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**

I. 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 & Vaughn1998; 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.

CSR approach mainly focuses on teaching reading through strategies. Studies of good readers have identified a number of comprehension strategies. Previous studies on strategic reading have claimed that reading comprehension is best attained when students are actively engaged in seeking, organizing, reformulating information on their own words. (Pressley, 2002; Grabe, 2004). Further, according to Little (1991), CSR also aims to develop Learner Autonomy.

Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) Instruction Approach

Collaborative Strategic Reading approach combines strategic reading instruction with the cooperative learning approach. The basic expectations of the approach are to help learners improve their strategic reading ability and to take more responsibility for their own learning. CSR focuses on four strategies as follows;

Strategy	The skills the strategy aim to develop
Preview	A pre-reading strategy which mainly aims to trigger the background knowledge.
Click and Clunk	Click and clunk is a while reading strategy which is aimed at developing learners' vocabulary skills.
Get the Gist	A while reading strategy which aims to enhance learners' skill of identifying the main idea and supporting details.
Wrap Up	A post skill strategy in which students learn to *wrap up* by formulating questions and answers about what they have learned and by reviewing key ideas.

In the CSR process the students are assigned with 'roles' within their group.

Role	Task
Leader	leads the group
Clunk Expert	Assist the group in vocabulary difficulties
Announcer	This student calls on different group members to read or share an idea.
Encourager	This student watches the group and gives feedback.
Reporter	Reports to the class the main ideas the group learned
Time Keeper	Sets the timer for each portion of CSR

In order to assist the students, cue sheets, learning logs and clunk cards are employed as material. In the CSR approach the teacher plays a passive role during the lesson but provides ongoing assistance whenever it is required.

Research conducted on CSR have shown the effectiveness of this approach in improving reading competence of learners from different backgrounds. Studies conducted by Klingner and Vaughn (1998, 2000) using primary students identified significant gains in comparison to control group in reading comprehension. Another study conducted in a public university in East- Azerbaijan province of Iran employing 42 university freshmen observed the effectiveness of the approach Modified Collaborative Strategic Reading (MCSR) on adult learners (Zoghi et al., 2010). In another study, the effect of CSR on Taiwanese Engineering undergraduates in an EFL context was measured and effectiveness of the approach was reassured (Fan, 2009). A more recent study conducted by Ziyaeemehr (2012) using CSR confirmed the importance of teaching reading strategies in developing academic reading ability of the learners. In another study, conducted by Novita (2018), the effectiveness of the approach in an ESP context has been studied. The study has proved the effectiveness of approach in improving ESP skills.

Even though effects of CSR on different contexts have been widely investigated, to what extent the model would be effective with adult learners in a Sri Lankan ESL or English for Academic Purposes (ESP) classrooms has not been studied. Thus, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the CSR instructional approach for less proficient adult learners in a Sri Lankan ESP context.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out in the University of Peradeniya employing 67 lower intermediate level science based undergraduates. The study employed a mixed method design which incorporated both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods. Multiple instruments including Quasi-experiment, participant observation, questionnaire surveys and semi structured group interviews were used. A quasi-experiment differs from a true –experiment in the method of sampling; i.e. quasi-experiments, unlike in true experiments, non-random sampling is employed. In this study, quasi experiment was used in order to answer the first research question. The participants were chosen from two relatively homogeneous low achieving intact classes. The comparability of the two groups was guaranteed by a proficiency test which consisted of a cloze test with Flesch readability score of 50.4. A Pre-test, which is a test conducted prior to the intervention to test the current knowledge of the participants in the field intended to be improved and a post-test, which aims to test the level of improvement of the participant in the relevant field were conducted. Based on a standard IELTS passage, a set of multiple choice questions were deigned as the pre-test to test the existing knowledge of the learners on the strategies the approach intended to develop. The post-test was conducted under the same conditions. A questionnaire survey was also used as a quantitative instrument, whereas participant observations, group interviews were employed as qualitative instruments. In order to carry out the intervention, 10 IELTS standard reading passages with a readability scale of around 50 were selected. Before the intervention, the experimental group was given explicit explanations on how the CSR approach is carried out. The students were grouped accordingly and each student was assigned with a role. The students were given learning logs and cue sheets in order to record their work. The researcher assumed the role of the teacher in the experimental group. Another instructor with same qualifications was assigned as the teacher in the control group to carry out the same reading passages employing traditional teacher led method. The results of the Pre-test and the Post –test were analyzed using the software Minitab. After the intervention, the questionnaire was administered in order to gather data on ESP learners' perspectives on CSR. Researcher observations were also recorded. The group

interviews carried out at the end of the intervention were recorded to analyze.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to answer to the first main research question, data obtained from the pre-test and post-test were statistically analyzed. Wilcoxin signed rank test was carried out for both experimental and control groups. The results of the Wilcoxin signed rank test proved that both approaches have been significantly effective in order to develop reading skills (Table 1). However, the Mann –Whitney test proved that there is no statistical significance in the p values of the groups. Thus, it is proved that both approaches have been effective in developing academic reading skills of learners. In order to strengthen result of the main question, data related to sub research questions were also statistically analyzed. However, the results did not show any significant improvement in the experimental group over the control group.

The second research question was investigated employing the data gathered from the questionnaire survey, group interviews, participant observation sheets and student logs. The results of these analyses proved that learners had a positive perception regarding CSR and they were keen in employing strategies in reading (Figure 1 and 2).

V. CONCLUSIONS/ IMPLICATIONS

The statistical analysis did not prove that CSR is a better method of teaching reading for undergraduates. This could have been due to the short length of the intervention. Internalization of strategies may take time and thus, better results could have been achieved if the intervention had been carried out for a longer period.

When considering academic reading skills, even though statistical analysis did not prove a significant improvement in the experimental group, the results of the questionnaire survey and the group interviews proved that students have significantly gained knowledge on academic reading skills. However, the teachers themselves should be trained on strategic reading instruction in order to develop strategic reading skills of learners. Furthermore, it is important that the teachers as well as students understand the role of the teacher as the 'facilitator' so that students learn to take the responsibility of their own learning.

As recommendations, it is suggested to carry out another study employing a larger sample of students from different discipline and different proficiency levels. Employing multiple reading measures to assess the participants is another suggestion for further studies. It is suggested that in order to demonstrate the efficacy of the approach further research studies are carried out employing reading materials of other genres such as newspapers, magazine articles and narratives, etc. Evaluating long term effects of CSR is another recommendation for future studies. Examining the effectiveness of the approach in content learning is another important area worth studying.

Tables

Table 1: Results of the Wilcoxin Signed Rank

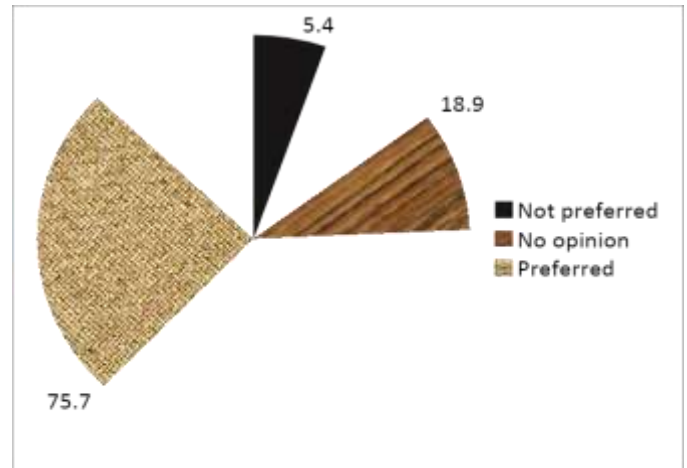| Group	P
Experimental	0.001
Control	0.000

Figures
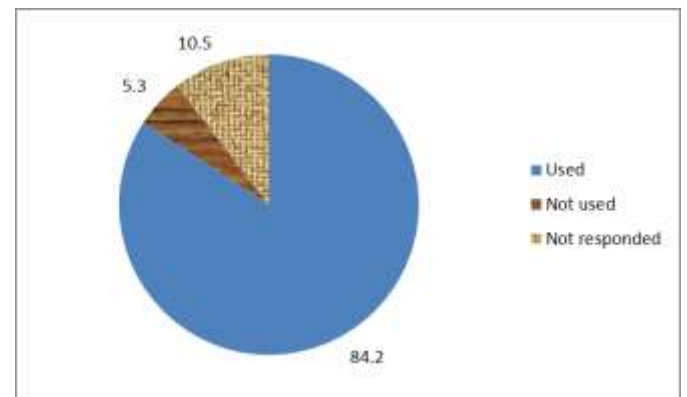

Figure 1: Learner Preference for CSR

Figure 2: Learner use of strategies while reading

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