

## COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIC READING IN TEACHING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

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### Abstract

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to investigate the extent to which Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) serves as an instruction in teaching reading skills developing students' targeted comprehension skills. This study was conducted to 42 participants of eight-grade in one of junior high schools in Sumedang, West Java, Indonesia. The data were collected through observation, students' learning logs, and comprehension tests. The data analysis was conducted in several steps, including statistical analysis of pre- and post-test using Wilcoxon signed-rank test, students' learning logs, and observation. The findings of this study indicated that CSR developed three out of seven comprehension skills, namely *Brainstorming*, *Predicting*, and *Identifying clunks (problems)*. In addition, students' syllabus-targeted comprehension skills were also improved, particularly answering detailed questions and context-driven vocabulary meaning. Moreover, collaborative working through peer interaction appeared to foster students' active engagement in group discussion. The implication of this study was that CSR seemed to be beneficial to be implemented in teaching English reading since this method was relatively comprehensive. However, during the implementation, teachers had to adjust this learning model to suit students' condition and competence.

**Keywords:** *Collaborative Strategic Reading, reading comprehension strategies, reading comprehension skills, collaborative working*

### INTRODUCTION

In the process of acquiring reading competence, English reading in particular, two main problems hinder the language teaching in Indonesia (Mbato, 2013). First, as a foreign language, most of Indonesian students have limited exposure to natural communicative English. Second, although English is used as a medium language in gadget and many students learn English while using them, this seems not to influence the development of their reading competency. Besides, based on informal observation conducted in the classroom and the researcher's experience during teaching, the researcher found out that students' main problem, particularly junior high school (SMP) students, seems to be lack of various strategies whilst comprehension activity. Consequently, that students have to possess comprehension strategies to help them with English comprehension is inevitable. Thus, this study was intended to investigate the implementation of a reading comprehension strategy to enhance students' comprehension skill, namely Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR); as well as to identify the extent to which CSR can develop comprehension skills of a group of junior high school students.

### *Review of Literature*

Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) is an instructional model which was developed by Klingner, Vaughn, and Schumm (1998). CSR was inspired with the studies of Reciprocal Teaching and Cooperative Learning as well as other features of effective instruction, such as interactive dialogue and procedural strategies (Bremer, Vaughn, Clapper, & Kim, 2002; Klingner, et al., 1998; Mohammed, Swanson, Roberts, Vaughn, Klingner, & Boardman, 2010; see also Abidin & Riswanto, 2012). This model is expected to address three common problems in teaching and learning, namely:

“(a) how to adequately include students with disabilities and English language learners (ELL) in text-related learning; (b) how to teach text comprehension strategies that facilitate students’ learning ... ; and (c) how to provide opportunities for students with disabilities to interact effectively with peers” (Klingner, Vaughn, Arguelles, Hughes, & Leftwich, 2004, p.292)

There are four strategies in CSR implemented before, whilst, and after comprehension activity, namely:

a. Preview

This strategy, which is conducted before reading a text, comprises four activities of which purposes are to recall and activate students’ background knowledge and associations about topic of a passage with their peers (Vaughn et al., 2011). According to Vaughn et al. (2011), there are four steps in implementing this stage. First of all, the teacher makes the students know about the topic of a passage and pre-teaches several related or specialized vocabularies which are not familiar to students. Second, students brainstorm or recall what they already know about the topic. Third, students are taught to preview the passage by searching the clues of what the text will be about through reading the title, headings, and graphics to learn the text as much as possible in a very limited time. Finally, students predict what the text might be about and what they will learn from the passage. Throughout Preview activity, students are required to share and discuss ideas within the group and record their discussion, including brainstorming and prediction on their Learning Logs.

b. Click and Clunk

The purposes of this strategy are to teach students to monitor their comprehension while reading, to identify their breakdowns or ‘*clunks*’ (difficulties) in understanding the text, to apply fix-up strategies to *declunk* (resolve) their problems and misunderstandings (Vaughn et al., 2011). The strategy comprises: (1) reread the sentence without the word, think about what word meaning would make sense; (2) reread the sentence before and after the clunk, looking for the clues to determine the meaning of the word; (3) identify key elements in the word (such as prefixes or suffixes); and (4) identify word parts that will help students in understanding the text (Vaughn et al., 2011).

c. Get the Gist

Students are required to restate the most important ideas or the most critical information in each section of a text in their own words to make sure they improve their understanding of what they read and memorize what they have learned (Vaughn et al., 2011). Implementing the strategy, teachers prompt students to identify the most important person, place, or thing in the paragraph questioned and to rephrase the most important idea of them in as few words as possible.

d. Wrap up

This is an after-reading activity of which purposes are to summarize and review the key ideas of what has been learned, to monitor and evaluate what students have learnt for further extend comprehension, and to generate questions based on what they just read and learned (Vaughn et al., 2011).

A large number of studies have been conducted to examine the implementation of Collaborative Strategic Reading to enhance comprehension skills. Some examples of the study investigated the implementation of CSR on adult EFL learners (Alamin & Ahmed, 2014; Al-Roomy, 2013; Fan, 2009; Karabuga & Kaya, 2013; Zoghi, Mustapha, & Maasum, 2010), and on young adult learner (such as Demachkie & Oweini, 2011). In Indonesian context, several studies were conducted in implementing CSR as a learning model for teaching reading comprehension (Novita, 2012; Puspita, Tasnim, & Ariyanto, 2013). However, there has not been many research conducted in the implementation of CSR to junior high school students in EFL setting, particularly in Indonesia. Accordingly, this present study attempted to fill the gap by trying to examine the implementation of CSR in teaching comprehension strategies as well as its implication to students’ comprehension skills of a group of junior high school students. By learning how to comprehend English texts, students are expected to be able to benefit from the implementation of CSR to enhance their overall academic achievement.

## METHOD

### *Instruments*

This study was a mix method study conducted both quantitatively and qualitatively. The participants were an intact class of eight-grade students in one of state junior high schools in Sumedang. Most of the participants are Sundanese, having Bahasa Sunda as their mother tongue. Bahasa Indonesia is their second language, thus English is their foreign language. Subjects of the research consisted of 22 male students and 20 female students with age about 13 to 15 years old, though four students were excluded from this study as they did not have complete scores in both pre-test and post-test.

The data were collected through CSR learning logs, comprehension tests – including pretest, post-test, and formative assessment – and observation. Pre- and post-test were intended to measure the significance of students' progress on acquiring the targeted comprehension skills before and after an intervention. On the other hand, formative tests were conducted to measure progress of students' ability in answering comprehension questions related to the objectives as targeted by the syllabus throughout two cycles of intervention.

The focus of English reading was limited to comprehension of narrative, recount, as well as functional texts due to the school curriculum. However, the texts for the research were restricted only to test narrative and recount texts. The reason for using only two types of text was because of the teacher's experience that students had more difficulties in comprehending narrative and recount texts than a functional text. Moreover, adjusting the targeted skill with the curriculum-based learning objectives, two objectives became the focus of this present study: identifying information and identifying reference in narrative or recount text. These objectives were further elaborated into several learning activities for achieving numerous reading skills, as presented in the following table:

**Table 1.** Learning Objectives and Learning Activities for Eight Grade Students in Second Semester

Learning Objectives	Targeted Comprehension Skills
Identifying various information in narrative text	Finding the meaning of context-driven vocabularies Determining main and supporting ideas Answering detailed questions
Identifying reference in narrative or recount text	Identifying reference

The items tested in each test were 20 questions covering the four targeted skills stated in the table above in both narrative and recount texts. In pre-test and post-test, two types of both narrative and recount texts were used, entitled "Visiting a Mall" and "The Legend of Nyi Roro Kidul". The first formative comprehension test utilized two narrative texts, entitled "Banyuwangi" and "The Ant and The Dove", while second formative test used two recount texts, namely "Firecrackers" and "Travel by Air". The multiple-choice form (close-ended questions) was used, due to its practicality as well as easy scoring and analysis (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

CSR learning logs was used in this study to record ideas or questions when applying the strategies. The logs provide written documentation in their activity before, during, and after reading activity (Klingner & Vaughn, 1998). These logs also serve as a students' guidance which helps students demonstrating the implementation of each CSR strategies (Bremer, et al., 2002; Vaughn & Edmonds, 2006).

CSR learning logs consisted of several sections covering stages before, during, and after reading (Texas Centre for Reading and Language Arts, cited in Bremer et al., 2002; NSW Centre for Effective Reading, n.d.). In '*Before Reading*' section, students were required to write their brainstorm and

prediction of the content of the text based on their prior knowledge. Meanwhile, in ‘*During Reading*’ section, students were required to jot down their difficulties or parts that were hard to understand in the passage as well as to write down the main ideas of each paragraph in the passage. In ‘*After Reading*’ section, questions regarding the content and summary of information obtained from the passage were recorded.

Observation is conducted during the intervention to look at the extent of implementation of CSR strategies during comprehension activity. In this study, behavioral observation was chosen to measure students’ acquisition of CSR strategies as well as the targeted reading skills. In doing so, the researcher employed descriptive field notes and reflective field notes to record a description of events, activities, and people; as well as to record personal thoughts that researcher has during the observation (Cresswell, 2012; Fraenkel et al., 2012).

### **Data Analysis**

The data from the field notes was categorized based on themes, and then classified based on the stages in CSR. After the data had been classified, it was analyzed and interpreted by examining students’ behavior in each implemented strategy in each session.

The written documentations of groups’ activity written in the Log were examined to measure the extent of CSR implementation as well as the progress of students’ comprehension skills in each session. Each of the strategies was analyzed using CSR scoring rubrics proposed by Klingner and Vaughn (2012), in which the score range from 1 (the least proficient) to 3 (the most proficient). In order to ease the computation process, the researcher divided the obtained score with 21 and multiplied the score with 100. Thus, students’ maximum score on their Learning Logs was 100, while their minimum scores was 33,33. After the scores were obtained, they were categorized into three groups: proficient, becoming proficient, and not proficient.

Comprehension tests were used to measure the significance of students’ comprehension skill before and after getting intervention on the implementation of CSR. In order to obtain the answer, a statistical testing was utilized. First of all, normality test was conducted to figure out whether the data was a normal distribution or not. Using Shapiro-Wilk, the result of normality test was as follow:

**Table 2** Normality Test of Pre-test scores

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Pretest	.178	42	.002	.880	42	.000

**Table 3** Normality Test of Post-test Scores

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Posttest	.128	42	.080	.910	42	.003

It was found out that the data was not normally distributed. Since it was intended to measure two sets of scores which was not normally distributed from the same participants, the parametric statistical computation used was Wilcoxon signed-rank test, which was a non-parametric test equivalent to the dependent t-test.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

As stated earlier that this study was intended to find out the implementation of CSR to enhance students’ comprehension skill as first question, while the second question was to identify the extent to which CSR could develop comprehension skills of a group of junior high school students.

### ***The Interpretation of Analysis on Comprehension Tests***

As indicated before, both pre-test and post-test were administered to 42 students. Pre-test was conducted before the intervention, while post-test was conducted after 3 weeks of intervention.

After the normality of the tests was measured, it was found out that the test was not normal; thus a non-parametric statistical procedure was employed. The researcher employed Wilcoxon signed-rank test as the equivalence of t-test for non-parametric statistics (Laerd Statistics, 2013). After obtaining the result of test Wilcoxon signed-rank test through SPSS, the following result was achieved.

**Table 4.** Test Statistics

	Posttest - Pretest
Z	-4.145 <sup>a</sup>
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Based on negative ranks.

b. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

The table indicated that Asymp. Sig (2-tailed) which was showing the coefficient value of Wilcoxon signed-rank was .000. This was a two-tailed computation with level of significance ( $\alpha$ ) 0.05. Still, the score for two tailed was 0. Because 0 was lower than 0.05 ( $0 < 0,5$ ), the result indicated that there is a positive significant impact of CSR strategies on students' syllabus-targeted comprehension skills before and after getting intervention on CSR as a model of teaching comprehension strategies.

This answers the first research question that CSR strategies gives statistically significant impact in comprehension skills of a group of junior high school students.

### ***The Development of Students' Comprehension Skills***

Generally, Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) was likely to develop three categories of comprehension skills as proposed by Chamot and O'Malley (1990), namely cognitive, metacognitive, and social and affective strategies. However, not all subskills of cognitive, metacognitive, and social and affective appeared. Throughout the intervention, CSR was likely to emphasize the development of two of six cognitive strategies, namely *brainstorming* (or Imagery), and *predicting* (or Elaboration). Meanwhile, students' metacognitive skill which was developed by CSR was only monitoring comprehension for particular information (Chamot & O'Malley, 1990) which is called *identifying clunks* in CSR strategies.

On the other hand, social and affective strategies that were emphasized by implementing CSR were *Promoting interaction* and *Cooperative social skills*. Throughout the observation, students' comprehension skills appeared to develop in each cycle, particularly in cycle 3 in which students demonstrated a significant development in acquiring the targeted comprehension skills. However, students' development in acquiring the skills is not in line with the result of comprehension tests and the Logs' scores. This findings support the previous study conducted by Zoghi et al. (2010) that the students did not demonstrate significant gains in their comprehension skills though students showed a positive attitude towards CSR.

The result of observation showed that students benefitted from the implementation of CSR since this comprehension model helped them develop the targeted comprehension skills through its four strategies, namely Preview, Click & Clunk, Get the Gist, and Review. Drilling these strategies, students seemed to develop not only their CSR comprehension skills but also their syllabus-targeted comprehension skills.

Meanwhile, the result of the Learning Logs scoring was presented in the following table:

**Table 5** Students' Scores of Learning Logs

CYCLES	GROUP									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Cycle 2</b>	57,1	66,7	47,6	33,3	47,6	57,1	47,6	66,7	57,1	52,4
<b>Cycle 3</b>	76,2	90,5	42,9	42,9	76,2	71,4	76,2	61,9	57,1	66,7

From this table, in general students were categorized of 'becoming proficient' as it can be seen that 70% of the total groups (seven groups) demonstrated an improvement on their skills, namely group 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and group 10. Meanwhile, only 20% of the total groups (two groups) indicated decreasing scores. Only 10% (one group) showed an unchanged score.

### ***The Improvement of Students' Cooperative Learning Skills***

In addition to the development of comprehension skills, CSR was likely to promote two out of four CSR Cooperative Learning features, as explained, namely *Promoting interaction* and *Cooperative social skills* (Klingner et al., 2012). As to *Promoting interaction*, CSR comprehension strategies, Learning Logs, and teacher's feedback appeared to promote interaction among the members of a CSR group throughout the intervention.

In turn, this active peer interaction led to the enhancement of *Cooperative social skills*, such as sharing, listening attentively, asking for clarifying, and giving feedback (Klingner et al., 2012) as they gradually appeared to actively interact within their groups. As the field notes indicates, at first, most of the groups seemed to passively interact with their peer. In cycle 3, they appeared to work with their peer better. Students were sharing information they had, asking each other for clarifying their comprehension problems, and giving comment to their friends' ideas and opinion. As the result, the Learning Logs showed that among the three cycles, students developed their comprehension skills the best on the third cycle.

From this finding, it can be asserted that cooperative learning enhances the learning process and the acquisition of strategies. This is also in line with the work of Vaughn and Edmonds (2006) that cooperative working made students involved in learning process.

From the interpretation above, it can be concluded that CSR as an reading strategy is likely to develop three of seven comprehension skills, namely *Predicting*, *Brainstorming*, and *Identifying clunks*. Meanwhile, three other skills are developed in a fluctuated way, namely *Get the Gist*, *Review*, and *Generate questions*. Only *Fix-up strategies* appears not to develop because of students' insufficient vocabularies. From these findings, it can be inferred that CSR seemed not to be effective enough to enhance students' comprehension skills in the research site. This supports the previous study conducted by Fan (2009) and Zoghi et al. (2010) that the participants did not demonstrate significant gains in their comprehension skills. However, these findings answer the second research question that CSR as a model of teaching reading comprehension strategies develops three of seven CSR comprehension skills significantly, develops three other skills in a fluctuated way, and one other strategy which is not developed.

### ***The Development of Syllabus-targeted Comprehension Skills***

The second research question was planned to identify the extent to which CSR can develop comprehension skills of a group of junior high school students. As this study focused on the syllabus-targeted comprehension skills, this section will elaborate the finding obtained from formative tests as the instrument for collecting data for syllabus-targeted comprehension skills. The syllabus-targeted comprehension skills included context-driven vocabulary, identifying main idea and supporting idea, answering detailed questions, and identifying reference.

In relation to metacognitive strategies, this learning model was likely to develop students' ability in monitoring and controlling their comprehension (Cromley, 2005), in which students were aware when something did not make sense, were able to detect the lack of understanding in order to be corrected (*ibid*) through processing the information and recognizing what they did and did not understand (Willis, 2008). These were reflected in students' ability in identifying their comprehension problem, which parts they did and did not understand. However, students' improvement in this skill was not in line with their improvement in solving comprehension problems (fix-up strategies).

In addition to this explanation, CSR seemed to give a significant improvement in developing students' social and affective skills. Referring to indicators of social and affective strategies (Habte-Gabr, 2006), students demonstrated five of seven indicators, namely (i) 'I have worked closely with groups in my class who have helped me with language problems.' (ii) 'Frequently, I have worked in groups to solve and discuss tasks in class.' (iii) 'I have used specific strategies suggested by my teacher and others to overcome difficulties with language.' (iv) 'I identified classmates who could help me with the specific English language problems.' and (v) 'I have approached my teacher for specific help with problems with the English language.'

According to the field notes, since students were assigned into a group based on the researcher's grouping, at first most of students were reluctant to work within the group because they were not grouped with their close friends or desk-mates. In the end, most of them could be actively engaged in group discussion.

In spite of this fact, collaborative working, which was emphasized in the entire implementation of CSR strategies, resulted on students' eagerness and active interaction to learn. As they were assigned into heterogeneous small groups, students who were high-achievers were encouraged to help their peers who were low achiever. This kind of participation appeared to foster students' motivation to learn, particularly to learn English as the foreign language in Indonesia.

## CONCLUSION

The major conclusion of the study is, despite some limitations, that CSR generally appeared to develop students' particular comprehension skills significantly, namely *Brainstorming, Predicting, and Identifying Clunks*; to develop other comprehension skills in a fluctuated way, namely *Get the Gist, Review, and Generate Questions*; and not to develop another comprehension skill, namely *Implementing Fix-up strategies*. However, since there were only two out of seven implemented strategies that were developed, it could be said that this learning model is not effectively developing students' particular comprehension skills.

There are some limitations of the study. First of all, since this study was conducted to a group of students in an intact class, this study has a little possibility of being generalized. Students' proficiency in different classrooms might be different. These differences may result on the different finding although participants get the similar treatment. Secondly, this study was conducted solely based on the researcher's perspectives. Therefore, there would be any bias and potential loss of objectivity in every stage of the research, in terms of data collection and analyses (Ivanic & Weldon, 1999 as cited in Emilia, 2005). Thus, in order to minimize bias for further research, other observer and assessor have to get involved.

On the other hand, this study suggests the importance of prior knowledge in comprehending a passage. This study revealed that if students did not have adequate background of knowledge, they will encounter problems in comprehending a text. Not only the prior knowledge, but also exposures to many entries of vocabularies will also help students deepen their comprehension. Therefore, the researcher suggests English teachers to put more attention to vocabulary instruction and modified reading materials to be the main part of English teaching and learning. Moreover, it is recommended to implement this learning model to higher level students, like high-school students, as they are expected to have a higher level of thinking than junior-high school students. In addition to this, another type of instruments, such as interview, would be better to be utilized to validate the result from other instruments.

In addition to the findings and limitations of this study, it is recommended for teachers to implement collaborative working as well as the integration of cognitive, metacognitive, and social and affective strategies in the form of Collaborative Strategic Reading. The findings of this study confirm the importance of the integrated reading instruction to teach comprehension skills instead of implementing the traditional method.

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