

## Investigating Iranian Students' Attitude toward Using Collaborative Strategic Reading in their Reading Course

Maedeh Karimabadi <sup>1,\*</sup>, Fatemeh Khonamri <sup>2</sup>, Omid Mahdavi <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Islamic Azad University, Ayatollah Amoli Branch, Department of Science and Research, Amol, Iran

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor of the Department of English Language and Literature, University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Iran

<sup>3</sup>English Language Department, Parsa Institute of Higher Education, Babolsar, Iran

---

**Abstract:** This study aimed at investigating Iranian first-year university students' attitudes towards a specific type of cooperative learning. Thirty four students majoring in English literature at the University of Mazandaran participated in this study. The whole class was then taught how to use Collaborative Strategic Reading. Students whose reading and achievement levels were not the same worked together in small, cooperative groups to help each other in applying four reading strategies that would facilitate their comprehension of the covered texts. The instruction and class activities lasted for 10 sessions, and every session took 90 minutes. An attitude Questionnaire followed by a semi-structured interview were administered to the targeted group in order to find their attitude and feedback toward this type of cooperative learning. The result obtained from the questionnaire and interview indicated that students had a positive attitude and perception toward CSR.

**Key words:** *Collaborative Strategic reading; Attitude; Reading comprehension*

---

### 1. Introduction

During the past few years, there has been a considerable attention toward attitude from second language researchers. Most of the researchers believe that student's attitude is an inseparable part of learning and it should, therefore, be considered as an important part of second language learning pedagogy. Brown (2000) defines attitude as "a set of personal feeling, opinions, or biases about races, culture, ethnic group, classes of people, and languages" (p, 377). He explains that attitudes, just like cognitive and affective developments in human beings, start to develop from childhood and are affected by our contact with our parents, peers or other people we meet in our life.

Gargner (1985) considers attitude as a sub-part of motivation in language learning. According to him "motivation refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language" (p.33, as cited in Tamimi& Shib, 2009).

Regarding to importance of the attitude in language learning, Brown (2000) also claims that second language learners benefit from positive attitude while negative attitudes lead to decreased motivation, decreased input and finally unsuccessful attainment of proficiency. Attitude as a social psychological variable plays a key role in second language learning. In order for students to become an effective reader they should have both the skill and willingness. Students can be highly motivated by interesting activities. Teachers should provide

suitable learning atmosphere to increase learning motivation in order for students to find reading classes interesting.

Cooter & Alexander (1985) define reading attitude as students' feeling toward reading which result in approaching or avoiding reading (cited in Clark & De Zoysa, 2011). Many studies have shown that motivated readers feel good about themselves as a reader and quite contrary, struggling readers find themselves responsible for their reading difficulties (Seitz, 2010). In the same vain, Wigfield & Guthrie (1997)

explained that:

"Reading attitudes affect motivation because reading attitudes lead students to either read a text (positive reading attitude) or resist reading a text (negative reading attitude). Students with positive reading attitudes, in turn, read more, achieve higher reading skills, and thus often score higher on assessments. Positive attitudes also increase the amount students read and the range of reading" (p. 5 as cited in Ive, 2010). However, the development of positive reading attitudes is often overlooked in EFL context. Teachers should apply some strategies to promote positive attitudes in students. Readers with negative attitude usually read less and find reading boring. Those with positive attitude then usually read more and find reading an interesting experience. Gottfried (1990) showed that reading comprehension positively correlated with high motivation for reading.

There are many studies which have tried to examine some variables to increase students' attitude toward reading and second language learning. For example, Çelik (2010) claimed, that

---

\* Corresponding Author.

task- based instruction and content- based instruction are two methods which can increase interest and motivation in learners. Brantmeier (2006) considered five important factors which can induce a positive feeling toward reading which are writing in a cohesive manner, having ample prior knowledge on the topic, engaging in what they read, recalling what they read, and having a strong feeling for what they read.

In a study by Ives (2010), he found that if he creates motivational classrooms he can motivate student to read. He changed his style of teaching and concentrated on five critical components of reading motivation. In other words, he focused more on developing learners' self-efficacy, making them autonomous learners, teaching goal orientation, and creating social motivation.

During the past few years, an indispensable amount of research has been done on strategy instruction amongst which Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) proposed by Klingner and Vaughn (1998) has captured the attention of educators in different research studies. In collaborative strategic reading learners are divided into small groups and try to use strategic reading abilities collaboratively. Klingner and Vaughn (1999) define CSR as a practice in which "students of mixed reading and achievement levels work in small, cooperative groups to assist one another in applying four reading strategies to facilitate their comprehension of content area text" ( p,739). Fan (2009) describes Collaborative Strategic Reading as a reading approach "theorizing that learners' strategic reading comprehension can be enhanced by teaching them a repertoire of comprehension strategies through collaborative peer-led discussions" (p. 6).

There are four reading strategies in CSR including preview, click and clunk, get the gist and warp up. In preview, students' background knowledge is activated. In Click and clunk, students check their understating of the concepts and words they encounter. In get the gist, students try to find the main idea of the text. And finally, in warp up, students should apply some metacognitive strategies, (Zainolabidin, 2012). In CSR there are some special roles, and all the members of the group have the opportunity to try out all the roles. These roles according to Klingner et al (?) include: 1. Leader: the role of the leader is to guide the group in implementing CSR .2 clunk expert: the role of clunk expert is to use clunk cards to make the group aware of the steps to fallow when trying out to figure out difficult words or concept.3. Gist expert: the role of the gist expert is to guide the group to find out the main idea rather than unnecessary details.4. Announcer: announcer should make sure every member participated in the activity. 5. Encourager: the encourager tries to encourage members to participate in discussion and also he or she gives feed back to members' behaviors and tries to praise them.6. Time keeper: the role of the time keeper is to take time in every stage of CSR (cited in Novita, 2012).

In Iranian educational setting, teachers hardly apply the necessary strategies to increase students' motivation toward reading and generally students engage in reading through some cliché practices such as: multiple questions, synonym or antonym and reading classes are difficult and unpleasant for them. Thus it is not odd if Iranian students don't have positive attitudes to the reading skill.

In general, findings of previous research revealed that cooperative learning increases motivation in students especially in second language learning situations ( Liang , 2002 ; Haung , 2004; Hsu , 2010; Farzaneh & Nejadansari , 2014) Thus, language teachers should create the situation for language learners to increase their positive attitude. Considering the above mentioned points, and regarding the findings of the existing literature about the lack of positive attitude toward reading in Iranian students, it seems necessary to provide a suitable environment for enhancing positive attitude toward reading in our educational setting. To this end, in this study, collaborative strategic reading was employed as a reading strategy instruction to help us investigate whether CSR as a classroom technique can increase positive attitude toward reading in the students or not.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participants

Thirty four students who majored in English literature at the department of English at the University of Mazandaran participated in this study. Their age range was 18 to 21 and all spoke Persian as their first language. They had passed one reading course the previous term which was taught in the traditional method of reading instruction. Their reading skill and language proficiency varied according to the results of a TOEFL test. In fact, about 60% were intermediate and the rest were mostly pre-intermediate with some 4% advanced level English learners. Students were randomly assigned to small groups of four so that students with mixed reading and achievement levels could help each other in using the four reading strategies to facilitate their comprehension of the covered texts.

### 2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

In order to understand the attitude of students toward collaborative strategic reading , two data collection tools (questionnaire and semi-structured interview) were used to make the results more reliable. Both tools were used to obtain more comprehensive information from the learners and the intention of both of them was to examine students 'attitude toward CSR. The data in this study was collected and analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. In the quantitative phase, the questionnaire related to learners' attitude toward

reading was analyzed by frequency count. Regarding qualitative data, the interview results on learners' feedback on CSR was analyzed carefully.

### 2.3 Instruments

The instruments in this study composed of, English proficiency TOEFL test to all the participants, a questionnaire of student's attitude toward Collaborative Strategic Reading, and also a semi-structured interview on student's perception and attitude toward CSR instruction. They were conducted before and after the study.

### 2.4 Procedure

Students were randomly divided into several small groups with 4 or 5 members with every member taking a particular role which would change every session. First the teacher started with previewing which was the first stage in CSR, and through brainstorming and asking questions, she tried to prepare the students for the activity. The purpose behind the first stage was to help the learners to activate their prior knowledge on the topic and assist them in making predictions about what they were supposed to read. Thus, students talked to the whole class about their ideas and their experience on the topic. After that students sat and engaged in silent reading of the text on their own for a while. Then the leader of the group was asked to read the text aloud to draw all the group members' attention to the silently read text again. After that the group members were asked to engage in discussions and to collaboratively reflect on the covered text. This was the beginning of the second strategy in CSR, i.e. Click and Clunk as a fix up strategy for finding and discussing the complicated words, sentences or ideas. At this point, it was the clunk experts' duty to present any complexity they had found in the text and share them with other group members and receive feedback from them. Later, they were asked to share their knowledge with the whole class.

The teacher was mostly a facilitator and tried hard to check on each group and guide or direct them if necessary. The third type of activity was finding and discussing the gist through which the gist experts presented the main ideas that they had found and the message that they thought the author tried to get across. The role of the encourager was somehow modified in this study as he/she was encouraged to note down the discussed issues in the group and report it to the teacher in a written form later.

After the 10th session, the teacher administered the attitude questionnaire and the semi-structured interview to investigate students' willingness and their attitude toward the process. The questionnaire consisted of 10 items and after the study was over, the frequency of each item was calculated by the researchers. The Questionnaire adopted Likert's scale and students marked on the blank from 1 to 5 to express the level of their agreements or

disagreement to each question. (1=strongly agree, 2= agree, 3= no comment, 4= disagree, 5= strongly disagree (see Appendix A).

The interview consisted of four open ended question designed to elicit information regarding their perception of CSR. Students talked about the negative and positive points of the CSR. In addition, they described their feelings and their attitudes toward group work in general. Students' opinions were recorded during the interview and transcribed later (see Appendix B).

### 3. Results

In this section the student's responses to the questionnaire were analyzed to find out the attitude of students toward critical reading in the experimental group. Ten 5- Likert-scale questions were administered to investigate the attitude of students toward CSR and after the instruction of CSR. The results were analyzed through frequency count and then were converted to percentage. The frequency and percentage of each alternative are explained in following the paragraphs;

In the first item, "I get the main idea of the text more comprehensively in collaboration with others." In total, most of the students (45%) agreed that they can get the main idea better in collaboration with others.

In the second item, "I can understand author's purpose better through group work activity", in total, only 40 % of the students had a positive attitude toward group activity (15% strongly agree, 25% agree).

In the third question, "Reading classes are more interesting to me because of collaborative reading". In general, 60% of the learners (20% strongly agree, 40% agree) believed that the reading class was interesting for them during CSR.

In the fourth question, "I feel more confident to read when I use collaborative strategic reading", 5% of students chose strongly agree, 40% percent of the students agreed, 40 % of the learner had no comment and 15 % of the students disagreed. According to the percentages students had neutral attitude to this question.

In the fifth question, "I know exactly what I'm expected to do when I am reading through CSR" in total 65% (20% strongly agree and 45% agree) of the students had a positive attitude to this question. In the sixth question, "I have learned to criticize author's idea through applying CSR" 65% of the students had a positive attitude toward criticizing the author's idea in CSR.

In the eighth question, "I can now better examine and draw conclusions through CSR", according to the percentages, most of the students had no comment on this question.

In the ninth question "CSR has taught me to evaluate the details of the text all the time". In general most of the learners (75%) believed that they could evaluate the details in CSR class. In tenth question, "CSR has helped me to relate the text to my

background experience; most of the learners (55%) said they could relate the information to their background knowledge. The frequency and

percentage of each alternative are illustrated in table 1.

**Table 1:** Attitude questionnaire

	Strongly agree = 25% Disagree = 15 %	Agree=45%	No comment =10 % Strongly disagree =10%
1. I get the main idea of the text more comprehensively in collaboration with others.			
2. I can understand author's purpose better through group work activity.	SA = 15 %	A=25%	NC=30% DA=25 SD=5%
3. Reading classes are more interesting to me because of collaborative reading.	SA = 20%	A= 40%	NC= 25% DA= 5% SD=10%
4. I feel more confident to read when I use collaborative strategic reading	SA =5%	A= 40%	NC= 40% DA= 15% SD=0%
5. I know exactly what I'm expected to do when I am reading through CSR.	SA = 20%	A=45%	NC= 20% DA= 5% SD=10%
6. I have learned to criticize author's idea through applying CSR.	SA = 20%	A= 45%	NC=25% DA= 10% SD=0%
7. I have learned to go beyond sentence level understanding through collaboration.	SA =25 %	A= 35%	NC=15% DA=20 % SD=5 %
8. I can now better examine and draw conclusions through CSR.	SA =25%	A= 10 %	NC=45% DA= 20% SD=0%
9. CSR has taught me to evaluate the details of the text all the time.	SA = 15%	A= 40%	NC= 35% DA= 10% SD=0%
10. CSR has helped me to relate the text to my background experience.	SA = 15%	A=40%	NC= 40% DA= 5% SD=0%

The semi-structured group interview which concentrated on four main questions regarding the students' perception of CSR was conducted. After 10 sessions of CSR instruction, the interview was conducted with all the group members. The teacher raised the questions and asked each group to verbalize their ideas and sometimes a series of related questions were asked to ensure that the first question was adequately answered.

During the process of interviewing, the content was recorded and transcribed afterwards. The student's perspective toward implementation of CSR instruction is detailed in next parts.

The main focus was on the following 4 aspects : (1) students feedback on CSR in comparison to ordinary reading classes (2) the advantages of the CSR instruction (3) disadvantage of the CSR instruction, and (4) the improvement of their understanding through the CSR instruction .The details are discussed as follows:

1. How do you compare CSR with your traditional reading classes?

Two of the students (S1, S2) mentioned that CSR is interesting and enjoyable for them. (S1) believed that she could express her ideas better during CSR. (S2) stated that she can look at the details better. (S3) stated that "now by CSR we know what we should do in the text, because the responsibility and the strategies were clear". (S4) and (S5) believed that they learned to read critically and pay attention to text in a different way during CSR. (S4) mentioned before they used to read the text and translate it, but in CSR by finding and scrutinizing the author's idea, discussing and finding the clunks they were able to comprehend the text in a better way. (S5) stated that CSR helped them to have critical eyes in reading.

2. What are CSR's points of strength? Two of the students (S1, S3) mentioned, group discussion was

interesting for them. (S1) believed that they could use group members' knowledge for better comprehending the text. She believed it was like putting the pieces of a puzzle together with every member assisting in his or her own ways. (S2) stated that in CSR they learned to read the text more carefully and instead of wasting their time in reading all the unnecessary details, they learned to look for the gist and discuss its main message with the others. And also (S4) mentioned "CSR is efficient and I learned I shouldn't take everything the text says as the truth and I am allowed to challenge the ideas put forth by the author as long as I can prove it." (S5) stated that by implementing CSR she progressed in writing as well because she detected the text carefully and spend some considerable amount of time on reading and rereading which provided a good model for writing, too.

3. What are CSR's weaknesses? All the four students (S1, S2, S3, and S4) had some problems with the nature of group work. (S1) did not like group work and felt more comfortable with individual activities. (S2) was unsatisfied with the irresponsibility of some group members. Some group members, as she said, were only passive participants and relied heavily on other members' works. (S3) preferred to do the stages in CSR individually. (S4) believed that they couldn't adapt themselves to group activities because the educational system, in which they have been trained, followed traditional methodologies and did not encourage any critical analysis of content.

4. Did CSR help your better understand the texts you were reading? (S1) mentioned that in CSR they tried to read more responsibly and were encouraged to criticize the author' ideas and didn't accept everything. (S2) stated that get the gist and click and clunk stages were two important stages that helped

them pay more attention to details and don't let go of the text so easily. (S3) mentioned that it helped them use this way of reading in their other courses in literature. (S4) believed that CSR guided her to detect the text carefully, and express her ideas better.

#### 4. Discussion

The study attempted to examine students' attitude toward a collaborative approach to teaching reading. Thus an attitude questionnaire along with a semi-structured interview was administered to investigate what students thought about CSR as a new activity in their reading class. Brown (2000) asserts that having a positive attitude can enhance students' motivation, and can lead to higher proficiency achievement as well. He further adds that reduced anxiety is positively correlated with group work and learners are found to have enhanced positive attitudes towards reading. The result of the questionnaire showcased more positive attitudes toward reading which was the result of using CSR as a novel way of teaching reading. Failure in understanding is an important factor in providing negative attitude in students. Findings illustrated that learners showed more willingness to read and had learned to clearly understand the purpose of the author during group work activity. As the results of the interview revealed most of the learners believed that this class had guided them to pay more careful attention to the details.

The findings of this study are consistent with some results obtained in studies on CSR in the literature. For instance, Huang's (2004) research examined the effect of inquiry-based pedagogy via CSR instruction on 42 Taiwanese students, the results of which showed that students in the experimental group outperformed the control group as a result of the instruction in CSR. They reported that CSR can be considered as a useful approach for enhancing learner autonomy and improved social skills. In another study, Liang (2002) studied how using cooperative learning would affect EFL junior high school learners' language learning and motivation for learning English as a foreign language. Results of the study indicated cooperative learning could be considered as a useful way of promoting students' motivation for learning English.

The analysis of the interview also showed students' perception of CSR was a positive one and they regarded this experience totally different from other experiences they had in their previous classes. A good number of students also expressed that CSR had helped them to become critical readers and they were really willing to continue with CSR.

An analysis of student interviews provided an important insight on what attributes of CSR were perceived as helpful or as not helpful by students. In total the CSR class was a new experience for them, and they found it interesting and exciting. Students identified "click and clunk" and "get the gist" as two important stages that were helpful for getting the

message of the text more easily. Jean Piaget and Vygotsky in Richard and Rodger (2001) have highlighted the important role of interaction in learning and convey that cooperative learning plays an indispensable role in deeper understanding. The present study also indicated that students found CSR helpful in facilitating their comprehension, critical thinking, and responding and discussing the message and accordingly creating the desire to read more seriously than before.

The positive features of CSR reported by the students included: they stated they can use their group members' knowledge to grasp the message better especially when they lacked some themselves; they found CSR efficient and applicable; they also put forward that the CSR approach improved their other skills such as writing. Generally the students in the present study seemed to have a positive perception toward CSR practice and they found this approach efficient, enjoyable, applicable and interesting.

The findings of the interview are also in line with some previous studies in the literature. Fan (2010) studied the Taiwanese learners, and attempted to discover learners' perception of CSR after engaging in a group discussion. The result illuminated the point that students' feedback toward CSR was quite positive. Hsu's research (2010) on 60 elementary school children in Taiwan, also used a qualitative approach and through an interview on students' perception of CSR instruction indicated that students showed considerable degrees of liking for the approach.

#### 5. Pedagogical implications

In the current study some important findings were obtained, which could be useful for the teachers and students who would like to carry out the CSR instruction. The findings revealed that CSR instruction promoted students' attitude toward reading.

The pedagogical implications of this study are mainly for teachers and material designers. Numerous studies in the literature advocate the effect of attitudes on the success of language learning (Brantmeier, 2006; Clark & De Zoysa, 2011; Çelik, 2010; Ives, 2010). Seitz (2010), for example, found that motivated readers' attitude about themselves as a reader are positive while struggling readers blame themselves for the difficulties they encounter in reading. Liang's study (2002) indicated that, "a possible strategy to address to the problems of low English proficiency and low motivation in EFL teaching would be the implementation of cooperative learning because cooperative learning methods hold great promise for accelerating students' attainment of academic learning, motivation to learn, and the development of the knowledge and abilities necessary for thriving in an ever-changing world" (p.153)

CSR can enable students to learn a collection of definite reading strategies through group activity,

and assist the students in improving their better understanding, which in turn leads to development of positive attitudes towards reading in a foreign language. Consequently, it seems useful if teachers apply reading strategies like the CSR Model and create the circumstances in which the students would develop positive attitudes toward reading.

## References

- Brown, D. H. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Brantmeier, C. (2006) .Toward a multicomponent model of interest and L2 reading: Sources of interest, perceived situational interest, and comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language*. 18(2). 89-115
- ÇELİK, M (2010). interest-based language teaching to increase motivation and output in turkey. Mu la University.
- Clark ,Ch ., Zoysa ,S. ( 2011) . Mapping the interrelationships of reading enjoyment attitudes, behaviour and attainment. *National Literacy Trust*.1-26.
- Fan ,y.c. (2009). *implementing collaborative strategic reading in EFL context in Taiwan* . unpublished ph. D .thesis, university of Liecester, UK.
- Fan ,y.c. (2010) The effect of comprehension strategy instruction on EFL learners' reading comprehension. *Asian Social Science*. 6 ( 8).19-29.
- Farzaneh,N. Nejadnasari, D (2014) .Students' attitude towards using cooperative learning for teaching reading comprehension. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 287-292
- Gottfried, A. E. (1990). Academic intrinsic motivation in young elementary school children.*Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82, 525-538.
- Huang, C.Y. (2004). *Think to win: An inquiry-based approach via Collaborative Strategic Reading technique to teach reading in a senior high EFL classroom* .Unpublished MA dissertation, National Taiwan Normal University,Tiwan.
- Hsu, Ch.Y.(2010) *.the effects of collaborative strategic reading on EFL students' reading comprehension and learning interest* . Unpublished MA thesis . National Yunlin University .Daulin , Ynlin, Taiwan,republic of China .
- Icmez, S. (2009). Motivation and critical reading in EFL classroom: A case of ELT preparatory students. *Journal of Theory and Practice in Education*, 5(2), 123-147.
- Ives , S (2010) To Read or not to Read: Motivating High School Seniors. *Mary's College of Maryland*. Jacobs, G. M., Lee, C, & Ng, M. (1997,). *Co-operative learning in the thinking classroom*. Paper presented at the International Conference on Thinking, Singapore.
- Klinger, J.K and Vaughn, S. (1988). Using CSR. Retrieved July 22nd 2013,
- Klingner, J.K., & Vaughn, S. (1999). Promoting reading comprehension, content learning, and English acquisition through collaborative strategic reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 52 , 7 , 738-747 .
- Liang, T.(2002) *Implementing cooperative learning in EFL teaching: process and effects*.
- Unpublished doctoral thesis. National Taiwan Normal University.
- Novita, D. (2012) the effectiveness of collaborative strategic reading(CSR) for teaching reading comprehension at muhammadiyah, *university of sidoarjo*.
- Seitz, I (2010). Student attitudes toward reading: a case study. *Journal of inquiry & action in education*, 3(2),30-44.
- Tamimi, A., Shuib, M. (2009). Motivation and attitudes towards learning English: a study of petroleum engineering undergraduates at hadhramout. **University of Sciences and Technology** .*GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*.9 (2) 29-50.
- Wigfield, A., & Guthrie, J.T. (1997). Relations of children's motivation for reading to the amount and breadth of their reading. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(3), 420-432.
- Zainol Abidin, M .J. (2012). Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) within Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies perspectives, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 2 No. 3; 193,195.