

A Comparative Study of Three Types of Extracurricular Reading Groups for Reading Behavior Intervention in Elementary School Students: Postprint

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study explores the intervention modalities and effects of three extracurricular reading group formats—literature circles, reading clubs, and dialogic reading—as well as the competency requirements for reading service professionals, thereby providing a basis for selecting appropriate reading intervention approaches and cultivating reading service talent. [Method/Process] Third-grade students from the same class were evenly distributed into four extracurricular reading groups with varying intervention intensities. A four-week reading intervention experiment was conducted, employing questionnaires, interviews, and reading performance assessments to obtain data. [Results/Conclusion] The study revealed that: Establishing clear roles and responsibilities prior to reading facilitates reflection during reading and proactive communication afterward. Excessive guidance suppresses interaction, whereas autonomy promotes it, consequently enhancing both reading motivation and reading proficiency. Each of the three extracurricular reading group models possesses distinct advantages, and unguided free reading also exerts positive effects. Extracurricular reading groups impose comprehensive requirements on reading service librarians. It is recommended to strengthen the development of comprehensive competencies and reading guidance theory among reading service professionals, concurrently reinforcing practical classroom exercises.

Full Text

A Comparative Study of Three Extracurricular Reading Groups for Reading Behavior Intervention in Primary School Students

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Abstract:

[Purpose/Significance] This study explores the intervention forms and effects of three extracurricular reading groups—literature circles, reading clubs, and dialogic reading—and examines the requirements for reading service professionals, providing a basis for selecting different reading intervention forms and cultivating reading service talent.

[Method/Process] Third-grade pupils from the same class were evenly assigned to four extracurricular reading groups with different intervention levels to conduct a four-week reading intervention experiment. Data were collected through questionnaire surveys, interviews, and reading assessments.

[Results/Conclusions] The study finds that: (1) Clarifying roles and responsibilities before reading promotes thinking during reading and active communication afterward. Excessive guidance inhibits communication, while autonomy facilitates it, thereby improving reading will and reading ability. (2) Each of the three extracurricular reading groups has its own advantages, and free reading without intervention also has positive effects. (3) Extracurricular reading groups require comprehensive competencies from reading service librarians. It is recommended to strengthen the cultivation of comprehensive qualities and reading guidance theory for reading service professionals while reinforcing classroom practice drills.

Keywords: extracurricular reading group; reading behavior intervention; literature circle; reading club; dialogic reading; reading will; reading ability

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Educational psychologist J.S. Chall divides reading development into six stages [1]: ages 0–6 constitute the pre-reading stage, where children gradually accumulate verbal knowledge through environmental interaction; ages 6–7 (grades 1–2) represent the decoding stage, where children primarily learn to establish connections between written symbols and spoken words; ages 7–8 (grades 2–3) constitute the confirmation stage, where children consolidate knowledge from the decoding stage and improve reading fluency by extensively reading stories they have previously heard; ages 9–14 (grades 4–8) represent the stage of reading to learn new knowledge, where reading ability reaches the level of an average adult capable of reading popular literature; ages 14–18 (grades 8–12) represent the multiple perspectives stage, where students learn to process multiple facts,

theories, and viewpoints through formal education, mastering more difficult concepts and gaining new perspectives to achieve free reading ability; ages 18 and above (university level) represent the stage of constructing and reconstructing worldviews, where students learn to conduct deconstructive, multi-layered understanding of works, using analysis, synthesis, and judgment to construct their own knowledge systems at higher levels of abstraction and universality.

The primary school stage is a critical period for developing reading habits. The confirmation stage corresponding to grades 2–3 is particularly crucial, as it marks the transition of attention from medium to information. Students need to read extensively from familiar content—including stories, themes, structures, and language patterns—to achieve necessary fluency before they can smoothly progress to the next stage of reading to learn new knowledge. Most reading failures occur because students struggle during this stage without effective guidance.

Due to limited classroom time, primary school students primarily accumulate reading volume through extracurricular reading to gradually achieve fluency, enjoy reading, and ultimately develop reading habits. Assisting primary school students with extracurricular reading is one of the important tasks of libraries. The Public Library Law of the People’s Republic of China requires libraries to conduct reading guidance and social education activities for children and adolescents [2]; the Regulations for Primary and Secondary School Libraries (Rooms) mandate the establishment of reading guidance institutions to coordinate school-wide reading activities [3]. Reading guidance and promotion conducted by libraries are professional activities that intervene in readers’ behavior [4] and should be implemented by professionals trained in reading service theory and methods [5–8]. However, China has not yet established a complete grassroots library reading service system [9], and library science education has long lacked professional training in reading service capabilities, resulting in a prominent contradiction between talent supply and demand [10]. This has led to long-term insufficient or even absent professional intervention for primary school students’ reading in grassroots libraries. The fundamental solution lies in developing professional reading service talent. Reading service is a practical activity, and its talent cultivation should reflect the close integration of theory and practice. Graduate students in library science receive basic training in reading behavior and reading service theory through coursework and seminars, then apply this knowledge to guide reading service practice, thereby improving practical abilities through professional intervention while gaining deeper understanding of reading service requirements for library science talent cultivation.

Chinese primary school students’ extracurricular reading is influenced by exam-oriented education, emphasizing form, skills, and standard answers while neglecting the development of students’ comprehension abilities and reading literacy [11]. In response, educators and researchers have sought solutions, with extracurricular reading groups being an important form, such as reading clubs [12] and literature circles [13]. However, research on extracurricular reading groups

in library science lacks empirical studies on reading effects and corresponding evaluation standards [14]. Reading club activities include reading discussions, book recommendations, and lectures [15], with extracurricular reading groups being a subcategory of reading clubs. Chang Xin divides reading club activities into five modes: reading discussion, guided reading, author lectures, audiobook listening, and extensive reading [14], each having different requirements for facilitators and participants and differing in reading intervention approaches.

What different impacts do various reading interventions in the form of extracurricular reading groups have on primary school students, and what are the requirements for reading service librarians? This study attempts to intervene in reading behavior at three stages—before, during, and after reading—based on students' autonomous reading, measuring reading effects from both reading will and reading ability perspectives. The aim is to summarize reading intervention methods conducive to cultivating students' reading habits and improving reading ability, providing effective reading intervention strategies for libraries, schools, and family education. Simultaneously, the study summarizes the requirements for reading service librarians under different intervention methods as a basis for talent cultivation.

Theoretical Foundation

Many forms of extracurricular reading groups exist. For the primary school student population, this study selects three representative types: literature circles, reading clubs, and dialogic reading. Based on the characteristics and basic requirements of these three groups, this study establishes its theoretical foundation.

Literature Circles

Literature circles are a literary reading model proposed and advocated by H. Daniels, characterized by each member having specific roles and responsibilities, such as discussion facilitator, character analyst, key passage finder, vocabulary selector, real-world connector, and film-book comparator. Members hold different reading cards based on their roles. After independent reading, group members assume their roles to conduct collective discussions. Establishing literature circles must follow certain principles: students select reading materials, groups should consist of 6–8 members, teachers serve as learning facilitators and observers without participating in discussions, and students rather than teachers pose discussion questions covering factual, interpretive, and evaluative issues, with more interpretive questions prepared to stimulate thinking and discussion. This reading model has been widely applied in the United States for its positive impact on students' reading habits and comprehension levels [16].

Reading Clubs

Guided reading in reading clubs refers to one person leading and guiding collective reading activities. The facilitator typically has rich reading experience, strong reading ability, and excellent organizational coordination skills [14]. This model is well-suited for extracurricular reading groups composed of grades 2–3 primary school students, where teachers or librarians familiar with reading content and methods guide students in reading exchanges. For this study, this model is still named “reading club.”

Dialogic Reading

Dialogic reading was developed by G.J. Whitehurst and colleagues as a parent-child picture book reading method. It requires parents to ask open-ended questions while telling stories, frequently repeat, expand, and modify children’s speech, and provide rewarding and corrective feedback based on children’s responses to promote language development [17]. This approach emphasizes communication and has been widely used in reading instruction and activities [18]. Referencing this method, this study designed a two-student reading group named “dialogic reading.”

Research Design and Implementation

Research Methods

This study organized three extracurricular reading groups with different intervention levels—literature circles, reading clubs, and dialogic reading—to conduct experimental research on reading behavior intervention. Data were collected through questionnaire surveys, reading ability tests, and individual interviews to explore changes and differences in primary school students’ reading will and reading ability. Simultaneously, experimenters participated throughout the process to understand the different requirements for reading service librarians across the three intervention forms.

Research Subjects

As mentioned above, the reading ability development of grades 2–3 students is critical. Through extensive reading to achieve fluency, the reading habits and abilities formed during this stage will last a lifetime [1]. Therefore, this study selected 54 third-grade students from Class 2 of the Affiliated Primary School of Huazhong Agricultural University in Wuhan, Hubei Province, as research subjects.

Reading Materials

Based on the themes and learning tasks of each unit in the Ministry of Education’s third-grade Chinese language textbook, reading materials were selected from the *Ministry of Education Primary and Secondary School Student Reading*

Guidance Directory (2020 Edition) [19] and the “New Reading Institute Recommended Booklist” [20] according to the following criteria: (1) appearing in both directories; (2) the *Compulsory Education Chinese Language Curriculum Standards* [21] require students to retell narrative works and grasp main content, so texts should be narrative with simple plots, educational significance, and discussion value; (3) vivid descriptive language; (4) knowledge background appropriate for third-grade cognition; (5) relevance to in-class unit themes; and (6) availability of derivative works such as music or film.

Based on these criteria, three books were selected: *The Secret of the Magic Gourd*, *Sanmao’s Wandering Life*, and *Little Hero Yulai*. On April 27, the researchers conducted a survey on reading will and prior reading in the classroom and found that *Little Hero Yulai* was the book students most wanted to read while having the fewest prior readers (4 students). Therefore, this book was selected as the experimental reading material. Literature circles require students to select reading materials; for comparison purposes, all groups used the same book.

Assessment Tools

Reading will was measured through questionnaire surveys, reading ability through reading and test assessments, and students’ reading situations and changes through reading cards.

Reading Ability Test is a series compiled by the Qinjin Mother Tongue Research Institute based on children’s reading ability components, organized into six volumes by grade level. Each reading material is followed by test questions assessing five abilities: information extraction, inference and interpretation, overall perception, evaluation and appreciation, and connection and application [22]. This study used the third-grade volume’s text “The Mouse That Ate Cats” for pre- and post-tests.

Reading cards are tools for recording students’ reading situations, including book title, reader name, group affiliation, reading date, reading duration, and pages read. Each experimental group member received one reading card at the beginning of the experiment.

Literature circle reading cards differed from the other two groups. In addition to basic information, they included content for students to complete based on their chosen roles. According to literature circle requirements and primary school student characteristics, four roles were designed: “Facilitator,” “Connoisseur,” “Summarizer,” and “Experiencer.” Students in literature circles could choose one role. “Facilitators” were required to propose questions based on text content for group discussion. “Connoisseurs” selected important sentences, recorded their locations, and explained their choices. “Summarizers” summarized main ideas, listed key points, and provided reasons. “Experiencers” recorded connections between text content and real life for discussion.

Experimental Procedure

The experiment lasted four weeks, as reading behavior intervention experiments by G.J. Whitehurst and A.C. Hargreave showed significant effects within this timeframe [17–18]. The study period was from May 11 to June 11, 2021. On May 6, reading will surveys and reading ability pre-tests were conducted in the classroom, with 51 students participating. Due to the large number, two groups were established for each type, forming eight groups total. Based on gender, personality, reading preference, and pre-test scores, 51 students were evenly distributed across the eight groups.

On May 11, 12, and 14, experimenters distributed books and reading cards to participating students. For literature circle groups, the responsibilities of each role were explained using the text “Lotus” from the third-grade Chinese language textbook to facilitate role selection and reading card completion.

Students were required to complete two sections daily (approximately 5 pages) and fill out reading cards. Experimental groups held weekly reading exchange discussions at the Affiliated Primary School of Huazhong Agricultural University library: literature circles on Tuesday afternoons 4:10–5:10, reading clubs on Wednesday afternoons 4:10–5:10, and dialogic reading groups on Friday afternoons 4:10–5:10. Students submitted reading cards upon arrival and received new cards after discussion.

Each experimental group participated in interviews after the fourth week to assess changes in reading will and evaluate the extracurricular reading groups. After four weeks, all students took the post-test using “The Mouse That Ate Cats” from the third-grade *Reading Ability Test* in the classroom on June 15. Experimental data were analyzed using SPSS 22.0.

Reading Interventions

Experimenters provided varying degrees of intervention to experimental groups before, during, and after reading, while the control group only received the same reading books with minimal intervention.

Pre-reading interventions for experimental groups were similar: selecting reading materials, designing reading cards, and guiding card completion. The difference was that literature circle reading cards were more content-rich, and the guidance process was more complex.

During-reading interventions were identical: requiring students to complete the daily two-section reading plan and fill out reading cards.

Post-reading interventions differed significantly, primarily in reading exchange guidance. Literature circle guidance focused on the first week, instructing students on proper discussion procedures and how to discuss questions recorded on reading cards, with only observation in weeks 2–4. Reading club intervention was the strongest, with experimenters fully guiding discussions while students

exchanged ideas according to requirements. Dialogic reading guidance also concentrated on the first week, instructing students to form two-person dialogue groups to discuss favorite characters/sentences/paragraphs, engage in story continuation, role-playing, reading aloud, and summarizing, then present to other pairs, with only observation in subsequent weeks. Table 1 summarizes the interventions:

Table 1 Reading Intervention Conditions for Each Group by Experimenters

Stage	Literature Circle	Reading Club	Dialogic Reading
Pre-reading	Select reading materials; Design reading cards; Design roles and responsibilities; Guide card completion	Select reading materials; Design reading cards; Guide card completion	Select reading materials; Design reading cards; Guide card completion
During-reading	Require daily completion of two sections; Fill reading cards	Require daily completion of two sections; Fill reading cards	Require daily completion of two sections; Fill reading cards
Post-reading	Week 1: Guide discussion procedures; Guide discussion around recorded questions; Weeks 2–4: Observe	Fully guide discussion throughout	Week 1: Guide formation of two-person groups; Guide activity procedures and content; Weeks 2–4: Observe

Results Analysis

During the four-week experiment, two students participated only once and one withdrew, leaving 48 students for analysis. The eight groups were merged by type, forming four groups for result analysis.

Reading Participation and Communication

Collected reading cards were organized to record basic information. Table 2 shows each group's basic conditions:

Table 2 Reading Participation and Communication Conditions

Indicator	Literature Circle	Reading Club	Dialogic Reading	Co
Students consistently participating in exchanges				
Students consistently filling reading cards				

Indicator	Literature Circle	Reading Club	Dialogic Reading	Control Group
Max daily pages read				
Min daily pages read				
Students completing whole book				
Group size				
Average daily pages	14.53	27.68	22.24	
Max daily reading time (minutes)				
Min daily reading time (minutes)				
Average daily reading time (minutes)	20.89	38.10	34.27	

One literature circle student and one reading club student did not finish the book. The dialogic reading group performed best, with all students completing the book. Four control group students did not finish. Fewer students consistently filled and submitted reading cards, primarily due to unwillingness to complete them, with some losing their cards.

Reading clubs showed the best participation in exchange activities, followed by dialogic reading groups, while literature circles performed poorly with frequent absences.

Daily reading pages and time varied significantly across groups. One reading club student read the entire 211-page book in one day, while others read only 4 or even 1 page. Four students in reading clubs and dialogic reading groups also read other books during the experiment. Reading clubs and dialogic reading groups had more pages and longer reading times than literature circles.

Observations revealed that literature circles had the best communication, with most students actively participating throughout discussions and reporting greater gains. Reading clubs had the weakest exchange intensity, with only outgoing students actively participating while others showed low enthusiasm that was difficult to mobilize. Dialogic reading groups involved all students through two-person discussions followed by group presentations, though a few students were inattentive during autonomous exchanges.

These differences can be explained by intervention conditions (Table 1). Literature circles' pre-reading intervention of designing roles and responsibilities required students to read with questions in mind. The question framework designed for literature circles spanned all three stages, ensuring guided reading and focused post-reading discussions, resulting in the best communication. However, the additional burden of designing questions and completing reading cards during the semester led to student complaints and some attrition.

Reading clubs differed from other groups in the post-reading exchange stage through full experimenter guidance, creating student dependence. Despite having the best performance in consistent participation, average reading time, and pages read, students lacked critical thinking during reading, resulting in poor communication quality.

Dialogic reading groups also focused post-reading intervention on forming two-person dialogue groups. Because students discussed with familiar peers, most showed high enthusiasm and willingness to participate.

The control group, with only pre-reading book provision and minimal intervention, still saw most students complete the book, indicating that free reading without intervention can produce positive effects.

Changes in Reading Will

Reading will changes were measured through reading preference, daily extracurricular reading time, and reading purposes. Table 3 shows these changes based on pre- and post-experiment questionnaire data (“-” indicates decrease).

Table 3 Changes in Reading Will

Indicator	Literature Circle	Reading Club	Dialogic Reading
Reading preference change	-21.25	+5.00	+12.69
Average reading time change (minutes)	-22.92	-decrease	+increase
Change in number reading for academic improvement			
Change in number reading to complete tasks			
Change in number reading for personal interest			
Change in number reading to communicate with others			

Literature circles showed decreased reading preference and average reading time, with more students reading for academic improvement and task completion, though some increase in reading for personal interest and communication. Overall reading will declined, but willingness to read for communication increased. Analysis suggests that the lack of autonomous book selection, task-based reading approach, and increased academic burden negatively impacted reading will.

Reading clubs showed increased reading preference (+5) but decreased average reading time, with more students reading for academic improvement and personal interest, and fewer reading to complete tasks, indicating improved reading will.

Dialogic reading groups showed increased reading preference and reading time, with fewer students reading for task completion (-1) and personal interest (-4), but more reading for communication with others (+3), showing improved reading will.

The control group showed significant increases in reading preference, reading time, and reading for academic improvement, personal interest, and communication, with fewer reading to complete tasks (-1), demonstrating markedly improved reading will. Control group students frequently asked about their discussion time, suggesting that experimental group exchanges stimulated their reading will.

Impact on Reading Ability

Changes in Reading Scores Based on pre- and post-experiment *Reading Ability Test* scores for each group, boxplots were created (Figures 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]–4 [Figure 4: see original paper]) to visually demonstrate score changes.

The number of lines in each plot corresponds to the number of test participants, with each line showing individual score changes. In literature circles, 5 students improved while 4 declined. In reading clubs, 9 improved while 3 declined. In dialogic reading, 6 improved while 3 declined. In the control group, 2 improved while 9 declined.

All four groups had pre-test upper limits of 93–95 points. Literature circles and reading clubs showed improved post-test upper limits, while the other two groups declined. All three experimental groups showed improved post-test lower limits. Literature circles showed little change in interquartile range but a decreased median, indicating that literature circle interventions could improve reading scores but not significantly. Reading clubs showed improvements in upper and lower limits, quartiles, and median, indicating effective score improvement. Dialogic reading groups showed improvements in quartiles, median, and lower limit, indicating effective intervention. The control group had more score declines, with decreased upper/lower limits, quartiles, and median.

Changes in Reading Competencies Children’s reading ability refers to the capacity to perceive, understand, and apply texts [22]. The *Reading Ability Test* assesses five competencies: inference and interpretation, information extraction, evaluation and appreciation, overall perception, and connection and application, with full scores of 10, 40, 30, 10, and 10 respectively. Table 4 shows mean scores and mean differences for each group.

Table 4 Changes in Reading Competencies by Group

Competency	Literature Circle	Reading Club	Dialogic Reading	Control Group
	Pre	Post	Diff	Pre
Inference & Interpretation			+0.25	
Information Extraction			+0.25	
Evaluation & Appreciation			-0.23	
Overall Perception			-3.31	
Connection & Application			-1.67	

Literature circles showed improvements in inference, information extraction, and connection/application, but declines in evaluation and overall perception. Reading clubs showed no change in inference, large improvements in information extraction, evaluation, and connection/application, but declined in overall perception. Dialogic reading groups showed improvements in four competencies

(except inference, which was already at full score pre-test). The control group improved in inference, overall perception, and connection/application, but declined in the other two competencies.

Overall, all groups showed improved reading ability, with reading clubs and dialogic reading groups showing the most significant improvements. Regarding the five competencies, groups differed in their impacts. All three experimental groups achieved high levels in inference and information extraction. Connection/application ability was weak across all groups, remaining far from full marks even after intervention. This may be because most students have limited extracurricular reading time and heavy academic loads. The survey found that while 40 of 48 students enjoyed reading, 16 had difficulties with extracurricular reading and 19 needed guidance. The average monthly extracurricular reading volume was 6.07 books, with average daily extracurricular reading time of 55.43 minutes.

Requirements and Implications for Reading Service Professionals

Requirements for Reading Service Librarians

Literature circles require librarians to have the ability to intervene appropriately and stimulate student thinking, mastering the degree of intervention. During the first exchange, when students are unfamiliar and unsure how to begin discussions, librarians need more intervention, such as guiding facilitators to control discussion pace and encouraging connoisseurs to think more deeply. As students become comfortable, librarians should reduce intervention.

Reading clubs demand high literary literacy, communication skills, organizational coordination, and on-site control abilities. Librarians must be thoroughly familiar with reading materials to lead students from topic to topic, guide opinion expression and discussion, ensure every student has opportunities to speak, and avoid creating a classroom atmosphere, requiring flexible communication approaches.

Dialogic reading requires strong observation and adaptability, as this format grants students full autonomy with multiple two-person groups creating various situations. Librarians should observe and listen to understand each group's discussion themes and pace, identify problems, intervene appropriately, and provide proper guidance.

In summary, extracurricular reading groups require comprehensive competencies from reading service librarians, including strong organizational coordination, communication, and on-site management abilities, high literary literacy, and familiarity with each format's characteristics and intervention methods.

Recommendations for Reading Service Talent Cultivation

Based on these requirements, three recommendations are proposed:

5.2.1 Strengthen Comprehensive Quality Cultivation

Reading service librarians need comprehensive abilities and broad knowledge bases. Training programs and curricula should be designed according to required competency and knowledge structures to develop students' abilities and build reasonable knowledge systems, comprehensively improving reading service capabilities.

5.2.2 Strengthen Reading Guidance Theory Instruction

Without deep understanding of literature circles, dialogic reading, and various reading club forms, librarians cannot skillfully conduct reading service activities. Students should systematically learn representative reading guidance theories, understanding each theory's intervention principles, content, forms, degrees, and conditions to ensure effective reading intervention.

5.2.3 Strengthen Classroom Practice Drills

In addition to internships, reading service courses can include classroom drills. For representative theories and methods like literature circles or dialogic reading, after learning basic concepts and principles, students should conduct practice drills in class followed by summary and discussion to truly grasp the essentials and confidently apply them in reading intervention practice, rapidly improving reading service abilities.

Conclusion

By organizing three extracurricular reading groups—literature circles, reading clubs, and dialogic reading—this study conducted reading behavior intervention research with third-grade students. The study explored how different intervention forms affect student reading participation, communication, reading will, and reading ability, and examined requirements for reading service talent cultivation.

Key findings:

- (1) Literature circles' pre-reading role design helps students think while reading and communicate more actively, but students easily develop a homework-completion mentality, showing weak reading will and insignificant ability improvement.
- (2) Reading clubs promote participation, but third-grade students easily depend on instructors, limiting thinking and affecting communication, though reading will and ability improve significantly.
- (3) Dialogic reading grants students more autonomy, conducive to establishing intimate communication relationships, making it suitable for third-grade students.
- (4) All three experimental groups achieved high levels in inference and information extraction, but connection/application ability improvement was not significant.

cant. The control group performed better than expected, with improved reading will and ability.

(5) Group reading intervention requires reading service librarians to have strong organizational planning, coordination, adaptability, and communication skills, plus broad knowledge and systematic reading guidance theory. It is recommended to strengthen these competencies and conduct classroom practice drills for important theories and methods.

Limitations: Due to students' limited extracurricular time and experimenter numbers, each group had only one hour weekly for discussion. Lost reading cards also affected interpretation of some phenomena. Conducting the experiment during the semester increased student burden, negatively impacting results.

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Wu Jianhua: Proposed research ideas, designed research plan, revised paper;
Zhang Lin: Designed experimental plan, implemented experimental research, wrote initial draft.

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Extracurricular reading groups have comprehensive requirements for reading service librarians. It is suggested to strengthen the cultivating of comprehensive quality and reading guidance theory of reading service talent, and to strengthen practice in classroom.

Keywords: extracurricular reading group; reading behavior intervention; literature circle; reading club; dialogic reading; reading will; reading ability

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.