

Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning for English as a Second Language (ESL) Learners in Sri Lankan Universities

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Cooperative learning or small group discussions claim to be an effective means of language learning. Collaborative Strategic Reading Instruction Approach (CSR) is a learner centered reading approach closely related to cooperative learning theory proposed by Klingner and Vaughn (1996; 1998; 2000). In this peer mediated instruction model, learners gain cognitive strategic knowledge through peer scaffolding and achieve successful comprehension. Fostering learner autonomy is another expectation of this model. This study was conducted to identify the effectiveness of CSR to enhance academic reading skills of undergraduates. The study also aimed at recognizing learners' perceptions and attitudes towards CSR and cooperative learning style. The informants of the study were 67 lower intermediate level Engineering undergraduates from the University of Peradeniya. Data was collected through the mixed method approach. A quasi- experiment including a pre-test and a post-test, a questionnaire survey, group interviews, participant observation sheets and student learning logs were employed as instruments. Statistical data did not prove that CSR is better than the traditional approach. However, the data elicited from the questionnaire survey indicated that the learners prefer CSR method to the traditional teacher centered method. Furthermore, the interviews with the informants revealed that the approach has helped learners develop their reading proficiency and foster autonomous learning. During the intervention, some problems and dilemmas such as low proficiency level of some learners were identified. 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 CSR are proposed.

Keywords: Collaborative strategic reading approach, Cooperative learning, Learner autonomy, Peer scaffolding