

Impact of Collaborative Learning on Reading Skills of Undergraduate ESL Learners at a Public Sector University in Karachi

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Abstract

This study aims to determine if Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) may enhance the reading comprehension skills of undergraduate ESL students at a public institution in Karachi, Pakistan. A mixed-methods strategy with 80 undergraduate students was employed to establish 80 experimental groups (CSR) and control groups (traditional instruction). Pre- and post-tests yielded quantitative data, while questionnaires, focus groups, and classroom observations gathered qualitative information. Qualitative results indicated enhanced learner engagement, reduced fear, and improved peer-learning dynamics, while statistical analysis using paired t-tests demonstrated a significant increase in the reading scores of the experimental group— $p < 0.05$. The study concludes that, particularly in resource-constrained environments, CSR serves as an effective educational instrument for public universities in Pakistan. It also recommends its incorporation into ESL courses alongside teacher preparation and institutional support.

Keywords: Collaborative learning, CSR, reading skills, public universities, Karachi

1. Introduction

Many undergraduate students in Pakistan's public sector institutions—where English is the main language of instruction—have trouble with academic reading comprehension because of inadequate exposure, teacher-centered pedagogies, and large class numbers (Hussain, 2020; Siddiqui, 2021). The traditional lecture-based approach usually ignores personal learning needs, which reduces motivation and raises dropout rates in English classes (MoE, 2022). Specifically Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR), Collaborative Learning (CL) offers a learner-centered strategy that promotes peer participation, group responsibility, and metacognitive awareness (Klingner & Vaughn, 2000). Although CSR has shown successful in Iran, Taiwan, and Sri Lanka (Zoghi et al., 2010; Fan, 2009; Galappaththy & Karunarathne, 2022), its applicability within the setting of Pakistan's public universities—characterised by limited infrastructure and inadequate teacher training—has yet to be investigated.

1.1 Research Objectives:

- To assess the impact of CSR on the reading comprehension of undergraduate ESL learners in Karachi.
- To explore student perceptions of CSR as a learning strategy.
- To provide policy recommendations for integrating CSR into public university ESL programs.

1.2 Research Questions:

1. What is the impact of Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) on the reading comprehension of undergraduate ESL learners in Karachi?
2. How do undergraduate ESL learners perceive CSR as a learning strategy?
3. What policy recommendations can be made for integrating CSR into ESL programs at public universities in Karachi?

2. Literature Review

The educational approach termed "collaborative learning" (CL) involves students working together in small groups to achieve shared learning objectives. Drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, CL emphasizes the role of scaffolding and social interaction in knowledge construction. Collaborative Learning (CL) is widely recognized in ESL contexts for enhancing language acquisition through substantial peer interaction (Long, 1996). Research has demonstrated that collaborative projects reduce language anxiety by creating a supportive atmosphere where students can practice without fear of assessment (MacIntyre et al., 1998). As students engage in meaning negotiation, partake in group discussions, and collaboratively solve problems, collaborative learning also fosters critical thinking (Gokhale, 1995).

Research conducted by Tan et al. (2020) demonstrates that Collaborative Learning (CL) significantly improved students' speaking and reading abilities at Malaysian institutions compared to traditional teacher-centered methods. In resource-limited rural ESL classes in India, where peer support compensated for insufficient instructional resources, Patel and Rao (2019) discovered that collaborative learning was particularly effective. These results demonstrate the adaptability of CL across many learning settings. Despite the significant potential benefits for ESL students, its implementation in Pakistani public universities remains inadequate.

Numerous institutional barriers in Pakistani ESL education hinder the adoption of collaborative solutions. Educators encounter difficulties in effectively managing group activities in large courses, frequently exceeding 50 students. Hussain, 2021 The lack of teacher education in student-centered pedagogies exacerbates this issue, resulting in many educators relying on lecture-based methods (Khan, 2022). Furthermore, the prevailing culture of rote learning constrains students' reading comprehension advancement by prioritizing memorization over critical engagement with texts (Butt, 2023). The issues are further exacerbated by restricted resources, such as insufficient supplies for group initiatives (MoE, 2023).

In a 2022 survey conducted by the University of Karachi, 65% of undergraduate ESL students indicated challenges with academic reading due to passive learning methodologies inherent in traditional education (Siddiqui et al., 2022). This emphasizes the necessity for innovative approaches such as Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR), which integrates cooperative learning with explicit reading instruction. Formulated by Klingner and Vaughn (2000), CSR encompasses four essential strategies: Preview, Click & Clunk, Get the Gist, and Wrap Up. These strategies guide students through the reading process, while assigned group roles—such as Leader, Clunk Expert, and Timekeeper—promote active participation.

Empirical studies on corporate social responsibility have demonstrated its efficacy in various domains. Zoghi et al. (2010) observed a 22% enhancement in reading scores among university students in Iran subsequent to the implementation of CSR. Fan's (2009) study in Taiwan demonstrated that engineering students engaged in CSR exhibited enhanced understanding and increased participation. Galappaththy and Karunarathne's (2022) study on Sri Lanka indicated that while CSR enhanced learner autonomy, it did not statistically surpass traditional methods, suggesting that contextual factors may affect outcomes.

Despite the growing body of research, there is limited understanding of the significance of CSR in Pakistani public universities, particularly in linguistically diverse urban centers such as Karachi. This study addresses the gap by examining the impact of CSR on undergraduate ESL students in public sector universities in Karachi. Based on Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, Bandura's (1986) Social Learning Theory, and Klingner and Vaughn's (2000) CSR model, the research aims to determine if CSR may address systemic difficulties and enhance reading comprehension in this specific context.

The literature review indicates the potential of CSR as a transformative pedagogical instrument, while acknowledging the structural barriers to its implementation in Pakistan. This study aims to offer practical insights for educators and lawmakers seeking to improve ESL instruction in resource-constrained environments by connecting theory with practice. To adequately assess the impact of CSR on higher education in Pakistan, future research should include longitudinal effects and interdisciplinary applications.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach integrating qualitative and quantitative data collection. Pre-test and post-test assessments were employed in a quasi-experimental design for both the experimental and control groups, respectively. Utilizing complete classroom cohorts in a practical learning context ensured the design's ecological validity.

3.2 Participants

The research involved eighty undergraduate ESL students from a public institution in Karachi. The participants were evenly divided into experimental (CSR) and control (traditional) groups. According to institutional placement assessments, all students were at the B1 CEFR level, with ages spanning from 18 to 22 years.

3.3 Intervention Framework

The ten-week intervention comprised two distinct instructional modalities. The experimental group was designated specific jobs and got education in CSR, which included particular reading strategies. The control group adhered to conventional teacher-led reading instruction, utilizing identical reading materials for comparison.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Standardized reading comprehension assessments derived from IELTS materials yielded quantitative data. Qualitative data included interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and student reflective journals. All instruments were examined prior to their usage.

3.5 Implementation Process

The study consisted of three sections: pre-intervention assessment and orientation; a 10-week educational intervention with ongoing monitoring; and post-intervention data collection. Regular classroom observations documented student engagement and the execution process.

3.6 Data Analysis Methods

T-tests were employed in quantitative analysis to compare performance across and within groups. Qualitative data was subjected to thematic analysis utilizing NVivo techniques, with codes generated iteratively through repeated data examination.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The project adhered to established norms and obtained institutional ethics approval. Participants provided informed consent along with assurances of anonymity and the right to withdraw. Data was maintained under stringent security and employed solely for research purposes.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

A multitude of assessments ensured academic rigor. The test equipment demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha > 0.80$). The triangulation of data sources and the validation of qualitative results by analysts enhanced the study's validity.

4. Findings of the Research

4.1 Reading Performance Improvement

The CSR group had significantly greater improvement in reading scores compared to the control group. Their mean gain of 3.7 points surpassed the 1.5-point rise of the control group. The statistical analysis confirmed that this difference was significant ($p = 0.05$).

Student Engagement Levels

Records suggest an increased attendance at CSR events. Students ardently adopted their assigned roles; 78% reported increased motivation. In contrast to traditional classrooms, the group dynamic fostered enhanced peer-to-peer learning and dialogue.

4.1.1 Vocabulary and Comprehension Gains

The CSR technique was particularly effective in facilitating vocabulary learning ("Click & Clunk") and primary idea identification ("Get the Gist"). Post-test results indicated an 18% improvement in vocabulary retention and a 22% enhancement in general comprehension compared to the control group.

4.1.2 Learner Confidence and Anxiety

Surveys indicated less reading anxiety among CSR members. Sixty-five percent indicated that collaborating on challenging literature in groups facilitated their relaxation. Numerous individuals noted that collective assistance rendered challenging topics more comprehensible.

4.1.3 Metacognitive Skill Development

A significant benefit was the enhancement of students' self-awareness. The CSR structure pushed students to pause, assess their comprehension, and use strategies—skills essential for independent reading.

4.1.4 Implementation Challenges

During the intervention, several obstacles emerged. Approximately thirty percent of the groups initially encountered challenges with time management. Occasionally, more reserved persons were overshadowed by dominant personalities; instructor intervention was necessary to ensure equitable involvement.

Post-study surveys indicated robust support for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Seventy-three percent of respondents expressed a desire to implement the strategy in more classes, while eighty-two percent preferred it over traditional teaching methods. Numerous individuals indicated that instructing peers facilitated their comprehension of concepts.

Complementary Benefits While both groups shown improvement, CSR students demonstrated a heightened ability to formulate inquiries regarding texts and an enhanced retention of significant material. Increased consistency in the implementation of reading procedures enhances prospects

for academic reading assignments. The results indicate that CSR offers multiple benefits for ESL students, contingent upon the resolution of identified concerns through appropriate training and support.

5. Discussion

This study's findings enhance existing research on Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) and provide a novel analysis of its efficacy at Pakistani public universities. The significant rise in reading comprehension scores among CSR participants corroborates previous research by Klingner and Vaughn (2000) and Zoghi et al. (2010), which similarly shown that structured peer cooperation enhances reading abilities. In contrast to the Sri Lankan study by Galappaththy and Karunaratne (2022), which indicated no statistical superiority of CSR over traditional methods, this study distinctly demonstrated advantages at both quantitative and qualitative levels. This volatility may arise from fluctuations in cultural factors affecting group dynamics or the duration of implementation.

The observed decrease in reading anxiety among CSR students indicates the affective benefits of group learning as reported by MacIntyre et al. (1998). The preference of students for CSR over traditional education (82%) aligns with data from Fan's (2009) study involving Taiwanese engineering students, suggesting that this approach resonates in various ESL contexts. The development of metacognitive skills within the CSR group particularly reinforces Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social learning, as peer interactions appeared to facilitate higher-order thinking. Specifically, research from more affluent contexts (e.g., Ziyaeemehr, 2012) elucidated the challenges encountered—such as initial resistance and role disparity—less distinctly. This underscores the necessity for further implementation support due to contextual constraints inside Pakistani institutions. The positive outcomes indicate that CSR, with suitable modifications, can address systemic reading challenges in similarly underfunded institutions. Future studies should further study discipline-specific applications and long-term impacts to corroborate these outcomes.

6. Conclusion

This study confirms that among Pakistani ESL students, Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) greatly increases reading competency. Although first implementation challenges were noted, the approach improved comprehension, confidence, and teamwork. The findings support the need of CSR in settings with limited resources and show how best to include it into ESL courses and teacher preparation. Though motivating, long-term studies are needed to assess long-lasting impacts.

Here's a compiled list of all the **APA-style references** based on the in-text citations in your document. Where full details weren't available, I've provided a generic format — please update journal names, volume/issue numbers, page ranges, and DOIs/URLs as needed:

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