

ENHANCING STUDENTS' CRITICAL READING SKILLS THROUGH GROUP DISCUSSION IN COOPERATIVE LEARNING

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Abstract

This study aims to find out whether or not group discussion is effective to enhance students' critical reading ability. The subjects were 64 students who were divided into two groups; one consisting of 32 students assigned as the experimental group, and the other consisting of 32 students as the control group. The experimental group studied critical reading through group discussion while the control group studied critical reading through a conventional way. Both groups were taught for 12 sessions, each lasting for 90 minutes. The data were collected by means of critical reading test. In the study, it was hypothesized that there was a significant difference between the critical reading ability of the students taught by employing group discussion activities and those taught employing a conventional way. The result of the t-test was 5.84 while the t-table was 3.6. It indicated that group discussion activities had improved the students' critical reading ability significantly.

Key words: *academic reading, critical reading*

A. Introduction

Critical reading has become of a primary concern among English lecturers at Higher Education, particularly in the English Department for it plays an important role in the success of the students' studies. The fact is that English Department students are assigned to critically read to complete the research or final project in English, for their undergraduate degrees. It is, therefore, critical reading is considered to be an absolutely important skill that should be acquired by the students. Unfortunately, most students consider critical reading as a daunting task that it is hard to read a text in great details and to organize ideas out of it into different texts of their own. They often get confused and are quite frustrated at the moment confronted with complex reading materials. They take a long time to get ideas and organize them into an acceptable reading presentation . They seem to be unproductive in this kind of situation; even when they try to speak, their final product of academic reading tends to be very poor with wrong choice of expression, wrong pronunciation, etc.. It is admitted by most lecturers that the students' inability to speak considerably well is due to the method employed. In general lecturers use teacher-centered method where instruction is completely managed and controlled by the teacher in which he or she simply gives some topics to discuss—and if the students are silent, the teacher then talks instead about the topic. This technique, to some extent is no longer applicable for the teaching of academic reading and therefore the shift to a more student-centered method is needed. In student-centered method, students are more active in the process of teaching learning. Cooperative Learning employed in critical reading activities is a technique of teaching that corresponds to such a shift. In this technique, classroom is

organized in such a way that students can work together either in small group teams or larger ones. The benefits of this technique are that the students get input or ideas from their friends for further development, create an environment where they feel less threatening and increase their participation in the teaching learning process (Barkley, Cross and Major, 2005: 9-10) However, the technique of cooperative learning investigated in this research is limited to the technique of :Think, Say, Pair and Share. This study therefore, addresses the following research questions: (1) to what extent is the students' academic reading ability before the implementation of cooperative learning: Think, Write, Pair and, Share? (2) Is there any significant difference between students who are taught reading using Think, Say, Pair, and Share startegy and those taught with traditional strategy?

B. Theoretical Framework

With reference to the definition by Slavin (1990:3), Kagan (1994) and Barkley, Ross, and Major (2005: 7) the notion of cooperative learning is a learning technique focusing on group work with constructive interaction creating interdependent with one another. Many people believe that this technique is able to encourage the students to have more opportunities to interact, to talk and share ideas with their friends and therefore, it can promote thinking and creativity in many ways. This idea is supported by interactionist followers in which they believe that language develops entirely from social interaction (Lightbown and Spada, 1999:23). It implies that learning takes place when there is an interaction among students in the classroom. The interaction will enhance students' motivation to attain a higher level of knowledge and performance than he or she would be capable of doing it independently.

In line with that idea, Connor (1996); Grabe&Kaplan (1996) suggest that practicing language elements in relation to casual reading is not sufficient. There must be something beyond that. With appropriate instructions, learners can improve their reading ability beyond casual reading—that is toward academic reading skills. Herrell & Jordan (2007); Race (2014) in http://www.ehow.com/info_8288599_critical-reading-skills.html outlines five important steps in critical reading, (1) trying very quickly to distinguish 'facts' and 'opinions' (2) surveying the text by reading important clues, such as from table of contents, index, summaries, and other people's reviews, (3) reading and restating the information, (4) reading while analyzing the purpose of any single expression, finally (5) drawing conclusion.

A reader should therefore be aware that a body of information may be written in several paragraphs, each of which contains specific information to for a unified whole. It is also argued that a paragraph usually consists of several sentences but it can also sometimes be just one or two sentences (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2002). A paragraph generally contains a topic sentence, a body or supporting sentences, and a conclusion or concluding sentence. The topic sentence itself should be concluded as a good topic sentence because it is the most important sentence in a paragraph for it contains the main idea of the paragraph and it informs the reader what the paragraph will be about.

Cooperative learning, in this case, Think, Say, Pair, and Share technique seems appropriate to be applied in teaching academic reading for it can motivate and encourage students to a high degree of classroom participation and assist students to formulate individual ideas and share these ideas with a peer. In this technique, a problem is posed,

students have time to think about individually, and then they work in pairs to solve the problem and share their ideas with the class. In practice, first of all the teacher explained to the students that they would have to critically read the text; afterwards, pair with a partner and discussed the topic and finally shared ideas with the class. To begin with, the teacher distribute text on a special discipline, such as linguistics, or biology, depending on the students' major of study. The students critically read the text, discuss with their friends and finally each of them presents the information in front of the class. Others may comment or ask questions afterward, therefore, there will be a two-way communication.

This is a strong reinforcement activity for English learners to give them opportunity to read and reread the text, while receiving encouragement and support from a partner. Pairing gives both students an opportunity to explore the language at a relaxed pace in a less stressful environment prior to the oral presentation in front of the class and managing a discussion about the topic under study. The social element introduced in this activity offers a positive opportunity for verbal and social interaction, reinforcing language acquisition and development (Herrel&Jordan, 2006).

C. Research Method

This is an experimental research aiming at finding out whether or not Cooperative Learning, in this case focusing on *Think, Write, Pair and Share* technique is effective for the teaching of academic reading. There were two classes out of 12 classes of the 5th semester students of the English Department of FB-Unissula (College of Languages) Semarang taken as samples each of which was consisting of 32 students. One class was taken as an experimental class and another one was as a control class. The experimental class was taught academic reading using "*Think, Say, Pair and Share*" while the control group was taught academic reading without using it.

The instrument used for collecting the data was a checklist prepared by the researcher referring to the content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation used during the students' presentation and the discussion afterward. Both experimental and control groups were given pre-test and post-test. Pre-test (interviews) was given before the treatment to ascertain that both groups have the oral performance. The means and standard deviation of scores on the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group and control group were compared by using paired samples t-test to make sure whether there was significant difference in students' English academic reading competence after being treated using cooperative learning: *Think, Say, Pair and Share*. While post-test given to both groups was to find out whether there was significant difference in the result of academic reading between the experimental group and control group. The data were analyzed using the independent samples t-test and the result of the t-test was compared to the t-table.

D. Findings

Paired samples t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the experimental group and control before the treatment to determine whether there was any significant difference in academic reading ability of the students in those groups. Table 1 shows the scores of the pre-test of the experimental and control groups.

Table 1. Reading Ability of Experimental and Control Groups before the Treatment

1. Experimental Group, 2. Control Group		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Score	1	32	60.0312	12.33533	2.18060
	2	32	60.5938	10.62213	1.87774

The mean score of pre-test of the experimental group was 60.0312 and the control group was 60.5938. Then they were analyzed using Levene's test for equality of variances and the result 0.846 or 84,6 % is greater than 0,05 or 5%. It could be assumed that there was no significant difference between students' academic reading ability of both groups prior to the experiment.

Meanwhile, Table 2 shows the mean score of the experimental group 75.8125 was higher than the mean score of the control group 66.1875. The t-test result of the post-test mean scores of both groups indicates that there was a significant difference between the experimental and the control groups. It could, therefore be interpreted that students studying reading using Cooperative Learning: *Think, Say, Pair and Share* developed their academic reading more than employing the traditional way.

Table 2 Comparative Mean Scores between the Experimental and Control Groups
Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Score	Equal variances assumed	.278	.600	-.195	62	.846	-.56250	2.87766	-6.31486	5.18986
	Equal variances not assumed			-.195	60.664	.846	-.56250	2.87766	-6.31738	5.19238

Table 2: Academic Reading Ability of the Experimental Group and Control Group after the Experiment

Group Statistics

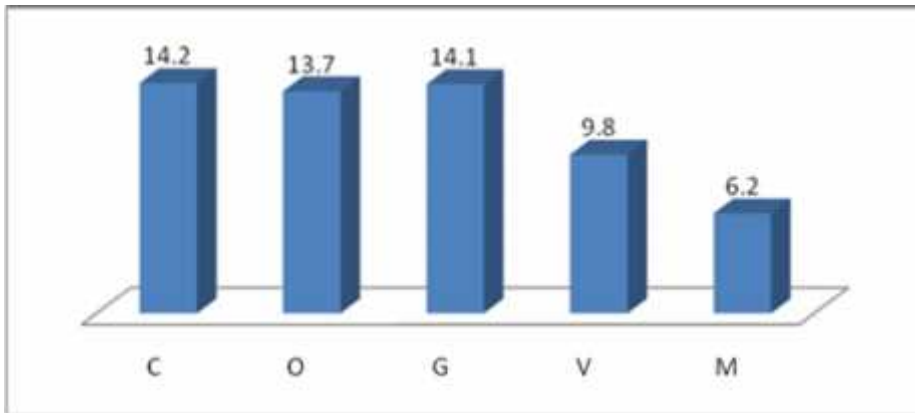
1. Experimental Group, 2. Control Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Score 1	32	75.8125	6.47794	1.14515
2	32	64.1875	9.16317	1.61984

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Score	6.651	.012	5.860	62	.000	11.62500	1.98374	7.65956	15.59044
Equal variances assumed			5.860	55.794	.000	11.62500	1.98374	7.65076	15.59924
Equal variances not assumed									

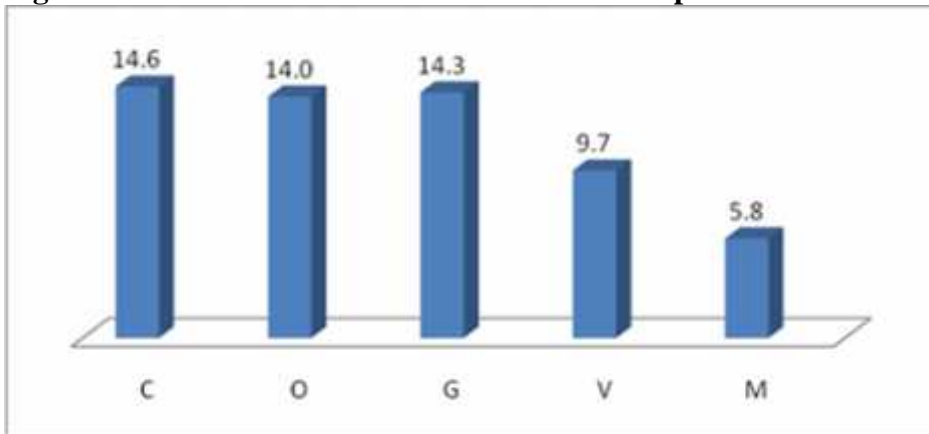
In order to know the improvement of the students' skill in academic reading, the mean scores were computed. It was found out that the mean score in the pre-test of experimental group was 58.1 while the control group was 58.3. From those scores, it is said that there is no significant difference in the result of the pre-test of both experimental group and control group. Therefore, it can be said that they have more or less the same competence before the treatment. However, after being treated for one semester using the technique of *Think, Say, Pair, and Share*, the average score of the experimental group was increasing to 75.8 while the control group was 64.19. The fact that both groups have a significant improvement after being taught academic reading for one semester. Surprisingly, experimental group got higher average score than control group. The comparison of the result of pre-test and post-test for both groups can be seen in the following figures.

Figure 1: The Pre-Test Score of the Experimental Group.



The total score of Pre-Test of the Experimental group is 58.1.

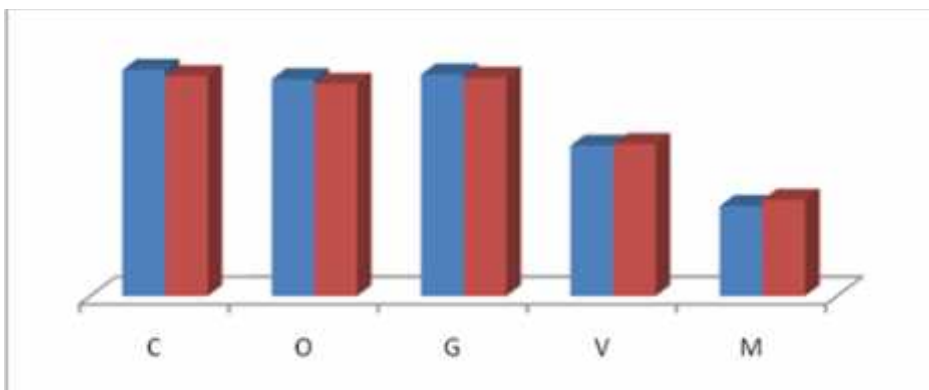
Figure2: The Pre-Test Score of the Control Group.



The total score of Pre-Test of the Control group is 58.3.

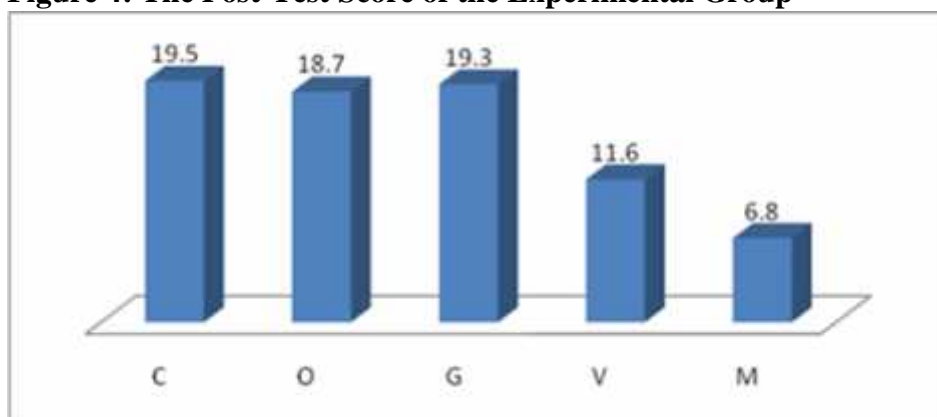
Thus, it can clearly be seen that both experimental and control groups started from the same competence before the treatment. The following figure is the comparison of the pre-test result of the experimental group and control group.

Figure 3: Pre-test result of both experimental and control groups.



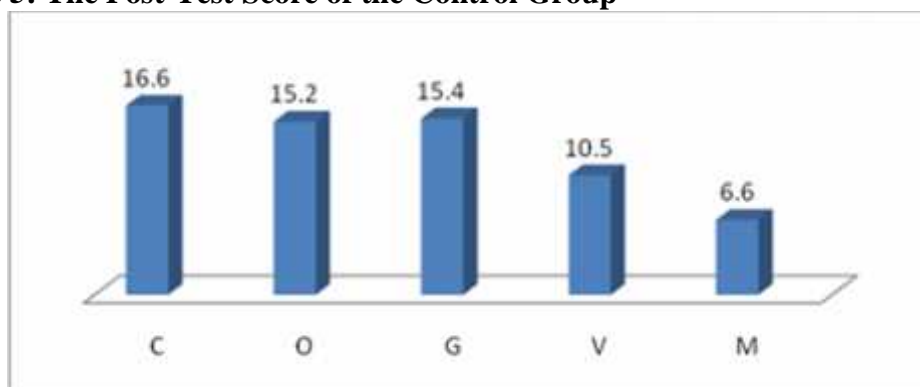
■ = The Pre-Test score of Control Group
■ = The Pre-Test score of Experimental Group

Figure 4: The Post-Test Score of the Experimental Group



The total score of Post-Test of the Experimental group is 75.8

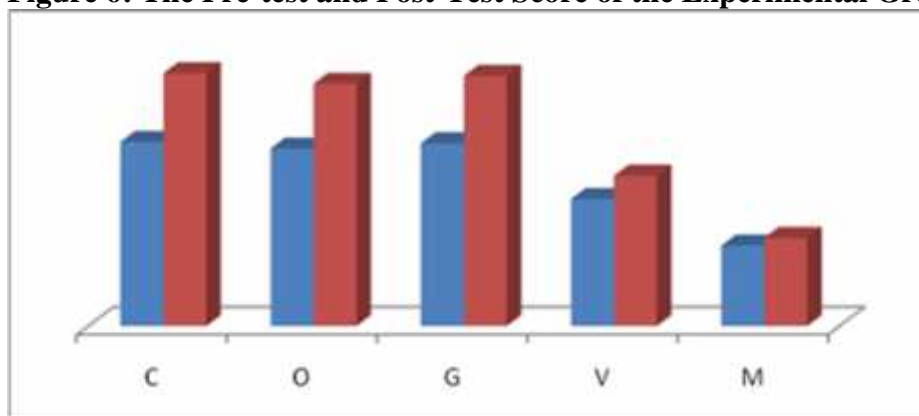
Figure 5: The Post-Test Score of the Control Group




The total score of Post-Test of the Control group is 64.2.

Thus, both experimental and control groups have a significant increase after being taught academic reading for one semester. However, experimental group got a stunning result which is higher than the control group. The following figures show the comparison between the pre-test and post test of the Experimental group.

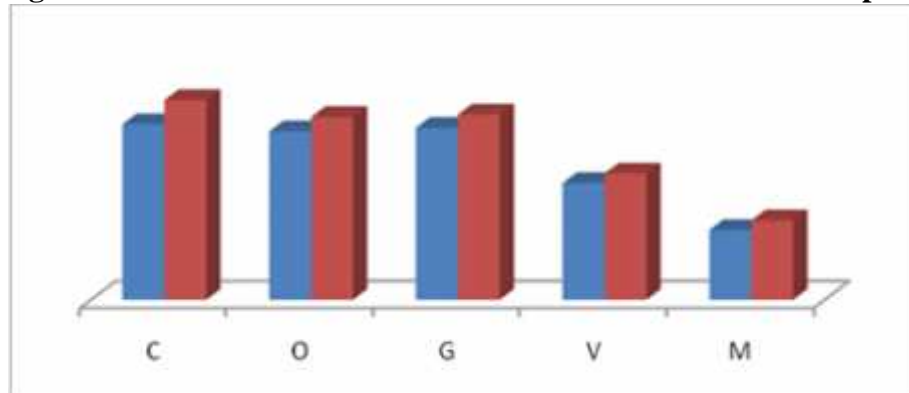
Figure 6: The Pre-test and Post-Test Score of the Experimental Group





 = The Pre-Test score of Experimental Group

= The Post-Test score of Experimental Group

Figure 7: The Pre-test and Post-Test Score of the Control Group



 = The Pre-Test score of Control Group
 = The Post-Test score of Control Group

To test whether there is significant difference between the students taught academic reading using the technique of Think, Write, Pair, and Share and those taught without using it, t-test is used. Based on the calculation, the mean difference of $75.8 - 64.2 = 11.6$ has a t-value of 5.84. From the t-table, t.001, where $df = 62$ is 3.60

Discussion

The result of the study is supported by earlier findings (Mukaromah, 2011) because there was significant difference between teaching academic reading using the technique of Think, Say, Pair, and Share and those taught without using it since the t-value is higher than t-table, $5.84 > 3.60$. Although Mukaromah's research did not explicitly stated the use of cooperative learning, it somehow is similar to the current study in the use of academic text.

Other significant result is the fact that some students who were considered 'slow' learners at the beginning of the semester were able to attain good results. This happened to Anik Puji L whose score was formerly 40 and got 73 afterwards. It indicates that the students' competence in academic reading improved significantly after the treatment. In other words, the working hypothesis which says "There is significant difference between the students taught using cooperative learning: Think, Write, Pair, and Share and those taught without it" is accepted and the null hypothesis is refuted.

Besides, this study also indicates that the motivation of the students which was formerly low improved significantly after the treatment. It can be identified from the students' participation in the sharing session in which most of them tried to respond and give comment on the their friends' work. The class without being realized looked alive and conducive with varied argumentation and comments.

Thus, the result of the study suggests that the students' skill in academic reading can be enhanced through the application of think, say, pair, and share as part of the activities in the teaching of academic reading.

E. Conclusion and Suggestions

The result of the study showed that cooperative learning: *Think, Say, Pair, and Share* technique appears to be an effective teaching technique for academic reading skill

for it gives the students an opportunity to actively participate in the teaching learning process. It encourages the students to be involved in learning new concepts and topics of reading and at the same time during the time of discussion with their friends in pairs, they can think about relevant words or phrases that can be developed into a good body of oral presentation. The slow learners in this case, get benefit that they can ask their friends as partners of ideas, words, or phrases that can make them easier to write without anxiety. The data show of its powerful influence toward those taught reading using this technique with higher result than those taught reading without using it. The fact that during the sharing ideas session, students were very active presenting what they have concluded in the pairing discussion. Because of the many positive findings of this present study, it is therefore suggested that Cooperative Learning: Think, Say, Pair and Share technique of teaching is applied in teaching academic reading. Since this technique could also increase students' motivation particularly in pairing and sharing sessions, it might also be good to be applied in reading

F. References

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