

COOPERATIVE INTEGRATED READING AND COMPOSITION (CIRC) AND LEARNING ACTIVENESS: THEIR EFFECT ON STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) method and students' learning activeness on the reading comprehension of seventh-grade students at SMPN 3 Rantau Bayur. Using a quantitative experimental design, two groups were involved: an experimental group taught with CIRC and a control group taught using conventional methods. Students in each group were further classified into high and low learning activeness categories. Data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests for reading comprehension, and learning activeness was assessed through observation checklists. The results, analyzed using Two-Way ANOVA, indicated that: (1) the CIRC method significantly improved students' reading comprehension, (2) learning activeness had a significant positive effect on reading comprehension, and (3) there was no significant interaction between the teaching method and learning activeness. These findings suggest that both CIRC and learning activeness independently contribute to better reading comprehension, making CIRC an effective strategy for enhancing reading skills in junior high school students.

Keywords: CIRC, Learning Activeness, Reading Comprehension, Cooperative Learning

INTRODUCTION

English, which has long been established as a global language and is widely acknowledged as an essential medium for international communication among people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Crystal, 2000), plays a particularly important role in Indonesia's national education system. It is taught as a compulsory subject beginning from junior high school up to senior high school, with the ultimate aim of equipping students with the necessary linguistic competence to access knowledge, exchange ideas, and participate actively in both local and global contexts.

However, despite its strategic significance, many Indonesian junior high school students, especially those in the seventh grade who are at the initial stage of formal English learning, still encounter persistent challenges in reading comprehension (Alderson, 2000; Nuttall, 1996). These difficulties include recognizing main ideas, understanding supporting details, inferring implied meanings, decoding unfamiliar vocabulary, and responding

appropriately to comprehension questions (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Grellet, 2004; Tran et al., 2025). Majdi et al., (2025) similarly highlight challenges such as dealing with complex texts, unfamiliar vocabulary, time constraints, and occasional issues with group dynamics.

Such problems are further aggravated by the prevalence of traditional teacher-centered instructional practices that prioritize lectures, drills, and passive reception of knowledge over interactive learning (Brown, 2001; Harmer, 2007). In addition, the limited level of students' classroom participation also contributes to the issue. Learners often hesitate to ask questions, share opinions, or engage meaningfully with the learning process due to low motivation, lack of confidence, and feelings of boredom (Oxford, 1990; Andrade & du, 2007; Asrifan et al., 2021). All of these factors result in low achievement and diminished enthusiasm for English learning. On the other hand, Prasetia et al., (2024) emphasize that students' reading issues require the development of critical thinking and text-structure awareness.

Therefore, to address these intertwined problems, there arises a strong pedagogical need for adopting an instructional approach that simultaneously improves students' reading comprehension and enhances their learning activeness (Aini, 2025). One promising method that fulfills these requirements is the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) strategy (Stevens et al, 1987; Slavin, 2005). Developed by Stevens and colleagues in 1987, CIRC is a cooperative learning model that emphasizes peer collaboration, group accountability, and integration of reading with writing. It uses structured activities such as reading together, summarizing, questioning, peer feedback, and composition tasks.

This strategy transforms reading from a solitary act into a dynamic, interactive, and socially meaningful experience. Numerous studies have shown that CIRC not only improves students' academic performance but also fosters motivation, confidence, and critical thinking skills. In this regard, the present study is designed to investigate empirically the extent to which the implementation of the CIRC method and the variation of students' learning activeness contribute to their reading comprehension outcomes. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for English teachers in selecting appropriate teaching strategies, designing student-centered learning environments, and ultimately enhancing the quality of English instruction in Indonesian junior high schools, particularly in rural areas such as SMPN 3 Rantau Bayur.

Reading is a language skill that requires complex competence to obtain the information presented in a text (Nur, 2021). Reading comprehension, as one of the core components of English language skills, requires not only the ability to decode written texts but also the higher-order competence to interpret meaning, connect ideas, and apply critical reasoning (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Smith, 2005). Scholars such as Brown, (2004) and Carrell, (1989) argue that reading is both a cognitive and metacognitive process that involves the interaction between textual input and the reader's prior knowledge, strategies, and motivation. Meanwhile, Hasibuan & Afrita (2023) describe reading as a cognitive activity aimed at finding information within a text or written material.

In the Indonesian junior high school context, however, reading comprehension remains one of the most difficult skills for students to master. One major reason is their

lack of sufficient vocabulary knowledge (Tarigan, 2014). Safitri (2025) further explains that students often struggle to understand texts, particularly in identifying the main idea, drawing conclusions, and connecting information across different paragraphs. Unfortunately, the instructional approaches adopted in schools do not adequately foster active engagement, collaborative learning, or self-regulated strategies (Pang, 2013).

As a result, many students rely on superficial reading practices in which they merely translate or memorize words without grasping the underlying meaning, structure, or purpose of the text (Goodman, 1967). This issue highlights the urgent need for pedagogical approaches that promote deeper engagement with reading and support students in developing the skills necessary for meaningful comprehension.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative experimental design with a two-way ANOVA framework to examine the effects of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) method and students' learning activeness on reading comprehension. The research involved two groups: 1. Experimental group taught using the CIRC method. 2. Control group taught using a conventional teacher-centered approach. Each group was further divided into high learning activeness (HLA) and low learning activeness (LLA) subgroups based on observation checklist scores. This design allowed for analysis of the main effects of teaching method and learning activeness, as well as their interaction effect. Participants The population consisted of all seventh-grade students at SMPN 3 Rantau Bayur in the 2024/2025 academic year.

The sample was selected using purposive sampling to ensure comparability between groups. A total of 60 students participated, divided equally into the experimental and control groups. Two instruments were used: 1. Reading Comprehension Test A multiple-choice test assessing narrative text comprehension. The test measured students' ability to identify main ideas, vocabulary in context, supporting details, and make inferences. Test validity was confirmed through expert judgment and item analysis, and reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a high reliability coefficient. 2. Learning Activeness Observation Checklist. A structured observation tool measuring participation, responsiveness, question-asking, group contribution, and attentiveness. Scores from the checklist were used to categorize students into HLA and LLA groups.

The study was carried out in several stages. First, a pre-test was administered to both groups to measure their baseline reading comprehension ability. During the treatment phase, the experimental group received reading instruction through the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) method over six meetings, which included activities such as cooperative group reading, summarizing, answering questions, and providing peer feedback. Meanwhile, the control group was taught using the traditional lecture method. Throughout the treatment phase, students' learning activeness was observed using an observation checklist. Finally, a post-test was administered to both groups to assess their improvement in reading comprehension

Data from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using Two-Way ANOVA to test: 1. The main effect of the teaching method on reading comprehension. 2. The main effect of learning activeness on reading comprehension. 3. The interaction effect between teaching method and learning activeness. The normality of the data was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test,

and homogeneity of variance was tested using Levene’s test before running ANOVA. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 29 with a significance level of 0.05.

RESULTS

The study examined the effect of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) method and students’ learning activeness on the reading comprehension of seventh-grade students at SMPN 3 Rantau Bayur. Data were collected from 60 students who were equally divided into experimental and control groups.

Table 1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

| Group | N | Pre-Test Mean (SD) | Post-Test Mean (SD) | Gain Score |
|------------------------|----|--------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Experimental (CIRC) | 30 | 56.67 (±8.89) | 77.33 (±7.91) | +20.66 |
| Control (Conventional) | 30 | 57.17 (±8.50) | 68.50 (±7.72) | +11.33 |

Table 1 presents the pre-test and post-test scores of both the experimental and control groups. The pre-test results indicate that the two groups started at a relatively similar level of reading comprehension, with the experimental group obtaining a mean score of 56.67 (SD = ±8.89) and the control group obtaining a mean score of 57.17 (SD = ±8.50). The close similarity in their initial performance suggests that both groups had comparable baseline abilities prior to the intervention, which strengthens the validity of the subsequent comparisons.

Following the treatment, the experimental group, which was taught using the CIRC method, showed a marked improvement, reaching a mean post-test score of 77.33 (SD = ±7.91). In contrast, the control group, taught through conventional lecture-based methods, obtained a lower mean post-test score of 68.50 (SD = ±7.72). This indicates that while both groups experienced progress, the experimental group demonstrated a more substantial gain in reading comprehension.

The gain scores highlight this difference more clearly. The experimental group achieved a gain of +20.66 points, almost twice the improvement of the control group, which recorded only +11.33 points. This substantial gap in learning gains provides strong evidence of the effectiveness of the CIRC method in enhancing reading comprehension compared to conventional teaching practices.

Moreover, the smaller standard deviation in the experimental group’s post-test scores suggests that CIRC not only raised overall performance but also promoted more consistent achievement among students. This implies that the method may help reduce performance disparities within a classroom, supporting weaker learners while still benefiting stronger ones.

The results are further supported by the Two-Way ANOVA analysis, which confirmed a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the groups. Taken together, these findings suggest that CIRC is not merely an alternative but a superior instructional strategy for improving reading comprehension. It fosters both higher learning gains and more uniform achievement

across students, making it a promising pedagogical approach for junior high school English classrooms.

In addition, students with high learning activeness consistently outperformed those with low learning activeness in reading comprehension, regardless of the teaching method used ($p < 0.05$). Moreover, a significant interaction was found between the teaching method and students' learning activeness ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that highly active students benefited the most from the CIRC strategy. Hypothesis testing confirmed that all null hypotheses were rejected, establishing that CIRC significantly improves reading comprehension, learning activeness significantly affects reading comprehension, and there is a meaningful interaction effect between CIRC and learning activeness. These findings demonstrate that implementing the CIRC method while simultaneously fostering students' learning activeness can substantially enhance their reading comprehension skills.

Table 2. Two-Way ANOVA Results

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | p-value | Sig. |
|---------------------------|-----------|----|----------|--------|---------|------|
| Teaching Method (A) | 816.817 | 1 | 816.817 | 14.984 | 0.000 | ✓ |
| Learning Activeness (B) | 1181.817 | 1 | 1181.817 | 21.676 | 0.000 | ✓ |
| Method × Activeness (A×B) | 331.817 | 1 | 331.817 | 6.086 | 0.016 | ✓ |
| Error | 3030.333 | 56 | 54.113 | | | |
| Total | 45274.000 | 60 | | | | |

Table 2 summarizes the results of the Two-Way ANOVA, which examined the effects of the teaching method, students' learning activeness, and the interaction between the two on reading comprehension outcomes. The findings reveal three significant effects.

The analysis shows that the teaching method had a statistically significant effect on students' reading comprehension ($F = 14.984$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Students taught using the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) method achieved significantly higher comprehension scores than those taught through conventional lecture-based approaches. These gains were reflected across multiple indicators, including identifying main ideas, locating supporting details, interpreting vocabulary in context, and making inferences. This suggests that CIRC, with its cooperative and interactive structure, created deeper engagement with texts and facilitated more meaningful comprehension than traditional teacher-centered practices, which often limit opportunities for active participation.

Learning activeness also had a significant main effect on reading comprehension ($F = 21.676$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Students with high activeness consistently outperformed those with low activeness in both the experimental and control groups. This pattern highlights the critical role of active engagement in shaping comprehension outcomes. Activeness in

this context includes students' willingness to ask questions, contribute ideas, engage in discussions, and think critically during learning activities. These results align with educational psychology theories emphasizing that active involvement is a key determinant of academic success, regardless of the instructional method employed.

The analysis further revealed a significant interaction between the teaching method and students' activeness ($F = 6.086, p = 0.016 < 0.05$). This means that the benefits of CIRC were not uniform across all students but varied according to their level of activeness. Students with high activeness benefited the most when taught using CIRC, achieving the highest comprehension scores overall. Even students with low activeness in the CIRC group, however, performed better than their counterparts in the conventional group, suggesting that the cooperative features of CIRC helped raise performance across different levels of engagement. This finding indicates that while learning activeness independently enhances comprehension, the CIRC method amplifies these advantages by providing structured opportunities for collaboration, interaction, and peer support.

Taken together, these results support the rejection of all null hypotheses and lead to three key conclusions: CIRC significantly improves reading comprehension, learning activeness strongly influences comprehension achievement, and there is a meaningful interaction between the teaching method and activeness. Further analysis of the mean scores demonstrated that the performance hierarchy followed a clear pattern: experimental-high activeness > experimental-low activeness > control-high activeness > control-low activeness. This trend underscores both the superiority of CIRC over traditional methods and the critical role of activeness in maximizing learning outcomes.

Additionally, students taught with CIRC showed more consistent gains and reduced performance gaps between active and less active learners, whereas improvements in the control group were smaller and less uniform. This suggests that the cooperative structure embedded in CIRC not only boosts comprehension but also provides a more equitable platform for learners, supporting weaker students while still allowing highly active students to excel. Consequently, CIRC emerges as a robust and sustainable pedagogical model for improving reading comprehension in diverse classroom contexts, including rural Indonesian schools such as SMPN 3 Rantau Bayur.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, which revealed that the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) method significantly improved students' reading comprehension compared to conventional teaching approaches, are consistent with previous research in the field of cooperative learning that emphasizes the effectiveness of structured group-based strategies in promoting academic achievement (Stevens et al, 1987). Since by providing opportunities for students to collaborate, share ideas, and provide peer feedback, CIRC transforms reading from a passive, teacher-centered activity into an interactive and engaging process where learners construct meaning collectively, thereby confirming the theoretical framework of Slavin, (2005) who argued that cooperative learning increases not only achievement but also motivation and social interaction among learners.

The significant effect of learning activeness on reading comprehension further supports the students who participate actively in classroom discussions, pose questions, and contribute to group work are more likely to internalize strategies, build connections between new information and prior knowledge, and sustain their motivation throughout the learning process (Tarigan, 2014; Grabe & Stoller, 2002). This explains why in the present study, highly active students consistently outperformed less active students regardless of whether they were taught with CIRC or traditional methods, highlighting that activeness is not merely a complementary factor but rather an essential condition for successful comprehension in foreign language learning.

The absence of a statistically significant interaction between the teaching method and learning activeness suggests that the positive effect of CIRC is relatively stable across different levels of activeness, indicating that while active students naturally achieve higher comprehension, even less active students benefit from the structured peer collaboration, scaffolding, and interactive tasks embedded in CIRC, which reduce reliance on teacher explanation and encourage every learner to participate to some extent; this finding implies that the method and activeness operate as independent predictors of comprehension, thereby offering practical value for teachers who may be concerned about how well cooperative strategies will work with students who are typically less engaged, since the results show that CIRC still contributes to improved performance for these learners.

The comparison of mean scores across groups, where the highest achievement was recorded by highly active students in the experimental group and the lowest by less active students in the control group, illustrates not only the superiority of CIRC as a teaching strategy but also the compounding effect of combining effective methods with active learner behavior. According to Harmer (2007), when innovative pedagogy is paired with student engagement, the outcome is maximized, whereas conventional approaches combined with low activeness produce minimal improvement. Thus, the findings reinforce the idea that effective teaching and active learning must be pursued simultaneously if the aim is to achieve substantial gains in reading comprehension, especially among junior high school learners who are at the formative stage of their English education. This aligns with Black & Wiliam, (1998) who emphasized that instructional design and assessment strategies must encourage interaction and reflection.

These findings carry important implications for English language teaching in Indonesia, particularly in rural schools such as SMPN 3 Rantau Bayur, where students often struggle with motivation, vocabulary limitations, and passive learning habits. According to Othman & Ahmed (2024), CIRC can facilitate student interaction, thereby resolving their reading comprehension challenges. It also provides students with the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to a discussion, which is challenging to accomplish individually. Meanwhile, Hasyim et al., (2020) argue that the CIRC strategy provides a learning environment where students understand their role in the group and to work as a team based on their ability. Students can learn how to be responsible for the group to achieve the goal together. Similarly, Sari & Nababan (2024) state that the CIRC method can be used to improve reading comprehension skills as well as to serve as a means for students to develop their abilities in thinking, relating, and collaborating. In other word, the writer In

other words, the writer argues that the CIRC method is not only effective in enhancing students' reading comprehension skills but also plays an important role in fostering critical thinking, interpersonal relationships, and collaborative learning.

According to Sintia & Ramadhan (2023) the CIRC learning paradigm emphasizes students' ability to read texts critically, comprehend their content, and draw conclusions. Based on Nunan (2003), adopting CIRC as an instructional model could help teachers create a more student-centered classroom that not only raises comprehension outcomes but also encourages students to be more responsible, collaborative, and confident in their learning, while at the same time emphasizing the need to foster learning activeness through motivational strategies, supportive classroom environments, and interactive activities, so that both pedagogical innovation and student engagement work hand in hand to improve the quality of English education and prepare learners to meet the demands of the national curriculum and global communication. Moreover, policymakers should support implementation with resources and training (Cline et al, 2006).

Another implication of these findings is the need for teacher professional development, since many teachers in Indonesian junior high schools continue to rely on conventional lecture-based practices that limit student interaction and provide minimal opportunities for collaboration, and therefore integrating CIRC into classroom practice requires not only curricular adjustments but also teacher training programs that equip educators with the skills to design cooperative tasks, manage group dynamics, and facilitate active learning environments; by doing so, teachers will be better prepared to shift from traditional roles as sole knowledge transmitters to facilitators of student-centered learning, which is in line with current educational reforms that emphasize competence-based curricula and 21st-century skills.

Finally, the results of this study highlight the importance of contextualizing cooperative learning strategies such as CIRC within the realities of rural schools, where limitations in resources, exposure to English, and classroom facilities may pose challenges to implementation, yet at the same time these environments stand to benefit the most from approaches that maximize interaction, peer support, and student motivation, and therefore policymakers and school leaders should consider supporting the adoption of cooperative methods by providing adequate resources, continuous supervision, and recognition of innovative practices, so that the positive effects documented in this study can be sustained and scaled up to improve English education outcomes across broader contexts in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) method has a statistically significant positive effect on students' reading comprehension, as students taught with CIRC consistently achieved higher comprehension outcomes than those taught using conventional teacher-centered methods, while learning activeness was also found to exert a significant independent influence on students' achievement, with highly active learners performing better than their less active counterparts, and although the interaction effect between

method and activeness was not statistically significant, the data nevertheless suggest that both factors operate independently in enhancing comprehension outcomes, which implies that effective teaching strategies and active learner engagement are equally essential for improving the overall quality of English instruction in junior high schools.

Previous research studies had indicated that the CIRC had effects on enhancing reading comprehension achievement. According to Simarmata (2023) research, students who get instruction in Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) method were more active, motivated, cooperated and enthusiastic working in group. Meanwhile, in Handayani et al., (2022) research, the application of CIRC method in reading adds to the activeness of students while studying and the method helps students to easily remember and know reading. Additionally, Berliana et al., (2025) implied that CIRC models can positively influence students' reading comprehension. This method can make students more active, stimulate them to gain new knowledge, and encourage them to cooperate. Also, students can complete assignments well. In other word, these findings therefore provide theoretical and practical implications for the field of English education in Indonesia, particularly by reinforcing the relevance of cooperative learning models such as CIRC in addressing students' difficulties with reading comprehension and by highlighting the importance of learning activeness as a determinant of academic success, since the combination of innovative instructional strategies with increased student participation creates an optimal learning environment where comprehension skills can develop more effectively, especially in rural schools such as SMPN 3 Rantau Bayur where students often struggle with passive learning habits, low motivation, and limited exposure to English outside the classroom.

In light of these conclusions, it is suggested that English teachers at the junior high school level consider adopting the CIRC method as part of their instructional repertoire, not only because it has been empirically proven to enhance reading comprehension but also because it encourages student collaboration, responsibility, and confidence. According to Farris (2004), at the same time teachers should make deliberate efforts to foster learning activeness by creating interactive classroom environments, designing tasks that require participation from all learners, and providing positive reinforcement for student contributions, so that both instructional method and learner engagement can function synergistically to maximize comprehension outcomes.

Furthermore, school administrators and policymakers are encouraged to support the implementation of cooperative learning strategies by offering teacher training programs, facilitating access to appropriate learning resources, and providing institutional recognition for innovative pedagogical practices (Black & Wiliam, 1998), while future research should consider extending the investigation of CIRC and learning activeness to larger and more diverse populations, incorporating qualitative approaches to capture students' perceptions and classroom dynamics, and exploring the long-term impact of cooperative strategies on other language skills such as writing, speaking, and listening, thereby enriching the understanding of how cooperative learning can contribute to comprehensive improvements in English education in Indonesia.

Another important suggestion arising from this research is the need for systematic teacher professional development programs that focus on cooperative learning models, because without adequate training teachers may struggle to implement CIRC effectively, particularly in managing group dynamics, designing integrated reading writing tasks, and maintaining equitable participation among students; therefore, institutions of teacher education and school leaders should collaborate in providing workshops, peer mentoring opportunities, and classroom-based coaching that enable teachers to gradually integrate cooperative strategies into their practice while simultaneously reflecting on and improving their pedagogical approaches.

It is also recommended that teachers and school administrators pay close attention to strategies for increasing students' motivation and engagement, as activeness was found to be a strong predictor of reading comprehension regardless of instructional method. Linse (2005) stated that interventions such as goal-setting activities, interactive discussions, use of technology-based resources, and recognition of student achievements can play a significant role in encouraging learners to participate more actively in reading lessons, thereby complementing the benefits of CIRC and ensuring that improvements in comprehension are sustained across different groups of students.

In addition, curriculum developers and policymakers should integrate cooperative learning principles into the broader English language curriculum (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Slavin, 2005). It ensures the assessment practices also reflect not only individual comprehension outcomes but also collaborative skills, critical thinking, and participation, since assessment systems that focus solely on test performance may discourage students from engaging fully in cooperative learning processes; by aligning curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, the educational system can create a more coherent framework that values both comprehension and activeness, thereby promoting holistic development of learners in accordance with national educational goals.

Finally, this study suggests that the successful implementation of CIRC in improving reading comprehension can serve as a model for enhancing other areas of education in Indonesia, particularly in rural contexts where challenges such as limited resources, low motivation, and passive learning attitudes are prevalent, and therefore the adoption of cooperative learning methods has the potential not only to improve English outcomes but also to strengthen broader educational values such as teamwork, responsibility, communication, and critical thinking, which are essential for preparing students to face the demands of the 21st century, thereby demonstrating that innovations in pedagogy can have far-reaching impacts beyond the immediate scope of language instruction.

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