

Effects of Bilingual Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition Strategy on English Reading and Writing Skills

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to analyze the effects of the bilingual cooperative integrated reading and composition (BCIRC) strategy and the traditional reading and writing pedagogical methods for elementary school students. The study group was composed of twenty-five 5th grade students at an elementary school in the present academic year. Reading Comprehension Test (RCT) and Written Expression Test (WET), both developed by the researcher, were used to collect data related to the study group's reading comprehension skills and writing skills, respectively. Results were analyzed via one-group pretest and posttest experimental design. RCT and WCT were applied as pre- and post-test to the students. The results revealed that there was a statistically significant progress between the reading and writing skills of the participants in terms of academic achievement. This showing evidence shed light on the effectiveness of adopting the strategy of cooperative integrated reading and composition strategy in the EFL/ESL secondary classroom.

Keywords : Bilingual cooperative integrated reading and composition (BCIRC), Reading, Writing skills

摘要

本研究旨在探討雙語合作統整閱讀理解模式對提升第二外語學習者英語讀寫能力成效之研究。本研究對象為國小五年級25位學童，並以研究者自編之閱讀理解測驗(RCT)及寫作能力測驗(WET)於研究實驗前後進行施測。本研究採用單組前後測實驗設計，分別探討實驗前後學童於閱讀理解及寫作能力技巧展現上是否有所提升。研究數據結果顯示學童在閱讀及寫作能力的學業成績展現上有顯著的提升。本研究也對雙語合作統整閱讀寫作模式融入雙語學習上提供了具有價值性的教學意涵。

關鍵字：雙語合作統整閱讀寫作模式、英語讀寫能力

I. Introduction

Reading and writing skills are very important in the context of language teaching and use. Reading and writing are the most concrete and systematic of the language skills. The more developed the reading and writing skills, the more systematic the individual's overall use of language. By this way, a person can speak, read and listen in a more accurate and effective way (Bryson, 2003). Writing is to individual expression what reading is to comprehension. Among language skills, reading together with writing is the first skill to be learnt. It is also known that, in the learning process, there is a high correlation between reading comprehension and academic achievement.

Cooperative learning is regarded as particularly beneficial to students in transitional bilingual programs at the point when they are making a transition to English learning. Cooperative learning routinely provides opportunities for students to work together to construct meaning and share understandings (Durán & Szymanski, 1993).

In Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) lessons, students are assigned to heterogeneous learning teams and work in their teams on a variety of cooperative activities including partner reading, identification of main story elements, vocabulary and summarization activities, practice of reading comprehension strategies, and creative writing using a process writing approach. Based on this assumption, the consistent positive effects of the CIRC program were found on student reading achievement, especially on measures of reading comprehension and metacognitive awareness (Stevens & Durkin, 1992; Stevens & Slavin, 1995).

Regarding the importance of the above issues and its impact on language learning, the current study presents an empirical study conducted in an elementary school in Taiwan. Particularly, the study aims to investigate the effects of young EFL learners' reading and writing skills in the English course.

II. Literature Review

Bilingual Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (BCIRC) provides a way to support English language learners (ELLs) through cooperative learning. Research on second-language learning has shown that, for students to reach high levels of proficiency, they must engage in a great deal of oral interaction. That is, to become proficient, students must cooperate to negotiate meaning and solve problems. Cooperative learning consistently provides opportunities for students to work together to better understand and decipher meanings of new words.

The Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) Model was developed at John Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools by Stevens, Madden, Slavin, and Famish (1987). This cooperative learning instructional model has been used in grades 2-8 for teaching reading and writing. The practice of the CIRC model involves student team building, and partner reading. Student activities include shared reading, independent reading, analyses of story structure, reading aloud, building content vocabulary, making predictions, story comprehension, and story retelling. At the teacher's discretion, CIRC may also include writing workshops. In addition to regular monitoring the teacher must periodically assess student progress and, at appropriate times, engage in direct instruction (Calderon, 1999; Bums, Roe and Ross, 1999). Calderon (1999) indicated that the CIRC Model not only helps students to develop both their social skills and language acquisition, but also to promote their academic achievement.

III. Research Design

The present study adopted Bilingual Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (BCIRC) instruction, which was designed to help students succeed in English reading and writing literacy in an effective and efficient manner.

Implementation process of BCIRC strategy

The key elements of BCIRC and of the original CIRC model are the same. As in original CIRC, teachers in Bilingual CIRC assign students to four-member, heterogeneous learning teams in which they work together to help each other learn academic material. During BCIRC activities, students learn how to solve problems, study together, help each other, solicit opinions, present rationales, defend, synthesize, listen to others, and ask relevant questions. The more a child is exposed to cooperative peer exchange, the more the child's own thinking becomes refined. Bilingual CIRC allows for this type of interaction in both Chinese and English.

Pre-reading/writing Stage: Firstly of all, teacher helps to appropriately build students' basic background knowledge facilitating the process of reading and writing.

During-reading/writing Stage: 4 or 5 student groups were established. Activities of making predictions, partner reading and story mapping are conducted in the stage, engaging students to steadily develop higher order thinking skills via inter-group communication. Story-related writing activities accompanied with three writing tasks help students write and polish the meaningful sentences from pairs of students and,

eventually, individually. Writing task is generated through the process of summarizing, synthesizing, commenting, and reflecting related to their reading materials,

Post-reading/writing Stage: At the end of the periods, students are given a context comprehension test, including write meaningful sentences. The tests are the culmination of a variety of interactive strategies which involve students in sequencing activities of the BCIRC process while providing them with strategies to participate fully in every learning event.

Materials and methods

The present study aimed to compare the effects of BCIRC strategy on facilitating students' abilities of reading and writing skill. A one-group pretest-posttest design was used in this study. The study group was composed of 25 5th grade students enrolled at an elementary school during the 2012/2013 academic year.

To assess the effects of the adopted methods on the reading comprehension skills of elementary school students, Reading Comprehension Test (RCT) and Written Expression Test (WET), developed by the researcher, was used in this study.

IV. Results and Discussion

The present study aims to analyze the BIRC instruction on the learners' English reading comprehension and writing skills.

Findings related to RCT

The paired-sample t-test analysis in Table 1 shows that the mean score on the posttest ($M = 65.15$) is significantly greater than the mean score on the pretest ($M = 53.38$). The observed mean difference is -11.765 , implying that the performance of the students had improved significantly. Therefore, H_0 (no significant difference between pretest and posttest in the reading comprehension scores) was also rejected. Based on the findings, the researcher accepts the alternative hypothesis that there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest reading comprehension scores. This indicates that digital reading and writing strategy had indeed helped to significantly elevate the students' performance in their reading comprehension texts.

Table 1

Paired Samples Statistics of the RCT Pretest-Posttest

N	Mean	SD	SE	t	df	Sig.
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(Continued)

							(2-tailed)
Pretest	25	53.38	6.243	1.071			
Posttest	25	65.15	6.907	1.185	-9.870	33	0.000

* $p < 0.025$, 2-tailed.

Findings related to WET

To find out whether the students improved significantly in their writing abilities, the pre- and post-test mean scores were compared by using a paired samples t-test. Results of the dependent sample t-test show a significant difference between the pretest and the posttest mean scores of the group at 0.05 level, suggesting that students achievement has significantly improved as a result of using the intervention ($T = -13.7$) with mean (-32.00) and standard deviation (12.70). The result indicated that the post-test mean score was obviously higher than that obtained from the pre-test at a significance level.

Table 2

Paired Samples Statistics of the WET Pretest-Posttest

	N	Mean	SD	SE	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest							
Posttest	25	-32.000	12.7035	2.319	-13.7	29	0.000

* $p < 0.05$, 2-tailed.

V. Conclusion and Implications

These findings generally suggest that BCIRC strategy is effective on reading comprehension and writing expression skills. In light of these results, four major implications from this study suggested that BCIRC teaching methods benefits language acquisition (Chen, 2004; Stevens, 2003).

The major implication is that interaction strategies orchestrated through BCIRC enable students to reach higher level of reading and writing proficiency in two languages. BCIRC learning process and procedures allow students to transfer the social, academic, and cognitive skills into English reading and writing development with much greater ease.

The second prevalent outcome is student engagement time. Guided interaction around meaningful and interesting tasks and this cooperative model helped even the most reluctant learners become actively engaged in learning.

The third implication is self-confidence and positive attitude. The varied

exposure to sufficient learning materials helped students see their achievements as positive.

The fourth major implication is the improvement-of-practice gains. Teacher in this study has shifted from traditional grammar-based learning, ESL drill on discrete skills to problem solving, and integrated language, reading, and writing. In between these stages, BCIRC teacher devoted extensive time to organize, reconstruct, recognize and refocus their lessons, and more teacher profession development generated significantly.

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