THE USE OF COOPERATIVE INTEGRATED READING AND COMPOSITION METHOD FOR BETTER QUALITY WRITING OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study was intended to find out whether the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) method would be effective for improving the quality of writing in English for second grade students in a middle school in Jakarta. The major purpose for doing this research was to find out whether students in a class taught using the CIRC method would produce better writing, especially recount texts, than students taught with the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). The subjects for this study were the students in a class as the experimental group (EG) and another class as the control group (CG). These classes were chosen to ensure the homogeneity of the participants. To find out the effectiveness of the CIRC method, pre-tests and post-tests were given to all the students in those groups. Data analysis of the results showed that there was a significant difference in the mean scores from the post-test results from the two groups. The mean score of the post-tests from the EG was higher than that from the CG, that is 61 to 39, while the gained score for the t-test was 5 and the value for t-table was 1.68 at a level of significance of 0.05. Hence it can be concluded that the students who were taught using the CIRC method had better performances in writing recount texts than those who were not. In brief, the CIRC method resulted in a better quality of writing by students and gave a positive effect for the teaching-learning process.

Key Words: *CIRC Method, Cooperative Learning, Writing.*

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INTRODUCTION

Learning strategy in general is one of the main problems in the educational world and for years now has been affecting the effectiveness of classes. The teacher-centered paradigm for example, a learning process which persists in one direction learning, is not the best way of teaching (Soefijanto, 2010). This issue whereby students are only asked to answer questions provided in a book is the object of this research. Here, the students do not have the opportunity to explore their own ideas and this affects the interaction between the students and their teacher which thus tends to be passive. As a result, the students might gain less understanding of how to communicate orally or in written form. Therefore, that kind of problem should be challenged if higher objectives or goals of learning are to be achieved.

As mentioned in the School Based Curriculum (Depdiknas, 2006), the target or expectation of that curriculum in English for junior high students is to be able to understand meanings and follow rhetorical steps in recount and narrative form for simple short essays. This means that the students should understand or recognize both genres in all aspects of learning especially in writing. Thus, to help the students as well as to improve their competency the teacher should give special consideration to the learning system used; in particular the goals of the teaching program and the method, techniques, strategy, and materials to be used before beginning to teach. In line with this, Mulyasa (2010) has stated that the effectiveness and the efficiency of learning will be largely determined by the use of appropriate methods.

Regarding the methods used in teaching writing at Nahdlatul Wathan Jakarta, the teachers usually used the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) which is part of the conventional teaching repertoire. This means that the students are guided to write in Indonesian then translate their work into English. Basically, this is a good start to teach writing for intermediate level students, but applying that method continuously could have a negative effect for students since it often results in an incomplete writing task. This is because the GTM consumes a lot of time to write in English. It takes double work.

For this study, the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) method (Stevens & Slavin, 1995) was believed able to overcome some of those kinds of problems, and to provide scaffolding for students to better develop their skills in writing English as well as to improve their interaction during the learning process.

Slavin, Stevens and Madden (1988) say this method could improve the writing proficiency of students and it might be an effective way of teaching writing. Additionally, the CIRC method could play a very important role in the process of learning writing and could be beneficial to generate better writing performances. This learning model might also increase the motivation of students by enabling them to share ideas with their partners or their group members so that they will have more knowledge of how to create a recount text.

Moreover, this method could assist students to build social interaction in their communities. They may also be able to improve their reading skills (Mustafa & Samad, 2015) at the same time as improving spelling and pronunciation. For these reasons, the CIRC method is the central point of this research, which is aimed at figuring out whether or not the implementation of the CIRC method can be effective in improving the writing abilities of students. In brief, the research question that was formulated for this study is: "Can the CIRC method develop the writing abilities of students better than the traditional GTM method of teaching writing for ESL?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nature of Writing

There is no doubt that writing has occupied a significant place in most English language syllabi since English has become the most prominent language in the world today (White, 1995). For academic purposes and for many occupations students have to be able to write well in English if they want to be part of an international campus or company. In this case, writing has an equal role among the other language skills such as speaking, listening, and reading.

In the ways of teaching writing, White (1995) has also said that there are a number of techniques to motivate students to learn to write one of which is by lesson integration. The latter means inserting another skill such as reading for example into the teaching of writing. On the other hand, learning how to write in a good sequence needs further theories because writing is not merely about producing a simple written text but it is closely related to the production of thought, and notions that are poured into that composition (Hairston, 1986). In line with this, Bram (1995) has expressed a similar view that writing is a productive skill that aims to convey the thinking of the writer through the written message. However, to be able to do so, the writer should be

familiar with the processes of composing first such as rehearsing, drafting, and revising before beginning to write. This must be the most important aspect of the teaching-learning process rather than a focus on the final written product.

CIRC Description

To understand the CIRC method properly, it is important to highlight its meaning which has been defined by experts. The first brief definition comes from the Institute of Education Science (2012:1):

> The Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition program is a comprehensive reading and writing program for students. It includes story-related activities, direct instruction in reading comprehension and integrated reading and language art activities. Pairs of students (grouped either by or across ability levels) read to each other, predict how stories will end, summarize stories, write responses and practice, spelling, decoding, and vocabulary. (Institute of Education Science, 2012:1)

The next definition comes from Suyatno (2009:68) who states "the CIRC (program) is the composition of integrated learning to read and write in a cooperative-group". He then explains that in the CIRC method the students are required to master the main thoughts of the discourse and the ability to master reading comprehension together with practicing writing.

In addition to the extracts above, it can be seen that the CIRC is one method that encourages students to be able to do several things together in short term learning. As mentioned above, reading and analyzing text together, then writing it down into a piece of paper as well as checking the shortcomings are the kind of activities that may help students improve their capabilities in reading or in writing or in both.

In a CIRC class, the students learn in a heterogeneous team doing all reading and writing activities together. They solve the problems or tasks by discussing them between themselves. When one member of a group has difficulty in understanding the materials, another group member can help explain them. At this point, the students build social connections amongst each other. In line with this, Toohey (2000) states that one of the ways recommended for teaching a second language is getting students to discuss things with a partner or in a small group as working in small groups allows students more turns at doing things.

There are many positive aspects within cooperative learning; the explanation above is one of them.

The CIRC method is basically part of the cooperative learning model that combines teaching two skills, reading and writing, at the same time. In line with this, Slavin, Stevens and Madden (1988) have noted similar advantages for CIRC as it enables mixed-ability cooperative learning teams and similar-ability reading groups for teaching reading, writing, and language arts in heterogeneous intermediate classes that can even include mainstream special education and remedial reading students. In this learning model, the students engage in a wide range of cooperative activities with four to five members in each team. Briefly, they describe an instance of implementing CIRC in the classroom where students are first given a reading text where they have to highlight the components or characteristics of the story or text then they have to write a composition in response to that story or text.

Similarly, Cruickshank, Jenkins and Metcalf (2009) points out that CIRC is principally used to teach reading and composition. They add that the typical procedure of its method is setting a lesson in some specific area of reading or composition. In teaching reading for instance, the students are asked to read the story and then identify the main characters and ideas in the story; they then write down their findings. By this activity, they, who may work in pairs or in teams, will interact with each other and will learn to respect the differences between them. Generally, all the cooperative learning methods, including CIRC, emphasize doing activities that could encourage students to participate together to achieve their learning objectives rather than competing with each other or ignoring the efforts of each other.

Based on the descriptions from the experts above, this study has used the CIRC method only for teaching reading and writing. Some people are of the opinion, that this method can only be applied for learning reading and writing, and this is seen as a weakness of this method. Some commentators argue that, principally, the CIRC method is an outstanding method that should be applied in the teaching process but it is limited to be used for learning languages. Despite that perspective, the CIRC method has now being applied and has been proven to work effectively for all kinds of lessons.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at the junior high school of Nahdlatul Wathan in Jakarta. The study design was a true experimental research study design (randomized experimental and control groups with pre-tests and post-tests after the treatments) which is "regarded as the most accurate form of experimental research, in an attempt to prove or disprove a hypothesis mathematically, with statistical analysis" (Shuttleworth, 2008, as cited in Manalo, 2013:80). The illustration of the research design is depicted in Table 1 that follows.

Table 1. Randomized Control-Group Pre-test and Post-test Design.
(Adapted from Setyosari, 2010)

Groups	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Experimental	T1	X	T2
Control	T1		T2

Note:
T1 is the first (initial) test known as the pre-test
T2 is the second test called the post-test
X is the code for the CIRC method

The population for this research was all of the students from the second year of the school. The second year has three classes (VIIIA, VIIIB, and VIIIC) each with 29 or 30 students. Two of the three classes were selected through a random sampling technique to be the sample for this study, the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG).

In the seven meetings that the writer had for this study, five were for the treatments. The steps undertaken in teaching with the CIRC method followed those proposed by Stevens and Slavin (1995). First, she made groups with balance students heterogeneously. She then presented the learning topic for the day. Afterward, students worked together to solve problems or find information in the tasks given. Once done, they presented the product of their groups. She finally made conclusions together with the students before closing the lesson for the day. The pre-test was given to both groups in the first meeting (Meeting 1) and the last meeting (Meeting 7).

The normality and variance from a homogenous population tests were done. After the tests were given to the students, their scores were analyzed by using the t-test. In addition, to evaluate the results of the tests, statistical analyses were conducted, such as finding the frequency

distribution, range (R), class of data (K), class of interval (I), means, standard deviations and t-tests (Sudjana, 2002).

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results of Normal Test on Pre-tests from Both Groups

The aim of conducting a normal test is to know whether or not the data has a normal distribution. There are two hypotheses that have to be tested which are the null hypothesis (H_o) and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) as described in the following:

H_o: The scores of both experimental and control groups are normally distributed.

H_a: The scores of both experimental and control groups are not normally distributed.

Besides these statements, there are criteria to identify which hypotheses to accept or reject, which is: if $x^2_{count} > x^2_{table}$ thus H_o is rejected, and H_o is accepted if $x^2_{count} < x^2_{table}$. Based on these procedures, the results of the normal tests on the results from the pre-tests from both are set out in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the Normal Tests on Pretests from Both Groups.

	x_{count}	Df	α	x_{table}
EG	7.98	5	0.05	11.07
CG	3.56			

As $x_{table} > x_{count}$ for both groups, thus the null hypothesis was accepted.

Homogeneity or Variance Test on Pre-tests for Both Groups

The homogeneity test is done to determine whether two populations are equivalent or not. In this case, there are also two hypotheses (H_o and H_a). H_o stands for the groups, who have the same variant, while H_a refers to the groups who have a different variant.

The hypothesis statement is:

H_o: $\sigma_1^2 = \sigma_2^2$, the variance in both groups is homogeneous.

H_a: $\sigma_1^2 \neq \sigma_2^2$, the variance in both groups is not homogeneous.

The testing criterion is: if $F_{count} < F_{table\ (0.05)} = H_o$ is accepted, but if $F_{count} \geq F_{table\ (0.05)} = H_o$ is rejected and H_a is accepted. Results from the testing for homogeneity are set out in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Results of Homogeneity from Pre-tests of Both Groups.

Groups	F_{count}	(n1-1, n2-1)	α	F_{table}
EG	0.94	(29-1, 30-1)	0.05	1.91
CG		(28, 29)		

From Table 3, the result for $F_{count} < F_{table}$, hence H_o was accepted.

Independent T-test on the Pre-Tests Results from Both Groups

Using t-test in an experimental research is highly recommended to see whether the data gained from the t-test shows that there is a significant difference between the results from the different groups. In this case the data to be examined was the results from the pre-tests from both groups. The summary of the t-test results can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Results from t-test of Scores from Both Groups.

Symbols	Groups		S_{gab}	t-test	df	A	t-table
	Experimental	Control					
N	29	30	18.8	0.63	57	0.05	1.684
$\bar{x}$	46	43					
s^2	345	367					
S	19	19					

From the results in Table 4, it can be seen that based on the t-test and t-table scores, there was no significant difference between the scores from the pre-tests from the two groups. Thus t-test < t-table or 0.63 < 1.684. This shows that students in both groups had the same initial capability of writing a recount text.

Independent T-test on the Post-test Results from Both Groups

The post-tests were done to see whether the implementation of the CIRC method had resulted in any changes in the writing performances of the students. This was aimed at proving the null or the alternative hypotheses set out below:

H_o: There was no significant difference in the writing achievements of the students taught using the CIRC method and those taught with the GTM.

H_a: There was a significant difference in the writing achievements of the students taught using the CIRC method and those taught with the GTM.

Table 5. Summary of Post-test Results from Both Groups

| Symbols | Groups | | S_{gab} | t-test | df | α | t-table |
	Experimental	Control					
N	29	30	18	5	57	0.05	1.684
$\bar{x}$	61	39					
s^2	136	481.35					
S	12	22					

The results in Table 5 above show that there was a significant difference in the mean scores from the results of the post-tests from the two groups: the mean score from the experimental group was 61 whilst that from the control group was only 39.

The results also showed that the students taught by the CIRC method significantly increased their scores in contrast to the students who were taught by the GTM. The evidence for this is from the hypothesis if *t-table>t-test* = H_o is accepted, and if *t-test > t-table* = H_a is accepted. From table 5 above, 5 is higher than 1.68 thus H_o is rejected and H_a is accepted.

The Result of Paired T-test Analysis

This stage of analysis is supposed to perceive the real score differences between the EG and the CG before and after given the treatments. In addition, it aims to compare the writing achievements of the students using the different teaching-learning models. By this, the improvement in the capability of the students for writing a recount text can easily be seen from the results of the t-test.

Table 6. Result of Paired Scores from Pre-test and Post-test of the EG.

Category	Symbol	Figure	t-test	df	A	t-table
Pre-test and post-test of EG	N	29	4,7	29	0,05	1,699
	$\bar{x}$	14				

Table 7. Result of Paired Scores from Pre-test and Post-test of the CG.

Category	Symbol	Figure	t-test	Df	A	t-table
Pre-test and post-test of CG	N	30	0,16	30	0,05	1,697
	$\bar{x}$	0,3				
	s2	95,8				
	S	10				

Table 6 and Table 7 above give us information on paired scores from both the EG and the CG. The data itself is obtained from the deviation in scores between the pre-test and the post-test results which

was then calculated by following the guidelines from the frequency distribution table that consist of f_i, x_i, x_i^2, f_ix_i, and $f_ix_i^2$ which is then followed by the t-test formula. This time, the formula used for the t-test is different from before which is now marked with the symbol 'D' (diversity).

Based on that clarification, the result of the t-test is 4.7 for the EG and 0.16 for the CG. Meanwhile, the value for the t-table of the EG is 1.699 and 1.697 goes to the CG in which the scores obtained are based on the number of samples (*df*) in each group.

Figure 1 shows the result of paired t-test analysis of both groups.
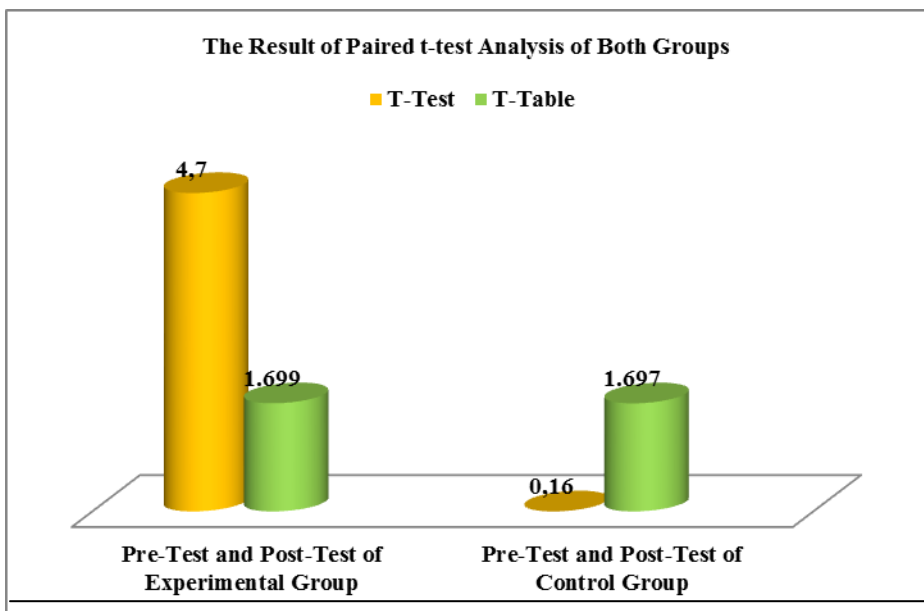

Figure 1. The Result of Paired t-test Analysis of Both Groups.

From Figure 1, it can be deduced that the students in the EG achieved a better performance in writing compared to the CG. This is evidenced by the t-test from the EG which is higher than the t-test for the CG via: 4.7 > 0.16. Hence it can be inferred that the CIRC method gave a positive effect to the results from the students.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

Regarding the research findings and data analysis, there are several significant points that can be concluded about the implementation of the CIRC for teaching writing.

First, the students who learnt through the CIRC method produced better results when writing recount texts than the students taught by the GTM. Second, the CIRC method enabled the students to positively develop their writing skills. Third, the CIRC method played an important role in enhancing the competence of the EG students and motivating them to improve their writing abilities.

In simple words, the students who were taught by the CIRC method achieved better performance than the students who were solely taught through the GTM which is normally used as part of the conventional teaching-learning process.

The second indication that states the effectiveness of CIRC in teaching writing is the result of the paired t-test that aims to know whether or not the students received a positive effect through the implementation of the CIRC. It can be summed up that the students who were in the EG got higher t-test results than the students in the CG. Therefore, it was proved that the CIRC gave a better outcome for the EG students and built up their interest to write a good or better recount text.

Suggestions

Based on the discussion above and the results from this research study, some suggestions are made herewith.

Teachers should learn about new teaching-learning methods which can make learning easier for students, especially teaching processes that will encourage students to be more actively involved in all the activities which could probably then produce better outcomes for the students. English teachers are recommended to apply effective learning approaches and methods in order to increase or improve student motivation for learning English specifically for teaching writing. Using the CIRC method for instance, has been recommended by many researchers due to the great benefits for teaching.

In doing this research, there were some flaws. One of them was the limited amount of time because the students had to take examinations.

Thus, other researchers should take this into account in order to get even better results.

This CIRC method can be applied for many subjects. Other researchers may focus on other language skills, via: reading, speaking, listening or even on other subjects. Too, it is not merely the CIRC method that should be used but other types of cooperative learning such as Team Games, Tournaments, Jigsaw and especially other methods that can benefit ESL language acquisition skills.

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