

## Optimizing Reading Ability Through the CIRC Model Assisted by Story Card Media in the Context of Multicultural Education in Elementary Schools

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze how the CIRC model assisted by story card media can support multicultural education in elementary schools. The research used is classroom action research (CAR), with research procedures including planning, action, observation and reflection. The subjects used were 24 first grade students consisting of 14 boys and 10 girls. The achievement results at the initial observation showed that, of the 24 students, only 6 (27%) students were in the capable reading category. In the first cycle, as many as 6 (33.3%) students were able to read, 18 students (66.7%) were in the unable to read category. The number and percentage increased in the second cycle to 24 (100%) students who were able to read. Based on the results of the research and discussion above, it can be concluded that through the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) model it can improve reading skills for first grade students at SD Inpres Tenubot, Belu Regency. The use of story card media in the CIRC model adds an inclusive and interactive dimension to the learning process, allowing students to explore various themes and stories that reflect cultural diversity.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of today's education, the challenge to create inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments is increasing (Carter, 2019; Markey et al., 2021). Multicultural education, which focuses on recognizing, understanding and appreciating cultural diversity, is becoming an important aspect in curriculum development and teaching methodologies (Pala et al., 2020). The CIRC model has proven effective in various learning contexts, including improving reading and comprehension skills in various subjects. For example, research by Maskaryanis Telaumbanua shows the effectiveness of the CIRC model in improving the ability to find nonfiction book elements in seventh grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Ma'u, Nias Regency (Telaumbanua, 2019). Furthermore, research conducted by Sutikno, Doni Sastrawan, Adam Sugiarto, and Diah Asih also emphasizes the use of the CIRC method to improve Arabic reading comprehension skills, demonstrating the flexibility of this method in different cultural contexts (Sastrawan et al., 2021). In a multicultural context, education aims not only to develop academic competencies, but also to foster sensitivity and appreciation for cultural diversity (Mukhamad, 2022). The use of story card media in the CIRC model provides an opportunity to introduce and appreciate cultural diversity through reading activities (Hemilda et al., 2023; Khusna & Nuryanto, 2021; Marwani, 2020). This is in accordance with the principles of multicultural education which prioritizes rich and inclusive learning experiences.

Learning is an interaction process between teachers and students and learning resources in a school environment (Rusman & Laksmi, 2019). According to Nurhasanah & Sobandi (2016), learning in the school context is a process that students go through by interacting with their environment to obtain overall self and behavior change. In learning students are expected to experience changes in the fields of science, attitudes and Indonesian language. Indonesian is one of the compulsory subjects that must be taken in every formal school, including elementary schools (SD) and madrasah ibtidaiyah (MI). Through Indonesian language subjects, students are expected to improve their ability to communicate both orally and in writing. According to (Sabila et al., 2020) in Indonesian language subjects there are four basic skills that students must master, namely speaking skills (speaking skills), listening skills (listening skills), writing skills (writing skills) and reading skills (reading skills). One important aspect that students must master of the four Indonesian language skills is reading skills.

Reading skills are a way to obtain messages that are intended to be conveyed through written media or language. Reading can also be considered as a process to understand implicit meanings in explicit meanings, as well as seeing thoughts contained in written words (Tarigan, 2015). In elementary school age children, if students do not have reading skills, they will experience many difficulties in various fields of study. This is because learning materials are increasingly diverse. According to Khoiriah et al. (2020), children must learn to read so that they can read to learn. Based on observations at an educational institution, specifically at SD Inpres Tenubot, it was found that the current condition of students' reading ability in class is not optimal and has not reached the expected target. Due to the low reading ability caused by the lack of variation in reading learning models used by the teacher. So there are still students who when reading cannot mention letters, every word in reading, and courage when the teacher asks them to read there are still some who are afraid of being wrong. This makes it difficult for students to improve their reading skills. To solve the above problems, the researchers offered the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) learning model. According to

Sharan (2018), the CIRC learning model is a cooperative learning model, where later students will be formed into small heterogeneous groups, usually consisting of 4-5 students regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, and intelligence level. . So that with the existence of discussions and reading stories in groups, students can get used to practicing speaking and reading skills. The learning process using the CIRC model students work together in groups to look for main ideas, main ideas, and things related to the reading text.

The application of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) model in the context of basic education, especially in a multicultural context, opens up new perspectives in effective and inclusive teaching methods. In this study it was found that the CIRC model assisted by story card media was able to improve reading skills for first grade elementary school students. One of the tools that can be used is story card media. Story card media is a learning tool that contains sentences used in an effort to improve students' reading skills. By using story card media, students can more easily understand how to read. According to Basori (2016) learning media is a means for students not to get bored in following lessons and the greatest effect expected by students is to be motivated and facilitate receiving subject matter. The use of the CIRC model in this study does not only improve academic skills but also has the potential to enrich students' understanding of cultural diversity. The CIRC model, which integrates cooperative learning with reading and writing activities, offers a structure that supports student interaction in small groups. This allows students from various cultural backgrounds to share their experiences and perspectives, which is a key element in multicultural education. Research by Telaumbanua et al. shows how this model can be applied in different contexts, improving students' reading and comprehension skills in certain subjects (Telaumbanua, 2019). Meanwhile, research by Sutikno et al. emphasizes the application of CIRC in learning Arabic, demonstrating the adaptability of this method in diverse language and cultural contexts (Sastrawan et al., 2021).

The utilization of story cards in this study adds a novel dimension to reading instruction. Story cards can encompass various themes and narratives that reflect cultural diversity, providing students with the opportunity to explore and understand different perspectives. This aligns with the objectives of multicultural education, which not only focus on academic achievements but also on fostering empathy and appreciation for diversity.

The Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) model, particularly when combined with tools like story card media, offers an effective and comprehensive approach to multicultural education. By emphasizing group work and cooperative learning, this model supports the development of social skills and empathy among students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, the use of diverse and inclusive stories helps strengthen understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, a core aspect of multicultural education. Building on the findings of previous researcher Supangat (2016) in the study titled "Implementation of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) Learning Model to Improve Reading and Writing Skills of Students in the Kitab Kuning Subject at Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School." The aim of Supangat's research was to assess proficiency in reading and writing the Kitab Kuning at Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School.

## 2. METHODS

This research was conducted at SD Inpres Tenubot, Jl. Flobamora No.1, Manumutin, Kec. Kota Atambua, Belu Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. The research focused on the application of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) Learning Model enriched by the use of Story Cards (Kari) as an innovation to develop reading skills for first grade elementary school students. This study uses a Classroom Action Research (PTK) framework by following the cycle model designed by Kemmis and Mc Taggart, which includes the stages of Planning, Implementation, Observation, and Reflection (Arikunto et al., 2014). The participants in this study were 24 first grade elementary school students, consisting of 14 male students and 10 female students. For data collection, this study utilizes non-test methods, including observation sheets and questionnaires, as well as test methods through objective tests. Data analysis was performed with a qualitative descriptive approach, which aims to deeply understand the improvement of students' reading skills.

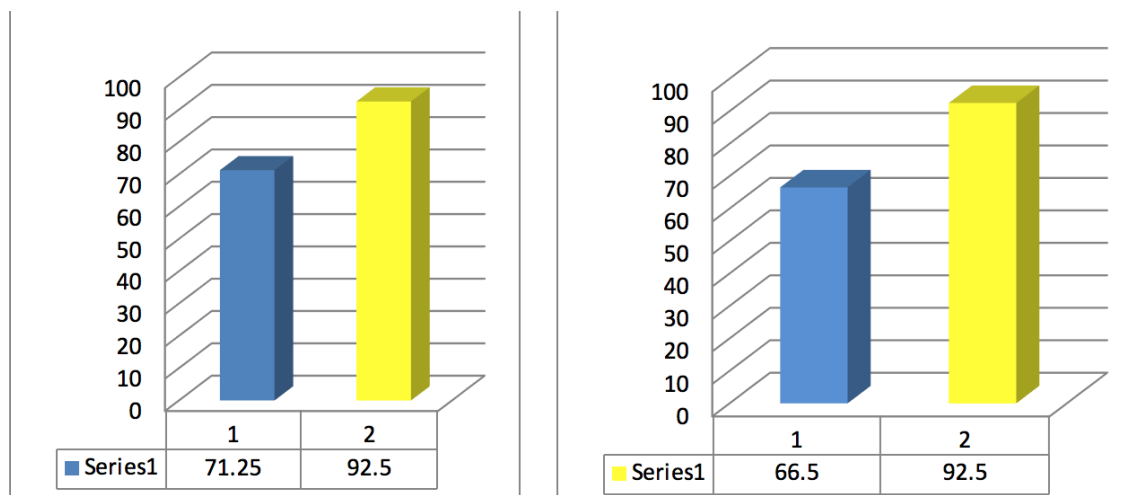
This research is designed to enrich the learning experience of reading elementary school students in the early grades through the integration of the Cooperative Integrated Reading And Composition (CIRC) Learning Model with the use of innovative story cards. This model is expected to facilitate collaboration and deeper understanding of reading texts. Based on the total number of participants which amounted to 24 students, with an almost balanced gender distribution, this study explores cross-gender learning dynamics. Through comprehensive data collection methods that include observation sheets, questionnaires, and objective tests, this study aims to produce rich qualitative data for descriptive analysis. The results are expected to provide insight into the effectiveness of the CIRC model enriched with Kari media in improving reading skills in a diverse educational environment.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This classroom action research comprised two cycles, each involving planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. In the planning phase of Cycle I, the researcher prepared necessary materials for action implementation, focusing on curriculum development, lesson plans, Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) model alignment, student worksheets, instructional materials, and reading proficiency assessments (Setiawati et al., 2023; Zalmansyah, 2018).

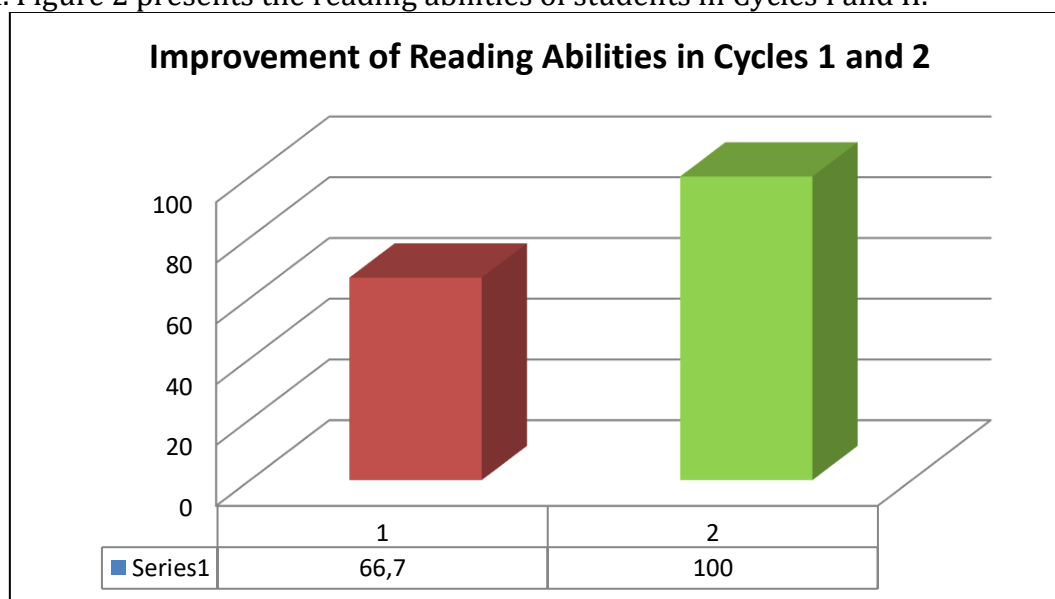
In the action phase, the CIRC model, aided by story card media, was implemented based on the pre-established lesson plans. Subsequent observation aimed to gain comprehensive insights into the learning process during Cycle I. The outcomes revealed 71.25% teacher activity, 67.5% student engagement, and a 63.5% reading proficiency, indicating that the reading proficiency had not reached the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) of 75 or 80%. Consequently, the study proceeded to Cycle II.

Reflection results confirmed the need to motivate students actively in reading through the implementation of the CIRC model with story card media. Cycle II planning and execution were guided by Cycle I reflection outcomes. Observations indicated a considerable increase in teacher and student activities to 92.5%, resulting in a 100% reading proficiency with an average mastery rate of 89.4%. Figures 1 illustrate the improvement across both cycles.



**Figure 1.** Diagram of Teacher Activities in Cycles I and II and Diagram of Student Activities in Cycles I and II

Observation outcomes demonstrated an enhancement from Cycle I to Cycle II in teacher activity, increasing from 71.25% to 92.5%. Similarly, student activity improved from 66.5% in Cycle I to 92.5% in Cycle II (Figure 2), categorizing the average score as good. Figure 2 presents the reading abilities of students in Cycles I and II.



**Figure 2.** Diagram 3 Reading Abilities of Students in Cycles I and II

Figure 2 shows that students' reading ability in the first cycle was 66.7% and increased in the second cycle to 100%. The results of the first cycle test show that students' reading ability reached 66.7% which was not yet complete, this was because the learning process was still teacher centered or teacher centered. Students have not been seen actively participating in learning activities by applying the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) learning model, because there are still many students who have not been seen observing and there are still students who lack attention when the teacher or their friends make observations so that the learning process is less effective and efficient. While in the second cycle the test results of students' reading ability reached 100% completeness with an average value of 89.4.

This means that the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) learning model is a type of cooperative learning model, which was originally an integrated

cooperative reading and writing teaching, namely a comprehensive or broad and complete program for teaching reading and writing for elementary schools (Sharan, 2018). Where in the learning process using the CIRC model, each student is mutually responsible for group assignments. Each group comes up with ideas to understand a concept in completing assignments, thus forming long-term understanding and learning experiences (Huda, 2017). One of the main focuses of CIRC activities as a basic story is to make non-progressive time use more effective. Students working in cooperative teams from activities, coordinated with group reading instruction, in order to meet the goals of other fields such as reading comprehension, vocabulary, message reading and spelling. Students are motivated to work with each other in activities (Slavin & Yusron, 2005). So that not only cognitive abilities are improved but also affective, psychomotor (skills) abilities, even with the acquisition of high affective, cognitive and psychomotor abilities can influence students' reading and writing skills.

Based on the results of the study that the use of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) Learning Model which is strengthened by the use of story card media has a positive impact on improving the reading skills of students at SD Inpres Tenubot. Through the application of this model in a multicultural context, there was a significant increase in students' reading comprehension, as measured by pre-test and post-test. In addition, the use of story cards as a learning medium has been proven effective in increasing student motivation and involvement in the learning process. This indicates the importance of visual and interactive aids in supporting collaborative learning methods, especially in multicultural environments. Further analysis of the data shows that students who previously showed low interest in reading activities are now more enthusiastic and proactive during learning sessions. The integration of multicultural content in story cards supports the development of sensitivity and appreciation for cultural diversity, which is an important aspect of learning in multicultural classes. The conclusion from this research is that the CIRC model, when combined with innovative learning media such as story cards, can significantly optimize students' reading abilities in elementary schools, while supporting inclusive multicultural education. Similar studies have shown that CIRC methods are effective in improving students' reading skills and comprehension. For example, research conducted by Stevens & Slavin (1995) in "The Cooperative Elementary School: Effects on Students' Achievement, Attitudes, and Social Relations" found that students who took part in cooperative learning such as CIRC showed improvements in reading. This research adds empirical evidence to the existing literature by demonstrating that the integration of culturally relevant learning media, such as story cards with multicultural content, not only supports culturally responsive pedagogy but also enhances student engagement and motivation to learn.

Referring to previous research, our findings underline the importance of considering the cultural context of students in developing learning materials. This is in line with the framework proposed by Gay (2018) in "Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice," which emphasizes the importance of teaching in a way that recognizes cultural diversity in the classroom. By applying these principles, this study shows how the adaptation of the CIRC model with the addition of multicultural story card media can enrich the reading experience of students in diverse educational environments. This reinforces the argument that culturally responsive learning methods can be the key to optimizing student learning potential. The research results emphasize the importance of integrating pedagogical approaches that are culturally responsive with the use of learning aids that are attractive and culturally relevant (Latifa & Hariyadi, 2022). These

findings indicate that learning that utilizes cultural diversity in teaching materials can enrich the learning process and help students better appreciate and understand cultural diversity around them. This research supports the thesis that cooperative learning models such as CIRC, when enriched with appropriate learning aids, can improve students' understanding and reading skills while strengthening multicultural values in the classroom.

Based on reflections and observations during the research cycle, it was revealed that students experienced improvements not only in technical aspects of reading but also in cross-cultural understanding. This indicates that a holistic approach to reading learning—which combines cognitive, social, and cultural aspects—can produce deeper and more sustainable learning outcomes. Students' positive attitude towards multicultural learning can be the foundation for further development of an inclusive and culturally responsive curriculum. The observed improvement in reading ability reflects the significant added value of using story card media oriented towards multicultural content. This is in accordance with the theoretical framework which states that students will be more engaged and motivated when the learning material reflects and appreciates their own cultural background. This discussion underscores the importance of adapting a culturally responsive curriculum to accommodate diversity in the classroom, with the aim not only to improve academic competence but also to foster sensitivity and appreciation for cultural diversity.

Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) learning model can improve students' reading ability. The results of this study are in line with Vygotsky's learning theory which emphasizes the learning process on the intellectual development of students who are directly faced with new and challenging experiences so that students can solve the problems raised (Wertsch & Sohmer, 1995). In an effort to gain understanding, individuals associate new knowledge with prior knowledge they already have then build new understandings, based on this theory the application of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) learning model emphasizes the contextual learning process for students (Aiman & Sunimbar, 2020). So that the criteria for the success process of students is not only determined by how far students can understand the material being studied, but also by how far students can solve the problems raised. This success is characterized by the activeness of students, good attention and more focus during the learning process by applying the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) learning model.

According to the National Association for Multicultural Education, multicultural education strategies are used to help students develop positive self-concepts by studying the history, culture, and contributions of diverse groups. However, studies have shown issues such as educators inadvertently protecting "whiteness" rather than uncovering structural racial domination in the United States. In addition, Gorski & Parekh's (2020) study highlights that the orientation of multicultural teacher education tends to be conservative or liberal, often lacking a critical approach to dealing with injustice. This shows that a significant barrier in research may be ensuring that the CIRC model and story card media are designed and implemented effectively to handle and embrace the rich diversity in multicultural classrooms. Educators' awareness and intentionality in dealing with this diversity, along with institutional support for a critical multicultural approach, is crucial for the success of such educational interventions. There are several challenges and obstacles that may be faced, namely Student Cultural Diversity. Given the multicultural context, students may come from various different cultural backgrounds,

which can lead to differences in prior knowledge, values, and experiences. This can affect how they interact with learning materials and with one another. Furthermore, the selection of Story Card Media. Story card media must be relevant and appealing to students from various cultures. The challenge is to create or find story cards that can resonate with all students and respect their diversity. Teachers' Ability to Manage Multicultural Classrooms also poses a challenge going forward. Teachers need to have the skills and cultural sensitivity to effectively manage the dynamics of multicultural classrooms when using the CIRC model. Teachers may require additional training not only in applying the CIRC model but also in multicultural teaching strategies. There is a challenge in garnering active student participation, especially for those who may feel marginalized or lack confidence due to cultural differences. Measuring reading ability in a multicultural context can be complex as it has to take into account multilingualism and dialect variations. The learning content and language used in story cards must be carefully chosen to ensure they are not biased towards certain cultures and can be accessed by students with varying language abilities. Facilitating positive interactions between students from different cultural backgrounds can be challenging, especially in the group discussions required by the CIRC model. Assessing learning effectiveness and conducting reflections for continuous improvement in multicultural contexts requires an in-depth understanding of cultural dynamics. Adapting learning resources to support multicultural education and the time required to effectively plan and implement the CIRC model can be a barrier.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The conducted research highlights the importance of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) model in the context of multicultural education. The CIRC model, which integrates cooperative learning with reading and writing activities, has proven to be effective in enhancing students' reading skills and comprehension while supporting diverse social interactions within the classroom. The use of story card media in the CIRC model adds an inclusive and interactive dimension to the learning process, allowing students to explore various themes and stories that reflect cultural diversity. The implementation of this model in the primary education context not only contributes to students' academic achievements but also fosters empathy, appreciation for diversity, and the ability to interact in heterogeneous environments. Therefore, the CIRC model, especially when combined with inclusive tools like story card media, becomes a crucial instrument in realizing the goals of multicultural education. This approach promotes a rich and inclusive learning experience, helping shape a younger generation that is not only literate but also sensitive and open to cultural and social diversity.

Based on the research results, it is evident that the implementation of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) learning model assisted by story card media can improve the reading abilities of 1st-grade students at Inpres Tenubot Elementary School. This is evident in the average reading ability scores of students, which increased by 100% from 66.7% in Cycle I to a satisfactory level in Cycle II, achieving the minimum passing grade. The teacher's activities increased from 71.25% in Cycle I to 92.5% in Cycle II. Student activities also improved from 66.7% in Cycle I to 92.5% in Cycle II.

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