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Improving Reading Ability Using Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) Learning Method in Class XI Students of SMAN 1 Gunungsari

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) learning method in enhancing the reading ability of Class XI students at SMAN 1 Gunungsari. The research was conducted as a classroom action study, employing a cyclical process of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through reading performance assessments, student questionnaires, and observational field notes. The findings reveal a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and critical analysis skills after implementing the CIRC method. Additionally, the collaborative nature of CIRC fostered greater student engagement and active participation in learning activities. The study concludes that the CIRC learning method is an effective pedagogical approach for improving reading skills in secondary education and recommends its broader application to enhance literacy outcomes. Further research is suggested to explore the method's adaptability across diverse learning contexts and student demographics.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill essential for academic success and lifelong learning. As a cornerstone of literacy, the ability to read and comprehend written texts underpins the acquisition of knowledge across disciplines. However, numerous studies have highlighted challenges in reading proficiency among high school students, particularly in contexts where reading habits are less ingrained or where traditional teaching methods fail to engage learners effectively (Snow, 2002; Alghamdi, 2018; Tsai, 2013). Addressing these challenges requires innovative pedagogical strategies that not only enhance students' reading skills but also foster their motivation and active engagement in the learning process.

The Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) method emerges as a promising approach to address these issues. Developed as a structured cooperative learning strategy, CIRC combines elements of group collaboration with individual accountability, aiming to improve students' reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing skills (Stevens, Madden, Slavin, & Farnish, 1987; Aunurrahman, Hidayat, & Hafid, 2019). By organizing students into small groups where they work together to achieve shared learning goals, CIRC capitalizes on the social dynamics of peer interaction to enhance individual learning outcomes. Furthermore, the method integrates reading and writing tasks, ensuring that students develop a comprehensive set of literacy skills (Nurlaili & Zulfah, 2020).

This study focuses on the implementation of the CIRC method in Class XI students at SMAN 1 Gunungsari, a secondary school where reading challenges have been identified as a barrier to academic achievement. Previous research has indicated that students in this context often struggle with reading

comprehension, critical thinking, and vocabulary development, which adversely impact their performance across subjects (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; McMaster, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2006). Traditional teacher-centered approaches, while effective in delivering content, often fail to provide the interactive and engaging environment needed to cultivate deep reading skills.

The CIRC method offers several advantages that make it particularly suitable for addressing the reading challenges faced by students at SMAN 1 Gunungsari. Firstly, its cooperative nature encourages active participation and peer support, creating a more inclusive and motivating classroom environment (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2014). Secondly, the integration of reading and composition tasks ensures that students not only understand the material but also learn to articulate their thoughts effectively. Thirdly, the structured nature of CIRC provides a clear framework for teachers to plan and execute lessons, making it easier to monitor student progress and adjust instructional strategies as needed (Liang, 2002).

Research on cooperative learning methods, including CIRC, has consistently demonstrated their positive impact on student outcomes. Slavin (1995, 2015) argues that cooperative learning promotes higher-order thinking skills, improves student attitudes toward learning, and fosters social cohesion within the classroom. In the context of reading instruction, studies have shown that cooperative strategies enhance comprehension by encouraging students to engage in discussions, ask questions, and clarify misunderstandings with their peers (Kagan, 1994; Vaughan, 2002). These findings underscore the potential of CIRC to transform reading instruction at SMAN 1 Gunungsari and similar educational settings.

METHOD

This study employed a classroom action research (CAR) design to examine the effectiveness of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) learning method in improving the reading ability of Class XI students at SMAN 1 Gunungsari. The research was conducted over two cycles, with each cycle consisting of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection, which are common procedures in CAR (Susanto & Nuryanto, 2019). The participants were 35 students, selected as the research subjects to ensure the homogeneity of the sample. Data collection methods included reading performance assessments, student questionnaires, and observational field notes. Reading performance assessments were used to evaluate students' comprehension, vocabulary, and analytical skills, while questionnaires gathered students' perceptions of the CIRC method and its impact on their learning experience (Slavin, 2015). Observational field notes provided qualitative insights into classroom dynamics, student engagement, and group collaboration during the implementation of the CIRC method (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to measure the improvement in students' reading scores across cycles, and qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in student behavior and feedback (Huda, 2017). Triangulation of data sources was employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, ensuring that the outcomes were robust and reflective of the impact of the CIRC method on students' reading abilities (Zoghi, Mustapha, & Maasum, 2010).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) learning method showed significant improvements in the reading abilities of Class XI students at SMAN 1 Gunungsari. Quantitative data revealed that students' reading comprehension scores increased markedly across the two cycles. In the pre-test, students scored an average of 65.8, indicating limited proficiency in reading comprehension. Following the introduction of the CIRC method in Cycle 1, their average scores rose to 78.4, demonstrating substantial progress. By the end of Cycle 2, the average score reached 85.7, indicating a high level of mastery. This trend highlights the CIRC method's effectiveness in enhancing students' abilities to understand and analyze complex texts (Stevens, Madden, Slavin, & Farnish, 1987).

One critical factor contributing to this success was the structured approach of the CIRC method, which integrates reading, discussion, and writing activities. As students engaged in small, cooperative groups, they benefited from peer-assisted learning. This aligns with findings by Slavin (1995, 2015), who emphasized that cooperative learning strategies promote higher academic achievement by fostering group interdependence and accountability. The group-based structure of the CIRC method allowed students to

share their interpretations and clarify misunderstandings, leading to improved comprehension and retention of information (Cohen, 1994; Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002).

Observational data further reinforced these findings, revealing a significant increase in student engagement and participation during classroom activities. Prior to the implementation of the CIRC method, many students exhibited passive learning behaviors, such as limited interaction and reluctance to contribute. However, during the study, students actively participated in group discussions, asked questions, and collaboratively solved problems. This transformation can be attributed to the interactive nature of CIRC, which motivates students by making learning a shared and supportive experience. According to Johnson and Johnson (2009) and Panitz (1999), cooperative learning creates an environment where students feel more comfortable taking risks and exploring ideas, which ultimately enhances learning outcomes.

Qualitative feedback collected through questionnaires revealed positive perceptions of the CIRC method among students. Many expressed that working in groups helped them understand the material better and increased their confidence in tackling complex texts. For instance, one student stated, "The group discussions made it easier to grasp difficult concepts, and I learned new strategies for analyzing passages." These findings are consistent with research by Gillies (2007), which demonstrated that cooperative learning not only improves academic skills but also boosts students' social and communication skills (Li & Lam, 2013).

An additional benefit of the CIRC method was its integration of reading and writing activities. After reading passages, students were tasked with summarizing, synthesizing, and critically analyzing the content through written assignments. This dual focus reinforced their comprehension by requiring them to articulate their understanding and apply critical thinking. Graham and Perin (2007) noted that writing activities complement reading instruction by deepening students' engagement with texts and enhancing their ability to make inferences and draw conclusions. This aspect of the CIRC method was particularly effective in improving students' analytical skills (Pressley & McCormick, 1995; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

The role of scaffolding provided by teachers was also instrumental in the success of the CIRC method. Teachers acted as facilitators, guiding students through the reading and writing processes while ensuring that groups functioned effectively. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes the importance of support in helping students achieve tasks they could not complete independently. By providing timely feedback and clarifying misconceptions, teachers enhanced the learning experience and ensured that students stayed on track (Arends, 2012).

However, the study also identified some challenges in implementing the CIRC method. One notable issue was uneven participation among group members. While some students took the lead in discussions and activities, others were less involved, which sometimes hindered group cohesion. This challenge aligns with concerns raised by Kagan (1994) and Stahl (1994), who argued that successful cooperative learning requires careful structuring to ensure equitable participation. In response, teachers in this study adopted strategies such as rotating group roles and providing clear guidelines to encourage active involvement from all students.

Another challenge was time management. The collaborative nature of the CIRC method, while beneficial, required additional time for discussions, planning, and completing tasks. Teachers noted that it was sometimes difficult to cover the entire syllabus within the allocated time. Similar observations were reported by Sharan (1994), who suggested that effective time management is essential for the successful implementation of cooperative learning methods. Future iterations of this approach could explore ways to streamline activities without compromising their effectiveness (McTighe & Wiggins, 2005).

The integration of technology could also enhance the implementation of the CIRC method. Tools such as collaborative online platforms and digital reading materials could facilitate group work and expand access to resources. Studies by Means et al. (2009) and Hattie (2009) have shown that the use of technology in cooperative learning environments can enhance engagement and improve learning outcomes. For instance, students could use online discussion boards to share their interpretations of texts or utilize digital tools for writing and editing their compositions collaboratively.

Despite these challenges, the overall impact of the CIRC method was overwhelmingly positive. The combination of cooperative learning, structured activities, and the integration of reading and writing tasks

created a holistic learning environment that supported both academic and personal growth. Students not only improved their reading skills but also developed critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork abilities. This multidimensional development underscores the broader applicability of the CIRC method in fostering 21st-century skills. Furthermore, the findings align with Roseth, Johnson, and Johnson's (2008) meta-analysis, which found that cooperative learning consistently produces better academic outcomes compared to individualistic or competitive learning environments (O'Donnell, 2006).

The findings of this study are consistent with broader literature on cooperative learning. For example, Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory supports the idea that learning is a social process, enhanced through interaction and collaboration with peers. The CIRC method operationalizes this theory by creating opportunities for students to learn from and with each other, thereby enhancing their understanding and retention of information. Additionally, Slavin (1995, 2015) emphasized that cooperative learning not only improves academic performance but also fosters positive social interactions and mutual respect among students, which was evident in the current study.

Another notable outcome of this study was the development of students' metacognitive skills. As students engaged in group discussions and reflective writing tasks, they became more aware of their own thought processes and learning strategies. This aligns with findings by Schraw and Moshman (1995), who highlighted the importance of metacognition in improving learning outcomes. By encouraging students to think critically about their reading strategies and collaboratively analyze texts, the CIRC method effectively supported the development of these skills (Klingner & Vaughn, 1996).

In conclusion, the implementation of the CIRC method significantly improved the reading abilities of Class XI students at SMAN 1 Gunungsari. The structured and collaborative nature of the method not only enhanced comprehension but also fostered critical thinking, engagement, and teamwork. While challenges such as uneven participation and time constraints were observed, these can be mitigated through effective teacher facilitation and strategic planning. Given its proven effectiveness, the CIRC method holds great promise for broader application in secondary education. Future research could explore its adaptability across different subjects, educational levels, and cultural contexts to further validate its efficacy.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) learning method significantly enhanced the reading abilities of Class XI students at SMAN 1 Gunungsari. The method effectively improved students' reading comprehension, critical thinking, and analytical skills while fostering engagement and active participation in learning activities. The integration of cooperative group work, structured reading and writing tasks, and teacher-facilitated scaffolding contributed to a comprehensive learning experience that addressed both academic and personal development needs.

The study also highlighted challenges such as uneven group participation and time management issues, which can be mitigated through role rotation, structured guidelines, and optimized planning. Despite these challenges, the benefits of the CIRC method far outweighed its limitations. It created a supportive and interactive learning environment that promoted not only literacy skills but also essential 21st-century skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving.

These findings align with established educational theories and empirical studies, reinforcing the value of cooperative learning methods in contemporary education. Future research could focus on exploring the adaptability of the CIRC method across different subjects, age groups, and cultural contexts to further validate its effectiveness and versatility.

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