

The Positive Effect of the English Reading Circle Method on Students' Reading Performance: Tishk University Case Study

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Received: 11/05/2023

Accepted: 02/16/2024

Published: 03/20/2024

Abstract

This study aims to investigate how the reading circle, also known as the literature circle method, affects students' reading performances and lessons. This study will be an example study in helping students who do not like reading gain a reading habit. In this study, a mixed research method was applied by collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. At the beginning of the study, control and experimental groups were created using the stratified sampling method, and a pre-test was applied by an expert staff to see the students' reading performances at the beginning of the study. The reading circle method was followed in the experimental group, and the traditional text reading and answering method was followed in the control group. During this five-week study, weekly tests were applied to both groups, and their reading performances were monitored. At the end of the study, post-tests and semi-structured interviews were applied to the students. According to SPSS t-statistics analysis, a significant difference of .001 was observed between the reading performances of the experimental group and the control group. In addition, students' positive feedback about the reading circle method was recorded from the interview analysis. As a result, this study revealed that the reading circle method made a positive contribution to students' reading performance. This study will shed light on other studies on reading in Iraq.

Keywords: English reading circle, Iraq, literature Circle, reading performance, Tishk University

Cite as: Kucuk, T. (2024). The Positive Effect of the English Reading Circle Method on Students' Reading Performance: Tishk University Case Study. *Arab World English Journal*, 15(1): 233-244. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol15no1.14>

Introduction

According to (Riswanto et al., (2023, “Reading is an essential skill required for acquiring proficiency in the English language. Books are windows to the world, reading opens a plethora of opportunities for learning and gaining knowledge about various subjects and cultures without the need for physical travel” (p.573). The place of reading in English or any language is indisputably important. Reading is a fundamental skill in establishing the cornerstones of education and completing personal development. It is a magic touch that makes every aspect of our lives beautiful (Isaqjon, 2022).

One of the primary and important characteristics of reading is its function as a gateway to acquiring knowledge (Kara & Kucuk, 2023). Through the dedicated pursuit of a literary existence, individuals might acquire comprehensive knowledge about their personal history, prospects, and global affairs. The acquisition of knowledge is dependent upon engaging in the act of reading (Kucuk, 2023). Despite possessing information, he lacks the necessary supporting traits and fails to exert influence over others through his speech. An additional advantage of engaging in reading is its contribution to cultivating critical thinking and analytical abilities. When engaging with various forms of textual material such as novels, newspaper articles, sports news, or academic studies, it is essential to initially comprehend the conveyed information and subsequently interpret it through our individual perspectives (Celik, 2018). Through this approach, we acquire the ability to analyse events from a suitable standpoint and evaluate them with a discerning mindset.

One further advantage of reading lies in its boundless impact on individuals' oral communication skills (Kara, 2023). The attainment of fluency in English or any other language is intricately linked to the act of reading. Engaging with various forms of written material, such as magazines, books, novels, columns, and other literary works, facilitates the expansion of one's vocabulary, fosters a heightened awareness of grammatical structures, and affords individuals the chance to acquire a nuanced understanding of the language (Dogan et al., 2020). Effective communication is more than just individuals expressing their thoughts; it also entails comprehending the perspectives of others. The primary determinant of attaining this objective is engaging in extensive reading.

The acquisition of reading abilities is one of the fundamental components in the English language instruction provided to students. In contrast to other skills, the acquisition of this particular skill necessitates a substantial amount of effort (Varita, 2017). Reading is one of EFL classrooms' most important academic skills to obtain new knowledge and make inferences from different perspectives (Rahayu & Suryanto, 2021). Reading ability provides students with the opportunity to evaluate and synthesize the information obtained, as well as interpret it from different perspectives.

Although reading is so important, teachers strive to make their students love reading and develop a habit. Reading has a great place, especially in English classes. Without acquiring the habit of reading, it is not possible to reach the desired conclusion and information in sentences, texts, and paragraphs (Daskan, 2023; Daniels, 2023).

On the other hand, numerous English language learners characterize the act of reading as a cognitively demanding activity that necessitates a significant investment of time and energy, often resulting in fatigue (Celik, 2019). The primary factor contributing to this phenomenon is the continued utilization of outdated and unengaging instructional techniques, along with the selection of academic materials that surpass students' comprehension levels. Due to the perception of reading as a tedious and hard task, pupils experience a decline in their motivation levels, leading

to a reluctance to engage in reading activities. During the subsequent phase, students abstain from completing the assigned reading materials provided by their instructors (Kucuk, 2023). Consequently, the desired outcomes set forth at the commencement of the semester are unattainable, leading to a decline in academic performance among students.

To enhance the enjoyment of reading, individuals should engage in the act of reading with their preferred style and manner. Contemporary pupils exhibit a reluctance to engage in activities that are enforced or imposed upon them, fostering a bias against such mandated endeavors. Consequently, they actively avoid participating in these activities, effectively severing any potential for future involvement (Kucuk, 2023).

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to investigate the contribution of the Reading Circle method to the reading skills of EFL students. Especially by using this method, it was aimed to improve students' reading skills and increase their activity in reading lessons.

1. How does the Reading Circle method affect students' reading performance?
2. What are the contributions of the Reading Circle method to reading classes?

Literature Review

Reading Circle also took its place in the literature as Literature Circle. This is an active reading method and originated in the United Nations. American scholar Harvey Daniels was the first person to come up with this idea. In his book, he stated that this method can be described as a Literature Circle because it includes mostly literary subjects. He also used the expressions "Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups" to describe the Reading Circle method (Daniels, 2023). The Reading Circle contains various notions despite sharing a similar attribute. Every student actively engages in their language acquisition process and strives to achieve their utmost potential. According to Varita (2017), the Reading Circle technique emphasizes the need for students to engage cooperatively to enhance their academic progress and language learning. According to Rahayu and Suryanto (2021), a separate study posited that the Reading Circle method integrates both individual and collaborative learning approaches, suggesting that contemporary educational systems should incorporate this method. In a broader context, it entails the establishment of discourse collectives wherein participants engage in a shared reading of a prescribed text and, after that, present and deliberate upon their respective viewpoints within the framework of assigned roles. Implementing the Reading Circle approach facilitates a transition for students from a passive stance to an active one, enabling them to generate a modest output.

It is believed that this method is beneficial in attracting students' attention to reading activities, understanding what they read, and active participation. "Learning results are significantly influenced by the utilization of appropriate learning resources as well as effective teaching methods" (Riswanto et al., 2023, p.591). More importantly, the teacher's duties in an ordinary reading course are many. He selects the book, prepares questions, deduces the meanings of unknown words, and prepares tests and quizzes. Thanks to this method, the teachers' duties are reduced, and the students freely choose the books they will read, create questions with the awareness of the responsibility of their duties, remove unknown words, and prepare tests. In short, a student-centered education takes place. Dogan et al. (2004) stated in their study that the Reading Circle method is almost a magical ability. This method transformed their students from passivity, silence, and reluctance to active students who fulfill their duties in the best possible way.

According to Harvey Daniels (2021), applying the Reading Circle method provides reader-centered reading and contributes significantly to intensive reading and extensive reading. In addition, he stated that this method greatly benefits students in expressing their opinions clearly, gaining self-confidence, comprehending the written material, and creating a group spirit.

In his recent study, Liu (2022) examined the benefits of the Reading Circle method within the scope of extensive reading and said “its application is a breakthrough in foreign language teaching” (Liu, 2022, p. 116). According to the study results, it was revealed that the Reading Circle method improved students' autonomous reading ability and critical thinking skills. By applying this method, it is aimed for students to participate in class activities and work on the given text. At the end of the study, the reason for applying this method is to move from teacher-centered education to student-centered education and to improve students' questioning and judging skills. Kaowiwattanakul (2021) conducted a study in Thailand with 47 students to examine the skills acquired by pupils by implementing the Reading Circle method. The objective of this study is to determine the potential impact of this particular instructional approach on the enhancement of students' critical thinking and reading proficiencies. The study yielded findings indicating that the students exhibited favorable behavioural changes and experienced enhancements in their critical thinking and reading proficiencies.

Avcı and Özgenel (2019) applied the Reading Circle method, also known as the Literature Circle, among teachers and examined how it contributed to their professional development. Before starting the study, they gave nine different books to seven teachers and asked them to choose which book they wanted to read by meeting with each other. According to the results of the study, which lasted approximately one year, it was seen that the Reading Circle method enables permanent learning and allows teachers to learn from each other. In addition, the results of the study revealed that teachers who come together at certain periods get to know each other better, and their social relations improve.

Most previous studies have focused on the theoretical aspects of the Reading Circle method, but Venegas (2019) examined the more practical aspects of this method. In her studies, she tried to keep the social and emotional aspects of this ability at the forefront. She named her study "Socioemotional Growth in Literature Circles". In this study, she stated that the Reading Circle method contributed to students' Socio-emotional development in addition to their reading skills.

Students need to develop the four basic skills of English. One of these four skills is a reading skill. In a study conducted in Indonesia, Novasyari (2021) reported that students had difficulty dealing with reading passages and needed professional support. He stated that a new method was needed to instill a love of reading in students and that this method was the Reading Circle. Novasyari, (2021) stated that thanks to this method, students participated in group discussions and learned to work in a team. At the end of his study, he said “reading circles provide a constructive educational opportunity for students to control their own learning as they share thoughts, concerns and their understanding of the concepts, events, and material presented in the material being read” (p. 14). Another positive aspect of this method is that it has been stated that students improve themselves academically thanks to the information they read, and their learning becomes more permanent. A similar study was conducted in the same country by Sutrisno et al. (2019) studied the effect of the Reading Circle method on students' critical reading skills. This study was conducted with the participation of thirty students at Semarang University. Indonesia, it was revealed that students who can criticize a foreign language comprehend the language faster

than others. In addition, it has been revealed that the Reading Circle method offers critical thinking skills to students more effectively than technology-integrated education.

Despite the benefits the Reading Circle method offers, it also has some shortcomings. Clarke and Holwadel (2007) recently reviewed the Reading Circle method and made some recommendations. They found that there were problems with this method, such as weak students and structural obstacles. It has been stated that more productive results can be achieved by solving such problems with mini lessons, watching videos, choosing books that students will like, and providing students with proper guidance.

Methodology

Research Design

This study applied a mixed-method approach to analyze the data obtained and student opinions. Combining the information obtained using the mixed method and analyzing the data obtained will yield more permanent results (Dawadi et al., 2021; Kucuk, 2023)). Quantitative data were obtained by applying a pre-test at the beginning of the study, quizzes throughout the study, and a post-test at the end of the study. When the whole study was completed, a semi-structured interview was applied to obtain and analyze the students' opinions about Reading Circle, and qualitative data was obtained.

Participants

For this study, two classes of the language preparatory school of Tishk University were selected using the Stratified sampling method in the 2022-2023 academic year. Using this method, it is possible to reach clearer results by taking the opinions of more groups (Iliyasu & Etikan, 2021). Two groups were created, the experimental and control groups, and the students were placed in classes on a voluntary basis. The students' level is at the B2 level according to the common European framework of reference for languages (CEFR). A total of 24 students of different genders, 12 in the control group and 12 in the experimental group took part in this study. This study lasted for five weeks.

Data Collection Procedure

At the beginning of the study, a pre-test, prepared by Oxford University Press and used to measure the language abilities of students in preparatory classes at Tishk University, was applied to measure the students' levels, and the students' results were recorded. A stratified sampling method was used to select the students, and a total of 24 students were selected based on volunteerism: 12 in the experimental group and 12 in the control group. The Reading Circle method was introduced to both groups and their teachers. By meeting with the group to whom we will apply the Reading Circle method and obtaining their information. A survey was created with 15 book options for students so they would not be pressured before choosing a book. Arthur Conan Doyle's book "A Study in Scarlet" was chosen and given to the experimental group. As in the Daniels (2023) model, students were given tasks. While assigning these tasks, student abilities and interests were taken into consideration.

The roles given to the students are as follows: summarizer, questioner, connector, illustrator, travel tracer, vocabulary enricher, researcher, and literary luminary. Without briefly explaining the tasks, it was explained to the students that they had to prepare for all these roles at home and that they had to demonstrate their duties in the classroom environment when they came

to class. The tasks assigned were based on Cloonan et al. (2020) and are briefly as follows, according to the explanations in their study. Summarizer reads the assigned text at home and summarizes the topic. In this study, this person is generally the one who appears at the beginning of the course and is responsible for the introduction of the Reading Circle method. The questionnaire task asks questions about the text and asks students questions, usually at the end of the lesson, and tests the students' knowledge. Another important task is the connector task. We can also call this task linker. This task investigates the connection between the events in the passage and real life and gives moral lessons to classmates. The next task is the illustrator task. When this task is initially given, it should not be given to students who can draw. Otherwise, these undesirable results may occur (Rahayu & Suryanto, 2022). In this role, students draw important parts of the book and tell their friends about these notable events by showing the pictures they drew to their classmates. Another fun role is the travel tracer role. In this task, students arrange events and places in the order they occur and tell them to their friends in the class. Our sixth role is the vocabulary enrichment role. This role has been called vocabulary wizard or vocabulary worm in various sources (Rahayu & Suryanto, 2022; Liu, 2022). The student in this role reads the book and removes the unknown words, and when the activity starts, he explains the unknown words to his classmates after the summarise. Our seventh task is the literary luminary task. This task is usually responsible for explaining figurative language terms such as metaphors, idioms, or quotations that the author uses. The last task is the researcher task. The student in this role researches the background of the book. They research realistic issues such as where the book was written, in what environment it was written, in what climate it was written, or the author's background, and share general information about the book with the class.

In this eight-week study, weekly quizzes were held, and the development of the students' academic reading performance was recorded. Five separate quizzes were applied, and these quizzes were selected from the book's source and prepared according to the levels from CEFR A2 to CEFR B2 level. At the end of the study, a specially prepared post-test was applied to measure the students' reading performance, and a semi-structured interview was also conducted with the students. The content analysis method was used to evaluate the results.

Findings

Table 1. *Pre-test and Post-test Results of the Experimental and Control Groups in Reading Classes*

Variables	Measurement	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Pre-test	Control	12	73.75	7.818			
Pre-test	Experimental	12	74.17	6.847	-.139	22	.891
Post-test	Control	12	78.33	7.203			
Post-test	Experimental	12	89.33	5.742	-4.137	22	.001

Table one revealed the students' pre-test and post-test results using the Reading Circle method. According to the calculated t-statistic results, the results of the control and experimental groups, according to the pre-test performed at the beginning of the study, are very close to each other. According to SPSS t-statistic calculations, the study's results revealed a highly significant

difference of .001 between the experimental group and the control group. According to the SPSS 27 analysis, there was a five-point increase from 75 to 78 in the control group. In the experimental group, the average score, 74 on the pre-test, increased to 89 on the post-test at the end of the study, showing a significant increase of 15 points. Based on the data obtained, it was determined that the Reading Circle method students greatly benefited the students' reading performance.

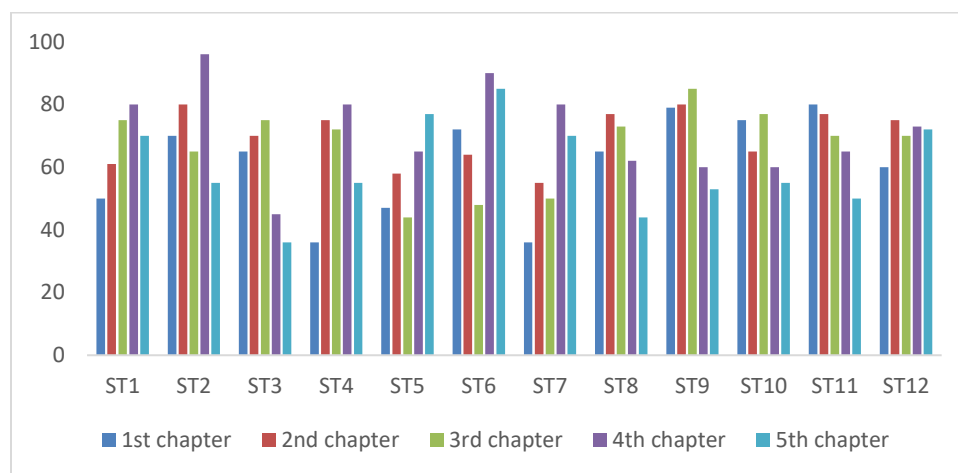


Figure 1. The Weekly Performance of Control Group Students in Five Quizzes.

The outcomes presented in Figure 1 illustrate the performance of the control group students on the chapter quizzes following the implementation of the traditional teacher-centered method for five weeks. The table presents the outcomes and performance graphs of the 12 students across five distinct quizzes. The quiz results of the students in the control group exhibited variable changes, with instances where a student who achieved a high score in one examination obtained a shallow mark in another examination, resulting in an unstable performance graph. The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of teacher-centred traditional approaches during reading activities had minimal impact on the students' reading performance.

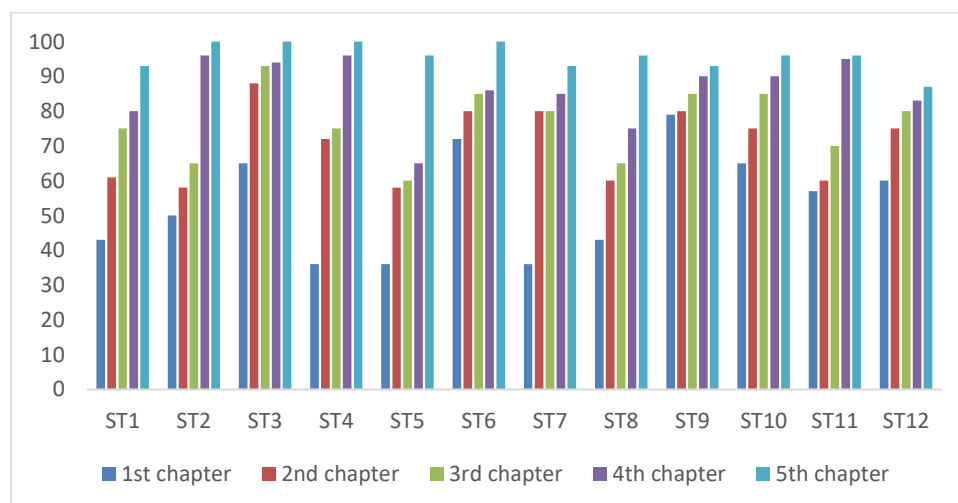


Figure 2. The Weekly Performance of Experimental Group Students in Five Quizzes.

The students' reading performance in the experimental group can be observed in the second figure, which presents the outcomes of five distinct quizzes conducted through the implementation of the Reading Circle approach. Upon examination of the table, it becomes evident that there is a consistent upward trend in the reading performances of the kids. In contrast to the control group, the success graph of the students in the experimental group exhibits a consistent trajectory without any fluctuations. Based on the data presented in the table, it is evident that the implementation of the Reading Circle approach has a beneficial impact on the reading proficiency of pupils.

Interview Analysis

In this part of the study, students were asked what they thought about the Reading Circle method and whether it boosted their reading skills. Five of the answers given by twelve students are given below as examples.

It improves the quality of my reading. This approach also improved my ability to string words together to form sentences. (*Student 2*)

Yes, of course. This activity broke my timidity since I gave presentations and spoke like a teacher. This technique enabled me to participate in activities with my classmates. (*Student 5*)

This study helped me learn a lot of new words and understand how to connect what I read to my own life. (*Student 7*)

Before I began this method, I read a book slowly. This practice has changed how I feel about reading books. I now believe that reading a book is one of the best things to do, and I cannot wait to do the Reading Circle method again. (*Student 10*)

Of course, this method helped me read better and pay more attention in class. I do not know why, but this activity taught me many words and was much fun. (*Student 12*)

According to the aforementioned semi-structured interview findings, the students' general perspective on reading activities has changed. Thanks to the Reading Circle method, students participate more actively in classroom activities, and we can eliminate shy students' concerns from their responses. It has been determined that besides improving students' reading skills, this method also facilitates their vocabulary acquisition. Finally, thanks to this method, we can deduct from the students' interview responses that reading classes, which they previously deemed tedious, have become more enjoyable.

Discussion

According to the results of the pre-test, post-test, chapter quizzes, and semi-structured interview applied in this study, the Reading Circle method, also known as the Literature Circle method, provided great benefits to the students' reading performance, contributed to vocabulary learning and changed the students' perspective on reading lessons.

The first section of the study's findings, the pre-test and post-test results, provided information that needed to be considered. The students' reading scores on the pre-test were highly similar to one another, indicating that the groups were distributed equally. Based on the study's results, the experimental group and the control group had a significant difference of .001, as determined by the SPSS t-statistic calculations. The study's findings were consistent with those of Liu's (2022) investigation. The Reading Circle method improved students' academic progress and reading proficiency in both studies. Another startling finding is that, although the control group's reading performance increased slightly, the experimental group's reading performance increased

by 15 points when the Reading Circle approach was applied. According to Novasyari (2021), teachers must provide children with a variety of reading strategies, and these strategies will have a direct impact on how well the kids read.

It is worth noting that the analysis of the results of the chapter quizzes applied to the control group for five weeks, as presented in Table 2, holds significance. Based on the data shown in the graphical representation provided, it can be observed that the improvement in reading comprehension among students who engaged in teacher-centered or directed-reading approaches had irregular patterns. In a recent study conducted by Rahman (2022), it was observed that there was no significant enhancement in the reading proficiency and reading comprehension of the pupils assigned to the control group.

The significance and effectiveness of the Reading Circle method for enhancing pupils' reading performance are demonstrated in the third table. Upon closer examination of the table, it becomes evident that there is a consistent upward trend in both students' reading performance and quiz outcomes. Remarkably, the strategy employed in this study increased the success scores of all twelve participating students. The data presented in the table indicates that students who initially obtained exceedingly low scores achieved perfect scores during the final week of the research. The findings of this study indicate that implementing the Reading Circle approach is a pedagogical strategy that holds potential benefits for all instructors (Daniels, 2023; Kaowiwattanakul, 2020; Xu, 2021).

Semi-structured interview analysis, which is the last data collection tool, produced meaningful results. When the answers given by the students were examined, it was determined that, as in other studies, the Reading circle method was beneficial not only to the students' reading performance but also to their vocabulary learning (Aytan, 2018; Ferdiansyah et al., 2020; Daniels, 2023). Another finding derived from the student interview data is that implementing the Reading Circle approach fosters a sense of confidence among pupils. Based on the data obtained from the student population, it was seen that a significant number of students exhibited increased engagement in collaborative activities, leading to the successful minimizing of their shyness-related inhibitions. According to the findings of Karatay (2017) and Su et al. (2019), their study revealed that timid students encountered difficulties in expressing themselves in reading classes due to being overshadowed by dominating students. The interviews performed with the students in this study yielded comparable findings, indicating that implementing the Reading Circle method enhanced the students' ability to overcome their shyness.

Conclusion

As a result of the pre-test, post-test, quizzes, and interviews applied in this study, it was clearly seen that the reading circle method helped students understand literature better and increased their desire to read. When the results of this study and other parallel studies are examined, students' attitudes towards studying within this circle have generally changed positively. It has created an environment that supports students' critical thinking and better understanding of reading texts.

It has been determined that the Reading Circle method also increases student social interaction. Thanks to this method, it has been revealed that they obtain information from each other cooperatively and help each other while transferring the information in the classroom. Unlike traditional methods, the reading circle method has contributed to students working more

confidently and responsibly. This responsibility was made possible by students working individually and feeling like a part of a whole while preparing for their roles.

The use of the reading circle method has resulted in children's acquisition of positive habits. Illustrative instances of these behaviors encompass engaging in systematic reading, engaging in respectful discussions within prescribed parameters, and demonstrating comprehension of written material. The implementation of this approach resulted in a noticeable enhancement in the students' reading performance and an observable improvement in their reading comprehension abilities, as evidenced by the outcomes seen in the experimental group. Upon the conclusion of the task, students demonstrate a comprehensive recollection of the text they have read, retaining intricate details. The findings of this study indicate that the pupils possessed a genuine comprehension of the material they read.

In summary, the results discussed above indicate that using the reading circle approach holds significant promise as an effective strategy for enhancing students' general reading abilities and comprehension skills. By employing this approach, one can surpass conventional methodologies and transform monotonous reading exercises into engaging and instructive experiences.

Funding

This research is not funded.

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest

I declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Authenticity

This manuscript is an original work.

Artificial Intelligence Statement

AI and AI-assisted technologies weren't used in this article.

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