as they have freedom to talk, challenge themselves to do experiments, and collaborate with peers in doing their tasks (see also DaLieu, 2001).

Furthermore, having their own reading interest on reading materials is an important factor that can encourage the students to learn better and Literature Circles Strategy offers choices in many different ways, one of which is in selecting reading materials (Hill, Johnson, & Noe, 1995). The selections of reading materials must match the students' characteristics, interests, and reading levels which, therefore, deserve to be considered to be exposed and used in the teaching and learning process. The short survey done before doing this present study showed that over half of the young adults studying in the school where this present study took place indicated that they liked to read emails, fiction, and comics. Newspapers were also a popular choice. When asked specifically about what type of fiction, if any, they preferred reading adventure, comedy, and horror/ghost stories. Those were the most frequently chosen genres. Only 5% of the pupils did not read fiction.

The sample of this study was made up of young adults and the materials used during the treatment were humorous, horror, myths, fables, and legends. This choice of materials is in line with the findings of the studies done by the previous researchers (Diem, Purnomo, Ihsan, Sofendi, and Viyanti, 2015). In addition, some research results proved the effectiveness of LCS in English language teaching. Carrison and Ernst-Slavit (2005), for example, found that Literature Circles could be used as a strategy to build confidence and to enhance students' language and literacy skills, especially reading comprehension and oral communication. Moreover, Diem (2011) found that LCS, one of the strategies of her 3-Ls approach, could improve the fifth graders' English literacy achievements (in all four skills) and could also promote their reading habit.

#### Gender and Learning

In addition to strategy, *gender* is another factor that influences the success of learning. The Analytical and Capacity Development Partnership (ACDP Indonesia, 2013) asserts that the ways that girls and boys experience the teaching and learning process in the classroom can be quite different from one another. This would influence their class participation, educational achievement, and learning outcomes. The International assessments of student achievement in reading literacy, mathematics and science, such as PISA, reports some consistent gender patterns. Boys perform better than girls in mathematics in most countries, and girls outperform boys in reading in all countries (OECD, 2011).

Ihsan and Diem (1997) also found that university female students were using *compensation* strategy significantly better than those of male students. In line with this finding, Rahmi and Diem (2014) confirmed that gender made a significant difference in perceptions of their classroom environment in which female students had better perceptions of classroom environment in almost

all the seven aspects measured. Diem and Viyanti (2015) also found that out of 79 items of reading interest measure, 47% was significantly chosen by boys but not by girls while Lestari (2016) found that girls' self-concept was higher than that of boys. In other words, females valued themselves better than males in many aspects as measured by Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS) questionnaire.

Based on the facts above, it was assumed that *strategy* and *gender* still played an important role in enhancing students' achievement in learning a language. Therefore, this present study aimed at investigating the interaction effects of Literature Circles Strategy and gender on students' EFL literacy achievement.

### Method

A pre-posttest-control-group design involving 42 students was used in conducting this present study. Twenty three boys were grouped into one group and 19 girls were in the other. These students were selected as sample from one senior high school in Palembang in the academic year 2014/2015. The students were chosen on the basis of their reading level tested by using Jennings' Informal Reading Inventory (2001). The result of the test indicated that their instructional level was at level four. The students in both groups (boys and girls) were given the same intervention in English literacy by using Literature Circles Strategy (LCS) with short stories for reading materials for about three months. Thus, the only difference of the two groups was in their gender grouping. During the intervention, the teaching procedure adopted from the key features of LCS proposed by Daniels (2002) and modified as needed for this present study was applied. The applied teaching procedure is as follows: (1) the students of each group chose the reading materials (short stories) that they were interested in and made sub-groups based on the stories they chose, (2) the students listened to and/or read either silently or aloud the short stories with peers in their own small sub-group, (3) the students completed their own work based on their assigned roles, (4) in each sub-group, the students discussed the reading materials they read; each student shared what he or she had found based on the role assigned, (5) the students in each sub-group of their own group (girls or boys) wrote the result of their sub-group discussion and were ready for group project (presentation), (6) each group presented the result of their discussion to the whole class, and finally (7) the students were guided to re-write the stories they had discussed in own group and the stories were presented using their own words.

In collecting the data, English tests covering four EFL literacy skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking) were administered to the sample before and after the intervention. The listening and reading tests were in the form of multiple choice questions with narrative passages of five-graded levels (Level 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6), which were firstly tried out and 32 items were valid ( $r$  value  $> .349$ ) and reliable (e.g. listening = 0.931, reading = 0.934). Those 32 questions covering the understanding of main idea (MI), detail (Det), sequence (Seq), cause and effect (C/E), inference (Inf.), and vocabulary (Voc.) were given to the sample-students. The scoring system for listening and reading was done based on how many items could be answered correctly. For the writing test, the students were asked to make up their own story related to the text they read and for the speaking test, they were asked to tell the story they had written in their writing test. Two raters with three criteria, such as having graduate (master's or magister's degree) from English Education study program, having more than 2 years of teaching experience, and achieving at least 550 TOEFL score) were asked to evaluate the students' writing by using Common Core State Standards (Turnitin, 2012) narrative writing rubric and their speaking by using *storytelling skills assessment* taken from NET Working (2012). For both of these productive skills, inter-rater reliability test was done to see the correlation between the two raters' scores. The results are presented in Table 1:

Variables	Test	Raters 1 & 2	
		Pearson Correlation	Sig.
Speaking	Pre-test	.542**	.000
	Post-test	.859**	.000
Writing	Pre-test	.840**	.000
	Post-test	.770**	.000

Table 1-Results of Inter-Rater Reliability of Speaking and Writing Tests (N = 42)

Note: \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

In analyzing the data, first the paired sample t-test was applied to see whether there were significant differences in students' (1) English Literacy Achievement as a whole (ELA<sub>Total</sub>), (2) each individual literacy skill (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing), and (3) each aspect of the skills, before and after they were given the intervention using LCS.

Then, a two-way ANOVA was also used to see the interaction effects of LCS and gender on the four language skills and aspects of each skill. Similarly an independent sample t-test was used to evaluate the significant differences in the achievements of all variables between boys and girls. Finally, to see the contribution of gender to each of the four English skill achievements as a whole (EA-Listening<sub>Total</sub>, EA-Reading<sub>Total</sub>, EA-Writing<sub>Total</sub>, EA-Speaking<sub>Total</sub>), a stepwise regression analysis was also used.

### Results

Regarding the use of LCS with short stories, the intervention was a successful attempt to improve all the four of the students' English literacy skills achievements (ELA<sub>Total</sub>) and each of the skills. The descriptive statistics of the students' English literacy achievements either as a whole (ELA<sub>Total</sub>) or each skill can be seen in Table 2:

<b>Variables</b>		<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Very Poor</b>	<b>Total Mean</b>
<b>ELA<sub>Total</sub></b>	Mean	-	75.50	65.47	47.58	39.50	<b>58.51</b>
	Frequency & Percentage	-	7 17%	16 38%	18 43%	1 2%	
	SD	-	3.69	3.44	3.63	-	
<b>Listening</b>	Mean	90.63	76.88	63.02	46.25	37.50	<b>57.51</b>
	Frequency & Percentage	1 2%	5 12%	18 43%	15 36%	3 7%	
	SD	-	2.79	4.45	4.75	.000	
<b>Speaking</b>	Mean	-	75.60	63.73	45.88	34.10	<b>57.93</b>
	Frequency & Percentage	-	10 24%	15 36%	12 28%	5 12%	
	SD	-	3.66	3.75	3.41	2.75	
<b>Reading</b>	Mean	87.50	76.37	61.72	50.35	-	<b>65.48</b>
	Frequency & Percentage	1 2%	16 38%	16 38%	9 22%	-	
	SD	-	4.11	4.34	3.65	-	
<b>Writing</b>	Mean	-	72.50	61.58	49.00	34.73	<b>53.19</b>
	Frequency & Percentage	-	4 10%	19 45%	8 19%	11 26%	
	SD	-	1.00	4.40	4.66	4.41	

Table 2- Score Distribution of Students' English Literacy <sub>Total</sub> and Each Literacy Skill achievements Based on Achievement Level (N = 42)

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As Illustrated in Table 2, the students' English Literacy achievement as a whole is average (Mean = 58.51). The highest mean score is on reading (65.48), followed by speaking (57.93), listening (57.51), and writing (53.19). Finally, the level of achievement based on gender (23 males and 19 females) can be seen in Table 3:

Variables	Male (N=23)				Female (N=19)			
	Mean (Raw)	Mean (%)	Category	SD	Mean (Raw)	Mean (%)	Category	SD
<b>Listening</b>	18.7	58.4	Average	5.07	18	56.2	Average	3.12
<b>Speaking</b>	57.7	57.7	Average	16.06	58.2	58.2	Average	12.92
<b>Reading</b>	20.9	65.3	Average	4.28	21.05	65.8	Average	2.69
<b>Writing</b>	12.8	51.2	Poor	3.77	13.8	55	Poor	2.79
<b>ELA<sub>Total</sub></b>	110	58.2	Average	27.26	111	58.7	Average	20.19

Table 3 Score Distribution of Students' English Literacy Achievement<sub>Total</sub> and Each Literacy Skill Achievement Based on Gender

It is clear that, based on gender, there is no significant mean difference between male and female students' English Literacy Achievement either as a whole or as an individual skill. As a whole they are still average. However, when each skill is considered independently the students' writing skills are poor (53.19) for both groups.

Males have progressed significantly in all skills both as an individual and as a whole after being taught English using LCS. (See Table 4). On the other hand, although as a whole there is a significant progress between female students' pre- and post test achievements, it is apparent that only their speaking, reading, and writing skills receive significant improvement. When we look at the post-test results, as mentioned before, there are no significant differences between male and female groups. This means that both groups are about the same in their English literacy achievements.

Variables	Pretest		Posttest		Mean Diff Pre and Post M within	Mean Diff Pre and Post F within	Mean Diff Posttest n M & F	T-Value and sig. (pre- and post M within)	T-value and sig. (pre- and post F within)	T-value and sig. posttest (M & F)
	Mean M	Mean F	Mean M	Mean F						
<b>ELA<sub>Total</sub></b>	86.3	85	110	111	23.7	26	-1	4.907 .000	3.764 .001	-.120 .905
<b>Listening</b>	16.7	16.6	18.7	18	<b>2</b>	<b>1.4</b>	.70	2.550 .018	<b>1.169</b> <b>.258</b>	.553 .583
<b>Speaking</b>	43.1	42	57.7	58.2	<b>14.6</b>	<b>16.2</b>	-.50	4.582 .000	4.019 .001	-.102 .919
<b>Reading</b>	17	17.4	20.9	21.05	<b>3.8</b>	<b>3.6</b>	-.15	5.611 .000	3.901 .001	-.161 .873
<b>Writing</b>	9.5	9	12.8	13.8	<b>3.3</b>	<b>4.8</b>	-1	4.895 .000	4.379 .000	-.953 .346

Table 4 Result of Paired and Independent Samples t-test of Students' English Literacy Achievements (N=42)

Furthermore, the results of ANOVA showed that there were significant interaction effects of LCS and gender on (1) *listening* as a whole ( $F=8.270$ ;  $p<.007$ ,  $d=.17$ ) and its *detail* aspect ( $F=13.939$ ;  $p<.001$ ,  $d=.92$ ), (2) *reading* as a whole ( $F=8.295$ ;  $p<.006$ ,  $d=.04$ ), and (3) *vocal expression* aspect of speaking ( $F= 5.337$ ;  $p<.026$ ,  $d=.73$ ). This is clear that for listening and reading as a whole, both LCS and gender has about the *same* effect size. However, the effect size of gender on the detail aspect of listening is much greater than that of LCS. Furthermore the effect size of gender on the vocal expression aspect of speaking is also greater than that of LCS. Unfortunately, *there was no* interaction effect found between LCS and gender on writing achievement ( $F=.879$ ;  $p<.354$ ) and neither on speaking as a whole ( $F=2.833$ ;  $p<.101$ ). See Table 5.



## Interaction Effects of LCS and Gender on Tenth Graders' English Achievements

Skills	Aspects	F Sig. (Gender*Group)	Mean Scores		Mean Difference	T-Value & Sig. (Between gender)
			Male	Female		
Listening		8.270 .007	18.7	18	.70	.553 .583
	Detail	13.939 .001	4.73	3.70	1.03	2.924 .009
Reading		8.295 .006	20.9	21.05	-.15	-.161 .873
Writing		.879 .354	12.8	13.8	-1	-.953 .346
Speaking		2.833 .101	57.7	58.2	-.50	-.102 .919
	Vocal Expression	5.337 .026	14.30	12.50	1.723	2.330 .031

Table 5- Results of Two-Way ANOVA and Independent Sample t-Test of 4 Language Skills and Aspects of Each Skill (N=42)

When *males and females'* achievements were compared, the results of the independent sample t-test revealed that males significantly outperformed females in *detail of listening* ( $t=2.924$ ;  $p<.009$ ) and in *vocal expression* of speaking ( $t= 2.330$ ;  $p<.031$ ) (See Table 5).

Furthermore, to see the influence of gender on English literacy achievement<sub>Total</sub>, regression analysis was done. The results of the analysis showed that, the significant contribution of gender was 3.5% on detail aspect of listening and 84% on vocal expression aspect of speaking significantly. In other words, 12.5% of the students' achievement was contributed by other factors which could not be detected (See Table 6 below):

Model	Change Statistics								
	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
				R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.916	.840 <sup>a</sup>	.836	9.7404	.840	209.771	1	40	.000
2	.936	.875 <sup>b</sup>	.869	8.7056	.035	11.074	1	39	.002

Table 6- Influence of Males' Vocal Expression of Speaking and Detail of Listening on Students' Literacy Achievement (Notes: <sup>a</sup>VocalExp. of Speaking; <sup>b</sup>Vocal Exp.of Speaking plus Detail of Listening)

### Discussion

The significant interaction effect between LCS and gender shows that gender is another factor which influences the students' English literacy achievement, especially in listening and reading, but not in writing and speaking skills as a whole. However, detail as a part of listening and vocal expression as a part of speaking had shown their strong interaction in which boys significantly outperformed girls. It can be interpreted that males are probably more attentive due to the stories being more of their interest. The stories used during the treatment were mostly humorous and adventurous fictions that boys preferred reading more compared to what girls did. This is in line with what is stated by Nilsen and Donelson (2009) that boys love adventure and excel in the love of humor, abandon, rough horse-play, and tales of wild escapades. This means

that their interest towards the stories made them keep paying attention and felt curious to know the end of the stories.

In addition, this could happen because males probably listened carefully to every detail of the stories read or played to them so that they could be more active in the discussion in which they are the ones who want to look greater and superior among others, especially female students. Usually, they take the major part during the interaction among peers in the class which is in line with a suggestion by studies of classroom interaction patterns that males are more prominent and dominant in both teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions (Middleton, 1988). Moreover, this finding also portrays Indonesian culture in which girls are likely discouraged from speaking or expressing their opinion in public (ACDP Indonesia, 2013).

The discussion above eventually leads to a conclusion denoting the reason as to why males were better in vocal expression aspect of speaking. It might also be affected by the choice of the roles in the combined male and female group discussion in which male students tend to become the “Discussion Director” leading the group discussion and females are usually permissive in this case. However, these findings are in stark contrast with what Cameron (2003) found where women are better at listening and sharing emotions with others.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed the notion that strategy and gender have significant influence on some aspects of receptive and productive skills of English literacy as a foreign language (EFL). This method deserves attention by teachers to further apply effective strategies, one of which is LCS, with different readability and genres of reading materials including the students’ reading interest. Furthermore, since every individual has his/her own innate characteristics in terms of gender, teachers of English are suggested to be wise and tactful in guiding their students so that they could make the best of their students’ strengths and or weaknesses but it would be more applicable if it is based on research studies.

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