# The Effect of Cooperation versus Collaboration on Iranian Students' Reading Ability

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**Abstract**

The present study attempted to investigate the impact of cooperation versus collaboration on college students` reading ability. To fulfill the purpose of the study, 90 participants were chosen from among 140 by means of administering the Nelson Proficiency Test. They were divided into three groups: cooperative group, collaborative group, and control group. A fifty-item multiple-choice reading vocabulary test was developed, validated, and used as the pretest. The results of the one-way ANOVA showed that there was no significant difference among the groups. Then after a number of cooperative and collaborative strategies used as the treatment in this study in six sessions of ninety minutes for each experimental group class, (control group without treatment) the posttest, which resembled the pretest in many respects, was administered to the three groups. The results of one-way ANOVA and Scheffee Test showed that the cooperative and collaborative groups worked better than the control group, and the collaborative one performed best.

**Keywords:** cooperative learning, collaborative learning, reading ability

## Introduction

Reading is an important cultural tool in modern societies. The ability to read and understand various texts is crucial to success in various every day setting as well as educational, professional settings. Proficiency in reading is a key goal of schooling and a major prerequisite for learning, both within and beyond the context of formal education (Boulware- Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Joshi, 2007).

Reading comprehension is an essential component of academic areas, professional success, and lifelong learning. Importance of reading skills in academic contexts causes to undertaking of considerable research studies in reading in a second language. The ability to read academic texts is regarded as one of the most important skills that university students of English as a second language and English as a foreign language need to achieve (El-Okda, 2005; Yigiter, Saricoban, & Gurses, 2005).

Reading comprehension may be one of the important skills which is usually under the investigation of the language experts in the field of second and foreign language acquisition. It is becoming more and more significant in the new knowledge economy and remains the most useful human activity for converting information into knowledge, both reading on paper or from the screen. The importance of reading as a key skill and of its sub-skills is confirmed so that academic goals need to be pursued right from the beginning in second and foreign language classroom settings, especially if the learners are supposed to be engaged in later academic pursuits at advanced levels such as to read abstract materials in order to get the key ideas from lectures, or they will be supposed to write critiques, and summaries, and so on and so forth (Richard- Amato, 1996). As McDonough and Shaw (2003) maintained:

As a skill, reading is clearly one of the most important; in fact from many instances around the world, we may argue that reading is the most important foreign language skill, particularly in cases where students have to read English material for their own specialist subject but may never have to speak the language; such cases are often referred to as English as a library language. (p. 89)

The terms *cooperation* and *collaboration* seem to be synonymous, but in fact they are different. In this paper, the researchers aimed to show the difference between *cooperative work* and *collaborative work* in general; the researchers also suggested practical activities that served as stepping stones to promote collaboration in EFL settings.

The main difference between these two approaches to group work is that cooperation is more focused on working together to create an end product, while successful collaboration requires participants to share in the process of knowledge creation (Dillenbourg et al. 1996; Roschelle & Teasley 1995). In other words, cooperation can be achieved if all participants do their assigned parts separately and bring their results to the table; collaboration, in contrast, implies direct interaction among individuals to produce a product and involves discussions, negotiations and accommodating others' perspectives.

## Statement of the Problem

Reading is considered as a skill of great importance for some reasons: first, it provides learners with access to a great quantity of further experience of language; second, it gives learners a horizon onto normal mean of continuing his personal education (Mirhassani & Toosi, 1996). So, with no doubt, reading comprehension would play an important role in the process of language learning. It looks necessary for the process of this language skill acquisition and intensively to improve it in our learners. By the way, that would be the teachers' responsibility to make his/her students aware of different language methods, strategies, and skills.

Hence, the present study aimed at probing into the effect of cooperative and collaborative learning strategies training on reading comprehension. To achieve this goal, we attempted to investigate whether the results obtained would confirm the findings of previous studies conducted in language learning settings or not.

## Significance of the Study

Learners of English as a second language (ESL) think of reading comprehension as an important and to some extent a difficult skill to acquire, but we believe all scholars, teachers, and university professors can help them to control over this failures by (a) teaching them what to read, and how to read, (b) teaching them practice language (in a discursive manner), (c) giving them exercises which are qualified and based on the needed strategies, and (d) working with students' different strategies and methods to improve their reading abilities and also vocabulary learning.

A big question that may be always raised by learners with difficulty in reading text is that what they should learn that can help/guide them to improve/advance their reading proficiency. We believe the answer to the question is to some extend introducing some methods and learning strategies in different needed fields, which is necessary for a good reading comprehension, such as, how to learn vocabulary, grammar, etc.

According to Farrell (2000), studies in second language reading have shown that reading strategies cannot only be taught to students, but that their use will help students with their performance on tests of comprehension and recall. Ultimately, based on what has mentioned, we

greatly would feel the potentiality of making learners aware of learning how to comprehend something when they encounter or need it from their text(s).

## Research Questions

The following research questions provided the specific focus for the study:

**Q1**. Does cooperative learning affect college students' reading ability?

**Q2**. Does collaborative learning affect college students' reading ability?

**Q3**. Which of the two techniques of cooperative and collaborative learning is more effective as far as reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners is concerned?

## Research Hypotheses

Based on the above research questions, the following null hypotheses were proposed:

$H_0$**1.** Cooperative learning does not affect college students' reading ability.

$H_0$**2.** Collaborative learning does not affect college students' reading ability.

$H_0$**3.** There is no significant difference between cooperative and collaborative learning with regard to Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension.

## Literature Review

### Cooperative Learning

Cooperation is working together to attain a common goal. Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that the members of the groups work together to enhance their own and each other's learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993). In cooperative learning situations, the learners know that they can reach their learning goals only if the other learners in the learning group also do so.

Cooperative learning represents the most carefully structured end of the collaborative learning continuum. Defined as "the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning" (Johnson et al. 1990), cooperative learning is based on the social interdependence theories of Kurt Lewin and Morton Deutsch (Deutsch, 1949; Lewin, 1935). These theories and associated research explore the influence of the structure of social interdependence on individual interaction within a given situation which, in turn, affects the outcomes of that interaction (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). In cooperative learning, the development of interpersonal skills is as important as the learning itself. The development of social skills in group work-learning to cooperate is the key to high quality group work. Many cooperative learning tasks are put to students with both academic objectives and social skill objectives. Many of the strategies involve assigning roles within each small group (such as recorder, participation encourager, summarizer) to ensure the positive interdependence of group participants and to enable students to practice different teamwork skills (Johnson & Johnson, 1989).

Built into cooperative learning work is regular "group processing": a "debriefing" time where students reflect on how they are doing in order to learn how to become more effective in group learning settings (Johnson & Johnson, 1989).

### Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is an educational approach to teaching and learning in which small groups of students work together to solve a shared problem, perform a task or create a product. Bruffee states that "the primary goal of collaborative learning … is to help the learners test the quality and value of what they know by trying to make sense of it to their peers–other people like

themselves." (Bruffee 1981, p. 745). Collaborative Learning is inherently a social activity in which learners and instructors, share knowledge, responsibility, and authority, and talk among themselves. So, learning takes place through the talk.

In the past two decades, collaborative learning methods and techniques (e.g. Collaborative Strategic Reading) have been widely used in ESL and EFL settings. Many studies show that collaborative learning is effective in enhancing the quality of ES/FL learning (Bejarano 1987; Flowerdew, 1998; Nelson; Roskams 1999; Schmid 1989). Nunan (1992) contends that collaborative learning provides a viable, and in many contexts, a more effective alternative to the competitive ethic which dominates much educational thinking today.

Research findings on collaborative as opposed to competitive learning have generally been positive. According to Good and Brophy (1987, cited in Nunan 1992) out of 41 studies reported in the literature, 26 reveal significantly  muchlearning in classes using cooperative methods, 14 were not significant, and only one found significantly greater learning in a control group.

The application of collaborative learning to different levels of education brought positive results in Taiwan. Being researched on for at least ten years in Taiwan, collaborative learning was proved to be very influentiol in increasing language proficiency, improving affective growth and enhancing social maturity (Liang, 2002).

**The Difference between Cooperative and Collaborative Learning**

Some scholars use the terms cooperative and collaborative interchangeably to mean participants working interdependently on a common learning task. Others, however, insist on a clear epistemological distinction (Bruffee, 1995). Advocates for distinguishing between the two terms suggest that cooperative learning differs from collaborative learning in that, in cooperative learning, the use of groups supports an instructional system that maintains the traditional lines of classroom knowledge and authority (Flannery, 1994). To other authors, cooperative learning is just a subcategory of collaborative learning (Cuseo, 1992). Still others (e.g. Millis & Cottell, 1998) hold that the most "sensible approach" is to view collaborative and cooperative learning as positioned on a continuum from most structured (cooperative) to least structured (collaborative). Since those who believe on a sharp distinction between cooperative and collaborative learning do so for epistemological reasons, it may help to clarify the nature of the argument.

In an article for *Change* magazine, subtitled, *Cooperative Learning versus Collaborative Learning*, Bruffee (1995) contends, "Describing the two terms as complementary understates some important differences between cooperative and collaborative learning. Some of what collaborative learning pedagogy recommends that instructorsdo tends in fact to undercut some of what cooperative learning might hope to accomplish, and vice versa" (p. 16). Based on this position, the goal of cooperative learning is to work together in harmony and mutual support to find the solution, whereas the goal of collaborative learning is to promote autonomous, articulate, thinking people, even if at times such a goal encourages dissent and competition that seems to undercut the ideals of cooperative learning. While cooperative education may be appropriate for children, Bruffee believes, collaborative learning is more appropriate for college students. Bruffee has made something of a brand name of collaborative learning in higher education circles. He intends the role of the instructor to be less the traditional expert in the classroom and more the peer of students. He states that knowledge at the college level is "likely to address questions with doubtful or ambiguous answers, answers that require well-developed judgment to arrive at, judgment that learning to answer such questions tends, in turn, to develop. ... The

authority of knowledge taught in colleges and universities should always be subject to doubt" (p. 15).

Thus, understanding the distinction between the two, and carrying out research on their effectiveness regarding different aspects of L2 seem to be a worthwhile attempt.

## Methodology

### Participants

For the purpose of the study, 90 English learners studying in an English college were chosen from 140 advanced students at Humanities in Islamic Azad University, Sari Branch, after having been checked for homogeneity. They were in their last semester in English Literature, Translation, and Teaching, and were instructed in their free time. For the researchers to make sure that the participants were at the same level of proficiency, a Nelson language proficiency test including grammar (30 items), vocabulary (10 items), and reading comprehension (10 items) was administered to the mentioned students. After analyzing the data, 90 participants whose scores fell one standard deviation above or below the mean were selected. Finally, they were divided into three groups, 60 subjects as experimental groups (2 groups of 30) and the other 30 as control group. The rest of the participants, whose scores were not at this range of the test, were dropped from the study. As a result, 50 students were discarded from the study. The participants had been studying English for at least 3 years in the college, were adults (their ages ranged from 23 to 27), and were both male and female. The subjects were at advanced level in compliance with the Nelson English Proficiency Test.

### Procedure

In order to conduct the research and to test the research hypotheses, the following steps were taken: First Nelson language proficiency test was administered to all of the participants to find out the homogeneity of the students; three classes, one with 30 subjects as control group, and the others with 60 subjects (two groups of 30 students) as experimental groups who were taking English classes at Islamic Azad University, Sari Branch were selected. The rest of the participants whose scores were not at this modified range, were dropped from the study. After 12 sessions of giving treatments to experimental groups, a final test of reading comprehension based on the treatments was given to each group as a posttest. To construct the pretest, the researcher found the readability of it through Flesch readability formula. It was done with the Microsoft Office Word 2007 software and the mean score was calculated. Therefore, the texts which were chosen for comprehension test had the mean readability of 62.06. In order to pilot the test, the researcher administered it to a parallel group of 30 subjects.

Then their reading comprehension scores were correlated with their proficiency scores, using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. The students in the experimental groups received 12 sessions with 90 minute treatment, including two sessions in a week. The passages were taken from *Reading Comprehension Success* by Chesla (1998).

### Cooperative Learning

The teacher maintained complete control of the class, even though the students worked in groups to accomplish the goal of a course. The cooperative teacher asked a specific question such as, *"What were the five causes of the start of World War II?"* The teacher then provided additional articles for the students to read and analyze, beyond the text, and then asked the students to work in groups to answer the question. The groups then presented their results to the whole class and discussed their reasoning. A follow up question then was posed to the groups to

analyze (e.g. about the United Nations to determine if this had been an effective organization to prevent world wars and to make recommendations on possible changes needed to make the UN more effective). The teacher used specific techniques, such as *Jig Saw, Think-Pair-Share, and Round Robin Brainstorming* each one for two sessions to help facilitate the group interactions.

*1. Jigsaw:* Groups with five students were set up. Each group member was assigned some unique material to learn and then to teach to his group members. To help in the learning students across the class working on the same sub-section got together to decide what was important and how to teach it. After practice in these "expert" groups, the original groups reformed and students taught each other.

*2. Think-Pair-Share:* Involved a three step cooperative structure. During the first step, individuals thought silently about a question posed by the instructor. Individuals paired up during the second step and exchanged thoughts. In the third step, the pairs shared their responses with other pairs, other teams, or the entire group.

*3. Round Robin Brainstorming:* Class was divided into small groups (4 to 6) with one person appointed as the recorder. A question was posed with many answers and students were given time to think about answers. After the "think time," members of the team shared responses with one another round robin style. The recorder wrote down the answers of the group members. The person next to the recorder started and each person in the group in order gave an answer until time was called.

## Collaborative Learning

Groups assumed almost total responsibility for answering the question. The students determined if they had enough information to answer the question. If not they identified other sources, such as journals, books, videos, the internet, to name a few. The work of obtaining the extra source material was distributed among the group members by the group members. The group decided how many reasons they could identify. The collaborative teacher did not specify a number, but assessed the progress of each group and provided suggestions about each group's approach and the data generated. It also occurred to the students to list the reasons in order of priority. The teacher was available for consultations and facilitated the process by asking for frequent progress reports from the groups, facilitated group discussions about group dynamics, helped with conflict resolution, etc. The final product was determined by each group, after consultation with the teacher. The means of assessment of the group's performance had been negotiated by each group with the teacher. Some groups decided to analyze the UN, as the cooperative group was directed to do, or they tried to come up with a completely new organization. They went back through history to determine how other periods of peace were created. The process was very open ended while it maintained a focus on the overall goal. The students developed a very strong ownership for the process and responded very positively to the fact that they were given almost complete responsibility to deal with the problem posed to them and they had significant input into their assessment. Following are five activities that practiced with the collaborative learning group:

### *Vocabulary Brainstorm*

This activity has a good warm-up or review activity. The language objective is to help learners learn new vocabularies about general topics such as weather, food, and clothes, or words that are examples of structures they may be studying, such as concrete nouns, phrasal verbs, adverbs and adjectives, to name a few.

*Step 1:* participants form groups and generate as many words as possible that relate to a selected topic. Everyone must participate, this is the rule.

*Step 2:* Each group chooses a spokesperson to read out that group's words to the whole class.

The advantage of this activity is that it is quick and fun, and exposes students to new words. It can be turned into a game if the teacher encourages students to generate many words as possible and keep track of or score the final number of words for each group. The teacher can also collect the lists of words and create a record book or make a poster wall.

### Preparing a Structured Survey

A survey activity works well in terms of collaboration because a variety of people are involved in asking and answering questions. The language objective is to practice relevant grammar constructions and functions that can be included in the questions and responses of the survey instrument.

*Step 1:* The teacher or the students prepare different sets of survey questions beforehand, which can be purposefully designed to practice targeted grammatical structures: "Where did you use to live? What do you prefer to drink with your meals? Where are you going after school?" When constructing the survey questions, students should avoid questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." It also helps to require students to answer the survey questions in complete sentences.

*Step 2:* Students form groups and each group uses a set of questions to interview members of their group. If possible, and to maximize the variety of responses, each group can ask different survey questions. Every student in each group must ask and answer a set of questions.

*Step 3:* Each group assigns a scribe who records all the answers to the group's survey questions.

*Step 4:* Group members choose a representative to present their group's survey responses to another group or to the whole class.

### Drawing Together

This activity, in which the participants create drawings using different colors, is fun and appealing to learners. The language objective includes the vocabulary of colors and adjectives, including comparatives and superlatives. Participants work alone at first and then as a large group (group size is dependent on the size of the class).

*Step 1:* Each learner chooses a different color and works alone for five minutes to draw a picture of his or her choice.

*Step 2:* The teacher provides a piece of paper large enough for all students to draw their pictures. Students draw together on the same piece of paper for five minutes.

*Step 3:* The learners analyze the final product and take turns naming the different colors.

*Step 4:* The teacher asks the learners to use adjectives to compare and contrast the single one-color drawings with the large multi-color picture.

### All the Ingredients Matter!

In this activity students role-play by representing the different ingredients needed to cook a dish or prepare a meal. The language objective is to describe, compare, and explain using the large vocabulary of food and cooking, including the names of ingredients, flavors, cookware, and utensils.

*Step 1:* Each student selects or is assigned an ingredient or utensil (either the real object or a picture).

*Step 2:* The teacher asks different students questions about what their ingredient tastes like, whether it can be eaten raw, and what their utensil is used for, etc.

*Step 3:* Students take turns asking similar questions to students sitting nearby (e.g., "What is the flavor of that spice? What does an egg taste like? Why can't you eat it raw? What kind of recipe is this ingredient used for? How do you cook with that pan?").

*Step 4:* Students form groups based on ingredients and cookware that can be used to prepare a meal; they brainstorm about the different kinds of dishes that can be made from their ingredients and discuss how to cook them. Students choose one person from their group to document the different dishes and cooking methods that were discussed.

*Step 5:* Students choose a representative from their respective groups to present their menus or recipes to either a different group or to the whole class.

*Step 6:* The teacher "steals" one of the ingredients or utensils and asks what is going to happen to the dish (e.g., "Is it still tasty? Can we still eat it? Is there another way to cook the dish?").

*Step 7:* The teacher returns the ingredient or utensil and reinforces the idea that all the ingredients matter.

### *The Secret of the Internet*

In this activity students discuss important components of the Internet, such as Wikipedia and social networking websites. The activity is most appropriate and interesting for teenagers and adults who are familiar with the Internet. The language objectives are the technical vocabulary and language functions associated with the Internet and social networking.

*Step 1:* As a whole class students take turns naming their favorite Internet site for homework, communication, entertainment, or social networking (e.g., Wikipedia, Face book, Twitter, MySpace).

*Step 2:* Students form groups and brain-storm about the features of websites and procedures to access or join social networking or other websites. This generates a large amount of useful specialized English vocabulary (e.g., surf, log in, register, create a profile, invite friends, upload/download photos, share music, edit content, and store information). One student from each group documents the vocabulary generated by that group.

*Step 3:* Each group takes a turn presenting the results of their discussion to the whole class, and all the class members take turns giving their reactions and opinions about the features and procedures of the Internet.

*Step 4:* The teacher tells students that "the rules of the Internet" have changed. Students can continue storing and accessing information on the Inter-net, but only their personal information will be available. Students vote for or against this idea and explain their choice. They also discuss how this would change the Internet.

*Step 5:* The whole class continues to share their ideas about the nature of the Internet (e.g., "Why does it take many active users to have a great website? Why is talking to others online fun? Do students learn anything from websites or people on the Internet?"). If the class has Internet access, students can demonstrate different websites and novel features that they are familiar with.

### Control Group Instruction

The same criteria and goals were discussed and also the same teaching materials were provided for the participants, but the difference was that in this group the same teaching materials were taught without any special strategies and discussing reasoning; that is, the participants in this group read the same texts in the class through the usual and traditional way of reading and

they did the same homework at home on reading. Everything in this group was the same as the other two groups, except for the cooperation and collaboration strategies that were not taught.

## Results

After collecting the data, the result was compared for the three groups. After gaining the scores from the posttest, a one-way ANOVA was used to see the result of treatment during the study. SPSS 17.0 software was utilized to analyze the results of the calculated scores and the results were shown on tables afterward.

**Table 4.1.** One-way ANOVA for Pretest

|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Between Groups** | 10.067 | 2 | 5.033 | 2.163 | .121 |
| **Within Groups** | 202.433 | 87 | 2.327 |  |  |
| **Total** | 212.500 | 89 |  |  |  |

ANOVA — Pre-test

By looking at the table, we will understand that the *Sig.* = .121, which is higher than .05. Therefore we can say that there were no significant and meaningful differences among all three groups on the pretest.

After treatment, posttest was taken by the learners, and the results are as follows:

**Table 4.2.** One-way ANOVA for Posttest

|  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Between Groups** | 2054.289 | 2 | 1027.144 | 490.548 | .000 |
| **Within Groups** | 182.167 | 87 | 2.094 |  |  |
| **Total** | 2236.456 | 89 |  |  |  |

ANOVA — Post-test

As it is shown in the table above, the *Sig.* was .000 which was less than .05. Therefore we can say that there were significant and meaningful differences among all three groups. In order to locate the exact places of differences in the subjects' performance, a Scheffe test was run. Table 4.3 indicates the results of the Scheffe test. Inspection of the *p* values shows that there were significant and meaningful differences among all three groups (*p* <. 05). In this table, standard error of measurements for each three groups including cooperative, collaborative, and control groups and also the mean differences were calculated.

**Table 4.3.** The Results of the Scheffe Test

| | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (I) Group Learning | (J)Group Learning | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| collaborative | cooperative | 6.07(*) | .374 | .000 | 5.14 | 7.00 |
| | Control | 11.70(*) | .374 | .000 | 10.77 | 12.63 |
| cooperative | collaborative | -6.07(*) | .374 | .000 | -7.00 | -5.14 |
| | Control | 5.63(*) | .374 | .000 | 4.70 | 6.56 |
| control | collaborative | -11.70(*) | .374 | .000 | -12.63 | -10.77 |
| | cooperative | -5.63(*) | .374 | .000 | -6.56 | -4.70 |

*Multiple Comparisons. Dependent Variable: Post-test. Scheffe.*

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Therefore we can say that there were significant and meaningful differences among all 3 groups. Table 4.3. Shows the heterogeneity of the groups. It shows none of the three groups were homogeneous and there was a meaningful difference between the groups. By looking at the groups we can see that the two cooperative and collaborative groups improved significantly after the treatment, but collaborative group improved more.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The results of the present study revealed that the learners reading collaboratively consistently outperformed the learners reading cooperatively and individually. The impact of collaborative reading appears to be salient in promoting the reading comprehension ability of Iranian EFL learners. These findings supports Chang (1995) finding. His study showed that the average scores of learners in collaborative learning were about two points higher than those of learners in a traditional teacher-oriented English reading class.

The gains of the collaborative readers can be grouped under the following categories: (a) the increase of learner talk in the collaborative reading context, (b) the supportive and communicative learning available in collaborative reading context, and (c) the presence of interactive processes in the collaborative reading context naturally stimulating the learners' linguistic, cognitive, and social abilities.

In a collaborative learning context, comparing with cooperative and traditional learning classes, the learners were able to promote the level of their peer interactions, which was the main feature of learning when the students were in the action of interacting with others in their environment and in cooperation with their peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Learners in collaborative reading groups had more opportunities to interact with their peers and, therefore, whenever they made mistakes they had more chances to be corrected by their peers. Collaborative reading created natural, interactive contexts in which learners were engaged in interactive processes such as brainstorming, listening to one another, eliciting self-disclosure, asking questions, eliciting confirmation, clarifying issues, making reflexive comments, asking for explanation, collective summarizing of paragraphs, and collective paraphrasing of the utterances. Such frequent interaction among students increased the amount of student talk and student participation in the

classroom, which, in turn, played a role in developing the students' encyclopedic and linguistic knowledge. The individual readers, on the other hand, were deprived of these interactive processes.

In the collaborative reading class, comparing to cooperative learning classes, the participants had opportunities to receive feedback and modeling from their peers. According to Vygotsky (1978), the key feature of learning is that it awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the students is in the action of interacting with people in their environment and in collaboration with their peers. Therefore, when it comes to collaborative reading comprehension, the authenticity of the environment and the affinity between the learners are essential elements to make the learner feel part of this environment. These elements do not exist in private reading. In collaborative reading, the group activities encourage participants to engage in such high-level cognitive skills as analyzing, synthesizing, elaborating and explaining.

This study also provides some evidence that collaborative learning can be effectively implemented in a reading comprehension class with Iranian EFL learners who are majoring in English as a foreign language. It also gives evidence to the potential impact collaborative learning can have on learners' development of linguistic and encyclopedic knowledge. The linguistic knowledge in this research is interpreted in terms of the knowledge of the grammatical structures and lexical knowledge. The encyclopedic knowledge is interpreted in terms of the concepts, and overall purpose or meaning contained in the texts.

The findings of the current study are sufficiently clear to suggest that collaborative reading has an important place in the EFL settings, and that this approach to language teaching would repay further research in a variety of institutional and cultural situations.

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