

Effect of Collaborative Learning Strategy on EFL Students' Skimming, Scanning and Questioning Abilities

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Received: April 15, 2023

Accepted: May 19, 2023

Online Published: May 22, 2023

doi: 10.5539/elt.v16n6p68

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v16n6p68>

Abstract

This paper examines how collaborative learning strategy (CLS) impacts Saudi University EFL students' reading comprehension, especially their skimming, scanning and questioning abilities in order to determine the effect of CLS in improving reading strategies. This 14-week study employed a quasi-experimental method to collect data through the pre-test, the post-test, and the semi-structured interview. The participants were 30 students divided into the control group and the experimental group of 15 students each. The quantitative data were analysed using t-test as inferential statistic, and the qualitative data were analysed using thematic transcription. Findings from the t-test analysis revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of reading skills under collaborative learning approach. The study will play a significant role in determining the impact of CLS on 30 EFL learners from monolingual backgrounds when they worked collaboratively in a classroom as an experimental group and a controlled group of 15 participants each. The research findings will be helpful in foregrounding the problems of reading strategy of monolingual EFL learners, facilitating thereby the designing of a more effective reading pedagogy to hone EFL, TOEFL, ELETLS reading skills.

Keywords: collaborative learning strategy, reading skills, skimming, scanning, questioning, EFL

1. Introduction

Reading is an essential skill for education as well as for academic careers. Smooth academic progression requires aspirants to understand, explore, and apply the knowledge to communicate successfully in workplace communication situations. For all types of learners, it is important to have an ability in all subject areas all through their education (Clarke, et. al., 2013). Considering the popularity of EFL in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and its requirement as one of the job prerequisites in service sectors, language skills are the qualifications in demand, especially reading comprehension in EFL. The language proficiency tests like IELTS and TOEFL iBT also target high level of reading skills for admission in graduation and post-graduation courses (Li, Y., 2018). Reading strategies help students understand what is not clearly stated. Therefore, an in-depth practice of reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, and questioning is crucial.

Regardless of reading strategies necessity to EFL and ESL learners, many language students in Saudi Arabia lack the required reading comprehension skills. Commanding a good competence in reading strategies that help in understanding complex ideas and vocabulary of text, is not that easy for Arabic-monolingual EFL learners in a country like Saudi Arabia (Al-Qahtani, 2016). Al-Qahtani also studied that the students from rural background have minimal exposure to the EFL skills (Al-Qahtani, 2016). Reading fluency is the final outcome of a complex process that involves many distinct skills that lead to the final goal of reading or reading comprehension. However, EFL learners face problems such as anxiety, vocabulary, and surface and pragmatic comprehension issues when they are exposed to text reading (Alrabai, 2018).

A collaborative learning approach was developed in 1960. This umbrella approach has been under development for last 60 years. Nowadays, the word "collaborative learning" is used to refer to a variety of instructional strategies for small group learning. Collaborative Strategic Reading is a type of explicit strategy education that was initially planned to aid in the comprehension of expository reading for disabled learners. It provided ELL students with several chances to communicate with people who spoke the same language as them. With the aid of this instructional approach, students were better able to acquire language (Klingner, Boardman, Eppolito, & Schonewise, 2012). With the help of this approach, students use their background knowledge and socially

negotiate and build meaning (Klingner et al., 2004). Collaborative learning method emerged as popular conducive teaching approach which can promote metacognitive awareness and improve reading comprehension of adult learners (Fan, 2010; Khonamri & Karimababdi, 2015; Kusiak, 2001).

The studies discussed above recommended that learners should be offered classrooms that are conducive to the development of reading strategies to overcome EFL reading related difficulties. Collaborative learning is one of the Four Cs of educational methodologies known for their effectiveness in 21st century (Erdoğan, 2019). In this educational approach, learners, in two or more groups, can study together to achieve common objectives. Collaborative learning approach studies showed that this method is motivational to language skill learners. Apart from using background knowledge and constructing meaning, CL method is also proven in building critical thinking skills. It plays a positive role in goal setting and self-evaluation among the participants (Su, Li, Liang, & Tsai, 2019). Klinger et al., (2012), in their research, stressed better learning settings that are helpful and responsive to student needs for reading comprehension strategies as collaborative strategy reading proved to be helpful because while cooperating with one another, students in the CSR condition improved their reading comprehension and content knowledge. Students' reading comprehension considerably increased in CSR classrooms, and comprehension increases were linked to the effectiveness of the implementation.

Reading strategy issue of Saudi EFL learners at college level remain a meagerly studied area of research. While most researchers have studied the problems and effects of CL on skimming, scanning and questioning abilities, very little has been done regarding the monolingual learners and their reading abilities in CL approach classroom. The anxiety, motivation, and cognitive reading strategies are still challenging for them. To sum up, a few studies in Saudi Arabia have explored effects of CL approach on Arabic monolingual EFL learners reading strategy. The database search for related work for the study returned many works exploring EFL learners' issues with, poor vocabulary, inferring, summarizing, skimming, scanning, and reading comprehension that requires higher level of critical capability. Still, we could find a few studies directly catering the Arabic monolingual EFL learners reading problems of Saudi students in higher education institutions of Saudi Arabia.

Reading comprehension skills are a necessity for every student and professional aspirant across all sectors. EFL learners, in general, require strong reading abilities to learn new facts. Studies have shown that Saudi EFL students currently struggle with both cognitive and metacognitive reading abilities. A higher level of information-gathering proficiency is now required as a result of the globalization and rapid information flows. Saudi nationals will soon be required to serve as global citizens, which will require high reading comprehension abilities.

1.1 Reason for the Study

The study had better be conducted for some reasons. The following justifies conducting this study: First, reading strategies are very crucial in the process of acquiring language skills. Secondly, the research carried out in this field has discounted the major problems of EFL learners from Arabic-monolingual background. The studies in Saudi EFL learner context have exaggerated the comprehension factors and anxiety linking their performance in reading related studies. Finally, many studies have downplayed the value of group activities and CL approach in enhancing reading strategies of EFL learners when considering solutions for reading strategy fluency and comprehension issues.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The study takes forward an understanding of reading strategies and guidelines to improve skimming, scanning and questioning abilities. Reading being a complex process, the analysis of the EFL learners' reading challenges will open better opportunities and create an environment conducive to learning, leading thereby to marked improvements in the learners' reading proficiency. A deeper insight of Arabic-monolingual EFL learners' problems in skimming, scanning and questioning abilities and their exposure to the Collaborative Learning Strategy will help teachers to develop a better pedagogy. The findings from the study will help learners acquire the level of reading skills required for productive academic reading, such as accomplishing reading tasks in IELTS and TOEFL. Reading skills, specifically skimming, scanning, and questioning are the prerequisites for studies at college and beyond. Thus, the study will encourage stakeholders to identify areas of improvement in reading proficiency in various courses in Saudi Universities.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objective of this quasi-experimental study is to assess the effectiveness of Collaborative learning strategy on skimming, scanning and questioning abilities by obtaining quantitative and qualitative data of college level EFL learners. The study aims to identify the major challenges in the application of reading strategies. Based on the

findings, recommendations are made to augment the academic reading performance of the Saudi college students.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions and objectives for the investigation were as follows.

- (1) What is the role of Collaborative Learning Strategy in teaching skimming, scanning, and questioning abilities to EFL students?
- (2) How do students improve in skimming, scanning and questioning strategies?
- (3) To what extent does Collaborative Learning Strategy improve EFL learner's skimming, scanning and questioning abilities?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Related Studies

Scholars, practitioners, and academicians around the world have been supporting the realm of EFL teaching and learning by drawing on the concepts, theories, pedagogies through their articles, books, and research publications. A selected review supporting the effect of collaborative learning method on reading strategies have been linked to substantiate the argument of this study.

2.1.1 Studies Related to Reading and Reading Strategies Issues

A study was conducted by Hezam et. al., (2022) on reading comprehension problems of Saudi EFL learners in an intensive English Program. This quantitative study was administered on 301 male and female Saudi EFL students at University of Bish, KSA faced the problems like, vocabulary, grammar, and inferences of the text. The researchers observed that the learners took time to answer the questions related to reading strategies i.e., in which skimming, scanning, and questioning techniques are applied. The quantitative outcome showed that male learners have more reading comprehension than female due to the higher exposure to the target language skills. Lack of practice and vocabulary emerged as the biggest problems when learners tried to draw inferences from the text. The fact that this study focuses on college students, makes it pertinent to the current one, and the findings of our study may thus be comparable to those of Hazem et. Al., (2022).

Another research 'Why do Saudi EFL Readers Exhibit Poor Reading Abilities?' by Al-Qahtani (2016) has investigated the reading habits of 90 Saudi EFL middle school students, eight EFL instructors and six supervisors. The study attempted to know how much Saudi EFL students employ reading comprehension skills and investigated how students, teachers, and supervisors view Saudi EFL students' reading abilities. The study revealed that the very reasons behind Saudi EFL readers poor ability are readers had less exposure to target language; poor in-class environment; lack of attention while reading; poor reading strategies; limited vocabulary. The researcher recommended that an adequate reading practice in target languages be given to learners, to develop a method for improving reading comprehension skills, and offer learners flexible and autonomous reader environment to address their anxiety and attitudes towards learning reading skills. The study highlighted the poor reading strategies of learners and the requirement of a learning method helpful to learner's anxiety. EFL reading anxiety among monolingual learners can be a silent factor as Zhao, (2017) studied in his research. He claims that the difference between the two writing systems can cause reading anxiety unique to EFL learners, which could cause them to become slow learners. Because the writing systems of Arabic and English are so dissimilar, Arabic EFL learners are certain to experience the same anxiety. These studies are relevant as they give background knowledge of reasons behind the poor reading abilities of Saudi EFL learners. Whereas Zhao, (2017) considered anxiety as silent factor affecting badly on EFL learners from monolingual backgrounds. The issues of the present study will be compared with those of Al-Qahtani (2016) and Zhao, (2017) studies.

2.1.2 Studies Related to Reading Strategies and In-class Issues

The EFL learners' lack of exposure to reading strategy and poor attempts to address their in-class problems have been covered in a hallmark article by Al-Seghayer (2019) under a very relevant topic, 'Unique Challenges Saudi EFL Learners Face'. The discussion covered that Saudi EFL learners remain reticent about their understanding of reading strategies, which is crucial to effective reading comprehension, their level and perspectives on reading strategies are not always readily available for the language instructors to examine and assess. He argued that Saudi EFL readers are slow and take great effort to process the word's meaning, they face difficulties in arriving at the meaning of lengthy sentences; students encounter reading challenges when exposed to higher-level reading comprehension involving setting goals. They lack effective ways of reading; skim and scan reading texts; identifying general ideas and drawing inferences. Al-Seghayer concluded that Saudi EFL students' lack of

interest and low motivation are due to the lack of effective teaching methods. The cognitive reading abilities examined in this study and its findings indicate that Saudi EFL learners' in-class issues have not been adequately addressed, necessitating additional research to gain a deeper understanding of reading strategy problems and to apply a strategy (collaborative learning approach) suited to reducing in-class issues. This paper discusses the necessity for a method playing a catalyst role. The findings of Al-Seghayer (2019) will be compared with current study results.

2.1.3 Studies Calling for an Effective Learning Strategy

In his survey study, Par. L. (2020) studied reading strategies (SORS) established the relationship between the application of reading strategies and reading achievement among 56 EFL University EFL students learning English as major. According to the survey's findings, reading strategies and reading achievement are significantly correlated. However, due to insufficient reading exposure and poor practice in the classroom and outside of it, EFL students employ reading strategies but have low application abilities. The EFL learners need active reading strategies and training in skimming, scanning and questioning techniques to achieve higher reading comprehension. The study also emphasized regular practice of reading strategies for improvements in reading comprehension.

While study by Yusuf, et al. (2017) established that the skimming and scanning techniques can improve EFL student's English reading comprehension. The research carried out on 32 eleventh grade students by offering them recount texts in English reading comprehension to identify main ideas and detail information. The study found that Language Skills can be improved after the practice in the skimming and scanning abilities. The study insisted on identifying more effective strategies to enhance because other students' distractions and disruptions throughout the study had an impact on the learners' performance. Researchers emphasized the importance of a supportive learning environment, and they now hold that collaborative learning will significantly aid in the development of reading methods. Overall, the use of CL with EFL students had fruitful outcomes. The Yusuf's (2017) and Liang's research (2002) showed that enhancing affective development and language competency goes hand in hand. To be more specific, both able and poor EFL learners' motivation was fostered through collaborative learning.

In a CL related research, Momtaz and Garner, (2010) investigated Iranian college students to find out if CL leads to greater comprehension classes in non-western university environment. The researchers in this mixed-method study divided 36 learners in experimental and control group of 18 each. CL approach offered students opportunities to maximize the level of their member interactions, these frequent interaction situations in classroom gave them more chances to correct and be corrected by the other members of the group. The study established the fact that collaborative reading of the members created free interactive contexts like listening to each other and being open for correction and learning. Especially, asking questions, explanation, clarifying issues, other cognitive reading activities like, skimming, scanning, summarizing questioning, inferring. CL learning played a developing role for the learners of experimental group in motivation, environment and affinity which are usually absent in traditional whole class setting. CL encourages students in high-level cognitive skills like analysing, explaining, inferring, elaborating tasks. Findings of this study are convincing enough to imply that CL approach in reading strategy is significant in EFL classrooms. Therefore, the study by Momtaz and Garner, (2010) holds vital relevance value, and our research outcomes will be compared with these above discussed findings.

Yet another study by Benlyazid (2019) was carried out which determined the impact of CL on reading comprehension of ESL International students in Washington community college. The study employed CSR strategy to address students' challenges related to cognitive strategies, comprehension, and content reading. This 9-week study involving 32 international students coming to seek higher education in US universities found out that learners of experimental group showed improvement in reading ability as well as higher comprehension which is required to answer questions related to making predictions, inferences, comments and finding main ideas of the text. This key discovery of reading comprehension and metacognitive knowledge during CSR practice is crucial for advancing research on the impact of CL on reading ability.

In a related study on effect paradigm by Handayani, et al., (2019), researchers have identified CL as an effective method to engage small numbered EFL group actively. Learners achieve a common learning goal by working together. An EFL students' group having very low initial reading comprehension learned for themselves and helped others learn. In this classroom action study, the planning, action, observation, and reflection phases of Kurt Lewin's design are all intertwined. The results of this study showed that the participants had the most substantial difficulties with things like finding specific information, identifying general information, and

understanding textual meaning and allusions. To overcome the problems, the researchers applied CL approach that improved reading comprehension and critical thinking. Because the activities such as working together to solve problems, make a joint decision, role play, and helping each other develop autonomous qualities among learners. To conclude, the study determined that CL plays crucial role in improving reading comprehension and critical thinking among the students of experimental group. The results of this study on CL role will be further discussed and compared with outcomes of the present study.

In conclusion, the previous review of the pertinent studies has two main consequences. Saudi EFL learners face reading and reading comprehension related challenges which affects their education and slows down their advancement. These issues range from vocabulary, poor exposure to target language, anxiety whereas CL approach happened to be helpful in improving reading comprehension and developing their critical thinking skills. Further study is required to give a clearer picture of what types of issues Monolingual Saudi EFL learners face in reading strategies. The subject of monolingual Arabic EFL learners' reading strategies has received very little research in Saudi Arabia.

2.2 Language Skills and the Collaborative Learning Approach

Many studies examining the advantages and pedagogical aspects of the CL technique in learning language skills have been published. A related study follows.

The article by Redes (2016) foregrounds the very important role that collaborative learning approach plays in teaching and learning practices. The article identifies CL approach as one of the innovative skills of 21st century education. This method has emerged and is defined by Smith and MacGregor (1992) as 'an umbrella term' comprising students and teachers' activities jointly. The argument depicts CL as very pragmatic approach and it is known for its features; it gives real learning opportunities for learners who want to improve their self-critical thinking, it improves interpersonal and team skills, in this approach, learners take part in task-oriented learning groups, when applied in classroom, it offers real fulfilment to the learners, and offers role plays like setting common objectives and sharing responsibilities. The discussion recommended CL approach as inevitable framework in teaching and learning practices (Redes, 2016).

In yet another study, that highlighted the importance of CL approach in language skills by Al-Ahdal et al., (2021) investigated that (MALL) mobile-assisted language learning as a tool of collaborative learning. The research among the two Saudi university, Majmaah University and Qassim University, EFL learners found to be beneficial in vocabulary improvement and critical knowledge application. The study used a mixed-method approach on 80 participants for 3 months. The results revealed the experimental group had improved memory of vocabulary. The researchers identified CL method as one the biggest achievement in solving two major problems: low motivation of EFL learners and varied proficiency levels of group members.

Many studies have strongly recommended using the CL strategy to the utmost extent possible for learners' overall EFL ability development. Scager et al., (2020) called this approach 'a widely used instructional method', which increased the efficacy of collaboration. Groups, in this method, achieve tasks, foster sense of responsibility, carry out challenging and relevant tasks, evoke autonomy and self-regulatory behaviour, that nurtures learning environment (Scager, 2020). Giving an insight into the effectiveness and realistic practice of collaborative strategic reading (CSR), Alqarni, F., (2015) reemphasized Vygostky's theory of social constructivism. According to the findings of Alqarni, F., (2015), learners improved their reading strategies when they use CSR. The study concluded that collaborative strategic reading improves the reading skills of EFL learners, especially the marginalized ones. Scager et al., (2016) recommended the application of CL especially at higher education courses, for it draws out a sense of 'positive interdependence' and making learners feel sense of accomplishment. Alghamdy (2019), in his research, identified that the EFL learners who participated in collaborative learning strategy, improved their language skills as they perform different roles, develop self-confidence, and learn to respect different opinions.

2.3 Difficulties and Problems in Reading Techniques for Learners

It is evident from entire EFL research work that learners run into difficulties and problems. They progress through the learning stages of the target language. EFL learners face lots of major skill issues as well as sub-skill problems; vocabulary, grammar, listening to target language, and enriching knowledge when exposed to new topics, passages, or texts. The Research by Semtin and Maniam (2015) concluded that application of skimming, scanning and questioning techniques can fix the EFL learners' problems in reading comprehension. Al Mahmud, (2022), in his study, also insisted on integrating new approach to traditional one for Saudi EFL learners' reading comprehension improvement.

The problems related to reading text, reading aloud, reading speed, and struggling with difficult words can be addressed by using effective reading strategies. According to Zhou (2017), learners with poor level in skimming, scanning and questioning techniques face lots of difficulties which hamper their reading comprehension progress. Moreover, in a book review, Jacobs and Renandya's (2019) investigation also suggested some follow-up activities for each participant to persuade others to act or not to act on reading, writing, events, characters of texts. Group interactions have been shown to have an impact on language learning outcomes, but little is known about how it directly affects the reading abilities of Arabic Monolingual EFL learners.

3. Methodology

3.1 Method

This 14-week study includes 30 chosen students of first year reading course. They were divided into two quasi-experimental groups of 15 each (Creswell, 2011). Both the groups were offered an early preliminary test (a pre-test) and a post-test) to obtain quantitative data. The study follows mixed method research design of John Creswell for different data source and to have deep insights into the research phenomena, therefore, semi-structured interviews with the students were conducted to measure and have a deep sense of the effects of collaborative learning method on their questioning, scanning, and skimming behaviors. This strategy is justified by the fact that the quantitative data and findings provide a broad overview of the study problem; further analysis through the gathering of qualitative data is needed to sharpen the overall picture. Additionally, it enables comprehensive research of the phenomenon under study and offers a more thorough evaluation of the effects of collaborative learning on skimming, scanning and questioning abilities of participating students.

3.2 Participants

The participants were 30 language skills learners of B.A. Second-year Reading-2 course in the University of Jeddah; they were split into two groups, i.e., 15 in control group and 15 in experimental group. 5 students from each group of 10 participants voluntarily participated in the interviews. All the selected students were from the same discipline and were learning the Reading Skills-2 (KSEL-222) course. In this programme, after completing and mastering English language skills, the students can choose English Literature or Translation as their specialization. All the participants were Arabic speakers and had poor exposure of English till date. In other words, they are Arabic monolingual community members.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

The data were obtained through the following tools: pre-test and post-test, and semi-structured interviews. The primary data collection tools comprised two portions. The first tool comprised of a pre-test and post-test on preferred reading strategies. The second tool included a 60-minute semi-structured interview of students who were purposefully asked to volunteer and share their sense of this investigation which was analyzed qualitatively.

3.4 Research Procedure

To assess the students' reading abilities, especially skimming, scanning, and questioning, we administered a reading pre-test to 30 students in total, 15 each from two different reading classes. The experimental group and the control group were formed. The experimental group was taught reading strategies by employing collaborative learning strategy, whereas the control group was taught reading through traditional lecture method. A summative assessment method (skimming=100 points, scanning=100 points and questioning= 100 points) was adopted to evaluate the pre and the post- tests to assess their level of proficiency in the selected sub-skills of reading. After being briefed on the study's goals and objectives, the researcher oversaw the semi-structured interview in person with learners from both the groups to gain a deeper knowledge of the beneficial effects and their perception of CL approach. Ten participants, 5 from each group, were interviewed for a total of 60 minutes, with each participant being interviewed for 5-6 minutes.

3.5 Interview

A semi-structured interview approach was used to discuss the learners' sense of this study. The learners were asked about the role of active participation and the problems they encountered in the process of practicing skimming, scanning, and questioning under the collaborative learning strategy. Five participants from each group were purposefully asked general questions on reading strategies to compare the results and differences of the two groups. The results of the interviews were transcribed and coded into themes.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Findings

The quantitative findings obtained from the pre-test and post-test show positive effect of CL method and the same could be read through the illustration of the Tables below.

As shown in Table 1, EFL students taking reading strategies in skimming (Experimental) had higher scores ($M = 59.66$, $SD = 10.93$) than those who did not take reading strategies (control) ($M = 40$, $SD = 11.64$), $t(28) = 4.77$, $p = 0.00 < 0.001$. The 95% confidence interval of the difference between means ranged from [11.2 to 28.8] and did indicate a difference between the means of the sample. These findings indicate that the application of collaborative learning helped the experimental group improve their skimming strategy abilities considerably.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare scanning skill score between experimental group and control group. There was a significant difference between the scores of the experimental group ($M=59.33$, $SD=12.8$) and the control group ($M=40.66$, $SD=13.07$); $t(28) = 4.06$, $p = 0.00 < 0.001$, see Table 2. The 95% confidence interval of the difference between means ranged from [9.25 to 28.25] and this difference is significant between the means of the sample. The results show that the experimental group excelled in scanning skill due to the application of collaborative learning approach.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there is a significant difference in terms of questioning skill between the experimental group and the control group. The results indicate a significant difference between the experimental and the control group as mean and standard deviation for experimental group is ($M=58.33$, $SD=9.75$), Whereas, for control group, it is ($M=28.66$, $SD=6.39$), [$t(28) = 9.84$, $p = 0.00 < 0.001$]. The 95% confidence interval of the difference between means ranged from 23.49 to 35.83] and this difference between the means of the sample is significant see Table 3. The outcome suggests that the experimental group significantly improved its questioning ability when EG was treated under collaborative learning approach.

These results suggest that collaborative learning method had a significant effect on EFL students' skimming, scanning, and questioning abilities. EFL learners of EG scored much better compared to traditionally learning CG.

Table 1. Independent sample t- test for skimming

	n	M	SD	St. Error	t	df	sig	95% Confidence interval	
								Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Experimental	15	59.66	10.93	2.82	4.77	28	0.00	11.2	28.2
Control	15	40.00	11.64	3.0					

Table 2. Independent sample t-test for scanning

	n	M	SD	St. Error	t	df	sig	95% Confidence interval	
								Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Experimental	15	59.33	12.08	3.11	4.06	28	0.00	9.25	28.08
Control	15	40.66	13.07	3.37					

Table 3. Independent sample t-test for questioning

	n	M	SD	St. Error	t	df	sig	95% Confidence interval	
								Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Experimental	15	58.33	9.75	3.01	9.84	28	0.00	23.49	35.83
Control	15	28.66	6.39						

4.2 Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data were obtained from the semi-structured- interviews and the transcript was coded into themes to learn the patterns of correlations and disparities. Four major themes emerged; conceptual difficulties, issues related to comprehension, difficulties related to inferences, issues related to environment. Some other minor

issues were related to practice, time management, anxiety, and hesitation.

The interviewees also faced difficulties with vocabulary, grammar. In the early stages of the study, most students encountered typical issues like fear and hesitation. (Hesitation caused them uncertainty, delay and at a time mental uneasiness for being not sure about the answers).

4.2.1 Conceptual Difficulties

Reading is a complicated process. Reading practices are necessary to gradually improve the level of comprehension. Instructors identified the reading strategy related conceptual difficulties among the learners in the beginning of the study. When asked, a student from experimental group (EG) asserted that: "I was not confident in finding answers to the questions related to skimming, and I think it was because of I had less exposure to this reading sub skills". The other participant from control group (CG) responded, "Some concepts like skimming and scanning are often confusing as the purpose of these techniques is not clear". Another EG participant expressed his problem about the confusion between skimming and scanning: "I wasn't exactly clear what the distinction between skimming and scanning was until I spoke with other students. I greatly benefited from the occasional doubt clearing in class when practicing because it allowed me to understand the concepts of skimming and scanning and improve my accuracy in these areas". As the study progressed, the majority of EG participants had their conceptual ambiguities clarified.

4.2.2 Issues Related to Comprehension

Reading comprehension and reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, and questioning are interdependent skills. The EG participants struggled with pragmatic and surface understanding because they lacked a strong vocabulary and had little exposure to literary language. As a result, they had trouble responding to comprehension-related questions. When asked whether they face problems of comprehension experimental group student 3 (EGS3) and control group student 1 (CGS1) replied, 'I found it difficult to answer the skimming and scanning questions because I was not that good at vocabulary because of less reading habit. I also failed to understand the text where metaphorical and ironical language was used (EG3). For CG participant as he communicated, 'It is difficult to understand the meaning of the new words. For me, most of the time, it is difficult to understand the overall meaning of the text (CGS1).' The participants from both the groups faced difficulties regarding vocabulary and comprehension and EG learners solved to a greater extent due to the collaborative learning set up.

4.2.3 Issues Related to Inference

Questioning ability requires readers to understand hints or cues given by writers in the text they read. Inferring in reading, is called an ability to 'read between the lines' which helps in gaining deeper knowledge. Based on the text reading, learners are supposed to draw conclusions in skimming and questioning skills that develop their critical thinking. When asked, S1 and S4 from EG recalled the difficulties they faced related to inferential questions. The EG participant expressed, 'I face difficulties in answering questions on central idea or main idea of the text. My understanding of implied or indirectly stated language was not good in the beginning'. The fourth learner recalled, "I had difficulties in drawing conclusions and making inferences because I failed to understand the exact purpose of reading. For me, it was also difficult to understand the figurative sentences". Despite the fact that the majority of participants had trouble answering questions of an inferential nature, inter-communication, goal setting, and gradual reading strategy practice improved the quality of thinking in EG learners.

4.2.4 Issues Related to Practice, Time Management and Anxiety

Researchers observed that both surface reading and inferential reading require high reading skills, thus learners must be exposed to them frequently to master these reading techniques. Being a multi-skilled activity, reading necessitates a favorable atmosphere and practice. In the beginning, being new to the practice and in-class CL approach, The EG learners had difficulties in understanding such questions, time management, and hesitation in communication. However, the routine practice and communication in the class facilitated them to speed up the answering and doubt clearing process. Their hesitancy was lessened by consistent reading practice and the use of reading methods.

Frequent conversations and the CL approach allowed them to interact freely, which encouraged EG members to support one another. In general, nearly all the learners from both groups who were interviewed shared the same experience. S2 stated, 'In the beginning, it was difficult to understand how exactly the questions on skimming, scanning and questioning strategies are answered. These concepts are not very familiar and when asked about it most of the group members were unfamiliar'. The student five from experimental group (EGS5) recalled, 'I was

very slow in answering the questions as I have no idea about the techniques of skimming, scanning, and questioning. But, after practice and discussions, I was able to answer quickly, and my techniques developed progressively.

4.2.5 Learning Environment Difficulties

It's a fact that the environment plays an important role in the quality of learning. A learning environment offers opportunity to interact, communicate, back-communicate, motivate, and encourage learners that boosts their learning behavior. Learners develop their individual roles in learning skills when they are motivated and encouraged in conducive and learner-friendly class. The participants, in the beginning, were hesitant in asking questions and seeking help from their co-learners. Weak learners had reservations in revealing their problems to more able learners and seeking their help in the problems of sub-skills of reading. However, collaborative learning strategy motivated all the participants to interact with one another and play their roles freely, which finally resulted into positive learning outcome in their skimming, scanning, and questioning abilities and reading comprehension in general.

To conclude, most of the participants from both the groups had, initially, vocabulary, grammar, sentence-structure understanding and practice-related issues. As the controlled group participants were not exposed to the collaborative learning strategy and practice in sub skills of reading, they were very slow and remained least able performer in the post-test. All the 5 students from control group who were interviewed expressed their issues related to comprehension, concept, and practice in the reading strategies. The lack of practice and conducive environment was the major reason behind their poor performance in the post-test.

5. Discussion

The core objective of this study was to determine the effect of reading strategies on EFL participants' skimming, scanning, and questioning ability, using a collaborative learning approach in a reading skills course. For 14 weeks, we gave students reading techniques instruction in a CL classroom setting. To ascertain the difference, the data were examined using the t-test inferential statistical analysis. Interviews with the deliberately chosen students from the two groups were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of their perception about the study. We continue our discussion about the study questions and synthesize our findings, placing them in the context of a review of pertinent prior research.

The pretest results gave a way to obtain an overview of the learner's ability level in reading abilities. On commencement of the study, we briefed up the learners about the CL approach and their act in the study so that they could feel free to talk and discuss their doubts and difficulties among themselves. On asking about their problems in pretest and their say about the low score, we found that participants problems were similar to our investigation results about the first question. Our findings show that all these problems discussed below are addressed though to varied degrees by the CL approach. The analysis of outcome of the study is loud and clear as learners improved their reading abilities at the end of the study.

While investigating the first research question, the qualitative and quantitative analysis of pretest scores established that the major difficulties of the students were: conceptual clarity of the reading strategies, reading comprehension issue, issues related to inferences, and time-management and anxiety. For learners, questioning ability proved to be the toughest to acquire of the three reading strategies. Being monolingual, the learners had very low exposure to EFL reading. Therefore, learners could not draw main, general idea from the texts. So much so that the learners first struggled to grasp the conceptual distinction between skimming and scanning. The results revealed that most of the participants had low skimming and scanning techniques the limited access to the target language kept their reading comprehension low. But on employing CL method in classroom the learners found it easy to take tasks and started to improve their abilities in the respective reading strategies. The reading difficulties participants faced show similarity with those found in the study of Hazem et. Al., (2022). Inadequate reading skills, problems with vocabulary, a lack of teamwork, a lack of group discussions, a lack of enthusiasm, and a poor ability to use prior knowledge due to anxiety are the issues which show coherence with the finding of Al-Qahtani (2016) and Zhao, (2017) studies.

The studies explored and examined the problems and factors affecting reading comprehension among EFL learners in Saudi Arabia. However, they insisted on the need of having an approach to address these issues but didn't suggest any approach directly. The studies available on reading comprehension are limited to reading and call for the appropriate method such as collaborative learning or cooperative learning is subdued. In the present study, we designed the practice sessions so as to address the problems of the participants. CL approach provided the learners by giving them interactive in-class environment, that helped them to interact to clear their doubts and help each other. In other words, they learnt and helped others learn by which indirectly they improved the

knowledge and motivation among themselves. They felt free for correction and learning in friendly role-playing situations. Throughout the study, the learners were motivated, CL approach proved to be helpful in improving their reading abilities especially those involving high level of critical thinking. In short CL approach proved to be catalyst in the overall progression of reading abilities of the learners. The CL role is pertinent to that of examined by Momtaz and Garner, (2010) and Benlyazid (2019) in their studies.

To sum up, CL proved to be playing a crucial role by providing an opportunity for students to share their work, improving, and helping others improve, which was a very effective process to uplift the weak and slow performing learners. It plays a vital role in improving critical thinking and reading comprehension. This study's conclusion corresponds with the CL study by Handayani, et al., published in 2019. In addition to this, the researcher noticed very important activity that was boosting weak students. The more-able learners help, and company made less-able feel equally comfortable and driven consequently they improved speedily. It is indeed notable finding.

These findings answered the research problem that the students' reading comprehension and critical thinking could be improved through collaborative learning. Collaborative learning is not just working together between students in an ordinary group, but a learning activity collaboratively to solve problems together to achieve certain goals. In achieving certain goals, students work together with friends to determine the problem-solving strategies assigned by the teacher. A small group of students discusses to find a way out, make a joint decision. Students' discussions create a feeling that the issues being discussed together are shared and owned by all group members.

As discussed in the introduction section, all the efforts were taken to ensure that learners get CL in-class environment for the practice in selected reading abilities. The learners were hesitant in the beginning in the CL environment class. However, the instructors helped and motivated them to lead and interact as and when required. Gradually, the communication among members assisted to perform the classroom activities to clear their doubts about the reading comprehension and strategies. The roles and group motivation in CL class conditions extended the learners opportunities to improve and become an autonomous reader.

Reading comprehension surfaced as another major problem for the learners. Reading comprehension and reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, and questioning are interdependent skills. The EG participants struggled with pragmatic and surface understanding because they lacked a strong vocabulary and had little exposure to literary language. As a result, they had trouble responding to comprehension-related questions. The outcome of the pre-test revealed that the learners were low scorers in the beginning. The mean of all the three skills was around 28 only. Learners came from urban as well as rural Arabic-monolingual backgrounds. Poor reading habits, low exposure to common vocabulary and use of only Arabic language in a day today communication were the major reasons behind their reticent ability in the reading skills. They were given relevant passages and text to read and practice in CL class atmosphere to take reading strategy related exercises. The EG learners developed their surface understanding and improved vocabulary in the period of 10 weeks. The team approach to the problem in CL method helped learners to score better each time. EG members had high motivation, free communication which developed their learning. This finding is consistent with the findings of Al-Ahdal et al., (2021) whose study concluded that collaboration among EFL learners helps them develop better, especially in vocabulary and reading comprehension. Another study by Scager et al., (2020) confirms the findings that CL favourably contributes to the completion of difficult and pertinent tasks, making collaborative learning settings highly recommended. Rojas-Drummond et al., (2014), in their study, echoed that CL develops reading comprehension by promoting self-regulation and autonomous habits among learners.

The findings pertaining to the second study question are covered in this section. Mostly, students face problems in finding or getting specific information from texts. Regular exercises on reading strategies exposed the learners to a variety of text and ample practice on selected text pragmatically improved their skimming and scanning and questioning ability. In this study, the learners overcame their issues such as insufficient schematic knowledge and the obliviousness about skimming and scanning abilities. Time management and anxiety emerged as the most prevalent problems that EFL students encountered during their studies. Reading strategies like all other language skills are subject to the practice. The more practice one does the more efficiency one puts in. Learners initially took time to skim and scan the text. Most of them would often confuse skimming with scanning. All reading strategies require some techniques, a good vocabulary level and drills to carry out competently. When learners were instructed to follow the tips of each reading ability carefully, they acquired reading skills gradually. The skill related exercises improved their proficiency. Finally, most of the learners started attempting exercises in time.

The researchers saw that all the EFL learners were hesitant and had anxiety in the beginning until they started to enjoy solving their difficulties and CL environment. EG learners had reservations and uneasy sort of feelings when they were asked to read texts. They experienced this because of the terms, sentence structures, and fundamental differences between the EFL and Arabic languages. Lack of familiarity with the EFL system and the cultural content were the main causes of the reading discomfort. The monolingual status of the learners was another major reason for their anxiety. As a solution to the anxiety, the learners were introduced to CL class activities and the more practice time they spent the easier and more familiar they became with the EFL text. Anxiety regarding the reading strategy was another level and type of anxiety they encountered. The instructor offered enough practice to reduce the anxiety level. The prevalence of anxiety among all EFL learners was also studied by Zhou (2017). He found out that all the EFL learners face anxiety, and the level of which differs language to language. The very outcome of this investigation relates to the higher performance level of skimming, scanning and questioning abilities of experimental group which can be associated with previous studies: the study by Zhou (2017) concluded in an undertone that the challenges of foreign language learners include anxiety and other complexes, if addressed properly can help the learners improve their reading strategies.

Students struggled significantly for drawing inferences. For EG participants, learning skimming and scanning ability became simpler as comprehension increased. Yet, inferencing-based inquiry was tough nut to crack. For EFL students, it might be challenging to read for hidden meaning that is frequently communicated indirectly by the author. It was observed that the learners, even after practice, took 5 weeks to understand this skill. This is because the drawing conclusion requires a high level of reading comprehension. Learners had difficulty in finding facts given in the text. They were also unable to read between the lines. Being from the Arabic-monolingual society, the learners faced difficulties in understanding complex ideas. Using clues, grasping the meaning of a passage, gathering all information about the plot, routine knowledge does not help in these tasks because the inferences had to be drawn on the text given. Both the groups had very low scores in questioning technique; EG mean of the score was 20 whereas CG mean was 24. The instructors, after evaluation of the difficulties for two weeks guided EG learners to read the passage thoroughly, avoid details, concentrate on the main ideas, and connect the links in the paragraphs especially, the primary idea. Learners were asked to find out the purpose of the passages and writer's argument. Learners learnt this ability quite a bit later than the other two reading strategies: skimming and scanning. And for the monolingual learners, they learn it much later and with quite a slow space. The EG's score of Mean of this skill improved from 20% to 60%. The finding of the present study is in line with findings by Elleman (2019), Kastberg et al., (2016) and Ahmed et al., (2016). The difficulties faced by learners in the beginning are similar to those of US students who struggle to complete easy tasks like finding facts, main idea and inferences in the study by Kasberg, et al., (2016). As a result, we can say that reading comprehension initially took more time to improve, students steadily got better after more practice. Similarly, Ahmed et al., (2016) also observed the similar pattern regarding the initial reticent progress in their research on Saudi learners. They found Saudi participants improving as per the age and practice. We discovered that the critical thinking level required for inferring tasks or cognitive tasks took longer to acquire than skimming and scanning, even though these findings are inconsistent with the other studies mentioned above. The causes of the sluggish progress of inferring tasks could be further investigated.

With reference to the third research question, the quantitative data showed significant differences between EG and CG post-test performance. Experimental group excelled substantially in skimming, scanning and questioning abilities, whereas the control group's reticent progress was due to their lack of coordination, confidence, and inadequate practice of skimming, scanning, and questioning in the absence of the collaborative learning approach. Therefore, they performed slow and failed to manage time in the said techniques of reading, as a result, they remained sluggish. The statistics of the study reflected EG's outstanding performance after the post-test. The researchers performed individual t-test to compare t-scores, which is the ratio in numerator denoting difference between the mean of the two groups: the EG and CG sample sets in all the three reading strategies. The t-test value is as follows, skimming $t=4.77$, scanning $t=4.06$ and questioning $t=9.84$. The previous studies carried out by Al-Ahdal and Alharbi, (2021) on the efficiency of collaborative learning method, Aqarni's study, (2015) on how collaborative strategic reading enhance EFL reading comprehension, and the study on Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) by of Babapour, et al., (2019) also showed results which are in consonance with the current results.

6. Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study can be considered as follows; The number of students and instructors are considerably small. Further, most of the participants of EG and CG are from rural background and same Saudi University. Therefore, the findings and conclusion of the present research cannot be extrapolated to other Saudi

universities. The study is entirely based on learners' reading strategy level and their perception about the study, there is likelihood of at least a few inaccurate perceptions of the participants.

7. Research Recommendations

In view of the findings, researchers recommend that the CLS is found to be significantly accelerating in learning reading strategies: skimming, scanning, and questioning abilities. Therefore, this learner friendly approach be employed in other skills such as Writing, Listening and Speaking as well. This approach will motivate learners to acquire other EFL skills. The researchers recommend that the language classrooms be designed as per the CL norms to address the learner-specific problems. It has been observed that learners were encouraged and motivated. We noticed that in-class environment plays an important role in improving and learning after an initial slow progress.

An independent inquiry exploring the comprehensive picture of the causes of the Saudi EFL learners' sluggish progress in cognitive reading abilities, especially, inferring tasks can be further investigated. For better depth of the issues, comparing such studies with other western university learners would provide minute details.

The researchers also found that effective learning of language skills is directly proportional to conceptual clarity and practice. Therefore, the education authorities should design more interactive courses to develop language abilities. The CL method is very successful in classes with a limited number of students (small groups/ small class); hence the language skill class should be restricted to limited strength. The study recommends the CL approach in all the higher education institutions.

8. Conclusion

This study examined how monolingual Saudi EFL learners' skimming, scanning, and questioning abilities were affected by collaborative learning strategies. A collaborative learning approach proved to be helpful in using knowledge and enhancing critical thinking. The t-test inferential analysis of the research data revealed that the experimental group's skimming, scanning, and questioning abilities improved considerably. The experimental group improved their sub-skills of reading better compared to the control group's trivial progress.

During the study, the learners faced challenges: Reading comprehension, pragmatic and surface understanding difficulties, inferring, and searching specific information, time management, anxiety. The cognitive reading ability improved slower and much later compared to skimming and scanning abilities. All these findings are in consonance with the other studies carried out on Saudi students as well as others.

The subsequent conclusions can be strained from the results and discussions; Firstly, the experimental group excelled in reading comprehension more significantly than the control group did. Secondly, the CL approach helped students overcome their problems. It proved to be catalyst in developing the reading strategies and providing them conducive in-class opportunities. This in-class environment helped EG participant improve level of reading abilities, and critical thinking. Finally, the CL approach proved to be conducive to mitigate the surface comprehension and pragmatic comprehension issues of the EFL learners in skimming, scanning and questioning abilities. The study offers first-hand information and in-depth insights regarding how monolingual EFL students behaved in the CLS classroom while learning reading strategies. The study also recommends tactics like increasing reading practice in CLS classes, creating settings that encourage independent reading, and creating language classrooms that closely resemble CLS standards for a better and more effective EFL learning experience.

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