


# Exploring the Impact of Collaborative Reading Strategies in Improving Academic Reading Comprehension in Learners of English as a Foreign Language

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## A B S T R A C T

Academic reading comprehension is a crucial skill for EFL learners, as it enables them to understand complex texts and succeed in academic settings. Various studies have explored the use of collaborative reading strategies to improve students' reading skills. However, most previous research has primarily focused on general reading comprehension, with limited attention given to academic reading in authentic EFL classroom contexts. This indicates a gap in understanding how collaborative reading strategies specifically support academic reading comprehension among EFL learners. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the impact of collaborative reading strategies in improving academic reading comprehension through a qualitative case study. The result of this are anticipated to contributed to provide practical findings for teachers in implementing collaborative learning approaches and contribute to the development of more effective academic reading instruction in EFL classrooms.

**Keywords:** *Collaborative Reading Strategies, Academic Reading, Cooperative Learning, Classroom Interaction*

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## INTRODUCTION

Academic reading is very important in higher education, particularly for students in EFL context. It helps students understand subject knowledge, read and interpret academic texts, and take part in academic discussions (Taye & Teshome, 2025). In higher education contexts, the ability to process and comprehend academic texts is considered a foundational skill that supports students' success across disciplines, as most learning materials are presented in written form (Buehl, 2023b). In EFL contexts, academic reading is not only about understanding language, but also about thinking carefully and using strategies. Students need to analyze ideas, combine information from different parts of the text, and evaluate evidence in a critical way. (Pelenkahu et al., 2024). However, many EFL students find it difficult to understand academic texts. This happens because they have limited vocabulary, lack enough background knowledge, and are not familiar with academic writing styles and conventions. (Othman, 2024). These challenges often make students less interested and less active in reading academic texts in English. They may also feel less confident when trying to understand the material. (Williams et al., 2023). As a result, improving students' academic reading ability has become a major concern for educators in EFL contexts.

However, many EFL students encounter considerable difficulties when dealing with academic texts written in English. To overcome these challenges, many researchers suggest using interactive and student-centered teaching methods in reading classes (Tang, 2023). One teaching approach that has gained much attention is collaborative learning. This approach draws on sociocultural theory (Daramola et al., 2024). According to this theory, learning happens through social interaction. Students build knowledge together by talking, discussing ideas, and solving problems as a group. In reading classes, collaborative learning encourages

students to talk about the text, share their understanding, and help each other understand the meaning better (Liu et al., 2024). Such interaction promotes deeper comprehension and fosters higher-order thinking skills (Yadav & Singh, 2026). Therefore, collaborative approaches are considered particularly relevant for addressing the complex demands of academic reading in EFL settings (Zhang & Li, 2025).

More specifically, collaborative reading strategies use structured collaborative activities, including reciprocal teaching, think-pair-share, and guided discussion to help improve students' reading comprehension (Abdelmoati Mohamed, 2023). Through these activities, students become more active in reading by making predictions, asking questions, clarifying difficult parts, and summarizing information. Previous studies show that collaborative reading can improve students' understanding of texts, increase their motivation, and help them become more aware of their own learning strategies (Bermillo & Merto, 2022). In addition, working with peers gives students direct feedback, which helps them discuss meaning together and fix misunderstandings while reading (Yang & Xiaochen, 2022). Although many studies have discussed collaborative learning and reading comprehension, there are still some gaps (Koşar, 2023). Despite these benefits, the existing body of research still shows several important limitations (Galante et al., 2023).

First, many previous studies focus on general reading skills, not specifically on academic reading, which is more complex and requires deeper thinking (Aziz et al., 2024). Second, many studies use experimental methods that mainly measure test results, but they do not explore much about students' experiences and opinions during the use of collaborative reading strategies (Diener et al., 2022). Third, in many EFL classrooms, reading is still taught in a teacher-centered way. Students usually read silently and answer comprehension questions individually, which gives them fewer chances to interact and discuss ideas with others (Vaughn et al., 2024). In addition, limited attention has been given to how collaborative reading strategies are implemented in real classroom contexts and how learners actively construct meaning through interaction (Buehl, 2023a). Therefore, more research is needed to understand how collaborative reading strategies are applied in academic reading classes and how students respond to these activities.

Based on these considerations, This study aims to examine the implementation of collaborative reading strategies in supporting academic reading among EFL learners and to examine students' experiences and responses during the learning process (Amumpuni et al., 2025). By focusing not only on instructional procedures but also on learners' perspectives, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the pedagogical value of collaborative reading in EFL contexts (Wafiroh et al., 2024). This study is significant as it provides a comprehensive understanding of both the implementation process and its impact of collaborative reading, which can inform more effective and context-sensitive teaching practices. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more interactive, student-centered, and contextually appropriate reading instruction practices (Busa & Chung, 2024).

In addition to enhancing comprehension, collaborative reading strategies also play a significant role in developing learners' academic literacy skills (Liu et al., 2024). Academic literacy involves not only understanding texts but also recognizing rhetorical structures, identifying authorial stance, and engaging critically with arguments (Buehl, 2023b). In EFL settings, students often struggle with these higher-level literacy demands because they are simultaneously processing linguistic form and content meaning (Călinescu, 2024). Through structured collaboration, learners can externalize their thinking processes, articulate interpretations, and negotiate different viewpoints, which supports deeper cognitive processing (Zhou & Qu, 2024). This dialogic engagement allows students to scaffold one another's understanding within their zone of proximal development, thereby gradually fostering independent academic reading competence.

In addition, collaborative reading strategies match modern teaching approaches that focus on communication and student-centered learning (Adam & Gheitas, 2025). These

approaches encourage students to participate actively and interact meaningfully in the classroom (Adam & Gheitas, 2025). Instead of being passive readers, students are encouraged to engage actively in the learning process in understanding and building meaning from the text. This active involvement is very important in academic reading, where students need to interpret, evaluate, and combine complex ideas (Liu et al., 2024). Therefore, studying how collaborative reading strategies are applied in real classrooms and how students experience them can give useful insights for improving academic reading instruction in EFL classes. Ultimately, this study attempts to bridge the gap between theory and practice perspectives and actual classroom practices in EFL reading instruction (Al-Jarf, 2026). By connecting theory with classroom practice, this study aims to reduce the gap between research and classroom practice (Phillips & Condy, 2023).

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the implementation of collaborative reading strategies and students' responses in an academic reading class (Safitri et al., 2025). A case study was selected as it allows for an in-depth exploration of investigation of a particular instructional practice within its real classroom context. This design is particularly suitable for this study as it allows the researcher to examine complex classroom interactions and capture rich, contextualized data that cannot be obtained through quantitative approaches. The study focused on understanding how collaborative reading strategies were applied and how students experienced the learning process rather than measuring statistical effectiveness (Wahyurianto & Sylvia, 2024).

Through this approach, the researcher was able to observe the interaction between students, the teacher, and the learning materials during the collaborative reading activities (Yon et al., 2022). The qualitative case study design also enabled the researcher to capture students' opinions, experiences, and responses toward the learning strategy used in the classroom (Baker et al., 2024). Furthermore, this approach supports an in-depth exploration of learning processes over time, allowing the researcher to understand not only what happens in the classroom but also how and why it happens. By focusing on a small group of participants in a specific learning environment, this method provided detailed and contextual insights into how collaborative reading strategies support students' engagement and comprehension in academic reading (Liu et al., 2024).

### Respondents

The respondents in this study were 25 eighth-grade students from an academic English as a foreign language (EFL) reading class at SMPN 1 Krejengan in the 2026 academic year. They were selected through purposive sampling because they participated directly in the implementation of collaborative reading strategies. Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure that participants had relevant experience with the instructional strategy being studied and were able to provide meaningful and information-rich data. These students were between 13 and 14 years old and had intermediate English proficiency based on their previous academic achievements. Prior to the study, they were mostly taught using teacher-centered reading teaching methods and had limited experience in collaborative learning activities.

All students were involved in classroom observations, while several students were selected for interviews to explore their experiences and responses in greater depth. The interview participants were selected purposively to represent diverse levels of participation, engagement, and academic ability, allowing the researcher to capture varied perspectives on the implementation of collaborative reading strategies. The interview participants were chosen to represent different levels of participation and engagement during the learning activities. The identities of the participants were kept confidential to ensure ethical research practices and to protect students' privacy throughout the study.

### Instruments

This study used three instruments to collect data: classroom observation, interviews, and documentation (Chand, 2025). First, classroom observation sheets were used to record the

application of collaborative reading strategies during the learning process. These observations focused on student participation, group interaction, and the stages of collaborative reading activities (Otto et al., 2024). The observation process was conducted systematically to capture naturally occurring classroom interactions without disrupting the learning process. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with several students to explore their experiences and responses to the use of collaborative reading strategies in academic reading (Liu et al., 2024). The interviews allowed students to express their opinions and challenges during the learning process. Semi-structured interviews were selected to provide flexibility, enabling the researcher to probe deeper into students' responses and obtain detailed insights. Third, documentation was used to document important events, classroom situations, and additional information that supported the observation and interview data. The use of diverse instruments helped ensure data credibility through triangulation (Chand, 2025). This triangulation strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings by cross-checking data from multiple sources.

### **Procedures**

During the preparation stage, researchers developed lesson plans based on collaborative reading strategies and designed research instruments (Yon et al., 2022). This initial coordination ensured that the instructional procedures were aligned with the classroom context and curriculum objectives. Coordination with English teachers was also carried out prior to implementation. During the implementation stage, collaborative reading strategies were applied in small groups of four to five students. Learning activities included pre-reading discussions, shared reading, group discussions, and group presentations (Čopeć, 2025). Teachers guided students throughout the process to ensure active participation. The structured stages of collaborative reading were designed to promote interaction, critical thinking, and shared meaning-making among students. During the data collection stage, classroom observations were conducted in each meeting to monitor the implementation of collaborative reading activities. After implementation, several students were interviewed to gather their experiences and responses to the use of collaborative reading strategies. Data collection was conducted over multiple sessions to ensure consistency and depth of the observed phenomena.

### **Data analysis**

To ensure the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023). The data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques. The analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman (Fajri, 2023), which consists of three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

First, data reduction was conducted by selecting and focusing on relevant information from observations, interviews, and field notes. Irrelevant data were excluded to maintain clarity (Chand, 2025). Second, data display involved organizing the data into descriptive explanations and thematic categories to make patterns easier to identify (Ahmed et al., 2025). Finally, conclusion drawing and verification were carried out by interpreting the findings and continuously comparing data from different sources to ensure consistency (Yunusova, 2024). In addition, the researcher conducted continuous verification throughout the analysis process to ensure the accuracy and credibility of interpretations. Through these steps, the researcher identified patterns related to the implementation of collaborative reading strategies and students' responses during the learning process. This analytical process allowed the researcher to generate in-depth insights into both the instructional practices and learners' experiences within the classroom context.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the findings obtained from classroom observations and interviews conducted after the implementation of collaborative reading strategies. The findings focus on students' engagement, comprehension, confidence, and challenges

experienced during the learning process. Based on direct observation in a class consisting of three female students and two male students, as well as interviews conducted after the learning process, a clear picture emerged regarding the impact of applying collaborative reading strategies in academic reading learning. During the activity, the researcher observed that students were actively involved in group discussions. They read sections of the text to each other, discussed difficult vocabulary, and tried to summarize the content of the paragraphs together. These classroom interactions indicate that students were not only reading individually but also constructing meaning collectively through discussion.

During the interview session, researchers asked about their experiences while learning using collaborative strategies. One student said, "When studying alone, I often get confused, but during group discussions, I can ask my friends directly. So I understand more quickly." This statement shows that peer interaction helped students overcome difficulties while reading academic texts. Another student added, "I'm usually afraid of getting it wrong when answering alone, but when I'm with my friends, I'm more confident." This response reflects the role of collaborative learning in reducing students' anxiety during the reading process. Meanwhile, a third student said, "Discussions help me find the main ideas, because my friends also give their opinions. So it's more complete." This indicates that collaborative discussion supported students in identifying key ideas within the text.

Interview data shows that students find it easier to understand academic texts through group discussions. They can clarify difficult vocabulary, identify main ideas, and summarize the content of the text with their peers. Observations also show that students are better able to connect information between paragraphs and understand the structure of the text. The consistency between observation results and interview responses strengthens the credibility of these findings.

Two male students also gave similar responses. One student said, "If there is difficult vocabulary, we discuss it together. Sometimes my friends know the meaning faster, so we can help each other." This response illustrates how collaborative learning encourages mutual support among students. Another student said, "I feel more confident now reading English texts because I'm not alone. If there's something difficult, we can talk about it." This statement further confirms that group interaction contributed to students' confidence in academic reading.

The researchers also interviewed teachers who taught in these classes to gain additional perspectives. The teacher said, "I saw a pretty clear change. Usually they just wait for my explanation, but when using collaborative reading, they are more active in asking questions and discussing." The teacher also added, "There are indeed obstacles such as limited discussion time and uneven participation, but with guidance and division of roles in groups, students become more involved." In addition, the teacher stated, "This strategy helps students understand the structure of academic texts. They don't just read, but also try to analyze and conclude together." These statements from the teacher confirm the observations that collaborative reading strategies increased student engagement and participation in the classroom.

Several obstacles were encountered during the implementation of collaborative reading strategies, particularly uneven participation and limited discussion time. In some meetings, certain students were more active and dominated the conversation, while other students tended to remain silent and needed to be encouraged to speak. Differences in English proficiency also affected students' confidence in expressing their opinions. In addition, discussion time was sometimes insufficient, especially when the text being discussed was quite long and difficult. These challenges indicate that collaborative learning requires proper classroom management and guidance from the teacher.

Another challenge was the process of adjusting students to collaborative learning. Since they were previously accustomed to teacher-centered learning, at first some students still waited for direct explanations from the teacher rather than discussing with their friends. Teachers also needed to be more active in monitoring each group to keep the discussion

focused and on topic. However, over time, students gradually adapted to this learning approach.

However, with guidance from the teacher, these obstacles can be overcome. The teacher divides roles within the group so that all students have responsibilities, such as reading, taking notes, looking up difficult vocabulary, and summarizing the text. The teacher also manages the discussion time more clearly and provides examples of how to find the main ideas and understand the content of the text before the students discuss it. Over time, students become accustomed to this learning method. Participation becomes more balanced, discussions are more focused, and students become more independent in understanding the text.

This section discusses the findings in relation to previous studies and theoretical perspectives on collaborative learning and academic reading. These findings indicate that collaborative reading strategies promote active student engagement in reading activities. The increased interaction observed in the classroom suggests that students were actively involved in constructing meaning together rather than relying solely on the teacher. This result is consistent with previous studies which suggest that collaborative learning encourages students to share ideas, ask questions, and construct meaning together (Alzubi et al., 2024).

The findings also show that collaborative reading helps students improve their comprehension of academic texts. Through discussion, students were able to clarify vocabulary, identify main ideas, and connect information from different parts of the text. This supports the idea that learning through social interaction can enhance students' cognitive processing during reading activities.

In addition, the results indicate that collaborative reading contributes to increasing students' confidence in reading English academic texts. Many students reported feeling more comfortable and less anxious when working with peers. This finding aligns with sociocultural learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of interaction and peer support in the learning process.

Furthermore, the teacher's observations strengthen the findings of this study. The teacher reported that students became more active and participated more frequently in discussions compared to previous teacher-centered learning practices. This suggests that collaborative reading strategies can transform the classroom environment into a more interactive and student-centered learning space.

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges were also identified, including uneven participation and limited discussion time. These findings indicate that successful implementation of collaborative reading requires careful planning, clear role distribution, and effective classroom management. Nevertheless, with proper guidance from the teacher, students gradually adapted to the collaborative learning approach.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that collaborative reading strategies have a positive impact on students' engagement, comprehension, and confidence in academic reading. These results contribute to existing research by providing detailed classroom-based evidence on how collaborative reading strategies function in real EFL learning contexts.

Pedagogically, this study recommends the integration of structured collaborative reading activities in academic reading instruction to create a more interactive and student-centered learning environment. Further research could combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to measure the effectiveness of this strategy more comprehensively.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that the application of collaborative reading strategies has a positive impact on supporting academic reading learning in EFL students, as structured group discussions encourage active participation, facilitate comprehension of texts, and build students' confidence in reading academic materials in English. Through social interaction, students are better able to clarify difficult vocabulary, identify main ideas, and understand text structures and arguments more deeply. The findings confirm that collaborative reading

not only enhances literal comprehension but also contributes to the development of academic literacy and critical thinking skills, while fostering a more communicative and student-centered learning environment compared to traditional teacher-centered approaches. A key contribution of this study is its detailed description of the implementation process of collaborative reading strategies and students' responses in a real secondary school EFL classroom context, offering insights into learning experiences and classroom interactions beyond mere test outcomes. Pedagogically, the study suggests that teachers should design structured collaborative reading activities with clear roles, guided discussions, and organized stages to ensure active student involvement, and that such strategies can be integrated into the curriculum to promote student-centered learning and improve academic literacy. However, the study is limited by its small sample size and focus on a single classroom, as well as its reliance on qualitative data without quantitative measurement of reading improvement. Therefore, future research should involve larger and more diverse samples and adopt mixed-method approaches to provide a more comprehensive evaluation, as well as explore the long-term impact of collaborative reading strategies on students' academic reading development.

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