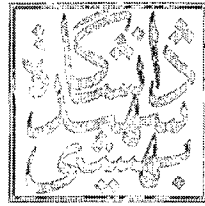


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IN THE NAME OF GOD



SHAHID BEHESHTI UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY OF LETTERS AND HUMANITIES  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

**The Role of Collaborative Strategic Reading in  
the Improvement of Reading Comprehension  
Ability of Iranian Pre-University Students**

By  
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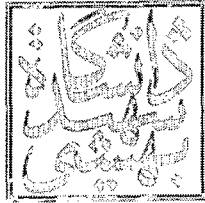
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## **Abstract**

In order to meet the reading needs of the students, educators are pressed to develop effective instructional means for teaching reading comprehension and reading strategy use. This study was conducted to investigate the effect of a reading strategy, which is called Collaborative Strategic Reading, on the improvement of reading comprehension ability of Pre-University students in Iran. Collaborative Strategic Reading is a combination of cooperative learning, which is a learning strategy, and four reading strategies. The following four reading comprehension strategies are taught through Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR): previewing and predicting (Preview), monitoring for understanding and vocabulary knowledge (Click and Clunk), main idea (Get the Gist), and self-questioning and passage understanding (wrap-up).

A sample of 54 male students with an average age of 17 was selected and equally divided into an experimental and a control group. The control group received no treatment while the experimental group read the passages through Collaborative Strategic Reading. At the end of the study, it was observed that the difference between the results of the pretest and posttest in the experimental group was significant enough to prove that CSR had an impact on reading comprehension. However, regarding the primacy of CSR over the traditional model of reading comprehension teaching, the mean difference was not big enough to show a statistical beneficial effect for CSR on reading comprehension. However, the results showed an inclination toward the effectiveness of Collaborative Strategic Reading.

**Key terms:** Collaborative Strategic Reading, Cooperative learning, Learning strategies, Reading strategies.

*Dedicated to my parents,*

*My wife &*

*My daughter*

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**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

## 1.1 Introduction

Learning how to read in a second or foreign language is a priority for millions of learners around the world. According to Farhady (1998), because of the rapid explosion in the world of science and technology, reading in English has received priority among other objectives of English Language Teaching (ELT). Reading is a receptive skill in that the reader receives a message from a writer. Recent researchers in reading describe reading in a way that implies an active reader using his background knowledge to recreate the writer's intended meaning. Perfetti (1984:40-41), for example, defines reading as "thinking guided by print." In fact, "the student is engaging in complex interactive processes that are dependent on multiple sub-skills and an enormous amount of coded information" (Mc Laughlin, 1987:59).

The importance of reading is quite clear to everybody; however, there has been much dispute over the question of the reading process (Farhady, 1998). Reading is viewed as a process of interaction between the reader's knowledge and the text (Alptekin, 2006). According to Chastain (1998, p.217), reading involves comprehension. Learners' activity is not considered as reading unless they comprehend. Reading comprehension has come to be the "essence of reading" (Durkin, 1993). Reading is a complex process which involves a variety of skills. It is a gradual, developmental, time-consuming process (there are no short cuts!). Therefore, using strategies during the process of reading is crucial (Harvey, 2005). Recent researchers consider three approaches to reading, namely: a) bottom-up processing in which we build up meaning from the black marks on the page; b) top-down processing in which we draw on our own intelligence and experience - based on the

schemata we have acquired – to understand the text; c) interactive processing in which we use both textual decoding and background knowledge interactively (Carrell, 1991; Grabe, 1997; Nuttall, 1996).

Recent researchers have emphasized the role of learners, and learning strategies in effective learning. Since the use of strategies has been considered to be one of the important factors for successful language learning, strategy instruction through various methods has been implemented in many countries (Dreyer and Nel, 2003; Oxford et al., 1990).

In practice, however, the conventional approaches to the teaching of reading, in which students are asked to review the relevant vocabulary, read the text, and answer the comprehension questions, is not effective (Farrell, 2001). The reason might be that when we require students to "read the passage and answer the questions that follow", in fact, we are not teaching them reading but rather testing their ability to comprehend a passage. To break the current cycle, some scholars (Carrell, 1998; Klingner & Vaughn, 2000) in reading pedagogy have proposed reading strategy instruction.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Based on the researcher's experience of teaching students reading, lack of comprehension can mostly be attributed to unfamiliarity with efficient reading strategies. When students are pressed to read, they often select ineffective and inefficient strategies with little strategic intent. Often this is due to their low level of reading strategy knowledge and lack of meta-cognitive control (Dreyer, 1998). Unfortunately, there is little sufficient and efficient instruction in this regard. Reading comprehension instruction is simply limited to the assignment of a reading passage, accompanied by a number of short or multiple-choice questions relating to the passage (Dreyer and Nel, 2003). Comprehension strategy instruction is based on the

idea that even students with poor comprehension ability can successfully be taught to apply the strategies used by good readers (Farrell, 2001; O'Malley et al., 1990; Oxford, 1990). It is claimed that when poor readers learn to apply these strategies, their reading comprehension improves (Farrell, 2001).

Nowadays group work in every aspect of life, especially in education, has received much attention. When carefully planned and executed, cooperative learning can lead to a more dynamic classroom interaction that can promote learning. Pair and small group activities that involve interaction between learners are often used in second language (L2) classrooms for both theoretical and pedagogical reasons (McDonough, 2004). Pair and small group activities provide learners with more time to speak the target language than teacher-fronted activities. Moreover, they promote learner autonomy and self-directed learning, and give instructors opportunities to work with individual learners (Brown, 2001; Crookes and Chaudron, 2001; Harmer, 2001). In addition, learners may feel less anxious and more confident when interacting with peers during pair or small group activities than during whole-class discussions (Brown, 2001; Davis, 1997).

Cooperation is a kind of socio-affective strategy which is defined as working with one or more peers to obtain feedback, pool information, or model a language activity (O'Malley et al., 1985: 582-584). In second and foreign language learning, theorists propose several advantages for cooperative learning: increased student talk, more varied talk, a more relaxed atmosphere, greater motivation, more negotiation of meaning, and increased amounts of comprehensible input.

In a group work reading (cooperative), much of the guidance comes from fellow students. The effort to understand the text is made jointly; that is, individual efforts are pooled and discussed in the hope of arriving together at the best interpretation.

There are some advantages in this process. Motivation is generally high, provided that the tasks are challenging and conducive to promoting discussion. Individuals participate more actively, partly because it is less threatening than expressing ideas in front of the whole class and partly because it is more obvious that everyone's contribution counts. And the discussion helps students see how to read thoughtfully (Nuttall, 1996).

Furthermore, research in second language reading suggests that reading strategies can be taught to students, and when taught, strategies help improve students' performance on tests of comprehension and recall (Carrell, 1985; Carrell, Pharis, and Liberto, 1989). One of these practical strategy training techniques is Collaborative /Cooperative strategic Reading (CSR). In CSR, proposed by Klingner and Vaughn (2000), certain reading strategies are taught and practiced through peer cooperation and collaboration.

Although reading is the most widely used skill in our country, few students can benefit from it as well as they should.

It is assumed that by using CSR instead of conventional ways of reading, one can enhance students' reading comprehension ability.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

Most of the English language learners, particularly in an EFL situation like Iran, consider language learning equal to being able to read in English. There is a generally accepted reality among first and second language reading researchers and practitioners that students who must study in a second or foreign language are almost always at a disadvantage, particularly in the areas of reading and writing (Mokhtari and Reichard, 2004). Since the researcher has been teaching English for seven years, he has observed that students are not equipped with efficient reading strategies. Some

of them memorize vocabularies to be able to read better. But still they can not understand the passage clearly. In order to help students be effective readers in a second language, teachers need to be aware of reading strategies that contribute to effective reading (Pani, 2004). Teaching students reading strategies can help them understand better what they read.

Language learning strategies have received a great deal of attention from both researchers and language teaching professionals in the past two decades (Woodrow, 2005). Strategies to improve reading are diverse. Since nowadays group work is emphasized, it is hypothesized that collaborative strategic reading is one of the best strategies to promote reading.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Does CSR have an effect on promoting students' reading comprehension ability?
2. Is there any difference between CSR and conventional ways of reading in terms of their effect on reading comprehension?

#### **1.5 Research Hypotheses**

In order to answer the aforementioned questions, the following two null hypotheses were made.

1. CSR does not have any effect in promoting students' reading comprehension ability.
2. There is not any difference between CSR and conventional ways of reading in terms of their effect on reading comprehension.

## 1.6 Definition of Key terms

**Strategies:** are those specific “attacks” that we make on a given problem (Brown, 1994).

**Learning strategies:** Oxford (2001) defines learning strategies as “specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills.

**Reading strategies:** are ways of assessing text meaning which are employed flexibly and selectively in the course of reading. In teaching, attention is paid to the manner in which the reader is able to draw effectively on existing linguistic and background knowledge (Carter and Nunan, 2001).

**Strategy Training / Learner Training:** is training in the use of learning strategies in order to improve learners’ effectiveness (Richards and Platt and Platt, 1992).

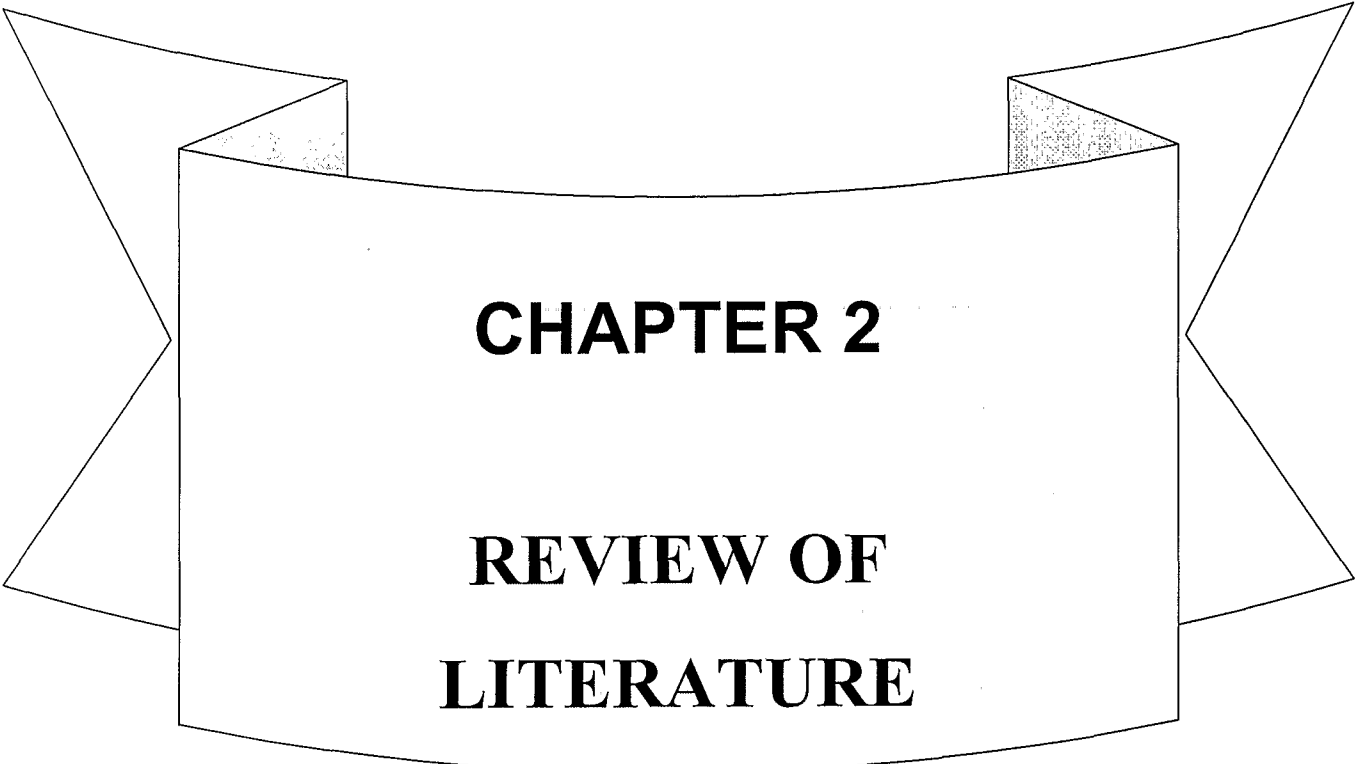
**Cooperative learning/Collaborative learning:** an approach to teaching and learning in which classrooms are organized so that students work together in small cooperative teams (Richards, Platt and Platt, 1992).

## 1.7 Limitation of the study

This study was conducted with 54 students which were divided into two classes in a pre-university center. If it had been done with more classes, better results would have been gained. Another limitation of this study was that all the participants were male. If the researcher could carry out the study with a combination of male and female students, he might get different results. And finally, the most important limitation was that Iranian students are normally not used to doing group work.



Accepting group work as an essential part in education leads to getting better results in implementing Collaborative Strategic Reading.



**CHAPTER 2**

**REVIEW OF**

**LITERATURE**

## 2.1 Background

It is generally recognized that academic success depends more on reading than other skills, since most of the scientific and technical writings are published in English.

Reading is a skill highly valued by both students and teachers alike. An enormous amount of time, money, and effort is spent on teaching reading in elementary and secondary schools around the world. In fact, it is probably true to say that more time is spent on teaching reading than any other skill (Nunan, 1999). The ability to read in a foreign language is all that students want to acquire. Reading for comprehension is the primary purpose for reading (Grabe, 2002).

The predominant approach to reading until the late 1960s was “bottom-up” model. In bottom-up processing, the reader builds up a meaning from the black marks on the page: recognizing letters and words, working out sentence structure. We can make conscious use of it when an initial reading leaves us confused (Nuttal, 1996). The bottom-up approach views reading as a process of decoding written symbols into their aural equivalents in a linear fashion (Nunan, 1999). Wallace (2001:21) states that the term bottom-up has been used for approaches to reading which emphasize text-based features at word and sentence level. Data-driven is another term used for bottom-up approach.

Through the late 1960s the psycholinguistic or “top-down” approach to reading became the dominant model. In top-down processing, we draw on our own intelligence and experience - the predictions we can make, based on the schemata we have acquired - to understand the text. We make conscious use of it when we try to

see the overall purpose of the text, or get a rough idea of the pattern of the writer's argument, in order to make a reasoned guess at the next step (Nuttal,1996). According to Nunan (1999:253), in top-down or psycholinguistic approach, one begins with a set of hypotheses or predictions about the meaning of the text one is about to read, and then selectively samples the text to determine whether or not one's predictions are correct. Conceptually-driven is another term for top-down processing. In order to make much better benefit from the reading, the readers use both top-down and bottom-up processes simultaneously. Using top-down and bottom-up strategies, readers use pre-reading information to make some predictions about the text. Using bottom-up strategies, readers start by processing information at the sentence level. As they process the information that each new sentence gives them, they check to see if and how that information fits, again using both bottom-up and top-down strategies (Aebersold and Field, 1998). This model is called interactive reading.

Although reading has received special focus in the realm of language teaching, most foreign language learners are not aware and able to use practical reading strategies to comprehend a passage as they should. Reading is a gradual, developmental, time-consuming process (there are no short cuts!). Hence, using suitable strategy is crucial (Harvey, 2005).

Research on second language reading has also provided a number of insights for development and instruction. A critical component for comprehension is the ability to use them and in what combinations, depending on different reading purposes and task (Grabe, 2002). Research has also shown that learners can be instructed to use appropriate reading strategies to help them improve comprehension and recall (Carrell, 1985; Pharis, and Liberto, 1989).