Improving Reading and Writing Achievements through Whole Language Approach

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Abstract: The main purpose of this study was to find out whether or not whole language approach could make a difference in improving both students' reading and writing achievements. The research was conducted in terms of reading and writing intervention for about two months or 24 meetings including pre and post-tests. The tests were reading comprehension and writing. The findings showed that (1) there was a significant progress within each group in both reading and writing. (2) there was also significant mean difference between the experimental and control groups with the contribution of the Whole Language Approach to students' reading comprehension by 99.2% and to writing achievements by 87.2%.

Keywords: *whole language approach, reading achievement and writing achievement.*

Abstrak: Tujuan utama dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui apakah pendekatan whole language dapat membuat suatu perbedaan dalam meningkatkan prestasi siswa dalam membaca dan menulis. Penelitian ini dilakukan dalam hal intervensi membaca dan menulis selama sekitar dua bulan atau 24 pertemuan termasuk tes awal dan tes akhir. Tesnya adalah pemahaman membaca dan menulis. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa (1) ada kemajuan yang signifikan dalam masing-masing kelompok dalam membaca dan menulis. (2) ada juga perbedaan rata-rata yang signifikan antara kelompok eksperimen dan kontrol dengan kontribusi dari Pendekatan Whole Language untuk prestasi siswa dalam pemahaman membaca sebesar 99,2% dan menulis sebesar 87,2%.

Kata-kata kunci: *pendekatan whole language, prestasi membaca dan menulis*

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Reading and writing, two of the four literacy skills in English as a foreign language, are very important to acquire by learners. According to Geske and Ozola (2008:71), they are the ground of almost all processes of learning in the 21st century. Geske and Ozola also state that if students' reading literacy level, for example, is low, in most cases it automatically implies difficulties in the acquisition of several other subjects. In the same vain, de Debat (2006, p. 6) believes that reading is a crucial skill for students of English as a foreign language (EFL) or a second-language (ESL). Meanwhile, Harris (2007, p. 1) states that the easiest way to educate people to be literate citizens is to teach them the skill of reading. Therefore, even in this day of multimedia, reading is still the most essential skill to acquire knowledge.

Massi (2001, p. 1) asserts that another skill to bear in mind if we talk about literacy is writing. Writing which is considered the most elaborate skill to be acquired by students plays a significant role in communication especially in this information age. She also states that writing is a tool for creation of ideas and the consolidation of the linguistic system (by using it) for communication in an interactive way. From this perspective, writing implies the successful transmission of ideas from an addresser to an addressee via text, and this exchange of information becomes powerful means to motivate and encourage the development of language skill.

However, the teaching of writing has been neglected in our education from elementary to college although it must be taught in schools like the other skills: listening, speaking, and reading (Alwasilah, 2001). On the other hand, teachers seldom ask students to practice writing in a class because they need a lot of time to correct and give feedback to their students' compositions. Gebhard (2000, p. 238) adds that writing teachers often spend many hours reading and marking students' papers, offering revision suggestions and feedback on language errors. Students also consider that writing is a waste of time because they need more time to write down their ideas and revise them. It means that writing is time-consuming for students and teacher (National Commission on Writing, 2003:3). Therefore, it is often a neglected skill in English language teaching.

DIKNAS of South Sumatera Province (2011) found that the achievement of reading and writing of the students of SMA Negeri 10 Palembang of science program was in rank 46 out of 100 schools and social program was in rank 66 out of 125 schools. According to Cahyono (2006) the students' reading and writing achievement of SMA Negeri 10 Palembang was worsened whenever the teachers taught writing to their students by only using very traditional method—giving writing assignment as homework, collecting and then returning it to them. Sometime teachers did not return the assignment to the students. This happened because they thought that writing was very difficult to teach. They also said that teaching writing was time consuming. Therefore, the students' reading and writing achievements of SMA Negeri 10 Palembang need improvement.

In relation to the facts above, teaching reading and writing by using an appropriate approach is very essential to produce a good result. **"Whole Language Approach"** as suggested by Freeman and Freeman (in Plummer, 1993) is assumed to be an effective approach to improve students' reading and writing skills. Therefore, the writer was interested to find out (1) the progress in reading and writing achieved by the students after they were taught by using "Whole Language Approach"; (2) the difference in reading and writing achievements *between* the students who were taught by using "Whole Language Approach" and those who were not; and (3) the contribution of Whole Language Approach (if any) to students' reading and writing achievements.

The Importance of teaching Reading

Reading is a crucial skill for students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or Second Language (ESL) (de Debat 2006: 6). Reading is a complex and dynamic process that involves a set of activities such as remembering, comprehending, interpreting, differentiating, comparing, finding out, analyzing, organizing and applying messages sent through written language in order to understand its content. While the purposes of reading are: a) to search simple information, b) to skim quickly, c) to learn from text, d) to integrate information, e) to write for information needed for writing, f) to critique texts, and g) for general comprehension (Grabe & Stoller, 2002, p. 9).

The Importance of Teaching Writing

Writing which is considered the most elaborate skill to be acquired by students, plays a significant role in communication especially in this information age. Writing is a tool for creation of ideas and the consolidation of the linguistic system by using it for communication objectives in an interactive way (Hairstone, 1986, p. 2; Hedge, 1992, p. 7 Massi, 2001). From this perspective, writing implies the successful transmission of ideas from an addresser to an addressee via text, and this exchange of information becomes powerful means to motivate and encourage the development of language skill. Furthermore, the role of writing is little different from its role in any other subjects. It allows students to see how they are progressing and to get feedback from the teacher. It also allows teachers to monitor and diagnose problems.

The Relationship between Reading and Writing

Most experts agree that reading and writing are similar and mutually supportive language process (Cooper, 1997; Camacho, 2005, p. 29). Both rely on the reader's or writer's background knowledge to construct meaning and both make use of cueing systems (graphic, semantic, syntactic) to allow the reader or writer to predict and confirm meaning.

Furthermore, Camacho (2005, p. 29) states that an important point in the theory about reading and writing is that both share similar linguistic and cognitive elements. He (2005, p. 29) also concludes the relationship between reading and writing are as follows:

1. Good writers tend to be better readers than are less able writers.
2. Good writers tend to read more frequently and widely and to produce more syntactically complex writing.
3. Writing itself does not tend to influence reading comprehension, but when writing is taught for the purpose of enhancing reading.
4. Reading experiences have as great an effect on writing as direct instruction in grammar and mechanics.

From the above explanation the writer concluded that the relationship between reading and writing are very close and relates to each other.

Strategies in Teaching Reading and Writing

Learning strategies is a key to student success, Schumacher and Deshler (2006) define a learning strategy as "an individual's approach to a task. It includes how a person thinks and acts when planning, executing, and evaluating performance on a task and its outcomes." Furthermore, they assert that reading is perhaps one of the most important tools to gain knowledge. The technique had positive outcomes. The use of strategies like summarizing after each paragraph has come to be seen as effective strategies for building students' comprehension.

Taylor, et al (1992) proposed activities which they believe aid in the teaching language Arts, that is, reading and writing. They focus on how students comprehend, how they receive and interpret information, and how they make meaning of the learning process. These activities are related to Piaget's Developmental Theory of Learning and the Whole Language Approach appears to be based upon this theory, by providing cognitive activities based upon principles of growth and development.

Teaching Reading and Writing through Whole Language Approach

According to Baker (2008, p. 23), Whole language becomes a comprehensive way to teach reading and other language skills with concrete suggestions for how teachers can deal with instructional, psychological, and institutional factors. For the whole language approach, it is essential to provide a literate classroom environment with a wide variety of relevant texts that are attractive to learners. Even though students make mistakes in word recognition, spelling, and pronunciation, they will eventually be able to create meaning out of words and sentences by using textual cues and their own background knowledge to figure them out.

A major emphasis of the whole language approach is to make language learning as simple as possible, and to keep the language "whole." Moreover, Richards and Rodgers (2006: 108) asserts that the Whole Language Approach emphasizes learning to read and write naturally with a focus on real communication and reading and writing for pleasure.

Furthermore, Freeman and Freeman (cited in Plummer, 1993) set six principles of

Whole Language Approach:
1. Lessons should proceed from whole to part.
2. Lessons should be learner-centered because learning result from the   active construction of knowledge by students.
3. Lessons should have meaning and purpose for the students.
4. Lessons should engage groups of students in social interaction.
5. Lessons should develop both oral and written language.
6. Lessons that show faith in the learner expend students' potential.

Components of The Whole Language Approach

A review of the literature on whole language indicates that there is no step-by-step recipe for implementing whole language in the classroom. Instead, researchers tend to stress principles and techniques that foster the success in a whole language classroom: Implementing a child centered curriculum, emerging children in literature, building lessons around a theme-based unit, stressing language experiences, and parental involvement are crucial elements in the whole language approach. **A child centered curriculum** refers to one major goal of whole language is to bring child centered educational strategies back to the classroom (Ferguson in Taylor 1992). **Children in literature** refers to a crucial element in the whole language approach is to provide a variety of literature for students to enjoy. **A theme-based unit** refers to the use of thematic approach to integrate language arts with other areas of the curriculum. **Language experience** is a method of teaching that is based on the language generated orally by the children during a first-hand or vicarious experience. **Parental involvement** refers to parents, teachers and students who are considered as a team in the whole language approach.

METHOD

In this research, the writer taught the students   in terms of reading and writing intervention for about two months or 24 meetings including pre and post-tests. She used an experimental method by applying quasi experimental design and specifically chose non-equivalent group pre-test and posttest design. In this design, there were experimental and control groups. In the experimental group, the students were given pre-test, treatment of Whole Language Approach and post-test, while in the control group the students were given only pre-test and post-test without treatment of Whole Language Approach at all. The effect of Whole Language Approach can be seen from the results of reading and writing tests obtained by the experimental group compared with those of obtained by the control group.

The design of the study used is shown in the following diagram (Creswell, 2005, P. 297).

Pre- and Post-test Design			Time
Experimental group	Pretest	Experimental Treatment	Post-test
Control group	Pretest	No Treatment	Post-test

Diagram1. Pre- and Posttest Design

Population

The population of this study was all the eleventh-grade students of SMA Negeri 10 Palembang in academic year of 2010/2011. The total number of the population was 374 students comprising 9 classes, XI IPA 1, XI IPA 2, XI IPA 3, IX IPA 4, XI IPA 5, XI IPS 1, IX IPS 2, IX IPS 3, and IX IPS 4.

Sample

In this research, the writer did not take all the population as the sample. In selecting the sample from the population, the writer used purposive sampling technique. The selection of the sample was based on the following criteria: (1) the students whose average score of English in their previous semester in academic year 2010/2011was between 70 and 75, (2) they were taught by the same teacher in their regular class, (3) they were all in the same grade (the eleventh grade), (4) gender, and (5) they were not taking the English course during the study was conducted.

Having the results of the reading comprehension and writing tests, the students were selected. Only 40 students who fulfilled the criteria above were selected and equally divided into experimental group (20 students; 10 males and 10 females) and control group (20 students; 10 males and 10 females).

Teaching Procedure

The procedures of teaching reading and

writing were based on the framework of Whole Language Approach proposed by Freeman and Freeman (in Plummer, 1993). Each meeting consisted of 2 x 45 minutes time allocation. In teaching and learning process, the teacher instructed the students based on three phases which gradually shifted from classical work, group or pair work, then to individual tasks.

1. The first phase—the students were given the instruction classically. In this phase, most of the instructions and class tasks were handled classically. This was purposively done due to the expectation that the students would brainstorm ideas and exchange any information needed to discuss the reading material before the writing activity.

2. The second phase—the majority of the instructions were emphasized in group work. The students were divided into groups of three or four in order to share responsibilities in doing the tasks given.

3. The last phase—each and every student did the task given by the instructor individually. In this phase, everybody had to depend on his or her own ability in finishing the assignment.

Learning Stages

The stages for learning activities are as follows.

1. Pre-activities (10 minutes)
   a. Warming up: The teacher asked a few questions (or talked about pictures) related to the topic to recall the students' previous knowledge.
   b. The teacher introduced and explained Whole Language Approach to the students that it would be used during the experiment.
2. Whilst Activities (70 minutes)
   a. The teacher distributed the copy of reading comprehension passages for every meeting during the experiment.
   b. The students read the reading passages.
   c. The teacher gave small groups a task in which students compared and clarified what they understood and appreciated the main points of the reading passage.
   d. The students discussed the readings and members of group react with comments, questions and attempts to answer each other's questions.
   e. The students made presentation in the workshop in class.
   f. The students wrote free written reaction or response to the text individually.
3. Post Activities (10 minutes)
   a. Both the students and the teacher concluded the materials.
   b. The students were encouraged to ask some questions.
   c. The students were given homework as a follow-up activity to find another example of the similar text.

Techniques for Collecting the Data

The data were taken from the results of the pre-test and the post-test of reading comprehension and writing of both experimental and control groups. They were done to find out the differences of the students' progress before and after the treatment. The research instruments used in this study are as follows.

Reading comprehension test

The reading test was administered to the students before and after being taught with Whole Language Approach. The reading tests included questions reflecting the aspects of reading comprehension: MI (main idea), D (details), Seq (sequence), Inf (inference), C/E (cause and effect), and there are also questions related to Voc (vocabulary) as suggested by Shipman-Warncke Assessment Profile (SWAP) (1988). The reading comprehension test used in the study is a standardized test taken from the exercises to reading comprehension that compiled from many sources. The number items of test were 25 items of a multiple-choice type test with five options: A, B, C, D, or E that consisted of two grades below and two grades above their expected reading level. This means the sample took a test that covered the level of reading for grades 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13.

Writing test

To assess the students' writing achievement, the students were assigned to write an essay which consists of 150-200 words based on the topic they chose from 3 (three) options provided by the researcher. To evaluate the writing tests above, the writer were assisted by two raters . The raters were considered as an appropriate for being raters, for the following reasons. The first raters has English teaching experience for more than 20 years and she is a supervisor of English of Senior High School of DISDIKPORA Palembang, she also has he Master's Degree (M.Ed.) in Language Education and her TOEFL score

was 600. The second rater has English teaching experience for more than 10 years and *Magister* Degree (M.Pd.) in Language Education. His TOEFL score was 560. The result of the students' writing were scored using an analytical rubric writing suggested by Rublee (2007).

Validity and Reliability of Reading and Writing Tests

In finding the validity and reliability, the researcher analyzed the items of the reading test by doing the try-out first in order to find out how easy or difficult these questions for the students The instruments of reading test were tested to 40 students of the eleventh grade of SMA Negeri 2 Palembang. In this study, the writer estimated the content validity. Content validity refers to how well the questions represent all the possibilities of question available (Creswell, 2005: 165). The validity was used with correlation product moment among the items with the total score, and then product moment correlation score was compared with table correlation. If product moment correlation score was higher than table correlation scores so the item of the question was valid. The hypothesis result showed that correlation product moment score > 0,312 so it can conclude that the item of the test in this research instrument was valid.

The writer used content validity in order to know the validity of the writing test. To know whether the test has a high degree of content validity, the writer related it to the table of the test specification and to access the reliability of writing test, the writer used inter rater method.

Techniques for Analyzing the Data

In analyzing the data, the writer followed some steps. First of all, after the normality of data were found normal by using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test then the data of the students' pre-test and post-test in both reading comprehension and writing were analyzed to find out: (1) the significant mean difference between pre and post-tests of both reading and writing achievements within each group using paired sample t-test, then (2) the gain scores obtained by the students in each group were compared using independent t-test analysis to prove that there was a significant difference in reading comprehension and writing achievements between the experimental group and the control group. To see whether the students' achievements in reading comprehension and/or writing and their sub-variables were influenced by the Whole Language Approach, Stepwise Regression analysis was used. All the computation was analyzed by using SPSS 17.0 version.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the statistical analyses using paired sample t-test, independent sample t-test, and the stepwise regression, the results of the study are presented as follows.

Statistical Analyses of the Pretest and Posttest of Students' Reading Comprehension Achievement and Writing Achievement in the Experimental Group using paired sample t-test

Based on the paired sample t-test, the mean of the students' reading comprehension pre-test in the experimental group was 15.95 with the standard deviation 2.856. While the mean of reading comprehension post-test was 21.85 with the standard deviation was 1.268. The output showed that the mean difference of reading comprehension achievement between pre-test and post-test in the experimental group was 5.90, with standard deviation 2.63, and t-obtained was 10.018 (p<0.000), and the mean of writing pre-test in the experimental group was 15.45 with the standard deviation 3.10. While the mean of the students' writing post-test was 28.10 with the standard deviation 1.119. The output showed that the mean difference of between pre-test and post-test of the writing achievement in the experimental group was 12.65, with standard deviation 3.66, and t-obtained 15.441 (p<0.000). Since the t-obtained of both reading comprehension and writing were higher than t-table 2.093, it could be stated that the null hypotheses $(H0_1)$ and $(H0_2)$ were rejected and the research hypotheses $(H1_1)$ and $(H1_2)$ were accepted. It means that there was significant difference in students' achievements after the treatment in the experimental group was done.

Statistical Analyses of the Pretest and Posttest of Students' Reading Comprehension Achievement and Writing Achievement in the Control Group Using Paired Sample T-Test

Based on the paired sample t-test, the mean of the students' reading comprehen-

sion achievement of the pretest in the control group was 15.65 with the standard deviations 3.924. While the mean of reading comprehension achievement of the post test was 17.50 with the standard deviations 2.417. The output showed that the mean difference of reading comprehension achievement between pre-test and post-test in the control groups was 1.850, with standard deviations 2.3, and the t-obtained of the reading comprehension achievement and writing achievement was 3.596, and the mean of the students' writing achievement of the pretest in the control group was 15.95 with the standard deviation 2.84. While the mean of writing achievement of the post test was 17.45 with the standard deviations 1.669. The output showed that the mean difference of writing achievement between pre-test and post-test in the control groups was 1.50, with standard deviations 3.1, and the t-obtained of the writing achievement was 2.150. Since the t-obtained of both reading comprehension and writing were higher than t-table 2.093, it could be stated that the null hypotheses $(H0_1)$ and $(H0_2)$ were rejected and the research hypotheses $(H1_1)$ and $(H1_2)$ were accepted. It means that there was significant difference in students' achievement made by students in the control group.

Statistical Analysis of Students' Reading Comprehension Achievement and Writing Achievement of the Post-Test between the Experimental and Control Groups Using Independent T-Test

The result of the independents sample t-test shows that the mean difference between reading achievement in the experimental group was 4.350 and t-obtained 7.127 (p<.0.000), and the mean difference between writing achievement in the experimental group wa 10.8 and t-obtained 23.83 (p<.0.000). Since the p-output of both reading comprehension and writing were less than the value of probability 0.05 and t-obtained was higher than t-table (2.093), the null hypothesis $(H0_1)$ and $(H0_2)$ were rejected and the research hypotheses $(H1_1)$ and $(H1_2)$ were accepted. It means that there was significant difference in reading comprehension achievement and writing achievement between students who were taught through whole language approach and

those who were not.

The Contribution of Whole Language Approach toward Each Aspect of Reading and Writing in the Experimental Group using Stepwise Regression
The Results of Stepwise Regression Analysis of Reading Comprehension Achievement

Table 1 shows the result of stepwise regression analysis; as a whole, the contribution of the Whole Language Approach toward reading comprehension achievement is 99.2%. Partially the contribution of each aspect of reading is as follows: sequence 40.4 %, detail 15.7%, cause and effect 13.0%, inference 12.6%, vocabulary 10.0%, and main idea 0.75%, and the rest, unexplained factors 0.8%

The Results of Stepwise Regression Analysis of Writing Achievement

As a whole, the contribution of the Whole Language Approach toward writing achievement was 87.2% (see also Table 8). Partially the contribution of each aspect of writing is as follows: organization 47.2%, level of discourse 17.6%, support 15.9%, content of knowledge 0.64%, and the rest, unexplained factors 12.8%.

INTERPRETATION

From the beginning of the treatment, it was hypothesized that Whole Language Approach did make a difference in students' reading and writing. Based on the results of the study it was proved that whole language approach could really change the performance of the students. This might be caused by the implementation of the student-centered curriculum, emerging the students in literature (refers to provide a variety of literature for students to enjoy), building lessons around a theme-based unit, and stressing language experiences. Therefore, the students in the experimental group had a better progress in reading and writing achievements than those of in the control group.

Based on the finding above, all the sub variables in reading were influenced significantly by the whole language approach. It showed that this approach is quite effective. Sequence showed the most influenced might be caused by the signal words often used in

the text. Then detail and cause and effect were also influenced significantly by the whole language approach may be caused by the explicit information in the text. Meanwhile, the contribution of the whole language approach toward inference and vocabulary was not as high as the other ones. These may be caused by the inability of the students to read beyond the line. Especially for the vocabulary, there was a possibility that the researcher as the teacher did not give enough explanation and exercises to the students about how to use contexts in determining the meaning of the difficult words (one of the weaknesses in this present study).

Then, why only four sub-variables of writing (organization, level of discourse, support, and content of knowledge) were influenced significantly by the whole language approach may be related to the nature of each provided reading text itself which was well written, therefore made it plausible reason in triggering the students to write better. In addition, that organization was influenced most by Whole Language Approach may be caused by the activities in discussing the reading text which often analyzed the text based on the generic structure of the text itself. In other words, the prior reading activities made it easier for them to organize their composition based on the tasks given in various levels of discourse.

That there was no contribution of the other four aspects of writing (argument, originality, vocabulary and grammar) may be primarily caused by the minimum vocabulary owned by the students and their lack of knowledge in grammar. These weaknesses surely had a negative impact on the originality of the students' composition and in giving good arguments as well.

Finally, it is important to say here that the progress of the students' achievement in reading comprehension, occurred as expected, may be caused by the reading passages given to them which were based on their level (Level 11). If the students were supplied with the passages far below their capacity level, it would take them less time to do the task but it did not guarantee that they could comprehend the reading passages. The same is true if the reading level was beyond the students' capacity (above their grade level), they would find the passages more difficult to comprehend especially when those materials are not of their interest. Sometimes, interesting materials (based on their interest) also could make a difference in students' comprehension (note: in this study these were not measured) and extra time may probably be needed. Therefore, the right level of materials is in line with Meyer's (1998) finding which showed us that the more appropriate the students' reading level with the materials, the easiest for the students to understand the text.

Table 1. Summary Statistics of Stepwise Regression Analyses of Reading Comprehension Achievement and Writing Achievement

Model	Reading Comprehension Achievement	R	R^2	R^2 d	F	Sig.
1	Sequence	.636[a]	.404	.404	12.210	.003
2	Sequence, Detail	.749[b]	.561	.157	6.071	.025
3	Sequence, Detail, Cause and Effect	.831[c]	.691	.130	6.752	.019
4	Sequence, Detail, Cause and Effect, Inference	.904[d]	.817	.126	10.360	.006

5	Sequence, Detail, Cause and Effect, Inference, Vocabulary	.958[e]	.917	.100	16.872	.001
6	Sequence, Detail, Cause and Effect, Inference, Vocabulary, Main Idea	.996[f]	.992	.075	126.457	.000

Model	**Writing Achievement**	**R**	**R^2**	R^2d	**F**	**Sig.**
1	Organization	.687[a]	.472	.472	16.114	.001
2	Organization, Argument	.805[b]	.648	.176	8.511	.010
3	Organization, Argument, Support	.899[c]	.807	15.9	13.224	.002
4	Organization, Argument, Support, Content of Knowledge	.934[d]	.872	.064	7.517	.015

CONCLUSIONS

Three conclusions are drawn in this study. First, students made a progress in reading comprehension and writing achievements due to the application of the principles of Whole Language Approach during the process of teaching and learning activities. Second, the contribution of Whole Language Approach to the aspects of reading and writing may be caused by activities which often or rarely done during the research. Third, giving appropriate reading passages based on students' grade reading level before writing activities could make it easier for the students to understand the texts, therefore, have a positive impact on their achievement in both reading and writing.

Based on the result of the research on the use of the Whole Language Approach in the teaching of reading and writing, the writer offers some suggestions for EFL classroom teaching. First, the student's achievement is depending on how creative the teachers of English in managing their class. They should know at least various approaches that may be appropriate to their students. One of the plausible approaches is Whole Language Approach, especially in teaching reading and writing. To use this approach effectively, the teachers of English should consider appropriate materials based on students' level of reading and their own interests. Second, it is also suggested that further researchers do similar study but focusing more on vocabulary development and the use of them, as much as possible in their writing. Third, the teachers are suggested to teach balance reading and writing.

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