



EFL Students' Critical Reading and Collaborative Learning Skills via Virtual Literature Circle (VLC) within a Critical Reading Class

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Abstract: Research within EFL education highlights specific challenges in fostering critical reading and collaborative learning skills among students, extending to the implementation of Virtual Literature Circle (VLC). Notable issues include persistently low engagement levels and limited participation observed within conventional instructional methods. Moreover, there exists a substantial gap in providing meaningful collaborative learning experiences in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, emphasizing the need for alternative approaches. This study investigated the impact of VLC within a Critical Reading class tailored for EFL students. Through a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design involving a cohort of 25 EFL students at STKIP PGRI Sidoarjo, the study examined their engagement with VLC and subsequent skill development. The findings revealed promising advancements, with students demonstrating increased engagement and active participation during VLC sessions. Additionally, students reported enhanced critical reading skills and a deeper understanding of literary texts through collaborative discussions within VLC. However, challenges persist, including the importance of diversified group dynamics, structured facilitation, and support mechanisms. Notably, students expressed a preference for the collaborative learning format facilitated by VLC over traditional instructional methods. These findings underscore the critical importance of VLC in addressing challenges and enhancing collaborative learning experiences for EFL students.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, Critical Reading, EFL Students, Virtual Literature Circle.

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Introduction

Within the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, several studies have highlighted persistent challenges hindering the cultivation of critical reading and collaborative learning skills among students. Research shows EFL students have consistently low engagement levels and limited participation ([Ritonga et al., 2022](#); [Songnuan & Nomnian, 2023](#); [Sutherland & Incera, 2021](#)). This phenomenon was observed particularly within traditional instructional methods, where students often exhibited passive attitudes toward reading assignments and group discussions. Similarly, [Sunani et al. \(2021\)](#) conducted qualitative research with EFL instructors and students, revealing a lack of meaningful interaction and engagement during collaborative learning activities. These findings underscore the need for alternative approaches to foster active participation and critical thinking skills among EFL students ([Kao & Wu, 2022](#); [Radia, 2019](#); [Yazdani & Sadeghi, 2022](#)).

In response to these challenges, Literature Circle (LC) has emerged as a transformative tool in EFL education, offering unique opportunities for collaborative learning and critical engagement with literary texts ([Karatay, 2017](#); [McElvain, 2010](#); [Sutrisno et al., 2019](#)). Previous studies have underscored the importance and strengths of LC in addressing challenges commonly encountered in traditional instructional methods. [Mirantika \(2021\)](#) and [Thomas and Kim \(2019\)](#) demonstrated the efficacy of LC in enhancing student engagement and critical thinking skills through longitudinal studies and comparative analyses. Moreover, [Su et al. \(2019\)](#) highlighted the potential of LC to provide flexible and accessible collaborative learning experiences, transcending geographical barriers and allowing students to interact synchronously or asynchronously. Additionally, LC offers opportunities for personalized learning experiences, as students can explore diverse literary texts and engage in discussions tailored to their interests and proficiency levels ([Fadhli, 2022](#); [Widodo, 2016](#)). In this context, a Virtual Literature Circle (VLC) represents an adaptation of LC to online environments, leveraging digital tools and platforms to facilitate collaborative reading and discussion among students ([Anugerahwati et al., 2021](#); [Ramli, 2022](#)).

The implementation of VLC, moreover, has emerged as a promising alternative. Studies by [Ramli \(2022\)](#) and [Wafiroh et al. \(2023\)](#) have demonstrated the potential of VLC in enhancing student engagement and critical reading abilities. [Ramli \(2022\)](#) conducted a study involving EFL students participating in VLC and found a significant increase in student participation and motivation over time. Similarly, [Chen and Wang \(2021\)](#) conducted a study in literature discussions and VLC, revealing higher levels of student engagement and critical

thinking in the virtual setting. These findings suggest that VLC offers a viable solution to address the challenges of low engagement and limited participation within traditional instructional methods. However, despite the promising results of VLC implementation, challenges persist. Technical issues such as unreliable internet connections and limited access to devices can hinder the seamless integration of VLC into EFL classrooms ([Anugerahwati et al., 2021](#); [El-Esery, 2023](#)). Additionally, [Su et al. \(2019\)](#) found that varying levels of digital literacy among students may lead to unequal participation and learning outcomes in virtual collaborative settings. These challenges highlight the importance of considering contextual factors and addressing potential barriers to ensure the effective implementation of VLC in EFL education.

Critical reading skills are crucial for EFL students as they navigate complex texts and engage in collaborative learning environments. Positively, developing these skills enhances students' ability to analyze, interpret, and evaluate texts critically, fostering deeper comprehension and promoting active engagement with academic content ([Priyatni & Martutik, 2020](#)). Studies have shown that such practices not only improve students' language proficiency but also cultivate higher-order thinking skills essential for academic success ([Oroujlou & Sadeghi, 2023](#); [Zohrabi & Nasirfam, 2024](#)). However, challenges persist, including the need for tailored instructional strategies that address language proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds, ensuring equitable participation and meaningful learning experiences ([Anugerahwati et al., 2021](#)). Moreover, existing research highlights gaps in the adaptation of VLC specifically for EFL contexts, indicating a need for further exploration into effective implementation strategies and the impact on diverse learner outcomes. Addressing these gaps is critical to advancing pedagogical practices that effectively support EFL students in developing robust critical reading skills necessary for academic and lifelong learning success.

To the best of our knowledge, the identified gaps in existing literature within the field of EFL education underscore specific areas where further research is warranted. While previous studies have explored the impact of VLC on individual skill development, particularly in critical reading abilities ([Anugerahwati et al., 2021](#); [El-Esery, 2023](#); [Ramli, 2022](#); [Sutrisno et al., 2019](#)), there exists a notable lack of comprehensive research examining the combined effects of VLC on both critical reading and collaborative learning within the EFL context ([Fadhli, 2022](#); [Ferdiansyah et al., 2020](#); [Rokhayati & Alvionita, 2022](#); [Widodo, 2016](#)). This gap in research represents a critical area for exploration, as it is essential to understand not only how VLC influences critical reading skills but also how they contribute

to collaborative learning dynamics among EFL students. Furthermore, while some studies have examined the impact of VLC on individual skill development, there is a dearth of research exploring the nuanced interactions between critical reading and collaborative learning within the context of VLC. Therefore, there is a pressing need for research that addresses these gaps by investigating the combined effects of VLC on critical reading and collaborative learning skills among EFL students in a Critical Reading class setting. In light of these identified gaps and challenges, the present study aims to address the following research questions (RQs):

1. How does VLC influence the development of critical reading and collaborative learning skills among EFL students in a Critical Reading class?
2. What impact does VLC have on critical reading and collaborative learning experiences among EFL students in a Critical Reading class?

Literature Review

Challenges in EFL Education

In the dynamic realm of EFL education, educators are confronted with a myriad of challenges in nurturing critical reading and collaborative learning skills among students. Traditional instructional methods, notably lectures and worksheets, are increasingly under scrutiny for their effectiveness in engaging students and fostering profound learning experiences ([Krishan et al., 2020](#); [Abdulhussien, 2023](#); [Tang et al., 2020](#); [Tsang, 2017](#)). These time-honored methods often prioritize passive reception of information, thereby curtailing active student involvement and stifling the development of critical thinking skills essential for academic success and real-world problem-solving. [Anugerahwati et al. \(2021\)](#) delve into the intricacies of these challenges, shedding light on the passive role students often adopt in lecture-based approaches, where questioning, analysis, and practical application are marginalized. This critical stance highlights a significant impediment to students' independent critical thinking, necessitating a reevaluation of traditional approaches. Moreover, collaborative learning environments, while holding promise, introduce their own set of complexities in EFL settings. A crucial aspect, as highlighted by [Hammad \(2022\)](#) and [Sarifa \(2020\)](#), is the challenge posed by language proficiency differences and cultural diversity within collaborative learning. Students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds face hurdles in effective communication, resulting in misunderstandings and disruptions in collaborative endeavors ([Habeab Al-Obaydi et al., 2022](#); [Yazdani & Sadeghi, 2022](#); [Zohrabi & Khalili, 2024](#)). Building upon this challenge, research accentuates the impact of unclear objectives

and unstructured guidance, leading to students grappling with group dynamics and task allocation, ultimately undermining the collaborative learning experience. These findings underscore the urgency for educators to not only acknowledge the challenges identified by prior research but actively reshape educational practices to foster an environment where critical reading and collaborative learning thrive in EFL education.

The Importance of Critical Reading Skills

Critical reading skills play a pivotal role in academic success and lifelong learning, empowering individuals to analyze, evaluate, and interpret texts critically. In the context of EFL education, where students frequently encounter texts in a non-native language, the development of robust critical reading skills is especially vital. These skills not only aid in comprehension but also enable students to delve deeply into the content, question assumptions, and independently construct meaning ([Oroujlou & Sadeghi, 2023](#); [Sunani et al., 2021](#)). While technology offers a vast array of reading materials, its efficacy in fostering critical reading skills hinges on the pedagogical approach employed ([Sari & Wardhani, 2020](#); [Songnuan & Nomnian, 2023](#)). The mere provision of digital texts falls short; educators must design activities and tasks that promote active reading, critical reflection, and interaction with the text. This could entail incorporating multimedia elements, interactive exercises, and discussion forums to enhance student engagement and foster deeper comprehension. Moreover, collaborative learning environments present valuable opportunities to bolster critical reading skills through peer interaction and dialogue ([Habeab Al-Obaydi et al., 2022](#); [Sumarni et al., 2018](#)). Through collaborative reading activities, students can exchange diverse perspectives, challenge interpretations, and collectively construct meaning from the text. This collaborative sense-making process not only enriches comprehension but also nurtures critical thinking skills as students learn to assess evidence, analyze arguments, and synthesize information collaboratively.

Collaborative Learning in EFL Education

Collaborative learning skills stand as vital assets in today's interconnected landscape, where teamwork, communication, and problem-solving reign supreme. In the realm of EFL education, collaborative learning serves as a potent avenue for students to hone these skills while immersing themselves in authentic language use within meaningful contexts ([Amina, 2021](#); [Karnchanachari, 2020](#); [Rao, 2019](#)). Nevertheless, the effective implementation of collaborative learning in EFL classrooms demands meticulous planning, scaffolding, and

support to surmount the unique challenges students encounter. One pivotal challenge revolves around managing group dynamics and ensuring equitable participation among all students. Without well-defined roles, responsibilities, and norms, students may find it challenging to manage collaborative tasks, which can lead to feelings of frustration and disengagement ([Abdulhussien, 2023](#); [Judy, 2021](#); [Yazdani & Sadeghi, 2022](#)). To address this hurdle, educators can furnish explicit instruction on effective collaboration strategies, exemplify collaborative behaviors, and facilitate regular reflection and feedback sessions to foster self-awareness and accountability among students ([Dobakhti, et al., 2023](#)). Moreover, educators can harness technology to augment collaborative learning experiences in EFL classrooms. Virtual collaboration tools, online discussion forums, and collaborative document editing platforms furnish avenues for students to collaborate synchronously and asynchronously, irrespective of temporal and spatial constraints ([Anugerahwati et al., 2021](#); [El-Esery, 2023](#)). Through the seamless integration of these tools into instructional practices, educators can cultivate dynamic and interactive learning environments conducive to the development of collaboration, communication, and critical thinking skills.

Virtual Literature Circle (VLC) in EFL Education

VLC emerges as a promising approach to surmounting challenges in EFL education while nurturing critical reading and collaborative learning proficiencies among students. VLC provides a structured framework for collective reading, discussion, and analysis of literary texts within an online milieu ([El-Esery, 2023](#); [Wafiroh et al., 2023](#)). Through participation in VLC, students delve deeply into the text, exchanging interpretations and gaining insights from peers' perspectives. A primary advantage of VLC lies in their adaptability and accessibility. Unlike traditional face-to-face literature circles, constrained by temporal and spatial limitations, VLC empowers students to engage from any location with internet access, enabling asynchronous discussions and accommodating diverse schedules and learning preferences ([Anugerahwati et al., 2021](#); [Ferdiansyah et al., 2020](#); [Ramli, 2022](#)). This flexibility proves particularly advantageous in EFL contexts, characterized by students from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds, each with differing levels of proficiency in the target language. Furthermore, VLC serves as a scaffold for students' reading comprehension and critical thinking skills by furnishing structured prompts, guiding questions, and discussion protocols ([El-Esery, 2023](#)). Through the breakdown of complex texts into manageable segments and the facilitation of guided discussions, educators assist students in honing their analytical prowess, constructing meaning from the text, and critically engaging

with literary concepts and themes. The present study endeavors to bridge gaps in the existing literature by examining the effectiveness of VLC in fostering critical reading and collaborative learning skills among EFL students. This study aims to provide comprehensive insights into the dynamics of VLC implementation and its implications for EFL education. Moreover, the study seeks to contribute to the established body of knowledge on EFL pedagogy, offering practical recommendations for educators striving to enhance student learning outcomes in the digital age.

The Current Research Framework

The research framework for exploring EFL students' critical reading and collaborative learning skills through VLC is integral to understanding and enhancing educational practices in language learning. This framework integrates elements from sociocultural theory, which emphasizes social interaction and collaborative learning as fundamental to cognitive development and language acquisition ([Atkinson, 1997](#); [Paul, 1992](#)). It posits that VLC can facilitate meaningful engagement and deeper comprehension of texts among EFL learners by fostering interactive discussions and collaborative meaning-making processes ([Anugerahwati et al., 2021](#); [Ferdiansyah et al., 2020](#); [Ramli, 2022](#)). Existing studies demonstrate positive outcomes, including improved language proficiency and critical thinking skills ([Ferdiansyah et al., 2020](#); [Rokhayati & Alvionita, 2022](#); [Widodo, 2016](#)). However, challenges such as varying levels of technological access and proficiency among students, as well as the need for culturally responsive pedagogical approaches within VLC ([El-Esery, 2023](#); [Fadhli, 2022](#); [Wafiroh et al., 2023](#)), underscore gaps in current research. Further exploration is needed to refine instructional strategies, assess the impact of VLC on diverse learner populations, and address potential barriers to effective implementation. By addressing these gaps, this research framework aims to contribute insights into optimizing VLC as a tool for enhancing EFL students' critical reading skills and collaborative learning experiences in digital learning environments.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to delve deeply into the effects of VLC on the development of critical reading skills and the enhancement of collaborative learning experiences among EFL students enrolled in a Critical Reading class. The choice of a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design stems from the need to capture

both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for a holistic understanding of the research phenomena. This approach entails collecting quantitative data through a structured questionnaire adapted from [Karatay \(2017\)](#), focusing on critical reading and collaborative learning dimensions. Subsequently, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with selected participants, facilitating a nuanced exploration of their perceptions and experiences with VLC. The sequential nature of the design involves prioritizing the quantitative phase to establish trends and patterns, followed by the qualitative phase to provide deeper insights and explanations. This sequential approach enables the integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings, enhancing the overall comprehensiveness and validity of the study's conclusions. Furthermore, the explanatory aspect of the design allows for a thorough examination of the relationships between variables of critical reading and collaborative learning skills and the exploration of underlying mechanisms. By combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative interpretation, the study aims to uncover nuanced insights into the impact of VLC on critical reading skills and collaborative learning experiences among EFL students.

Participants

The study includes the 25 EFL students of the second semester at STKIP PGRI Sidoarjo (one of the private universities in East Java, Indonesia) enrolled in a Critical Reading class in the academic year 2023/2024. The decision to choose students from this specific course was deliberate, as it offers a controlled and relevant environment for investigating the impact of VLC on critical reading skills and collaborative learning experiences among EFL students. The selection process involved convenience sampling, a method chosen for its practicality and feasibility within the context of the research setting. Convenient sampling allowed the researchers to recruit participants based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in the study. Given the time and resource constraints inherent in academic research, this approach ensured a smooth and efficient recruitment process. Importantly, the Critical Reading class serves as a focal point for the study because it provides a structured setting where students engage with literary texts, offering a contextually relevant backdrop for implementing and observing the impact of VLC. This intentional selection aligns with the research objectives, allowing for a targeted investigation into the dynamics of VLC.

Table 1. The Demographic Participants

Demographic Characteristics	Participants
Gender	Female = 15
	Male = 10
Age (years)	18-24 = 19
	25-34 = 6
	35+ = 0
Language Proficiency	Low = 17
	Intermediate = 8
	Advanced = 0

Instruments

The investigation utilized a survey derived from [Karatay \(2017\)](#), containing 20 Likert-scale questions with closed-ended responses, each ranging from 1 to 5, gauging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. Out of these, ten items centered on evaluating Critical Reading skills, concentrating on inference, analysis, and evaluation. The remaining ten items aimed at exploring Collaborative Learning encounters, and assessing elements such as communication, cooperation, and problem-solving. Additionally, to delve deeper into participants’ viewpoints and encounters with VLC, semi-structured interview guidelines were thematically developed. These guidelines were tactically designed to probe into various dimensions, including the influence of VLC on critical reading abilities, collaborative learning experiences, encountered hurdles, and recommendations for potential enhancements. Furthermore, the questionnaire was disseminated among all 25 EFL students enrolled in the Critical Reading course to ensure thorough data collection. After the quantitative phase, a subgroup of EFL students, comprising 8 individuals, was chosen for interviews. The selection criteria for interviewees were based on their active involvement in VLC activities and their varied perspectives on the efficacy of VLC in improving critical reading and collaborative learning. This intentional selection process aimed to capture a spectrum of insights and experiences, enriching the qualitative analysis and augmenting the overall comprehensiveness of the study’s findings. The evaluation of critical reading levels was conducted using the cognitive levels of Bloom’s taxonomy new model ([Anderson & Krathwohl, 2021](#)), and the assessment rubric adopted from [Priyatni and Martutik \(2020\)](#). The assessments were scrutinized employing The English Reading Comprehension Observation Protocol (ERCOP): EFL Reading Comprehension Observation Protocol ([Smit et al., 2017](#)).

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over ten sessions spanning two months (June to July 2023), with each session dedicated to reading and discussing chapters of the novel *“Does My Head Look Big in This?”* by Randa Abdel Fattah. It was done by the first author, who is an English lecturer in a Critical Reading class. The other two authors, also part of the research team, collaborated in overseeing the research process and analyzing data. Technological tools such as the Zoom platform were used for conducting virtual discussions, while Google Classroom was employed by the authors to manage assignments and facilitate collaborative activities within the VLC. These platforms enabled the documentation of student interactions and provided insights into their engagement, comprehension strategies, and collaborative dynamics within the digital learning environment. During each session, students were assigned specific roles within the VLC framework, including Discussion Director, Word Wizard, Creative Connector, Summarizer, and Passage Finder. These roles were rotated weekly to ensure equitable participation and varied engagement among students. The following table outlines the activities for each week, delineating the assigned roles and corresponding discussion topics. The activities were guided by theoretical frameworks proposed by [Woodruff and Griffin \(2017\)](#), focusing on active student engagement and collaborative interactions within the VLC.

Table 2. Weekly Activities in VLC

Week	Activity	Assigned Roles	Discussion Topics
1	Introduction to VLC and novel	Facilitator (Introduction)	Overview of the novel <i>“Does My Head Look Big in This?”</i>
2	Reading and discussion - Chapters 1-3	Discussion Director	Themes and character introduction
3	Reading and discussion - Chapters 4-6	Word Wizard	Language and vocabulary analysis
4	Reading and discussion - Chapters 7-9	Creative Connector	Plot connections and predictions
5	Reading and discussion - Chapters 10-12	Summarizer	Summarizing key events and developments
6	Reading and discussion - Chapters 13-15	Passage Finder	Analyzing significant passages and quotes
7	Mid-term reflection and feedback session	Facilitator (Reflection)	Sharing insights, addressing challenges, and feedback
8	Reading and discussion - Chapters 16-18	Discussion Director	Exploring character motivations and conflicts
9	Reading and discussion - Chapters 19-21	Word Wizard	Language and symbolism exploration
10	Final reflections and conclusion	Creative Connector	Overall reflections, group dynamics, and future improvements

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis of questionnaire responses, to address the first research question, utilized descriptive statistics and inferential analysis to examine response frequencies and distributions. Statistical software of SPSS 26 was employed to analyze the quantitative data and identify significant associations between variables. The questionnaire exhibited strong reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.882, signifying robust internal consistency across its components. Qualitative analysis of interview transcripts and reading responses involved thematic coding to identify recurring themes and insights. The data were systematically analyzed to identify patterns, relationships, and emerging trends related to critical reading skills and collaborative learning experiences within VLC.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were rigorously adhered to throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the institutional ethics committee of KEP LPPM STKIP PGRI Sidoarjo to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines and standards.

Results

RQ1. Influence of VLC on Critical Reading and Collaborative Learning Skills

The study aimed to investigate the impact of VLC facilitated through platforms like Zoom and managed using Google Classroom on the development of critical reading and collaborative learning skills among EFL students in a Critical Reading class. Through the implementation of VLC, this study sought to discern how this innovative pedagogical approach influenced the EFL students' abilities to critically engage with texts and collaborate effectively with their peers. Data analysis, including questionnaire responses, was conducted using SPSS 26 to explore quantitative insights into student progress and interaction patterns within the virtual environment.

Critical Reading Aspects

Table 3 below presents the results of the quantitative analysis pertaining to the influence of VLCs on critical reading skills among EFL students. The questionnaire items were designed to assess various dimensions of critical reading, including inference, analysis, and evaluation.

Respondents rated each item on a scale of 1 to 5 (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree), indicating their level of agreement with the statements.

Table 3. The Results of the Questionnaire on Critical Reading Aspects

Critical Reading Aspects	Survey Items	SD (n, %)	D (n, %)	N (n, %)	A (n, %)	SA (n, %)
Inference	1. I can draw conclusions from the text.	2 (8%)	4 (16%)	6 (24%)	8 (32%)	5 (20%)
	2. I can identify implicit meanings.	4 (16%)	6 (24%)	7 (28%)	5 (20%)	3 (12%)
	3. I can make predictions about the text.	3 (12%)	5 (20%)	6 (24%)	7 (28%)	4 (16%)
Analysis	4. I can analyze the author's writing style.	1 (4%)	3 (12%)	7 (28%)	10 (40%)	4 (16%)
	5. I can identify the main ideas of the text.	2 (8%)	4 (16%)	6 (24%)	9 (36%)	4 (16%)
	6. I can identify supporting evidence.	3 (12%)	6 (24%)	5 (20%)	7 (28%)	4 (16%)
Evaluation	7. I can critically evaluate the text.	3 (12%)	5 (20%)	4 (16%)	7 (28%)	6 (24%)
	8. I can assess the credibility of sources.	2 (8%)	4 (16%)	7 (28%)	8 (32%)	4 (16%)
	9. I can identify biases in the text.	4 (16%)	5 (20%)	6 (24%)	6 (24%)	4 (16%)
	10. I can articulate my own interpretations.	3 (12%)	4 (16%)	6 (24%)	8 (32%)	4 (16%)

Noted: SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, N: Neutral, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree, n: number of respondents

The findings presented in Table 3 offer valuable insights into the EFL students' perceptions of their critical reading abilities within the context of VLC. Each survey item was designed to assess specific dimensions of critical reading skills, including inference, analysis, and evaluation.

The results indicate that the majority of students expressed agreement or strong agreement with their ability to draw conclusions from the text (32% strongly agree, 20%

agree). Similarly, a significant portion of respondents reported feeling confident in identifying implicit meanings within the text (28% agree, 12% strongly agree) and making predictions about the text (28% agree, 16% strongly agree). These findings suggest that VLC positively influences the EFL students' inferential skills by encouraging them to engage critically with the text and extrapolate meaning beyond surface-level comprehension.

Regarding analysis skills, a notable proportion of students demonstrated confidence in analyzing the author's writing style (40% agree, 16% strongly agree) and identifying the main ideas of the text (36% agree, 16% strongly agree). Additionally, a considerable number of respondents reported feeling capable of identifying supporting evidence within the text (28% agree, 16% strongly agree). These results suggest that VLC enhances the EFL students' analytical abilities by prompting them to dissect the text and discern underlying themes, stylistic elements, and textual evidence.

In terms of evaluation skills, the data reveal that a substantial portion of students feel equipped to critically evaluate the text (28% agree, 24% strongly agree) and assess the credibility of sources (32% agree, 16% strongly agree). Moreover, many respondents reported confidence in identifying biases in the text (24% agree, 16% strongly agree) and articulating their own interpretations (32% agree, 16% strongly agree). These findings imply that VLC facilitates the development of the EFL students' evaluative skills by encouraging them to scrutinize the text, discern underlying assumptions, and form independent judgments.

The results suggest that VLC has a positive influence on EFL students' critical reading skills, particularly in the areas of inference, analysis, and evaluation. The high percentage of agreement and strong agreement responses indicates that students perceive themselves as proficient in these critical reading aspects when engaging in VLC activities. This is attributed to the collaborative nature of VLC, which encourages active engagement with the text, discussion of various interpretations, and critical reflection on the author's intent and argumentation. Additionally, the structured format of VLC, which often involves assigned roles and guided discussion prompts, may provide scaffolding for students as they navigate complex literary texts and develop their critical reading skills. Overall, these findings underscore the potential of VLC as an effective pedagogical tool for fostering critical reading skills among EFL students.

Collaborative Learning Aspects

Similarly, Table 4 outlines the findings related to the influence of VLC on collaborative learning experiences among EFL students. The questionnaire items focused on

communication, cooperation, and problem-solving skills, aiming to gauge the effectiveness of VLC in fostering collaborative learning environments.

Table 4. The Results of the Questionnaire on Collaborative Learning Aspects

Collaborative Learning	Survey Items	SD (n, %)	D (n, %)	N (n, %)	A (n, %)	SA (n, %)
Communication	1. I can effectively communicate my ideas.	2 (8%)	3 (12%)	5 (20%)	9 (36%)	6 (24%)
	2. I can listen actively to others' ideas.	3 (12%)	5 (20%)	6 (24%)	7 (28%)	4 (16%)
	3. I can express myself clearly in discussions.	2 (8%)	4 (16%)	7 (28%)	7 (28%)	5 (20%)
Cooperation	4. I can work collaboratively with my peers.	1 (4%)	2 (8%)	6 (24%)	11 (44%)	5 (20%)
	5. I can contribute effectively to group tasks.	3 (12%)	4 (16%)	6 (24%)	8 (32%)	4 (16%)
	6. I can resolve conflicts within the group.	3 (12%)	5 (20%)	6 (24%)	6 (24%)	5 (20%)
Problem-solving	7. I can identify solutions to group challenges.	3 (12%)	4 (16%)	6 (24%)	7 (28%)	5 (20%)
	8. I can analyze problems effectively.	2 (8%)	5 (20%)	6 (24%)	8 (32%)	4 (16%)
	9. I can make decisions collaboratively.	1 (4%)	3 (12%)	7 (28%)	9 (36%)	5 (20%)
	10. I can apply critical thinking in group discussions.	4 (16%)	5 (20%)	5 (20%)	7 (28%)	4 (16%)

Table 4 provides an in-depth examination of the EFL students' perceptions regarding their collaborative learning experiences within VLC. The survey items were designed to assess various dimensions of collaborative learning, including communication, cooperation, and problem-solving skills.

The results indicate that the majority of the EFL students feel confident in effectively communicating their ideas during group discussions (36% agree, 24% strongly agree). Additionally, a significant proportion of respondents reported being able to actively listen to others' ideas (28% agree, 16% strongly agree) and express themselves clearly in discussions

(28% agree, 20% strongly agree). These findings suggest that VLC may facilitate the development of the EFL students' communication skills by providing opportunities for verbal exchange, active listening, and articulation of thoughts within a collaborative learning environment.

Regarding cooperation skills, a substantial number of the EFL students expressed confidence in working collaboratively with their peers (44% agree, 20% strongly agree) and contributing effectively to group tasks (32% agree, 16% strongly agree). Moreover, many respondents reported feeling capable of resolving conflicts within the group (24% agree, 20% strongly agree). These results imply that VLC promotes cooperative behaviors among EFL students by fostering teamwork, mutual respect, and conflict-resolution skills within the collaborative learning setting.

In terms of problem-solving skills, the data reveal that a significant portion of the EFL students feel equipped to identify solutions to group challenges (28% agree, 20% strongly agree) and analyze problems effectively (32% agree, 16% strongly agree). Additionally, many respondents reported being able to make decisions collaboratively (36% agree, 20% strongly agree) and applying critical thinking in group discussions (28% agree, 16% strongly agree). These findings suggest that VLC enhances the EFL students' problem-solving abilities by encouraging them to engage in strategic thinking, collaborative decision-making, and critical reflection within the group context.

The results indicate that VLC has a positive influence on the EFL students' collaborative learning skills, particularly in the areas of communication, cooperation, and problem-solving. The high percentage of agreement and strong agreement responses suggests that students perceive themselves as proficient in these collaborative learning aspects when participating in VLC activities. This may be attributed to the interactive and participatory nature of VLC, which provides opportunities for students to engage in meaningful dialogue, share perspectives, and collaborate on tasks within a supportive group environment. Additionally, the structured format of VLC, which often involves assigned roles, clear objectives, and guided discussions, may facilitate effective communication, cooperation, and problem-solving among students. Overall, these findings underscore the potential of VLC as an effective pedagogical tool for fostering collaborative learning skills among EFL students.

RQ2. Exploring the Impact of VLC on Critical Reading and Collaborative Learning

In the ever-evolving landscape of EFL education, VLC has emerged as a contemporary pedagogical tool, strategically designed to enrich critical reading skills and foster

collaborative learning. This exploration delves into the nuanced findings derived from meticulously conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight carefully selected EFL students

(P1 to P8). The choice to interview eight students was deliberate to ensure a diverse range of perspectives and experiences among EFL learners, thereby enriching the breadth and depth of insights gathered for the study. This sample size allows for comprehensive exploration and a robust understanding of varying viewpoints, contributing to the validity and reliability of the research findings. The primary objective of this interview was to capture a holistic understanding of the profound influence of VLCs on critical reading and collaborative learning within the framework of a Critical Reading class.

Participant Experiences with VLC

The participants provided articulate descriptions of their experiences with VLC, characterizing them as highly engaging, intellectually stimulating, and ultimately rewarding. P1 eloquently expressed, *“My experience with VLC was highly engaging and intellectually stimulating, providing a platform for in-depth discussions and critical analysis”*. P4 highlighted the challenging yet rewarding nature of the VLC experience, noting, *“It required active engagement and critical thinking, which ultimately enhanced my understanding of the texts”*. P6 found the discussions both enjoyable and insightful, noting, *“It deepened my understanding of the texts and expanded my analytical skills”*. P8 concluded, *“Overall, my experience with VLC was positive. It helped me develop a deeper appreciation for literature and improved my ability to analyze and interpret texts”*. These diverse reflections underscore the multifaceted impact of VLC on engagement, critical thinking, and intellectual growth.

Influence on Critical Reading Skills

Addressing the question of how participating in VLC influenced their critical reading skills, participants unveiled a spectrum of positive outcomes. P2 elaborated, *“Participating in VLC encouraged me to read between the lines and consider implicit meanings in texts, enhancing my inferential skills”*. P4 noted, *“The VLC experience has sharpened my analytical abilities. It has taught me to approach texts with a critical eye and discern underlying themes and messages”*. P6 added, *“VLC expanded my repertoire of critical reading strategies. They have challenged me to delve deeper into texts and extract nuanced meanings”*. P8 concluded, *“The VLC experience has been instrumental in developing my critical reading skills. It has taught me to approach texts with a discerning eye and to question underlying assumptions”*. These

insights collectively showcase the diverse ways VLC positively impacted participants' critical reading skills.

Challenges in Collaborative Learning with VLC

As the conversation shifted towards challenges encountered during collaborative learning activities within VLC, participants provided a candid exploration of the obstacles faced. P1 noted, *"It was sometimes difficult to find a time that worked for everyone."* highlighting the logistical challenge of coordinating schedules. P3 identified ensuring equitable participation among group members as a challenge, stating, *"Some members were more vocal than others, which sometimes resulted in unequal contributions"*. P7 remarked on the challenge of maintaining engagement throughout discussions, affirming, *"It required us to keep the momentum going and encourage active involvement"*. P8 noted the challenge of staying on topic during discussions, arguing, *"It was easy to veer off course, so we had to remain focused on the text and its key themes"*. These challenges underscore the dynamic nature of collaborative learning within virtual environments, emphasizing the importance of addressing logistical, participatory, and focus-related aspects.

Benefits of VLC in EFL Education

Exploring the benefits of incorporating VLC in EFL education, participants illuminated a myriad of advantages. P3 expressed that *"VLC promoted active engagement and critical thinking, essential skills for academic success"*. P4 noted, *"Engaging in VLC encourages independent thinking and empowers students to construct meaning from texts"*. P6 pointed out the enhancement of communication and interpersonal skills, noting, *"Participating in VLCs enhances students' communication and interpersonal skills, which are valuable in both academic and professional contexts"*. P8 determined, *"VLCs facilitate a deeper exploration of texts and promote critical engagement with literature, fostering a deeper appreciation for the subject"*. These identified benefits highlight the diverse impact of VLC on academic skills, communication abilities, and a deeper appreciation for the subject matter.

Suggestions for Improvement in VLC

In offering suggestions for enhancing the VLC experience for future students, the participants demonstrated a reflective and forward-thinking mindset. P2 mentioned flexibility in group dynamics, stating, *"Allowing students to self-select group members based on shared interests or learning goals would enhance the VLC experience"*. P4 suggested more structured

facilitation of discussions, noting, *“It would help ensure that all group members have an opportunity to contribute”*. P6 proposed providing additional support and resources for struggling students, stating, *“Incorporating multimedia elements or interactive activities into VLC would enhance student engagement and participation”*. These suggestions provide valuable insights into areas of improvement, emphasizing the importance of diversified group dynamics, structured facilitation, and support mechanisms.

In conclusion, the insights gleaned from the interview with all eight participants present a comprehensive and detailed view of the multifaceted impact of VLCs on critical reading skills and collaborative learning experiences among EFL students. The participants’ reflections not only highlighted the numerous benefits of VLC participation but also identified and addressed challenges, offering constructive suggestions for improvement. This comprehensive understanding emphasizes the need for continued exploration and refinement of VLCs to optimize their effectiveness in the dynamic landscape of EFL education.

Discussion

This study delves into the impact of VLC on critical reading skills and collaborative learning among EFL students, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of their effectiveness and areas for improvement. The findings of this investigation offer valuable insights into the participants’ experiences, the influence on critical reading skills, challenges encountered, perceived benefits, and suggestions for enhancing the VLC experience. By comparing and contrasting these findings with existing literature, the discussion aims to illuminate the complexities of implementing VLC in EFL education and to propose strategies for optimizing their effectiveness.

The participants’ experiences with VLC revealed a highly positive perception, characterized by engagement, intellectual stimulation, and a sense of fulfillment. The approach offered by VLC for in-depth discussions and collaborative learning was widely appreciated by the students, reflecting the potential of this pedagogical tool to enhance student engagement and critical thinking. These findings resonate with prior research highlighting the benefits of collaborative learning approaches in literature studies ([Karatay, 2017](#); [Ramli, 2022](#)). For instance, [Karatay \(2017\)](#) emphasized the role of collaborative learning in fostering a deeper understanding of literary texts, while [Ramli \(2022\)](#) underscored the positive impact of virtual platforms on student engagement and interaction. However, while the overall sentiment was positive, it is important to acknowledge that individual experiences may vary, and further exploration of factors influencing student engagement and

satisfaction with VLC is warranted. Additionally, contrasting findings from studies such as those by [Anugerahwati et al. \(2021\)](#) and [El-Esery \(2023\)](#), which identified challenges related to technological barriers and unequal participation, highlight the need for nuanced consideration of contextual factors in implementing VLC effectively within EFL contexts.

Regarding the influence of participating in VLC on critical reading skills, the participants reported significant improvements in their ability to question assumptions, analyze texts critically, and read between the lines. These findings align with existing literature emphasizing the role of collaborative learning and discussion-based approaches in fostering critical reading skills ([Anugerahwati et al., 2021](#); [El-Esery, 2023](#); [Oroujlou & Sadeghi, 2023](#)). For example, [Anugerahwati et al. \(2021\)](#) highlighted how collaborative discussions enhance students' ability to critically analyze literature, while [El-Esery \(2023\)](#) emphasized the importance of questioning assumptions in developing deep reading comprehension. However, it is essential to recognize that the development of critical reading skills is a complex process influenced by various factors, including instructional strategies, student motivation, and prior knowledge ([Wafiroh et al., 2023](#)). Therefore, while VLC may contribute to enhancing critical reading skills, it should be integrated into a broader pedagogical framework that addresses these factors comprehensively. Contrasting studies, such as those by [Su et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Ramli \(2022\)](#), which identified challenges in sustaining critical engagement and ensuring equitable participation in virtual environments, underscore the need for targeted interventions and contextual adaptations to optimize VLC's effectiveness in EFL learning contexts.

Despite the perceived benefits, the participants also encountered several challenges during collaborative learning activities within VLC. These challenges ranged from logistical issues, such as coordinating schedules and managing time effectively, to interpersonal dynamics, including conflicts over interpretations and unequal participation. These findings underscore the complexities of implementing collaborative learning strategies in diverse educational settings and highlight the importance of addressing both logistical and pedagogical challenges ([Mirantika, 2021](#); [Ramli, 2022](#); [Thomas & Kim, 2019](#)). Furthermore, cultural and linguistic differences among group members posed additional challenges, underscoring the necessity for culturally sensitive teaching methods and efficient communication strategies to encourage fair participation and equal opportunities ([Ferdiansyah et al., 2020](#); [Rokhayati & Alvionita, 2022](#)).

The benefits perceived by the participants regarding the incorporation of VLC in EFL education are consistent with existing literature, which emphasizes the role of collaborative

learning approaches in promoting student engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking ([McElvain, 2010](#); [Su et al., 2019](#)). [McElvain \(2010\)](#) highlighted how collaborative discussions in literature circles enhance students' understanding and engagement with texts, while [Su et al. \(2019\)](#) underscored the cognitive benefits of collaborative learning environments. However, it is essential to recognize that the effectiveness of VLC depends on various factors, including instructional design, group dynamics, and student readiness ([Widodo, 2016](#)). For instance, [Widodo \(2016\)](#) discussed the importance of structured discussions and clear learning objectives in maximizing the benefits of collaborative learning activities. Therefore, while VLC offers valuable opportunities for collaborative learning, they should be implemented thoughtfully and supported by comprehensive instructional strategies to maximize their potential impact on student learning outcomes. Contrasting findings from studies such as those by [El-Esery \(2023\)](#) and [Wafiroh et al. \(2023\)](#), which identified challenges related to technological barriers and varying levels of student participation, underscore the need for tailored approaches and contextual adaptations to optimize the effectiveness of VLC in diverse EFL learning contexts.

In offering suggestions for improving the VLC experience for future students, the participants demonstrated a reflective and forward-thinking mindset, proposing strategies to address both logistical challenges and pedagogical considerations. These suggestions underscore the importance of providing clear guidelines, offering training on communication and collaboration skills, incorporating multimedia elements, structuring discussions, and promoting diversity in group composition. Furthermore, the emphasis on flexibility in group dynamics and providing additional support for struggling students reflects a student-centered approach to learning, which recognizes the diverse needs and preferences of learners in EFL contexts ([Anugerahwati et al., 2021](#); [El-Esery, 2023](#); [Ramli, 2022](#)).

Overall, the findings of this study contribute to our understanding of the potential benefits and challenges associated with the implementation of VLC in EFL education. While the results highlight the positive perception and perceived benefits of VLC among students, they also underscore the importance of addressing challenges and implementing effective support mechanisms to enhance their overall effectiveness. Further research is warranted to explore additional factors influencing the implementation and outcomes of VLC, as well as to assess their long-term effects on students' reading comprehension and academic performance.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the impact of VLC on critical reading skills and collaborative learning among EFL students. The findings highlight the positive perception of VLCs among participants, who reported engaging experiences, improvements in critical reading skills, and perceived benefits in EFL education. However, challenges such as the importance of diversified group dynamics, structured facilitation, and support mechanisms were also identified, underscoring the need for comprehensive support mechanisms and instructional strategies to optimize the effectiveness of VLC. These findings have important implications for educators and curriculum designers aiming to integrate collaborative learning approaches, such as VLC, into EFL education. While this study highlights the perceived benefits of VLC in enhancing critical reading and collaborative learning skills, it is crucial to acknowledge its limitations, including the small sample size and the focus on a specific educational context. Future research should delve deeper into the nuances of VLC implementation by exploring factors such as varied instructional designs tailored to different proficiency levels, optimizing group dynamics for inclusive participation, and addressing technological challenges that may impact engagement and interaction quality. Additionally, longitudinal studies are essential to assess the sustained impact of VLC on students' reading comprehension, academic performance, and overall language proficiency development over extended periods. By addressing these specific limitations and conducting targeted research, educators can refine VLC methodologies to effectively meet diverse educational needs, thereby maximizing their potential benefits in EFL classrooms. This study contributes valuable insights for informing future research directions and practical applications, facilitating evidence-based decision-making in enhancing collaborative learning experiences in EFL settings.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest pertaining to this study.

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