USING COOPERATIVE INTEGRATED READING AND COMPOSITION TO TEACH WRITING

By
Zahratul Idami

SMP Negeri 1 Muara Batu, North Aceh

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate the effect of the use of Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) technique in teaching writing to the second grade students at a junior high school in Muara Batu, North Aceh. An experimental design was used in this study and the data was collected through tests as the instrument. Two classes of the second grade were taken as the sample for this study. The experimental class (EC) had 28 students and there were 30 students in the control class (CC). The findings showed that using CIRC technique positively affected the writing scores of the students. The students in EC got higher writing scores ($\bar{x} = 85.75$) than those of the students in CC ($\bar{x} = 72.267$). Furthermore, students' writing ability in both classes was different as indicated by the t-test. The result from t-test was 5.08. Whilst the result from t-table at the level of significance 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$) was 2,012. Thus the t-test result is higher than t-table ($5.08 > 2.00654$). Thus, it can be concluded that the students who were taught through CIRC got better results in writing than those who were taught through the conventional individual writing activity method.

Key Words: *Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) technique, Writing, EFL students.*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the skills in English where the writer informs us about ideas and messages in written form. The reader will understand the experiences, events and information more easily when the writing is

well written. In line with this statement, Bram (2006) states that learning the way to organize information in English is necessary, so that people can write effective compositions because organization is the key to good writing. In addition, through writing, people can communicate with their readers. Bram (2006) further claims that to write interesting and enjoyable paragraphs, people should master the topic first. After understanding the topic, producing sentences to express the messages will be easier and will help the writer to interact with the readers using written language. The principal's purpose is to help the readers understand easily.

For junior high school students, writing English is one of the integrated skills which the students should have. In Indonesia's School Based Curriculum (SBC, or *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pembelajaran* or *KTSP*), it is mentioned that the second grade students of junior high school are expected to be able to express meaning and organize text in a short essay using written language accurately, fluently, and acceptably. It is further stated that the essays taught are in recount and/or narrative format as for daily life contexts (BNSP, 2006). Thus, teachers must find creative ways to design activities in the classroom that can stimulate and motivate their students to learn and practice writing short essays. To achieve such a situation, teachers have to provide suitable learning activities that can help students use the target language as much as possible. In line with this, Nunan (1989) states that the first task of the teachers are to create the best conditions for students to study in. In other words, teachers play an important role in promoting stimulating situations where the students can learn well and work together with their classmates.

The second grade students from SMP Negeri 1 Muara Batu in North Aceh were found to still be weak in writing English. The problems were not only on the students' side, but also on the teachers' side. Firstly, many teachers still used traditional techniques for teaching writing, such as the individual writing activity. The way they were teaching did not establish a stimulating atmosphere to motivate the students to write. The students received information passively by listening to the teachers' explanation about the writing tasks. During the learning process, there was no effective interaction between the students and the teachers to solve the problems faced by the students when they were trying to compose writing. Secondly, they had difficulties in developing ideas, using sentence patterns, choosing appropriate words and were confused about deciding what to write

about which did not stimulate the students to produce good writing. Thirdly, the teachers directed the students to work individually in writing. As a result they merely did their work without actively participating in the learning process. Working alone, they often found it difficult to understand the given texts since they were unable to exchange ideas with their friends about the meanings in the text that they could not understand.

To get good progress in the teaching-learning, the teachers need to use appropriate techniques to increase the students' motivation which will then improve the results. Among the techniques which can be used in teaching how to write in English is the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) Technique (Slavin, 1994).

CIRC is a comprehensive reading and writing program that includes story-related activities, direct instruction in reading comprehension and language arts activities (Slavin, 1994). CIRC is a kind of cooperative learning method. Cooperative learning methods use an approach to teaching that maximizes the use of cooperative activities involving pairs and small groups of learners in the classroom. Cooperative learning allows for interactions and transactions amongst the students during the learning process.

In line with the information above, the proposed research problem to be investigated in this study is: *"Is there any significant difference in the writing produced by the students who are taught using the CIRC Technique and the writing produced by students who were taught using the individual writing activity technique?"*

The objective of the research was to find out whether there was any significant improvement in the quality of writing produced by the students who were taught using the CIRC Technique and that produced by the students who were taught using the individual writing activity technique.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing

Writing is a dynamic process wherein students discover, develop, and organize ideas to be able to compose simple paragraphs. Moreover, writing is an activity to express ideas and convey messages to the reader through the flow of written ideas and images using words, punctuation, grammar, and vocabulary (Ur, 1996). The second grade students at junior high school are required to learn the ability to express

meaning and to organize written texts in order to be able to access knowledge.

According to Osten, Hart & Reinking (1996:3), writing has many advantages to both writers and readers. Those advantages include the following:

1. Writers have time to reflect and research on what they want to convey that lets them shape and reshape the material to their satisfaction for communication.
2. By using written language, communication will be more precise and effective.
3. Writing can provide a permanent record of thoughts, actions, and decisions.
4. Writing can save the reader's time; readers absorb information more swiftly when reading something rather than hearing it.

Furthermore, Osten, Hart & Reinking (1996:4) states that there are four common general purposes for writing:

1. *To give and get information:* the primary goal of writing is to have someone receive certain information. When someone writes a piece of writing, they will present such information to the reader. In another case, in order to know how well the audiences have mastered the material, the presenter can ask their audiences to answer exams or write papers.
2. *To persuade readers:* the different ideas of every writer lead them to write to present different kinds of views. To make their views strong and possible they will pose some relevant reasons. So, the readers will pay great attention to their writings.
3. *To express yourself:* the art of expressing feelings is one goal of writing. Essays, fiction, plays, and poetry, as well as journals and diaries are all part of creative writing. Self-expression is one of the main kinds of writing.
4. *To entertain:* another purpose of writing is to entertain the reader about the topic presented. Some writing simply entertains, but others use entertainment for a more serious purpose. Thus the use of entertainment in writing will attract the attention of the readers more, thus making it easier to filter the information given.

Individual Writing Activity

In this research, individual writing activity means that the activity of writing is where the students only write or compose written work individually.

Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC)

CIRC is a technique which requires students to work together co-operatively in groups building interest and interaction amongst themselves to complete reading and writing tasks (Slavin, 1994). This comprehensive reading and writing program are known to be efficient for students from grades 2 to 8 (Slavin 1994). It consists of three principal phases: story-related activities, direct instruction in reading comprehension, and integrated writing/language skills (Stevens & Slavin, 1995), as explained in the following:

1. *Story-related activities.* In these activities, the teacher will stimulate background knowledge that the students have, set purposes for reading, introduce new vocabulary, review old vocabulary, and stimulate discussion amongst them about the background story after they have read it, and so on.

2. *Direct instructions for improving reading comprehension.* In this phase, the students receive direct instructions for specific reading comprehension skills, such as identifying main ideas.

3. *Integrated writing and language phase.* On all writing assignments, the students first draft their compositions after talking about their ideas and plans with their teammates and the teacher, they then work with their teammates to revise their compositions, and to edit one another's work using peer editing formats emphasizing grammar and flow of ideas. The peer editing formats are simple to start with, but as they improve their skills the editing formats get more complex. Finally, they 'publish' their final compositions in team and/or class books.

In all these activities, students work in heterogeneous learning teams. All activities follow a regular cycle that involves teacher presentation, team practice, independent practice, peer assessment, additional practice, and team recognition.

Furthermore, in CIRC, students are assigned to teams from the same or different reading groups. They work in pairs on a series of cognitively engaging activities, including reading to each other, predicting how stories will end, summarizing stories to each other, writing responses to stories, and practicing spelling, decoding, and vocabulary. Students work in teams to understand the main idea and master other comprehension skills. During language arts periods, students also write drafts, revise and edit one another's work, and prepare to 'publish' their writing (Stevens, et al., 1987).

Stevens and Slavin (1995) describes the steps of CIRC as follows:

1. Make heterogeneous groups of 4-6 students.
2. The teacher gives a text related to the topic of learning to each student group.
3. The students read the text to each other, discuss the text till they fully understand it then each of them rewrites the text on paper using their own words.
4. Each student then makes a presentation reading their own result to their group which then discusses it.
5. The teacher and all the students make a summary together.
6. The lesson closes.

Narrative Text

Narrative is the most common types of text. Various purposes are communicated in narrative type. Narratives are constructed describing certain events, characters or phenomenon in detail. A narrative is a text which contains a story, like a story about people, a folktale, a story about animals, a fable, a legend, etc. (Mukarto, 2007). In other words, a narrative text is a written text to communicate a message which can be interpreted from the story. In addition, the social function of a narrative text is to amuse or entertain readers.

Mukarto (2007) further explains that the social function of narrative text is to amuse, to entertain and to deal with actual or vicarious experiences in different ways; narratives deal with problematic events which lead to a crisis or turning point of some kind, which in turn finds a resolution. This means that the purpose of a narrative is to amuse or to entertain or to deal with an actual or vicarious experience in some way, which on evaluation shows how the problem started. Then, there will be complications after the problem arises. Finally the resolution comes to solve the problem in the narrative story. In brief, according to Mukarto (2007:123), the generic structure of a narrative text contains these three stages:

1. Orientation
   Introducing the characters in the story, the time and place of the story, introducing the problem (i.e. what happened (who, what, when, where, why, how)).

2. Complications
   A series of events in which the main character(s) attempt(s) to solve the problem.

3. Resolution
   The ending of the story which contains the solution.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Muara Batu, North Aceh which is located at Jalan Pendidikan Krung Mane. The research was conducted in the second semester of the 2013/2014 academic year.

In choosing the samples, this research used random sampling. There were two classes that became the sample for this study: the experimental class (EC) and the control class (CC). EC had 28 students (13 male and 15 female), while CC had 30 students (14 male and 16 female). The students from both classes had the same level of proficiency in English and they mostly came from the same low to middle socio-economic strata; only a few came from the middle to high socio-economic strata.

EC was the class that was taught writing by using the CIRC technique; meanwhile students in CC used the individual writing activity technique to teach writing. This experimental study used a *pretest-posttest control group design.*

To collect the data for this study, the writer used a test as the instrument. A test is any procedure for measuring ability, knowledge, or performance (Richards, Platt, & Weber, 1985:291). The two classes were given a pre-test and a post-test. The pre-test was to measure the dependent variable before the treatment began. This test was given at the start of the first meeting before teaching writing to both classes. Meanwhile, the post-test was to find out whether after the treatments, the ability of the students were better than before. The post-test was given at the end of the teaching-learning process. The results were then compared between the two classes.

The data were analyzed statistically to find the means, standard deviations, and t-tests. Before analyzing the t-tests, tests for normal distribution and homogeneity were done.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The results from the statistical data analysis are in Table 1 that follows.

Table 1. Summary of Results from Pre-tests of Experimental and Control Classes.

PRE-TEST	Control Class (CC)	t-obtain	Experimental Class (EC)
N (Number of Students)	30		28
R (Range)	45	-0,64	54
X (Mean Score)	61,23		63,57
S (Standard Deviation)	13,69		14,2

The results in Table 1 show that despite the range in CC was smaller than EC but the scores were considered as normal since there were no extreme scores. The calculation of the range is obtained by subtracting the highest score from the lowest score in the test. Thus, for the pre-test of CC the range was 79 – 34 = 45, while for the pre-test of EC the range was 89 - 35 = 54.

Furthermore, the mean score for CC is 61.23 and for EC it is 63.57. The distribution indicates that the scores for the two classes are not widely scattered. The standard deviation for CC is 13.69, while for EC it is 14.26. The t-obtain for both CC and EC is -0.64, hence the null hypothesis was accepted and the alternative hypothesis was rejected.

Table 2. Results from the Post-test of the Experimental Class and Control Class.

POST-TEST	Control Class (CC)	t-obtain	Experimental Class (EC)
N (Number of Students)	30		28
R (Range)	36		31
X (Mean Score)	72,26	5,08	85,75
S (Standard Deviation)	10,98		9.15

Based on Table 2, the range in the post-test scores of CC is 36 [from 88 – 52] and of EC is 31 [from 99 - 68]. The mean score for CC is 72.26, and the mean score for EC is 85.75. The distribution indicates that the scores for the two classes are scattered. The standard deviation for CC is 10.981, while for EC it is 9.15.

The results also showed that for t-obtain there was a significant difference between the post-test scores of CC (5.08) and that of EC (5.08), in which the result is outside the given limits (-2.00654 and 2.00654). Hence the alternative hypothesis is accepted and the null

hypothesis is rejected. Thus, the results show that students taught writing with CIRC technique resulted in significant better result than those taught with the individual writing activity technique. So it can be concluded that CIRC technique is effective in teaching writing.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the data, it was found that the post-test results from EC were better than that from CC. According to Brown (2001), the first aspect that must be considered in a test is the central tendency or mean score since it takes all the other scores into account. Therefore, the first measurement used in this study is the mean score since it is the central tendency of the test. The mean score of EC is 85.75, while the mean score from CC is 72.06 at a level of significance of 5% (0.05). Brown (2001) further mentions that the second measurement in a statistical test is variance that equals the standard deviation in the differences between the scores and the mean. Based on the data, the standard deviation in the post-test results from EC is 9.14, while that from CC is 10.98.

Based on the results above, it can be concluded that the CIRC technique significantly improved the writing performance of the students in EC compared to the performance of the students in CC.

SUGGESTIONS

In line with the conclusion above, it is suggested that when teaching writing, teachers need to find an interesting and attractive technique such as the CIRC technique that requires students to work in groups to understand the text. By putting the focus on group work, students can increase their motivation to write. Group work can also overcome difficulties that can cause them to have writer's block while writing. Moreover, other researchers who want to conduct research in the same field as CIRC should allocate more time for their studies. It is hoped that this study can be the starting point for further studies in CIRC or similar techniques at different levels and with different needs.

REFERENCES

BNSP. (2006). *Panduan Penyusunan Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan Jenjang Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah.* Jakarta: BNSP.

Bram, B. (2006). *Write Well.* Yogyakarta: Kanisius.

Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles (An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy).* San Francisco: Longman Inc.

Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing Tasks for the Communicating Classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mukarto. (2007). *English on Sky: For Junior High School Students Year VIII.* Jakarta: Erlangga.

Osten, R. V. D., Hart, A. W., & Reinking, J.A. (1996). *Strategies for Successful Writig: A Rhetoric, Research Guide, and Reader, 4th Ed.* New York: Prentice Hall.

Richards, J. C., Platt, J. T., & Weber, H. (1985). *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics.* Essex: Longman

Slavin, R. (1994). *A Practical Guide to Cooperative Learning.* Boston, MA: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

Stevens, R. J., Madden, N. A., Slavin, R. E., & Farnish, A. M. (1987). Cooperative integrated reading and composition: Two field experiments. *Reading Research Quarterly, 22*(4): 433–454.

Stevens, R. J., & Slavin, R. (1995). Effects of a cooperative learning approach in reading and writing on academically handicapped and non-handicapped students. *Elementary School Journal, 95*: 241-262.

Ur, P. (1996). *A Course in Language Teaching.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.