

## Character Education on E-Books Through Literature Circles: Practices and Experiences

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### ABSTRACT

Several studies highlight the role of storybooks in shaping character values, but few explore how pre-service teachers can use them as tools for character education. This case study investigates the impact of Literature Circles on character development among 27 pre-service teachers enrolled in an Extensive Reading course using e-books. Character education goes beyond knowledge—it involves awareness, reflection, and the willingness to act, especially for future educators. Through thematic analysis of class discussions, questionnaires, and interviews, the study reveals that Literature Circles foster character values such as responsibility, empathy, discipline, and tolerance. By engaging in book selection, reading, group work, and discussion, participants enhance their communication skills and reflect on moral values through authentic, collaborative experiences. Ultimately, the approach provides a meaningful entry point for integrating character education into teacher preparation.

**Keywords:** character education; e-book; extensive reading course; Literature Circles

### ABSTRAK

Beberapa penelitian menyoroti peran buku cerita dalam membentuk nilai-nilai karakter, sedikit yang mengeksplorasi bagaimana calon guru dapat menggunakannya sebagai alat untuk pendidikan karakter. Studi kasus ini menyelidiki dampak dari Literature Circles pada pengembangan karakter di antara 27 calon guru yang terdaftar dalam kursus Membaca Ekstensif menggunakan e-book. Pendidikan karakter lebih dari sekadar pengetahuan—ia melibatkan kesadaran, refleksi, dan kemauan untuk bertindak, terutama bagi para pendidik masa depan. Melalui analisis tematik dari diskusi kelas, kuesioner, dan wawancara, penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa Literature Circles menumbuhkan nilai-nilai karakter seperti tanggung jawab, empati, disiplin, dan toleransi. Dengan terlibat dalam pemilihan buku, membaca, kerja kelompok, dan diskusi, para peserta meningkatkan keterampilan komunikasi mereka dan merenungkan nilai-nilai moral melalui pengalaman kolaboratif yang autentik. Pada akhirnya, pendekatan ini memberikan titik masuk yang bermakna untuk mengintegrasikan pendidikan karakter ke dalam persiapan guru.

**Kata Kunci:** pendidikan karakter; e-book; kursus membaca ekstensif; Literature Circles

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Indonesian government policy addressed the Pancasila student profile as required for building character. According to the government's character education program, character values are taught implicitly in all subjects, including English. As a result, English teachers are encouraged to determine the precise ideals of character education and include instructions regarding these values in English learning activities in class. In other words, teachers must incorporate character education principles into their existing lesson plans and link their pedagogical approaches with the values identified in the activities they arrange (Qoyyimah, 2016). Lesson plans must be well prepared for preparation and execution for the quality of learning implementation plans to satisfy the expectations of learning objectives in specific and national education goals in general (Sa'adah & Anjarwati, 2022). Among these objectives is the teaching of character values.

Teaching character values aims to build continuous self-improvement and train self-abilities toward a better life (Harahap, 2021). Character development can only take place in the appropriate social and cultural setting. It indicates that character development can be accomplished through an educational method that does not exclude students from their social and communal environments, such as school, family, and friends. Being in class and carrying out learning activities led by the teacher is one of the critical activities in the school setting. In other words, the teacher is at the forefront of establishing character education at school through numerous activities that can be carried out during the teaching and learning process.

The importance of instilling character values in school education, even from an early age, has been widely studied (Annisa et al., 2020; Harahap, 2021; Prasetyo & Riyanti, 2019; Sahroni, 2017). Character education is an attempt to apply religious, moral, and ethical values to students through science, assisted by parents, teachers, and society, which is very important in forming and developing students' character (Annisa et al., 2020). From several studies on character education, especially in early childhood, it can be implemented well through habituation and exemplary. Exemplary can be felt directly through interaction and direct contact with teachers and parents as a good role model that can be emulated. However, in capturing the moral values taught, children need many role models, both directly and indirectly. One way to emulate character values is by reading exemplary stories that provide various images and imaginations of character values in everyday life. Emulating character values can also be done through stories contained in storybooks.

Several studies suggest forming and educating character values through story books (Arsyad et al., 2017; Munthe & Halim, 2019), not only in printed books but also in e-book form (Sari & Wardani, 2021). Moreover, as literary works, storybooks with negative stereotypes have an impact on student's attitudes toward people with disabilities and need the teacher's help to recognize and possibly reform their previous views of people with disabilities and teach them to interpret these representations through the filter of critical thinking (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2023). The storybook can be used as a medium in teaching character education. However, little research has explored how pre-service teachers can use storybooks to teach and instill character values. This study intends to explore the implications of character education for pre-service teachers in the Extensive Reading Course by reading and discussing e-books through Literature Circles.

In tertiary institutions, Literature Circles have been used to teach various courses with various purposes, including sociology courses (Wyant & Bowen, 2018), social justice (Wexler, 2021), political science classes (Cooper, 2019), pharmacy (Sullivan et al., 2022; Sullivan et al., 2022; Zagar et al., 2019), reading (Sylvan, 2018; Thomas & Kim, 2019; Ro & Burch, 2020) and Psychotherapy (Khokhlova & Bhatia, 2021). To support the understanding of psychotherapy and mental health practice in Psychology undergraduate students at a private university in Dubai, UAE, a book club

was evaluated by Khokhlova & Bhatia (2021). The study results reveal that Literature Circles help encourage a deeper conceptualization of the therapeutic relationship, visualizing future careers in psychotherapy and promoting self-awareness among college students. Similarly, Sullivan et al. (2022) found that most students in the acupuncture, pharmacy, physical therapy, physician assistant, and sonography programs agreed or strongly agreed that they were better prepared for culturally diverse patient interactions, and the activity allowed for interprofessional learning. Students can discuss many healthcare scenarios encountered throughout the book and share their own experiences.

Literature Circles can help students' professional journeys by increasing understanding and appreciation of interprofessional practice (Broemmel et al., 2023; Cooper, 2019; Khokhlova & Bhatia, 2021; Ney et al., 2023; Wexler, 2021; Zerden et al., 2021). One study in higher education explored and understood how Literature Circles can help teacher candidates critically reflect on social justice and equity and encourage reflection on race and privilege (Wexler, 2021). The study results reveal that Literature Circles centered on equality in the classroom as a primary method provides teacher candidates with an entry point into conversations about social justice, supports teacher candidates in understanding themselves better, and supports teacher candidates in understanding their student system. Furthermore, Broemmel et al. (2023) investigated the experiences of 43 pre-service teachers who participated in professional development book clubs as part of their educator preparation program's regular coursework. Pre-service teachers' perceptions of the value and format of book clubs as a professional development tool are among the findings.

Similarly, a study by Ney et al. (2023) revealed that participation in an informal book club between medical students and faculty helped to cultivate solid mentor-mentee relationships. Moreover, Alghamdi (2022) investigates the impact of book clubs on the professional development of teachers in Saudi Arabia. This study shows that by giving support and advice and validating shared experiences, book clubs may successfully develop learning communities by using a casual, engaging platform. In addition, Zerden et al. (2021) describe the process of implementing an interprofessional educational book discussion through a Literature Circle and provide recommendations on how this activity can be replicated and adapted throughout social work and other programs.

Based on the previous studies, this study intends to dig deeper into how Literature Circle, using eleven key features proposed by Daniels (2002), is used in Extensive Reading Courses. It is intended to investigate how pre-service teachers participating in Extensive Reading Courses understand, discuss, and reflect on character education for their future careers. Several activities were carried out through Literature Circles, including collecting and selecting books, reading the books, forming groups, and discussing the books. These activities align with the goals of the Extensive Reading course, which aims to provide an engaging experience that helps students improve their overall reading fluency and comprehension by encouraging them to read a wide variety of materials for enjoyment and personal interest. Understanding character education and integrating values into language learning activities requires special preparation from pre-service teachers. Not only knowing what character education is, but also understanding it to be reflected in their lesson plans. A critical part of lesson plans is preparing materials. By integrating high-quality literature into the course through a story, teacher candidates can provide opportunities for students to reflect on their beliefs and experiences (Howlett et al., 2017). For these reasons, this current study will be conducted.

## METHODS

### *Research design*

The research design used in this study is a case study. According to Ary et al. (2010), case studies focus on one unit to produce detailed, comprehensive, and in-depth descriptions. One unit

can be an individual, group, class, program, or institution. In a case study, the researcher explores a particular phenomenon (case) at a certain time and activity, such as programs or events, and collects detailed and in-depth information using various data collection procedures. In this study, researchers investigated how character education is understood, discussed, and reflected by pre-service English teachers who took part in an Extensive Reading Course through e-books, which were discussed using the Literature Circles. The Extensive Reading course enhances students' reading fluency and comprehension by encouraging them to read various materials for enjoyment and personal interest. Implemented through Literature Circles, the course was conducted to give experiences on collecting and selecting books, enjoying reading based on the students' interests, discussing using some roles, and reflecting on it.

### ***Research site and participants***

The participants were pre-service teachers who had taken educational courses as a basis for pedagogic knowledge to become teachers. They are considered to have basic teaching skills and basic knowledge of education. The students participated in the Extensive Reading course over one semester, consisting of 14 weekly meetings. The course was organized into three cycles, each comprising one meeting for collecting and selecting reading materials, two for reading the selected book, and one for discussion. The remaining two meetings were dedicated to reflection.

### ***Data collection and analysis***

The data in this study consists of several types. First, the data is from interactions between pre-service teachers and their peers when carrying out Literature Circles. The second data is in the form of answers from a questionnaire about how pre-service teachers understand and discuss character education in the Extensive Reading course on e-books through Literature Circles. The third data is recorded interviews conducted when the questionnaire data is still insufficient or unclear, so in-depth interviews are needed to clarify the data.

Regarding case study research, researchers used several research instruments to obtain detailed information about student interactions in the discussion process through Literature Circles. The main instrument is a human instrument, in which researchers observe the phenomenon of using e-books and pre-service teachers' discussions through Literature Circles. Questionnaires were also used to obtain data about the implications of character education in Extensive Reading courses in e-books through Literature Circles. As a complement, interviews were conducted to get deeper answers as the questionnaire was given. Some of the questions in the interview will explore the ideas, thoughts, and understanding of pre-service teachers about character education as well as their experiences reading and discussing e-books through Literature Circles about the character values found in the e-books. Through questionnaires and interviews, questions will be asked about the experience and whether it influenced teaching character education to students in the future when teaching English.

The data in this study were obtained through several stages, including: (1) observing the Extensive Reading lecture process using the Literature Circles based on predetermined indicators; (2) recording pre-service teachers' discussions while they are having discussions in Literature Circles; (3) preparing a questionnaire to explore pre-service teachers' involvement in running Literature Circles, starting from reading e-books outside class (carried out individually) to the roles taken along with the reasons for taking the role when running Literature Circles; (3) giving questionnaires to pre-service teachers via the Google form to obtain information about the ideas, thoughts, and understanding of prospective teachers about character education and their experiences reading and discussing e-books through Literature Circles; prepare semi-structured interviews to find out the implications both for now as students and as prospective teachers who in the future have to teach character education to students when teaching English.



Data in the form of recorded discussions during the Literature Circles and the results of distributing questionnaires and interviews about the implications of character education in the Extensive Reading course on E-books through the Literature Circles were analyzed to answer the research questions. Thematic analysis was used to examine the results of recorded discussions, questionnaires, and interviews. Researchers made conclusions and presented the reconstruction of meaning. Researchers uncovered recurring patterns and concepts using Miles et al. (2014) descriptive qualitative methodology to understand the implication of character education obtained after carrying out discussions from e-books that have been read in Literature Circles. Finally, all the data obtained were interpreted.

Using a triangulation process, the researcher seeks to reduce the potential for unfairness and inadequacy to ensure the data is valid and reliable. Triangulation is an important thing that must be done to ensure research credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Stahl & King, 2020). It is also designed to transform triangulation techniques into ways that help researchers define, investigate, and understand various aspects of research, thereby improving results and their interpretation. The researcher conducted data triangulation (time triangulation) and member checks based on this research data to ensure the reliability of the initial data in the form of observation sheets and field notes. Data from similar sources were collected in a different time sequence. Member checks were carried out through interviews.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Findings*

#### *Understanding Character Education through Literature Circles*

**Table 1.** How to understand character education

Literature Circles Activity			
Collecting and selecting the book	Reading the book	Forming groups	Discussing the book
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- practice how to get responsible freedom to choose books</li> <li>- practice the curiosity and friendliness in choosing the book</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- practice to get the freedom to choose the time and place for reading</li> <li>- be disciplined and responsible for finishing reading on time.</li> <li>- be creative in preparing the roles by taking notes to identify and understand the characters</li> <li>- express the emotions of the character</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- be communicative to make groups</li> <li>- practice to have a hard effort to finish reading on the agreed time</li> <li>- be disciplined and responsible in keeping agreements made with their friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- by playing different roles can express the emotions of the character</li> </ul>

Some activities in Literature Circles include collecting and selecting the books, reading the books, forming groups, and discussing the books. Pre-service teachers understand character education starts early, from how they collect and select the books during the reading process and form the group until they discuss the books. From all Literature Circles activities, pre-service teachers may get their understanding of character education.

The availability of books to read is the most significant aspect of the beginning activity in Literature Circles. Following technological improvements, book distribution is carried out by uploading e-books to Google Drive, which anybody with a Google Drive link may access. As a result, lecturers and all pre-service teachers doing the extensive reading course can upload their e-book collections for all link owners to choose from and read. Pre-service teachers have the freedom to select and determine the books they will read based on their interests,

although there were rules about the forbidden books to read, such as porn, radicalism, or terrorism books.

Pre-service teachers were then divided into groups based on the same interest in the books they read. Some of them decided to join a group first before discussing and deciding on a book of similar interest. Most of them stated that their decision to choose the book was based on the recommendation of one of their friends or reading a book review. PsT4 commented, *"Reading book reviews gives us a brief overview of the book's contents so that from the book review, we can decide whether to read the book or not. We will also know from book reviews whether the type of book suits what we like. Besides, friends' recommendations are also very influential. Friends who have read a book tend to provoke other friends to read the book they like so they can excitingly discuss books; for example, my friend said that the book is inspiring; it is a story full of struggle. I will read it, but when she said that the story is a scary story or thriller, I won't read it because I hate it"*. In a different way, PsT2 stated that *"I read the book at a glance, one or two pages to decide whether I continue it or not but sometimes I just read the last page of the book. I like romantic books that have happy endings. If the end of the story is sad, I do not think I will read it."* The book review and their friends' recommendation aroused their curiosity to continue and decide to read the books.

In some cases, students' peers will dominate the students' decisions, as PsT7 said: *"I always join my peers' group and read the books without any consideration of how I choose the books. I believe that my peers' choice suits my interest because my peers are my close friends, they know me well, and yeah... usually we have almost the same interest"*. From this situation, although the decision is influenced by their own and their peer interest in a theme or topic their peers, it can be concluded that they are free to make the decision. They are free to choose the book; it is the first character education they have realized.

Pre-service teachers do the reading process wherever and whenever they have free time. Bedrooms, living rooms, libraries, classrooms, cafes, or other public venues are popular reading locations. Pre-service teachers' leisure time for reading is typically after lectures or at night when they are free from their daily activities. Reading activities outside of class in students' free time teaches students to be responsible with their assignments and be disciplined in keeping agreements made with their friends. PsT1 says, *"I enjoy reading, but sometimes because I'm doing other things, I forget to finish my reading. Having a reading group makes me disciplined in completing reading according to the group's agreed-upon time. In choosing books, I feel that we are given extensive freedom in choosing reading but simultaneously carry the responsibility to complete it."* In line with PsT1's statement, PsT7 stated, *"Choosing our book and completing it within the time agreed by the group is an experience of having responsible freedom; I like it."* In selecting the books, the pre-service teachers feel they have freedom, although they must be responsible with their decisions. This responsibility motivates them to be disciplined to finish reading the book on time. In other words, pre-service teachers understand some character education, including freedom, discipline, and responsibility.

While reading the book, pre-service teachers can prepare for what role they want to play during the conversation. Some people prefer to mark and write remarks in books, while others prefer to take notes to prepare the roles they choose in the discussion. It improves discussion preparation and ensures that participants have enough issues to discuss. By choosing roles, students started identifying and understanding character education in the books during reading. Some characters are stated clearly in the books, but some are implicitly found in the story. They notice the characters and identified as good or bad characters. PsT2 wrote in her notes, *"I think he is a big dreamer. He built up his dreams since he was so young. He also worked very hard that even me, I can imagine I can do it... if I were him...hmmm I don't think I can do it..."*. Similar to PsT2, PsT5 also wrote in her notes, *"I like ...she cares for others, loves all of her friends. The way she treats her friends*

seems so sweet. I want to have a friend like her". Differently, PsT7 wrote, "She is like my mother, so religious and disciplined, always remind me to pray. Yeaah... I know it is good, but I do not want her always to do it. I want her to let me do it alone, and I'll be responsible". These notes showed that students started identifying and understanding some character education they found in the stories during their reading activity.

According to the statements above, reading novels or stories can provide an entire representation of the character of the actor or character highlighted by the author through all of the narratives or dialogues. Reading a novel draws the reader in and immerses them in the plot, perhaps becoming carried away by the characters' emotions. Several participants expressed that they cry when the characters in the narrative are unhappy and smile or laugh cheerfully when the characters in the story are happy. Literature can play a role in the development of all human beings in a fun way if used correctly and with the right approach, whether through novels or short stories.

Besides, through questionnaires, pre-service teachers mention character education they noticed when they read the stories. The results of the questionnaire revealed that the character education found in the books they read and discussed rarely mentioned democracy, national spirit, and patriotism. It was because the literature selected by the participants was primarily about subjects other than democracy, national spirit, and patriotism. According to the book chosen, the majority of the participants discovered character education in the form of friendship, hard effort, and social care.

Pre-service teachers' leisure time for reading is typically after lectures or at night when they are free from their daily activities. Reading activities carried out outside of class in students' free time teach students how to be responsible with their assignments and be disciplined in keeping agreements made with their friends. PsT1 points out that "I enjoy reading, but sometimes, because I'm doing other things, I forget to finish my reading. Having a reading group makes me disciplined in completing reading according to the time agreed upon by the group. In choosing books, I really feel that we are given extensive freedom in choosing reading but at the same time carry the responsibility to complete it." In line with PsT1's statement, PsT7 stated that "Choosing our book and completing it within the time agreed by the group is an experience of having responsible freedom; I like it." In selecting the books, the pre-service teachers really feel that they have freedom, although they have to be responsible with their decisions. This responsibility motivates them to be disciplined to finish reading the book on time. In other words, pre-service teachers understand some character education, including freedom, discipline, and responsibility.

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### Discussing Character Education through Literature Circles

**Table 2.** How the pre-service teachers discuss character education

Literature Circles Activity			
Collecting and selecting the book	Reading the book	Grouping	Discussing the book
-	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- communicatively sharing experience and knowledge</li> <li>- have social concern and a friendly attitude</li> <li>- tolerant or respect different opinions because of different experiences</li> <li>- increase their empathy</li> <li>- improve creativity based on their talents and interests</li> </ul>

After completing all group members' book reading, discussion activities are conducted. The discussion is moderated by one of the group members and starts with each member taking on a different role. Character education is found throughout the reading process and during discussions through the roles chosen by all group members. Several members may take the same role; nevertheless, what is expressed in the discussion may differ even with the same role. For example, in the position of the connector, one of the participants relates the story to an incident he has personally experienced.

In contrast, the other participant connects it to an event he recently read about in the internet news. Some roles become favored, such as if person, connector, and questioner. The if person is one of the most often picked roles. One of the participants (PsT5) said:

*Sometimes, I am irritated by what one of the characters is doing, and my imagination takes over. If I were Ronald, I would do something else. Choosing the role of an if person is also fascinating since there are usually many group members who give feedback, whether they have the same thoughts as me or have different ideas. We learned a lot about many other points of view from one particular event. It provides us with the experience of respecting our friends' opinions, which is important because we have various motives and points of view.*



Participants can express their opinions, ideas, concepts, and feelings about what they have read in the book by choosing their roles. Most participants agreed that discussing the book would allow them to dig deeper into its contents, including character education. The roles in Literature Circles differ from the general discussion in classes focusing on reading comprehension. They can express their thoughts, ideas, concepts, and emotions through discussions in Literature Circles by selecting several available roles. The conversation topic is broader than what is presented in the book but also goes beyond it. Furthermore, the group members gathered experience and set up compromises regarding selecting books to be discussed before, during, and after the discussion. After discussing the novel in Literature Circles, one of the participants (PsT1) commented.

*Discussions in Literature Circles help us develop character, comprehend and empathize with others, and gain a deeper awareness of our world. Sometimes, I was sad because of the story, but my friend cried when she connected the stories with her own experience. I almost cried. I understood the story better because my friend told us about a similar experience during the discussion. It also made me feel the way she feels.*

The other participant (PsT2) said

*We can gain in-depth insights into different characters and the lives of characters in novels or stories from various points of view during discussions. The discussions developed based on the character of our various backgrounds, experiences, and values. The experience of exchanging ideas and perspectives can help us get a broader understanding of a problem or event. Something that makes me laugh can be something shameful for my friend. It gives me a sense that I should be careful with my friend's feelings. It is just like I remember that I was happy when the flood happened because I could swim freely, but one of my friends said that he was traumatized by the flood because he lost his little brother at that time.*

Another participant (PsT7) stated

*After reading a short story or novel, the reader frequently gains a sense of what it would be like to be the character being read. Discussing the stories that have been read allows the reader to expand his imagination and portray the character according to his imagination. It is more enjoyable and challenging than simply reading stories and not debating them with your friend.*

The statements above provide an understanding that discussion activity in Literature Circles gives a variety of experiences in developing characters, such as communication, tolerance, friendliness, social care, environment care, and curiosity. PsT2, PsT5, and PsT7 clearly stated that having different points of view makes them respect each other. How they respect each other's opinions proves they have a communicative discussion and tolerance. The discussion also leads them to care about their friends, society, and environment, as PsT1 and PsT2 said. Engaging pre-service teachers with this activity will make them reflect and ask themselves how to encourage their students to experience character education.

Observation reveals that all participants actively communicate and participate in the discussion throughout the process. Participants work independently and responsibly to complete the reading and prepare their roles in the conversation. Even though it was carried out individually, participants had social concerns and a friendly attitude when doing the discussions, making the discussion fun and stimulating. Participants also improve their curiosity by asking group members' thoughts during conversations. They exchange their roles in the Literature Circles to gain experience in tolerating each group member's choices and interests in something they prefer. Discussions allow participants to share experiences on improving

creativity based on their talents and interests, such as when a member enjoys drawing and selects the role of a visualizer. Sharing experiences and knowledge are two things that the participants get during the discussion. Aside from that, crying and laughing are natural reactions that demonstrate empathy when individuals relate their stories. Discussions through Literature Circles provide an opportunity to build a learning environment for them to further reflect on character education.

### Reflecting Character Education through Literature Circles

**Table 3.** How the pre-service teachers reflect character education

Literature Circles Activity			
Collecting and selecting the book	Reading the book	Grouping	Discussing the book
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reflect how to choose bad and good storybooks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reflect how to introduce characters through reading stories, books</li> <li>- reflect how to identify and understand the characters through reading stories, books</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflect on how to be communicative and responsible with the group agreement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reflect how to discuss and share characters found in stories, books</li> <li>- reflect how to practice some characters through Literature Circles activities</li> <li>- reflect an authentic illustration of how character education occurs in an activity</li> </ul>

When participants participate in Literature Circles, reading, discussing, and summarizing the results of the discussions could give them an impression or an intense need to put some character education into practice. The range of activities in Literature Circles provides participants with considerable character education. According to the session results, based on the questionnaire, some character lessons that participants benefit from are honesty, tolerance, hard effort, independence, curiosity, friendliness, communication, and social care.

According to the interviews, the pre-service teacher can identify, experience, and implement various character education strategies when selecting, reading, and discussing the book in Literature Circles. The plot of the book they read can indicate how the character traits and behavior (particularly those of the main characters) connect with the environment and the individuals/groups in the story. After reading the book, one of the participants said:

*It is easy to comprehend how characters are portrayed in short stories and novels. These stories give me the historical context and additional information to fully understand the characters, including their motives, conflicts, and character development. I can comprehend the characters in the novel more fully and experience their feelings and actions because of their narration and conversation. We can grasp the story because we may feel like we are a part of it. It showed me how to teach about character education with little more explanation but simply through reading and discussing stories.*

Another participant commented:

*Novels like "The Rainbow Troops" have the potential to educate readers about principles and characters because of touching narratives that are relevant to conditions in many parts of Indonesia. Stories about difficulty, bravery, friendship, and passion can provide specific examples of character traits that the author wants readers to remember. The story inspires me to be such an impressive teacher who can motivate students to have ideas and dreams and struggle to reach them.*

When asked what they learned about character education from Literature Circles, most participants said they learned a lot. Running Literature Circles provides an awareness of how character education is taught successfully and is fun by reading and discussing books or stories. Furthermore, the experience of organizing Literature Circles provides an authentic illustration of how character education occurs in an activity. Participants get expertise in how to start a conversation about character education and provide concrete examples through novels, stories, or practice when Literature Circles activities take place by discussing it. This study demonstrates that literature circles can teach character education and provide reflection for pre-service teachers to implement in their teaching activities. Even though some character education is rare, the pre-service teacher can capture all character education when practicing Literature Circles.

## *Discussion*

Book selection is the initial activity in Literature Circles and is vital in guiding pre-service teachers to recognize their reading interests as Daniels (2002) proposed as one of eleven key features in conducting Literature Circles. While individual preferences may vary, this process encourages them to distinguish between high-quality and less appropriate literature. Engaging with printed or digital storybooks allows readers to explore characters deeply through narrative development and dialogue. The findings of this study are supported by previous research indicating that storybooks can effectively foster character education (Arsyad et al., 2017; Munthe & Halim, 2019; Sari & Wardani, 2021). As readers become immersed in the storyline, they often experience emotional responses aligned with the characters' feelings, such as crying, smiling, or laughing in reaction to sadness, disappointment, joy, or humor. Most participants in this study agreed that discussing the book helped deepen their understanding of key concepts, including character education. Experience emotional responses align with the findings of Ney et al. (2023), who reported that reading and discussion significantly enriched students' educational experiences. Furthermore, collaborative discussions are essential in fostering shared understanding and mutual validation, as emphasized by Broemmel et al. (2023).

During the discussion phase of Literature Circles, participants not only share experiences and knowledge but also demonstrate empathy through emotional engagement with the stories and one another. These affective responses highlight the interpersonal and reflective dimensions of the activity. Similar insights were found in the study by Sullivan et al. (2022), where students in various healthcare programs reported feeling better prepared for culturally diverse interactions through shared discussion activities that promoted interprofessional learning. Literature Circles likewise enable students to explore a variety of real-world scenarios and share their perspectives. Alghamdi (2022) supports this by showing how discussions can create supportive learning communities through validation and encouragement.

In addition, Literature Circles serve as an effective medium for pre-service teachers to reflect on and internalize character education. This is consistent with the work of Wexler (2021), who found that Literature Circles helped teacher candidates critically examine issues of social justice, equity, racism, and privilege. Through guided discussions and role-taking, participants developed a deeper understanding of themselves and the diverse learners they will one day teach. Howlett et al. (2017) similarly observed that such experiences offer future educators a preview of the pedagogical strategies they can adopt in their classrooms. Broemmel et al. (2023) also noted that participants valued book club-based professional development for its practical relevance and application to classroom instruction. These findings highlight the multifaceted value of Literature Circles in preparing pre-service teachers to teach content effectively and cultivate meaningful, character-based educational environments.

Implementing Literature Circles raises awareness of how character education can be effectively and enjoyably integrated into learning by reading and discussing books or stories.

Literature Circles' structured yet flexible nature provides an authentic and engaging context in which character education naturally unfolds. Through these activities, participants gain valuable experience initiating conversations about character-related themes and offering concrete examples from texts or real-life situations. This study aligns with previous research highlighting the versatility of Literature Circles in supporting diverse educational goals across various disciplines (Cooper, 2019; Khokhlova & Bhatia, 2021; Ro & Burch, 2020; Sylvan, 2018; Thomas & Kim, 2019; Wexler, 2021; Zagar et al., 2019; Zerden et al., 2021). Specifically, the findings underscore the potential of Literature Circles not only as a method for teaching character education and as a reflective tool for pre-service teachers to consider how such practices can be adapted in their future classrooms. Although character education may not always be explicitly addressed in formal instruction, Literature Circles offer a meaningful and accessible way for pre-service teachers to observe, explore, and internalize various character values within a collaborative learning environment.

Despite the benefits, implementing character education through Literature Circles has significant limits. One major problem is ensuring that all students are equally engaged and responsible in group activities, as differences in motivation and reading ability can affect participation and learning outcomes. The availability of adequate literary works relevant to character education attempts and students' interests can also be a barrier. Finally, character growth assessment remains subjective, making it difficult to standardize the impact of Literature Circles on students' moral and ethical development.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Literature Circles encourage character education by engaging students in various collaborative reading activities. Students develop responsibility, curiosity, and social interaction skills when selecting books. Through role preparation and character analysis, reading helps them develop discipline, responsibility, creativity, and empathy. Group formation promotes communication, commitment, and cooperation. During talks, students develop empathy, tolerance, and creativity while reflecting on moral values and personal growth. These activities provide authentic opportunities for pre-service teachers and students to learn about, apply, and reflect on character education in meaningful and interactive ways.

Based on the findings, several suggestions can be made to enhance character education through Literature Circles. Lecturers should encourage pre-service teachers to select books with strong moral or ethical themes, providing rich opportunities to reflect on good characters. Literature Circles can be used to enhance literary understanding and as a form of authentic assessment that evaluates students' grasp and demonstration of character values throughout the process.

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