

Cooperative Integrated Reading Composition (Circ): Improving Achievement in English Writing Composition Among Seventh Graders

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Abstract: Cooperative learning strategies have occupied a prominent place among language learning methodologies. This study quantitatively validates the effect of the Cooperative Learning Approach-Cooperative Integrated Reading Composition (CIRC) on the Writing Composition Achievement in English among seventh graders. Cooperative Learning was compared with conventional teaching learning classroom structure using an experimental design. 140 students of seventh class were randomly selected out of which 70 students formed Experimental Group (E) and 70 students formed Control Group (C). Writing Composition Achievement Test in English and Instructional Material were developed by the investigators themselves. Whole teaching - learning process was carried out for eight weeks only. At the end of the experiment, Writing Composition Achievement test in English was given to the subjects. Data were analyzed by using t-test. The findings revealed that Experimental Group outscored significantly Control Group on post-test showing the obvious supremacy of Co-operative Learning Technique (CIRC) over Conventional Method of teaching. It was concluded that co-operative learning is an effective approach which need to be incorporated in teaching Writing Composition to improve writing skill.

Keywords: Co-operative Learning Strategy (CIRC), Writing Composition Achievement

1. INTRODUCTION

Cooperative learning is an instructional strategy based on the human instinct of cooperation. It is the utilization of the psychological aspects of cooperation

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and competition for curricular transaction and student learning. The concept of cooperative learning refers to instructional methods and techniques in which students work in small groups and are rewarded in some way for performance as a group. The idea behind the cooperative learning method is that when group rather than individuals are rewarded, students are motivated to help one another to master academic materials. Cooperative learning is a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping teammates learn, thus creating atmosphere of achievement. It is a pedagogical technique in which students work together in small and mixed groups on a structured learning task with the aim of maximizing their own and each other's learning. The underlying premise is founded in constructivist epistemology. It is a process which requires knowledge to be discovered by students and transformed into concepts to which the students can relate. The knowledge is then reconstructed and expanded through new learning experiences and Cooperative Learning (Lundgren, 2008) is a relationship in a group of students that requires positive interdependence, individual accountability, interpersonal skills, face-to-face positive interaction, and processing. It is a new approach in educational practice. The central idea underlying Cooperative Learning is involvement, which basically means that learners form a kind of mutual help group, and work interdependently to achieve a common goal of learning. "Cooperative learning" is one of the three major learning patterns (self-directed learning, cooperative learning and inquisitive learning), which are recommended by the present elementary educational reforms. (Deutach, 2001). Gupta & Pasrija (2011) investigated Cooperative Learning as an efficient technique to convert students into active learners in classrooms and it makes teaching-learning more satisfying, momentous, enjoyable and effective. The essence of Cooperative Learning lies in the cooperation among learners inside the classroom to achieve a common goal.

2. COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND WRITING SKILL

Writing is one of the four language skills which is given emphasis in second language learning. As "Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man and writing an exact man," says Bacon. It is an important tool, which enables man to communicate with other people in many ways. Writing is the most concrete and systematic of the language skills. The more developed the writing skill, the more systematic the individual's overall use of language. It means that in writing skill, students are expected to be able to express their

knowledge and idea in form of producing the text. Our abilities in language are made perfect in writing. Writing is an art, a creative art in which the acquired skills in language and innate interests are made manifest. System should move beyond the rote learning method which most considered as methods of the past (Kaur 2001; Wong 2003; Chan 2004; Lee & Tan 2004; Campbell 2006). One of the approaches which show positive result in boosting the students writing skill is the incorporation of cooperative learning (Kagan & High 2002). In the field of language, cooperative learning values the interactive view of language, which is known as developed combination of structural and functional views of language. It considers knowledge of appropriate use of language and the ability to structure discourse interactions. Like any other approach, as Richards and Rodgers (2001) argued, it possesses its own theory of language and theory of learning. In its theory of language, cooperative learning sees language as a tool of social relations. Students are provided with authentic context for negotiation of meaning through using the language that is reading with understanding as Gupta & Ahuja (2014) reported Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) one of the cooperative learning strategy as an effective technique in improving the student's reading ability. Cooperative learning facilitates and deepens learning. It results in higher levels of understanding and reasoning, the development of critical thinking, and the increase in accuracy of long – term retention. In cooperative learning method when the teacher gives a writing task, the members of the groups work together towards certain shared learning goals. They help each other during the process of drafting the writing. They plan, translate and review the work together. They monitor and evaluate their writing. They try to gain appreciation for their group. In such class activities team members try to make sure that each member has mastered the assigned task because the teacher randomly calls upon the students to answer for the team. The teacher should reward the best team and the most challenging individual. This kind of grading will serve as an incentive to harness competition for further cooperation amongst teams' members. Studies also show that there are 3 major positive impact of cooperative learning which are categorized into greater effort to achieve, more positive relationship among pupils and greater psychological health (Johnson & Johnson 1989). Cooperative learning stimulates the students to be more actively involved and motivated in the writing process so that their writing ability improves. Cooperative integrated reading and composition (CIRC) technique, one of the learning techniques based on cooperation, is designed to develop reading, writing and other language skills in the upper grades of primary education.

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3. COOPERATIVE INTEGRATED READING & COMPOSITION (CIRC)

Co-operative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) one of the co-operative learning strategy improve students' writing skill and language art. CIRC technique provides students the opportunity to plan, revise and summarize their story in a collaborative team. In CIRC Writing, groups of heterogeneously students cooperate each other to read, to find main idea, and give opinion to text and at the end, the students write the result on the paper. They make presentation or read the result from group's discussion and make summary together. They have equal opportunities for success. CIRC provide a structure for teacher to teach and students to learn which help all students become more effective writers. Sabarun (2011) reported that cooperative learning strategy with cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) was effective in improving the student's writing ability. Ulya (2011) investigated the students' Ability in writing a narrative text, to apply CIRC in teaching learning activity to improve students' from aspect: Content, Organization, Vocabulary, grammar, and mechanic and revealed that there is an improvement before and after students get the teaching. This method give much time to students to be active in the English teaching and learning process Beside that, they can develop critical thinking and learn to solve the problem. The purpose of the present study was to determine the impact of the cooperative learning strategy; Cooperative Integrated Reading Composition (CIRC) on Writing Composition achievement in English among seventh grade students.

4. LITERATURE/ THEORETICAL PLANNING

Research demonstrates that cooperative learning is much more effective learning method than competitive and individualistic learning (Cohen, 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 1999b). Research also indicates that cooperative learning produces higher academic achievement among a wide range of students (Armstrong-Messler, 1999; Calderon, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Salvin, 1998; Stevens & Slavin, 1995; Vaughan 2002). Liang (2002) found positive effect of cooperative learning on EFL junior high school learners' language learning, motivation toward learning English. Chen (2004) investigated the effectiveness of co-operative learning strategies in teaching English as a foreign language and revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group and that males performed better in a co-operative structure than in the traditional competitive structure. Mandal (2009) revealed the effect of cooperative learning strategies to enhance writing skill and showed high level of enthusiasm, curiosity and involvement in being taught through cooperative learning tasks. Thus, an incorporation of these activities will be of great benefit to the student community and help them enhance their writing skill. Rininta Triwuri (2011) investigated the effects of cooperative integrated reading and composition (CIRC) strategy to improve students' reading

achievement and also focused on the use of CIRC to minimize the heterogeneity of students reading achievement and this study proved that CIRC can be used to minimize the heterogeneity of students reading achievement. Keshavarz, Shahrokhi, & Talebi (2014) also found the positive effect of cooperative learning techniques on promoting writing skill. Experimental group performed better on writing skills than the control group. The information provided in several of the researches indicates that the overall effect of co-operative learning on student self-esteem, peer-support is positive. It suggests that the use of co-operative learning methods can go a long way in improving achievement level of the students of different racial or ethnic groups and between mainstreamed students and their normal progress classmates. It also emerges from this brief survey that the number and range of studies conducted to examine the effectiveness of co-operative learning methods in Indian situation are limited, leaving much scope for research. Apart from this, the prevailing phobia of English as a second language in our students also urges to examine the effectiveness of co-operative learning for achievement in English. For this purpose, the present study was conducted and it would be fruitful and beneficial for not only students and classroom teachers but also for educators and planners.

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5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following research objectives were formed to carry out the plan of the study.

1. To compare the mean achievement scores of two groups Experimental (E) and Control (C) in English Writing Composition of seventh graders to be taught through co-operative learning strategy CIRC and conventional method before experimental treatment.
2. To compare the mean achievement scores of two groups (E and C) in English Writing Composition of seventh graders taught through co-operative learning strategy CIRC and conventional method after experimental treatment.
3. To compare the mean gain achievement scores of two groups (E and C) in English Writing Composition of seventh graders taught through cooperatives learning strategy CIRC and conventional method.

6. METHODOLOGY

The present study used a pre-test-posttest method as a basis for its design and was carried out in eight-week time period. Both groups were equated on the basis of socio-economic status & intelligence. As measuring tools, Writing Composition Achievement test in English was administered to students, as both a pretest and a posttest.

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6.1 Sample

A sample of 140 students was selected through random sampling technique. All the 140 students were divided and formed experimental group (E) and control group (C). Students, who belong to middle strata of socio-economic status and are of moderate intelligence level were taken for the present study.

6.2 Tools Used

Following tools were used for the purpose of collecting data related to different variables covered in the study:

A Standardized Tests

- a) General Intelligence test (GIT) by S. M. Mohsin to measure the intelligence of students.
- b) Socio-Economic Status Scale Questionnaire (SESSQ) by Kalia & Sahu to measure the socio-economic level of students.

B Self Developed Tools

- a) Achievement Test in Writing Composition to measure the achievement of students in writing skills.

C. Instructional Material for CIRC

Following Instructional material have been developed for CIRC

- a) Lesson Plans for Co-operative Learning strategy CIRC.
- b) Worksheets for CIRC.
- c) Formative Tests for CIRC.

7. PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION

The whole experiment was conducted in the three phases as depicted in table 1

Table 1: Design of the Study.

Phase	Experimental Group	Control Group
Pre Phase	Measurement of Intelligence SES Achievement in Writing Composition in English	Measurement of 1. Intelligence 2. SES 3. Achievement in Writing Composition in English
Treatment Phase	Teaching English through Cooperative Integrated Reading Composition (CIRC) for 8 weeks	Teaching English through Conventional Method for 8 weeks
Post Phase	Measurement of Achievement in Writing Composition in English	Measurement of Achievement in Writing Composition in English

8. STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED

1. Means and S.D.'s were worked out on the writing composition achievement scores.
2. t-test was applied to compare the performance of two groups.

9. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The present experiment was conducted to examine the impact of co-operative learning strategy CIRC on the Writing Composition Achievement performance among the seventh graders. The objectives of the study were to compare the mean pre-test achievement scores, mean post-test achievement scores, mean gain achievement scores of the two groups (E and C) of seventh graders. t-test was applied on the Writing Composition Achievement scores and the results have been given in Table-2. The mean pre-test achievement scores, mean post-test achievement scores and mean gain achievement scores are presented graphically in fig.1 respectively. 't'-value (1.33) vide Table-2 for the difference in pre-test scores of the two treatment groups was found to be not significant. It leads to the conclusion that there is no significant difference in the mean Writing composition achievement scores of the two groups (E and C) i.e. initially experimental group and control group were similar in their performance.

On perusal of the table-2 it is evident that 't'-value (24.89) for the difference in mean writing composition achievement scores of experimental group and control group in post-test is highly significant at 0.01 level which reveals that experimental group performed better than control group in post-test on writing composition achievement in English . Thus the subjects exposed to co-operative learning strategy CIRC of teaching scored higher than the subjects taught by

Table-2: 't'-values for Mean Writing Composition Achievement Scores in English for Experimental (E) and Control (C) Group.

Scores	Group	N	Mean	S.D.	't'-value
Pre-Test Achievement Scores	E vs C	70 70	19.05 18.65	2.04 1.86	1.33 (NS)
Post-Test Achievement Scores	E vs C	70 70	40.18 30.97	2.28 2.16	24.89**
Gain Achievement Scores	E vs C	70 70	20.9 13.41	2.98 2.31	17.02**

NS=Not Significant

** Significant at 0.01 level

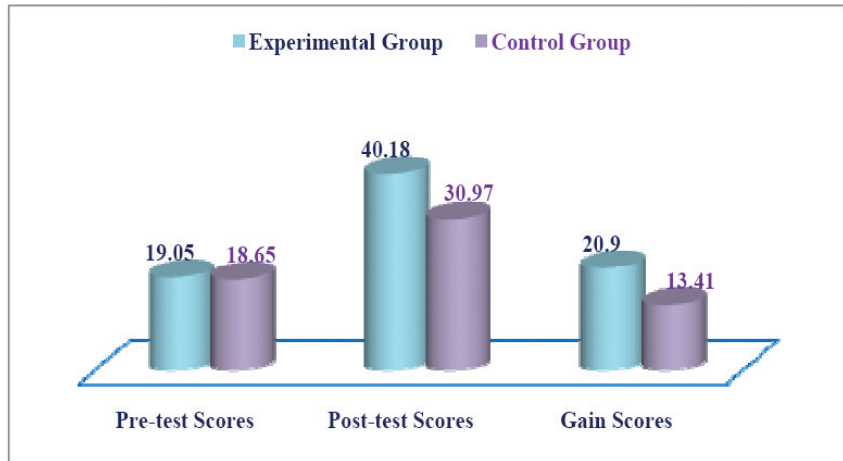


Figure 1: Mean Writing Composition Achievement Scores in English for Experimental (E) and Control (C) Group.

conventional method of teaching. It can be concluded that CIRC method is more effective than conventional method in raising the Writing Composition achievement in English.

It can further be depicted from the Table-2 that 't'- value (17.02) for the difference in the mean gain Writing Composition achievement scores of students of Experimental Group and Control Group is significant at 0.01 level. This revealed that CIRC method is more effective than conventional method in raising the achievement level in Writing Composition. The findings that students instructed through co-operative learning achieved higher score than those instructed through traditional methods are in tune with Giedrė & Svetlana (2006) analyzed co-operative learning as the most effective techniques being applied in the foreign language classroom, on social skills development, foreign language proficiency and in producing greater gains in academic and social outcomes. The positive effects of the cooperative learning paradigm are impressive. Hsiung (2010) investigated the efficiency of the co-operative learning method with that of the traditional learning method. The results revealed that the students in the co-operative learning condition outperform those who study individually. Therefore, it is concluded that co-operative learning has a higher efficiency than the individualistic learning method. Gupta & Pasrija (2012) investigated cooperative learning as an efficient technique with that of the traditional learning method. The findings revealed that experimental group performed better than control group on post-test showing the obvious dominance of Co-operative Learning Strategy

(STAD) over conventional method of teaching. Significant difference was found between mean retention scores of the two groups (E and C) favoring the cooperative learning strategy. Amalia (2012) revealed the positive effect of Implementation of Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) to improve students' writing skill not only they improve successfully but also felt enjoy and interest about applying CIRC in their writing class. Paramita & Rahmah (2013) focused on improving students' achievement in writing News Item text through Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) Technique. The result showed that Cooperative Integrated and Reading Composition (CIRC) technique improved students' achievement in writing news item text. Gupta & Ahuja (2014) revealed Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) as an effective technique in improving the student's writing ability. Students improve their writing efficiently and effectively by using CIRC.

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10. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- No significant difference was found in the Writing Composition achievement scores of experimental group and control group of seventh graders in English to be taught through co-operative learning strategy CIRC and conventional method before experimental treatment.
- The post-test Writing Composition achievement scores in English of experimental group and control group of seventh graders differ significantly in favor of experimental group. This implies that students who are taught English through co-operative learning strategy CIRC show significant improvement in their Writing Composition achievement than the students who received instructions through conventional method.
- The mean gain Writing Composition achievement scores in English of experimental group and control group of seventh graders differ significantly in favor of experimental group. This suggests that students who are taught English through co-operative learning strategy CIRC benefited more in their Writing Composition achievement than the students who received instructions through conventional method of teaching.

11. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- Co-operative learning strategies provide teachers with effective ways to respond to diverse students by promoting Reading Comprehension achievement in English. In the present study, co-operative learning strategy CIRC was found more effective than conventional method of teaching with respect to student's Writing Composition achievement in English.

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- Efforts should be made by the teachers to create suitable CIRC learning environment especially in English classes for enhancing the improvement in Writing skill.
- Purpose of the cooperative groups is to make each member stronger as an individual. Individual accountability ensures that all group members take responsibility for their share of the work. Therefore feeling of accountability is developed among the students in cooperative learning environment.

CONCLUSION

Cooperative Learning is an effective technique in teaching Writing Composition because there was an improvement in writing skill of the students. In cooperative learning the student are given opportunity to write and to revise and rewrite what they have written. Students sharpen their knowledge about essays structure and grammatical rules. This student-centered approach changes the one-way operation in traditional classroom and creates harmonious atmosphere by establishing active cooperation among students. It provides EFL learners with opportunities to acquire a foreign language through group interaction and discussion where their stress will be reduced by working in small groups and their motivation to learn will be enhanced greatly. The change from passive reception into active cooperation and exploration arouses their interest and involvement in classroom activities to improve their writing competence as well as their language skills.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study unbolts certain boulevards for further research which are briefly listed below:

- The present study has been carried out only on limited topics of English syllabus at seventh level; more studies may be conducted involving larger content of the curriculum and different subjects at different grade level.
- Such a study can be conducted using larger sample groups and schools with different socio-economic levels. It would be of interest to understand the internal dynamics of CIRC, e.g. evidence on peer instructions might be obtained from observations.
- This study examined only the achievement in reading comprehension and in writing ability of students in English. Further studies can be conducted to investigate the effectiveness of cooperative learning for other variables such as attitude towards Listening and speaking skill, other subjects, self-

esteem, peer relation, social skills and academic motivation for different subjects.

- There is a broader need to study co-operative learning in the contexts of attempts to the replace homogeneous with heterogeneous grouping, especially in middle and high schools.
- Research is needed to study the effect of co-operative learning on exceptional children or special children.

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