

Effectiveness of Collaborative Strategic Reading Instruction for Tertiary level English as a Second Language (ESL) learners

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Abstract: In the process of language learning, Reading is considered a fundamental skill as it is the only means of access to written documents in a language (Alderson, 2000). With sound proficiency in reading, learners, especially at tertiary level, can achieve their academic and professional goals. This study was carried out in order to investigate the effectiveness of Collaborative Strategic Reading Instruction Approach (CSR) which is a learner centered reading approach closely related to cooperative learning theory (Klingner and Vaughn, 1996; 1998; 2000). The informants of the study were 67 lower intermediate level undergraduates from the University of Peradeniya. Data was collected through the mixed method approach. The qualitative data of the experiment demonstrated that collaborative work during the reading activities lead the learners to learn and think significantly more and better. However, the statistical analysis did not prove this method as a better method than the traditional teaching method. Thus, pedagogical implications for English instruction at university level in Sri Lanka and suggestions for future research based on the findings to further validate the impact and effectiveness of collaborative learning are proposed.

Keywords: Preferred Learning Style, Collaborative Learning, Collaborative Strategic Reading

1. INTRODUCTION

Collaborative learning or small group discussions is an effective means of language learning in which learners work together to achieve a common goal; thus, each member tries to contribute and hold responsibility in achieving that goal (Colbeck et al., 2000). This approach enables learners to work in small groups in order to accomplish their goals. The success of the approach broadly depends on the commitment of the learners to collaborate with the team mates (Smith & MacGregor, 1992). Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) is a learner-centered comprehension strategic instructional approach which aims to develop reading comprehension of learners through the amalgamation of strategic reading and cooperative learning (Klingner & Vaughn, 1996; Klingner & Vaughn, 1998; Klingner & Vaughn, 2000). This approach helps fostering learner autonomy and positive interdependence which are identified as prime aims of the approach (Little, 1991).

This study was carried out to study several important aspects of the CSR approach in the Sri Lankan context. The study

aimed to measure the effectiveness of the CSR approach over the traditional teacher centered classroom approach in improving academic reading skills of lower intermediate level undergraduate learners in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the perceptions of learners regarding the approach and employing of strategies were also examined in this study.

Based on the above objectives following research questions were formed.

1. Is Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) instructional approach more effective than traditional teacher-led reading lessons in improving academic reading skills of lower intermediate undergraduate learners of Sri Lanka?
 - 1.1. Does CSR improve the academic reading skill of identifying the main idea?
 - 1.2. Does CSR improve the academic reading skill of identifying the supporting details?
 - 1.3. Does CSR improve the academic reading skill of overcoming vocabulary obstacles?
 - 1.4. Does CSR improve the academic reading skill of activating prior knowledge?
 - 1.5. Does CSR improve the academic reading skill of making inferences?
2. What are the adult ESP learners' perceptions of CSR?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) instructional approach is a learner centered reading approach. It is mainly based on strategic reading instruction theory and cooperative learning theory. Cooperative learning or small group discussions is claimed to be an effective means of language learning. It is theoretically based on cognitive developmental theory of Vygotsky, behavioral theory and social interdependence theory.

The cognitive developmental perspective mainly stands on the theories of Vygotsky (1896-1934) and Piaget (1896- 1980). According to Vygotsky, students learn from a person who is more skilled and peers whereas Piaget believed that when children have discussions with other children, advancement in thinking occurs (Piaget, 1995). Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1962) also has contributed to this perspective.

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