

# **EXPLORING EFL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**

**Satria Aris Fadilah<sup>1</sup>, Diah Retno Widowati<sup>2</sup>, Fitri Awaliyatush Sholihah<sup>3</sup>**

*English Education Department, Universitas Islam Malang, Indonesia*

*Email: [22001073049@unisma.ac.id](mailto:22001073049@unisma.ac.id)*

## **ABSTRACT**

Students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) must develop reading comprehension skills as the foundation for future academic achievement and effective communication in this increasingly globalized world. Reading comprehension is crucial but many students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) face challenges that hinder their reading comprehension development. Therefore, there is still a lack of research that investigates how Communities of Practice facilitate EFL students' reading comprehension from the perspective of learners' experiences, particularly in Indonesian higher education contexts. This study aimed to explore EFL students' experiences when learning reading comprehension through Community of Practice, including the challenges, the benefit and the role of Community of Practice in their learning reading comprehension. The researcher used narrative inquiry method to explore the EFL students' experiences in learning reading comprehension through Community of Practice. Narrative inquiry was the study of experience as story. The participants of this study were two students of third semester in Universitas Islam Malang, the researcher used semi-structured interview as a data collection and analyzed thematically. The result showed that Community of Practice had a role to improve EFL students' reading comprehension. This was implemented through peer support, collaborative discussion, vocabulary sharing, and scaffolding strategies. In conclusion, this result of this study showed that the CoP also provided opportunities for students to learn together, exchange ideas, and solve problems together, which helped students better understand reading materials.

**Keywords :** EFL Students, Reading Comprehension, Community of Practice

## INTRODUCTION

Students of English as a foreign language (EFL) must cultivate reading comprehension skills to provide the groundwork for future academic achievement and proficient communication in our increasingly globalized world. Reading comprehension is crucial, but many English as a foreign language (EFL) students face challenges that impede their language development. Collaborative interaction markedly improves comprehension skills; nonetheless, traditional educational approaches frequently prioritize solitary learning. Students in higher education in Indonesia still have trouble understanding texts, evaluating information objectively, making independent decisions, and finding the best solutions. As a result, they need to be taught how to think critically and read critically (Sahiruddin et al., 2022). (Ayu, Diem & Vianty, 2017) observed that children's cognitive development, linguistic skills, and experiential knowledge can all be enhanced through reading. They will acquire essential knowledge and understanding through reading (Sasalia & Sari, 2020). The control group is taught using a traditional method. In summary, activities like reading, encoding, annotating, and pondering can help students improve their reading skills (Sholihah, 2017).

The CoP facilitated student revision by promoting increased participation among new members in activities. This was achieved by fostering relationships and establishing a supportive environment. Moreover, it cultivated a sense of independence among the children. The findings illuminate the capacity of Facebook groups as Communities of Practice (CoP) to enhance effective writing revision activities, bearing considerable theoretical, pedagogical, and research consequences (Razak & Saeed, 2014). Lave and Wenger (1991, 98) assert that communities of practice develop over time and in relation to other overlapping and intersecting groups, activities, and surroundings. "Communities of practice" refer to informal networks of professionals and individuals collaborating to instruct newcomers in their respective fields. The authors based their recommendations on personal experiences with faculty development programs involving Communities of Practice, as well as prior research on the topic. These recommendations serve as a general framework rather than a definitive set of rules. It is also crucial to consider cultural and national differences when creating and applying Communities of Practice, as they are grounded in sociocultural theories. Here are some recommendations, First, choose a core group to start the process. Second, define the objectives and importance of the Community of Practice (CoP). Third, start a specific job or project. Fourth, adopt a problem-

centric approach. Fifth, Keep an open Community of Practice. Sixth, invite members who have experience and innovative ideas. Seventh, select a facilitator as "primus inter pares."/first among equals. Eighth, Ensure the process benefits both members and the institution. Ninth, Pursue institutional support. Tenth, communicate success. Eleventh, Engage online. Finally, assess the Community of Practice (Carvalho-Filho et al., 2020). Previous research tends to emphasize outcomes rather than exploring students' lived experiences in depth. Therefore, there is still a lack of research that investigates how Communities of Practice facilitate EFL students' reading comprehension from the perspective of learners' experiences, particularly in Indonesian higher education contexts. Therefore this study addressed the following questions:

1. What is the role of Community of Practice in learning reading comprehension?
2. What challenges do EFL students face in learning reading comprehension through community of practice?
3. What benefits do EFL students perceive in understanding reading comprehension skills through Community of Practice?

## **METHOD**

This study applied narrative inquiry method to explore the experiences of EFL students' reading comprehension through the Community of Practice. Narrative inquiry is the study of experience as story. The argument is made that experience itself is always understood in narrative form, and that people tell stories to make sense of their lives (Clandinin, 2006). The researcher used narrative inquiry design because by using narrative as the primary way to understand experiences, researchers can access how individuals interpret and give meaning to their lives. This approach allows for a more holistic understanding of the context of their life, feelings and perceptions in learning reading comprehension through community of practice.

The study was conducted in the English Education Department of a private university in Malang, East Java, Indonesia, where the students usually learn reading comprehension through community of practice (CoP). Two participants as CoPs' member were selected through purposive sampling, as this technique allows the selection of participants who possess rich and relevant information related to the research focus.

The participants, referred to by the pseudonyms Ragil and Novita, had completed reading classroom and they were as the CoPs' member when learning

reading comprehension, providing them with direct experience in real activity. Their participant was voluntary and both met the criteria of learning reading comprehension through community of practice.

The data were obtained by interviews. The interview was addressed to EFL students' reading who have been chosen as a sample of this research and it was used semi-structured interview as a data collection through the EFL students in reading classroom who were selected to more understand how they learn reading comprehension through Community of Practice. A semi-structured interview is a research technique that uses a set of guiding questions but allows for flexibility to adapt the conversation (Saunders et al., 2015). The researcher has gotten permission from participant before they are interviewed and the participants have known that the purpose of interview is for obtaining data collection in this research. The researcher did the interview by WhatsApp call because the limit of time from the researcher and the participant, then the researcher recorded the whatsapp call.

The researcher analyzed the results by using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes the data set in great detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher took some answers from the participants which was asked by the researcher. The researcher also re-asked the question to get more understanding of the result. The data were obtained from the whatsapp call recording between the researcher and participant.

## **FINDINGS**

These findings provide answers to the research questions, on what is the role of Community of Practice in learning reading comprehension, what challenges do EFL students faced in learning reading comprehension through community of practice, what benefits do EFL students perceive in understanding reading comprehension skills through Community of Practice?

### **1. The role of Community of Practice in learning reading comprehension**

Ragils' experiences in learning reading through CoP was active in discussing with others member about the reading material, however novitas' experiences she preffered like listening to other members' discussion carefully, after that she asked questions to clarify points that were not yet clear.

Ragil said that " My experience learning reading comprehension through community of practice by discussing with other members", in addition, Novita said " My experience learning reading comprehension through community of practice is to first pay attention when other members are discussing, and then at the end of the session, I will ask the questions"

Ragil said that having friends in the community helped her and it was very helpful when she had difficulty understanding the text. P2 said that being part of the CoP helped her learn new words and expressions by doing shared reading activities. These show that people in the community help each other by explaining things and talking about them.

Ragil said that "The community of practice is very helpful in improving my reading comprehension. I feel very supported when I have difficulty understanding a text. And my friends help me by explaining the difficult text to me.", similarly novita said "in fact community of practice has helped me improve my reading comprehension. I can learn new vocabulary and idioms after studying reading together."

Ragil and Novita have had similar experiences in finding motivation to improve their reading comprehension through a community of practice. Their friends, who are smarter than them, used to motivate them to read fluently and accurately.

Ragil stated "When I see my friends understanding the text easily, it makes me want to keep learning. Their energy is infectious, making the

learning environment more positive and pushing me to keep going.” And Novita explained “I am motivated because i see my friends' abilities, which are greater than mine and learning reading in Community of Practice motivates me to learn to read because I like learning with friends, rather than learning alone, which is boring.”

Ragil showed active and collaborative interaction, where members encouraged each other and created a supportive atmosphere for friends who were passive or hesitant to speak. And Novita described a more receptive or passive interaction, which involved asking questions more often than giving opinions or knowledge.

Ragil state “I often interact with others, because we encourage our silent friends by saying, ‘Which part do you find difficult? Just say it, and others will help/teach you. In addition, Novita said : “When learning reading comprehension through the community of practice, I often interact by asking questions, not giving opinion or knowledge to other friends.”

Statement Ragil showed the existence of peer scaffolding, which was supporting among friends to help with gradual understanding, until learners felt more confident in understanding the text. Meanwhile, Novita participant mentioned that she was advised not to immediately look up the meaning of words in the dictionary, because often the meaning of a word can be understood from the context of the following sentence.

Ragil ” My friends often advise me to read texts slowly so that I can understand every idea and understand the sentence structure well. They also help explain difficult vocabulary, give examples of word usage, and summarize important parts so that I am more thorough and confident when understanding the reading material.”, similarly Novita said” One of my friends advised me not to rush to look up words I don't understand in the dictionary, because they will be explained in the next sentence.”

Ragil said that the community atmosphere was very supportive because all members respected each other and encouraged each other when mistakes occurred. Novita also felt comfortable because they were familiar with their friends' personalities, and there was no teasing or disrespectful behavior.. This showed that there was psychological safety within the community

Ragil said “It's very comfortable, because all participants in the community support each other. They tolerate friends who make mistakes and encourage them to believe in themselves and not be afraid of making mistakes. No one looks down on their friends.” And also Novita said “Yes, I feel comfortable. The first reason is because I already know my friends' personalities, and the second reason is because no one else teases or insults me when I make a mistake.”

Statement Ragil indicated that CoP members not only share answers, but also shared learning resources to strengthen individual understanding. Novita emphasized that the community regularly held sharing and discussion sessions.

Ragil “The community helped me overcome my reading comprehension difficulties by suggesting that I watch instructional videos on YouTube. From there, I was able to get clearer additional explanations, which improved my understanding of the text.”, in addition, Novita said “The community helps me by always holding sharing and discussion sessions.”

Ragil highlighted the aspect of collaborative learning, where members helped each other understand the reading text through discussion and exchange of explanations, Novita emphasized that the community provides freedom to express opinions (open participation), so that each member has the same opportunity to contribute to the learning process.

Ragil said “Community of practice provides us with opportunities to learn collaboratively through reading. Through these activities, we can understand texts together, discuss them, and share explanations with each other when we encounter difficult passages. With this cooperation, each member complements one another, resulting in a better understanding of the reading material.”, similarly Novita said “The community opens up opportunities as widely as possible to express opinions”

## **2. The Student's Challenges Faced When Learning Reading Comprehension Through CoP**

This section explains a lot of challenges faced by the the EFL students when learning reading comprehension through Community of Practice, for the example, there is lack of vocabulary, feeling of nervousness as Ragil & Novita explained that they felt embarrassed when interacting in the community because their vocabulary were still limited. And they also mentioned time constraints as

another factor that hindered his understanding of the reading text. the more limited a person's vocabulary is, the lower their confidence in actively participating.

Ragil said “The challenge I faced when learning reading comprehension through the practice community was feeling embarrassed because my vocabulary was still limited. In addition, the time available sometimes felt too short to really delve into the text, so I had to make more effort to understand the reading well.”, similarly Novita said “I have difficulty understanding sentences because my vocabulary is limited, which causes me to lack confidence.”

### **3. The Benefit Preceived by EFL Students in Learning Reading Comprehension Through CoP**

In this section explains the benefit perceived by the members Community of Practice when learning reading comprehension through CoP. as Ragil said he felt confident in every CoP activity because of the support from his peers and the safe learning environment. Meanwhile, the second person in the group said that before joining, she lacked confidence because she compared herself to other friends' skills. However, after going to several sessions, she became more confident because the other members motivated and encouraged her. This showed that the child was being encouraged by society and that positive reinforcement was helping reduce their anxiety about learning community that supported effective learning were placed where people feel safe.

Ragil “I feel confident doing every activity in CoP because we support each other and no one looks down on me when I misinterpret a text.” And also Novita said “Before joining the reading group, I lacked confidence because I saw my friends who were so good at reading comprehension. But after several sessions, I gained confidence because of the support I received in learning things I didn't know.”

Ragil said that learning to understand texts through a Community of Practice (CoP) was better because each member had different levels of ability and understanding. Novita also said that learning to understand texts together in the CoP was more effective and fun.

Ragil said “I think it's more useful to learn reading comprehension through CoP, because each participant has different abilities. The smarter

ones can help the less smart ones. So we get support and different knowledge from each member.”, similarly Novita said “I prefer learning reading comprehension together, because it helps improve my reading comprehension more as other members share their knowledge, and I don't get bored because there are people who support me and share their knowledge.”

## **DISCUSSION**

This chapter discusses the research findings by relating them to relevant theories and previous research findings. All findings are discussed in this following points.

According to the study's findings, being a part of a community of practice (CoP) greatly enhances participants' self-confidence, learning motivation, and English reading comprehension. Social connection and peer support, shared learning methodologies, psychological safety, and linguistic and temporal obstacles are some of the significant elements that are revealed by analyzing statements the participant. This shows a collaborative practice where everyone plays an active role in building understanding. Collaboration is a promising way for people to connect that has become a trend in the 21st century. It is more important than ever to think together and work together on important issues (Austin, J. E., 2000; Welch, M., 1998).

Novita prefers to listen to the discussion and then ask questions at the end of the session to clarify any parts that are not understood. Social learning theory is an important part of managing natural resources in a way that lasts and encouraging the right kinds of behavior (Muro & Jeffrey 2008). This idea is based on the idea that we learn from our interactions with others in a social context. People also learn from what they see other people do. People tend to copy others' behavior, especially when it's positive or has rewards associated with it. According to Bandura, imitation is copying the actions of others (Bandura;1977).

That statement also relates with the theory of peer-assisted learning, where more proficient learners help less proficient learners as tutors in understanding the material. PALS is a program that helps students learn to read. It is based on science and is used in the classroom. In this program, students who are reading below their grade level are paired with students who are reading above their grade level. They practice reading together. Studies have shown that

PALS can help children develop better reading skills at the start (Rafdal et al., 2011).

They said that they support each other when studying together because they have the same goal. Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) is an approach in which students are asked to teach each other during the learning process, making it more active. These interventions effectively engage students in the learning process and produce academic gains across various student populations, academic subjects, and classroom arrangements (Johnson et al., 1981, cited in Rohrbeck, 2003, p. 240).

Both students said that they are motivated when they are leaning reading through community of practice, it means that the community support them to get new knowledge and experiences. Motivation in learning is when a student is eager to participate in the learning process (Feng, Fan, & Yang, 2013). Motivation is what makes learners want to learn a foreign language (Astuti, 2022). Research shows that students' motivation to read is important for their success in school. When students are interested in reading, they tend to do better on reading tests and in other school subjects (Guthrie et al., 2006). It has to do with being mentally prepared to read, being willing to read, what you believe about reading, and how you think about reading (Alhamdu, 2015).

The motivation for reading is clear: it is internal reasons for reading that activate cognitive operations. These enable the individual to perform such acts as acquiring knowledge, enjoying aesthetic experiences, performing tasks, and participating in social contexts (Kirchner & Mostert, 2017). Their statement also relates with the CoP framework. The CoP framework can assist motivated individuals in advancing faculty development and fostering a culture transformation towards evidence-based teaching methodologies. It is founded on the premise that learning is a social activity dependent on knowledge-sharing connections and mentorship (Steinert 2010).

Students collaborate with their friends in learning reading comprehension, which means they also use collaborative reading strategies and state that these strategies can improve their reading comprehension skills. Collaborative strategic reading is an appropriate teaching technique to hone students' reading skills, enrich their vocabulary, and teach them to work together to achieve a goal. According to (Oktarina, 2018), strategies that focus on teaching and promote collaboration have been widely acknowledged to impact students' reading comprehension and participation. (Bremer, Vaughn & Clapper, 2002) stated that, "Collaborative Strategic Reading is an approach that works well in mixed-ability classrooms and helps students improve their reading comprehension". That statement also relates with the study of (Kadir, Zuhairi & Suhartoyo, 2020) that successful learners use a variety of strategies to learn

grammar. One strategy is to ask teachers or classmates about grammar rules you don't understand. This is called a "social strategy." It's a very effective way to learn grammar. To remember grammar rules, learners should practice using the grammar rules when talking with friends or others.

Social interaction, how knowledge is shared, and working together are all important parts of learning how to do a job. When beginners see how complicated something can be, and that there are different ways to do things, and they talk with experts and other beginners, it helps them understand that being an expert is not just one thing, and it helps them see learning as something that keeps on happening in a social setting (Vygotsky, 1978).

Another finding from the results is that students stated that they could learn new vocabulary from their peers in the community. The teacher's scaffold and friend's scaffold were also able to improve reading comprehension skills a lot (Bui & Fagan, 2013; Hiebert & Daniel, 2019). Peer scaffolding also makes students more willing to ask their friends for help understanding the text. This is different from how things were done with teaching scaffolding. When teaching scaffolding was used, many students weren't free to ask the teacher for help for different reasons (A. Saarinen, 2020; Smith & Curtis, 2020). This research is in line with what other studies have found. These studies show that students feel more free and satisfied when they can study with friends or work in groups (Maguet et al., 2021; Rezat et al., 2022).

In another statement, the students said that they're feel comfortable in learning reading comprehension through Community of Practice because the implementation of Community of Practice (CoP) in learning reading comprehension provides a strong sense of comfort, support, tolerance and psychological safety. Those are significant factors that contribute to students' positive engagement and improvement in reading comprehension. in terms of enhancing meaning, by helping individuals speak out openly and provide feedback, psychological safety promotes the good interaction between students and students, as well as between students and teachers, Psychological safety helps people think more freely and adventurously, and it encourages them to explore and learn on their own (Liang et al., 2012). This helps people meet their need for autonomy and improve their influence on the project process (Newman et al., 2017).

## **CONCLUSION AND LIMITATION**

Based on the above findings, the researchers concluded that, First, participating in a Community of Practice really helped students improve their

reading comprehension skills. They worked together, supported each other, and shared learning strategies, which made a big. The students really enjoyed the discussions, explanations, and sharing of vocabulary, which helped them understand the texts better and get more involved with them.

Second, the member of CoP had a really positive impact on the students, boosting their motivation and confidence. The community was so supportive, and everyone felt safe and comfortable enough to share their ideas and ask questions. It was really encouraging to see learners feeling brave enough to step outside their comfort zone and try new things. Social interaction, encouragement, and feedback from peers are all so important in helping students stay excited about reading.

Third, the learning process in CoP helped people learn from each other. Students who were better at the task helped students who were not as good, which is an example of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Bandura's Social Learning Theory. This exchange helped students learn new words, understand difficult texts, and become more independent learners.

Fourth, even though there were many benefits, there were also some challenges. Some of the challenges were limited vocabulary and not having enough time. These barriers sometimes made learners feel less confident and less likely to participate. However, the support from their peers helped them overcome these challenges.

To sum it up, learning to understand what you read by working with a group of people who are doing the same thing can improve your mind as well as your emotions. It encourages students to work together, helps them feel motivated, and makes them believe in themselves. This makes it a good option instead of the usual way of teaching reading that focuses on one student at a time.

This study only involved a small number of participants from one institution, because only the students who have participated in learning reading comprehension through Community of Practice (CoP). so the findings can't be generalized widely. Future research can involve more participant from different faculty and educational levels to get broader result. In addition, this study does not aim to measure the effectiveness of the Community of Practice, compare students' reading achievement before and after the implementation, or examine the relationship between the Community of Practice and other language skills such as speaking, writing, listening, or grammar. Rather, it simply seeks to explore the participants' experiences.

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