Employing Cooperative Learning to Enhance the University Students' Reading Comprehension

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History Article

ABSTRACT

Cooperative learning is considered one of the most effective learning methods to improve students' language skills. Reading is an essential language skill for students in language learning. Therefore, this study was aimed at improving reading comprehension through cooperative learning. The results showed that the score in each cycle improved significantly. The grand mean of the first cycle was 78.26, and 85.22 in the second. The grand mean score of the first and second cycles is more significant than the mean pre-test score. Moreover, the questionnaire result showed comparative percentages of 41.62%, 41.62%, 16.76%, and 0% for items A, B, C, and D, respectively. The questionnaire results indicated that most of the students were actively engaged in learning reading comprehension. Therefore, this study implies that lecturers should utilize the cooperative learning method more intensively in teaching English.

INTRODUCTION

Language is the most crucial possession of humans. It is a way for humans to communicate and express their thoughts, information, sentiments, etc. Language is vital in daily life and numerous relationships (Astawa et al., 2017). Their language proficiency level for conveying their desires wants, and feelings to other individuals and society significantly impact their growth in that area (Mantra & Widiastuti, 2023).

People utilize a language for many purposes. People frequently utilize language for fun. They converse with themselves and recite things for enjoyment. As people age, they are more likely to use language to communicate with others. (Handayani et al., 2019). People use language to communicate ideas, feelings, and thoughts. Using a language is effective if the message reaches the intended audience and produces the desired result (Rosyidi et al.,2022). English is a critical language worldwide because it is an international language. Aside from that, English is also

spoken globally as the instructional language of scientific research, commerce and business, technology information, and politics (Widiastuti et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, English is the first foreign language compulsory to be taught from junior high school to university. Nowadays, English is taught formally in the fourth grade of primary school. One of the reasons for teaching English in schools in Indonesia is that it is spoken as a tool of international communication (Belinda, 2020). English is playing a bigger and bigger part in advancing information, politics, science and technology, the arts, and culture in our global day. In language education, a new movement frequently starts with the response of the previous one. At the moment, mastering all four language skills. It is the recommended approach for teaching English in Indonesia. Oral and written communication are used in English instruction using the communicative method. (Mantra et al., 2020).

One of the basic strategic abilities is language ability and skills. With language skills acquired from an early age, which are then mastered, students can communicate with each other, gain various knowledge, and develop themselves continuously (Hasanah & Malik, 2020).

Apart from that, language abilities and skills are critical in forming individuals as citizens and understanding and participating in the development of society or the nation. The language learning aspect includes four aspects, namely: (1) listening, (2) speaking, (3) reading, and (4) writing. Language teaching begins with teaching receptive skills, while productive skills can also be improved in the next stage (Khalilova, 2023). Improving these two skills will result in an integrated language activity. The four language skills are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Of these skills, one skill that has a vital role is reading skills. Reading skills are essential for the students to enrich their competencies (Widiastuti et al., 2021).

Reading is an excellent source of language learning; language can be acquired from reading instead of studying directly. Many benefits can be found through reading. Students can get new information to elevate their knowledge (Fahira et al., 2023). They can improve their knowledge if they read more often. Reading is one of the basic skills in English, which is not simply translated word by word; one needs to know the passage of the text. Therefore, when students are reading, they need to comprehend the text. They must try to comprehend the main idea of the reading material because comprehending the text will make it easier to understand what they have and what the writer means in the text. They can find new information from the text they read (Zubaidah et al., 2018).

Reading is the technique of employing text to produce meaning; thus, if no meaning is created, reading serves no use. Reading continuously changes; students' reading skills will increase if they practice (Mantra et al., 2022). Regarding this study, reading comprehension is a complex thing to be achieved. It cannot be accomplished in one day or month, as people often see in the advertisements for many English courses. It is not as simple as students must do a lot of practice to improve their reading comprehension (Mogea, 2023).

Reading skills need to be developed using a method that can have a positive impact on student's success in their language skills in the future. Students not only gain improvement in their language skills but also their reasoning abilities, creativity, and appreciation of moral values. Students are no longer just reading; they are required to understand the content of the reading. Moreover, as time passes, the amount of information available increases. In such a situation, students can only absorb this information correctly.

In this increasingly developing world of education, you need competent and knowledgeable educators to introduce and improve reading comprehension skills at the elementary school level (Prayuda, 2023). One thing that is very influential in improving learning outcomes is teachers' teaching strategies or methods. However, in reality, it is often found that in

the learning process, teachers use learning methods that are pretty monotonous and boring and often need to remember other techniques or strategies that are more interesting, creative, easy for students to understand, and appropriate to the material. This also makes students less interested in participating in the learning process.

Furthermore, this study found that students still needed help to achieve reading comprehension. The students commonly encountered a lot of difficulties. Several factors influenced the students' lack of ability to read English. First, students needed assistance comprehending a text, particularly in locating specific material and word meanings and classifying the text's generic structure. Second, The students required assistance in identifying the text's primary idea. As we all know, one of a text's most important components is the main idea. Third, assistance is also required for the students to respond to the comprehension question concerning the text's content.

The lecturer needed help finding the correct method or technique to provide materials for students to learn and quickly understand the material presented. The lecturer still used traditional techniques and conventional learning methods to teach reading comprehension in class. It will influence the students' achievement if we do not give different styles or methods in teaching the learning process. As a result, the lecturer should change their teaching style by applying motivated learning processes such as cooperative learning.

Cooperative learning is a concept of synergy where energy or energy is gathered through cooperation, a phenomenon in community life. In cooperative learning, the class is used as a miniature or reflection of the conditions of the wider community (Tamimy et al., 2023). Cooperative learning utilizes the phenomenon of cooperation in learning, which emphasizes the formation of relationships between one student and another, the formation of democratic attitudes and behavior, and the growth of productivity in student learning activities (Kasmiati et al., 2023).

Previous studies found that cooperative learning is a strategy for teaching to develop students' motivation (Arthur, 2023). This technique is effective for reviewing material and checking for knowledge and comprehension, and it develops the team-building skills of the students (DelliCarpini, 2009). This technique promotes discussion and both individual and group accountability. As a result, the group supports each member and provides opportunities to practice and discuss the material's content (Qomariah et al., 2023).

The researcher used cooperative learning to improve the student's active learning in reading comprehension. Students are placed in groups and given specific tasks. Therefore, based on the facts above, the researcher was interested in applying cooperative learning to enrich the students' reading comprehension.

METHODS

This study was conducted in the English Education Study Program. This class has 23 students, which consist of 14 females and 9 males. They were chosen as the study's subject because, after an interview with the English lecturer, the result showed the students still needed help finding general and specific information, textual meaning, and textual reference. Therefore, an immediate and appropriate teaching-learning process must be carried out to solve the problem.

This study was classroom action research (CAR). It consists of a cyclical process; in addition, in every cycle, there are four interconnected activities: planning, action, observation, and reflection (Ary et al., 2018). The purpose of the research is to determine the methodology and design of the research. With this design, the researcher can do the research step by step

(Cohen et al., 2018). The research design is the conceptual structure within the research that is conducted.

The present study employed classroom action research, as previously explained. There were two cycles to the process of teaching and learning. Every cycle consists of two sessions with four related activities in each. Preparation, action, observation, and reflection are the four interrelated actions. The first cycle's reflection and observational findings were utilized to modify the second cycle's planning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The classroom was the source of all the data required for this investigation. The researcher used three tools to collect the data from the students included in this study: a pre-test, a post-test, and a questionnaire. The pre-test aimed to determine the students' baseline reading comprehension skills. During the test, students were required to identify the text in multiple-choice and short-answer questions. They were tasked with locating specific information, general information, textual references, and textual significance. The pre-test result was the main factor considered when administering the two-cycle treatment. The post-test, which used numbered heads combined to gauge students' reading comprehension development, was given once every cycle. Thus, two sets of unprocessed scores were acquired.

Results

The preliminary observation and the pre-test result showed that the students in this study had low reading comprehension abilities. Therefore, to solve the problems, the present study used a cyclical process of classroom action research. After carrying out the cyclical process into practice, the present classroom action research findings can be elaborated as follows.

Pre-Cycle

Pre-cycle was the first step in collecting the data. The researcher made an initial reflection in which the researcher interviewed the English lecturer who taught the students to know the problems faced by the students. The initial reflection showed that the students in this study had low reading comprehension abilities.

Moreover, to support the data gathered by interviewing the lecturer, the researcher administered a pre-test to ensure the problems occurred in this study. In the pre-test, the researcher asked the students to answer 15 items that identify specific information, general information, textual reference, and textual meaning in the text in a short answer task. The pre-test result indicated that the student needed to enhance their low reading comprehension.

The mean score of the pre-test, which 23 students followed, was 45.22. In addition, only 2 students in this study could achieve the minimum standard passing grade. Most students needed help in understanding the texts. This finding suggested that they desperately needed to enhance their reading comprehension. Cycle 1 was so carried out.

The First Cycle

Preliminary observation results informed the first cycle's execution. Cycle 1 of the research process was split into two sessions, Sessions 1 and 2. Four interrelated tasks made up each session: preparation, execution, observation, and reflection.

Planning begins the first cycle, a crucial stage in ensuring that the action and the teaching-learning process go as smoothly as possible. Planning was focused on constructing lesson plans to suit the syllabus used in the school and fixed with the time allotment of 2 x 45 minutes in each session. In this step, everything that was needed for the implementation of the technique was well

prepared. It needed to create a plan that addresses the problem faced by the students in this study that had been identified. The planning goal was to prepare everything for the problem-solving process in the following activity. The student group was ready for this preparation. Subsequently, the pre-test results were used to group the pupils.

After all the things needed were well-planned, the action was then conducted. During the action, the researcher had a significant role as a lecturer to accommodate the class and apply the cooperative learning technique, which had been planned before. The first consisted of two sessions. In this step, the researcher taught the students descriptive text about place and person in this study. The students were asked to work cooperatively within the group that had been made before. The teaching-learning process ran smoothly. The students were teaching as advised and discussing the material with their group.

While taking action, the researcher also observed the teaching-learning process. The observation was mainly focused on identifying the situation of the lessons and analyzing the data taken from the action. Here, the researcher acted as an observer to know the students' response toward the application of the technique as well as the students' improvement in reading comprehension. During the teaching-learning process, some students made noise when asked to work with their group; however, after giving the attention, the teaching-learning process ran as smoothly as planned. A post-test was administered to gather the data needed for the present study. The students were asked to answer the short answer task in 30 minutes.

The mean score of the first cycle obtained by the students was 78.26. There was an improvement in the pre-test results. In post-test 1, 14 students could achieve the minimum standard passing grade of the students of that was 75. However, since session 2 was the last session of the first cycle and the success indicator was not reached, the second cycle was conducted for better improvement.

The Second Cycle

The second cycle was conducted to achieve the success criterion, which was that 80% or 18 of the students could reach the standard passing score. Similarly, the second cycle was divided into two sessions, namely session 3 and session 4 of learning sessions.

The second cycle started with planning. The researcher revised the lesson plan, which was made during the first planning. In the planning stage, additional material was prepared. In the first cycle, the material was explained verbally. In the second cycle, the activity material was presented using pictures to determine the student's knowledge of the topic. A lesson plan, post-test, and questionnaire were also prepared in the second cycle. The material that was taught in this cycle was descriptive text. The students' group was also the same as the previous cycle.

The action was carried out following the completion of the preparation. The lesson plan's second cycle was executed precisely as intended. The teaching-learning process required four periods of forty-five minutes each in the second cycle, which was identical to the first cycle. The lecturer's primary responsibility throughout this learning period was executing all the prior planning. The professor displayed topical images to test the students' understanding of the subject. In sessions 1 and 2, the students had an opportunity to practice reading with their group and answered questions in student worksheets.

While doing the action, the researcher observed whether the subjects under study were motivated and interested in implementing cooperative learning in learning reading comprehension. The researcher also observed students' responses to the technique applied. In this step, the students responded positively to the material and became more active in the classroom. The students enjoyed the implementation of cooperative learning in teaching reading.

The last step, which was in line with the previous cycle, was called reflection. In this step, the results of the post-test and questionnaire were reflected. The mean score of the second cycle obtained by the students was a figure of 85.22. This result showed that better improvement was achieved in this cycle. In addition, the subjects who could reach the minimum standard passing grade in post-test 2 were 20 students. It means that the students in this study who could achieve the minimum standard passing grade were in line with the success indicator in this present study. Therefore, the present action study could be ended in this cycle.

The data questionnaire found that 41.62% of the students strongly agreed, 41.62% agreed, 16.76% of the students quite agreed, and none disagreed with the implementation of numbered heads together. In addition, it also clearly indicated the students' positive response to improving their reading comprehension through the application of cooperative learning.

Discussion

The current study aimed to increase students' reading comprehension through cooperative learning. Cooperative learning has the potential to significantly increase students' reading comprehension, according to the post-test results from the two cycles.

The researcher gave the pre-test during the pre-cycle. In assessing the students' proficiency in reading comprehension, a short response activity was given to them to complete. According to the study's mean score for students, just two pupils got the required passing level in reading comprehension. Most of the students needed help understanding needed help understanding the reading passage, indicating a lack of vocabulary and grammar. This mean figure clearly showed that the student's reading comprehension ability under study was relatively low. The low score obtained on the pre-test was also based on the problem shown through the observation, which proved that the students had difficulty comprehending the reading texts. The lecturer needed help finding the correct method or technique to provide materials for students. Therefore, this classroom action research was conducted to improve students' reading comprehension.

In the first cycle, the researcher instructed the students by grouping numbered heads. Some pupils in the first session complained throughout the instruction since they were unfamiliar with the method. Compared to the first session, the second one saw higher student engagement. The post-test was given to the students at the cycle's conclusion after receiving cooperative learning instruction. Nine students got the standard passing mark, as the post-test results showed a rising figure. In this study, the average post-test score that the students received was higher than the average pre-test score. Due to the students' preexisting anxiety related to reading a book, the mean score on post-test 1 increased.

` The identical cooperative learning strategy used in the first cycle was applied to the students in the second. The teaching-learning process was enjoyable for the engaged students. The researcher gave the students additional assignments in this cycle to help them strengthen their comprehension of reading materials. It came out to display the increasing mean figure in the second cycle. The second cycle's cooperative learning approach to teaching reading comprehension was more effective than the first, as evidenced by the significant difference in the mean figure between the two cycles. As a result, the second cycle's teaching scenarios were revised to address the weaknesses identified in the first cycle.

In this cycle, most students could identify the text's general structure, meaning, references, and specific material. The indication of success was determined so that this research could end. Moreover, the success of this study was determined by the criterion that 80% of all students could obtain the minimum passing mark. In conclusion, since the target of passing grade

scores was already achieved, this study was finished until the second cycle and regarded as successful.

Additionally, after learning reading comprehension through cooperative learning, the students under research improved their attitude and motivation, as evidenced by the comparative percentage of the questionnaire completed for the current classroom action study. This means half of the students in this study found that the activity was quite fun during the teaching-learning process through the cooperative learning technique. Moreover, according to some criteria in the questionnaire, the students were taught that the technique also motivated them to improve their reading comprehension. They taught that the technique also improved their creativity in reading comprehension. This result showed that the students responded positively to implementing cooperative learning in teaching reading.

In this study, it has been proved that learning cooperatively is much better than learning individually. Cooperatively learning is much better than learning individually. The cooperative learning method treats the students well as human beings who need to do and interact instead of self-understanding. Learning cooperatively will help students communicate what they do not know and share what they already know (Abbood, 2024). Therefore, the students should continually receive assessments and feedback to ensure their competencies improve during and after the learning processes (Widiastuti, 2021).

Based on the classroom observation, it was found that students' reading comprehension is influenced by various factors, such as students' personality, attitudes, interests, motivation, and habits. Another factor related to the reading instruction program is the length and difficulty of the material (Cabural & Infantado, 2023). Determining the proper length and difficulty of reading selection for good comprehension is related to the child's age, reading ability, experiential background, and general intellectual abilities. Moreover, the quality of the text cohesion is a factor influencing comprehension. Having readers generate relations among the parts of the text through such activities as constructing summaries and supplying headings facilitated comprehension and meaning (Uto et al., 2023).

For several reasons, someone might need help comprehending information that was read but has little difficulty comprehending similar information when it was listened to. One possibility consistent with the diagnosis of a specific reading disability is that recognition of words is so slow and inaccurate that it makes it difficult to read the text with comprehension (Sari, 2023). Slow or inaccurate word reading performance can significantly inhibit reading comprehension because of a part of the human cognitive system called working memory (Pal et al., 2023). Therefore, to continually monitor the student's competence, formative assessment should be conducted in the classroom (Widiastuti & Saukah, 2017).

Reading is a skill that covers many complex problems. Those problems can be minimized by employing cooperative learning. Based on the above data, improving reading comprehension through cooperative learning techniques was acceptable and effective. In other words, the post-test scores in the first and second cycles proved that cooperative learning effectively improves students' reading comprehension.

CONCLUSION

Cooperative learning is an essential learning strategy that the teacher uses to improve students' reading comprehension. The findings of the present classroom action study convincingly proved that teaching reading comprehension through cooperative learning techniques could improve low ability in reading comprehension. Moreover, based on the

questionnaire results, the students in this study responded positively to the application of cooperative learning.

Furthermore, this study implies that cooperative learning should be intensified in language teaching, and teachers are advised to develop the implementation of cooperative learning in English classrooms more comprehensively. Consequently, other researchers should conduct further studies to explore the benefits of cooperative learning in improving students' competencies.

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