

IMPROVING WRITING ABILITY THROUGH COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGY

Sabarun

STAIN Palangkaraya

sabarun_ws@yahoo.com

Abstract: The objective of the study was to improve the students' writing ability in writing English class using Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) model of Cooperative learning strategy. The study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) design. The subjects of the study were the fifth semester students of the English Department of Malang Muhammadiyah University. The numbers of the subjects were 5 students. The study was conducted in two cycles with 4 steps of classroom action research procedure: planning, implementing, observing and reflection. Each cycle had two meetings. The result of the study showed that Cooperative learning strategy with Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) model was effective to improve the students' writing ability that could be seen from the improvement of the students' writing achievement.

Key Words: improving, cooperative learning strategy, writing ability.

The main aim of teaching English is to develop the four language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing is one of the four language skills which should be developed in teaching English. Writing is a series of related text-making activities: generating, arranging and developing ideas in sentences: drafting, shaping, rereading the text, editing, and revising (Gould, et al., 1989: x).

To produce a piece of good writing demands standard forms of grammar, syntax, and word choice. Besides, writing needs good mechanics, organization of paragraph, content, the writer's process and purpose. It should be clear, fluent, and effective communication of ideas (Raimes, 1983: 6). Consequently, the teaching of writing involves many components, such as word choice, grammar, organization, and mechanics. However, in the process of teaching writing in the researcher's university, some colleagues of EFL teachers still face a number of problems in their writing class. Based on the observation result in the preliminary study conducted with the fifth semester students of English Department

at Malang Muhammadiyah University, it was found that the students had problems in organizing ideas when they were asked to write an essay. Some of them did not know how to start writing and what to write. As a result, they had poor ability in writing classification exposition essay. The above assumption motivates the researcher to conduct an action research on "Improving the Writing Ability of the Fifth Semester Students of the English Department of Muhammadiyah University of Malang through Cooperative Learning Strategy." Based on the background of the study, the research problem is "How can the students' writing ability be improved using cooperative learning strategy?" The aim of the study is to improve the students' writing ability using cooperative learning strategy.

METHOD

The design of the study was Collaborative Classroom Action Research (CCAR). The researcher and his collaborative classroom teacher directly conducted it. The researcher applied cooperative learning strategy during

the learning process to cope with the classroom's problem in teaching writing,

There were two models of cooperative learning applied in the study: Group Discussion and Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC). To implement Group Discussion, the students were grouped into five groups on the basis of the list of the groups that had been determined. Each member of the group had to sit face to face among the group members so that they could see, talk, and share ideas to one another. Then, each group was asked to choose a captain of the group. The researcher also applied Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) model of cooperative learning. Implementation of CIRC (Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition) model of Cooperative Learning strategy in the writing class consisted of several steps as follow:

First, the teacher gave sample of an essay. Then, he asked each group to analyze the given text. Each group had to find the thesis statement, the supporting ideas, the concluding paragraph, the type of text, the type of its development, and the transition signals used in the text. In this stage, each student discussed and shared ideas within the group members. The student, then, were assigned to select and develop a topic, and make an outline. Each member of the group gave comments and suggestions to his or her member's topic. Third, after discussion, the students were guided to make an outline and write the first draft based on comments and suggestions of their group members. Fourth, he assigned each student to revise his or her friend's draft. Then, he assigned each student to write the final draft based on the member's comments and suggestions.

The research was conducted at Malang Muhammadiyah University, Malang. The subjects of the study were five students the fifth semester of class V-C2 of the English Department. They were the students who had serious problems in writing expository

essays. Since the study belonged to a classroom action research, it was done in cycles. In this case, the researcher applied the model of Classroom Action Research developed by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1988), which consisted of four steps: (1) planning of action, (2) implementing of action, (3) observing of action, and (4) analysis and reflection.

In the planning step, the researcher prepared an appropriate strategy, designed a lesson plan, provided media, made observation sheets, made field notes, and prepared the criteria of success. The study was considered to be successful if it met three criteria of success: (1) the students were able to make good improvement in teaching-learning process and achieve the minimum score of 4.00; (2) the students were active in pairs and group work discussion; and (3) the students enjoyed learning writing using cooperative learning strategy.

In the observing step, the researcher recorded and collected data about any aspect or event that was happening in the teaching and learning process. In this case, the researcher observed what to become the strengths of Cooperative Learning strategy in teaching essay writing. This part consists of some important points such as data and data sources, research instruments, and techniques of data collection.

In this sense, the researcher used qualitative and quantitative data in presenting the data. To observe the data about the students' improvement in writing ability, the researcher obtained the data from the result of the students' score both in pretest and posttest. In this case, the data were in form of quantitative data. Furthermore, to observe the data about the implementation of Cooperative Learning strategy in teaching essay writing, the students' activity in-group work discussion during the class, the researcher observed the data from the observation sheet and field notes. Here, the data were in the form of qualitative data. Moreover, to observe the

data about the students' response toward the process of learning using the cooperative learning strategy, the researcher obtained the data from the questionnaire. Dealing with the data collection, the data were taken from some sources such as (1) the result of observation and field notes about the activities of the teaching and learning activities; (2) the result of the student's learning in writing expository essay; and (3) the students' final product of writing in each cycle.

After collecting the data, the next step was reflection. Reflection was the most important part of classroom action research. In the reflecting step, the researcher focused on making a judgment whether the study was successful or not. Here, the researcher compared the result of data analysis with the criteria of success. If all the criteria of success had been fulfilled, the action was stopped but if not, the research was continued to the next cycle by improving and revising the plan.

FINDINGS

The implementation of CIRC model of cooperative learning strategy in teaching essay writing was divided into three stages: prewriting, whilst writing, and post writing. In the prewriting activities, the teacher assigned students to list the interesting topics. In this sense, they were assigned to share ideas with their group members. In whilst writing stage, the teacher assigned the students to write the first draft and revise their compositions in close collaboration with group members. In the post writing stage, the teacher assigned each student to edit his or her members' draft. Then, he assigned each student to write the final draft based on member's comments, suggestions, and revisions.

Findings of Cycle 1

It was found that the result of the five subjects' improvement in the teaching and learning process and in learning results in Cycle 1 gained little improvement. In the targeted criteria of success, the students were considered

to be successful if they were able to achieve the minimum score of 4.00. In Cycle 1, two of five subjects of the study did not achieve the targeted criteria of success. They were DS and DP. Both of them obtained 3.75. In this sense, the implementation of Cooperative Learning strategy in essay writing had not achieved the goal as stated in the criteria of success. There were some facts in Cycle 1, which showed the failure of Cycle 1. First, the result of the subjects' final product of writing did not achieve the goal. In the criteria of success, it was stated that the students had to obtain 4.00 as minimum score. However, those students (DS, ROD, EAP, DP, and IA) just obtained 3.75, 4.00, 4.25, 3.75, and 4.00 respectively. In this case, two of the five subjects' improvement in essay writing did not achieve the criteria of success. They were DS and DP. The content of their essay was still classified as "uneven." It presented some clear information but was list-like and undeveloped.

Second, the increasing number of the average score was also a slight increase. In the pretest, the mean of the students' score was 4.15 in a 1.00 to 6.00 scales. Five students obtained "poor" level. They were DS, ROD, EAP, DP, and IA. They obtained 3.00, 3.00, 3.00, 3.50, and 3.50 respectively. It increased slightly to 4.65 in the posttest in Cycle 1. The above failure was possibly caused by a number of factors. First, the teacher had limited time when he explained the material, so that the students did not catch the teacher's explanation. Second, the teacher did not manage the time well. The teacher spent much more time for prewriting activity rather than for whilst writing activity. Third, the subjects had insufficient background of knowledge for the topic discussed. Fourth, the subjects had problems in grammar. They had problems in utilizing grammar knowledge that they learnt when they were writing.

Considering all the above problems, the researcher and his collaborative teacher determined that the implementation of Cycle

1 still needed to be improved and revised. There were some revisions that should be made on the lesson plan. First, in terms of giving further explanation about the material, the teacher explained it in more detail with more examples. In addition, the teacher also explained the steps to write an essay and the characteristics of good essays and gave wait time for students to ask questions. Second, in terms of the time management, the allotted time to complete the assignment was set up proportionally by allocating the time. In the first meeting, the time used for opening the class and checking the attendance lists was about 10 minutes, prewriting stage about 40 minutes, whilst writing stage about 40 minutes and closing the class about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, in the second meeting, the time used for opening the class and checking the attendance lists was about 10 minutes, distributing the students' first draft about 5 minutes, editing the first draft about 20 minutes, writing the final draft about 40 minutes, reporting the final composition about 15 minutes and closing the class about 10 minutes.

Third, the intensive guidance was given to the students in every stage of essay writing. When the students were doing the assignment, the teacher proactively guided them without waiting for the students to raise questions. Fourth, in terms of emphasizing on students' grammatical errors in revising the students' composition, the teacher assigned the students to look closer on grammatical errors when they were revising the members' draft. In addition, they had to know the kinds of grammatical errors and how to revise it.

Findings of Cycle 2

Referring to the findings of Cycle 2, the implementation of Cooperative Learning strategy had achieved the criteria of success. There were some facts showing that the criteria of success had achieved. First, in the teaching and learning process, all the subjects were able to (1) select the topic and order ideas; (2) introduce the topic of the essay and give

background information on the topic (3) state the thesis statement, list subdivisions and indicate methods of organization (4) use logical and appropriate pattern of organization for the topic and use between-paragraph transition (5) write a concluding paragraph by summarizing of the main points or paraphrasing of the thesis (6) check the draft whether it contained a thesis statement, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph; (7) proofread the draft for accuracy and correctness in terms of spelling, capitalization, punctuation and grammar; and (8) write and report the final composition, and give comment on other's written work. In the other words, they were able to achieve the criteria prescribed for successful prewriting, whilst writing and post writing.

Dealing with the subjects' final composition, all subjects were able to achieve the minimum level (sufficient level) at four criteria (content, organization, sentence structure, and grammar, usage and mechanic) as prescribed for successful writing of expository essay. Other evidence of the students' improvement was the mean of the students' score, which also improved. In the pretest, the average score of the students' writing achievement was 4.15. In Cycle 1, it slightly increased to 4.65. Then, in Cycle 2, it increased dramatically to 5.04.

Second, in terms of the implementation of Cooperative Learning strategy, the students as a team developed social interaction among the group members. They learnt listen other students, appreciate others' opinions, communicate intensively, and work together to achieve the goal. They shared their ideas, knowledge, and strategies. They also improved their academic achievement. In addition, each student interacted socially to each other within the group. The high and low achievers learnt together. They worked together to complete the assignment given. The poor achievers improved their writing ability from the help of the high achievers.

Third, it was also found that students en-

joyed learning writing using Cooperative Learning strategy. Based on the questionnaire checklists, about 18 of 20 or about 90% students agreed that they enjoyed learning English in the classroom through cooperative learning strategy. About 85% or 17 students agreed that after attending the cooperative classroom, they took benefits such as increasing motivation, self esteem, and achievement. For the above reasons, the researcher and his collaborative teacher thought that it was not necessary to continue the study in the next cycle, because the study was considered successful.

DISCUSSION

Before the implementation of Cooperative Learning strategy, there were several procedures to be done, such as grouping students, establishing seat arrangements, designing lesson plan, setting the learning objectives, designing appropriate media, and dividing the time allotment. In the present study, the planning was focused on five components: (1) designing instructional objectives, (2) selecting appropriate material, (3) preparing media, (4) designing instructional procedures, and (5) designing the procedures of assessment. Based on the findings, it was identified that the appropriate model of teaching essay writing through Cooperative Learning strategy required the teacher to do a particular technique in each stage of writing including prewriting, whilst writing and post writing.

1. Prewriting Stage

Prewriting activities involved selecting and developing the topic, making an outline, and writing the first draft. Before coming to the topic discussed, the teacher asked students questions related to the topic. This was done in order to direct the students to the topic, and to build on students' previous experience. To implement CIRC model in the prewriting activities, the teacher assigned students to list the interesting topics. Here, each student made an outline. Then, they were as-

signed to discuss and share the topic selected with their group members. Each member of a group gave comments and suggestions to his or her member's topic.

2. Whilst Writing Stage

There were two writing activities in whilst writing: drafting and revising. To implement the CIRC model in whilst writing stage, the teacher assigned the students to write the first draft and revise their compositions in close collaboration with group members. In this case, students drafted composition after consulting group members about their ideas and organizational plan, and worked with group members to revise the content of their compositions. In this case, before coming to the topic discussed, the teacher explained the steps of doing the assignment. First, each student had to write the draft by using the collected information from the groups. Then, each student had to revise and edit his or her friend's work within a group.

3 Post Writing Stage

Post writing stage included editing, writing and reporting the final draft. Editing an essay was the last stage in the process of writing. Editing referred to correcting grammatical errors, rewriting misspelled words, and changing punctuation. To implement CIRC model in the post writing stage, the teacher assigned each student to edit his or her members' draft. Then, he assigned each student to write the final draft based on member's comments, suggestions, and revisions.

The results of the students' achievement in writing essay throughout the study were classified into two types, i.e. process and product. Based on the results of the observation conducted throughout the cycles of action, it was found that cooperative skills of the students were gradually improved. The cooperative skill such as taking turns, sharing ideas with each other, developing social interaction among the group members, and accepting roles were achieved during the class activity

by the students. Moreover, the high achievers improved their knowledge of writing from explaining their knowledge to the poor achievers. Consequently, the poor achievers could improve better in writing ability. This was evidenced from the improvement of the final scores of the class. In the pretest, the average score of the students' writing achievement was 4.15 in a 1.00 to 6.00 scales. Five students obtained 'uneven' level. They were DS, ROD, EAP, DP, and AI. They obtained 3.00, 3.00, 3.00, 3.50, and 3.50 respectively. In Cycle 1, the average score of the class increased slightly to 4.65 in a 1.00 to 6.00 scales. This was a slight increase of improvement. Only two students did not achieve the criteria of success. They were DS and DP. Both of them obtained 3.75. Meanwhile, ROD, EAP, and AI obtained 4.00, 4.25, and 4.00 respectively. Then, in Cycle 2, the average score of the class increased dramatically to 5.04 in a 1.00 to 6.00 scales. This was a sharp increase of improvement. All subjects were able to achieve the minimum criteria (sufficient level) prescribed for successful essay writing. Three of five subjects obtained 4.50, while the rest of them obtained 4.00 in a 1.00 to 6.00 scales. In other words, all subjects were able to achieve the minimum criteria (sufficient level) as prescribed for successful essay writing. Based on the improvement of the average score of the writing class, it could be stated that the students' writing ability gradually improved when Cooperative Learning strategy was implemented in the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The study is aimed at improving the students' writing ability using Cooperative Learning strategy. Based on the research findings and discussions of the study, it can be concluded that Cooperative Learning strategy has been successfully used in improving students' writing ability by implementing the following procedures. The teacher has to design the teaching strategy. Here, the teacher

should apply two models of Cooperative Learning strategy: Group Discussion and CIRC (Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition). Second, the teacher should design the lesson plan. The teacher has to manage the organization of cooperative classroom. Then he should direct the students to the topic discussed by asking questions related to the topic, giving students wait time to answer the questions given, then, distributing the model of an expository essay and, then, assigning students to find out the thesis statement, the introductory paragraph, main idea of each paragraph, the concluding paragraph and the transition words used in the text. Then, the teacher should direct the class into prewriting activities, which involved selecting the topic, making an outline, and writing the first draft. Fifth, in whilst writing stage, which involved drafting, and revising, the teacher should explain the steps of doing the assignment, such as assigning students to discuss the first draft with their group members, assigning each student to give comments, suggestions, and revisions to the member's draft, and assigning each student to revise the first draft based on comments, suggestions, and revisions from the group members.

Sixth, in post writing stage, which included writing and reporting the final draft, the teacher should ask students to write the final draft based on comments, suggestions, and revisions from the group members. Then, he should assign each student to read the final composition in front of the class. Seventh, the teacher should correct the students' written work by underlining the grammatical errors, giving comments on the side of paper, giving back the students' written work, and scoring the students' written work. The implementation of Cooperative Learning strategy in teaching essay writing gives benefits to students in many ways. First, Cooperative Learning strategy can improve the students' writing ability. The students are able to make good improvement in teaching-learning pro-

cess. The minimum criteria of success prescribed for successful essay writing are able to be achieved. They are able to obtain score of 4.00, prescribed for successful essay writing. This is evidenced from the improvement of the result scores of the class in the pretest, Cycle 1 and Cycle 2.

Second, Cooperative Learning strategy makes the students active in pairs and group work discussion. In the cooperative classroom, students are able to share ideas with each other. They are able to work together to accomplish shared goals and do the assignment cooperatively rather than competitively and individualistically.

Third, Cooperative Learning strategy makes the students enjoy learning writing. This is evidenced from the result of the questionnaire checklists. Based on the questionnaire checklists, about 18 from 20 or about 90% students strongly agree and agree that

they enjoy learning English in the classroom through cooperative learning strategy. About 85% or 17 students strongly agree and agree that after attending the cooperative classroom they can take benefits such as increasing motivation, self esteem, and achievement.

REFERENCES

- Gould, E., DiYanni, R. & Smith, W. (1989). *The Act of Writing*. New York: Random House.
- Kemmis, S & Mc Taggart, R. (1988). *The Action Research Planner*. Victoria: Deakin University Press.
- Raimes, A. (1983). *Techniques in Teaching Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

