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## Cooperative Learning Strategy for Improving Students' Critical Reading Ability: A Case Study in English Study Program of Brawijaya University

**ABSTRACT:** This study deals with a strategy named GD (Group Discussion) model of cooperative learning strategy applied in the teaching of critical reading course at English Study Program at the UNIBRAW (Brawijaya University) in Malang City, East Java, Indonesia. By using that strategy, it is expected that the problem in Critical Reading class can be solved and students' ability in critical reading will, in turn, be improved. The design of the study is CAR (Classroom Action Research), since the study is aimed at improving the students' critical reading ability and solving the classroom's problems on the teaching of reading. Based on its characteristics, the CAR is done repeatedly until those problems can be solved. Dealing with the classroom setting, the study is directed to develop the teaching strategy in order to find out a solution to the classroom's problem in the teaching of reading. This study reveals that cooperative learning strategy has successfully improved students' critical reading ability. In doing so, there are stages conducted, namely: having cooperative work organization, using appropriate media, having creativity (for teachers), monitoring teaching and learning processes closely, and giving students feedback on their work. In conclusion, cooperative learning can be beneficial for students' learning in critical reading as it can make students active and enjoy the classroom activities. However, it also has weaknesses, such as time consuming and less appropriate for classes with bigger number of students. Despite the weaknesses, teachers are still recommended to apply this strategy in Critical Reading classes.

**KEY WORDS:** Critical Reading; Students' Ability; Cooperative Learning; Group Discussion; Classroom Action Research.

### INTRODUCTION

CR (Critical Reading) is one of the skill subjects offered at Study Program of English UNIBRAW (Brawijaya University) in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. This course is given at the second semester in response to the need of critical reading today. It is also taught to respond to the fact that students are lagging in problem-solving and thinking skills. As its

name suggests, CR actually teaches students to think while reading. It has been defined as learning to evaluate, draw inferences, and arrive at conclusions based on the evidence (Vygotsky, 1978; and Zintz & Maggart, 1984).

CR is categorized into a higher-order level of reading than literal and interpretive reading. This course is very crucial, because it provides the students with the skill to

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be critical readers. Students' ability to think and read critically will enhance their understanding toward the text they read. This happens due to the fact that in the critical reading process, readers continue to be "producers". They analyze, produce, and judge (Vygotsky, 1978; Pirozzi, 2003; Suharmanto, 2006; and Atabaki, Keshtiaray & Yarmohammadian, 2015).

B.S. Bloom *et al.* eds. (1956)'s taxonomy of cognitive domain identifies three levels within critical reading category: analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bloom *et al.* eds., 1956). At the analysis level, readers distinguish facts from opinion, propaganda techniques, and fallacies in reasoning. They also identify motives or reasons for something to happen, assess the qualifications of a source of information, and determine evidence to support a conclusion, inference, or generalization. The readers also draw conclusions and identify motives.

At the synthesis level, readers bring together information, produce original communications, make predictions, and anticipate outcomes. They may also write, create, develop, design, and synthesize. There will be more than one possible answer, and more open-ended than the applied level. Finally, at the evaluation level, readers are making judgment. They form and offer opinions, and they also value and appreciate. They judge the merit of an idea, a solution to a problem, and an esthetic work.

The readers may also offer opinions based on a set standard (Vygotsky, 1978; Rivers, 1981; Skidell & Becker, 2001; Suharmanto, 2006; and Atabaki, Keshtiaray & Yarmohammadian, 2015). In this case, B.S. Bloom *et al.* eds. (1956)'s taxonomy of cognitive domain is chosen under the reason that this taxonomy provides appropriate level of critical reading that one should master (B.S. Bloom *et al.* eds., 1956). This taxonomy clearly shows the three levels within the scope of critical reading.

Students' critical reading ability needs to be enhanced because by reading critically, they will find the deep truth about what is being said and the reasons of saying so. Reading critically is done by seeing the writer's motives

or purposes and then evaluate it. The readers do not merely read, but also think about what is being read or discussed. It is done in a meaningful way. In this case, the readers should analyze and evaluate what they are reading. In such a way, reading is called to be an interactive process, which affects both the writer and the readers. So, reading is not only meant to understand the content of a passage, but it also involves reader's emotion, so the reader can give an analysis and evaluation (Soedarso, 2001).

In line with this idea, Betty D. Roe & Ellinor P. Ross (1996) state that a critical reading skill is a process of querying and evaluating the text, which surpasses the skill of interpreting the text literally (Roe & Ross, 1996). Consequently, critical readers have some characteristics that they understand how to ask, analyze, and evaluate. They try to find a cause of a problem; and they are capable of differentiating between facts and opinions. With those explanations, it can be inferred that critical readers should rely on knowledge on literal and interpretive reading. It means that the literal and interpretive reading is the prerequisite for someone to be a critical reader (Vygotsky, 1978; Leo, 1994; Roe & Ross, 1996; Skidell & Becker, 2001; and Pirozzi, 2003).

In spite of the importance of the critical reading course at college level, the Critical Reading Course in English Study Program at the UNIBRAW (Brawijaya University) in Malang City, East Java, Indonesia is still inadequate. Based on the preliminary study conducted on teaching Critical Reading Course on second semester students, it is found that the teaching of Critical Reading was still far from expectation. In this case, Critical Reading is offered in the second semester, which is aimed at applying the various reading techniques taught in Basic Reading Skills in more complex passages by analyzing authentic materials suitable with the students' needs (UNIBRAW, 2010).

However, the result of the preliminary study shows that the students have problems in comprehending text as the texts are getting more and more complicated in terms of length and the topic. Besides, the students are bored and unmotivated to join the

reading class. As a result, they are passive in the classroom. Moreover, the classroom atmosphere is individual competition and the students do the reading assignments individually. They are not accustomed to sharing ideas. They rarely work cooperatively, when they are on reading activity. It means that students are rarely organized into pairs or groups, when they are doing their reading tasks. They are rarely trained to cooperate with their peers; and they work individually instead. For instance, if student A finds a problem in answering certain comprehension questions, he does not share with his peers, instead he asks his teacher for a help.

Dealing with the above problems, the teacher as the facilitator in the learning process should motivate the students to participate actively in the reading class. The teacher may offer guidance in helping students to engage in the thinking process (Brown, 2001:340). The teacher should also be able to provide a model of certain teaching strategies, which can encourage the students to be more active and have strong motivation in the reading class. Ideally speaking, the Critical Reading class should be filled with exciting and challenging ideas for discussion, so that the students can learn by talking, listening, and explaining with one another (Vygotsky, 1978; Rivers, 1981; Leo, 1994; and Pirozzi, 2003). One of the strategies to achieve this is by applying the concept of cooperative learning.

Regarding the concept of “cooperative learning”, R.E. Slavin (1995) states as follows:

Cooperative learning refers to a variety of teaching methods, in which students work in small groups to help one another learn academic content. In cooperative classrooms, students are expected to help each other, to discuss and argue with each other, to assess each other's current knowledge, and fill in gaps in each other's understandings (Slavin, 1995:2).

Cooperative learning has been part of the language learning domain for at least two decades (Kessler ed., 1992; Burden & Byrd, 1999; Jacobs, 1999; and Lie, 2002). The approach principally aims to enhance the quality of learning by having learners cooperate in small groups or pairs. It is a mode of learning that promotes mutual

helpfulness and active participation from all students in solving a problem.

In a cooperative classroom, students cooperate, interact, share material, and help each other to achieve the goal. Here, the students understand that they have different roles or specific tasks to allow opportunities for all group members to participate. Cooperative learning has been successfully used in a wide range of classroom; and many studies have proven that cooperative learning promotes higher academic achievements (*cf* Kessler ed., 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Slavin, 1995:45; Jacobs, 1999; Sharan ed., 1999; and Lie, 2002).

Considering the phenomena in Critical Reading class, this study employed group discussion model of cooperative learning strategy to be applied in the teaching of Critical Reading Course. By using that strategy, it is expected that the teacher's problem in Critical Reading class could be solved; and students' ability in critical reading would, in turn, be improved. Based on the above explanation, the research problem is “*to what extent can the cooperative learning strategy improve students' critical reading ability?*”.

## METHODS

The design of the study is CAR (Classroom Action Research). Based on its characteristics, the CAR is done repeatedly until those problems can be solved (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; and Burden & Byrd, 1999). Since it deals with the classroom setting, the study is directed to develop the teaching strategy in order to find out a solution to the classroom's problem in the teaching of reading; and, therefore, cooperative learning strategy was applied during the learning process.

The model of cooperative learning applied in the study was group discussion. To implement discussion model of cooperative learning in the reading class, there were several steps conducted. In the study, one of the researchers acted as the practitioner who taught students using cooperative learning strategy. The co-researcher acted as an observer, who observed the practitioner and the students' activities when the teaching and

learning process took place (Kessler ed., 1992; and Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

The participants were the second semester students of class B of the English Study Program at the UNIBRAW (Brawijaya University) in Malang City, East Java, Indonesia, academic year 2014/2015, consisting of 29 students. All students had the same treatment in the teaching and learning process. However, the researchers focused on four students, who have low ability in the class. They are the students who have serious problems in critical reading. It is assumed that if the students with poor reading ability can improve their reading ability, other students with better ability can improve better (Vygotsky, 1978; Leo, 1994; and Pirozzi, 2003). The selection of four students in Critical Reading class was based on the results of the pre-test, daily quizzes, and daily observation (Skidell & Becker, 2001; Pirozzi, 2003; and UNIBRAW, 2010).

## CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH

**Preliminary Study.** Since the study is a CAR (Classroom Action Research), which was proposed based on problems found in a classroom, a preliminary study was conducted. A preliminary study is aimed at obtaining data of the real condition about the teacher and students' problems in the process of teaching and learning in the Critical Reading class (Leo, 1994; and Pirozzi, 2003).

To begin with, the researchers, whom one of them is the teacher of Critical Reading, observed the students in B-class of Critical Reading and collected students' level of competence retrieved from quizzes and daily observations from the very beginning of the semester (February-March 2015). Based on the result of preliminary study, it was found out that students had problems in comprehending texts. As the texts were getting longer with more difficult topic, it took them a long time to answer one simple question. Besides, the students felt bored and unmotivated to join the class (Lai, 2011).

As a result, they became passive in the classroom. They rarely had initiative to raise their hands, when they were given chances. On the other hand, they were just waiting for

the line of being appointed by the teacher. Moreover, the classroom atmosphere was individual competition and the students did the reading assignments individually (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; and Lai, 2011). They were not accustomed to sharing ideas. When it came for them to share ideas, they kept silent and are passive.

From the preliminary observation, it can be seen that the students did not work cooperatively on reading activity. They were rarely organized into pairs or groups, when doing their reading tasks. They were not accustomed to cooperate with their peers; instead, they worked individually. For instance, if student A finds a problem in answering certain comprehension questions, he does not share with his peers, but he asks his teacher for a help.

Seeing this phenomenon, the researchers considered that there should be a way to solve this problem, since it might hinder critical reading learning process if this phenomenon happens continuously; and, in turn, it will result in unexpected critical reading achievement.

**Planning.** The following are the components of planning:

**First, Preparation.** This stage focuses on conducting pre-test and socialization of the cooperative learning strategy to the students. The pre-test was administered before the implementation of the action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; and Sharan ed., 1999). Here, the students were assigned to answer reading comprehension questions. They were assigned to answer the question of reading on the line, between the line, and beyond the line. The pre-test was designed to find the students' current reading achievement. The result of the test was used to group students, which have heterogeneous ability background: high, moderate, and poor achievers (*cf* Oakes, Gamoran & Page, 1992; Hattie, 2002; and Davis, 2012).

**Second, Designing Appropriate Strategy.** To conduct the study, the first step is designing the teaching strategy, the theme, and the learning items. In this study, discussion model of cooperative learning strategy was applied (*cf* Kessler ed., 1992; and Sharan ed., 1999). In this case, the heterogeneity of the students'

achievement is considered. Students were assigned to set up groups that are mixed in performance level and gender. The students were divided into heterogeneous groups, in which each group consisted of four students from different ability levels (high, moderate, and low); and contain both males and females.

To structure the groups, the researchers began with determining the rank of the students based on the result of the pre-test. The rank was arranged from 1 to 29, following the total number of the students. Number 1 represents the highest rank; and number 29 represents the lowest rank. In order to organize the equal ability of each group, the students were combined in equal order (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Hattie, 2002; and Davis, 2012). A group consisted of high achievers and the low achievers.

In the learning process, the teacher explained the steps of doing the assignment. In the reading comprehension activities, the students were assigned to follow the three steps of reading activities: pre-reading, whilst reading, and post reading (Vygotsky, 1978; Leo, 1994; and Pirozzi, 2003).

In the pre-reading stage, the class activity was designed to guide students to do brainstorming to activate their schemata concerning their background knowledge or their previous prior knowledge on a certain piece of text. In the whilst-reading stage, the class activity was designed to guide students to understand the reading instruction and answer the reading comprehension questions given. In the post-reading stage, the class activity was designed to guide students justify their answer and share to the whole class (Dishner, Bean & Readence eds., 1981; Leo, 1994; and Pirozzi, 2003).

The teacher gave feedback and provided correction of the answer to the students. Here, the students were assigned to work cooperatively with each other within a group in each step of reading activity. In this case, the teacher's role was to facilitate, guide, and monitor the class activity (Dishner, Bean & Readence eds., 1981; and Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Afterwards, the whole class discussed the result of their works under the teacher's guidance; and each student revised his/

her written work based on the result of the discussion.

**Third, Designing a Lesson Plan for the Reading Class.** After determining the appropriate strategy, the researchers designed a lesson plan as the guideline for the teacher in teaching reading. The lesson plan was designed based on the following items: (1) Instructional/Learning Objectives; (2) Materials and Media; (3) Procedures of Implementation; and (4) Procedures of Assessment/Evaluation (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2000; and Slavin, 2002).

**Fourth, Preparing Media and Observation Sheets.** Before conducting the study, the researchers prepared suitable media and observation sheets. The media, which was in the form of pictures, was used to make the teaching and learning activities more effective. Such media were used to prompt student's schemata to the topic being discussed.

To record the interaction between the teacher and the students, dealing with the situation of learning process in a cooperative way, the researchers used observation sheets and field notes (*cf* Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; and Lie, 2002).

**Fifth, Deciding Criteria of Success.** This study is considered successful if it meets the criteria of success as the following: (1) the students are able to make good improvement in their learning process, which is shown by their scores; (2) the students are active in group work discussion; and (3) the students enjoy learning reading using cooperative learning strategy (*cf* Kessler ed., 1992; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2000; and Slavin, 2002).

**Implementing.** Implementing the plan means conducting the teaching and learning activities in the classroom based on the pre-arranged plan (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; and Kauerz & Coffman, 2013). In implementing the plan, one researcher acted as the practitioner and the other as the observer. Teaching process was conducted in class B based on the schedule established. During the teaching and learning process, the observer observed the teacher's and the students' activities using the observation guidelines and journal (Johnson & Johnson,

1994; and Forster & Masters, 1996). The time used in the classroom activities was 150 minutes in each meeting.

The instruments used in conducting this study were reading test, observation sheet, field notes, and interview (*cf* Johnson & Turner, 2003; and Zohrabi, 2013).

**First, Reading Test.** The tests (reading test) used in this study consist of two types: pre-test and post-test. The students were assigned to answer questions from a reading passage. The pre-test is used to know the students' ability in reading, and to rank their achievements. The post-test is used to find out the improvement of the teaching reading using cooperative learning in the reading class (Gronlund, 1981; and Pirozzi, 2003).

**Second, Observation Sheet.** Observation sheet is a sort of guidelines used to obtain information concerning the implementation of cooperative learning strategy in teaching critical reading. Observation sheet was used to observe and to record what to become the strengths of cooperative learning strategy in teaching the critical reading (Kessler ed., 1992; and Pirozzi, 2003).

**Third, Field Notes.** Field notes are instruments used to record the data, which are beyond the observation sheet (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). In this study, field notes were used to record some aspects of the teaching and learning activities in the classroom that might not be covered in the observation sheets, such as the students' responses toward the implementation of cooperative learning strategy.

**Fourth, Interview.** To evaluate the students' attitude toward cooperative learning strategy applied in class, the researchers do an interview to the students for knowing the students' responses toward the process of reading using cooperative learning strategy.

**Data Analysis.** In analyzing the data, there were some procedures applied as the following:

**First, Data classification.** The classification of the data is made according to their properties. When classifying the data, the researchers considered the form of data. It means that the data taken from the results of the quiz were distinguished from the data

gathered from the observation sheets (Johnson & Turner, 2003; and Zohrabi, 2013).

**Second, Data presentation.** The classified data would be described according to their properties. Data taken from the performance in each quiz were presented in the form of tabulation. The percentage of individual mastery of materials required from the test items should be at least 70% or 7.0. The materials are said to be completed by students when 85% of them classically achieved the least percentage of mastery predetermined. The data derived from the observation sheets, interview, and field notes; on the other hand, were described in narrative description (Johnson & Turner, 2003; and Zohrabi, 2013).

**Third, Data conclusion.** The conclusion is done in two different ways: the conclusion made at the end of each cycle and the final conclusion. The conclusion made at the end of each cycle is used to see whether the action conducted in one cycle is successful or not. If the action succeeds, it is not necessary to continue to the next cycle. Otherwise, the following cycle is needed. The final conclusion is done, when the research conducted has been successfully accomplished (Johnson & Turner, 2003; and Zohrabi, 2013).

**Reflecting.** Reflection is the most important part of classroom action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Leo, 1994; and Pirozzi, 2003). Reflection is a final phase of a cycle, in which the researcher and the collaborative teacher evaluate the strengths of the strategy implemented in the class, whether it is effective or not. At this stage, the researcher wanted to know whether or not the action conducted was effective.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part is divided into two main sections. The first section discusses the result of the first cycle held on Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015. The second section focuses on the result of the second cycle held on Friday, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2015. The description of each cycle is presented in the order of: meeting of each cycle, reflection, and conclusion of the cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Leo, 1994; and Pirozzi, 2003).

**Application of Cooperative Learning Strategy in Teaching Critical Reading.** To implement

GD (Group Discussion) model of cooperative learning strategy, there were several procedures conducted, namely grouping students, establishing seat arrangements, designing lesson plan, setting the learning objectives, and designing appropriate media (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Kessler ed., 1992; Jacobs, 1999; and Sharan ed., 1999).

To implement the strategy, the students were grouped into six groups on the basis of the list of the groups that had been determined. Five groups consisted of five members and one group consisted of four members. Each member of the group had to sit face to face with the group members, so that they could see, talk, and share ideas to one another. Then, each group was asked to choose the captain of the group.

The implementation of GD model of cooperative learning strategy in teaching critical reading was divided into three stages: pre-reading, whilst-reading, and post-reading (Kessler ed., 1992; Jacobs, 1999; and Pirozzi, 2003). In the pre-reading activities, the students were asked to do discussion in the class that would help them discover: what they brought in their reading, what their fellow students brought, as well as shared experiences. This activity aimed at activating students' schemata or prior knowledge related to the topic. In activating schemata, the teacher gave them some pre-reading questions expected to stimulate their understanding on the topic being discussed (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Leo, 1994; and Pirozzi, 2003). In this sense, they were assigned to share ideas with their own group members.

In whilst-reading stage, the teacher assigned the students to share the ideas that they have discussed within the group members to other group's members. In the post-reading stage, the teacher assigned each student to write their own personal comment or responses with regard to the topic being discussed (Leo, 1994; and Pirozzi, 2003).

**Findings of Cycle 1.** This section discusses the findings of cycle 1 related to the activities, which were done for improving the students' ability in Critical Reading class. The meeting was held on Friday, 15 May 2015, for 150 minutes. In this meeting, the students were

expected to be able to brainstorm on the topic, develop the topic into ideas, and do the assignment cooperatively within a group.

To implement cooperative learning strategy, the students were grouped into six groups consisting of five students. Each member of the group sat face-to-face with the group members, so that they could see, talk, and share ideas. Then, each group was asked to choose the captain of the group. The captain's task was to lead the discussion among the group members and to give responsibilities to each of the group members.

During the class discussion, the captain was also responsible for ensuring that each member did the assignment (*cf* Sharan ed., 1999; Leo, 1994; and Pirozzi, 2003). Meanwhile, the members of the group were responsible to accomplish the assignment given by the captain. Besides, they had to work cooperatively with their group members to complete the assignment given.

Afterwards, the teacher explained the model of learning implemented. In cooperative classroom, there were no individual competitions among the group members (Kessler ed., 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Jacobs, 1999; and Lie, 2002). The students as a team should be able to complete the critical reading assignment cooperatively. Then, the teacher started her teaching activity by explaining the specific instructional objectives to direct the students to achieve the aims of the lesson. All students paid attention to the explanation. The teacher then asked her students some displayed questions related to the topic. This was aimed at activating the students' background knowledge on critical reading, particularly on the topic of the "Author's Purpose and Tone" (Pirozzi, 2003).

Having successfully activated their background knowledge and aroused their attention on the topic, then the teacher started to implement GD (Group Discussion) model of cooperative learning strategy. Based on the procedures of cooperative learning, in which the critical reading process was the basis, the implementation of cooperative learning strategy in the teaching of critical reading was divided into three stages: pre-reading,

whilst-reading, and post-reading (*cf* Kessler ed., 1992; Jacobs, 1999; Sharan ed., 1999; Lie, 2002; and Pirozzi, 2003).

**First, Pre-Reading.** In the pre-reading activity, the students were given a text containing the author's tone and purpose. Each group was given the same text entitled "My Father's Keeper". Then, they were assigned to discuss and share the text with their group members to find out the author's tone in it.

The teacher first gave pre-reading questions to help the groups in activating their background knowledge. To identify the author's tone, the captain gave the tasks to each member of the group to firstly read the whole passage. He, then, gave each member a certain task, in which each student should concentrate on revealing the idea of each paragraph in the passage; and, then, share what they have found. Each member of the group gave explanation on every paragraph of their part; and while listening to the explanation, the other members could give comments or raise questions.

In this case, the teacher's role was as a facilitator, who managed the class and guided the students to do the group discussion activities (*cf* Leo, 1994; Burns, Roe & Ross, 1996; and Pirozzi, 2003). Sometimes, she walked around the class to give students necessary help.

**Second, Whilst-Reading.** The reading activities in this stage involved a series of activities, which aims to identify the writer's purpose of writing that long passage (Burns, Roe & Ross, 1996; and Giesen, 2001). In this stage, each group shared the ideas to the other group's members. In this session, the captain of each group took turn to share the result during in-group discussion to the rest of the class. At this stage, the members of any group could directly comment and ask questions as well. They might also disagree toward what other members said. This session was led by the teacher, who played role as a facilitator without being one sided into certain group.

This session aims at evaluating an argument based on the passage discussed. It might involve the activity of testing the logic of a text as well as its credibility and emotional impact. All writers make assertions

that all they say as true. As a critical reader, students should not accept anything said by the other member on face value, but to recognize every assertion as an argument that must be carefully evaluated (Giesen, 2001; and Pirozzi, 2003).

An argument has two essential parts: a claim and support.<sup>1</sup> The claim asserts a conclusion – an idea, an opinion, a judgment, or a point of view – that the writer wants the reader to accept. The support includes *reasons* (shared beliefs, assumptions, and values) and *evidences* (facts, examples, statistics, and authorities) that give readers the basis for accepting the conclusion.

When students assess an argument, they are concerned with the process of reasoning as well as its truthfulness. At the most basic level, in order for an argument to be acceptable, the support must be appropriate to the claim and the statements must be consistent with one another. Therefore, in this session, the members can evaluate, give comments, judge, criticize, or even disagree with the opinion shared by other group's members. No one opinion is regarded as the wrong one (Leo, 1994; and Giesen, 2001).

**Third, Post-Reading.** In this post-reading stage, the teacher asked some students to make personal comments regarding the passage they have read (*cf* Vygotsky, 1978; Leo, 1994; and Burns, Roe & Ross, 1996). At the end of the class, all students had to submit their personal comments. These personal comments deal with the way of reflecting or challenging the students' beliefs and values, which aims at examining their personal responses.

The reading provided for this class might challenge the students' attitudes, unconsciously held beliefs, or their positions on current issues. By evaluating personal comments, the teacher could figure out whether or not the students had already improved as their personal comments reflected their understanding on the text (Vygotsky, 1978; Leo, 1994; and Pirozzi, 2003).

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, "The Essentials of Argument". Available online at: <http://www.smcm.edu/writingcenter/wp-content/uploads/sites/48/2014/11/argue.pdf> [accessed in Malang, Indonesia: October 9, 2015].

Before closing the class, the teacher made reflection on the learning process, by asking the students what they had learnt and what benefits they obtained from the class. The teacher also asked them if they were happy and enjoyed the lesson or not.

**Reflection of Cycle 1.** In the reflection of cycle 1, there are two important things: (1) the Teaching and Learning Process; and (2) the Learning Results.

**First, the Teaching and Learning Process.** In terms of the students' activities during the teaching and learning process, it was found that during the class activity, some students faced a number of problems. For instance, they did not know how to give comments and suggestions on other's opinion. They also felt strange and were not familiar with cooperative classroom, although the strategy had been implemented before. This is shown by the inability to work cooperatively in completing the assignment given.

As a result, the teacher needed to repeat the instructions and give more detailed explanations about the activity in a cooperative classroom. In addition, the teacher also assigned the bright students to help their friends understand the teacher's instructions.

Most of the students were actively involved in the class activity and showed good response to the teacher's explanation. They participated actively in group discussion. They gave comments and suggestions to other members' opinion. They also accepted comments and suggestions from other group's members. They shared ideas to other members of their group. They were also motivated to attend the class. They enjoyed completing the assignment.

However, four students (named AA, EA, MN, and OS) had a serious problem in understanding the text. They did not know what the text was about. Therefore, the teacher gave additional explanations to help them. In the pre-reading stage, these students cannot really comprehend the pre-reading questions, so, by the time the class was arranged into groups, these four students were still confused.

In whilst-reading stage, it was found that these four students had difficulty in answering

the questions. They also did not give adequate comments and suggestions to the other members' answer. It seemed that they had difficulties in comprehending what the text was about. In this case, the teacher asked their group members to give necessary help to them.

In the post-reading activity, it was found that these four students still had difficulty to re-explain what the text is about in the form of text reflection. These four students did not share enough in their reflection essay as they did not really understand the text.

The personal comments were evaluated after the class ended and would be considered as a description reflecting students' competence on critical reading (*cf* Vygotsky, 1978; Leo, 1994; and Pirozzi, 2003).

**Second, the Learning Results.** Based on the result of the students' reading tasks in Cycle 1, it was found that there were still some students who cannot identify the author's tone well. Like tone in a voice, "tone" in writing is an aspect that reveals the author's feelings and contributes to the overall message. Many human emotions, such as disapproval, hate, admiration, disgust, or gratitude, can be communicated through tone. It very often becomes the author's main tool in expressing his/her feelings and attitudes; therefore, it is very important for the readers to learn to recognize tone (Barry, 2002; and Day, 2004).

Students' success in identifying the author's tone very much relies on their competence in identifying the issues. As with "purpose", writers do not always come right out and say what they are feeling about a particular topic or issue. In those instances, it becomes necessary to "read between the lines" and use inference skills to help determine tone (Vygotsky, 1978; Leo, 1994; and Pirozzi, 2003).

Furthermore, compared with the pre-test, the students' achievement had little progress on their critical reading during the teaching and learning process in Cycle 1, yet it has not met the criteria of success.

The first subject was EA, who belonged to group I. Compared with her previous critical reading ability, she gained some improvement. It was proven from the result of her quiz in

the first cycle. In the pre-test, she obtained 56; and in the post-test of cycle 1, she improved her score into 65. She had not met the criteria of the score predetermined that was 70. She had 61 as the average score, she was lacking in giving logical arguments to support her answer, when she expressed her opinion on a certain issue.

The second subject was MN, who belonged to group II. MN gained a better progress. However, he still did not achieve the criteria of success. He got 64 and it had not fulfilled the criteria.

The third subject was OS, who was a member of group III. OS gained a little progress. She was in doubt, when it was the time for her to express her own opinion. She was worried of making mistakes.

The fourth subject was AA, who was quite shy in participating in a discussion. She was quiet all the time and rarely gave comments. However, she showed improvement in her quiz.

**Conclusion of Cycle 1.** Referring to the criteria of success, it was stated that the study was considered to be successful if it met the criteria of success: (1) the students were able to improve their scores in teaching-learning process and achieve the minimum score of 70; (2) the students were active in group discussion; and (3) the students enjoyed learning reading using cooperative learning strategy (Kessler ed., 1992; and Lie, 2002).

However, in Cycle 1, four subjects of the study did not achieve the targeted criteria of success. They were EA, MN, OS, and AA. In this sense, the implementation of cooperative learning strategy in critical reading had not achieved the goal as stated in the criteria of success.

There were some facts which showed the failure of Cycle 1. The results of the subjects' average scores did not achieve the goal. In the criteria of success, it was stated that the students had to obtain 70 as the minimum score (Gronlund, 1981). This failure was possibly caused by a number of factors, as follows:

*First*, the teacher had limited time, when she explained the material, so that the students did not catch her explanation. *Second*, the teacher did not manage the time quite

well, the teacher spent too much time for pre-reading activity rather than for whilst-reading activity. *Third*, the subjects had insufficient background of knowledge on the topic discussed. *Fourth*, the subjects had language problems, they had problems in understanding some vocabularies.

Considering all the problems, the teacher and her collaborative teacher determined that the implementation of Cycle 1 still needed to be improved and revised. Here, the researchers made some revisions on the planning of cooperative learning strategy implemented in Cycle 2, by considering the following aspects:

*First*, the teacher needed to have more time, when explaining the material and giving instructions, so that the students were able to catch the explanation.

*Second*, the teacher needed to manage the time proportionally by allocating the time for opening the class and checking the attendance lists for about 5 minutes; pre-reading stage for about 25 minutes; whilst-reading for about 90 minutes; post-reading stage for about 30 minutes; and 5 other minutes to close the class.

*Third*, the teacher needed to guide students intensively in every stage of reading by walking around the class more frequently during the class discussion, in order to give necessary help to the students. Here, in the pre-reading stage, it was necessary for the teacher to cultivate the students' background knowledge.

**Revision of the Plan.** The results of Cycle 1 have not achieved the criteria of success. Therefore, some revisions were made on the lesson plan, such as the learning objectives, time allotment, and classroom management. However, the planning of Cycle 2 was similar with Cycle 1.

Before teaching and learning activities, the planning was carried out. There was no change in the procedures of instruction and the procedures of assessment, because the action was mainly to continue the teaching and learning process in order to fulfil the criteria of success.

The preparation made for Cycle 2 was based on the result of reflection in Cycle 1. It covered the instructional material, the needs

to give further explanation and instruction, the time management, and the needs to guide students intensively in every stage of reading.

For the above reasons, there were some activities that had to be done by the teacher in Cycle 2. The instructional materials should be prepared well. The topic discussed in Cycle 2 was about the writer's bias that was still related to the previous discussion.

*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 implement the GD (Group Discussion) model of cooperative learning strategy and gave time for students to ask questions.

*Second*, in terms of the time management, the teacher needed to manage the time proportionally by allocating the time for opening the class and checking the attendance lists for about 5 minutes, pre-reading stage for about 25 minutes, whilst-reading for about 90 minutes, post-reading stage for about 30 minutes, and the last 5 minutes to close the class. By doing so, the time allocation for each stage of reading was managed well, so that each stage took proportional time in accordance with the kind of activities and level of difficulties of each stage. This was aimed at avoiding the teacher spending too much time on certain stage.

*Third*, the intensive guidance was given to the students in every stage of critical reading. When the students were in the discussion, the teacher pro-actively guided them without waiting for the students to raise questions (*cf* Pirozzi, 2003; and Sabarun, 2009). The teacher should walk around the class more frequently, when students were working together within a group, so that she can help and guide the students who needed the teacher's helps. Besides, the teacher asked the bright students to help their friend in the group.

**Findings of Cycle 2.** Cycle 2 was conducted on Friday, 29 May 2015, with the same time allocation (150 minutes). In this meeting, the topic was "Identifying the Writer's Bias".

*First, Pre-Reading.* In the pre-reading stage, the teacher presented an advertisement of mineral water named AQUA. Then, she asked and invited each group to analyze the

advertisement. The teacher tried to activate the students' schemata by asking their opinion regarding AQUA advertisement.

After giving opinions related to the ad, the students were asked to form a group (the previous group set). The teacher asked them to do the assignment on identifying the writer's bias found in headline of a newspaper (*cf* Burns, Roe & Ross, 1996; Pirozzi, 2003; and Sabarun, 2009). There were six different pairs of headlines to discuss for six groups.

*Second, Whilst-Reading.* During the whilst-reading stage, the teacher asked the captain of each group to lead the discussion within their group. The students were busily discussing with their group members. After sometimes, the teacher gave a signal that the time for discussion ended.

The students were asked to share what they have got with the other members of the other groups. The teacher let them express different opinion once they found that their interpretation was different. The teacher gave feedback once the discussion was about to end to gain everyone's agreement (*cf* Burns, Roe & Ross, 1996; Pirozzi, 2003; and Sabarun, 2009).

*Third, Post-Reading.* In the post-reading stage, the teacher reinforced students' understanding on the topic by reviewing the material and by posing some review questions. Having done with it, the teacher asked the students' opinion on the discussion they have just had and how they felt about it. The teacher ended the class by saying good bye and informed that they will have a quiz on this topic on the next meeting (*cf* Burns, Roe & Ross, 1996; Pirozzi, 2003; and Sabarun, 2009).

**Reflection.** To know whether or not Cycle 2 gave improvement to the students' critical reading ability, the researchers made reflection. It included the results of teaching and learning process; and the result of the subjects' learning in critical reading.

*First, the Teaching and Learning Process.* In pre-reading stage, all subjects (the four students) found no difficulty in understanding the topic. Firstly, they uttered their opinion within the group and discuss it. Then, they gave their opinion to other groups as well. The four students, who formerly seemed confused

in sharing ideas, at this point became actively involved. They also shared ideas to other members of their group and accepted other friends' opinion, comments, suggestions, and revisions.

In whilst-reading stage, all subjects were actively involved in the discussion. They appreciated their friends' opinion though they seemed disagree. In the post-reading activity, all subjects seemed to understand the concept as they had already shown good response once the teacher reviewed the material by giving reinforcement questions.

**Second, the Learning Results.** Based on the results of analysis of students' reading ability in Cycle 2, it was found that all subjects obtained significant improvement from Cycle 1. It was indicated by the improvement of students' final score. All subjects' scores met the criteria of success, the minimum score was 70 (Gronlund, 1981).

Two (out of the four) students, who are EA and OS got 71; while AA and MN got 72, which could be categorized as "sufficient". In other words, all subjects were able to achieve the minimum criteria (sufficient level) prescribed for successful critical reading. The results of the analysis of the subjects' improvement are presented in the following:

The first subject was EA, who belonged to group I. In Cycle 2, she gained improvement in terms of score. She improved her score from 65 into 77. She had met the criteria of the score predetermined that was 70. Besides, she also improved her skills in expressing opinion. She was no longer shy.

The second subject was MN, who belonged to group II. MN gained a better progress and had achieved the criteria of success. He generally was very active. He kept silent, when he did not feel sure about what he would like to say.

The third subject was OS, who was a member of group III. OS gained very much confidence during group discussion activity. As a consequence, her score improved as well.

The fourth subject was AA, who was not too active as she was quite shy in participating in a discussion. She only gave a few comments. However, in the second cycle, she showed improvement in her quiz result.

**Conclusion of Cycle 2.** Referring to the findings of Cycle 2, the implementation of cooperative learning strategy has achieved the criteria of success. *First*, the students' score, especially the four subjects' score, could achieve the minimum score of 70 as stated in the criteria of success. *Second*, during the class, the students, including the four subjects, were actively involved in group discussion. *Third*, the students enjoyed learning reading using cooperative learning strategy.

It was shown in the process of learning, all the subjects were able to participate in answering the pre-reading questions; and they were also actively participating in sharing ideas during the discussion time. In other words, they were able to achieve the criteria prescribed for successful pre-, whilst-, and post-readings. Another evidence of the students' improvement was the mean of the students' score, which also improved.

In terms of the implementation of cooperative learning strategy, the students as a team developed social interaction among the group members (Kessler ed., 1992; Jacobs, 1999; Sharan ed., 1999; and Lie, 2002). They learned to listen to 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 learned together. They worked together to complete the assignment given. The poor achievers improved their reading ability by the help of the high achievers. Meanwhile, the high achievers improved their knowledge of reading by transferring their knowledge to the poor achievers.

Moreover, it was also found that students enjoyed learning reading using CL (Cooperative Learning) strategy. Based on the interview, most of the students said that they enjoyed learning English in the classroom through CL strategy (interview with EA, 29/5/2015; interview with OS, 29/5/2015; interview with AA, 29/5/2015; and interview with MN, 29/5/2015). For the above reasons, the researchers thought that it was not necessary to continue the study in the

next cycle, because the study was considered successful.

**Discussion.** With regard to the effort in improving students' critical reading achievements, there were several procedures to be done before implementing the strategy. Those are grouping students, establishing seat arrangements, designing lesson plan, setting the learning objectives, designing appropriate media, and setting the time allotment.

Grouping students was an important step in the implementation of CL (Cooperative Learning) strategy in reading class (*cf* Kessler ed., 1992; Burns, Roe & Ross, 1996; Jacobs, 1999; Sharan ed., 1999; and Lie, 2002). During the class activity, the groups were permanently assigned, since the group members within a group were approximately heterogeneous in ability. The aim was for the bright students to help the poor students, and the poor students learn from the bright students. They shared ideas during the class discussion. Establishing the seat arrangement was also necessary to successfully implement CL strategy, since the students' close position in working together within a group determined the relationship among the members within that group (Kessler ed., 1992; Jacobs, 1999; Sharan ed., 1999; and Lie, 2002).

In this case, during the class, the form of seating arrangement was face-to-face. It was selected for the practicality for the members of a group to sit close with the others while they were working together. Next, designing the lesson plan was an essential thing before conducting the teaching and learning activities.

During the implementation of cooperative learning, the classroom atmosphere became less tense (*cf* Kessler ed., 1992; Jacobs, 1999; Sharan ed., 1999; and Lie, 2002). Students seemed to enjoy the activities as the classroom provided the chances for them to share ideas. They smiled a lot, responded to opinions, and took turns orderly. The practitioner and her collaborator also walked around the room offering help which of course lessened the tense situation.

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 skills, such as taking turns,

sharing ideas, developing social interaction among the group members, and accepting roles, were achieved during the class activities (Kessler ed., 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Sharan ed., 1999; and Lie, 2002). The high and poor achievers could learn together. They were working together to complete the assignment.

The poor achievers improved their critical reading ability from the help of the high achievers. On the other hand, the high achievers improved their knowledge of critical reading by explaining to the poor achievers. This really created a positive learning environment in the classroom. Consequently, the poor achievers could improve better in reading ability. This was proven by the improvement of the final scores of the class. In this situation, positive interdependence, self-accountability, and sharing in teams as signs of cooperative learning fully appeared.

The finding asserted that the implementation of cooperative learning was proven to be effective in teaching critical reading. Students were expected to be accustomed to having discussion and those who felt less superior would be facilitated. The finding of this current study confirmed the findings of the other two previous studies.

P.A. Okebukola (1986), as cited also in R.E. Slavin (1995a) and Lena M. Ballone (2001), found that students who preferred cooperative learning learned more in cooperative methods than those who preferred competition (Okebukola, 1986; Slavin, 1995a:45; and Ballone, 2001). Also B. Chambers & P.C. Abrami (1991), as cited also in R.E. Slavin (1995b), found also that students on successful teams learn more than those on less successful teams (Chambers & Abrami, 1991; and Slavin, 1995b:45).

Those studies have shown that cooperative learning is considered appropriate to enhance students' learning process. The findings of the study also supported the finding of Ruslin (2003)'s study which also found that pair work and STAD (Student Team Achievement Division) model of cooperative learning were effective for increasing students' reading comprehension (Ruslin, 2003). This was clearly indicated by the increase of

the estimated percentages of achievement throughout the cycles of action.

## CONCLUSION

The implementation of CL (Cooperative Learning) strategy in teaching critical reading gives benefits to students in many ways. *First*, CL strategy can improve the students' critical reading ability. The students were able to make good improvement in teaching-learning process. The minimum criteria of success prescribed for successful critical reading competence were achieved.

*Second*, CL strategy makes the students active in group 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*, CL strategy makes the students enjoy learning reading. This is evidenced from the result of the interview showing that they enjoyed learning English in the classroom through cooperative learning strategy. Moreover, they also said that attending the cooperative classroom was beneficial for them for increasing motivation, self-esteem, and achievement. In addition, during the cooperative classroom, students are able to practice some cooperative skills, such as structuring groups, taking turns, sharing responsibilities, making decision, building trust, and appreciating each other.

However, there are also weaknesses concerning the application of cooperative learning to teaching critical reading. *First*, it is time consuming. There are many things the teacher needs to prepare to implement this strategy starting from assigning students into group which of course takes time. Next, the teacher cannot really deal with big classes. When it was the time to have bigger number of students (e.g. 30 students) in one class, this is another challenge the teacher should face as the implementation of cooperative learning in bigger setting will certainly need bigger effort.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>*Statement:* Herewith, we have declared that this paper is our original work; so, it is not product of plagiarism and not yet also be reviewed as well as published by other scholarly journals.

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**Faculty Members of UNIBRAW in Malang, East Java, Indonesia**  
(Source: <http://fib.ub.ac.id/PendidikanInggris>, 9/10/2015)

CR (Critical Reading) is one of the skill subjects offered at Study Program of English UNIBRAW (Brawijaya University) in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. This course is given at the second semester in response to the need of critical reading today. It is also taught to respond to the fact that students are lagging in problem-solving and thinking skills. As its name suggests, CR actually teaches students to think while reading.