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Using Cooperative Learning Methods (STAD and Think Pair Share) to improve the Students' Reading Comprehension

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This research aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using cooperative learning methods in developing the students' reading ability in English class and their attitudes toward cooperative learning. The research focused on the students' interest to study English by working in groups and how their academic achievement increased. The research was conducted in a Christian school in Kalimantan. The data was obtained by giving students a questionnaire, reading test and observation of the application of STAD (Student Team Achievement Division) and Think Pair and Share cooperative methods in the two cycles. The STAD cooperative method was applied in the first cycle; and Think pair and Share was applied in the second cycle. After collecting and analyzing the data, the researcher noted that these two cooperative methods helped to develop the students' reading skills because they helped understand the story and the vocabulary. The questionnaire given to the students also showed that the majority of the students liked to learn through cooperative learning activity because they liked to share their ideas. .

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1.   INTRODUCTION

Language is an instrument used to communicate and transfer feelings, information or thought. English as an international language is used for communication all over the world. It is also used to get information of knowledge, technology, culture and art among the people. In other words, English is very useful in all aspects of life particularly in daily life. In addition, English is not a new thing for Indonesian students because it has been taught from kindergarten to university level. Realizing its importance, Indonesian government has even determined that English should be taught as a compulsory subject at schools and colleges. In order to obtain information especially from sources which are composed in English, one should understand that there are four aspects of so-called language skills which are also the main focus of Communicative Approach (Carter and Nunan, 2004). The four language skills are as the following: Reading skills; Speaking skills; Listening skills, and Writing skills.

Reading as one of the language skills is the most significant one in order to be successful in English taught at schools because most of the tests are reading comprehension tests. So, if the students do not do well in reading skills, it will be hard for them to accomplish the learning objectives and to pass the tests. Buzan (2001) stated that over the last 20 years over 100,000 people from each of the five major continents have been polled. The first and the second area of the top 20 areas commonly mentioned as requiring improvement

and became the most significant problem areas were reading speed and reading comprehension. From this statement, the writer concludes that reading is a multi-level process; therefore English teachers need to understand the best way to teach students so that they will be able to develop their ability in reading skills. Many researchers have been interested in undertaking research to investigate appropriate reading strategies to help students have a better understanding when they read. Many reading methods have been used in classrooms alternately. The results show that some are successful with a particular group of students but some are not. Actually, what should be taken into consideration now is the way the knowledge or information is presented.

Fortunately, a good teaching strategy, called "Cooperative Learning", can enable development of English skills. Basically, every class consists of good and weak students. The weak students often sit in isolation as they lose confidence in their ability to learn English. Working in groups, therefore, should help solve this problem. Shy students who don't like to speak in a large class are more comfortable to speak in smaller groups. Group members can complement each other's strengths and weaknesses in English. Each student has a different background and ability in English, which he or she can bring to the group. For example, one student might have a strong vocabulary that can supply the students with a good background in grammar. Furthermore, poor students will benefit from interaction with better students, and good students will feel useful that they play an important role in helping their weaker classmates. Ironically, this cooperative learning has not been applied a lot in Indonesia education although Indonesian themselves are a cooperative community (Lie, 2005).

In addition, teachers are required to seek out skills that enhance their professionalism. These teachers need to become effective teachers so that the teaching will impact the students' lives. As a result, the relationships are also built in an effective classroom. And through relationship, all the students along with the teacher will be able to work together for the betterment of the teaching and learning process (Wong and Wong, 2009).

The problems in this research can be formulated as the following: 1. Does cooperative learning develop the students' reading skills? And if so how well do students improve their English reading skill through working in cooperative groups?; 2. What are students' attitudes towards cooperative learning?; 3. How much do students cooperate within the group?

2. METHOD

This research was categorized as Classroom Action Research (CAR). This research focused on the application of a cooperative learning strategy in increasing the students' ability in English reading comprehension. The research design employed action research as the main method for obtaining the data. Action research is a systematically structure process which follow a systematic set of procedures (Hendricks, 2006). This action research comprised of two cycles. There are four steps or phases in each cycle of classroom action research (Arikunto, Suhardjono and Supardi, 2009). These phases are:

2.1. Planning

In this step, the researcher explains about the ways the research is conducted (often using 5Ws and 1H Questions which are what, where, when, why, which, and how). It includes preparation before conducting the action research such as: preparing the teaching materials, choosing the teaching strategy to be used, making the media and other tools that might be required during the teaching and learning process.

2.2. Action or Application

The second step in action research is the application of what has been planned previously in the first step. The researcher is required to follow all things that have been planned.

2.3. Observation

The third step in action research is observing. At this stage, the observation is done to see how the planning is being applied in the classroom. Later, the data obtained from the observation can be used for the betterment of the research being investigated. It can also be use to show how well the planning is applied; what are the weaknesses and the strengths of the learning application.

2.4. Reflection

Reflecting is the last step in the action research cycle. After the teaching has taken place, the researcher is required to reflect on what was happening during the process. There are many things to be reflected on, such as the students' behavior, the obstacles found during the process, the strengths and the weaknesses in applying the method.

After doing all these four steps, the researcher, then, analyses and reflects on the information or data gathered from the phases. The researcher then conducts further research by moving into the next cycle. The same phases also happened in the second cycle like the first cycle. The diagram of these action research steps can be seen in the following figure.
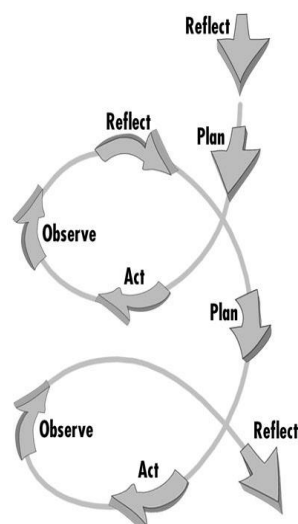
Figure 1. Cycles in Action Research (Noakes, 2010)

3.   RESULT AND DISCUSSION
3.1. Questionnaire Part One (Cycle One)

Part one of the students' questionnaire consisted of 20 questions which were categorized into six categories as can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Questionnaire categories

No	Categories	Questions
1	Teacher	2, 10,11, and 12
2	Subject Knowledge	1, 3, and 4
3	Teaching Method	6, 7, and 15
4	Resources used	8, 13, 14, and 16
5	Assessment	17, 18,19, and 29
6	Subject Skills	5 and 9

The rating the students gave the category about the teacher's knowledge, preparation and performance was quite high (Q2, Q10, Q11 and Q12). In fact, the majority of the students chose between three and four which indicated the students' high judgment about the teacher; on the contrary, only a few students chose one or two.

It can also be noted that the majority of the students understood the purpose of the subject and its contribution to their developments (Q1, Q3 and Q4) because most of the students' ratings ranged from three to four. The third category about the teaching method used by the teacher was also highly valued by the students which scored between three and four. Thus, teachers need to be more creative to find and learn other teaching methods because various methods are needed in educating the students (Ozmon and Craver, 2008). However, in the fourth category about the resources used, the students' ratings ranged from one to four which indicated that the story was not easy to understand. Furthermore, the students' view about the assessment seemed to be average. It can be noted from the students' ratings which ranged from two to four although the students' choices mostly fell on four. Finally in the last category about the subject skills, the majority of the students rated either a three or four which showed that the lesson contributed to their skill development.

3.2. Questionnaire Part Two (Cycle One)

Unlike the first part of the questionnaire, this second part comprised of five questions which required open ended answer about their opinion toward group work. And the result showed that in working in groups the students valued sharing opinion/ideas, working together and asking friends for help. Other things the students valued discussion as a mean of discussion, problem solving, and being active. The questionnaire also showed that the students found working in groups help them to understand the English story through helping each other, asking friends, translating together, sharing vocabulary and exchanging information. In addition, it also showed that working in group also helped the students with their English. Their answers indicated that the students gained skill and understanding in English subject through sharing information/vocabulary, asking friends, and being helped by friends. This learning is not only individual process for them but also social process, which happens when they interact with others, and then they build

understanding and knowledge together (Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 1991). In contrast, the researcher noted things that the students did not like during group activity which included working as an individual (doing work alone), doing different amounts of work, becoming too serious/not serious, being lazy, and rejecting opinions. Lastly, the students also commented that group work was very helpful, important and fun. It was obvious that the students enjoyed working in group although there were some weaknesses found in its practice.

3.3. Questionnaire Part One (Cycle Two)

The questionnaire was also given to the students at the end of cycle two. The first part comprised of 20 questions which were categorized like the following.

Table 2. Questionnaire categories

No	Categories	Questions
1	Teacher	2, 10,11, and 12
2	Subject Knowledge	1, 3, and 4
3	Teaching Method	6, 7, and 15
4	Resources used	8, 13, 14, and 16
5	Assessment	17, 18,19, and 29
6	Subject Skills	5 and 9

In this second cycle, it appeared that the students valued the teacher's knowledge, preparation, and performance highly which was as it was in the questionnaire of the first cycle. The majority of the students still voted for options three and four which showed students' high evaluation about the teacher category; and only one student chose option two. In the second category about the subject knowledge which was represented by question one, three and four. It seemed that most of the students understood the purpose of the subject and its contribution to their development since most of the students' choices ranged from three to four although there were still five students who chose option two.

Later in the third category about the teaching method used in the classroom, it appeared that the scores ranged from two, three and four. Yet, the majority of the students chose three and four. It showed that the teaching method used by the teacher was also preferred by the students. Unlike the fourth category in the first cycle, in this cycle two the students valued three options which were option two, three and four. It indicated that the story used was not really difficult to understand. However, in the fifth category the students' choices scored from option one, two, three and four which showed that the students viewed the assessment as average. Lastly, in the last category about the subject skills, the majority of the students' choices fell on option three and four which concluded that the lesson contributed to their skill development.

3.4. Questionnaire Part Two (Cycle Two)

The questionnaire given to the students in cycle one and cycle two was the same. The results of part two of the questionnaire showed that while working in groups most of the students enjoyed having fun, sharing opinions or information, interacting with peers and asking or helping friends. As shown in cycle one group activity helped the students in understanding the English story through helping one another, sharing opinions and vocabulary. Other students valued asking questions, translating together and found discussion really helpful in understanding the story. In addition, the majority of the students agreed that their English ability was also improved through the group activity by sharing information or vocabulary, helping one another and asking friends. It means that learning is not only individual process but also social process, which happens when individual interacts with others, and then they build understanding and knowledge together (Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 1991).

Some students, however, were lazy or just playing around and were noisy. The students also commented that group work was a very good activity in learning. Others commented that they wanted to learn more through group activity because it was fun and a good way to share knowledge and information. Nevertheless, the students also added that group activity needed to be more relax but still focused on the task. Hence, the teaching strategy brings individuals into relationship which supports the fact that people are social beings (Pazmino, 2001). Overall, it could be concluded that the students enjoyed working in groups although there were some weaknesses found in its practice.

3.5. The Result of Reading Tests

During the research, the students had taken four reading tests which were: a) Pretest; b) Individual test in cycle one; c) Individual test in cycle two; and Post test. After comparing all the results from the reading tests, the researcher noted that the students' scores from the pretest to posttest tended to increase. Thus, the students' ability in reading comprehension was improved. However, there were four students

whose scores stayed constant from the pretest to posttest. On the other hand, there were two students whose scores decreased. The record from the tests which were taken during the teaching and learning process also showed that ten students got better scores when the *Think Pair and Share* strategy was applied. This implies that maybe these students learned better while working in small groups. The researcher also noted that seven students learned better when STAD was applied which could be seen from their reading scores which were higher while working in groups using STAD.

3.6. Cooperative Learning and Reading Skills

In answering research question number one whether cooperative learning developed the students' reading skills, it was found that cooperative learning STAD and *Think Pair and Share* strategies developed the students' reading skills. The results showed that the students' scores improved although a few students also got a lower score. This may be related to the learning styles of these students because they had low interpersonal skill. As stated by Carter and Nunan (2004) that the learning preferences of students relate to what interests them and comes most easily to them. More importantly, the students could improve their English reading skills very well through working in cooperative groups which could be seen from the reading test that the majority of the students got higher scores. Viewed from learning preferences, it was found out that most of the students preferred to work in groups. They even commented through the questionnaire that they really liked to work in groups because it was fun.

3.7. Attitudes to Cooperative Learning

Related to research question number two, it was found that the students' attitudes toward cooperative learning were also positive. It was noted that the students cooperated well in their groups and understood the lesson better because they could share opinions, knowledge, and vocabulary. In addition, they also helped one another during group activity. During the discussion the students tried to be active and gave explanation if one of their peers asked a question.

3.8. Cooperation within the Group

In answering to the research question number three, it was noted that the students cooperated well in their group during the time given. They tried to discuss and solve the problems without wasting time. They always wanted to prove that their group was the best by working hard on the project and questions given. In conclusion, the students highly cooperated within the group which is very beneficial for the students as Westwood (2008) said that working in groups not only increases students' active participation, it also encourages social skill development, enhances communication, and increases independence. Students working together, sharing ideas and learning from one another also facilitates effective learning.

During the group activities in STAD and Think Pair and Share cooperative methods, the researcher also noted the strengths and weaknesses of these two methods. He found that the strengths of the STAD cooperative method included: a) There were more ideas and opinions contributed during the discussion; b) The students were more creative in bigger groups; c) It was easy to supervise the groups; d) The students could do more work at the same time. However, the researcher also noted some weaknesses of this method which included: a) It needed a longer time to form the groups; b) It took time for the members to adapt to each other in the group; c) The students needed a longer time to make decisions; d) It was easier for the students to ignore or be ignored in the group; and e) The chance for every individual was sometimes limited.

In cycle two, in which *Think Pair and Share* was applied, the researcher also noted the strengths and weaknesses of this cooperative method. The strengths found by the researcher included: a) It was easier to form the group; b) Decision making was quick; c) Every member could participate a lot; and d) Interaction among the students was easy. This cooperative method also had weaknesses which were: a) It was difficult for the teacher to monitor the groups because there were so many groups; b) The ideas in the groups did not show a lot of variety; and c) The students were less creative.

4. CONCLUSION

From this study, the researcher found that cooperative learning helped to develop the students' reading skills. It was also discovered that the students reading skills improved because the researcher gave some specific strategies in reading through which the students could read better. The students also showed positive attitudes and responses related to group activity because they benefited much from this activity. The students could share ideas, information, vocabulary, and opinions which enhanced their understanding about the task given to them. They also helped one another so that they could develop their skills better. In addition, the students cooperated a lot during the group activity which contributed greatly to their understanding. And more importantly, by working in groups they could exchange their thoughts and complete the task. Because of these advantages, the students even preferred to work in groups most of the time. This can be seen from

the comments they gave in the questionnaires. However, the stories chosen seemed to be difficult and students did not really engage with the stories which could be seen from the questionnaire.

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