

UNVEILING THE POWER OF COLLABORATION: COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIC READING IN ENHANCING UNDERGRADUATE READING COMPREHENSION

^{1*}Rengganis Siwi Amumpuni^{ORCID}, ²Rudi Hartono^{ORCID}, ²Dwi Rukmini^{ORCID}, ²Rahayu Puji Haryanti^{ORCID}

¹Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas PGRI Madiun, Indonesia

²Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

*Corresponding author email: rengganissiwi@unipma.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) on undergraduate students' reading comprehension. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed, involving 30 purposively selected undergraduate students (11 males and 19 females, aged 18-20) enrolled in reading comprehension courses. Data were collected using reading comprehension tests and questionnaires, and were subsequently analyzed with SPSS to evaluate the impact of the CSR intervention. The results demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in students' reading scores, as evidenced by a *t*-test result at the 0.05 significance level ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). These findings confirm the effectiveness of CSR as an instructional strategy for enhancing reading comprehension. Students particularly commended CSR's straightforward structure and ease of adaptation into the curriculum. Thus, the study concludes that CSR not only sharpens academic reading but also increases motivation to engage in reading. This study seeks to close the gap between theoretical research and practical teaching approaches, showcasing the need for the implementation of CSR in higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is an essential skill for success in higher education and professional landscapes, as it entails a range of cognitive processes such as decoding, vocabulary acquisition, inferencing, and connecting new concepts with existing knowledge (Bilici et al., 2023; Wui & Aziz, 2022). Undergraduate students are often required to engage deeply with complex, subject-specific texts and to critically evaluate sources while synthesizing information for various assignments (Mohseni et al., 2020; Nurhalimah et al., 2022). However, many students face difficulties in developing these reading skills, especially if they are unfamiliar with academic reading strategies or are non-native English speakers

(Chowdhury & Ara, 2021; Ratanaruamkarn et al., 2023). This situation underscores an urgent need for explicit and structured instructional strategies that teach reading comprehension as a skill rather than assuming it as a product of content learning, vital for fostering deeper engagement with academic materials and enhancing student outcomes in both academic and career contexts (A. Ardiana et al., 2024). In Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language, this challenge becomes even more prominent, as university students often lack structured exposure to academic reading strategies suited for specific materials.

Collaborative learning has emerged as a favored approach that significantly boosts academic performance across different educational stages. Rooted in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, this method emphasizes the crucial role of social interactions in cognitive development (Alqarni, 2015). Through collaboration, students are able to exchange varied viewpoints, clarify any misconceptions, and jointly create knowledge. This dynamic interaction not only nurtures critical thinking skills but also promotes deeper learning outcomes compared to more conventional, solitary learning methods (Buphate & Esteban, 2022; Saputra et al., 2019). In reading contexts, collaborative learning provides multiple advantages: it motivates students to identify main ideas, encourages peer feedback, and fosters comprehension through interactive and reflective discussion (Amumpuni et al., 2024; Mendieta et al., 2015; Rajaei et al., 2020). Engaging in collective meaning-making also supports metacognitive awareness and enhances students' ability to critically evaluate texts within their Zone of Proximal Development, as proposed by Vygotsky.

CSR represents a structured model of collaborative learning that merges cooperative principles with systematic reading strategies aimed at improving comprehension. Initially designed for students struggling with reading in inclusive classroom settings (Vaughn et al., 2013). CSR emphasizes the importance of peer scaffolding and social interaction in cognitive growth (K. Ardiana et al., 2024). Within CSR, learners engage in group discussion to construct meaning collectively, with each participant taking a defined role to promote active involvement and comprehension monitoring (Alqarni, 2015; Rozanah Katrina Herda et al., 2023; Khonamri & Karimabadi, 2015; Vaughn et al., 2013). While CSR has been shown to be effective at primary and secondary levels, its application in higher education, especially in EFL contexts like Indonesia, remains underexplored. Research investigating CSR at the university level, particularly within Indonesian EFL contexts, remains scarce. Most studies in Indonesia have focused on secondary education, leaving a gap in understanding how CSR can be adapted to the academic literacy demands of higher education students. Undergraduate students face challenges not only in identifying main ideas or understanding vocabulary but also in synthesizing information from multiple texts, evaluating the reliability of academic sources, and applying disciplinary knowledge in specialized contexts. Adapting CSR to university-level instruction may therefore provide a structured, socially mediated approach to overcome these challenges and strengthen academic literacy.

In many universities, reading instruction still focuses primarily on content transmission rather than the explicit teaching of comprehension strategies, leaving students to manage complex texts independently. Such instructional limitations highlight the need for pedagogical approaches that explicitly develop academic literacy while aligning with the cognitive and linguistic demands of higher education. In the Indonesian context, where students often rely on teacher-centered instruction, CSR offers a potential shift toward student-centered, strategy-based reading pedagogy that encourages collaboration, autonomy, and critical engagement with texts.

Despite CSR's proven success in K-12 education, little is known about its application and effectiveness in higher education, particularly within the Indonesian EFL context. This study addresses this gap by examining the effects of Collaborative Strategic Reading on

undergraduate students' reading comprehension and by exploring their perception of its classroom implementation. Specifically, this research seeks to answer two key questions:

1. Is there any significant difference in reading comprehension outcomes when utilizing CSR at the undergraduate level?
2. How is the students' views regarding the implementation of CSR in their reading classes?

Based on prior empirical evidence, it is hypothesized that CSR will (1) significantly improve students' reading comprehension scores and (2) foster positive perceptions toward CSR as an engaging, collaborative approach to academic reading in higher education.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to comprehensively examine the effects of collaborative strategic reading on students' reading comprehension and their perceptions and its implementation. According to Creswell et al. (2018), a convergent parallel design involves the simultaneous collection, analysis, and interpretation of qualitative and quantitative data. This mixed-methods research methodology included an assessment of both qualitative and quantitative elements. To establish a baseline for students' reading comprehension levels, a pretest was administered prior to the intervention, which was designed to enhance reading skills within a specified timeframe. The CSR intervention was conducted over six weeks, consisting of 100 minutes in a sessions. Quantitative data were obtained from reading comprehension pretests and posttests designed to measure changes in students' performance before and after CSR intervention. The qualitative component consisted of open-ended questionnaires and open-ended responses. Both datasets were collected concurrently and analyzed separately; the results were then compared and merged during the interpretation phase to identify convergent and divergent patterns between quantitative outcomes and qualitative insights. This process aligns with Creswell's (2018) framework for data integration in mixed-methods research.

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the study. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, were assured that participation was voluntary, and were informed that their responses would remain confidential and anonymized. Although the study did not include a control group, this decision was made to preserve the authenticity of the classroom setting and avoid disrupting ongoing coursework. A visual representation of the research process based on Creswell's (2023) mixed-methods models is presented in Figure 1

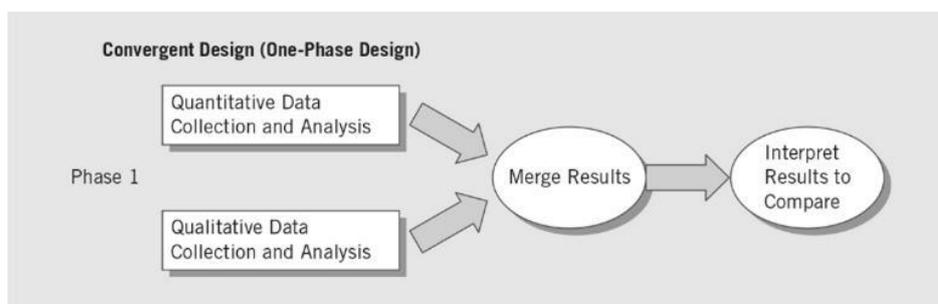


Figure 1. Convergent design adapted from Creswell

Population and Sample

The population in this study was the undergraduate students at one of the private university in Madiun, East Java. The sample in this study comprised thirty students (19 females and 11 males) aged 18-20 years, enrolled in a reading class during the odd semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. They were selected through purposive sampling, which was

deemed appropriate to ensure that the selected group reflected typical characteristics of undergraduate EFL learners in Indonesian higher education—namely, intermediate English proficiency, similar academic backgrounds, and prior exposure to general reading instruction. To provide additional context, participants were drawn from the English Education study program, where English is the primary medium of instruction for the courses. Their English proficiency ranged from B1 to B2 levels on the CEFR scale, based on university placement tests.

Prior to the intervention, a pretest was administered to evaluate the students' initial reading comprehension skills. Following the instructional period, a posttest was conducted to assess any changes in their reading comprehension scores. The comparison of pretest and posttest scores will be utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. Although no control group was employed, an inherent limitation of this quasi-experimental design, the study maintained internal validity through the consistent implementation of instructional procedures, equivalent exposure time for all participants, and triangulation of findings from qualitative data. The choice to use a single group design was intentional, aiming to preserve the authenticity of the classroom environment and to explore CSR's impact within a naturalistic instructional setting typical of Indonesian EFL classrooms.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of participants (N=30)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	19	63.3
	Male	11	36.7
Age	18 years old	5	16.7
	19 years old	15	50.0
	20 years old	5	16.7

Instruments

This study employed three primary instruments for data collection. The first instrument was a TOEFL-based reading comprehension test, a questionnaire, and students' open-ended written responses. The reading comprehension test consisted of 50 multiple-choice items adapted from standardized TOEFL reading materials, covering such as identifying main ideas, making inferences, understanding vocabulary in context, and recognizing text organization. The items were modified to align with the participants' proficiency level and the learning objectives of the Reading Comprehension course. To ensure content validity, three experts in English language education reviewed the test items for linguistic clarity, relevance, and alignment with course outcomes. Revisions were made based on their feedback before administering a pilot test with 20 students from a similar cohort. The pilot test results indicated satisfactory reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86, demonstrating good internal consistency.

The second instrument was a questionnaire and the last was students' open-ended responses. As noted by Cohen et al. (2018), questionnaires are a common tool in survey research, valued for their ability to generate structured, reliable quantitative data that can be independently analyzed. The questionnaire and students' interviews in this study were specifically developed to explore students' views on the use of Collaborative Strategic Reading in the classroom. A Likert scale was used to measure their responses, asking students to indicate the extent of their agreement with each statement, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." To ensure validity, the questionnaire items were evaluated through expert judgment by three English education lecturers specializing in language pedagogy and assessment. Following minor adjustments for wording and clarity, the

instrument was pilot tested on the same group used for the reading test, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.91, which indicates excellent internal consistency. The open-ended responses provided complementary qualitative data to capture students' reflections on their learning experiences and perceived benefits of CSR. These responses offered insights that enriched the quantitative findings, aligning with the principles of data triangulation in mixed-methods research. Both quantitative and qualitative instruments thus contributed to a comprehensive understanding of CSR's impact on reading comprehension and student perceptions, ensuring the study's methodological rigor through validated, reliable, and contextually adapted instruments.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the reading comprehension test and the questionnaire were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. For the reading comprehension test, each correct answer was scored as one point, yielding a total possible score of 50. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores, were calculated to provide an overview of the students' reading proficiency levels. Prior to further analysis, normality of the score distribution was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test, ensuring the appropriateness of subsequent parametric analyses. The questionnaire data were analyzed in two phases. For the closed-ended items, responses were coded numerically based on a five-point Likert scale, with values ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Descriptive statistics were calculated for each item to examine central tendencies and dispersion. To examine the relationship between students' reading comprehension scores and their perceptions of Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR), Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted. This analysis aimed to explore whether higher reading proficiency was associated with more positive attitudes toward CSR implementation.

After collecting data from the pretest and posttest, the researcher used a paired sample t-test and SPSS Version 22 to evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional method. This evaluation was carried out for assessment purposes. For the open-ended responses, a thematic analysis approach was adopted. Responses were read repeatedly to identify recurring themes and patterns. Emerging themes were then coded and categorized to capture the qualitative nuances of students' experiences with CSR. Triangulation between quantitative and qualitative data provided a more comprehensive understanding of the students' reading experiences and attitudes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

In this section, the results will be discussed, emphasizing the impact of implementing CSR on the reading comprehension skills of thirty undergraduate students as well as analyzing their perception of its usefulness in the classroom.

1. Collaborative strategic reading in students' reading comprehension

The objective of this investigation was to assess the intervention's effectiveness by conducting a statistical analysis of the students' comprehension test scores in a sequential manner. The students' means before and after the implementation of the collaborative strategic reading instructional strategy are shown in the descriptive statistics. The average scores pre- and post the treatment are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Paired samples statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 pretest	71.00	30	6.226	1.137
posttest	76.10	30	6.656	1.215

As shown on the summary statistics (Table 2), the mean of the pretest was 71.00 ($SD = 6.226$), and the mean of the posttest also increased to 76.10 ($SD = 6.656$). The results show a mean increase of 5.10, which is above the expected threshold and indicates a clear improvement in students' reading comprehension after the intervention.

Table 3
Paired samples correlations

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 pretest & posttest	30	.872	.000

A Paired Samples Correlation (Table 3) revealed a strong positive correlation between the pretest and posttest scores, $r = 0.872$, with a p -value < 0.001 . This result suggests a significant, strong, and positive association between the two sets of scores, indicating that students' relative performance levels were maintained across both assessments.

Table 4
Paired samples test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 pretest - posttest	-5.100	3.284	.600	-6.326	-3.874	-8.507	29	.000

Further analysis using a Paired Samples t -test (Table 4) confirmed a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores, $t(29) = -8.507$, $p < 0.001$. The effect size (Cohen's d) was calculated at 1.55, which represents a large effect, suggesting that the CSR intervention has a substantial impact on students' reading comprehension. The 95% confidence interval for the difference ranged from -6.326 to -3.874, providing further evidence that the intervention led to a measurable and reliable improvement in students' reading comprehension.

Taken together, the results suggest that CSR had a meaningful positive effect on students' reading comprehension skills. The strong correlation, combined with the significant increase in posttest scores, underscores both the consistency and the effectiveness of the instructional intervention.

2. Students' views regarding the implementation of CSR

Learners' responses toward using the collaborative strategic reading are positive. This could be seen from their responses and willingness to take part in learning English. The results of the questionnaire can be observed in Figure 2.

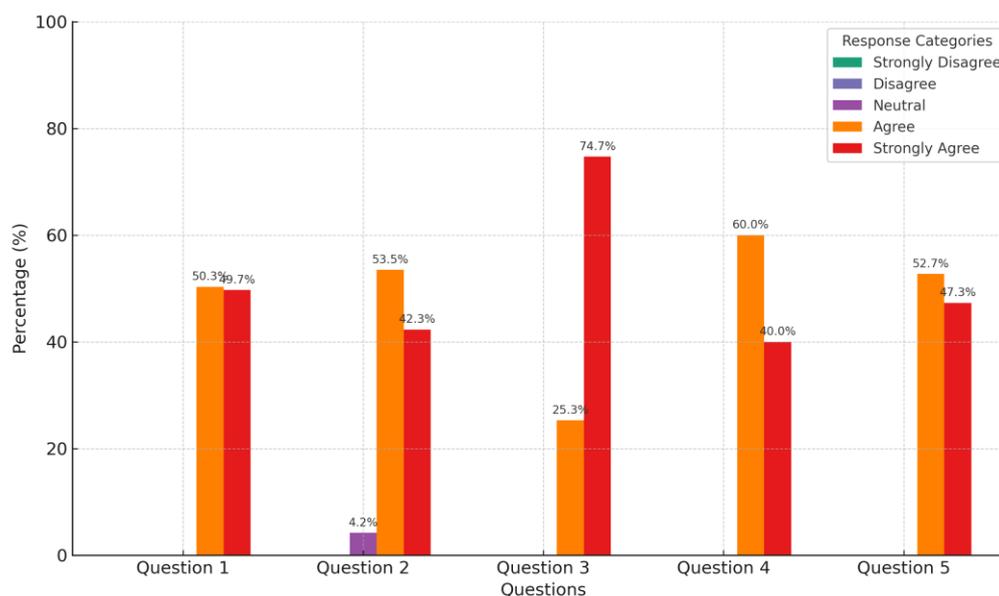


Figure 2. Students' perception of CSR

Note:

Statement 1: Students feel enthusiastic when learning reading comprehension through collaborative strategic reading

Statement 2: Collaborative strategic reading can be taught as part of the reading comprehension course

Statement 3: Collaborative strategic reading improves students' reading comprehension

Statement 4: Collaborative strategic reading presents material clearly

Statement 5: Collaborative strategic reading develops students' motivation and self-confidence in reading

Students' responses revealed consistently positive perceptions toward the implementation of Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) in reading comprehension classes. As shown in Figure 1 and summarized in Table 5, learners expressed high enthusiasm and confidence in using CSR, noting its structured phases, collaborative nature, and clear contribution to comprehension improvement.

Across all five indicators, students reported strong agreement that CSR made reading activities more engaging, interactive, and effective. They highlighted the novelty of CSR and its ability to increase motivation and participation in class. One student reflected, "This is my first time learning reading comprehension using CSR, and it's very interesting" (ST1), while another shared, "I love reading class because CSR helps me learn better" (ST2). Students also emphasized CSR's structured process, particularly the "Get the Gist" phase, as a useful scaffold for identifying main ideas and improving comprehension. They perceived the strategy as feasible to integrate into regular reading instruction, with one noting, "CSR helps me understand the text better because it has several stages" (ST10). In addition, CSR was viewed as an effective means of enhancing vocabulary development and overall reading performance, as expressed by a participant: "It helped me grasp the meaning of new words easily" (ST12). Importantly, students linked CSR to improvements in motivation and self-confidence, attributing this to peer collaboration and mutual support. Comments such as "I can discuss with my group, so I feel more confident in reading class" (ST9) illustrate how CSR fosters a supportive and encouraging learning environment.

In summary, both quantitative and qualitative findings confirm that CSR positively impacts students' reading comprehension and affective engagement. It not only strengthens comprehension skills and vocabulary knowledge but also promotes enthusiasm, confidence, and collaboration, core principles of student-centered learning in EFL contexts.

Table 5
Table of themes

Statement Focus	Emerging Themes	Representative Student Comments
Enthusiasm for learning through CSR	Novelty of CSR, increased engagement, positive emotional response	“This is my first time learning reading comprehension using CSR, and it's very interesting” (ST1); “I love reading class because CSR helps me learn better” (ST2)
Feasibility of CSR integration into the curriculum	Structured approach, curriculum alignment, support in comprehension	“It helps me to get the main idea in the 'Get the Gist' phase...” (ST16); “CSR helps me in understanding the text...” (ST10)
Impact of CSR on reading comprehension	Vocabulary development, improved textual understanding	“It developed my vocabulary...” (ST12); “CSR improves my reading comprehension” (ST5)
Clarity and structure of CSR	Clear instructional phases, cognitive support, ease of use	“It has several phases that can help me...” (ST17); “CSR has four stages...” (ST11)
CSR's effect on motivation and self-confidence	Peer collaboration, confidence building, and increased motivation	“I enjoy reading class, which motivated me to learn” (ST3); “I can discuss with my group, so I feel confident...” (ST9)

Discussion

The results of this study revealed a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension after the implementation of CSR. The mean posttest score (76.10) was notably higher than the pretest score (71.00), indicating measurable progress in students' ability to understand and interpret texts. This improvement aligns with previous studies that have demonstrated CSR's effectiveness in promoting reading comprehension through structured group interaction and strategic engagement with texts (Azizah et al., 2024; Hermida, 2023; Putri & Yuliana, 2021). The strong positive correlation between pretest and posttest scores ($r = 0.872$, $p < 0.001$) further suggests that the intervention yielded consistent gains across the sample.

However, beyond these statistical outcomes, deeper interpretation points to several possible factors influencing the improvement. While CSR's cooperative and strategy-based nature likely contributed to the gains, the novelty effect, students' excitement about experiencing a new learning method, may have also enhanced motivation and participation. Similarly, increased test familiarity between the pretest and posttest could have supported higher performance, even though the test content differed. These alternative explanations highlight the complexity of measuring learning improvement and suggest that the observed enhancement may reflect both genuine comprehension development and positive affective responses to the innovative instructional approach.

Considering this, the intervention proved to be highly effective as an educational measure, as there was evidence from all participants in the study of improved reading comprehension skills. This corroborates other studies which reported that collaborative approaches greatly increase reading comprehension (Amjadi, 2024; Amumpuni et al., 2024; Aritonang Rotua & Swondo, 2021; R K Herda, 2023; Sa'adah et al., 2023; Siahaan et al., 2022; Sulistyani et al., 2022; Topalov, 2023; Yon et al., 2024). In addition, the low variance also indicates that the intervention can be applied to a wider range of more homogeneous populations. In light of these findings, the research strongly supports the rationale in adopting non-discretionary policies for the purpose of program decision-making, advocating for the sustained use or expanded application of the program to make a lasting impact.

An analysis of student responses about the implementation of CSR reveals its influence on reading comprehension and overall learning motivation. The level of enthusiasm for CSR is overwhelmingly positive as 49.67% of students responded strongly agree and 50.33% agreed which reflects positively on CSR. Such results support earlier studies that underscore the many motivational advantages of CSR, especially regarding the increase in reading motivation among learners (Aldossary, 2024; Sarshogh et al., 2024; Zoghi et al., 2014). The students' written reflections showed that CSR was a new instructional approach for them, and it was an interesting strategy for working on reading comprehension.

The students' positive views on the possibility of integrating CSR into their curriculum, with 44.00% strongly agreeing and 52.67% agreeing, also suggest its incorporation into academic goals. These views are in line with previous research, where teachers remarked that the organized nature of CSR is congruent with curricular aims and is feasible in many types of classrooms (Moore et al., 2019; Mustapha & Zoghi, 2010). The structured phases of CSR, particularly the 'Get the Gist' part, as students have claimed, enable the retrieval of the main ideas which scholars have argued about regarding CSR's effectiveness in clarifying the learning material (Azizah et al., 2024). The most striking impact pertains to CSR's effect on reading comprehension, where 75% of students reported improvements in vocabulary acquisition and understanding of texts. This is consistent with Sarshogh et al.'s findings on CSR's positive relationship with reading motivation and comprehension, further along the Lerner's cycle (Sarshogh et al., 2024). Also, the emphasis on vocabulary qualitative feedback resonates with recent literature noting the greater lexical and comprehension awareness achieved through CSR (Amjadi, 2024; Khonamri & Karimabadi, 2015; Nurdiana et al., 2024). As for students' attitudes towards CSR, 40% strongly agreed, and 60% agreed to the statement pertaining to the clarity of material presented, which supports the hypothesis claiming that clarity of instruction, along with systematic teaching, greatly affects educational achievement. Such frameworks ease learners' navigation of intricate and difficult texts, a phenomenon documented in studies exploring the impact of CSR on reading instruction (Azizah et al., 2024; Fithriyah et al., 2022). In addition, comments regarding the motivational aid provided through CSR collaboration further illustrate the positive impression that CSR contributes toward self-confidence and enthusiasm for reading (Hermida, 2023; Zoghi et al., 2014).

Despite these positive results, this study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The sample was relatively small ($n = 30$) and drawn from a single university in East Java, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The absence of a control group also restricts causal inference, as improvements could partly result from external factors such as increased exposure to English or natural academic progression. Furthermore, the study's six-week duration provides a limited view of CSR's long-term effects. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples, employ control or comparison groups, and extend the intervention period to evaluate the sustainability of the outcomes.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings carry important implications for lecturers in higher education. CSR can serve as an effective, low-cost, and adaptable strategy for fostering active reading comprehension among EFL learners. Lecturers can integrate CSR phases, such as Preview, Click and Clunk, Get the Gist, and Wrap-Up into existing curricula to promote collaborative learning, critical thinking, and student autonomy. Furthermore, CSR's structured design can be adapted across disciplines beyond English education, enabling students to approach academic texts systematically and reflectively. To maximize its impact, instructors are encouraged to provide continuous scaffolding, clear role assignments, and reflective discussion sessions after each CSR cycle.

In conclusion, while the results demonstrate that CSR enhances reading comprehension and learner engagement, they should be interpreted with consideration of contextual and

methodological constraints. Nevertheless, the integration of CSR in higher education presents a valuable opportunity to foster interactive, student-centered learning environments that not only improve comprehension skills but also cultivate motivation and collaboration among learners.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research show that reading comprehension for undergraduate students improved substantially after the implementation of Collaborative Strategic Reading. The improvement in posttest scores, supported by students' positive perceptions, indicates that CSR effectively combines cognitive and social learning processes to strengthen reading skills and motivation. These findings highlight CSR's potential as a practical and interactive strategy for improving academic literacy in higher education. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding how structured, collaborative approaches can enrich reading instruction and promote active learning among university students. CSR provides a framework that encourages peer interaction, strategy use, and reflective comprehension—key components of student-centered pedagogy in tertiary education.

Future research should extend these findings by involving larger and more diverse samples, implementing control or comparison groups, and examining CSR's long-term impact through longitudinal studies. Investigating CSR across different academic disciplines and varying proficiency levels would also provide valuable insights into its broader applicability and effectiveness in higher education settings.

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