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An Action Research Study of Collaborative Strategic Reading in English with Saudi Medical Students

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October 2013

Declaration

This thesis is my own work, and no part of it has been submitted for a degree at this or any other, university.

Muhammad AL-Roomy

Dedication

To those I care for:

My mother

My father

My wife

My two sons

Acknowledgment

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Abstract

This is an investigative action research study on ways of improving the reading comprehension skills of Arabic medical school students. The study first analysed the difficulties of teaching and learning English and reading in English in a Saudi university medical college. An intervention was planned and implemented based on Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR –Klingner and Vaughn, 1996). This involved using group work to teach explicitly a set of reading strategies to a class of students who had failed their first year examinations. The process and outcomes of this intervention were analysed through mainly qualitative research methods including: semi-structured interviews which were audio taped to explore students' reading habits, field notes and video and audio taped observations to examine students' interactions while reading, the results of the reading comprehension test taken at the end of the course, and a questionnaire of students' perceptions completed after implementing collaborative strategic reading.

The results of the first action research cycle suggested that CSR had enabled these students to improve their reading comprehension considerably. However, the analysis also revealed some issues about the group work on which this was based, suggesting that improved interaction in groups might enable students to make better use of the CSR strategies. A second cycle of action research, this time with a different class of first year students, was therefore enacted including group work training using the idea of exploratory talk (Mercer 2000) alongside CSR to help students to think more critically and constructively.

Analyses revealed significant findings. First, CSR had a positive improvement on students' learning by boosting their learning strategies. Second, students were able to build on the structure of CSR and gained other collaborative skills. Third, students

reported positive feedback about CSR and its strategies and changed their views about group work and its efficacy in the classroom. Moreover, when CSR was combined with exploratory talk the group work became more critical and productive.

However, analysis of data from group work transcripts suggested that Mercer's typology, developed with British children, may not be so useful for Arabian students working with English as a foreign language. The sociolinguistic context means that a different typology is required and the thesis suggests one appropriate to Saudi students who are studying English for a specific academic and professional purpose.

The findings offer a framework for developing reading comprehension through group work and combining it with exploratory talk. The thesis has implications for those in similar contexts to the research site and makes some practical recommendations. It also raises questions about conducting action research in this context and engages with micro and macro political issues related to the purpose of teaching and learning English in the college and how they limit teaching and learning practices.

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Abbreviations

CL: Collaborative Learning

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

CSR: Collaborative Strategic Reading

EAP: English for Academic Purposes

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

EOP: English for Occupational Purposes

ESP: English for Specific or Special Purposes

ESL: English as a Second Language

KSAU-HS: King Saud bin Abdul-Aziz University for Health Sciences

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

NS: Native English Speaker

NNS: Non Native English Speaker

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Origins of the Study

This study is related to my work as a new lecturer in the English Department of the College of Medicine at King Saud University for Health Sciences, (KSAU-HS), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. It is an action research project that explores collaborative approaches to teaching reading in English for speakers of other languages. The idea for my study emerged through my own experience of teaching English to medical students, as well as my professional interests, my experience as a student of English at Saudi schools and the narrowing of its focus from an extensive review of the related literature. Discussions with colleagues at the College of Medicine and fellow students as a PhD candidate at the University of Sussex helped formulate and further refine my focus. My personal experience, professional interests and literature review are important in understanding the expectations of teachers and students as well as people in higher positions in the hierarchy.

I studied English for six years in public schooling at intermediate and high school levels. At that time, students were introduced to English from the first intermediate level as a compulsory subject and it is the only foreign language taught in public education up to now. I took some English courses at some English institutes while I was at secondary level located in Riyadh (capital of Saudi Arabia). I travelled once to the UK to study English for two months in1998 at college level. I joined the English department at Immam University at Riyadh in 1996.

This chapter consists of my reflections drawn from personal experience and enhanced by wider research literature with which I engaged during my study. It then describes the approach to the research i.e., action research with an overview of collaborative strategic reading (CSR), and how CSR would work within the context of action research. Finally, it ends with the research questions followed by the organisation of the thesis.

I taught for seven years at the Telecommunication and Information College in Riyadh before moving to my new position as an English teacher. When I joined the College of Medicine, the university had recently been established and the English department was run by two native-speaking teachers from the English Training Unit at the National

Guard Hospital. They were charged with establishing a new English department and interviewing and recruiting teachers to staff it. All faculty members were bachelor's degree holders except two who had master's degrees. For this reason, there was an opportunity for me, as one of these, to apply for a scholarship. The dean of the college discussed this with the head of the English department and finally agreed to authorise a scholarship so that I might study for my doctorate abroad.

English is taught to medical students because it is the main medium of instruction at the College of Medicine, all prescribed books and teaching materials being published principally in English. If students want to request anything from the department, they have to write a memo in English; instructions in the library and laboratories are printed in English; and all subjects – except Islamic and Arabic classes – are taught in English. However, as I explain below, learning English seemed to be somewhat problematic for the students.

Reflection on my teaching experience at the Medical College generated issues that I wanted to pursue further as a formal study. The first issue had to do with students' negative experiences of learning English at intermediate and high school levels. Based on my personal experience as a learner and professional experience as a teacher, it was clear that some students develop attitudes toward English and how to learn it before starting. If teachers do not help them to dispel these attitudes, they can lead to negative attitudes toward English and how it should be learnt and taught. Although previous learning experiences may help students learn faster and more efficiently (Sifakis, 2003), these experiences can cause problems if learners insist on using them with the target language (Harmer, 2007).

Second, students often complain about how hard it was for them to cope with native speakers of English who taught them different subjects. This could have been due to the fact that there were differences between the two cultures that neither teachers nor students were aware of. Indeed, Dudley-Evans and St John (2003) claim that well-qualified English for specific purposes (ESP) teachers who know more about their learners' situations and backgrounds are better than native-speakers at motivating students and deploying different learning styles.

Reading comprehension is a key skill that ESP students who will become doctors need the most. This is primarily because it is the principal means by which students learn in English and on their medical courses. This stress on reading does not mean in principle that other skills are less important in learning the language, but in practice ESP students spend more time reading, and reading is essential for their academic success (Rajabi and Azarpour, 2011). They need to read books, articles and diagrams so that they can cope with their field of study. Yet, some course books intended for medical students are full of medical terminology and long texts which seem difficult and boring. As a result, some students complain that although they can understand the text, they do not have enough time to read all of it, as teachers rush them when in fact they need time to finish reading.

Moreover, students at the College of Medicine are not good readers. Al-Samadani (2009) points out that Saudi students are not efficient readers when they reach undergraduate level, observing:

> In my experience as a former EFL [English as a foreign language] teacher and supervisor, I have observed a huge gap between Saudi College students' proficiency level and that of the higher proficiency expected from EFL university students. (Al-Samadani, 2009, p. 17)

Al-Qahtani (2011) observes that teachers at university level can turn reading classes into pleasant and enjoyable experiences if they help students develop good reading habits, such as guessing the meaning from the context, not reading every single word (skimming for gist or scanning for detail), and reading outside the classroom. Reading in a foreign language, either for academic or special purposes, is regarded as a useful tool for improving learners' knowledge in the target language (Nuttall, 2005). Moreover, Koda and Zehler (2008) consider reading skills to be vital elements of academic learning and the basis from which the reader is able to become a member of the broader academic or disciplinary community. Further, they claim that if students fail to attain sufficient reading proficiency they will lose a crucial tool for further learning (Koda and Zehler, 2008).

The strong relationship between reading and academic success is clearly shown by research. Students who are good readers often pass their examinations with high marks, unlike poor readers. This is because good readers have a rich repertoire of strategies that

enable them to overcome textual difficulties (Nassaji, 2006). Pretorius (2000, p. 39) points out the essential role of reading in high academic performance, commenting that, "Academic success relies on successful learning; successful learning relies on the ability to read."

However, especially in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context in which there may be many unknown words, students are liable to encounter many textual problems while processing reading materials. This is what makes the difference between efficient and inefficient readers. Good language readers bring different reading strategies to the task of reading that become automatic and rapidly executed skills as time passes. Dole et al., (1991) point out that students who deploy the same sub-skills all the time are more likely to be passive readers, unlike those who implement flexible reading strategies to comprehend different texts. Wallace (1992) relates the difference between successful and unsuccessful readers to their respective reading strategies:

> Good learners, in short, tend to use the same strategies as good experienced readers, drawing on as much of the surrounding text as possible, being prepared to tolerate uncertainty, using a wide range of textual cues in predicting what comes next, and generally being flexible in their response to texts. (Wallace, 1992, p. 59)

Marco (2003) defines reading strategies as

> ...the cognitive and metacognitive actions that individuals either consciously decide to use or use automatically when attempting to access a written text. (Marco, 2003, p. 136)

Based on this definition, readers have different ways to approach reading texts and their attempts are associated with either conscious or unconscious awareness of how to comprehend the meaning of a text. This implies that there is a need to learn reading strategies and for the explicit teaching of these strategies. However, Oxford (2002) argues that much strategy training focuses on cognitive and metacognitive strategies that exclude other effective and social techniques that can be developed through pair and group work.

Research shows that the explicit teaching of reading strategies has a positive impact on learners, especially in second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) contexts. Abdel

Latif (2012) suggests that learning such strategies should be an inseparable part of the language curriculum:

> L2/FL strategy instruction needs to be looked at as a process of learner empowerment; by raising learners' awareness of the more effective strategies for learning the language and by enabling them to employ the strategies, we develop both of their language learning process and product and prepare them for their future learning. (Abdel Latif, 2012, p. 34)

When teachers expose students to the same strategies, low achievers will do the best they can with them, while higher performers – who have already developed their own techniques – will assimilate and build on the taught strategies. Nevertheless, care should be taken when teaching strategies because this may be seen as an end in its own right. Grabe and Stoller (2002) argue that reading strategies and reading instruction should not be taught as two different skills: the aim of reading instruction is to develop strategic readers rather than merely to teach discrete reading strategies. Moreover, being a strategic reader requires time, effort and a considerable amount of practice in order to use strategies automatically, which is where the methodology of collaborative strategic reading (CSR) can be utilised to great effect (Klingner and Vaughn, 1996).

In Saudi Arabia, teaching reading to undergraduates has been the subject of several different studies. For example, Al-Nujaidi (2003) examines the relationship between reading strategies and their impact on reading comprehension. Salebi (2007) found that Saudi students at the tertiary level did not engage in enough effective reading activities to enable them to deploy a range of strategies both inside and outside the classroom; rather, they were dependent on their tutors to help them find solutions to reading problems. Another study by Alsamadani (2009) explores the reading strategies utilised by Saudi students, including planning, attention maintenance, and evaluation techniques. However, Alsamadani (2009) concludes that there has been insufficient empirical research examining either the effects of reading strategies on reading comprehension or the factors that influence reading instruction as a whole in the Saudi EFL university-level context.

According to Nuttall (2005) students who want to be efficient readers should bear in mind two criteria: understanding the text and the time allotted for each task. However, it

is also important that students are highly motivated to read and are aware of the importance of reading, not just because the reading course is on the timetable and they have to study it to pass the examination. This motivation should lead students to become active readers and high achievers (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000).

Based on my experience, teachers of English within Saudi higher education do not employ collaboration or implement different techniques in teaching reading comprehension. Rather, they mostly lecture and ask students to answer questions as homework, or they focus on whole class oral interaction as a means of assessing whether or not a given lecture has been understood. A few teachers ask their students to work in pairs to discuss a topic, but this is implemented in an unsystematic way. As a result, students tend to work individually rather than collaboratively.

There is a trend in medical education to implement problem-based learning, which may include the use of group work. For example, Crosby (1995) argues that group work in medical education is a way of improving deep learning and training students to manage their time. Crosby (1995) goes on to note that just as deep learning is a key feature of group work, reflection is a key feature of deep learning.

Language teaching and the learning process have undergone significant changes in the last few decades. In particular, communicative language teaching (CLT), which is not considered to be just a pedagogical method for second or foreign language teaching but rather a broad approach to education, emphasises active modes of learning such as group work that enables students to engage at different levels of interaction and create powerful learning experiences (Richards and Rodgers, 2003). The focus on group work demands much effort from learners and therefore aims to change the learning process from one of a teacher-centred approach to a student-centred approach by creating genuine participation in the learning process (Watkins, 2010).

In group work, students are required to play a central role in the lesson and become more active rather than being receptive and passive, which results in their achievement (Schmidt et al., 2009). Setting up collaborative work is regarded as a useful way for teachers to promote learning as it helps students to use the target language rather than

just learn about the language. This is because when students work in groups, they gain and manipulate knowledge from different sources rather than just focusing on the teacher and course book. They also acquire different skills such as communication, time management, leadership skills and so on (Marin-Garcia and Lloret, 2008). Such an aspect of learning holds the student accountable for using what he or she has learnt productively in a less stressful environment. One way to reduce students' anxiety and, therefore, to motivate them to learn is by creating the pleasant and supportive atmosphere typical of group work (Dörnyei, 2001).

Moreover, Muijs and Reynolds (2005) highlight the social dimension of learning in contending that collaborative work can promote learners' social skills by developing their empathetic ability, which enables them to deal with the different points of view raised by fellow students. Long and Porter (1985) add another pedagogical advantage of group work, that is, the fact that it can help individualise instruction. Because students have different levels of language proficiency, group work allows them to learn at their own pace and help one another, elements that might not be found in teacher-led instruction. Pica and Doughty (1983) also direct attention to the potential of group work in the second language classroom by arguing that it assists students to make linguistic and conversational inputs. Therefore, carrying out research on the way students interact with teachers and each other make research more accessible and practical (Brown and Rodgers, 2002).

Although collaborative learning (CL) is seen as an integral aim of King Saud University for Health Sciences, it is not part of teaching and learning culture in the English department. This creates a contradiction in the institution between the syllabus that English language programme teachers are assigned on the one hand, and the College of Medicine objectives and description of its programme on the other hand.

To the best of my knowledge, no research has been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of collaborative work in improving reading comprehension amongst Saudi medical students; only a few studies on group work have shown that it has a positive impact on reading comprehension (Alharbi, 2008). This gives the present study additional value in introducing collaboration to solve problems that students might

encounter in the classroom when accomplishing tasks related to a given text, and in investigating such methodology as an approach to teaching and learning.

In summary, Saudi medical students need to demonstrate their proficiency in English before they are allowed to begin their medical studies. Once they begin these studies, they require English as it is the medium of instruction and even after they qualify as doctors they need to be able to use English as it is the language used in text books which they need to consult and the medical papers with which they can update their knowledge. In all of this English is a key skill but is considered difficult to learn and problematic to teach, both to these medical students and to Saudi higher education students in general. This study aims to address these issues and to generate knowledge about the teaching and learning of reading in the context of Saudi higher education.

1.2 The Action Research Project

I decided to conduct action research to improve the reading of medical students at King Saud University for Health Sciences by utilising a form of intervention known as collaborative strategic reading (CSR), which was initiated and developed by Klingner and Vaughan (1996). I adopted action research because it was a useful tool for me as a teacher to research my students' performances as well as my own practices, and produce evidence to support different claims. In this case, I gradually developed a personal understanding of my own teaching through a cycle of planning, acting, collecting, reflecting and planning again. As Wallace (1998) argues, while it is vital for teachers to rely on their own experience in seeking professional development, care must be taken as the process of such development should be looked at as on-going and continuous.

Among reading approaches, CSR has been developed in different educational contexts to increase reading comprehension. As a learning package, it has been used in the United States and other contexts but not previously in Saudi Arabia. CSR is a particular approach to collaborative reading, which is defined by Klingner and Vaughn (2000, p. 73) as "a classroom technique developed to take advantage of the potential of collaboration for language development in classrooms". According to Klingner et al., (1998), CSR combines the comprehension strategies found in reciprocal teaching (Palincsar and Brown, 1984) with a cooperative approach to learning (Johnson and

Johnson, 1989). Reciprocal teaching is an instructional method designed to teach comprehension by implementing the four reading strategies of questioning, summarising, clarifying and predicting (Palinscar, 1986).

Klingner et al., (2004) state the objectives of CSR. First, it aims at meeting the needs of diverse classroom situations in terms of both ESP students and those with learning difficulties. Second, it offers a strategic instruction technique that helps students develop textual comprehension, and to maintain and transfer new knowledge. Third, it provides opportunities for special needs students to interact in meaningful situations.

When engaging in CSR, students apply four strategies before, during and after reading in small cooperative groups, with a specific role assigned in advance to each member. These reading strategies are:

1- Preview (before reading): a pre-reading strategy to help students brainstorm what they already know about the topic and predict what the passage might be about.
2- Click and clunk (during reading): a monitoring strategy to teach students how to signal their comprehension of each sentence as they read through the passage. Click stands for the smoothness of reading while clunk refers to reading breakdown. If students, for instance, do not know the meaning of a word, this is called clunk. To solve this problem, students use 'fix-up' strategies to tackle the meaning of difficult words. The fix- up strategies technique includes rereading before and after the unknown words, looking for affixes and breaking the difficult words apart.
3- Get the gist (during reading): a strategy that is concerned with finding out the main ideas of each paragraph and reading the text as a whole.
4- Wrap-up (after reading): a strategy that students implement to summarise the main ideas of the text by reviewing it and discussing questions that the teacher might ask out of the reading text (Klingner et al., 2004).

There have been many studies of CSR that have yielded positive findings in terms of its effectiveness in different contexts. For example, the strategy has recorded positive results with undergraduate native-speaking English students (Klingner and Vaughan, 2000; Standish, 2005; Vaughan et al., 2011); in EFL settings (Ziyaeyan, 2012; Zoghi et

al., 2010; Chi Fan, 2009; Hsu, 2010); and in teaching Arabic comprehension (Demachkie and Queinin, 2011). In all cases, the effects of CSR were to some extent clearly noticeable and could be examined qualitatively. However, although the strategy was generally judged to improve reading comprehension, it was difficult to gauge its positive impact objectively by focusing on pre-test and post-test measure (Vaughn et al., 2011).

In action research, there are two roles: that of the researcher and that of the practitioner who is involved in his or her research. Unlike the conventional researcher for whom his or her influence on the situation under study is often problematic, the practitioner-researcher does not only study events, but by describing, analysing and interpreting data, he or she seeks to change and improve the quality of his or her practice (Elliott, 1991).

The present action research project implemented different stages in a cycle designed to bring about change. It began with a reconnaissance phase to problematise the situation and describe what was happening before the intervention. This was followed by an intervention phase that was conducted with a group of first year students. CSR was implemented as a means of teaching reading to a group of students who had failed their first year English examinations. Analysis of research findings gained from the intervention phase suggested that CSR was helpful in some ways but problematic in others. In particular, the quality of group interaction was not as high as it might have been. Therefore, this led to a second intervention phase with a different group of first year students, which included an element of training in group work techniques that drew on the notion of exploratory talk developed by Mercer (2000). Exploratory talk is regarded as an effective type of talk because it has a learning potential which leads to better argumentation and reasoning by students as they focus on their shared knowledge to solve learning problems (Rojas-Drummond and Zapata, 2004). Mercer (1995), after observing the way children interact with each other, has distinguished three types of talk: disputational, cumulative and exploratory talk. In disputational talk, partners uncritically disagree with each other without providing evidence, and this type is based on individual decision making. In the cumulative type, partners uncritically build on each others' ideas in a positive way. Exploratory talk emerges when partners engage

critically but constructively when they solve problems by offering suggestions and alternative solutions.

The findings of this action research project constitute the contribution to knowledge of this thesis. Their analysis enabled me to develop a framework for the practice of teaching reading through collaborative group work to medical students that may be of use to others involved in ESP, and English for academic purposes (EAP) elsewhere. It also helped me to develop trial and document a well-theorised approach to teaching that can help Saudi medical students make use of CSR to improve their reading skills.

In addition, this study provided concrete examples and theoretical resources to help curriculum designers within the field of ESP in general and academic medical education in particular. It may encourage curriculum designers to produce textbooks incorporating more extensive use of collaborative activities. Finally, the study may encourage further practitioner-research amongst EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia. However, conducting action research within this context was not a straightforward undertaking and the micro-political issues that constrained it are also discussed and analysed in the thesis.

1.3 Research Questions

This thesis addresses the following action research question:

How can collaborative strategic reading be developed through action research to teach reading successfully to first year students at the Riyadh College of Medicine?

Its more specific sub-questions are as follows:

1. Why and how is English problematic to Saudi Medical students?
2. What reading strategies do students bring with them from their previous experiences?
3. What are students' attitudes towards reading and group work?

4. How does CSR improve reading comprehension?
5. To what extent does CSR promote active learning?
6. How does CSR help students acquire new problem-solving strategies that can be applied in other subjects?
7. What are students' attitudes towards CSR?

8. How can group work training through exploratory talk improve the quality of student discussions in CSR?

In addressing these questions I am generating substantive knowledge about the context which is of interest to those concerned with English language learning in similar contexts. Alongside this, however, this study also raises other important methodological issues concerning the possibilities and limitations of conducting action research in higher education in Saudi Arabia. In particular, these concern the place of micro-politics in terms of gaining and maintaining access and of instituting curricular change.

1.4 Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis is organised in nine chapters. Chapter One has presented the background, outlined the rationale for, and design of the study, as well the research questions it addresses. Chapter Two gives an account of the research context with regards to problems in Saudi higher education and discussion of why reading is seen difficult by students. Chapter Three reviews the relevant literature review, which is drawn from the theoretical corpus and covers reading and second language learning, CL, CSR, and micro-political issues in education. It also includes an assessment of the findings of previous empirical studies. Chapter Four addresses the following methodological issues: a description of the method of sampling, action research as the main approach, research design, research instruments, and the method of data analysis. Chapter Five begins by discussing the reasons for teaching English at the college and describing different dimensions related to reading in L1 and the target language, and goes on to consider the micro-political issues that emerged before and during fieldwork. Chapter Six analyses data gathered from the remedial group. It ends with a justification for implementing exploratory talk to improve the quality of students' talk. Chapter Seven interprets data from the first year group with focus on the patterns of learning practices emerged from CSR and exploratory talk. Chapter Eight focuses on summarising the main findings of the study with reference to students' learning strategies and their beliefs of learning English in general. It also covers the efficacy of CSR and exploratory talk with deeper engagement of the impact of exploratory talk in a bilingual setting. Chapter Nine provides an account of contribution of knowledge and some suggestions and implications for further research.

Chapter Two

Context of the study

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research context which includes the location of the study, the students and teachers who participated in it, the medical programme and the intensive English course and its curriculum. It provides an insight into the education system of Saudi Arabia with a particular focus on English language teaching. It presents some studies undertaken in Saudi context which showed how English was taught and what was the preferred way of teaching. It suggests that teachers were authoritative and students played a small role in classrooms. The chapter concludes with a detailed discussion to clarify why and how reading in English was problematic to Saudi students.

2.2 Context of the Study

This study was carried out in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the Riyadh College of Medicine, King Saud bin Abdul-Aziz University for Health Sciences (KSAU-HS), which was established in 2005 under the umbrella of the Ministry of Higher Education. It is the only university in the country that specialises in medical sciences. The university, which is presided over by the Minister of Higher Education, operates according to the rules and regulations of the Higher Education Council and the University Council. It is located in the northeast of Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia.

Although health care is a necessity, less than 20 per cent of employees who work in the country's health sector are Saudi. In an attempt to remedy this situation, the College of Medicine, which is considered to be the core of the university, was established in 2004 by King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz to fill the big gap in the health workforce. The university is currently located within King Abdul-Aziz Medical City, which houses a 900-bed tertiary-care hospital with highly qualified medical staff and is also the main teaching centre for medical students.

The College of Medicine has two main departments: basic sciences and medical sciences. The English Department comes under the basic sciences department. The university offers a wide range of programmes, including medical and general courses,

which are accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education. King Saud University is spread across three sites in Riyadh, Jeddah and Al Ahsa. The colleges at each site are as follows:

1- Riyadh: Medicine, Nursing, Applied Medical Sciences, Public Health and Health Informatics, Pharmacy, and Dentistry

2- Jeddah: Nursing College and College of Medicine

3- Al Ahsa: College of Nursing

Virtually all colleges offer bachelor's degrees, but the College of Applied Medical Sciences also offers higher diploma degrees. The College of Public Health and Health Informatics offers master's degrees only. In addition, all three sites offer postgraduate courses, including Saudi Board programmes, amounting to 21 specialities and fellowships. The Board programme is a type of certification offered to doctors who have finished their bachelor degree allowing them to take additional training and obtain a high level of skills. This programme lasts from three to five years depending on the medical speciality.

2.2.1 Context of the Students

The participants in this study comprised 2 groups of 30 first-year male students at the College of Medicine in Riyadh who studied general and medical English. Before joining the medical programme, students – who must be high school graduates – are required to take a pre-professional English programme, which includes intensive language classes throughout the first three semesters. Each semester includes academic reading and vocabulary, communication skills, and language structure and drills. In addition to English, students take Arabic Skills, Islamic values, and some basic science courses such as Physics, Chemistry and Biology.

Most of the students I taught and researched had similar backgrounds. They were aged between 18 and 20 years, and had studied general English for six years at state middle and secondary school, although a few of them had also taken English courses at private institutions. They had been taught by Saudi and native Arab university graduates (bachelor's degree holders). However, a limited number had different educational experiences. Their parents, or at least one of them, were well-paid hospital doctors.

Therefore, they could afford to send their children to private school in Saudi Arabia or for short English courses abroad. From the above description, it is clear that my students were adults, generally non-beginners, and were required to study in English for the specific purpose of completing a medical degree and becoming a doctor.

2.2.2 Context of the English Teachers

At the time of my fieldwork, there were 17 members of staff in the English department: 7 lecturers, 5 teachers, and 4 instructors. Seven of them were native Arabic speakers while the remaining ten were native English speakers from the United States and Canada. There was only one Saudi lecturer. The fact that there were more native English teachers than not, might have been regarded as a contentious issue. Such a situation can raise tension among teachers, as, within the culture of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia, non-native English teachers are seen as better, although it is assumed that some courses, such as communication skills and writing should be taught by native English teachers. Braine (2010, p. 9) claims that the most important distinction between the terms 'native' and 'non-native' speaker is probably connected with the connotations that they carry. Describing someone as a 'native' speaker implies that he or she is aware of the cultural and socio-cultural aspects of the language, as well as being fluent, while 'non-native' may suggest marginalisation, stigmatisation and minority (this issue is fully discussed in section 2.3.4).

2.2.3 Context of the Medical Programme

The Medical College bachelor's degree study plan is divided into three main phases as follows:

Phase1: a pre-professional (premedical) programme that includes intensive English and basic science (chemistry, physics and biology) courses, as well as Arabic and Islamic Studies. In this phase, which is three semesters in duration, students study general English throughout, with a course in English medical terminology added in the third semester. This programme is pre-professional in that it is regarded as a foundation course enabling students to 1) develop their academic and social skills; 2) improve their English; and 3) familiarise themselves with the higher education environment. If students successfully complete this foundation, they are eligible to proceed to the professional phase of the degree, which lasts for two academic years (four semesters).

Students are categorised into two groups; Applied Medical Sciences (Pre-Ams) and Medical (Pre-Med). The requirements needed for the second group are more demanding than the first group. Students participating in the present study were studying general English belonging to the first group and were in Phase 1.

Phase 2: the professional or specialisation phase (medical), in which students enrol in an elective for specialisation. Courses are taught in English but there is no further EFL input. This phase, which lasts for two academic years, includes classroom tutorials, laboratory skills training, and clinical practice tuition.

Phase 3: a clinical internship that lasts for two years. Clinical experience combines basic skill development with a continuing structured problem-based learning (PBL) programme (COMR, 2010).

The medical programme where the study was carried out is not unique in Saudi Arabia. There are similar programmes run in different universities.

2.2.4 Context of the Intensive English Language Programme

This programme is part of the pre-professional phase in which students study English for three semesters (see Appendix One for the structure of the English Programme and Appendix Two for the courses taught in each semester). It is structured as follows:

Semester 1: a 17-week course designed for low intermediate level that comprises 20 hours of tuition per week.

Semester 2: a 15-week course designed for upper intermediate level that comprises 12 hours of tuition per week.

Semester 3: a 17-week course designed for advanced level that comprises 10 hours of tuition per week.

2.2.5 Context of the Taught EFL Curriculum

All core textbooks are selected by the department before each semester. All teachers adhere to the core textbooks and follow the syllabus to cover all lessons. The only course in which teachers are not obliged to cover all chapters of the textbook is Language Structure and Drills. Teachers of this course are encouraged to complete it but the examination includes what has been taught based on assessment tools found in the syllabus. There is a coordinator of each course who discusses matters arising with the

teachers and reports any unresolved concerns to the head. However, not all concerns are resolved by the head

Teachers are required to follow the sequence of each textbook chapter by chapter in class (see Appendix Three which includes contents taken from the Supplementary Reading and Discussion textbook used in the first semester, for an example of this sequence).

2.3 The Saudi Education System

The Saudi education system is regarded as highly centralised. Alshumaimeri (1999) observes that:

> All educational policies are subject to government control and supervision by the Supreme Council of Education. Curricula, syllabi and textbooks are uniform throughout the kingdom. (Alshumaimeri, 1999, p. 4)

There are three authorities responsible for the Saudi education system: the Ministry of Education, The Ministry of Higher Education and the General Organisation of Technical Education and Vocational Training. The Ministry of Higher Education was established in 1975. Currently, there are 25 government universities and 8 private universities that have been established since King Abdullah began his reign in 2005. In addition to these institutions, there are many government and private colleges and academies (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013).

The Ministry of Education is responsible for three types of education: general education, adult and literacy education and special education (see Appendix Four for the gross enrolment ratio for each type which is adapted from Ministry of Education, 2013). The general education system in Saudi Arabia consists of three levels i.e., primary, intermediate and secondary levels. Boys and girls are separated from each other at schools, with some differences in the standard curriculum. Students aged 6-12 years go to primary level schooling and this level is compulsory for every male and female Saudi citizen. The intermediate level lasts for three years and consists of students aged 12-15 years. The secondary level spans for three years and students aged 16-19 years go to secondary schooling. In these three levels, students must pass the individual subject examination and score at least fifty per cent of the overall score in order to get the required certificate and move to a higher level (World Data on Education, 2010).

2.3.1 English teaching and learning in a Saudi education setting

The need for English is increasing in Saudi Arabia for economic, political and educational purposes. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out that English has spread in the Arab world for two reasons. First, it is the language of the scientific and technical revolution led by the United States. Second, Western money and knowledge has moved to oil-rich countries, and the language through which such power is propagated is English.

Saudi Arabia, which is a member of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), hosts several oil companies facilitating an industry that has flourished since the 1970s. Many Western experts from different nations work for such companies and the main means of communication is English. Some big oil companies such as the Saudi ARAMCO Company, which was established in 1933, require their employees to use English as a lingua franca and have them trained by American native speakers of English. Another decisive factor is related to the link between economic success and the quality of education because it is widely accepted that new knowledge is created by developed countries and published in English. Saudi Arabia joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2005 and the economy has subsequently grown rapidly (Shaabi, 2010). All these factors have contributed to the realisation on the part of the government of the essential role of English, prompting it to institute it as a compulsory subject, but treat it as a foreign language, in the school curriculum and in society at large.

English was first introduced in Saudi middle and secondary schools in 1927 (Alamri, 2008). However, students' level of English on leaving high school is still less than satisfactory. At school, students study English four times a week in lessons each of 45 minutes' duration, but the question as whether this amount of time guarantees a reasonable level of English or even creates the necessary motivation to improve once students leave high school stage has been raised by several recent studies.

Al-Saif (2011) concludes that Saudi high school leavers' English vocabulary is generally limited to about 890 of the 5,000 most frequent words in the language and that these tend to be merely target words taught in prescribed textbooks. In another study,

Al-Saif and Milton (2012) relate this inadequacy in English teaching and vocabulary acquisition to some shortcomings in textual content, such as thematically dull contexts, a lack of systematic organisation, inadequate learnt vocabulary, and a dearth of exercise books to facilitate sufficient practice.

In a third study, Alsughaer (2009) claims that although students spend approximately 508 hours in total learning English at middle and high school combined, they still lack the basic ability to communicate in English when they graduate from the latter. Alsughaer (2009) goes on to argue that students are generally unmotivated to learn English because it does not meet their immediate needs, and traditional teaching methods used by English teachers (audio-lingual and grammar translation) are uninspiring. Alzahrani, (2009) corroborates the ideas of Alsughaer (2009), adding that English teachers should receive in-service training in order to improve their performance and ability, and they should be encouraged to exchange experiences with others.

Some educators associate the issue of low levels of English to faults in the education system as student priorities diverge from those of the government. For example, Al-Saloom (1988) highlights the fact that the main aim of the Saudi education system is to evaluate academic achievement based on the curriculum. Once the examinations are over, students are not willing to use what they have learnt in their daily lives, meaning that they do not recognise the value of learning English in the long term.

Al-Sadan (2000) takes this concern a step further in contending that although all teachers rely on testing to assess their students, they are not provided with guidance in examination design. Moreover, each teacher writes his or her own testing materials that reflect different points of view and may not necessarily concur with the national curriculum. In addition, Al-Sadan (2000) states:

> The regulations and procedures of assessment in Saudi Arabian schools omit any reference to individual or group work. The education system is geared towards examinations considered to be the crucial gateway to personal advancement. The system has been described as a 'killer of pupils'. Teachers and pupils focus on only one objective: how many pupils will pass?. (Al-Sadan, 2000, p. 154)

Finally, some commentators have observed that Saudi students tend not to be proficient in English because they are not exposed to the language at an early enough age (Gawi, 2012; Al-Mansour, 2009). For this reason, in 2008, English was introduced to students for two hours a week from the sixth grade in few selected schools (Alamri, 2008). In 2011, English was introduced from the fourth grade in all schools in Saudi Arabia. Such innovation leads to a consideration of the relationship between age and learning a second or foreign language.

2.3.2 The effects of age on learning

The early years constitute a critical stage for all language development, whether first, second or additional foreign tongues. The concept of age as one of the variables in second language acquisition (SLA) has been the subject of much discussion along with motivation, individual differences, teaching methodology, and so on. Of all the variables, age has attracted the most attention because first, it can be easily and accurately measured compared to other factors because it is less likely to be affected by external factors; and second, the question of whether children learn more effectively than adults has created a certain division amongst scholars (Ellis, 2003). Linguists and researchers have different views on the implications of early learning for a child's native language, learning with a minimum of effort, and academic gain.

Marinova-Todd et al., (2000) examine the effect of age on language acquisition:

> Although older learners are indeed less likely than young children to master an L2, a close examination of studies relating age to language acquisition reveals that age differences reflect differences in the situation of learning rather than in capacity to learn. (Marinova-Todd et al., 2000, p. 9)

Marinova-Todd et al., (2000) add that some researchers have a misconception around the notion of 'the younger the better' that is based on the concept of a critical period in SLA. They argue that research findings refute this claim in showing that some children need more time and effort in comparison to adults in order to learn a second language.

Other commentators claim that early learning has a positive influence on both the development of the mother tongue and SLA in children. Kovelman et al., (2008) assert that early age has positive effect on reading, phonological awareness, and language development. However, others argue that early attempts at SLA have a negative effect

on the child's native language. For example, Roma (2008) warns that early L2 exposure will lead to language confusion in association with the L1, even resulting in L2 dominance. Finally, some researchers report that early SLA influences academic achievement by improving cognitive ability in problem-solving skills (Stewart, 2005, and Dominguez and Pessoa, 2005).

In the Saudi context, linguists and researchers have different points of view on the best age to introduce English to students. Proponents of early EFL teaching cite a variety of factors to support their stance. Al-Jarf (2005) conducted a study to investigate the effect of age on English learning in Saudi students. She argues that English should not be learnt at the expense of Arabic as the former may hinder the natural development of the latter. However, she concludes that students can learn any language at any age as long as certain factors are taken into account, such as motivation, qualification of the teacher, appropriate teaching methodology, suitability of the curriculum, etc. (Al-Jarf, 2005).

Conversely, Gawi (2012) argues unreservedly that early exposure to English influences student performance positively. He conducted a case study at a Saudi intermediate school to investigate the influence of the age factor on English learning. Two groups of male and female students were involved in this study: a group of elementary students (grade four) who had started learning English at the age of 6, and a group of intermediate students (grade three) who had started learning English at the age of 13. Gawi (2012) found that the elementary students outperformed the intermediate students in both written and spoken tests. Their teachers also responded positively to the concept of starting to teach English at an early stage.

Al-Tubaity (2011) conducted a study to compare the English language performance of children aged between 10 and 11 with that of young adults aged between 19 and 21. He found that the young adults were better than the children at answering language-based questions such as those on pluralisation, tense, pronominalisation, and so on (Al-Thubaity, 2011).

Alamri (2008) evaluated the sixth-grade English textbook for boys, the foundation of the Saudi English language programme. The researcher concluded that although the

textbook met the expectations of teachers and supervisors in terms of objectives and level, it did not meet students' needs. Some topics were found to be not sufficiently stimulating and activities did not allow students to participate in the learning process as there were no communicative exercises (Alamri, 2008).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that age does not always guarantee language proficiency. When evaluating the effects of age on language acquisition in Saudi Arabia it should be stressed that final linguistic attainment has been found to be very loosely linked with the age at which tuition starts. For example, all private schools start teaching foreign languages from the age of six. However, by the age of eighteen, when learners proceed to tertiary education, placement tests have shown both private and state school students to have similar levels of English (ALoasheq, 2005). Similarly, in a recent study, Deraney and Abdelsalam (2009) compared the academic achievement of high school graduates from private and public high schools. They found that although students who had graduated from private schools outperformed their peers who had attended public school at the admission test, at graduation the public school students did much better.

2.3.3 Problems in Saudi higher education

Khashan (1984) considers a major problem Saudi students might encounter in the context of higher education:

> Many Saudi college students enter college with only a vague idea of what a college education entails. Most students think that college is an extension of high school education. (Khashan, 1984, p. 22)

Shaw (2006) concurs with Khashan (1984) in that the culture of higher education differs from that of the schools from which students graduate, and regards old habits of learning as false starts:

> Often candidates arrive with the appropriate school examination certificates, but are not prepared for the demands of higher education, for more critical and individual thought, and the application of older skills in a new context. (Shaw, 2006, p. 49)

One reason for this lack of preparedness is the methodology that teachers adopt in Saudi schooling. Prokop (2003, p. 80) observes that, "This philosophy of teaching inculcates passivity, dependence, an a priori respect for authority, and an unquestioning attitude".

In such an environment, teachers are regarded as authority figures that constitute the fount of all knowledge. This derives from the history of Saudi Arabia and the roots of its education system. In the 18th century, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was created by a political and religious alliance between Al-Saud and Al-Sheik, the dual authorities being merged to establish the Islamic constitution of the country (Mazawi, 2005). The Saudi education system is thus based on Islamic ideology. The Ministry of Education (1980 cited in Saleh, 1986) states that the general aims of Saudi education are:

> …to have the student understand Islam in a correct comprehensive manner; to plan and spread the Islamic creed; to furnish the student with the values, teachings and ideals of Islam; to equip him with various skills and knowledge; to develop his conduct in constructive directions; to develop society economically, socially and culturally; and to prepare the individual to become a useful member in the building of his community. (Saleh, 1986, p. 19)

Clearly, there are aspects of these aims may be regarded as emphasising analytical and creative thinking, and encouraging students to be active and improve themselves as well as society. Nevertheless, they can also be interpreted as encouraging an authoritative approach. Some commentators regard at this issue from a religious perspective, such as Prokop (2003, p. 80), who argues that "debate is often absent as the sources of knowledge; the Qur'an and Sunna are considered inviolable."

Nevertheless, I would argue that the whole issue is more complex and that Islam itself is not wholly responsible; the society or discourse into which both teachers and students are born, raised in and with which they eventually engage must also be taken into account. In schooling, for example, the practices of observation, the technologies of examination and normalising judgement produced knowledge that allows the control of the individual and indeed populations. If a teacher practices power, that does not mean he is acting in such a way because of his personality but rather because of his position in the institution. In contrast to knowledge that could claim to be universal, all knowledge was historically contingent.

At home, children are told to listen to their parents and respect older people, but have not been told – at least by some parents – that they can negotiate things with them. When children go to school they apply what they have already learnt. The mass media also plays a crucial role in spreading these cultural influences among young people. Therefore, children's identities are shaped by what they have listened to and have been asked to do by powerful people. However, I can apply what Kirdar (2007) notes about the relationship between Saudi women going to school and traditional cultural norms. She argues that these traditions are related to tribal customs rather than to Islam itself. Kirdar (2007, p. 43) remarks that, "Many of the customs practiced today...[are] a result of local contexts and social class."

Khashan, (1984) relates the absence of communication between students and professors to the education system adopted by Saudi universities. Khashan (1984, p. 23) contends that the education system has accorded departments and professors a prestigious status that they want to sustain, in that "Saudi faculty do not want to communicate, except in strictly matters, with their students. The faculty believe such association would discredit their elite status".

Another way of looking at this issue is to identify the tradition engendered by the training instructors who first taught Saudi trainee teachers. According to Alromi (2000), the Directorate of Education was established in 1925 after help was sought from the Syrian and Egyptian ministries of education. However, the Saudi system was influenced more by the Egyptian ministry that later sent its experts and teachers. Alromi (2000, p. 4) describes the Egyptian system as "following in the footsteps of the English educational model at that time; therefore, indirectly adopting the English educational system" – at a time when the English education system was teacher-centred and emphasised the norms of repetition and memorisation (Alromi, 2000).

Another concern has to do with the English teachers and whether they are native or non native English speakers as an important factor affecting learning and teaching English.

2.3.4 Native versus non native English teachers

The issue of being a native or non native English teacher has both a positive and negative impact in the process of teaching and learning. On the one hand, non native English teachers might lose their confidence in their language ability to teach English

and feel more stressed. As a result, they may not communicate with students in an appropriate way. Medgyes (1994) states that playing both the role of teacher and student simultaneously creates this linguistic insecurity. By acknowledging the fact that non native teachers are students at the same time, they will be enabled to have a more confident stance in the classroom. According to Mousavi (2007) teachers who experience such stress are often in their early years of teaching. Therefore, she suggests that teacher training programmes have to attend to these problems and provide new teachers with support and guidance to address these issues to reduce and control teachers' stress. Mousavi adds that it would be worthwhile offering new special programmes that are exclusively addressing non native English teachers' problems.

On the other hand, Medgyes (1994, p.436) notes that non native English teachers have some characteristics which give them superiority over native English teachers. These characteristics are:

1. Provide a better learner model;
2. Teach language learning strategies more effectively;
3. Supply more information about the English language;
4. Better anticipate and prevent language difficulties;
5. Be more sensitive to their students needs;
6. Benefit from their ability to use the students' mother tongue.

The above characteristics suggest that there is relationship between culture and language. According to Kramsch (2013) the issue of culture is debatable in teaching foreign languages including school curricula, language teachers and language learners. Kramsch notices

> Many school systems prefer to hire native speakers (NSs) as language teachers because of their authentic relationship to the target language and culture, but native speakers don't necessarily know the home culture of their students nor the intellectual tradition of their school system. (2013, p.38)

However, some researchers look at English as a world language which is owned by an increasing number of people. For example, Graddol (2004) points out that there is a decline in the number of English native speakers which implies that there are more non native English teachers around the world. Braine (2010) pinpoints that 80% of the English language teachers around the world are non-native English speakers. Graddol

regards English as a global language and raises the concern of whether people who use it as a second language will look to native speakers of English as authoritative. Canagarajah (2006) agrees with Graddol and adds that the division of native and non native speakers should be disrupted and replaced by the term pluralisation and observes

> Only the colour of my skin would influence someone to call me a non-native speaker of English—not my level of competence, process of acquisition, or time of learning. Therefore, it is more appropriate to use terms such as expert and novice that don't invoke considerations of blood, family, or race to describe proficiency (Canagarajah 2006, p. 589-590)

Another concern has to do with examining students' beliefs and attitudes as well toward native and non native teachers. Ghobain (2010) observed that Saudi university students preferred native English teachers because they thought that they have ownership of English and those teachers are the only ones to produce perfect English. Another reason is that students are familiar with such models of English. In the following section the problem of reading is examined more closely because reading in English is considered one of the major problems encountered by students (see section 1.1).

2.4 Why and How Reading in English is Problematic for Saudi Medical Students

In this section, I discuss the problems that Saudi medical students encounter when they read in English. In order to address this issue, these problems can be divided to the following categories: 1) the status of reading in Saudi society; 2) differences between Arabic and English, including spelling and pronunciation variation; 3) different attitudes towards the teaching of reading; 4) different interpretations of the process of reading; 5) grammar translation method versus communicative language approach.

2.4.1 The Status of Reading in Saudi Society

I will start by discussing the nature of reading for two reasons. First, it seems that students are not motivated to read English texts, and I seek to discover whether or not this is the case for Arabic as well. Second, being aware of how students read in Arabic might help to address their problems with reading in English.

An analytical study reported in the publication *What Arabs Read* (NEXT PAGE, 2007) was carried out to discover Arabs' reading habits, the kinds of books they read, their purposes and motives for reading, to whom they read, and so on. The findings indicate that 85 per cent of Arabs only read one book a year. Nevertheless, they also indicate that

94 per cent of Saudis are literate, and the first book they pick up is the Noble Qur'an – the word 'Quran' is derived from 'القراءة' (*alqiraa'h*), which means 'reading'. In my opinion, reading the Noble Quran implies reading more than just one book. In principle, it includes reading other religious works such as interpretations of the Quran known as *tafseer*, books related to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, and others related to his followers.

However, the findings of *What Arabs Read* (NEXT PAGE, 2007) have been criticised by some Arab researchers such as Kahsim (2008), who raises many concerns in relation to sampling, methods of analysis, timing, and the language used in the study's questionnaire. For example, Kahsim (2008) notes that only 1,000 people in each country returned this questionnaire, which is a small sample. Moreover, the survey was only conducted in five countries – i.e. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Morocco – altogether, and did not take into account other aspects such as the social background of each society, economic factors, or the age of participants.

Some Saudi researchers claim that Saudi students are poor readers in Arabic from the early stages. Additionally, Casey (2001) contends that when Saudi children go to school, the problem is compounded as there is a direct correlation between academic success and the ability to access written texts and instructions. Al-shalan (2007) argues that children in Saudi Arabia are poor readers because they are not used to reading at home, preferring to spend long hours playing video games or watching television. Al-shalan (2007) holds that reading should begin at home and provides several suggestions whereby parents might encourage their children to read, emphasising that it should be made an enjoyable activity that children want to engage in as they do with other activities. Some of his methods include the following:

1- Parents should be role models and read in their children's presence.
2- Children's books should be around the house all the time.
3- Parents should take into account their children's interests when choosing reading materials.
4- Parents should give books as presents to their children.

Salim (1999) widens the scope of reading to encompass schools, society, media, bookshops, and public libraries, suggesting that the role of the school, for example, is vital in motivating children to read: teachers can join their students in the school library give them the opportunity to choose books they are interested in, and guide them if they ask for help. In addition, Salim (1999) adds that educators should not neglect the essential role of foreign-published and translated books, and the need to increase the number of newspapers and magazines in all these places.

I discussed the issue of reading with the Arabic teacher at the College of Medicine who taught all classes in the first semester. He told me that his students were not keen on reading in Arabic because silent reading was regarded as a chore directly associated with school; they read to pass the examination but not to increase their general knowledge or for fun. Even those who read newspapers and magazines did not do so on a regular basis. Finally, he mentioned that students had great difficulty reading in both English and Arabic. The problem was that when they read, they paused after each word because if they read the whole sentence without stopping they had to be aware of the grammar. For example, instead of reading, "Ali goes to school every day," as a single unit of meaning, they stopped after each word. For all these reasons, reading in English was stressful because they were afraid of academic failure. However, since it was not something that students got into the habit of outside the classroom, the college tried to think of ways to strengthen reading.

Based on the points that the Arabic teacher highlighted, two important issues should be discussed further: 1) attitude to reading in the mother tongue (L1) and its relationship with the second language (L2); and 2) the complexity of reading in Arabic.

Many researchers note the relationship between L1 reading attitude and motivation, and learning to read in an L2. Yamashira and McLaughlin (2001) found a direct correlation between both L1 and L2 reading attitude, and learners' performance in L2 extensive reading, which indicates that teachers should take into account the student's reading attitude because he or she tends to transfer positive emotional traits in particular from L1 to L2.

On the other hand, Takase (2007) examines the role of motivation in two languages, concluding that although students have positive motivation to read in L1 they have negative motivation to read in L2. This was found to be due to a disparity between reading abilities in the two languages.

Other researchers have examined the issue of reading from a psychological perspective. Ibrahim and Eviatar's (2009) study at Haifa University investigated the effects of language status on hemispheric involvement in lexical decision making. They conclude that the brain's right hemisphere does not engage in the initial processes of reading Arabic, unlike Hebrew (a similar language to Arabic) and English (a dissimilar language to Arabic). Ibrahim and Eviatar (2009) explain this by arguing that Arabic has a visually complex writing system; for example, an Arab learner must be aware of dot patterns if he or she is to be able to read the language.

However, some researchers disagree with Ibrahim and Eviatar (2009), contending that their assumptions are based on unconvincing arguments. Nadwi (2010) indicates three defects in the aforementioned study. First, the researchers presented an unconventional Arabic orthography to their subjects; in fact, they create a totally new Arabic orthography. For example, they render 'مزرعة' (*mazra'h*), which is 'farm' in English, as 'م ز ر ع ة'. In Arabic, words are not formed of separate letter strings as in English.

Second, the issue of diglossia and how individuals learn to read leads to another major problem. Ibrahim and Eviatar (2009) do not consider their subjects to be bilingual, regarding traditional spoken Arabic as the L1 and modern standard Arabic as the L2, followed by Hebrew and English as additional languages. If this hypothesis is accepted, it can be argued that Arabic was not the subjects' native language on the premise that traditional spoken Arabic has no written equivalent and therefore all reading and writing must be in the form of a non-native language.

Third, Ibrahim and Eviatar (2009) claim that in Arabic, 22 of the 28 letters of the alphabet have only 4 shapes, which is incorrect. However, it is argued that such a limitation results in longer response times and more errors because it forces the use of

the right hemisphere, although the brain naturally gives superiority to the left hemisphere when processing written text.

The aforementioned hypotheses notwithstanding, in my opinion, what can create difficulty for Arabs when they learn to read are the short vowel sounds that are signalled by diacritics (dots and dashes above and below letters). Diacritics are required for pronunciation to indicate grammatical structure or role. Therefore, a sound knowledge of grammar is essential Arab learners are to read aloud adequately. Al-Muhtaseb and Mellish (1998) highlight the significance of diacritics for Arab readers:

> These diacritics are most of the time assumed to be guessed by the Arabic reader. Most Arabic text is written without these diacritics. It is insisted that verses of The Holy Quran should be written fully diacritized to avoid any possible mistake and/or ambiguity. Arabic diacritics with their names are<fat.ha>[$\acute{\circ}$],<.damma[$\overset{,}{\circ}$],<kasra>[$\circ$],<sukūn>[$\mathring{\circ}$],<tanwiēnfat.h>[$\acute{\circ}$],<tanwiēn. da> [$\overset{,}{\circ}$],<taniēnkasr[$\circ$] [emphasis in original]. (AL-Muhtaseb and Mellish, 1998, p. 2)

Ghareeb (2012) considers Arab learners' reading difficulty from a different angle, referring to the mechanics of eye movement when the individual learns to read. Slow readers tend to pause after each word in order to ensure that they recognise it and can assign a meaning, a process that is known as parallel distributed processing. As a result, the eyes are likely to read words two or three times and by the time the reader moves on, he or she is likely to have lost his or her train of thought. On the other hand, fast readers skim words quickly and yet can apprehend the meaning of a sentence or the whole text because their eyes and brain work in harmony. This is due to the fact that good readers do not stop even if they encounter difficult words and their comprehension of the whole passage does not break down. Indeed, they have been found to use different strategies to determine the meaning of unknown words, such as relating graph phonemic clues or syntactic clues with semantic clues (Ghareeb, 2012).

Alharbi (2010) attributes the difficulty of reading in the mother tongue to several factors. The first is the social factor, which is associated with whether or not children read at home before starting school. Children who get into the habit of reading early have a more varied vocabulary than those who do not. Second, if either or both parents have learning difficulties, the possibility of their children experiencing reading

problems is high. Third, standard of living is critical because poor families often give priority to basic needs and at the expense of books for their children.

Alharbi (2010) also highlights five major factors leading to problematic reading that are suggested by research: general lack of interest in reading; inability to recognise phonemes; restriction of reading to the word level; too few strategies to aid comprehension; and inadequate preparation on the part of teachers. With regard to the last point, Alharbi (2010) argues that many teachers in the Arab world lack the skills to teach reading comprehension effectively because there are no specialised programmes to teach reading at university. Alharbi adds that there is a noticeable misconception between how to teach reading in general and how to help students overcome reading difficulties encountered on major degree programmes.

2.4.2 Differences between Arabic and English

The fact that Arabic and English have totally different conventions and systems of writing, spelling, pronunciation, and so on creates another problem for Saudi learners. For example, unlike English, Arabic alphabet letters are read and written from right to left. This can decrease reading speed in English learners because students are in the habit of starting on the right-hand side of the page before moving their eyes to the left.

Another difference is that some Arabic letters and sounds do not exist in English, such as ح, ع or خ. similarly, some English letters and sounds are not found in Arabic, such as those represented by 'p' and 'v'. More importantly, the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabetic have no upper case representation. If Saudi students of English do not recognise conventional case variations, or have not learnt the rules governing the use of capitalisation, they sometimes believe that a word beginning with a capital letter has a different meaning from the same word written entirely in lower case.

2.4.3 Different attitudes towards the teaching of reading

In this subsection, I shed light on the different perceptions of reading that both teachers and students have. In so doing, I seek to draw attention to some of the problems caused by misconception of the reading process. To support my arguments, I give authentic examples taken from my own teaching experience, lesson observations, and points about reading made by teachers and students in the semi-structured interviews. I also

refer to learning tasks and activities that teachers at the College of Medicine implemented, and how they exploited them.

Students and teachers alike might fail to observe major reading problems once the former reach the intermediate and advanced levels, at which English classes at the College of Medicine are only taken for short periods four times a week. The English course under study combined the four main skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, as well as the sub-skills of grammar and vocabulary building, but little time was devoted to reading comprehension. Such a problem surfaces when students enrol at university, especially if they take scientific courses, which have lengthy reading lists with more English titles than some other subjects. All too often students are plunged into confusion at the beginning of the semester when departments present them with reading lists full of works in English.

2.4.4 Different interpretations of the process of reading

It is clear that what teachers do in the classroom stems from received philosophy and approaches to pedagogy. There are three distinct approaches to teaching reading, as identified by Abraham (2000): 1) the bottom up model in which students are required merely to decode or extract meaning from the text, which is regarded as a one-way process of meaning identification; 2) the top down model in which readers utilise existing knowledge and predictions that they relate to the text; and 3) interactive process that integrates the two models.

At the College of Medicine, I noticed that teachers implemented some features of the bottom up model. For example, a native speaking teacher of English used a pointer when he read from the blackboard, indicating each word as he proceeded. However, if learners rely on such a technique – pointing at individual words with a finger as their eyes move across the page – they might develop into slow readers. Reading individual words limits reading speed as well as it interferes with comprehension, and could lead to what is known as 'subvocalisation' or inner voice (Bhagya Lakshmi, 2006). Indeed, I found that students unconsciously tried to pronounce each word with a slight movement in the tongue or throat region, causing an inevitable slowing down of the process. In this model, the visual focus is important for word recognition.

The same teacher asked a volunteer to read a paragraph; if he mispronounced a word or letter, the other corrected him at once and asked him to repeat the correct pronunciation five times. The teacher also told the whole class to ask him about any problematic words, emphasising the importance of identifying individual words and the notion that it would not be possible to capture the meaning of a given word without accurate pronunciation. It should be noted here that the primary focus of instruction was on word recognition.

Another teacher I observed also used some features of the bottom up model. He asked each student to read a sentence or two and then explained ideas and difficult words or phrases. Again, such methodology induced students to focus on passive learning of difficult words rather than employing other strategies to guess their meaning. The teacher also digressed into a lecture on inflection and the English sound system when a student mispronounced a word.

Finally, a native teacher of English I observed wrote the target vocabulary on the blackboard and translated each word separately. When he was asked a question, he gave the answer immediately without attempting to encourage the students to participate actively by eliciting information.

In summary, the features of bottom up model the study found were a focus on the identification of words, and the pronunciation of letters and words as an approach to determining the meaning of the whole text. Students were also stopped from time to time and asked about the meaning of individual words, or to enunciate mispronounced words correctly several times. There was no explicit teaching that developed awareness of reading strategies. Students were neither told what approaches to utilise when they encountered a problematic word, nor taught how to engage in activates that would develop, for example, inference or fluency skills. Rather, they were merely required to memorise and translate isolated words.

The following are some examples of the top down model of teaching reading. An American teacher of English began his lesson by asking several questions intended to brainstorm the topic:

1- Looking at the picture, what do you think the topic will be about?

2- Do you like big cities? Why or why not?

3- What is the danger of pollution?

In brainstorming the topic, the students were able to interact and engage with the text before reading it.

A Jordanian teacher utilised inference skills with his students to identify the meaning of unknown words:

S: What does 'ghost' mean?

T: Looking at the picture it your book, do you think it's good or bad?

S: It's bad.

T: OK, why you think it's bad?

S: The picture is scary and dark.

T: If something is scary and you see it at night what do you call it?

S: It's a… وحش (*wahesh*)… 'monster' in English.

T: That's right.

Finally, another American teacher of English used grammatical clues to explain the meaning of a difficult word:

S: What's 'disable'?

T: You know the meaning of 'able'.

S: Yes, able….. I can do.

T: That's right; now you know the meaning of 'dis'?

S: No.

T: OK, it's like 'un', 'im', or 'in'.

S: Yeah, the opposite.

T: That's right.

When teachers made use of the top down model, they gave students the confidence to believe that it was possible to comprehend the gist of a text without recognising each word. They could also use different strategies for meaning identification and draw on their existing knowledge if necessary.

2.4.5 Grammar translation method versus communicative language approach

From my own experience and lesson observations, I found that two dominant and opposing methods of teaching English at the College of Medicine were grammar translation and a more communicative approach. Some teachers adopted features of each method interchangeably. For example, while they taught vocabulary in the form of lists of isolated words, they might also ask students to infer the meaning of some unknown words from the context.

Richards and Rodgers (2003) identify the main characteristics of both the grammar translation method and the communicative approach; I focus on those that directly related to the teaching of reading:

Grammar Translation Method

1- Main focus on L1 rather than target language

2- Prioritises translation and memorisation of wordlists

3- Emphasis on accuracy; students should know exact translation of each word

4- Students are passive; therefore a teacher-centred approach

Communicative Approach

1- Meaning is central, which is achieved through communication

2- Utilises authentic and various materials

3- Emphasis is on fluency

4- Trial and error an important aspect of learning.

5- Translation can be used if necessary

6- Comprehensible pronunciation without technical explanation

7- Interaction and active learning (pair and group work) essential for progress; therefore a student-centred approach

There follow some examples of how teachers refrained from using communicative methods, tending to deploy aspects of the grammar translation method. Two teachers did not seem to be keen to implement student-centred activities, claiming that collaborative work was not conducive to learning in this particular environment owing to constrictions such as classroom size, number of students, and type of course. On the

other hand, two native English speaking teachers implemented some collaborative work, arguing that it was an effective tool, although even they did not use it with all tasks. Moreover, it was noticed that although the latter attempted a student-centred approach to teaching, they undertook to do almost everything, even when they asked students to work in groups; and when responding to students' questions, they gave the answers directly rather than helping students to seek correct answers themselves or ask others. Sometimes, they clarified points by using the same examples and teaching methodology. As a result, some students repeatedly asked the same questions as they struggled to understand. No teachers provided their students with supplementary materials for further explanation. They all adhered strictly to the textbook on the grounds that students were only examined on the contents of the book.

It seems that the two native English speaking teachers favoured collaborative learning because it was the predominant methodology in their societies. However, no one mentioned anything about the formal courses they had taken as students, methods of teaching, or active modes of learning such as group work.

The following example shows how vocabulary was taught. An American teacher of English wrote a list of target words on the blackboard, and asked the students to find their definitions and practice the words in sentences. He wanted to make sure that they understood and were able to memorise the meanings. This was a typical technique for grammar translation.

The final example demonstrates how some teachers dealt with student errors. Teachers did not tolerate any mistakes even when they did not impede comprehension. They corrected each one at once; if a student made a mistake as he spoke, the teacher stopped him and corrected him at once. As a result, the student was nervous about reading the following sentence because he was afraid of making a mistake.

The following examples demonstrate the communicative aspects of teaching. Some teachers began their lessons by brainstorming the topic they were going to address. In the process of exploiting existing knowledge, they attempted to link learning in the

classroom with the students' experiences in wider society in order to make learning more meaningful.

Another example indicates how some teachers encouraged their students to be more active in class. The students read a text and after they had finished the teacher asked them what they thought about the point of view of the writer, and whether or not they agreed with him or her. Another teacher also asked some students to present their answers in front of the class while the others corrected any mistakes they noticed. However, whenever I observed reading comprehension lessons, I noticed that teachers never taught their students innovative strategies for approaching a text, focusing heavily on the meaning of unknown controlled vocabulary and syntactic structures instead. Unsurprisingly, the students tended to be poor and nonstrategic readers.

When I started teaching at the medical college and before that at the telecommunication college, I tried to rely on communicative activities which emphasised interactions when teaching different subjects rather than focusing on repetition and drills. For example, I would ask students to read the whole text silently to get the general meaning. After that, students would guess the meaning of unknown words from the context without resorting to a dictionary or asking me. However, most students showed resistance to such an approach because they were not familiar with it or they did not have confidence to learn alone.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter covered issues related to the study context which included the location of the study, students and teachers who were involved in it and the English programmed taught at the college of medicine. It presented the Saudi educational system, its problems and its influence on teaching English and how it might have led to authoritative roles of teachers in Saudi universities. Factors that affect English reading ability amongst Saudi students were also discussed. These included the status of reading in the mother tongue and how it differs from English, how reading in English is defined, and strategies for approaching reading comprehension. It is clear that the issue is not about teaching reading but also about the concept of teachers' understanding of students' learning strategies and developing learning strategies.

Chapter Three

Review of related literature

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to shed light on the theory and research findings related to collaborative learning (CL), collaborative strategic reading and its theoretical framework (CSR), and the study of the English language that I utilised to construct the conceptual framework for the present study. The theoretical background covers the following topics: a definition of English for specific purposes (ESP) and academic purposes (EAP) and their characteristics; a definition of reading, its types, the influence of first language (L1) on second language (L2) reading texts and the importance of reading to academic study and more specifically in an ESP context; CL and its advantages; the role of students and teachers in CL; CSR and its strategies.

3.2. Theoretical Background

3.2.1 English for specific or academic purposes

Within English teaching and learning, a distinction is usually made between the different purposes of pedagogy as they have various implications for the way that the subject is taught and learnt. The present study investigates students who are learning English for a specific, academic purpose. Those who study English for academic purposes (EAP) are seen as having particular needs, interests and purposes in learning a foreign language, which influence their motivation for learning (Nuttall, 2005). In their definition of ESP, Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.19) state that, "ESP should probably be seen not as any particular language product but as an approach to language teaching which is directed by specific and apparent reasons for learning".

It should be noted here that ESP can take many forms depending on learners' needs. Robinson (1991 cited in Dudley-Evans and St John, 2003, p.6) categorises ESP based on the degree of specificity or experience that is appropriate for the course. Such categorisation lends itself to two types of ESP: English for occupational purposes (EOP) and English for educational purposes (EEP) or English for academic purposes (EAP), as shown in the tree diagram in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: ESP classification by experience (adapted from Dudley-Evans and St John, 2003)
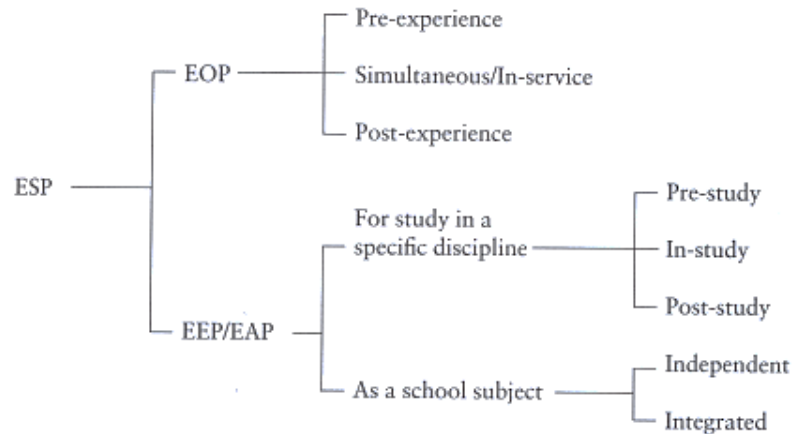
Dudley-Evans and St John (2003, p.6) divide EAP and EOP by discipline and professional area respectively, as shown in Figure 3.2 below.

Figure 3.2: ESP classification by professional area (adapted from Dudley-Evans and St John, 2003)

What is interesting about ESP classification by discipline is that in the context of the present study, English is taught and studied for academic medical purposes, but the course is also intended to prepare students in EOP for when they become doctors.

Jordan (2003, p. 250) suggests a different division by comparing English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) with English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). In such a division, EGAP is regarded as the base of a pyramid and ESAP as its pinnacle, as shown in Figure 3.3 below

Figure 3.3: ESAP and EGAP (adapted from Jordan, 2003)

(Discipline-specific; motivational and relevant to students)

ESAP

EGAP

(Generalisable skills; applicable to most students; economical of effort and time of the tutor)
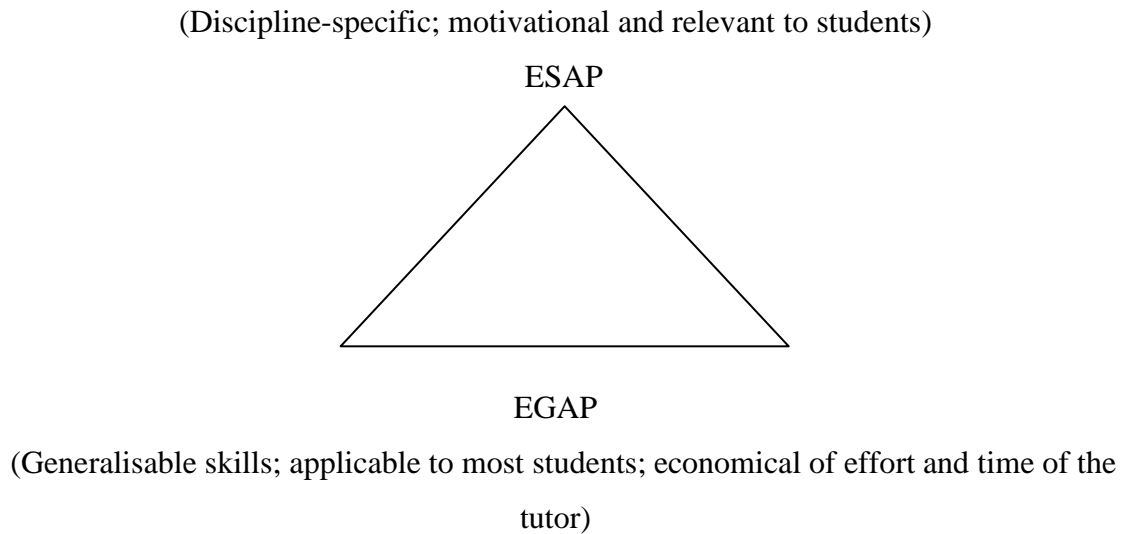
According to Figure 3.3, ESAP should take into account students' needs because they are already motivated to learn, while EGAP is seen as an aid to help ESP students acquire the necessary tools to study specific academic subjects. Teachers can benefit from the EGAP skills students have learnt to facilitate ESP learning.

Nevertheless, the focal point of any categorisation of ESP is that English is not taught as a separate subject but is constructed around functions determined by the purposes of learners. Clearly, ESP demands a way of teaching based on students' specific needs. Therefore, one of the main characteristics of ESP is that it focuses on language in context rather than on explaining grammatical and lingustic structures (Dudley-Evans and St John, 2003).

Language in context draws our attention to the authenticity of texts, and whether and to what extent teachers should use 'authentic' materials for teaching ESP learners. Generally speaking, authentic materials are spoken or written texts that are not prepared specifically for language learners, but rather are produced for native speakers of English. Kilickaya (2004, p.1) describes the use of authentic materials as "exposure to real language and its use in its own community."

On the other hand, Meinhof (1987, p.79) restricts authenticity to those materials which facilitate real communication and may only be "original pieces of written or spoken language which [have] occurred naturally between native speakers and...[can] therefore be accepted as genuine communicative acts". However, he goes on to argue that when teachers bring such materials into the classroom for pedagogical purposes, they lose their authenticity. In addressing this problem, he suggests that students can take part in the process of collection and bring in what they find after they are provided with stimuli via different articles taken from magazines (Meinhof, 1987, p.79).

In ESP, authentic learning materials are those that are designed for a particular special purpose. Using them has obvious advantages in that they motivate students since they can see the relevance to their chosen field; they also allow exposure to real language and awareness of the cultural content of the target language (Benavent and Penamaria, 2011). Another benefit is that authentic materials can keep students up to date with what is happening in the world and in their particular fields (Oguz and Bahar, 2008). Vahid baghban and Pandian (2011) note that authentic materials are of great help to the ESP student because they enable effective communication both inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, Phillips and Shettlesworth (1978) argue that students badly need authentic materials in order to learn to cope with long reading texts, given that ESP teachers might not be able to construct adequate materials as they are non-native speakers.

However, Dudley-Evans and St John (2003) suggest that authenticity cannot be clearly defined, since when brought to the classroom, the materials are being used for pedagogical purposes. This may be so, but for many students, the issue is about the complexity of the text. As Harmer (2007) points out, some authentic materials are very difficult and can be demotivating for students if they are not well chosen.

Another concern to be taken into account is that authentic materials that seem to be appropriate for some learners might not be so for others. For example, the level and subject of a text exploited for secondary students might be unsuitable for university students (Kilckaya, 2004). There is thus a need to provide learners with appropriate materials in terms of difficulty, style and need (Al Fraidan, 2012). For this reason,

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that focusing on simplified texts that reflect the learning process is more important than using materials just because they are authentic.

The final disadvantage is that the authenticity of materials might create an additional problem for students who are not familiar with the target language due to cultural differences. Alptrekin (2006) asserts that by changing certain words in authentic texts to more common ones that students are familiar with leads to better comprehension. Hakki and Razi (2009) add that even if teachers use different reading activities taken from authentic materials, the influence of cultural familiarity cannot be compensated for.

Other characteristics of ESP include the fact that students are adults and generally non-beginners who can make judgements about themselves and others (Sifakis, 2003). That ESP students are adults can be an advantage because they are more likely to know what they need and how to achieve it. Moreover, previously acquired learning skills potentially allow them to learn faster and more efficiently. However, Harmer (2007) identifies a problem related to adult education that may hinder the learning process. Adult students bring with them a wide range of experiences, including different learning styles that teachers can benefit from when implementing various tasks. However, not all habits acquired in earlier education are helpful and previous experiences can cause problems if learners insist on using them with the target language.

The distinction between EAP and ESP is relevant to the present action research project because it is concerned with both forms of English language learning. The study is related to EAP since English is used as the medium of instruction in an academic setting. However, since learners are medical students training to be doctors who will need English in their practices, they are also involved in ESP.

3.2.2 What is reading?
At some level, everyone can agree on what reading is. This said, there are many approaches to its characterisation that emphasise different aspects. In their definition of reading, Broughton et al., (1980, p.91) suggest that "the essence of reading, then, is just this – the understanding of the black marks on paper".

Others define reading by just looking at the purpose of it. Grellet (2003, p.3) states that "understanding a written text means extracting the required information from it as efficiently as possible".

In his description of the reading process, Goodman (1970) considers reading to be:

> …a selective process which involves partial available minimal language cues selected from perceptual input on the basis of the teacher's expectations. As partial information is processed, tentative decisions are made to be confirmed, rejected or refined as reading progresses. (Goodman, 1970, p. 498)

Wallace (1992) supports Goodman's viewpoint in suggesting that:

> Reading is a unitary process both because it cannot be adequately broken down into separate skills and because we draw on similar processing strategies in the reading of all languages even where the written systems are very different. (Wallace, 1992, p.22)

This 'whole language approach' emphasises not only the technical process involved but also the fact that it is deployed in order to derive meaning. Many writers agree with Goodman on this point. Widdowson (1979), for example, states that:

> Reading is not a reaction to the text, but an interaction between the writer and the reader mediated through the text. Reading efficiency is a matter of how effective a discourse the reader can create from the text. (Widdowson, 1979, p. 169)

Reading is therefore about comprehension. Snow (2002, p.11) defines reading comprehension as "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written text". The process of involvement includes bringing what readers already know to the reading of a text. Accordingly, Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) define reading by focusing on background knowledge:

> Reading is an interactive process in which readers construct a meaningful representation of text using their schemata. Schema theory describes the process by which readers combine their own background knowledge with the information in a text to comprehend that text. (Gilakjani and Ahmadi, 2011, p. 142)

Finally, Koda (2007, p.4) points out that although the terms 'reading competence' and 'reading ability' are used interchangeably, they have been defined in different ways. However, all definitions emerge from the idea that extraction and integration of information are essential. She goes on to argue that "Comprehension occurs when the

reader extracts and integrates various information from the text and combines it with what is already known".

This definition presupposes that comprehension has three elements: the reader, the text, and the activity. 'The reader' includes all the abilities and knowledge that the reader brings when he or she reads; 'the text' refers to the construction of any printed or electronic text; and finally, 'the activity' includes the purposes, processes and consequences of the process of reading. It also implies that reading extends beyond the mere comprehension of words, phrases, sentences or even whole paragraphs. The word 'integrate' suggests that the reader should combine his or her overall language proficiency with prior knowledge and metacognitive strategies, that is, knowledge about cognition. It also suggests that reading is a complex process because it moves beyond recognition and comprehension as it is influenced by different factors that are not directly referenced in the text currently being read. Crucially, these three elements take place within a larger socio-cultural context, which may include a classroom learning environment, classroom interaction, social interaction with peers, institutional culture, socio-economic background, and so on (Koda, 2007).

In summary, it can be argued that reading is more than simply extracting meaning from a printed or written text; it is an interactive process that involves prediction and using previous knowledge to arrive at the meaning (Koda, 2007). However, the extent to which these insights from the research literature are used to underpin the syllabus and practice of reading in situations such as the one under study is open to question.

3.2.3 Types of reading

Two major types of reading that are often utilised in considering teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) are intensive and extensive (Grellet, 2003). Nation (2001, p.149) defines intensive reading by focusing on what it includes, stating that, "Although the aim of intensive reading is to understand the text, the procedures involved direct a lot of attention to the vocabulary, grammar and discourse of the text."
Brown (1994) draws an analogy for the attention required in intensive reading, describing it as a 'zoom lens' strategy. According to Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1998), intensive reading is a classroom activity that is carried out under the guidance of the teacher. They add that it is mainly concerned with the text and involves focusing on

new words, structures, expressions and cultural insights. Al Bader (2007) notes that intensive reading is a skill that students need to acquire for utilisation in examinations and tests because they must read every single line if they are to be able to answer all the questions.

On the other hand, in defining extensive reading, Brown (1994) points out that it includes two distinct functions: skimming for the main idea and scanning for details. Skimming and scanning are important in CSR because they can be deployed as strategies both during and after the initial reading of a text.

Long and Richards (1987) link extensive reading with the vast quantity of materials of interest to students which is usually to be found outside the classroom. Other commentators such as Krashen (1982, p. 183) discuss extensive reading in terms of time allotted for the activity, suggesting an hour per evening. However, it should be noted that this depends on the age of readers and the nature of the reading materials. Hedge (2008, p. 202) adds that extensive reading can take place inside or outside the classroom, pointing out that it includes "reading longer texts during class time but also engaging in individual, independent reading at home, ideally of self-selected material".

3.2.4 The impact of first language (L1) skills and knowledge on second language (L2) reading texts

Good teaching and learning of L2 reading involves helping students to adapt different reading skills as well as acquire knowledge to enable them to cope with texts in the target language (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 2003). Alderson and Urquhort (1984) address the issue of skills and knowledge by raising the question of whether literacy in a foreign language is a reading challenge or a language challenge. The reason for asking such a question is that some teachers believe that good readers of a foreign language transfer their (L1) reading skills. However, the relationship between L1 and L2 reading is problematic because L1 reading abilities are less important than knowledge of the (L2), (Alderson and Urquhort 1984).

Perhaps learners should start with a threshold level of L2 knowledge that enables them to benefit from their L1 skills and apply them to target language reading texts. Jiang

(2011) examines the interrelationship between L1 and L2 literacy and its impact on L2 reading comprehension, concluding that L1 literacy is not a predictor of L2 reading ability. However, Hashim (2006) cites several studies that show the role of using the L1 to help in approaching L2 texts as individual readers, and the role of social interaction in helping students when they read in the target language. In Hashim's (2006) study, students were asked to think aloud while reading English texts and were found to use more than 30 per cent of their L1 strategies with the L2.

On the other hand, Birch (2006) claims that some features such as listening and speaking skills, and the L1 alphabetic writing system and pronunciation convention may cause incomplete knowledge of English. He adds that just as similarities between two languages can facilitate learning, differences might interfere with the process (Birch, 2006).

In corroborating Birch (2006), Koda and Zehler (2008) argue that L2 reading in older students in particular builds on the L1 literacy skills they have already acquired. At a later stage, L2 students start to develop their L2 reading skills, a process that leads to competency in the target language. Koda (2007) points out that the effects of L1 literacy experiences on L2 reading can be clearly noticed if the students' mother tongue is linguistically distant from English; large differences might lead to multiple difficulties, thereby inhibiting reading development. Awareness of L2 reading processes will thus help teachers identify differences and take measures to pre-empt potential problems.

In the context of the present study, unlike English, Arabic is written and read from right to left. Another difference is that some Arabic letters and sounds do not exist in English, for example, ح,خ ,ع . Conversely, some English letters and phonemes are not found in Arabic, such as the sounds produced by the letters 'p' and the phoneme 'ʒ' (see section 2.2.2).

3.2.5 The importance of reading to academic study

It is agreed among linguists that reading is an important aid in learning L2 vocabulary, grammar and other skills. For example, Bright and McGregor (1970, p. 52) remark that, "Where there is little reading there will be little language learning". Krashen (1993)

considers reading to be a purposeful means of developing L2 competence, contending that those who read more have larger vocabularies, do better in grammar tests, write better, and spell better. Moreover, Coady and Huckin (1997, p. 93) state that, "The incidental vocabulary learning stemming from reading is an essential complement to the explicit teaching of vocabulary".

Bell (2011) points out that the more students are aware of the essential role of reading, the better they become in their academic fields. As noted by Marlow (1999), reading is even more important and vital for higher education students:

> One reason that university students fail to achieve optimally in course work is their lack of reading skills. The higher education student needs to achieve skills appropriate to the involved task in reading. (Marlow, 1999, p.1)

Marlow (1999) emphasises that students need to develop reading skills to cope with a university curriculum that includes reading around the subject of study, analysing ideas, solving problems, and stimulating creative thought. Similarly, Hermida (2009) points out that students at university level need to engage in a range of activities not found at high school that encourage a deep approach to academic reading. One reason for a lack of the requisite reading strategies is noted by Sidek (2012), who observes that the secondary school EFL reading curriculum tends not to include activities and tasks that emphasise communicative learning, which results in an inability to read effectively at the university level.

3.2.6 Academic literacy

The notion of academic literacy emphasises the importance of the socio-cultural context mentioned earlier. Lea and Street (2000) highlight the importance of academic literacy in higher education:

> Academic literacy's practices – reading and writing – within disciplines constitute central processes through which students learn new subjects and develop their knowledge about new areas of study. (Lea and Street, 2000, p. 32)

Pawn and Honeyford (2008, p. 27) add, "At the college level, the pervasiveness of reading and writing as literate acts obscures their roles as gate-keeping structures that govern students' access to tertiary education."

Flippo and Caverly (2008) point out another issue raised by the question of academic literacy in tertiary students: when they practice reading in an academic context, they are able to create new meanings because they can develop their own ways of understanding the text. Moreover, not only do students understand meanings by interacting with texts, but also by interacting with their peers and teachers. Flippo and Caverly (2008) further suggest that students as readers can comprehend the different purposes of writers and what they are trying to say by working collaboratively in the classroom.

The importance of academic literacy can also be seen with students who are not native speakers of English. Ridgway (2003) specifically examines the impact of academic literacy on foreign language reading, arguing that students have difficulty in approaching texts because they have different styles and attitudes that are culturally specific. He explains the importance of style and attitude by emphasising the role of transferability, that is, students might transfer their L1 reading habits to the target language. Ridgway (2003) concludes that both socio-cultural elements such as style and attitude, as well as cognitive elements such as skills and strategies should be considered by teachers. Yurekli (2010) takes the argument a step further in asserting that in EFL, consideration of the needs and expectations of both teachers and students are essential if a suitable curriculum is to be designed which takes into account the language skills needed for academic literacy.

3.2.7 Reading in an ESP context

Johns and Davies (1983) propose an approach for developing reading skills in a foreign language for specific purposes, the main principle of which is a shift away from the text as a linguistic object (TALO) to the text as a vehicle for information (TAVI). The key characteristics of this approach are summarised in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Characteristics of developing reading skills approach (adapted from John and Davies, 1983)

	TALO	TAVI
Principles underlying text selection	Texts illustrate syntactic structure Topics are of general interest Texts are specially written, modified or re-written New vocabulary is controlled Texts are selected by teachers	Texts are chosen for their value in relation to students' needs A range of authentic texts are used Grading is implemented through tasks and support Texts are of different lengths, growing longer Texts are selected not only by teachers, but also by learners and others
Preparatory activities	Almost none Some translation of vocabulary	Always: important as direction finders, to awaken interest and establish purpose
Working with text	Focus on language and what is unknown Focus on detail and understanding all the sentences and words Questions on syntax	Focus on information and what is known Guessing unknown words Focus on links between meaning (function) and form
Type of teaching/ learning interaction	Teacher monologue Teacher-centred: teacher questions, student responds, teacher evaluates	Students work in groups Reversal of roles: students ask questions, evaluate each other, reach agreement Model for self-study Learning and learner-centred
Follow-up activities	Comprehension questions Grammar and lexis exercises	Using the information: transfer, application or extension Applying techniques

Based on the information in Table 3.1, Johns and Davies (1983) argue that ESP students need to be able to extract information quickly and accurately rather than pay excessive attention to detail, meaning that the focus should be on information rather than the structure of the language.

In the context of the present study, my students are both ESP and EAP students. They are medical students who study reading for a particular purpose. However, as long as they are students they study reading in an academic setting and what they learn will be used later after they have graduated. Therefore, they are involved in English for specific academic purposes (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

3.2.8 What is Collaborative Strategic Reading?

CSR deploys four strategies and specific procedures to help students use them independently (see section 1.2). Learners work in groups of four or five, with critical roles assigned in advance. The teacher presents the four strategies to the class as a whole before using them. Next, the teacher shows the students how each strategy works by modelling, role play and 'thinking aloud'. He or she then participates with the students as they become actively involved in the process of learning. Finally, the students work independently with a given task. The same instructional framework is implemented with each of the four CSR strategies, which the students apply before, during and after reading in their small cooperative groups.

The four reading strategies are:

1- Preview (before reading): a pre-reading strategy to help students brainstorm what they already know about the topic and make predictions about what the passage might contain. Previewing enables students to generate interest in the topic, gives a purpose for reading, links experiences with knowledge, and explores ideas they will read about in the text. Watkins (2010) suggests that giving students a reason to read helps them comprehend the text by directing their attention to the most important parts of it. Ur (2003) argues that some students experience a breakdown in reading comprehension because they pay equal attention to all parts of the text. To solve this problem, they should be trained how to focus on the most important parts of the text before they start reading by using previewing strategies (Ur, 2003).

2- Click and Clunk (during reading): a strategy that enables students to signal their understanding of particular parts of a text for teacher monitoring purposes. Students say or gesture 'click' if they understand a sentence and 'clunk' if they find it problematic. Several studies have shown the essential role of vocabulary in reading comprehension. With regard to vocabulary building, August et al., (2005) point out that teachers should pay special attention to the crucial role of vocabulary development of non-native English learners because it has a direct impact on their reading comprehension. It is thus necessary to consider what vocabulary is to be taught and how. When a student comes to a 'clunk', he or she is encouraged to utilise preset remedial strategies to tackle the problem. Klingner et al., (1998, p.33) propose the following so-called 'fix-up' (remedial) sub-strategies:

- Reread the sentence and look for key ideas to help in the understanding of problematic words.
- Reread the sentence that resulted in a 'clunk' and the sentences before or after the 'clunk' looking for clues.
- Look for a known prefix or suffix in a problematic word.
- Break the word down and look for smaller known words.

3- Get the Gist (during reading): a strategy concerned with identifying the main ideas of each paragraph and the text as a whole. Several studies have shown the importance of recognising the main ideas of a passage to support reading comprehension. For example, Jitendra et al., (2000) note the need to implement different strategies to apprehend main ideas through explicit instruction. In CSR, students should also learn how to exclude less important details by limiting the number of words in answers to questions. Bremer et al., (2002) recommend that students ask themselves 'wh' questions to identify the most important place, person and thing (where, who, what) while working on this strategy.

4- Wrap-up (after reading): a strategy that the students implement to summarise the main ideas of the text by reviewing and anticipating questions that the teacher might ask. The students begin with 'wh' questions and move on to more complex ones that entail higher level thinking skills (Bremer et al., 2002).
 Figure 3.4 shows the CSR reading strategies.

Figure 3.4: CSR plan for strategic reading, **adapted from (adapted from Vaughan and Klingner, 1999, p.740)**

Figure 1
CSR's plan for strategic reading

During reading

Click & clunk

1. Were there any parts or words that were hard to understand (clunks)?

2. How can we fix the clunks? Use fix up strategies:

(a) Reread the sentence and look for key ideas to help you understand the word

(b) Reread the sentences before and after looking for clues

(c) Look for a prefix or suffix in the word

(d) Break the word apart and look for smaller words.

Before reading

Preview

1. *Brainstorm*
What do we already know about the topic?

2. *Predict*
What do we think we will learn about the topic when we read the passage?

After reading

Wrap-up

1. *Ask questions*
What questions would check whether we understand the most important information in the passage? Can we answer the questions?

2. *Review*
What did we learn?

Get the gist

1. What is the most important person, place, or thing?

2. What is the most important idea about the person, place, or thing?

3.2.9 Constructivism

According to Standish (2005), CSR is based on a social constructivist approach to learning. This subsection addresses a brief historical background of constructivism and its forms before going on to discuss its application in education in the following subsection. A single definition of constructivism is elusive because it is subject to various descriptors such as philosophy, methodology, pedagogical approach, model, epistemology, and framework of interpretation (Noddings, 1995).

Schwandt (1994) describes constructivism as a broad term that carries different meanings each of which is based on the discourse to which it is applied. For example, he differentiates between constructivism in mathematics or logic and constructivism in the social sciences. Schwandt (1994, p. 125) focuses on the function of the mind when defining constructivism, arguing that, "Most of us would agree that knowing is not passive – a simple imprinting of sense data on the mind – but active; that is, the mind does something with these impressions – at the very least it forms abstractions or concepts".

Just as there are different definitions of constructivism, it also has several forms, such as developmental constructivism, feminist constructivism, radical constructivism, social constructivism, scientific constructivism, and educational constructivism. Social constructivism is defined by Klee (1997) thus:

> …a term referring to an increasingly popular philosophical position in which the objects of our knowledge are held to be either wholly or partly constituted by our coming to know them in the way we do. Basically, social constructivism is a variety of antirealism and relativism. (Klee, 1997, p. 249)

However, some writers define social constructivism in terms of the significance of the role played by culture and context in constructing and understanding knowledge (Derry, 1999). Kukla (2000) defines it by focusing on the ontological level, that is, the nature of reality and how it is constructed through human activity. Others define it from an epistemological point of view, that is, how people come to know things. Ernest (1999) contends that knowledge is a human product that is socially constructed through interaction with others. According to this viewpoint, knowledge cannot be constructed without the process of interaction.

Nevertheless, social constructivism is generally regarded as an important aspect of learning, and the question of how it can be applied in the classroom is of growing interest to researchers. Vighnarajah et al., (2008) suggest that the social constructivist concept of interaction plays an essential role in helping students to be more active participants in the classroom. When students become involved in discussions with their teachers as well as one another, learning shifts from being teacher centred to student centred (Vighnarajah et al., 2008).

3.2.10 Constructivism and learning

Constructivism is a way of thinking about knowing, a referent to the construction of models of teaching, learning and curricula (Tobin and Tippin, 1993). In this sense, it is a philosophy. The key idea of constructivism is that knowledge and understanding are not received from others so much as actively constructed by the learner. The active role of the learners means that language should be used by them socially to make meanings understood.

One form of constructivism is known as educational constructivism. Walker and Lambert (1995) point out that educational constructivism is a theory of pedagogy addressing the way in which learners gain knowledge that is based on the work of John Dewey (1916), Piaget (1950), Vygotsky (1978), and others. Walker and Lambert (1995) further note that:

> Educational Constructivists believe that learning occurs when children encounter new experiences and concepts and seek to assimilate these into their existing cognitive structures or adjust these schemes to accommodate the new information. (Walker and Lambert, 1995, p. 1)

Some writers discuss educational constructivism by comparing it with behaviourist theories of learning. Behaviourism holds that learning is nothing but a habit in that learners acquire knowledge through a process of stimulus and response (Hassad, 2011). However, Von Glasersfeld (1995) argues that:

> From the constructivist perspective, learning is not a stimulus–response phenomenon. It requires self-regulation and the building of conceptual structures through reflection and abstraction. (Von Glasersfeld, 1995, p. 10)

Many authors that identify with social constructivism trace their ideas back to Vygotsky (e.g. 1978), a pioneering theorist in psychology who focussed on the roles that society played in the development of the individual. Social or 'Vygotskian' constructivism emphasises education for social transformation, reflecting a theory of human development that situates the individual within a socio-cultural context. Accordingly, individual development derives from social interactions within which cultural meanings are shared by the group and eventually internalised by the individual (Richardson, 1997). Individuals construct knowledge in interaction with the environment, in the process of which both the individual and the environment are changed.

In this study, social constructivism, built on the ideas of Vygotsky is the main conceptual framework informing the analysis. The central tenet of this is that learning is social in nature and takes place via social interactions. Students learn through interaction and communication with others before being capable of doing things alone. One of the main contributions to Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development is the notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which is defined by Vygotsky (1978) as

> The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86)

The above definition implies the following educational implications:

1- Learning and development cannot be separated from the social context.

2- Social interaction is important for learning and tends to precede the development of cognition.

3- Social cooperation and interaction can shorten the gap at the developmental level.

4- Language is a basic tool for making meaning and constructing knowledge as well as a medium for interaction with other people.

5- In the process of interaction, the individual with more capable peers, language learning is both an individual as well as a social process.

The pedagogical implications of socio-cultural theory to second language learning (SLL) are clearly examined by researchers. Mitchell and Myles (2004), for example, state

> Application of the Zone of Proximal Development to SLL assumes that new language knowledge is jointly constructed through collaborative activity, which may or may not involve formal instruction and meta-talk, and is then appropriated by the leaner, seen as an active agent in their own development. (Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p. 200)

From the above quote, it is worth noting that learning is built up by active social collaboration with others which results in making meaning. It also entails that the learner can internalise or appropriate the new knowledge while he or she is involved in a process of interaction. Therefore, learning is viewed as creative construction 'this occurs as a result of natural processing strategies and exposure to the second language in communication situation' (Littlewood 1984, p.69). The final thought is that learners can learn from each other, which requires teaching to be both a student-centred approach and a teacher-centred approach. Children need to understand the surrounding culture while interacting with each other which results in shaping their cognitive development.

Unlike behaviourists, social constructivists regard learning as an active process that requires a high level of student involvement. Thus, learners should develop advanced thinking and problem-solving skills. In this respect, knowledge is shifted from being a product to being a process (Jones and Brader-Araje, 2002). Scaffolding as an important element of collaborative learning, leads to better learning. The benefits of scaffolding can extend to include other situations beyond the immediate tasks. Students can implement individually what they have learnt socially in groups via interaction (Vygosky, 1978).

3.2.11 What is collaborative learning?

CL is regarded as a useful tool for teaching a language in general, and in reading comprehension in particular. Dillenbourg (1999) maintains that CL has various definitions because it is used differently within each academic field. These definitions can be summarised as follows:

1. CL is relevant to any collaborative activity in an educational context, such as sharing a course assignment.

2. CL may be linked to any activity that requires problem solving. Learning will take place as the result of a problem-solving process that leads to the production of new knowledge or a modification of the problem-solving process itself.

3. CL may be regarded from a developmental perspective as a biological and/or cultural process that takes place over years.

Dillenbourg (1999) concludes that CL is neither a single mechanism nor a discrete method, defining it in its broadest sense as "a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together."

Additionally, Gokhale (1995 p. 22) defines CL as "an instruction method in which students at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common academic goal". The commonality between these two definitions is that CL takes place when students work together to accomplish a given task. However, the first definition

expands CL to include any situation inside or outside the classroom, while the second seems to be more technical and implicitly limits CL to the classroom. Nevertheless, proponents of CL argue that it promotes active learning, critical thinking, conceptual understanding, long-term retention of material, interdependence, social interaction, and high levels of student satisfaction (Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Nunan, 1999; Gokhale, 1995; Bruffee, 1993).

On the other hand, Richards and Rodgers (2003) regard CL as a principle of teaching and learning emphasised in communicative language teaching (CLT). Richards and Rodgers (2003, p. 172) define this approach as a "set of principles that reflect a communicative view of language and language learning, and that can be used to support a wide variety of classroom procedures." They add that a humanistic approach to teaching that includes interactive processes between students and teacher is vital (Richards and Rodgers 2003).

Thus, the main aim of CLT is to help students move from linguistic competence to communicative competence. This means using what they have learnt in the classroom when communicating outside the classroom (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Nevertheless, Greenwood (2007) claims that students often do not benefit from CL in higher education because, as we shall see, it is not always employed by teachers. According to Bruffee (1993) traditional college and university teaching does not implement CL or teach it as a way of facilitating learning. In his study of Harvard Medical School's traditional curriculum, Bruffee (1993) comments:

> …although traditional education stuffs young physicians full of facts, it leaves their diagnostic judgement rudimentary and does not develop their ability to interact socially with either colleagues or patients, over complex, demanding perhaps life-and-death issues. (Bruffee (1993, p.2)

Bruffee (1993) suggests that in traditional education, students are regarded as repositories of information in the short term and therefore unable to tackle practical issues occurring in the real world in the long term. He claims that collaboration allows students to share responsibility with their teachers, produce authoritative knowledge, and learn the skill of interdependence, thus enabling them to cooperate with others

productively (Bruffee, 1993). What makes CL different from traditional teaching in Bruffee's (1993) opinion is that the role of the teacher shifts from being the centre of action as someone who does almost everything, to that of the centre of attention. As a result, everyone in the classroom plays his or her part.

In his book *Collaborative Learning*, Bruffee (1993) particularly advocates consensus groups. This seems to be the type of organisation that is most appropriate to reading comprehension work in higher education. The main points can be summarised as follows:

- In consensus groups, students work together to accomplish a limited but open-ended task. They negotiate and discuss their points of view in order to reach an agreement.

- In terms of organisation, the teacher divides the class into small groups and assigns each a short task that has preferably been designed and tested beforehand. Finally, the teacher evaluates what the students have come up with.

- The task of organising consensus groups is not very difficult; the challenge lies in ensuring that groups work in a dynamic way. For this reason, the teacher should have some sensitivity to social situations and relationships.

- The teacher should provide guidelines and simple explanations to the students. The teacher should also make sure that each group is arranged well with sufficient space between them to avoid distraction. After arranging seating, the teacher assigns the task with clear instructions. Each group selects one of its members to take notes and report to the whole class. Finally, the teacher should be sure to set a time limit for the task.

- When the students have finished, each group's secretary writes down the main results of the task on the blackboard. All groups then compare and contrast their work while the teacher takes notes and tries to fill in gaps in learning. When the students have finished, the teacher can intervene and comment on the quality of students' answers.

CL tasks should be challenging and utilise open-ended questions that require critical thinking (Campano, 2010). However, working in groups can create two main problems for learners. The first concerns the question of the extent to which students are dependent on what they say; should it be one member who has authority over the group or do members share equal power. The second problem occurs if there is intimacy between certain members of the group who may not evaluate each other's work objectively because they are close friends. Finally, learning might turn from being collaborative to being competitive which prevents students from exchanging ideas (Orlich et al., 2001).

It is clear that teachers' role is as important as students' role in collaborative learning especially in a context where English is taught as a foreign or a second language. However, how much involvement should teachers act is debatable issue which is addressed below.

3.2.12 The role of the teacher in EFL/ESL context

Teachers can perform different roles in the classrooms but their roles are seen as crucial when it comes to teaching English to non-native speaking students. One obvious reason is that the relationship between teaching and learning is a complex and inseparable process. For example, what teaching involves is not only telling students about language such as new vocabulary and grammatical items, but also includes taking into account students' abilities and needs (Watkins, 2010). Another reason has to do with students' opportunities to practice English outside the classroom. Khan (2011) examined the situation of Saudi Arabia and concluded that students had limited exposure to English and could not practice what they had learnt outside the classroom. For this reason, teachers' roles are important for creating a proper environment for students to learn. According to Richards and Rodgers, teacher roles are linked to learner roles in defining the type of interaction characteristics found in different teaching methods. Richards and Rodgers, 2003) state

> Teachers roles in methods are related to the following issues: (a) the types of functions teachers are expected to fulfil, whether that of practice director, counsellor, or model, for example; (b) the degree of control the teacher has over how learning takes place; (c) the degree to which the teacher is responsible for determining the content of what is taught; and (d) the interaction patterns that develop between teachers and learners. (Richards and Rodgers, 2003 p. 28).

However, AL-Mutawa and Kailani (1998) pinpoint that there is no single method that can meet the requirements of all foreign teachers. The reason for this is the other factors influencing the choice of a particular method, including the teacher, the pupil, objectives of instruction, psychology of learning, time available and classroom situation and motivation. AL-Mutawa and Kailani highlight that a teacher's competence in teaching English is a key element in defining their roles because some roles cannot be played while teachers lack a good command of teaching. For instance, a teacher cannot teach students how to speak correctly unless he or she has a sound knowledge of the English sound system and its grammar function. Richards and Lockhart (2002) add that although some teachers are given some freedom from their institutions and can make decisions inside the classroom, they limit their roles to managerial and organisational procedures such as lesson planning, preparing and delivering lessons, marking work and giving feedback and so on. In collaborative learning, teaching has the characteristics of social constructivism where knowledge is constructed in individual contexts and through social interactions (see section 3.2.10 above). The role of the teacher is part of scaffolding where teachers support or scaffold learners to make use of prior information and acquire new knowledge which is beyond their ability. Teachers act as a model, a monitor and a guider by offering help to students who are engaged actively in given tasks and being directed at the same time. When teachers allow students to learn at their pace by interaction with more capable peers, they enable them to be more independent learners and problem solvers.

3.3 Previous research on collaborative strategic learning and reading

Klingner and Vaughn (2000) conducted a study to investigate how often and in what ways bilingual students with limited English helped each other while working together in small, heterogeneous groups as they engaged in CSR. This study included 37 students in a fifth-grade class at a large elementary school in the United States. It was conducted in two phases: first, the teacher and his students were taught how to implement CSR; and second, the students utilised CSR to learn from their science textbooks while the researchers collected data.

Post-test results revealed that students attained high marks in an English vocabulary test after spending a considerable amount of time discussing different tasks and learning

from each other (Klingner and Vaughn, 2000). However, the findings suggested that the students' collaborative behaviour led to positive outcomes only so long as they were familiar with the methodology and the appropriate stages of the lesson at which to deploy reading strategies. Klingner and Vaughn (2000) note that teachers should also bear in mind their students' English level when working, and intervene if necessary to make adjustments to guarantee the equal participation of all learners.

Another study was conducted by Chi Fan (2009) in an EFL setting. The intervention was designed to investigate the effects of CSR on 110 Taiwanese university students who had low intermediate to intermediate levels of English. It consisted of two groups: the experimental group in which the treatment of CSR was deployed, and the control group in which no special treatment was employed but traditional teaching based on vocabulary and grammar instruction was used. The study incorporated pre- and post-test elements that were implemented with the control group and the analysis of field notes and group discussions. Chi Fan (2009) found that students' scores increased in comprehension questions on getting the main idea and finding supporting details. However, there was statistically no difference between the groups in terms of strategic reading competence regarding predicting, making inferences, and tackling problems with unknown words. Finally, all students in the experimental group expressed a positive attitude towards CSR and its strategies (Chi Fan, 2009).

In another study, Standish (2005) conducted a comparative investigation on the effects of CSR and direct instruction on sixth-grade students' persuasive writing skills and general attitude. This study divided its subjects into three groups: CSR with direct instruction, direct instruction only, and a control group. Different measures were used to evaluate persuasive writing including observation and interviews. The findings revealed that the students in the CSR with direct instruction group performed significantly better than those in the other two groups because they spent more time working on different activities. Student outcomes in respect of the first group showed that a positive attitude led to better writing as learners were more engaged compared to those in the other two groups (Standish, 2005).

Klingner et al., (2004) conducted a long-term study extending over eight years to examine the potential benefits of CSR on 211 students with learning disabilities. Ten schools participated in this study: five schools as control groups comprising teachers and students, and five schools as experimental groups comprising teachers and students. In comparing pre- and post-test evaluations, it was found that students who participated in CSR activities performed significantly better in reading comprehension than those in the control groups (Klingner et al., 2004).

Vaughn et al., (2011) conducted a study to examine the impact of CSR and metacognitive strategic learning on the reading comprehension of 782 seventh and eighth-grade students selected randomly from 61 classes. Teachers were randomly assigned to either an experimental or control group and received initial training in CSR. The study lasted for 18 weeks, being monitored for 50 minutes a day, two days a week. The results showed that students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group in a standardised reading comprehension test. However, students made similar progress in reading fluency across both groups, as had been expected. This was due to the fact that the focus of CSR was to enhance abilities in how to think and interact with a text without addressing the separate skill of how to increase reading speed (Vaughn et al., 2011).

Researchers have also assessed the efficacy of CSR in students of different reading levels. Bryant et al., (2000) conducted a study consisting of 60 sixth-grade middle school students of varied reading ability, implementing CSR to enhance reading outcomes over four months. A multi-component reading intervention was employed that included three reading strategies, fluency, and content reading comprehension. The results of the statistical analysis revealed that students performed significantly better in word identification and fluency, while there was no significant difference in content comprehension (Bryant et al., 2000).

CSR has also been used to teach reading comprehension in languages other than English. Demachkie and Oueini (2011) carried out a study on 46 seventh-grade Arab male and female students to enhance their reading in Arabic with the use of CSR. Experimental and control groups were established, the study lasting for three months. Students in the experimental group had little interest in reading in Arabic, preferring

French or English. The findings indicated that students achieved well in a reading test. In addition, curriculum design and choice of resources were found to play an influential role in teaching reading comprehension and motivating students to read. Demachkie and Oueini (2011) conclude by suggesting that teachers should encourage students to be proactive in choosing reading materials.

Hsu (2010) examined the effects of CSR on 60 male and female Taiwanese third-grade elementary school students. Although the aim was to determine the impact of CSR on reading comprehension, interestingly, the study also provided insight into the impact of CSR on learning English in general. The intervention lasted 12 weeks and the researcher used multiple measures including pre- and post-tests, interviews, and a questionnaire. All the students in the experimental group participated fully in the study except for the interviews; after the post-test, six high-achieving students at elementary and intermediate levels of English were selected for these.
The results showed that students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group. The former demonstrated a positive attitude towards CSR instruction as well as an interest in learning English in general. This study suggests that by implementing CSR, students can become more self-motivated and independent readers. Therefore, learners should be encouraged to enjoy reading both inside and outside the classroom in order to promote English proficiency (Hsu, 2010).

Zoghi et al., (2010) carried out a six-session study to probe the effectiveness of modified collaborative strategic reading (MCSR) on 42 Iranian first-year university-level EFL students. The MCSR methodology combined the four CSR strategies (previewing, 'click and clunk', get the gist, and wrap-up) with additional reading techniques such as approaches to the recognition of text organisation and discourse marker identification. Data were collected with a range of instruments comprising pre- and post-tests of reading comprehension, interviews, and a questionnaire. The results revealed some improvement in the post-test but the difference was not significant. However, students' responses to the questionnaire were almost invariably positive. This study suggests that although students came from a long-standing educationally conventional tradition, they expressed a positive attitude towards group work and instruction via CSR. However, there are factors which may affect the impact of CSR

and the attitude of some students towards it, including the limited duration of the intervention and the intensity of lessons (Zoghi et al., 2010).

The efficacy of CSR has been sought in ESP settings as well. Ziyaeyan (2012) conducted a study to investigate the impact of CSR on 40 Iranian second-year university students majoring in electronics. The subjects were selected randomly and divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught to implement the four CSR strategies, while the control group continued with traditional learning methods, for example, presentation of new words and phrases on the board by the teacher, and students' translation of a reading passage into Persian before answering questions on it. Based on pre- and post- test scores, a significant positive difference was found between the experimental group and the control group. This study confirms that students experienced more opportunities to exchange their ideas and understandings when working in groups (Ziyaeyan, 2012).

Another study investigated the effectiveness of CSR by utilising computer assisted language learning (CALL). Kim et al., (2006) carried out a study to examine the usefulness of employing a computer assisted collaborative strategic reading (CACSR) programme for improving reading comprehension. A sample of 34 middle school male and female students with learning disabilities were selected randomly and divided into experimental and control groups. All students took a standardised reading test before the intervention to guarantee the homogeneity of the participants.

The study lasted for 12 weeks and utilised three data collection tools: two statistical measurement tests and interviews with participating students and teachers in the experimental group. The two statistical measures used to evaluate CSR were a proximal measure of the intervention (i.e. the CSR measure) and a standardised comprehension measure. The results of the post-test revealed that there was a significant positive difference in student achievement between the experimental group and the control group. The majority of students (12 out of 16) as well as their teachers demonstrated a positive attitude, expressed affirmative responses towards CSR, and showed a desire to continue with it (Kim et al., 2006).

The findings of all the studies discussed in this subsection concur in indicating that CSR helps both EFL and native-speaking learners of English to improve all language skills and leads to positive attitudes. Indeed, these studies show that CSR has yielded positive results in investigations of its effectiveness at many different levels, such as elementary, middle and high school, as well as for other language learners including disabled native speakers. Finally, CSR has also been used to improve other skills such as writing and oral fluency as well as the study of subjects other than English.

However it is striking that almost all the experimental studies were quantitative and used statistical analysis. There were few studies which used qualitative tools for data collection. Although all of these studies are relevant to my research project, none of them specifically addresses the effects of CSR on improving the reading comprehension skills of Saudi learners in an EFL context using action research. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill such a research gap by investigating the effects of CSR on the development of reading comprehension skills amongst Saudi EFL learners at the Riyadh College of Medicine. It also aims to discover their attitudes toward CSR and its strategies.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter began by highlighting the theoretical background to ESP and EAP as well as defining reading comprehension and its impact on first language and second language reading. The experimental review revealed that some studies have been conducted to determine the effects of CL and CSR on students' advancement in written and oral skills, and others have been carried out to investigate how much help students get from their fellows. The findings of all surveyed studies showed that CSR is a successful technique for helping to improving all L2 language skills. The review also revealed that very few studies have been conducted to investigate the effects of CSR on the reading comprehension skills of Saudi learners in an EFL context.

Chapter Four

Methodology and Methods

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological approach to the action research project. It begins with a description of the study context. It then gives a definition of action research, its characteristics and problems with a review of action research in Saudi Arabia and the discussion of access as a micro political problem. Because action research is more than just a single method of collecting and analysing data, different methods were implemented utilising qualitative and quantitative research. These methods include participant-observation, semi-structured interviews, and a questionnaire; as well as a review of university documentation, including student assessments and overall evaluations. This chapter also presents how data were analysed, the research limitations, and the ethical considerations of the study.

The study was conducted during the academic years 2009 and 2010, which corresponded to the first and second years respectively of the degree programme undertaken by the students to whom I taught English.

4. 3 Action Research: Characteristics and Challenges

Action research has received a considerable amount of attention among researchers, and has been especially influential internationally in the areas of educational practice, teacher education, and post-graduate education theses and dissertations (Gitlin and Peck, 2008). Lewin (1935), who is recognised as one of the founders of modern social psychology, first coined the term 'action research'. Lewin (1935) argued that the best way to influence individuals was by studying the relations between groups in order to address social problems.

McNiff and Whitehead (2006, p. 1) describe action research as a method of promoting growth, defining it as "a common-sense approach to personal and professional development that enables practitioners everywhere to investigate and evaluate their work and to create their own theories of practice." If we look closely at this definition, it may be noted that 'practitioners' are researchers and that the context for the generation of knowledge is the decisions they make about their own actions – it is not just a

question of examining others' work. Whitehead (2000) argues that the practitioner

should use 'living' education theory to gain personal and professional development:

> Living educational theories are, for me, the descriptions and explanations which individuals offer for their own professional learning as they ask, answer and research questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'(Whitehead, 2000, p. 26)

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) take a very social view of enquiry in action research,

defining it as:

> …a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, p. 5)

Thus, social justice in action research is achieved when students are allowed to

participate in the process of learning and voice their own opinions freely about what

they think.

Elliott (1991, p. 69) gives a simple and direct definition of action research, attracting

our attention to its purpose as "the study of a social situation with a view to improving

the quality of action within it." The improvement of action means that the focus of

action research should not be merely to describe and evaluate outcomes, but to reach

beyond this to intervene in the process of looking for improvement. Altrichter et al.,

(1995) comment on this definition, stating that the main motive for conducting action

research is the intent to improve the quality of action, and that such quality includes the

action of teachers conducting research as well as students engaged in learning.

Reason and Bradbury (2008) claim that it is not easy to define action research as a

phenomenon because it should be seen more as a verb than a noun. Accordingly, they

attempt a definition that focuses on its continuity, in that, "Action research is a family of

practices of living inquiry that aims, in a great variety of ways, to link practices and

ideas in the service of human flourishing" (Reason and Bradbury, 2008, p. 1).

Part of the difficulty in defining action research may also lie in the manner of testing its methods and theories. Nevertheless, the following key ideas can be applied to the present study:

1- Action research is authentic research as well as practice development; it involves generating knowledge and understanding. Key terms that show it to be research are 'investigation', 'evaluation' and 'enquiry'. However, it is also contextualised and grounded in practice development, as indicated by terms such as 'practice', 'improvement', 'development' and 'action'.

2- The purpose of action research is to generate knowledge in order to change practice, just as in other fields of applied research; but in action research, such change in practice occurs while the study is being conducted.

3- Action research is concerned with social situations.

4- Action research is a purposeful activity that aims to promote the work of its practitioner as well as that of his or her subjects.

McNiff and Whitehead (2006) pinpoint what is special about action research in asserting that it is practical, and equate such practicality with the knowledge-generation aspect of research in that practical knowledge is generated more critically than through simple processes of professional reflection. In other words, action research draws on systematic data collection to justify a claim to knowledge. Findings can thus be evaluated and claims to knowledge are not merely based on a point of view or wishful thinking. What makes action research attractive is the notion that action researchers intervene rather than just describe the phenomena they research. Just as action research accords responsibility to the researcher it also shares this responsibility with its subjects (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006).

Saito et al., (2008) cite another advantage of action research which is related to the learning process. They suggest that action research in an education environment has the potential to change the pedagogical style from a teacher focus to a student focus. When

a student-focussed approach is implemented, learners tend to adopt a deeper approach to learning through which they are able to progress quicker (Saito et al., 2008). Richards and Lockhart (2002) add that innovation action research might include changes to the syllabus or curriculum and changes to the nature of assessment in a positive way.

Wallace (1999) provides the following justifications for action research. First, action research is problem focussed, that is, the problem already exists and stems from professional practice, and the researcher does not need to invent it. Second, Wallace (1999) raises another important feature that is of great help to the action researcher, that is, the 'reflective cycle' found in action research. The reflective cycle is a cyclical process in which the researcher can change his or her method of data collection and test new ways of solving a problem until appropriate practices are developed. Third, this feature leads to the notion that action research does not aim to construct general hypotheses because it is concerned with the professional practice of small groups (Wallace, 1999), (see Figure 4.1for action research cycle).

Like Wallace, Somekh (2006) highlights the reflective cycle that is found in the integration of action research into a practical context. Such integration is characterised by a series of flexible cycles that are based on related steps. For example, the continual process of data collection and analysis does not stop until the researcher has found a solution that leads to change. The reflective cycle requires that practitioner-researchers should work in collaboration with the group under study. Reason and Bradbury (2008, p. 45) link this feature with action research in arguing that the "human community involves sense making and collective inquiry."

However, it has been argued that action research is subject to several inherent challenges. For example, because it does not deal with large samples, Koshy (2005) and Schwalbach (2003) raise the concern that the findings of action research cannot be validated or valuable beyond a narrow domain. Researchers suggest several ways to address this concern about generalisation, Walford (2001) for example pinpoints two ways of tackling the issue in terms of qualitative and ethnographic case studies. The first is to achieve a thorough description of the particular context studied. This enables the researcher and the reader of the research report to obtain the full picture so that it

might be compared with a second case. The second is to establish a strong theoretical or logical argument linking the first case with a wider population. Flyvbjerg (2001, p.2) argues that social science research should not claimed to be value free. Flyvbjerg draws on the concept 'phronesis' which is translated as practical wisdom to best describe social practices. According to him, phronesis goes beyond the decontextualaised generalised certain knowledge-episteme- and beyond purely technical knowledge-techno- to involve decision making. That is to say social practices cannot be represented by social rules or general laws of human behaviour. Therefore, an action research-based case study does not in general claim generalisability but rather offers description and theorisation which allow others to make meaningful comparison with other cases (Walford, 2001).

Somekh (2006) highlights another challenge associated with action research in that the quality of any such study is based on how aware and diligent the researcher is with regard to the processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The problem with awareness has much to do with the self and identity. This is especially likely to be problematic when one is operating in two different roles and when the responses of other participants in the study are conditioned by the role of the researcher. In the case of the present study, this appertains to my dual role as researcher and teacher, and how this affected classroom dynamics between my students and me. Thus, the fact that I was a researcher did not mask my identity as a teacher and vice versa.

Zuber-Skerritt (2003, p. 341) raises another problem sometimes levelled at action research in that, "Action researchers have often been criticized by other scientists for not producing 'scientific' research and theory, for producing only action and improved practice". However, this is unlikely to be the case in successful doctoral work. When I had finished my study I was obliged to write it up in this thesis, and unless it meets the requirements of social scientific research it is unlikely to meet with approval.

The problem of validity can be tackled by considering the criteria for judging the quality of the research, which can be technical or more subjective. The technical aspects can be found in traditional criteria. For example, does the researcher demonstrate systematic data collection, analysis and interpretation? The present study sought to do so by

utilising triangulation, and different methods of data collection and analysis with the aim of detecting bias and helping to avoid it. The subjective aspects include the points of view of critical friends whom I trust. For example, I asked colleagues what they thought of my findings. I also presented some of my findings in two student conferences at University of Sussex. One was about how micro-political issues might limit the potential of action research- which is discussed in more details in the following subsection- while the other was about improving the quality of group discussion: exploratory talk in a bilingual setting.

Such subjectivity also includes being reflexive about considering my own perspective as a practitioner and researcher, and the way in which these determine what I see as significant. With regard to the claims of Koshy (2005) and Schwalbach (2003), the main aim of action research is not to generalise data but to generate knowledge by interaction. If I apply my findings in a similar fashion, I may or may not reach similar conclusions because applying action research findings and coming to the same conclusions seems very unlikely, given the contingent and situational nature of such research.

Mckeachie and Svinicki (2006, p. 5) argue that, "Studies have demonstrated that research and teaching are not necessarily in conflict. Many faculty members are excellent researchers and teachers as well". Nevertheless, because the role of researcher is also that of practitioner, some methodological problems might emerge. Wong (1995) argues that being both a teacher and a researcher in fact leads to serious conflicts of interest, tensions being due to the goals and methodologies of teaching and research respectively. On the other hand, Wilson (1995) relates such tension to the way in which we define the two occupations; in particular, she regards problems as being based on a rigid view of teaching.

4.4.1 Micro politics as a factor in access

To begin with, it is worth mentioning that little attention has been paid to access as one of the most important methodological components in social research, and it is only addressed as a sub-issue in the literature (Cipollone and Stich, 2012). Nevertheless, access is usually considered to be an issue for outsider researchers because even if they succeed in gaining access, insiders tend to be sceptical about the role of outsiders and

their effect on social phenomena. Bechhofer and Paterson (2000) point out the concern about the researcher's role:

> Reactivity is classically seen as a threat to control. Because the fieldworker is participating, it is undeniable that they will have some kind of influence on what happens. (Bechhofer and Paterson, 2000, p. 100)

On the other hand, the advantage of being an insider is that access is seemingly assured. In my research proposal, I claimed that access would not be a problem, since I already had admission to the site of my intended project, Riyadh College of Medicine, at which I was employed as an English teacher. I was sure that my familiarity with the college, students, staff and, more importantly, the fact that I was an insider would guarantee some sort of facility for my research. I was not aware of all the problems involved in obtaining access at a deeper level because I regarded it purely in terms of obtaining permission to use a physical location for my fieldwork.

However, my experience as an action researcher shows how access can be problematic for an insider as well. More than this, my reflections demonstrate how micro-political issues are even more significant in action research than in other types of study, since the former deals not with a fixed situation but seeks to enlist others in bringing about change. Thus, successful action research depends on gaining as well as maintaining access, and is extremely sensitive to the collaboration of other actors in the study setting. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) indicate the problems that might emerge from collaboration with others in that

> Because fieldwork is characterised by long-term and intimate participation in the daily life of the people being studied, it is associated with a number of ethical, legal and political dilemmas.(Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996, p. 298)

The following subsections demonstrate the complexity of access, and illuminate the extent to which micro-political issues influence both research conduct before, during and after fieldwork, as well as the findings of the study themselves.

4.4.2 Micro-political considerations in fieldwork preparation

Before commencing fieldwork, I chose the face to face contact method in locating a research site. The first issue that came to mind was how I was to go about reconfiguring

professional relationships and reconsider the meaning of social relations. Johl and Renganathan (2010) highlight the need for establishing appropriate relationships:

> Often in the early access process it is important for the researcher to have someone of the community to vouch for his or her presence. In addition, this will help the researcher to build webs of relationships which will aid and provide the researcher lateral and vertical connections to people. (Johl and Renganathan, 2010, p. 42)

As I already had good relationships with my students, colleagues and those in authority, I considered it necessary to go to my head of department and request formal permission to access confidential data for research purposes and ask for clarification of college regulations in this regard. Similarly, there was little talk with my colleagues about the problems with their classes and how they articulated such problems. Discussion of professional development with colleagues, if there was any, was informal and involved exchanging teaching experiences. Finally, my position with my students was less authoritative, that is, my teaching tended towards a student-centred approach.

However, there were more serious problems that went against my research plans. I had designed the preliminary intervention to begin with a planning phase that included writing detailed lesson plans for the book I wanted to teach from. Teaching the remedial programme meant that I had to use a different book from the one I intended to use. A further problem related to the sample for the study. In my proposal, I had selected first year medical students to be taught over two semesters. However, I was anxious that remedial students might become frustrated owing to their failure to progress and lack enthusiasm to learn. Nevertheless, I was given the following reasons to teach the remedial class:

1- The department had already assigned courses and given the teachers their timetables. It would have been inconvenient and might have lead to disruption if the department had reorganised its schedule at this stage.
2- All the students in the remedial class had low but similar levels of English and had failed to pass the examination.
3- It was the department's first attempt at a remedial programme and the head hoped my work would be of great value.

4- If I taught a credit class, I would be unable to design my own syllabus, try out different supplementary materials, or choose what to teach; there would be different groups joining different classes meaning that all teachers had to adhere to the same book, and give the same tests and examinations.

I thanked them and submitted two copies of my research proposal to the college. I expected them to read my proposal and give me some feedback, but, as I later realised, they did not have a clear understanding of what I proposed to undertake. For example, during the fieldwork, when I asked permission from the head of Basic Sciences to interview some students, he asked me why I needed to do that. In another situation, the head of the English department asked me some questions about the strategies I was implementing. At the time, I was sure that the head had not read my proposal. I learnt later that heads of department were far too busy to read such things; the two heads surely had no time to read a 12,000-word proposal – they could realistically be expected to read one or two pages at most. However, the current research ethics processes at Sussex University would require the researcher to develop an information sheet for such reasons which outlines the research methods intended to be used. This is much more concise than just submitting a proposal, as used to be the case.

4.4.3 Micro-political considerations during fieldwork

I had succeeded in gaining access to my subjects, but I had not considered the degree of access to data. For example, when I arrived at the college, I asked for internet access, which I needed for my research and also for preparing lessons. Moreover, each classroom was equipped with a digital whiteboard connected to a computer; I could not use the whiteboard without the computer. I asked the college information technology (IT) services to reinstate the username and password I had before I left to study in the UK. However, first, I needed a letter signed by the head of department stating who I was and a copy of my identification badge card. To accomplish this, I had to go to three offices – the first to get a letter from my department, the second to get a copy of my badge from the administration office, and finally to get my password reset by IT services.

Another example was when I needed some brochures about the university and, more specifically, the college. When I went to the admissions office to ask for their help, I introduced myself and told them the reason for my visit. They gave me some leaflets but I got the impression that they were suspicious of my request and did not really want to talk with me. It might have been the first time that someone who was not a student had approached them and asked about how things were done for students.

4.4.4 Micro politics and power relations

In discussing micro politics and power relations I wish to draw on understanding that discourse is best understood as language and social practice (Dunne et al., 2005). Therefore, as an action researcher who was directly disrupting and interrupting a social process within an institution and in the classroom, I was aware that my presence and mode of lesson delivery shaped and reshaped relationships that would ultimately influence both the research process and the final product. The process I adopted as an action researcher necessitated the exercise of power in line with such theorisation. I realised that the macro and micro distinction should be recognised and therefore tried to construct some links between these. Rather than considering only people (students, teachers, head) I considered the technologies of evaluation which are at work in this institution and how individuals are positioned within them.

Consider the following conversation taken from my research diary, between me, the head of department and the deputy head. This exchange, which took place in an official meeting, shows the process of initiation of change and how it was contested.

In the department meeting, I was asked by the head of department to say something about what my project was about. I gave a brief presentation and then started to discuss some issues related to the way in which exams were designed. I argued that there was a concern about the validity and reliability of the reading exam. It contained many questions related to grammatical items and recognition of individual words; only one question was related to reading comprehension. I told them that these question types did not test reading. Students could depend on memorisation to answer vocabulary questions such as matching, and synonym and antonym items.

The head of department stopped me to point out that students should know how to read a sentence and its constituent words in order to answer such questions. I replied, "Yes, but their reading here stops at the word and sentence level; but what about the paragraph level?" The deputy head of department interrupted the discussion and added that because the students had limited vocabulary, it would be very difficult to focus on comprehension questions; besides, if the exam did, they would need more time to read

than was permitted by the exam's time limit.

First, I had been invited to the meeting by the head of the remedial programme, who had asked me to give a presentation of my concerns about the programme before it started. Second, although 18 English teachers attended the meeting, there were only two levels of engagement in the debate – me at the first level, and the head of department and deputy head at the second. I got the impression that all the other teachers agreed with what the head had said, and, surprisingly, four teachers approached me after the meeting to say that they were in full agreement with my concerns. Two of them raised other issues about grammar and writing examinations. I wondered why they had remained silent in the meeting when I raised these issues.

On the following day, the head of department asked me to write a letter listing my concerns and promised that he would consider my points. Again, what was the value of submitting a letter without engaging the other teachers? What I proposed in the meeting was not of a personal nature; it was of common interest to the whole department.

In general, the aim of a meeting is to set goals and negotiate practical issues. The head's answer to my letter included references to knowledge as well as rules. In the process of negotiation, the debate was frustrating because no solution to the problem was suggested. Indeed, I believed that interpersonal conflict between individuals was negative and led to disharmony. Confronted by the head and deputy head of department, I was the one who initiated the discussion. If the other teachers had agreed with my point of view and cooperated, we would have been able to achieve our aim, but they did not support me. Although teachers wielded a form of power, that is, used their will to avoid becoming involved in the conflict, it seemed to me they their main concern was to maintain a positive relationship with the head of department. Yet, providing alternatives is the essence of decision making because if there is no alternative, there will be no choice; therefore, there is no problem that requires a decision. Indeed the meeting provided a lot of insights to my expectations, as well as to the space available for reflective engagement by different actors and potential collaboration. Although a meeting might be considered a space for setting collective goals and negotiating outcomes, it can also be a space for the imposition of a particular agenda with those who are placed higher up in an institutional hierarchy.

Another point to address is that being aware of institutional organisation is a key element in understanding how micro politics function. In other words, rules and regulations cannot be easily changed in any organisation. Each education institution level – elementary, middle, high and tertiary – has its own distinctive context that may not be similar to others. In the following example a student raised a concern about the course timetable, comparing the current situation with his previous one: "We sometimes have to wait for the next class for three hours. This is due to insufficient classrooms and staff; most universities have the same problem."

4.5 Action Research in Saudi Higher Education

There is an aspect of novelty in implementing action research in Saudi Arabia. Although many studies have been undertaken in teaching in the pure sciences – for example, in engineering (Alsehaimi et al., 2009); in information technology (Alajimi, 2010); and in medicine (Al-Naami et al., 2010) – only a few investigations have been carried out in the social sciences, and even fewer in a specifically English as a foreign language (EFL) context.

Nevertheless, in one such study, Ali (2007) conducted a collaborative action research project on pre-service Saudi EFL teachers to examine the efficacy of the training course in improving teaching autonomy, and to determine the appropriateness of the training materials. The study concluded with several positive findings: first, trainees were able to bring about change in their teaching practice by gaining a deeper understanding of the learning environment and implementing more strategies to overcome problems they encountered; second, they became more reflective about students' needs and how to act accordingly; and finally, trainees readily changed their initial beliefs about teaching and learning because they had not yet developed entrenched practices. Ali (2007) recommends that teacher training programmes should foster action research and keep traditional education studies to a minimum.

4. 6 The Researcher's Positionality

The researcher's identity and how he or she positions him or herself within the research derives from the methodology of any given study (Dunne et al., 2005). Therefore, before discussing my methodology, I will discuss my philosophical assumptions as an action researcher, followed by my identity as both an insider and outsider. According to

Creswell (2007), there are five sets of assumptions with regard to research: those about the nature of reality (ontology); how the researcher knows what he or she knows (epistemology); the impact of values on the research (axiology); the language of research (rhetoric); and the strategies or plans of action in the research (methodology). Thus, philosophy plays a central role in research and in the social sciences in particular.

Carr (1995) highlights this as follows:

> Research always conveys a commitment to philosophical beliefs even if this is unintended and even though it remains implicit and unacknowledged. Researchers cannot evade the responsibility for critically examining and justifying the philosophical ideas that their enquiries incorporate. It follows that philosophical reflection and argumentation are central features of the methods and procedures of educational research. (Carr, 1995, p. 1)

Ontologically, I would argue that reality exists objectively and independently. However this reality exists at different levels and is observed by me, my students, and sometimes by outsiders such as college employees and authorities all of whom have different perspectives on it and will therefore know it in different ways. That is to say, within the research situation there are multiple truths or realities – not just one. As far as critical realism is concerned, a distinction between ontology and epistemology is necessary to avoid falling into an 'epistemic fallacy', that is, ontological and epistemological statements that are conflated and based on one another (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 13). McNiff and Whitehead (2006) argue that researchers can create their own realities in action research and allow others to create their own. The compatibility of critical realism as a research paradigm and action research is highlighted by Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001), who contend that the two share some values and processes in relation to their capacity to facilitate the description of social situations and their need of reflexivity to interpret data.

Therefore, I positioned myself as a critical realist whose interpretations depended on my critical reflections of phenomena Scott (2005) explains what is meant by 'critical' in critical realism from a philosophical point of view:

> Critical realism is critical then, because any attempts at describing and explaining the world are bound to be fallible, and also because those ways of ordering the world, its categorisations and the relationships between them, cannot be justified in any absolute sense, and are always open to criticism and their replacement by a different set of categories and relationships. (Scott, 2005, p. 2)

Bryman (2012) argues that critical realism is critical because its practitioners investigate structures in order to change them. One of the main aims of action research is to bring about change in a specific context as discussed earlier in 3.3

I came to understand new knowledge by interaction with others to improve my practice. I took into account my position as both an insider and outsider researcher. In this case, the relationship between myself as a knower and the known thing was interrelated and cyclic.

Data analysis was somewhat subjective, which meant that axiologically, I acknowledged that my study was value laden and biases were present at different levels. In order to reduce my biased position, I tended to use triangulation, that is, the utilisation of more than one research method to recheck results. Berge (2007) argues that triangulation is a useful tool in data analysis:

> By combining several lines of sight, researchers obtain a better, more substantive picture of reality; a richer, more complete array of symbols and theoretical concepts; and a means of verifying many of these elements. (Berge, 2007, p. 5)

For example, I compared responses in student interviews with a questionnaire that I distributed at an early stage of the study before I had drawn any conclusions. Rhetorically, the register I have adopted is personal and in the form of storytelling. For example, I use the first person throughout the thesis and consciously use terms more commonly found in qualitative research such as 'group' rather than 'population'. However, I retain a few terms associated with quantitative analysis such as 'validity' and 'reliability' with respect to tests.

Finally, being critical means that there are multiple truths, which necessitates the use of different data collection and analysis methods that lend themselves to interpretations of events and the construction of knowledge influenced by different factors. Accordingly, the data collection methods I employed included a document review, observation, interviews, tests, and questionnaires. My initial understandings of action research have changed throughout the course of the doctorate study and through the processes involved in carrying out my action research project. That is was very important because

it enabled me to be more reflective while collecting and analysing data. For example, when I started teaching exploratory talk to the first year group I followed my research plans but realised that some steps needed to be amended. I first introduced exploratory talk to students in English and gave an activity for practice. However, some students did not know what to do. Therefore, I explained exploratory talk in Arabic and made sure that all students understood it before carrying on with a new activity. Table 4.1 summarises the five philosophical assumptions I took into account in my study. However, I acknowledged the fact that these philosophical assumptions were not independent as they intersected and informed each other at different stages during my research.

Table 4.1: Philosophical Assumptions and My Stance

Philosophical assumption	Stance
Ontology: the nature of reality	Objective and independent reality
Epistemology: the nature of knowledge and how it is constructed	Knowledge is constructed subjectively via interaction with others
Axiology: the impact of values in research	Research is value laden and subject to bias
Rhetoric: the language of research	Language is more personal
Methodology: the strategies and methods of data collection and analysis	Qualitative and quantitative methods are combined in the processes of collecting and analysing data

4.7 My identity as an Action Researcher Insider and Outsider

Some commentators regard action research as a social activity (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988; Blaxter et al., 2003), or a micro-political activity (Eilersen et al., 2008). However, I had to play two roles simultaneously, that is, that of both an insider and outsider, meaning that a degree of tension would be created between researcher and institutional requirements if my voice were to be retained. The requirements of the institution limited my research such that I was obliged to change some of my research

plans. For example, there was a time constraint to cover all the chapters in the set textbook because the examination was standardised and set by the department, (see Appendix Five for the materials taught to the two groups).

It was also necessary to develop relationships with relevant people in the college, taking sensitive and ethical issues into account. My involvement with others helped me to understand things better. Walford (2001) highlights the importance of establishing relationships with others:

> At a deeper level, access can be seen as a process of building relationships with people within the organization. The aim is that teachers and students learn to trust the researcher to the point where they are prepared to be open and honest about their perceptions and beliefs. (Walford, 2001, p. 34)

Reality was constructed from various interconnected dimensions with my students and sometimes with outsiders such as colleagues and people in positions of authority. Thus, the relationship between me as the knower, the process, and the known functioned in a dynamic way.

I also needed to be aware of micro politics because education institutional regimes are both implicit and explicit in their daily practices and rules (Ball, 2012). People maintain power or influence by different means, whether it originates from their place within the hierarchy, being knowledgeable, or as a result of experience, responsibility or collaboration. Everyone exercises and has access to some form of power and in turn, is personally exposed to different power mechanisms wielded by others (Eilertsen et al., 2008).

Discovering relationships between causal mechanisms and outcomes was essential if I was to construct knowledge, improve pedagogical practice, and bring about change; and if others were to participate in the process of change, which I did not aim to bring about for my benefit alone. This I did by a reflective process moving between different parts of the data in order to interpret what was going on and then returning to the data to check the way these ideas made sense – a cyclic process of reflexivity (see Figure 4.1). Bryman (2012, p. 715) calls this retroduction and links it to critical realism, defining it as "a form of reasoning that entails making an inference about the causal mechanism

that lies behind and is responsible for irregularities that are observed in the social world."

Thus, in this study, I acted as both researcher and practitioner. Unlike the researcher conducting a traditional study by investigating what has happened, describing, analysing, interpreting, and giving feedback to bring about change and improve practice, I scrutinised my own actions as part of the research process, collecting and examining data closely. The following section illustrates in more detail how I conducted my research.

4.8 Research Design

Thirty first-year medical students of Riyadh College of Medicine were purposively selected to take part in the action research project. They were drawn from two different classes: one group of 15 students attended a remedial English course and a second group consisted of 15 students studying in the pre-professional programme. The different methods used to collect data included a post-intervention test, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews before the intervention; and audio-visual recording of student group sessions during the study. The use of such a multi-method approach was determined by the action research nature of the study.

Action research involves a cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. In this study, I utilised an action research cycle- with the two interventions- adapted from Altrichter et al., (1995) with the two interventions, whose model is represented in Figure 4.1 below. The first stage was a reconnaissance that took into account issues such as reasons for teaching English at college, the status of reading in society, and differences between Arabic and English and micro-politics in terms of gaining and maintaining access, power relations at college. This stage offered an understanding of the research problem and clarified the context.

The starting point (A) is established in Chapter One. Clarifying the situation (B) began with discussing why English is problematic to Saudi Medical students and the observation of classes of colleagues who taught reading at the College of Medicine, and conducting interviews to find out what they did in the classroom (see section 2.4). The aims of the lesson observations were as follows:

- How is reading taught?
- Do teachers implement collaborative activities?
- If yes, how do students interact when carrying out these activities?
- Do teachers limit themselves to the textbook or do they introduce other supplementary materials?

Figure 4.1: Action Research Cycle (Adapted from Altrichter et al., (1995), and from a version used in my MSc Action Research Course)

(A) Finding a starting point
What am I interested in improving?

(B) Clarifying the situation
What is happening at the moment?
Is it really like I thought?

(C) Developing action strategies and putting them into practice
How do we think we can make it better?

(D) Analysis
What difference does it make?
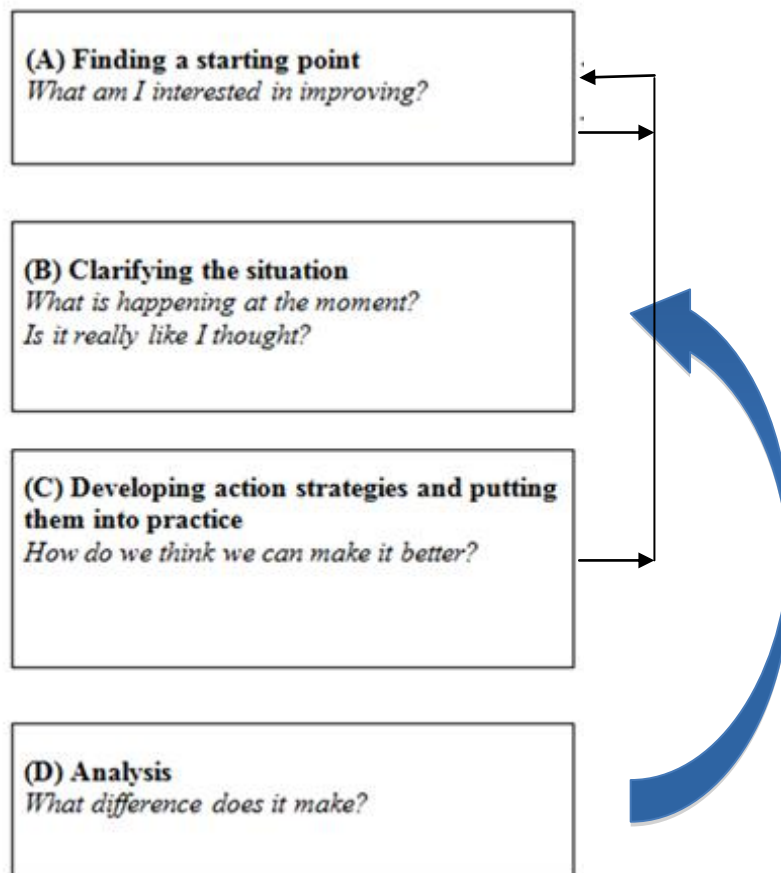
To further clarify the situation, I carried out a semi-structured interview with all students to deepen my understanding and develop the investigation of questionnaire responses. The interviews helped me to gain a better understanding from the students' points of view, which I triangulated with my own perceptions (see Appendix Six). Stage (C) involved teaching the first group the CSR. I taught CSR alongside and within the course as prescribed. I introduced CSR and its four strategies: previewing, click and clunk, get the gist, and wrap-up (Klingner et al., 2004), to the whole class using modelling, role play and 'teacher thinking aloud'. I prepared two short texts beforehand

and presented them on the digital whiteboard. I asked the students to practise the four strategies alone to begin with, working on the first text. I allotted a specific time for practising the four strategies of not more than five minutes for each.

After practising the four strategies through teacher-led activities, the students were divided into groups to work on the second text. Each group member was assigned a specific role. This is an aspect of CSR that is considered to be essential. These roles are: leader, clunk expert, gist expert, announcer, encourager, and timekeeper, the first four being regarded as vital while the latter two are optional. Students were given a CSR learning log to fill in while working – see Appendix Seven- (Vaughan and Klingner, 1999). Finally, I introduced the set book to the students and suggested a medical reader as supplementary material.

Stage (D) was the analysis of CSR in the first intervention, evaluating its success and problematising the process and outcomes based on the data that I had collected throughout the intervention. As represented by the arrow in figure 4.1, this then led to a further cycle of action research. This took the form of an extended intervention in the second phase with a second group of students teaching CSR alongside and within the prescribed course, as well as introducing exploratory talk to students and combining it with group work. Exploratory talk suggested by Mercer (2000) was intended to improve the quality of students' talk to reason critically and constructively and arose from the analysis of the previous cycle. Once again in the second cycle I began by clarifying the situation by collecting data at the start of the intervention (B) implementing the action strategies and of CSR and exploratory talk (C) and analysing the process and outcomes of the second intervention (D).

The textbook used to teach both courses was Hartmann et al., (2007) *Interactions Access: Reading and Writing, Middle East*. The book I chose to teach medical reading in the first phase was Mazyad (2004) *English for Health Sciences, Reading Skills: Intermediate.* In the second phase, I taught the elementary level edition of the same book. In cycle two, I introduced a new set book: Lee and Gundersen (2001) *Selected Readings*, but retained the same supplementary materials (see Appendix Five).

4.9 Research Methods

As previously stated, this study is heavily qualitative and lightly quantitative. I used different methods of data collection, including a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, observations, and audio and video recordings of some lessons. Additionally, a reading test was administered to group one after the intervention and the same test was given to group two both before and after the intervention. The objective of the pre-test was to determine student level before implementing CSR, and by implementing a pre–post test, I aimed to discover if there were any significant differences in the performance of group two before and after the intervention.

The methods utilised for data collection were mainly of a qualitative nature except for the questionnaires which were given to students at the end of the intervention. Additionally, the pre–post-test was subjected to statistical analysis. I used diverse tools for collecting data due to the nature of action research. In action research the study is carried out over a period of time and data need to be reflected at different level from an insider point of view. For this reason, the researcher should triangulate findings gained from different sources for broader and deeper understanding of different situations. The most important tools of data collection I relied on were semi-structured interviews as well as videotaped recordings. They helped me a lot to build on a picture of the ways in which students in the cohort responded to English reading.

There is a growing interest in mixed methods research (qualitative and quantitative) in social and human sciences (Creswell, 2007, Silvermann, 2010). Such an approach has not always been popular because until recently researchers have traditionally been more inclined to use qualitative methodology (Creswell, 2007). The main reason for a mixed methods approach is the need to look at a problem from different aspects in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding, better and stronger inferences, and find different answers to research questions (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003); which of course requires the learning of a greater range of data analysis skills (Silvermann, 2010).

However, Bazeley (2002, p. 149) argues that although some researchers claim that a mixed methods approach lends greater validity to the results, the following considerations should be observed:

- Clarity of purpose, basis and substantive focus, giving direction to the study and a logical basis for explanation.
- Awareness of the limitations of traditional methods as they are modified in a mixed methods environment.
- Appropriate use and interpretation of quantified coding from qualitative data.
- Varied methods of treatment of error or deviance.
- Appropriate generalisation given choice of sample and methods.

In action research, there is even more need to deploy such an approach in order to collect the requisite data. This is because action research has been criticised for the unreliability of its results as they cannot be consistently replicated. However, the triangulation of data that derive from different collection methods might increase the replicability of research findings (Wallace, 1999). Moreover, Creswell (2003) contends that triangulation is an important tool in mixed methods research because it may be utilised at different stages of the process, that is, in data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, or in combination of the three, thus allowing the researcher to interpret the data with a wider focus. In my case, providing a sufficiently rich amount of data of my research and my position in the research, can allow other researchers to relate my findings to other contexts, which is a form of generalisation. The following subsections describe the main research methods deployed for the collection of data in this study.

4.9.1 Questionnaire

At the end of the study, I developed a questionnaire consisting of 49 items (see Appendix Eight for the English version and Appendix Nine for the Arabic version) designed to investigate the following:

1- General student attitude to CSR (19 items)

2- Student attitude to individual CSR strategies

- Previewing (3 items)
- Click and clunk (3 items)
- Fix-up strategies (1 item)
- Get the gist (2 items)
- Wrap-up (2 items)

3- Student self-evaluation of CSR instruction (10 items)

4- Methods of dealing with new vocabulary (5 items)

5- Methods of enriching vocabulary (4 items)

Asking questions via a written questionnaire is a simple method of collecting data from a group of people, in this case all students in the college's remedial and first year English classes, and I was able to obtain a reasonably large amount of information that I may not have got from other sources within a short period of time. McNabb (2010) identifies the main features of the questionnaire as being that all questions are fixed and therefore cannot be adjusted in situ; however, respondents may also remain anonymous, helping them to feel free to answer frankly.

4.9.2 Semi-structured interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with all the students on both courses who I taught in order to deepen my understanding of and further investigate questionnaire responses. In so doing, I gained a better understanding of students' points of view and was able to triangulate them with my own. I had already developed a semi-structured interview schedule for students of English based on research questions which I had piloted for one of my MSc courses i.e. an action research course, which I further adapted for the present study.

Interviewing is regarded as the most commonly used and preferred method of qualitative research (Mason, 2004; Bryman, 2012; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Briggs, 1986). Kvale (1996) defines interviewing as simply a conversation with a structure and an objective. However, it is not merely everyday conversation, but extends beyond such pleasantry to a professional dialogue involving careful questioning and listening techniques. Dunne et al., (2005, p. 34) suggest another dimension that differentiates the interview different from a casual exchange in that "both the researcher's methodological stance and specific substantive interests make the interview more than conversation."

According to Barbour (2007), the semi-structured aspect of the interview enables interviewees to talk freely whilst preventing the researcher from excessively directing their responses. In carrying out my action research project, semi-structured interviews allowed me to gain a better understanding of the context from the students' points of view. Formal interviews were conducted at the beginning of the study, for which I was obliged to ask students to give up their time. Students told about the preferable ways of studying and expressed their feelings toward failure, reading and group work. They also

had the opportunity to ask any questions they had. Some of them added some suggestions while others complained about some courses and the structure of teaching at the college. I also carried out many more informal interviews either inside or outside the classroom, opportunistically, as I implemented my action research.

4.9.3 Participant observation

As the students worked collaboratively on assigned tasks using CSR, I engaged in participant observation to gain insight into what was actually taking place in the classroom. I assumed that the particular ways in which students acted while they participated in the lesson were meaningful and purposeful in terms of my study, and that by taking notes, I would be able to present feedback related to my initial findings and suggest different strategies for tackling problems in the future.

According to Taylor (2006), participant observation is popular in educational settings because it has the unique advantage of placing the action researcher in close proximity to the observed data as he or she becomes a member of the group under study. Similarly, Cohen et al., (2007, p. 396) note that "the distinctive feature of observation as a research process is that it offers the investigator an opportunity to gather 'live' data from naturally occurring social situations" .

However, it is very important to note that participant observation is more than just taking notes. May (2001, p. 153) draws attention to the difficulty of employing participant observation as a tool for collecting data in that "it is…plausible to argue that participant observation is the most personally demanding and analytically difficult method of social research to undertake." This is especially true when the participation in question is teaching, which is an extremely demanding form of interaction, both intellectually and socially. Wallace (1999) adds that another challenge to participant observation – the unstructured type in particular – is its extreme subjectivity in that it depends on the observer's beliefs and ideas in the interpretation of the situation.

Nevertheless, in implementing my action research project, I utilised participant observation as my main data collection tool, giving a full description of all I saw. The observed data were mostly gathered from video recordings, from which the thesis

quotes extracts to refer to important significant incidents. I also collected some data from real-time observations as they took place. I conducted observations together with two other teachers who kindly attended some of my classes to observe me as well as my students. I kept all events including my observations, ideas, questions, filed notes and so on in my research diary. This helped me in the process of analysis and evaluation and provoked more reflection. The research diary is an important tool to keeping the research track especially for action researcher. Fox et al., notice

> In action research the diary might be used to monitor progress through the action cycle: for example, key indicators by which the group demonstrated readiness to change. (Fox et al., p. 149)

4.9.4 Audio and video recordings

Audio and video recording is regarded as a powerful method of data collection (Richards and Lockhart, 2002; Silverman, 2010; Wallace, 1999). One of the main advantages of such media is that much of what takes place can be recorded and played back focusing on various aspects of events as one chooses (Richards and Lockhart, 2002). As Orlova (2009) points out, another advantage of the video recording is that teachers can be self-reflective when they view them because they capture all the important aspects of a lesson that are not easily noticed while teaching. However, care should be taken when using recordings because they can be a highly intrusive technique and the presence of an audio or video recorder might distract the attention of students (Orlova, 2009).

Although my students never objected to being audio taped, a few of them refused to be directly videoed and preferred not to be in the front of the class. Nevertheless, the following procedure was followed in planning recordings:

1- Permission to use an audio or video machine was obtained from the department.
2- Students were assured at the beginning of a lesson that no one would listen to or watch recorded excerpts other than me or my supervisor.
3- Students were welcome to listen to audio recordings or view videos but not to keep them.
4- On the rare occasions that students asked me to delete recorded excerpts or not to transcribe them, I readily complied with their wishes.

5- Lessons to be videoed were agreed with the students in advance. If any student asked me to delete any part that he appeared in for any reason, I would respond immediately.

6- The video camera was placed either in the middle of the classroom or directed towards a certain group.

7- A small microphone was given to the leader of a targeted group to ensure good sound quality.

In this study, when using examples of recordings, the transcripts originally said in English will be written in 'Times New Roman' font while those said in Arabic and then translated into English by the researcher will be written in 'Arial Narrow' font. The analyses of audio and video recordings allowed me to gain deeper understanding of the researched people, which might not have been possible. The data were more detailed leading to further insights. Without recordings, the analysis of group talk in the second phase would not have been possible. Ten lessons were video and audio recorded for each group. While the camera was directed to a certain group, I used a tape recorder with another group.

4.9.5 Pre–post test

I developed a reading test for the present study (see Appendix Ten) based on a reading comprehension text from Kirn and Hartman (1990). The text was of the same level of difficulty as that which the subjects studied during the intervention, i.e., intermediate. The test consisted of seven questions testing four sections:

Section 1: Relating the subject of the text to their own lives and experiences – Activating their background.

Section 2: Finding the meaning of words in context in the text - Words in context

Section 3: Gaining the main ideas of the text – Main ideas

Section 4: Summarising and interrogating the text – Summarising and interrogating

In the first three questions, students were required to find the meaning of given words by matching two columns; in the fourth question, they had to say whether certain statements were true or false; in the fifth question, they were given direct questions to be answered; the sixth question was multiple choice; and finally, they were asked to summarise the whole text in order to measure their ability to summarise and generating question about the read text.

To assure that the test was valid I designed the test to sufficiently and adequately test reading comprehension and the four reading strategies I intended to teach to students found in CSR- see section 4.9.5-. Brown (2000) defines test validity as the degree to which a test measures what is claiming to be measuring. The reading text was similar to what students had in their prescribed book in terms of difficulty and the way of asking questions i.e., pre, during and after reading sequence. For test reliability, I made sure that the test was scored in a consistent way. Alison (1999, p.85) states that reliability is concerned with 'the accuracy and trustworthiness of its results'. To maximise the scorer reliability, five out of seven questions were in the form of multiple choices which were objectively scored while the first and the final question required students' points of view and were subjectively scored. The test-retest procedure was performed on data obtained before and during the experiment. The aim of the pre-test was to find out the students' achievement before training so that it can be compared with that of the post-test. It also aimed to find if there were any significant differences between the same group, and that they were almost equal so that any differences found at the end of the experiment could be attributed to training. The aim of the post-test (which was given after the treatment) was to find out the achievement of the students in reading comprehension at the end of the experiment and to find out if there are any differences due to training. For the first group, I gave only a post test because I knew that all students were weak as they had failed the course. For the second group, the test-retest procedure was applied. The same test means that comparison was easy and because improvement was directly measurable. However, by giving students the same test for the second time at the end of the treatment, it was possible that students got familiar with test questions and the improvement was related to such familiarity. Without the pre-test it would be difficult to measure improvement.

4.10 Data Analysis

Once the data had been collected with the aid of different methods, the next stage of the research project was to analyse it. Since pre–post test data were quantitative in nature and easily converted into numbers, they were analysed in numerical form and presented as statistics. I attempted to use inferential statistics to analyse these data but the small size of the sample precluded the use of more than straightforward descriptive techniques.

To analyse the interviews, I mainly used the 'meaning condensation' method after identifying themes suggested by Kvale (1996), who defines the technique thus:

> [Meaning condensation] entails an abridgment of the meanings expressed by the interviewees into shorter formulations. Long statements are compressed into briefer statements in which the main sense of what is said is rephrased in a few words. Meaning condensation thus involves a reduction of large interview texts into briefer, more succinct formulation. (Kvale, 1996, p. 192)

Based on this definition Kvale highlights the following five steps in utilising this approach:

1- The whole interview transcript should be read once to establish the main ideas

2- The exact words of the subjects are identified by the researcher

3- A main theme is assigned to each response by the researcher without bias

4- Meaning units should be related to the purpose of the study, which can be done by reminding oneself of its main questions

5- The researcher gives a relevant description to each theme

Before commencing the process of analysis, I downloaded the interviews from the digital recorder onto my laptop so that I could listen and write at the same time. I then listened once to each recording to get a sense of the whole. Next, I began to transcribe the interviews, translating from Arabic into English as I went along. If I was unable to make out any words, I left a space and continued with the rest of the interview. I then replayed the recording and filled in any blanks, checking what I had written.

The next step was to identify the main themes in the transcript according to key words in my questions, as well as new themes that emerged from interviewees' responses. Sometimes, themes could be determined through the use of repeated words. I used a highlighter pen to mark relevant themes, from which I was able to identify meaning units as they emerged from the text. The meaning unit is defined by Graneheim and Lundman (2004, p. 106) as "the constellation of words or statements that relate to the same central meaning."

Finally, I gave an appropriate title to each theme (see Appendix Eleven for an example of a full transcript).

I used two approaches to the analysis of participant observation, that is, structured and unstructured methods (Wallace, 1999; Taylor, 2006). The structured method was only used by colleagues who had observed my lessons. I gave them an observation sheet that

included what I wanted them to focus on (see Appendix Twelve for an example of the observation guide). I used the unstructured method in the case of my own lessons to record what I could discern about the practices of my students. When analysing the transcripts of group work, I was looking carefully at the interactions of students. I used the categories derived from Mercer (1995) to differentiate between students' types of talk (see Chapter One, section 1.2). This critical analysis led to a formulation of different categories of talk which were appropriate for students' context taking into account the differences between English and Arabic norms.

4.11 Ethical Concerns

Diener and Crandall (1978 cited in Bryman, 2008) discuss four areas related to ethical issues, which are harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception. Before beginning my research project, I obtained the permission of each student participant and made sure that they were all willing to take part. As there were parallel English classes at the College of Medicine, I asked those who seemed reluctant to engage in the CSR intervention to join other groups.

Bryman (2008) points out that ethical issues arise at different levels in social research and they should not be neglected by the researcher because they might affect the integrity of the study. As a researcher, I was aware of theoretical issues such as ethical principles and guidelines, and empirical or practical ones that arise while engaged in research (Mauthner et al., 2002). For guidance, I drew on and complied with the Sussex Institute Standards and Guidelines (2008) which were in place at that time (see Appendix Thirteen). The Sussex Ethical Approval requirements have changed since I submitted my proposal to include school level review as well as the Social Sciences and Arts cross-School Research Ethics Committee review.

I was also aware of the need to take micro-political issues into account, as action research is regarded as an activity in which the researcher uses his or her power to affect the context they work in (Eilersen et al., 2008). It is thus clear that being aware of getting approval from the relevant authorities was essential for conducting my study. I therefore contacted the dean of my college to ensure that they had clear idea of what I was planning to do before I began my project, and also to keep people informed of the progress of the research as it was taking place.

In practice, this involved discussing the guidelines that I was following with the head of department and obtaining approval of the head and the students as well as the participating teachers. Regarding the anonymisation of the research subjects, all participants' real names were concealed when transcribing data gained from audio and video recordings to ensure the protection of participants' identities.

4.12 Conclusion

Chapter Four discussed the methodological issues related to my study. It started by highlighting the research questions and the context of the study. The rationale for using action research and a mixed methods approach was presented with an account of the place of action research in Saudi Arabia. My identity as both insider and outsider was pointed out and the extent to which this might have affected the research findings was noted. Playing a dual role also meant that I was required to account for how I might have been perceived by different agents and how I positioned myself within a particular philosophical stance. The research design and treatment description were also stated with an overview of the methods utilised in this research. Finally, issues relating to data analysis and how to enhance the validity and reliability of the test as well as the ethical concerns were also addressed.

Chapter Five

Reconnaissance Data Collection and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the reconnaissance phase of the study, which was the first part of my action research project. The reconnaissance aimed to clarify and problematise the context in order that I might utilise the results to formulate plans for an intervention that would in the first instance improve my own teaching of reading, and then might give rise to changes in pedagogy and the curriculum at an institutional level.

The chapter begins by highlighting some contradictions between the aims of teaching English and how the language is actually taught. The following section discusses how any change in education practice must be grounded in a social context. An analysis of the of way in which my action research project was involved in the micro politics of the institution formed the second part of the reconnaissance, as it shaped the overall project and determined the bounds of what could be implemented in the intervention phase.

5.2 Reasons for Teaching English: Disjuncture between Curriculum Objectives, and Teaching Practice

The following aims are set by the College of Medicine English department:

> The goal of this English language programme is to provide students with extensive daily practice in academic reading, vocabulary, oral communication, grammatical structures, and writing. It also aims to help these students acquire the language skills necessary for pursuing careers in the health sciences and undergoing practical training in an environment where English will be the principle medium of instruction and communication (ELLI,2010).

Moreover, in general, medical students are required to study English with short- and long-term goals for the following reasons respectively, according to the syllabus given to teachers:

1- To pass the examination, enabling continuation with the main degree course (short term)

2- To gain sufficient proficiency in English to enable effective study on the main course (short term)

3- To use English fluently in the workplace after graduation (long term)

4- To use English fluently in general and for cultural exchange (long term)

Officially, the course was concerned with achieving the first and second goals but tended not to fully address the third, and native English teachers and their materials alone served to achieve the fourth.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the first goal reflects an essential prerequisite of Saudi education before an individual can study medicine. Al-Saloom (1995) notes that the main aim of the Saudi education system is to evaluate academic achievement based on the curriculum. Siddiek (2011) takes the matter a step further in arguing that although all teachers rely on examinations, they are not provided with guidance in designing such assessment. All teachers design their own examinations and tests, which reflect different points of view, but, as Siddiek (2011) asserts:

> The results of this local testing process has yielded a tangible deterioration in students' English language performance and (lazy) teaching tendency in the teachers' community; as teachers exert little effort on teaching. (Siddiek (2011, p. 57)

Siddiek concludes that such way of assessment does not account for the general objectives of education. Teachers should be trained to meet the objectives embedded in the syllabus and consider this when examining students.

Having said this, there remain some issues related to the context and the quality of examinations which may put the first and second aims of the English course in conflict with each other. This will be examined in the following two subsections.

5.3 Student Context

As mentioned in section 2.2.1, students at the College of Medicine studied English for special/specific purposes (ESP), which suggests that they might have had different needs and goals from those who studied English for general purposes. Nutall (2005) points out that the requirements and interests of students influence their motivation to learn. Generally, ESP students require English for their careers because it would be difficult to pursue them or study in order to advance them without taking a course in English. This may lead to an instrumental approach and to their study of the language,

meaning they regard the usefulness of English only in terms of how it will help them to pass examinations.

The manner in which assessment functioned in the college seemed to reinforce such an instrumental approach. For example, all teachers were required to follow the prescribed textbooks closely and not stray from them with the use of 'authentic' materials. However, authentic materials, which might be in the form of newspapers, reports, magazine articles, brochures, menus, and so on, can expose students to 'real' discourse. When provided with authentic materials, students experience language that has mainly been designed for native speakers of English and therefore reflects how it is really used outside the classroom (Berardo, 2006). Authentic materials also motivate students since they can see the relevance of their chosen field of study and keep abreast of what is happening in the world.

Yet, the college tended to ignore such needs and interests in curriculum design. All reading texts were related to general topics such as how to make a speech, culture shock, home life, and so on. The course description mentions that reading texts will focus on subjects taken from authentic materials such as science, medicine and psychology; consider the following extract from the course description (ELLI, 2010), which states that it "provides them [students] with regular reading practice from a variety of sources such as graded readers and passages selected from original articles published in a variety of periodicals and newspapers." However, in reality it did not.

There was in any case little time to devote to authentic materials because teachers had to cover all the contents of the prescribed textbook before the end of term, since examinations were standardised. Indeed, the whole curriculum gave the impression of treating students with a 'safety-first' attitude, taking them as a group rather than individuals with the sole aim of guiding them to examination success. The rationale was that curriculum standardisation led to less risk of failure. However, such a policy hardly encouraged students to explore their own ideas or ways of approaching the language, a limitation that was also true of the teachers.

There was much emphasis on teaching discrete items of grammar and vocabulary

deductively in the belief that it was important to teach form, and that an understanding of form would allow students to come to the correct understanding of meaning. When observing lessons in the reconnaissance phase of my project, it was clear that teachers favoured direct instruction and placed great emphasis on teaching vocabulary and grammatical rules.

Sometimes, teachers asked students to read aloud so that they could practice pronunciation. The students repeatedly asked questions such as, "Is this bit important," "How would we be asked about this piece of information," and so on. One English teacher summarised the teaching of reading thus:

We mostly concentrate on improving students' knowledge of vocabulary, giving the meaning of a word but without any further practice. Thus, students merely memorise a list of words; they don't get any chance to experience the language in use through tangible and meaningful exercises. We don't have any exercises that help students to practice each word at least once.

Such a method of teaching vocabulary created another problem for teachers. In the third semester, students were required to take a course of medical terminology. Most teachers tried to avoid this component because while they found it quite easy to teach general English by relying on word sheets, it was difficult to teach medical English by the same means, as explained by one teacher who taught the course:

None of the teachers wanted to teach this course because no one was specialised in ESP or, more specifically, English for medical purposes. The book was full of medical terminology – around 5,000 words that I had to explain with definitions. There were few illustrative examples and no reading texts to show how these words were used in different contexts. I used the same method I use with general English and did my best to give the Arabic equivalents.

5.4 Student Assessment

The assessment system at the college was an important factor that might have influenced the way in which teachers taught – and students learnt – reading comprehension. If there were faults in the assessment system, this could be expected to cause problems in the process of teaching and learning in general, because teachers and students concentrated on what was emphasised in the tests.

The four main language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing were separated into different textbooks. This is to say that the four skills are not integrated into one book. According to the curriculum, there were two midterm examinations and one final

examination. All examinations were standardised, designed by the English department, and marked by teachers other than those who taught the course. Those who did teach it could only give students tests. Similarly, course teachers were not allowed access to examination scripts or marks; the department provided teachers with students' marks when the examinations were over and known by students.

There are some concerns about the examination and marks being kept unknown to both teachers and students. First, in assessing students, teachers know where they stand and can track their progress, and teaching content can be changed or modified depending on student performance and mastery of it. If marks are unknown to course teachers, how will they be able to achieve such objectives? Second, students need to know their marks while they are still studying in order to remedy areas of weakness and improve their performance. Third, some teachers might perceive that the department prevents them from designing the examination because it does not trust them and that they might inform their students of a few questions in advance, and in this way prepare them for the examination.

However, the only way of assessing students at the college was the achievement test. Jordan (2003) defines an achievement test in the following terms:

> At the end of a course, a final test is often conducted to see if students have learned what they should have been taught. In other words, it covers the syllabus or course books and is usually set by the course director for all the classes on the course. (Jordan, 2003, p. 87)

In theory, an achievement test should be a reasonable indication of the efficacy of a course for both students and teachers. It tells students where they stand and denotes their progress, and it informs teachers how effective their instruction is by gauging how much learning has occurred. However, the poor quality of the assessment system at the college in a sense led to a conflict with the second reason for teaching English – because it is the main medium of instruction – since reading examinations did not really test students' ability to read English.

A good way of judging the quality of an examination is to analyse its contents. I therefore asked the head of department if I could look at some sample reading papers, and my analysis of them generated a few concerns. In the two-hour examination,

students were presented with two parts. In each part, candidates read two short reading passages and were then required to answer 50 questions, consisting of cloze, multiple choice, true/false, and matching questions. It possessed some of the qualities of a good assessment such as practicality, objectivity, and timing; however, it also ignored some equally vital features such as validity, comprehension, balance, and appropriate level of difficulty. The ways in which the reading examination lacked these features are as follows:

1- It was poor in terms of validity because a valid assessment measures that which the course syllabus determines should be tested. The first concern about the examination was that all questions were in the form of multiple-choice or matching exercises, which did not require fully written answers that could have evaluated expression as well as comprehension. If students knew the kinds of questions to expect in advance, they might adopt inappropriate learning techniques merely to do well in the examination. For example, students might choose the first option for the first ten questions in the hope of getting at least two or three correct answers. Another concern is that multiple choices do not encourage medical students to implement a wide range of skills which require higher level of cognitive domains incorporating critical thinking such as evaluation and synthesis (Amin et al., 2011). Finally in the course description given to teachers, tests and examinations should be in different format such as fill in the blank questions, short answer questions, T/F questions, cloze exercises, matching questions as well as multiple questions.

Moreover, the types of questions led to further concerns. The examination was valid for certain purposes, for example, evaluating vocabulary and grammatical awareness. However, such questions could not be considered valid for evaluating reading comprehension. In the first part, there were 50 multiple-choice questions, 10 of which tested grammar while 40 related to vocabulary, although only 10 of the latter were in context. The second part consisted of two reading passages, also followed by 50 multiple-choice questions, 5 of which required the determination of meaning in context. This means that in parts 1 and 2 combined, 55 out of 79 questions concerned vocabulary while only 14 addressed comprehension. Nevertheless, all questions required students to

utilise skimming skills in order to work out the answers, except one which required inference.

In summary, although this examination aimed to measure reading comprehension, test items did not fully serve this purpose. This can be shown as follows:

1- Only one item was concerned with reading, while two were related to grammar and two aimed at testing vocabulary. For example, in respect to the matching questions, candidates were required to match items in column A with those in column B to provide word definitions.

2- It was not reliable because there was a high degree of chance involved in all questions: some candidates might achieve a high score merely through a combination of lucky guesses. This problem could easily be addressed by controlling the nature of the questions and/or increasing the number of choices.

3- It was not comprehensive because each examination paper included only 2 reading passages while the textbook contained more than 19.

4- All reading passages lacked balance given that research suggests that a practical assessment evaluates both linguistic and communicative competence. For example, the vocabulary matching questions tested candidates linguistically but did not evaluate their ability to demonstrate the appropriateness and accuracy of these words because they were all taken out of context.

5- Examination questions should vary in difficulty to account for individual differences among students. However, there were no challenging questions that required critical thinking or judgment decisions.

6- Another important factor was that on the days of both mid-term and final examinations, all classes gathered in one large classroom, which exacerbated stress levels.

It was clear that students at the College of Medicine studied mainly in order to pass the examination, which was a negative effect of the assessment system. In such cases, scores do not represent exactly what students have learnt from a given course but reflect what their teachers want them to learn. Thus, the education system in schools and colleges all too often merely prepares students to be examination candidates, and they are dependent on their marks in order to graduate to the next level. In Saudi high schools, students need high marks in English, Mathematics, Science and Physics – an average of 90 per cent – in order enrol in medical college. Indeed, in my lesson observations, I noticed that students frequently asked the teacher, "How are you going to test us on that?" The teacher would then proceed to explain assessment techniques instead of focusing on subject content. Thus, motivation for studying English was confined to the desire to pass the examination.

In the semi-structured interviews, I asked some students about the qualities of a good teacher. They listed many features such as patience, helpfulness, subject knowledge, and enthusiasm; however, some were more overt in recognising the influence of the assessment on their evaluation of the teacher, arguing that good teachers were simply those who assigned good grades. Students assessed their teachers at the end of the semester by filling in a questionnaire and having a talk with the head of the department. As the teachers wanted to be commended by their students in front of the head, the main incentive for the former was also to teach for the examination.

The following is a list compiled from my lesson observation notes of problems associated with the effect of the assessment format on teaching and learning.

1- The classroom environment was not conducive to effective or enjoyable learning because students were stressed and afraid of not passing the examination.
2- There were no collaborative activities because all students were preoccupied with competition for the highest grade.
3- Teachers were extremely authoritative and did much of the work in the lessons; conversely, students were seen to be largely receptive.
4- Memorisation without understanding of the subject led to short-term memory retention, meaning that teachers had to explain points repeatedly.

The study also found that teachers prepared students for the examination by taking five minutes at the beginning of each lesson to review vocabulary taught in the last one. The process of revision was oral: the teacher said a word and the students gave the definition or vice versa. There was also a test every two weeks to prepare students. However, reading tests emphasised what teachers had focussed on in lessons including vocabulary building and grammatical items.

The assessment system in the college is mainly based on documenting students' performance by giving tests and exams. However, the assessment system should be seen as a way of improving the quality and efficacy of the schooling system as a whole by integrating different testing technologies as well as the involvement of different people such as students, teachers and stakeholders (Looney, 2011). There are two types of assessment that should be integral parts of teaching and learning i.e., formative and summative. Harder and Gibson (2001, p.356) define formative assessment as a way to 'monitor learning progress, provide feedback to reinforce learning, correct learning errors' and summative assessment as a way to 'determine final achievement for designing grades or certifying mastery'. Harder and Gibson argue that formative assessment is the most important type that teachers have to engage in because it is the best indicator for teachers about their students' growing competence and success in learning.

The distinction between the two types of assessment is hardly acknowledged in the college. It seems there is more focus on summative assessment. The course description indicates that while 50% of the total mark is given to midterm exams and 40 % to the final exam, only 10% is devoted to students' participation in the classroom. What might be a form of formative assessment is using questionnaire for student feedback. However, while students do fill in a questionnaire at the end of each semester, this is designed to evaluate their teachers and does not include anything about the curriculum or the English programme.

5.4.1Assessment and its consequences in relation to communicative competence
Although it is clearly stated in the college values and description of the programme that graduate students should play a central part in their professional situation by working

with others in teams and contributing to medical research (COMR,2010), tuition was found to be highly teacher-centred and did not emphasise communicative competence. Yet, it was just such communicative skill that was badly in need of development for appropriate interaction with others and when learning English for professional purposes, given that students hoping to become doctors would have to communicate with non-Arabic speakers in English, use medical textbooks in English, write reports, and attend conferences both in and out of the country. However, learning English was regarded as an individual rather than a social process in that learners studied the language individually in the abstract and there were few opportunities either inside or outside the university for them to use what they had learnt in a meaningful way.

Brown (1994, p. 227) defines communicative competence as "that aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages, and to negotiate meaning interpersonally within specific contexts." This definition implies that communication is not merely the ability to talk with others or to understand what is said; it is a dynamic process in which messages are aligned appropriately in a social context.

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (2003), communicative competence embraces three main elements together with their sub-features as follows:

1- Linguistic competence, i.e. knowledge of lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competences.

2- Sociolinguistic competence, i.e. knowledge of linguistic markers of social relations, politeness conventions, expression of folk wisdom, register differences, and dialect and accent competences.

3- Pragmatic competence, i.e. discourse competence and functional competence, which consists of microfunction and macrofunction features as well as interaction schemata.

Yale (2012) suggests a similar taxonomy but with the additional component of 'strategic competence', which allows for different ways to compensate for any difficulties in getting a message across.

Based on the above definitions, English instruction at the college limited students to the first component. Indeed, it is unclear how teachers were able to observe or evaluate student accuracy and fluency without their being involved in communicative situations. However, classroom activities militated against engagement with learning materials.

5.4.2 The inconsistency between the demands of the course and the entry requirements
The choice of prescribed books for the ESP course sheds light on the fourth reason why medical students are required to study English, which is being able to use the language for cultural exchange. In the following analysis, I limit my scope to the contents of the reading course book – *Selected Readings* – as an example of what students were required to study in the first semester (Lee and Gundersent, 2001).
Before choosing any course book, the interests and level of the students as well as their needs should be taken into account (McDonough and Shaw, 2003). The first factor is vital because learners will not be motivated to read and interact with texts they do not like. For example, most of my students were keen on things like sport and technology, but there were some texts in *Selected Readings* that did not seem to have any connection with their probable interests, and were far removed from their knowledge or experience such as personal narratives or wedding traditions in Taiwan.

Of equal seriousness was the fact that the level of the book was much higher than the students' average English proficiency, being designed for intermediate level. When I observed teachers who utilised this book, I noticed that most students struggled with many unknown words. I examined the results of one group's pre-course proficiency test before the start of the first semester: the highest mark was 60 per cent while the lowest was 21 per cent. Only 5 students out of 15 had scored above 50 per cent and 75 per cent of them had not managed to reach a score of 50 per cent, meaning that they were officially classified as elementary level. One of the reading teachers raised this concern, reporting that, "We need to explain certain vocabulary while students lack basic English words".
However, the College of Medicine bachelor's degree programme admission requirements (COMR, 2010) do not include anything about level of English, even a minimum English level, being limited to the following:
1- Must be a Saudi national

2- Requisite pass marks in all relevant high school subjects and other necessary tests

3- Must pass the admission interview

4- Provision of all necessary documentation

Based on lesson observations, in teaching grammar, teachers wrote down a rule on the blackboard, explained it, and then ask students to provide more examples of their own. After this, they asked students to read a text and underline sentences in which the rule in question was used. The time allotted for such an activity was about 15 minutes. Details of the target vocabulary were then provided in the form of a handout with a list of words and their definitions. Students were required to study the list as homework before beginning a new chapter of the textbook. In the next lesson, the teacher asked some of them questions based on this list and they either offered meanings in Arabic or gave definitions. Students were obliged to memorise these words and told that if they wanted to get high marks in the examination, they would have to learn vocabulary lists by heart. Such methodology was a good way of practicing memorisation but it had some drawbacks in terms of language learning. Studying words out of context misled students because they did not learn when or how to use new vocabulary and it prevented them from developing the strategy of guessing the meaning of an unknown word from context. Therefore, if they came across these words in a reading text, students could at best learn them, take the opportunity to learn new words, or try to memorise those they already knew.

Finally, some of the activities students carried out in the classroom were regarded as boring and difficult. For example, at the end of each chapter there was a crossword puzzle. The purpose of this activity was to review key vocabulary from the texts. In interviews conducted before the intervention, most students told me that they found the crossword uninteresting because they were not used to doing such puzzles in Arabic. The few who did like it found it difficult because they knew all the definitions that made up the clues in Arabic but not in English.

The prescribed textbooks aimed at teaching general English. Moreover, there were no authentic or supplementary materials for teaching except the vocabulary sheets handed to students before each lesson. When implementing CSR, I tried to provide them with some medical texts. I noticed how students were interested and motivated to learn

although they found it difficult because their medical terminology was limited. Nevertheless, the medical texts focussed on their real reason for learning English. In other words, English was taught as EAP.

In conclusion, it was quite clear that teaching English and especially reading was problematic at the college, and there were contradictions between the teaching aims and what was really practiced. For this reason, students failed to reach the required level of reading in English. However, there were further issues related to reading English in the Saudi context in general.

5.5 Doing the research

In planning my action research project, I took into account the explicit acknowledgment of the micro politics of the situation because the study necessitated the participation of students, teachers, and other members of the English department in a social setting in which I already operated professionally and was subject to various power and authority mechanisms. If the appropriate permissions are not gained or other political niceties unobserved, the action research project all too often becomes a semi-clandestine, subversive activity. Indeed, it is claimed that school micro politics have not been sufficiently considered in the literature on action research, although teacher action researchers should be aware of hierarchies and power relations in order to avoid constraints on their projects (Eilertsen et al., 2008).

What I was able to do as an action researcher was restricted by the rules and regulations of the department. I needed to know where I stood and what my boundaries were, and act accordingly; although my ultimate goal was not just to gain knowledge of what was happening, but to bring about change that would be evident in teaching practice. Dunne et al., (2005) emphasise the role of local conditions in relation to micro politics:

> Both practical issues and micropolitics depend upon local conditions. Moreover, they are strongly connected since which method or instrument is suitable to use and how will be strongly affected by the micropolitics of the situation. (Dunne et al., 2005, pp. 165–166)

Additionally, the practical application of micro politics is defined by Blase (1991) thus:

> Micropolitics refer to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. In large part, political action results

from perceived differences between individuals and groups coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect. Although such actions are consciously motivated, any action consciously motivated may have 'political significance' in a given situation. (Blase, 1991, p. 11)

The following subsection shows how the micro politics were enacted in the action research context.

5.5.1 How are power relations enacted?

The technologies of observation, surveillance and evaluation used in the institution as well as how students, teachers and the head were complicit in these processes were good examples of power shifting.

The following notes from a lesson I observed highlight out how the teacher's actions affected student behaviour and attitude to learning:

The teacher asked for a volunteer to read the first paragraph. A student raised his hand and started reading. When he mispronounced a letter or a word, the teacher asked him to repeat the correct pronunciation five times. When the student had finished, the teacher asked for another volunteer to read the second paragraph, but no one raised his hand.

This exemplifies how students refused to participate because they were afraid of making mistakes and being corrected by the teacher in front of the class. It was the teacher's behaviour that led to such an attitude and reaction, but the students, either consciously or unconsciously, used their implicit power to resist the power of the teacher behaviour. The following is another example that shows how students enacted power:

At the end of the semester, the head of department attended one of each teacher's classes for the purposes of evaluation and assuring the success of the programme as a whole. The head distributed teacher evaluation form to the students and asked them many questions. One of the criteria for the renewal of a teacher's contract was the feedback the department received from this evaluation.

Thus, it may be observed that although students had no direct authority to make decisions, they could still use their influence to effect change. The head of department clearly had the final decision due to his position in the hierarchy, but it seemed that the students had affected this through the use of their power.

Another example of how students' power functioned proactively is shown in the following extract:

The teacher asked the students to work in groups to carry out a certain task. They sat together and spent about five minutes working on it. When they had finished, they assigned a group member to give their answer. If he made a mistake, the other members of the group would correct him.

In other cases, the language teachers used carried powerful implicit connotations:

I was observing a grammar class. A teacher asked a student to add a prefix to the word 'advantage'. The student offered the prefix, 'im'. The teacher corrected him at once: "that's wrong; it's disadvantage."

In the above extract, the teacher used the words 'no' and 'wrong', which are powerful expressions of criticism which might have influenced student attitude towards learning.

It is worth noting that adopting an authoritarian stance is not the only way of manifesting power; collaboration can serve as an equally important source of power enactment. This was apparent when I observed how teachers taught reading comprehension and how students collaborated with them. They did not utilise different learning strategies but focussed heavily on teaching grammatical items and lists of words. The students wanted to study reading in order to pass the examination, and the teachers wanted to help them achieve this goal.

Sometimes, the nature of the social setting itself leads to a kind of complexity that affects power relations. The following example shows the complexity of power and its contradictions:

When I was interviewing some teachers, they happened to mention that they did not utilise supplementary materials in their lessons because they had to adhere to the prescribed book and there was limited time to cover all the chapters. Moreover, they were reluctant to implement collaborative activities because they required more time and effort.

According to the above example, teachers were obliged to follow the book due to the way in which the syllabus was organised, and avoided collaborative activities as a result of negative experiences. It is thus apparent that a teacher's power may be influenced by extrinsic sources such as the regulations of the institution.

However, relationships between micro and macro politics are also of great importance in considering the different traditions of action research and its connection with social movements. Kemmis (1993) states:

> One of the reasons so many people have trouble in understanding and dealing with the political face of social and educational research is that they fail to understand the relationship between the 'micro' and the 'macro' in social and education life. (Kemmis, 1993, p. 3)

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter began by highlighting the disjuncture between the objectives of teaching English in the College of Medicine and how they were implemented in practice. The explicit acknowledgment of micro politics as a social phenomenon was discussed in relation to action research, in which the researcher must intervene at different stages to improve practice and bring about change. For this reason, the collaboration of other actors in the research setting is vital. In some situations, collaboration was relatively easy as long as power was enacted appropriately, as with student–teacher and student–student relationships in the classroom. In other instances, the power dynamic became more problematic, as in interactions between people who were equal or higher than me in the hierarchy. Such challenges led to substantial changes to the original research plans including the way of teaching, testing and adherence to the prescribed book.

Chapter Six

First Intervention: Remedial group

6.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on and examines the analysis of data I collected from teaching a reading course in the remedial programme (phase one). The findings were drawn from five sources of qualitative and quantitative data: semi-structured interviews which were audio taped to explore students' reading habits; field notes and video and audio taped observations to examine the students' interactions while reading; the results of the reading comprehension test taken at the end of the course; and a questionnaire of students' perceptions completed after implementing collaborative strategic reading (CSR) submitted after the intervention. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a better understanding of how CSR and its strategies promoted students' reading comprehension.

The English remedial programme was intended for students who failed in the pre-professional phase, which includes intensive English language courses and basic sciences courses (chemistry, physics and biology). It also includes Islamic and Arabic courses. Before starting the programme, students took a proficiency test to evaluate their level in English. Only five students out of 15 scored above 50 i.e., the pass mark. That was a good indication of why most students were considered low level students. It was the second time the remedial programme had been offered. The pre-professional programme, which lasts for three semesters, is a preparatory phase for medical students which includes an English course to strengthen their English language and enable them to communicate fluently before undertaking the medical programme. Students who failed the pre-professional phase had told the department that as English was the main means of instruction for all subjects; it was their poor English that was holding back their work overall and causing the failure. Therefore, the medical college wanted to give students another chance to improve their English before joining the programme. In the remedial programme students studied four courses: reading, writing, grammar and communication skills. All courses are done in the morning for three hours a day. At the end of the course, the department gave students a proficiency test to gauge their achievement.

Before teaching CSR, students were introduced to CSR and its four strategies i.e., previewing (before reading), click and clunk and get the gist (during reading) and finally wrap up (after reading). I deployed role playing and modelling to explain what was meant by each strategy and provided them with a reading text for practice. I then divided them into groups and assigned different roles for group members to act.

6.2 Reconnaissance with the remedial group

The reconnaissance phase was based on one source of data: the analysis of semi-structured interviews to explore students' learning strategies, especially for reading and study habits as a whole and their attitudes toward group work, English and reading in particular. By carrying out semi-structured interviews, I gained a better understanding from the students' points of view and triangulated these with mine. I conducted all interviews with 15 students in the first week before starting teaching. The analysis showed that there might be a relationship between students' conceptions of English and the strategies they were using. All students had studied English for six years in the intermediate and high school levels. The social context of learning is important for understanding the contributions students bring to the process of learning. Richards and Lockhart (2002) state:

> Learners' belief systems cover a wide range of issues and can influence learners' motivation to learn, their expectations about language learning, their perceptions about what is easy or difficult about a language, as well as the kind of learning strategies they favour. (Richards and Lockhart, 2002, p.52)

The purpose of this process was to have clearer picture and more detailed explanation of students' reading habits by touching on their reading strategies and attitudes toward group work before implementing CSR.

6.2.1 Strategies for Reading

Responses to the interview supported the conclusion that most students were not conscious of which strategies they were using when studying different subjects including reading, nor how and when to use an appropriate strategy. For instance, in one of the interview, a student was struck when he was asked about his way of reading. He tried to simplify his answer by saying 'I just read I look at the text and start reading' (interview, Khaled, 27-2-10). In another interview, Adel expressed his way of studying

a grammar book by trying to understand the general rules then choosing some examples and working on them. However, he emphasised that this way was not of great help because he had to look at some rules more than one time and could not understand them. For this reason, Adel stopped studying because he thought that he was wasting his time since all of his understanding was based on knowing the rules (interview, Adel, 27, 2, 2010).

It seems from the above quote reported by Adel, which is a typical answer that all students were not sure about which strategies were best needed for processing reading. When Adel said 'I try to understand the rules', he was trying to make the process of reading to be more mechanical and to define reading as knowing grammatical rules. However, he then showed that the failure of comprehending the rules prevented him from continuing studying. There were no alternative strategies he could utilise to tackle breakdowns in understanding. The only technique he resorted to was reading several times. In this case he indicated that not having strategies for solving problems led to bad feelings. Indeed in the interviews, all students spoke of negative feelings at not being able to tackle problems. They used words such as 'sad', 'frustrated', 'terrible', 'depressed' and 'annoyed' to describe how they felt. This quotation is a typical account of how students described their feelings when they failed to understand their reading:

> *If I fail to solve something I try it out once or twice maybe three times but if I cannot my blood pressure goes up and I become very sad. I stop doing things. For example, once I was preparing for a grammar exam I had some difficulty with chapter three because I missed some classes. I could not carry on with chapter four and five after. (Interview, Fahad, 27, 2, 2010).*

It seems that the student became upset for not only being unable to solve the problem but also because there was no specific strategy to help him continue.

This was expressed by fear from some students that if they did not understand they would be unable to pass their examinations. Muhammad, for instance, said that he could not stop thinking about the exams once he started studying because he needed to get high marks. If he failed to solve problems in exams he might not get high scores (interview, Muhammad, 27, 2, 2010).

Muhammad was again typical of someone who, even while engaged in any reading was thinking not about the task in hand, and how he might make meaning from the text and solve any problems of comprehension along the way, but about the examinations. They

remained in the front of his mind throughout. The final extract is a good example which shows more clearly the lack of problem-solving strategies. They tended to ask others for solutions. When confronted with difficulties in their reading one claimed ' I try to look for solutions' but had little idea about what these might be except to seek the help of 'my brothers, or my friends, and sometimes my teacher'(interview,Ahmed,27,2,2010).

The reason for not implementing different strategies to facilitate reading can be seen in the responses of students to whether or not they had received any training for reading. When I asked the question, all students replied 'no'. It seems that neither in schools nor in their study at the university had teachers explicitly taught students different strategies for reading. Therefore, students did not utilise different strategies to interact with the reading text. The responses students gave such as 'reading slowly', 'underlining difficult words', 'answering questions' to describe how they read, suggested that they had no idea about the main reading strategies such as skimming and scanning. However, it was found that the strategies students made use of are closely related to how they define reading comprehension. The following subsection shows how students looked at reading comprehension based on interviews.

6.2.1.1 Comprehension versus memorization

Students reported that memorising the reading materials was essential when they read. They defined reading as a process of memorisation. If they are able to memorise information, this means they can read. In the interviews, most students showed that they preferred memorising information when they approached reading texts. Some students implemented traditional ways of studying which focus on memorisation without critical thinking. Khaled stated

> I prefer to memorise things I do this with all subjects, then write down what I understood, I want to make sure that I catch the meanings of things, by doing this, the main points will be retrieved easily if needed. (Interview, Khaled, 27, 2,2010).

This may be consistent with one of the major reasons for defining reading as nothing more than the method or approach their teachers had utilised to teach reading, whereby, students learn grammatical rules and memorise them though without understanding. Khaled's way of studying depends on the ability to retain the learnt materials. Some

students admitted that they had a short memory span and could not keep being attentive and focussed on the subject matter.

6.2.1.2 Dealing with unknown words

Other definitions of reading were limited to the word level and connected the reading comprehension with only the recognition of the unknown words. The interviews pointed out how students limited reading to the recognition of unknown words. The following quotation is a typical answer of how students define reading 'I try to translate all the time; I underline difficult words and look for their meanings' (interview, Adel, 27, 2, 2010). It is clear that this student, like others, focussed on the word level for extracting the meaning of the text rather than moving a step further to include sentences and a text as a whole. According to this definition of reading, reading occurs in isolation not in a context, as if words exist in themselves not in relation with other words. Nevertheless, trying to translate every single word seems not to help in understanding the reading text. Muhammad expressed his worries 'sometimes even when I translate every single word I find it difficult to answer some questions related to the reading text' (interview, Muhammad, 27, 2, 2010). When students limit themselves to the word level they are more likely to ignore global comprehension and grammatical or lexical properties which are essential to explain the meaning of the text.

6.2.1.3 Absence of dialogue between the text and the reader

The analysis of interviews added another dimension to how students viewed reading. Most students did not regard reading as a social activity which required interaction between the reader and the text in a dynamic process. In the interviews most students tried to separate the activity of reading from the reader and the text. The following quotation, which is a typical one, shows how most students ignored some important elements of reading:

> *I start pronouncing words, ... it is important for understanding, if I cannot pronounce any I ask the teacher (interview, Sa'ad,27,2, 2010).*

According to the above interview, Sa'ad overlooked an essential element to facilitate reading of combining the overall language proficiency with previous knowledge of the text. Perhaps this is because of the type of the reading materials used. McDonough and Shaw (2003) observe that reading can fall into two types: the text as object point of

view and the text as process point of view. In the former, the reader is totally passive and has nothing to bring to the text. Therefore, the reader does not know any strategy which might improve his or her ability of reading. In the latter, the interaction takes place when the reader links what is in his mind with the new knowledge and enters into a direct dialogue with the writer.

6.2.1.4 Focusing on written materials

While there are some aspects of the text that can be used, the responses to the interviews revealed that the majority of students focussed on words to get the meaning of the text. Most students did not use typological or text features while they read because they believed that meaning only could be found in words. Moreover, there was no indication in any of the interviews that students implemented anything in the reading text to facilitate comprehension except the words. The following answer from Abdullah is a typical example which clarifies how students relied heavily on written materials. Abdullah claimed that he read sentence by sentence any reading text and when he was asked about using punctuation he replied 'no, what is punctuation, ... yes I got it no I do not use them in Arabic either' (interview, Abdullah, 27, 2, 2010).

6.2.2 Attitudes towards reading

Interviews indicated that students were not much interested in learning English to use it for other purposes such as travelling or personal interests. They just learnt it to help them in their studies. The lack of positive attitudes to reading could be a major reason of not acquiring sufficient reading strategies. Bad readers who are less motivated in reading matters develop bad reading habits such as concentration problems and word by word reading. However, not having the motivation to read may be the result of how students were motivated to learn English as a whole before joining the college.

The negative attitude led students not to recognise the importance of reading as an effective way for learning. Most students regarded listening and speaking as the most important skills they needed in their studies. The best way to learn from their point of view is by listening. The interviews also suggested that students were not clear about the relative importance to them of reading. Abdullah for example, when asked about which of these was most important to him, first claimed that it was speaking. When

prompted about whether speaking was needed in his homework or assessed work he then suggested that writing was the most important:

> *I changed my mind I think it is writing; my writing should be grammatical without grammatical mistakes…Because if you know how to write that means you know lots of things (interview, Abdullah, 27, 2, 2010).*

One possible explanation for not recognising reading as the main skill to learning is the influence of the status of speaking in students' mother tongue. In Arabic, speaking has more prestigious tradition.

6.2.3 Attitudes towards group work

Students' attitudes towards group work were ambivalent and this seemed to threaten the possible success of the intervention. Students were asked whether or not they seek the help of others in their study. What is interesting about their responses is that most of them saw no harm in asking others, including their classmates, for help before asking the teacher. This is a good indication that students saw their friends as a source of knowledge which they could rely on and benefit from. Only one single student did not see the value of asking others and preferred to look for the solution himself. Muhammad highlighted that at home he preferred to surf the internet or use the dictionary. At college, he would ask the teachers but not ask his friends for help because he thought that they might be wrong (interview, Muhammad, 27, 2, 2010).

Students were also asked about their ability to speak in front of the class because in group work every individual should exchange information with others. Most students were willing to speak in front of the class. A few mentioned that they had not experienced speaking in front of others before joining the college. They found speaking a rewarding experience which they learnt from. Bader described his experience when speaking in front of the class as 'I tried this before at high school, at first it was difficult to me but later it was fine. I did not expect to be able to speak in front of the class' (Bader, interview, 27, 2, 2010)

However, familiarity with other students is essential for being comfortable for most students. Consider the following excerpt which shows that students had to know their audience before speaking:

> *It depends on whom I am speaking to; do I know the audience well?. I feel no harm speaking in front of them regardless of the topic…because I know them well,*

I know the way they are thinking and what they might accept and not accept.
(Interview, Hamed, 27, 2, 2010)

The English level of students is another important factor affecting the way they feel. Some students were afraid of making mistakes when they spoke. Adel expressed his nervousness to speak in front of the class although he used to get involved in social activities before joining the college. He gave the reason that some students might be better than him. Good students might laugh at his level or the teacher might want to assess his English. Indeed, this would distract him and lead him to stop talking (interview, Adel, 26, 2, 2010).

However, students had different views about working in groups in the classroom. The following quotation shows that some students think group work is good only in learning English but not with other subjects. Abdullah preferred working individually when studying for different subjects. However, for English courses he preferred group work and he justified this as follows:

If I know three thousand words and my classmate knows three I do not know I can benefit from him but in mathematics it depends on how you understand the rule. (Interview, Abdullah, 27, 2, 2010).

Another student found group work beneficial but not for studying different skills. Fahad considered group work to be useful in workshops at labs only. He claimed that group work was not advantageous because students would chat and be easily distracted. Fahad stated 'if you ask us to work in groups to do something like designing a project, I think this is good but if you ask us to work in groups to do something related to studying it will be waste of time (interview, Fahad,27,2,2010). Some reasons for not seeing the value of group work were related to the competitive mode inside the classroom. Bader, for instance, thought that group work had more disadvantages because some members in the group would keep silent although they knew the right answer. The reason was that they did not want anyone to get their right answer and preferred to say the right answer themselves when asked by the teacher (interview, Bader, 27, 2, 2010). Others preferred to study alone to working in groups because they cannot catch up with the group as Khaled stated 'I think studying alone is better for me…it is easy for me to lose concentration when working in groups' (interview, Kahled, 27, 2, 2010).

Some students related the benefits of group work to their achievement in exams. Ali only saw the beneficial effect of group work in exams. He gave the reason that in group

work he and his friends spent time discussing the right answer. Therefore, the correct answer stick in his mind and he can remember it easily in exams *(interview, Ali, 27, 2, 2010).*

Other responses indicate that a few students had the feeling that working in groups might negatively affect their identity as students. For example, when they work in groups they might be themselves hidden because they are sharing their ideas and experiences with others members. Therefore, the correct answer and the bright idea are delivered to the classroom in the name of the individuals belonging to a certain group not in the name of separate individuals. The following quotation confirms this attitude. Sami explained his worries about group work by 'I do not like working with group, I work hard and someone takes my idea' (Sami, interview, 27, 2, 2010)

In some interviews students asked repeatedly about how they were to be assessed when they work in groups. It seems that some students were used to working in a more competitive setting where teachers encouraged them to participate all the time but as individuals. Anyone who gets the right answer will be given a mark by the teacher. In this case, students will participate only in order to get a reward. Consequently, if there is no reward students will not actively get involved in the process of learning. Ali, for instance, focussed on marks as a main incentive to learning, 'what is it about the participation marks?, usually teachers give marks for students who get the right answer' (interview, Ali, 27, 2, 2010).

Based on the analysis of students' reading strategies and attitude toward group work, it seems that students should change their strategies to read in a better way. However, most students expressed reluctance to do group work because they found it odd and unfamiliar due to the pedagogic approaches they came from. Students spent many years working independently and in a competitive environment and may not see the value of collaboration in academic setting. Those students had failed before and had negative ideas about English and about reading. They also had few to make use of when reading. For this reason, collaborative strategic reading is a good method which improves reading comprehension with full involvement by students.

6.3 Implementing collaborative strategic group work

Students' performances were evaluated during and after implementing CSR. They worked in groups with certain tasks given to each member in his group. They used the four CSR strategies to help them to read and solve some of their reading difficulties; previewing for brainstorming (before reading), click and clunk to tackle difficult words and get the gist to grasp the main ideas (while reading), and finally wrap up to summarise the main points (after reading) – see chapters One, section 1.2 and Two, section 2.2.8 for further details . In some activities, I asked them to write down their answers in the learning log which I copied and distributed to each student. Learning logs served as a discovery process for students to know what they achieved in their learning. I used some video and audio extracts taken while students were working in groups to do some tasks from the prescribed book as well as the medical book as examples to clarify how students were engaged.

CSR had a positive effect on students' learning by enhancing their learning strategies. Some of the students' learning strategies are found in the following recurrent patterns of practice or as Kilngner and Vaughn (2000, p.69) called 'helping behaviour', which helped in making reading comprehension easier, more active and self-directed. Other learning strategies were found in how students overcome problems tackling difficult words. Results gained from post test revealed that students performed much better compared with the departmental test. Finally, responses gained from the questionnaire distributed after the intervention showed positive attitudes toward CSR and its strategies. The overall results give answers to the specific questions of the study regarding CSR and its strategies. These questions were:

3- How does CSR improve reading comprehension?

4-To what extent does CSR promote active learning?

5-How does CSR help students acquire new problem-solving strategies that can be applied in other subjects?

6-What are students' attitudes towards CSR?

6.3.1 Building up knowledge

This is the first pattern emerging from this study which was defined as adding information to what had already been said. In such pattern students were able to

exchange ideas, activate background knowledge and bring what they had already got to classrooms. The process of integration between existing knowledge and new knowledge found in the text or students' discussions made the reading materials more accessible to them. Building up knowledge enabled students to promote learning by attending to their prior knowledge because they did not start from scratch to comprehend the new reading texts. The following videoed extract shows this process while students were working on previewing strategy (pre reading activity) to brain storm their ideas about the text. Extract 1: students were looking at a photo and answering some questions related to it. The original extract was in English.

> *Muhammad: what country do you think this family is from?*
> *Hamad: I think the man is Egyptian*
> *Adel: and the girl is Chinese*
> *Muhammad: (laughing)*
> *yes the girl looks different*
> *Muhammad: what is the relationship between them?*
> *Hamad: what is relationship?*
> *Muhammad: translated into Arabic (علاقه)/alaqah/*
> *Hamad: I think they are married*
> *Muhammad: that is right*
> *Adel: what is about the woman carrying the girl?*

In extract 1, all members of the groups were participating in the task to build on each others' answers. The elaboration phase can be seen when Hamad said what he thought about the man, Adel moved on to talk about the girl and Muhammad agreed with them and added that the girl looked different. Every member seemed to feel that he was a valuable contributor and had something to add. In this extract and others it was found that students had equal voices to participate and express themselves, although Muhammad was the leader of the group and also the best student. On the other hand, this does not contradict the role of Muhammad in the above conversation who was the leader of the group, guided the conversation all the time and finally took the final decision by accepting the final answer. Another important aspect of building up knowledge is the extent by which it can speed up the process of learning. When Hamad asked about the meaning of relationship, he was immediately provided by its meaning by Muhammad and therefore the discussion kept going. If, for instance, students were listening in a teacher led-classroom and there was no group work, Hamad might feel reluctant to ask the teacher for clarification which might result in hindered learning.

Moreover, building up knowledge was observed in some sequences where students helped one another in an indirect way to elicit further information as shown below:

Extract 2: students were reading an article about changing families. The original conversation was in Arabic.

> *Hamad: what is the meaning of changing here?*
> *Adel: from the verb 'change'.*
> *Muhammad: that is right it is used as an adjective.*
> *Ali: it means different family. If you read the sentences coming after there are different kinds of families.*
> *Fahad: like what happens from one generation to another, your father and grandfather.*

In the above extract, students were working on the 'click and clunk' strategy. Hamad asked about the meaning of 'changing' and how it was used in a sentence. All four members knew its meaning and provided Hamad with different clues to grasp the meaning. Adel and Muhammad gave a grammatical clue while Ali used a contextual clue to clarify meaning when he moved forward from word level to the sentence and paragraph levels. Finally, Fahad tried out the word 'generation' for an explanation. Nevertheless, there are some factors which affected how students built up meanings. The first one is the familiarity of the topic being discussed. For example, while students were reading a medical text, they found the word 'anaesthesia' difficult. Only Muhammad was able to explain it to them. He told students that he knew it because he was taking a training course at the same time at hospital. Another factor is the type of questions that were produced by the prescribed books. For instance, students had to answer some questions related to their books. Questions like; do you shop on line? If yes why? Or do you live in a big city?; did not require much engagement. If students' answers to such questions were 'no', that meant the discussion was over.

6.3.2 Offering Alternatives

Another pattern which emerged from cycle one was the ability of students to provide different options in order to deal with problems they encountered. The following example shows this pattern where the original conversation was in English.

Extract 3: students were asked to make a sentence with a singular verb

> *Hamad: Ali plays football at the school or school, what do you think*
> *Ahmad: at school*
> *Abdullah: just every day, say it without school*
> *Ahmed: teacher what do you think can we say……..*
> *Teacher: try it out*

Adel: I think it is right
Hamad: Ali play football every day
Ahmed: no, we have singular subject

It was clear that in extract three Abdullah gave a solution to tackle the grammatical problem faced by Hamad and Ahmed which was correct, although Ahmad seemed unsure about the provided alternative. Moreover, Ahmad's answer to the teacher gave another dimension to group work. While some students did not see the efficacy of collaborative work in the interviews carried out before the intervention because of being afraid of being laughed at by good students, it is obvious here how students became more confident to take the challenge and argue with the teacher as well.

Another example was related to the meaning of a given word shown in the following segment of conversation to practice click and clunk strategy.

Extract 4:

Muhammad: what is the meaning of extended family?
Ali: extended means big
Adel: it means grandfather, grandmother all living with you
Muhammad: yes not small family
Ali: stretching his hands
translated into Arabic /عائلة ممتدة/

In this extract, group work involved implementing multiple techniques rather than just one. Students explained the meaning of 'extended' by giving the synonym, to some extent a definition, an antonym and a demonstration. The final technique, used by Ashehiri, was translating the word into Arabic. Because each one used a different method of explanation, which the other might or might not know, it was found that individual differences were tackled because students made sure their answers were correct. In addition, due to the time and effort they spent working on different tasks, long-term retention of materials was gained. When students go beyond the reading text, reading comprehension becomes more than just focusing on the printed materials. This shows how CSR supported students to approach the material being read. In the interviews before the intervention, most students said that they relied heavily on the written materials while they were reading.

Students were found to provide different examples as alternatives to make the information more meaningful. In the following extract, students were thinking critically about the text to find reasons of smaller families.

In extract 5, students were working on this question as required by wrap up strategy: why are families in some countries smaller than in the past?

> *Ali: because life becomes more expensive*
> *Abdullah: because men and women spend a lot of time at work*
> *Fahad: why*
> *Abdullah: because they want to earn more money now we have more poor people*
> *Adel: ok but.......*
> *Muhammad: yes in the past here people who lived in desert did not send their children to schools because they did not need; now they do.*

The members in the group gave reasons similar to what they had in the reading text to answer this question. However, Adel seemed not to be convinced because such reasons carried a cultural aspect. Most students came from families where their mothers stay at home to take care of their husbands and children while men go to work. For this reason, Muhammad gave an example which is culturally based in order to give a convincing reason. By doing this students enhanced their understanding of the topic as Muhammad talked about what was familiar to them. On the other hand, extract 5 indicates that while practising the wrap up strategy, students had some problems generating questions and review and discuss the most important ideas. During my observations, I observed that most students often tended to ask simple and specific questions they found easy to answer or discuss topics that did not require a high level of thinking. This is supported too by the results of the post-test where students scored the lowest mark among the remaining three strategies (see Appendix Sixteen). Here are some examples of what brought from students' learning logs as they were answering these questions:

1- How can you form a learning team?

2- What is the main topic of this paragraph?

3- How old was the son when his father asked him to drive?

If students, for instance, were answering the second question, they would give one or two words and move to the next one.

6.3.3 Other Strategies for dealing with difficult vocabulary

My analysis based on video transcripts, field notes and students' learning logs was that whilst directed towards the click and clunk approach to difficult words, the preferred strategies were: translating into the mother tongue, using the electronic and paper dictionaries, using contextual clues, pictures, charts and diagrammatic clues, and

grammatical clues. Having said that, there were some strategies that students deployed to seek the meaning of unknown words which were not common. For example, some students preferred to understand the meaning of a difficult word by using punctuation clues, such as a word in parentheses or after a dash. For example, they sell products in many categories (groups of similar things). People can search for-look for-a book on the internet. Another uncommon strategy for finding the meaning of unknown words was pronouncing the words aloud.

Literal translation from English to the mother tongue of students i.e., Arabic was more frequently used in the group. Students stated that they often used translation for understanding difficult words because it accelerated the process of learning and understanding. They added that it promoted communication and saved time and effort. If they looked for other strategies to explore unknown words, this might retard the learning process. Most of the translated words were content words. This happened on few occasions when students were struggling with functional or grammatical words. The process of direct translation was found in the following example:

Extract 6: students were doing a crossword game. The clue was: a word that means this symbol, %.

Extract 6:

> *Teacher: yes Abdullah go ahead*
> *Abdullah: a symbol what does it mean*
> *Hamad: in Arabic it means (نسبة مؤوية) /nisbameaua/*
> *Abdullah: it means attend*
> *Teacher: no it is a noun*
> *Ahmed: quite*
> *Teacher: no it means per cent; go to the third column to find it*

However, some problems arose from direct translation. On some occasions students tended to use informal translation. As not all members of groups were from the same region, some found difficulty in catching the meaning of the difficult vocabulary. In Arabic for instance, a student translated the word 'host' into (معزب), /muazip/. This word would be understood only by students from the Najd area, in the mid of Saudi Arabia. When the teacher translated this word into formal Arabic, it was clear for all. Finally, I noticed that most students focussed on the meaning of the word and did not pay attention to its form, how it was pronounced. In the absence of colleges who

had same knowledge of the word in question, another popular technique used by students for finding the meaning of words was using an electronic dictionary. Some had an advanced electronic talking dictionary supported with many services. Others used a simple dictionary found on their mobiles. Students stopped for each word and consulted the electronic dictionary for some time. A few students had a paper bilingual dictionary. Based on my observations, students might take two minutes or more to look up a word, especially when using a paper dictionary. Some of them reported that they had never used a paper dictionary before. They had no idea about the dictionary's uses and the skills required for using it. However, because most students used their dictionaries very often, their reading processes were halted. This is because they forget some of the ideas of the reading and had to go back and read some of the sentences again. The following extract shows how students were in confusion carrying out an activity to find out the right pronunciation for selected words.

Extract 7:

Teacher: good, continue with the rest
Hamad: how
Teacher: now try to find the right pronunciation I want you to tell me how to say it
Fahad: transcription
Teacher: yes
Muhammad: using dictionary
Teacher: yes use your dictionary for that and look for the phonetic symbols first

Another issue emerged from using a paper dictionary which was that students were not familiar with the differences in pronunciation between American and British English. They kept asking which transcription to choose and why, or they told the teacher that the word with an American spelling was not found, as they used the Oxford dictionary. With regards to medical terminology, neither the electronic dictionaries nor paper dictionaries were helpful. In many cases students did not find the meaning of some medical words. For example, the word 'humerus' was not found in the paper dictionary they were using. The strategy they preferred was looking at pictures or charts to find out the meaning. With some medical words, it was difficult to give an explanation in English, so the best thing to do was to give the equivalent in Arabic.

6.4 Beyond CSR

Students were able to build on the structure of CSR as well to gain other collaborative skills which were useful in approaching group reading. The following subsection discusses these collaborative skills.

6.4.1 Dynamism of group work

An important pattern of teaching practice which emerged from cycle one was the active interaction of members in their groups. Each member was assigned a different role and a specific task to work on which helped them to develop their interactional skills. The dynamism of group work encouraged students' participation regardless of their individual differences in learning personalities or cognitive learning styles. For example, students were working on finding the main ideas of a text to practice get the gist strategy. They had to tell what is good or bad for health.

Extract 8:

Ahmed: was reading, cocoa

Hamad: what is it?
Ahmed: cocoa like cola or it might be kind of drug
All laughed
Hamad: asked the teacher, what is it
Teacher: a dark powder you find in hot chocolate for instance, (still not clear, translate to Arabic)
Adel: yes I think it is good, it is delicious
Fahad: yes it is good,
Ahmed: because it has antioxidants
Adel: translate antioxidants into Arabic (الكاوكاو) /alkaokao/

By considering the positive relationship between the members, it can be seen that all students worked together actively in an interactive process. They all took turns and knew when and how to begin and end the conversation with an agreement. They also enjoyed tutoring others although their answer was not always right. No one was passive; they all got involved in the process of learning by seeking the assistance from other members or from the teacher, who acted as a facilitator and intervened only to aid smooth learning. The interactional dynamics of the group work reduced my role as a teacher over the class as I became more like a facilitator or consultant. Changing my dominant role might not be possible if there is no group work.

However, a colleague who attended some of my classes to observe my teaching and how students were involved in the group work provided me with the following comment: when I was moving around the class I spent more time with some groups than with others. That behaviour, in his opinion, might give the feeling to some students that the teacher overlooked them because their responses to his questions were not right and therefore the teacher did not appreciate their answers. I justified myself that it would be hard to treat all students equally because good students would interact with what I was saying more frequently. Less confident students kept silent and preferred to interact with the members of groups and learn from more capable peers. But if they asked any questions, I would be happy to answer them. Moreover, good students might find it boring to keep tutoring others all the time. As a result, they sometimes interacted with the teacher to learn new things and challenge themselves. While students work in groups they solve any problem a member encounters, but if good students in the group find difficulty in solving certain problems and no one can tackle them, they need to fix them quickly by asking the teacher.

6.4.2 Being organisational

Students learnt over time to be more organised when working together. This pattern took different forms such as working within the time frame and acting in different roles. Tompson Issa (2009) stresses the essential role of adopting organisational skills by adults and state:

> Teaching and learning is all about organisation, so the framework is already there. Teaching organisational skills is mainly about finding ways to make the implicit explicit. (Tompson Issa, 2009, p. 17)

The following excerpt is an example of how students became more aware of time as they completed a given task. I gave them two minutes to answer some questions quickly by looking at some pictures.

Extract 9:

> *Fahad: (looking at his watch) hurry up guys, one minute left, what is the first question*
> *Muhammad: I think they are friends*
> *Ahmed: ok, what is the next answer?*

When students keep reminding each other of what they should do, learning is aided by implementing such procedural instruction. In a dominated- teacher classroom students are used to receiving instructions from one source, whereas in group work students give and receive different instructions from each other. This might help students to feel more

comfortable to work within a structured framework when they hear instructions from their friends rather than receiving them from teacher. Another point, I often found critical, was that students became more aware of which strategies they had to use every time. Although the objectives of tasks were known by students, for instance, the purpose of an activity was to practice the get the gist strategy, there were other strategies which supported students' reading comprehension.

In extract 10, students were working on identifying the main idea of the reading text; they had to choose one answer out of three:

> *Kahled: I do not think the first answer is correct, it is short*
> *Muhammad: I think number two is the best answer*
> *Abdullah: yes, look at the last sentence in the essay, the main idea is there*

Here, students were engaged in more critical reading to find out the main idea. They came to know the correct answer by analysing the sequence of the reading text. They read the last sentence instead of reading the full text to grasp the main idea, which usually offers what the passage is about.

6.4.3 Being empathetic

What is meant by this is that students were found to be more tolerant and empathetic listeners when working with each other. Such behaviour encouraged learners to take part in the discussion, especially less active ones. The following excerpt shows how a student appreciated others' points of view and found polite ways to express his disagreement.

Extract 11:

> *Khaled: I think new inventions can help in making our life easier*
> *Bader: yes, that is right, I agree with you, mm but how*
> *Salem: ok, using computer can save our time but sometimes it can prevent us from being more creative. For example, people will be more reliant on new technology. If you are an artist, you will lose your job because companies can use computer programmes to draw things.*

Here, it seems that Bader was not as good as Salem who patiently explained to him the advantages and disadvantages of new technology. It is clear that CSR enabled students to change their belief about group work and the learning process as a whole. Some students' responses to the interviews before trying out CSR showed that learning should take place in a competitive mode which contradicts with group work. If they tell the others about the right answers, teacher might give marks to the ones they told.

6.4.4 Giving feedback

Providing constructive feedback from sources other than the teacher was another pattern of behaviour which students were involved in when discussing different issues. Receiving feedback helped students to be clear about their learning progress.

In the following example, students in the same group were arguing about the value of installing more speed cameras in high streets.

Extract: 12

> *Fahad: I think such system is nothing but money making or stealing*
> *Muhammad: but this system saves people's life and saves money as well. I do not think as you said stealing*
> *Muhammad: got my point?*
> *Fahad: how they save money and if you do not pay in due time they double the fine*
> *Muhammad: they do so because they want to prevent you not to do that*

It is clear that Muhammad was trying to correct Fahad's point of view without making that personal. Muhammad focussed on his wordings and not on his intention and made sure that he understood his point. In another example, a Sa'ad did not say that Badar was wrong. However, he indicated that there was a mistake and let Sa'ad to find it out himself.

Extract 13:

> *Sa'ad: it is better that parents prevent a child from playing.*
> *Badar: the question was about is it right or wrong that children get something without taking permission?*
> *Sa'ad: oh sorry I think parents should be strict with their children*

Giving feedback from other group members was also found in group work activities. For instance, students were reporting their answers to the class, Fahad was from group B and wanted to answer this question 'what is the main idea of the second paragraph?'

Extract 14:

> *Fahad: we do not know*
> *Ali: we know the title of the topic but…*
> *Teacher: any answer from group A?*
> *Muhammad: people live together in large houses*
> *Hamad: the answer in line 52, the first sentence*

6.5 The Success of the intervention

I developed a reading test and administered it to students at the end of the intervention (see Appendix Ten). Because I knew from their previous performance that they were poor achievers as they were all failed students, I did not give them a pretest. The items of the test were designed to probe the four reading aspects of reading comprehension that conformed to each of the CSR strategies, namely their ability to contextualise a passage through previewing, their ability to solve problems around difficult vocabulary, their ability to understand the key points in the passage and their gain on overall grasp of the piece and finally their ability to summaries the main points and create questions about the reading matter. In the light of the results gained from the test, there was a remarkable difference in students' achievements and on the whole they were able to do answer questions well (see Appendix Fourteen).

The results of the test gain more significance when considered alongside what students said about CSR in the questionnaire which investigated the students' attitudes toward the intervention. The sample size was 15 students who filled in the questionnaire. Although their responses should be viewed with caution as they were likely to want to please me by giving a positive response, what they said did accord with my observations of them at work during the course. The questions posted by the questionnaire can be grouped under these four headings:

1- What are the students' attitudes toward collaborative strategic reading?

2- How does collaborative strategic reading improve reading comprehension?

3- To what extent does collaborative strategic reading promote active learning?

4- How does collaborative strategic reading help students to acquire new strategies for solving problems?

A global analysis across the group to items in the questionnaire shows that 257 responses showed a positive attitude towards CSR as opposed to 28 responses were against CSR.

By triangulating data collected from interviews carried out prior to the intervention, it becomes clear how students benefited from CSR and changed some of their previous attitudes. For example, while most students indicated that they tried to stay focussed and re-read the difficult text again, all students except two reported that CSR helped them to

read in a better way and improve their reading comprehension. Another example is that by triangulating their motivation here with their motivation they were asked about in the semi structured interviews before deploying CSR, students became more motivated and relaxed to learn English. They tended to be more open to express themselves and get their ideas across. CSR enabled students to foster good communication skills such as having mutual understanding when working with others and appreciating others' points of view. The positive responses were given to items related to timing and effort as students thought that they need more time to work on different tasks and more effort as well. Students believed even after employing CSR they still needed the help of the teacher when they got stuck, which is normal. In CSR, while students work in groups, teacher should go around and provide guidance and help all the time even if students do not ask his help. Based on my observations, students sometimes get off track and start talking about irrelevant topics. Therefore, teacher has to keep an eye on all groups.

With regard to items indicating students' attitudes after implementing the four strategies, most replies were in favour of using CSR. For example, most students agreed that using get the gist strategy was helpful for global understanding. On the other hand, some students disagreed that this strategy was useful for handling specific details. However, few students did not give positive answers to some items of the four strategies.

In response to items about using wrap up strategies, few students did not agree that practicing wrap up had facilitated their reading comprehension. That is was noticeable in the results of the reading test given after the intervention. The learning log sheet corroborated this as well. When students were asked to write down five sentences to summarise the whole text, most students did not write anything. Some students told me that discussing issues orally is much easier than writing because writing required paying attention to spelling, grammar as well as the content knowledge.

Three items were used to see how students assessed their performance after implementing CSR. The lower marks of positive replies were given to item 31 which showed the students' needs to depend on the vocabulary in order to approach the text. The highest number of responses was given to the way of reading that is by the help of

CSR students were able to increase rates of reading without reducing comprehension. This is because some strategies like previewing gave some familiarity to the text so that students read words as chunks rather than individual words. With regard to the application of CSR to other subjects other than reading, 5 responses did not support the idea that CSR could be applicable to any subject except reading.

Few items investigated the problems of CSR. Most students repeated the same worries they referred to in the semi-structured interviews carried out before the intervention. These worries included timing and participation of all members in the group. The main worry was given to the role of each member in his group. The majority preferred to stick to one role when working on different activities. One possible explanation is that the leader role, which was the most important role, was often chosen by good students while some roles such as reporter or time keeper did not require much knowledge and involvement.

Students also mentioned what strategies they preferred to adopt to find out the meaning of difficult words. For dealing with new words, most students preferred to figure out the meanings in context, make use of the contextual clues and almost half of them supported using a dictionary. When students learn meanings in contexts that means they cease to define reading in its narrowest sense in the form of individual words to include more global understanding. Using contextual clues and words in context were found in click and clunk and previewing strategies. This might give an indication that students were in favour of dealing with lexical meanings rather that depending on grammatical meanings. In comparison, in the questionnaire distributed before the intervention most students preferred translation to discover the meanings of unknown words. Similarly, in the interviews carried out before the intervention a typical answer for tackling new vocabulary was provided by this quotation 'I try to translate all the time; I underline difficult words and look for their meanings' (interview, Adel,27, 2, 10) .

Finally the questionnaire sought out the different strategies students liked to implement to improve their vocabulary. All respondents gave a positive answer to item three that they preferred to focus on high frequency words, synonyms and antonyms. However, the issue of appropriateness should be taken into account when dealing with words. The reason lies in the fact that some words which are taught or learnt for specific purposes

may not be seen as frequent for general settings. Yet, students need to learn less common vocabulary needed for their academic and professional lives. In reply to the item of the preferred strategy, almost half the responses did not prefer using crosswords as a strategy for getting new words. An apparent reason is that most students are not familiar with crosswords in their culture which is Arabic in this respect.

The results of questionnaire clearly indicated how students come to change their learning norms after CSR when compared with the interview prior to the intervention.

6.5.1 Changing views about group work

Students showed an ability to examine and evaluate their beliefs, attitudes and assumptions by practicing new strategies of learning. This is confirmed by their changed attitudes to group work. The process of evaluation led them to see group work as a useful technique for learning. For example, students were asked this question, as part of an interview carried out before teaching: 'do you think working in groups is different from working individually? How?' Some answers were negative because students saw group work as a waste of time as students would be less focussed and helpful for good students. Students came to change their minds after implementing collaborative strategic reading and general perceptions of CSR were mostly positive. For instance, students all agreed that CSR motivates students to work collaboratively and help each other. They also all agreed that CSR is useful in classes with mixed levels. Another important factor relates to students' modifications for reading habits. While all students were exploiting inappropriate or no specific strategies for reading like underlining and translating difficult words, their learning logs showed that they could answer comprehension questions without knowing all the words by guessing the meaning and using fix up strategies. Finally, students who initially saw teachers as the only and reliable source of learning, considered themselves as part of the process of learning as well. The long discussion helped them to gain the skill of judging themselves. Students explored how they learn by using their personal reactions to things that happen in groups and therefore they became independent learners. In the traditional way of teaching, teachers were supposed to do everything in the classroom, but with CSR students they were asking questions, checking their understanding and giving feedback on what they were doing.

6.6 Evaluating the intervention

The findings gained from this cycle allowed me to initiate and plan a second action cycle- a revised intervention of my action research project. I took into consideration what went right and wrong in order to improve the quality of classroom practices in the second phase and bring about change.

The CSR intervention was successful in that the students succeeded where before they had failed in the department's official examination. Prior to the intervention, only five individual students scored pass marks on the department exam. Although I was not able to access students' marks from the department's official exam, they all did well and passed. The field observation, the test results and the interviews made it clear that students attributed this in part to the individual use of the strategies that they had practised collectively. As CSR involved deploying reading strategies socially, social constructivist theory suggests that learning takes place when what has been done socially is able to be done individually. Vygotskian learning theory (1978) emphasises that individuals can learn better when interacting with more capable peers. After that they can work alone because they have received guidance and support needed for promoting learning. The various tests showed that students were able to carry their social (group work) reading strategies over into the individual setting of the test and examination. For example, students were able to add information, provide alternatives and develop communication skills. The questionnaire distributed at the end of the remedial course indicated that students' general perceptions after implementing CSR were positive. They all agreed that CSR enhanced active involvement and helped them to be part of the process of learning. However, some problems related to the roles given to each member in the group would be considered in the second cycle. Most students preferred to stay to one role every time because some roles required more engagement than others. The role of the time keeper, for example, would not be as crucial as the role of leader. I would choose the role for each member myself. When I gave the freedom to students they preferred to sit with their friends outside the classroom and avoid choosing the leader role. They might think that the leader should be the best student in the group.

 Students' interest in the curriculum was another concern I examined. Students were more interested in studying relevant (ESP English for Specific or Special Purposes) texts. They were more active and showed more interest while dealing with different topics. For this reason, I would continue teaching medical reading and devote more time for that to engage students' interest in their learning. However, the level of the book, both the prescribed book for teaching reading comprehension and the medical book, were either below or above the level of the students. Before teaching the remedial class, I had been told that all students had failed and were low achievers. Hence, the department assigned a pre-intermediate level book assuming that all students had the same level. As I started teaching I noticed that most students found the topics and activities more or less easy. They found ways to avoid the lesson either by chatting or reading something irrelevant. On the other hand, the level of the medical readings was too difficult for students. In cycle two, I considered this issue and chose a beginning level book for teaching medical texts. For the prescribed book, I was not able to change the book but I discussed this matter with the head of the department. Besides, in the second phase, I decided to give students a pre-test at the beginning of the course and a post-test at the end. The difference of the scores of the two tests would help to gauge the achievement of students and relate it to the intervention.

6.6.1 Problems with CSR

Where the intervention seemed successful, it was because students' group work was successful. However, there were ways in which the way they worked in a group might have been improved. Would more explicit training in working as a group, specifically in the language of group work, be helpful in taking this forward? There was a concern about the patterns of communication in which students used the language while they were working in groups. Karen, (1995) proposes that there are some factors which directly affect the roles that students play in each task and the type of language they produce, such as the instructional goals and how conflicts among students are tackled. Karen (1995) refers to the cognitive benefits found in the nature of the language students generate stating:

> When students work collaboratively in groups they are more likely to engage in exploratory talk and, thus, use language to learn as opposed to merely demonstrate what has been learnt. (Karen, 1995, p.113)

In some cases students agreed with a member in the group and started building up knowledge based on his ideas but in uncritical way. Nevertheless, the discussion often lacked depth as they did not ask him questions that required giving reasons and reflection. Further, the results of the reading test given to students at the end of the intervention showed that students scored fewer marks when answering questions related to previewing and wrap up strategies. These two strategies required students to argue a lot to support their ideas. For example, a question such as 'do you buy generic items? Why or why not?' Students had to argue about this question, share their experiences and provide their reasons. By improving the quality of discussions, this would help students to talk more critically and constructively when they read and do better in the previewing and wrap up strategies. This led me to analysing the quality of the group work, which I was able to do because I had recorded and transcribed it. On a few occasions, students' talk was not seen as productive at all. They tended to disagree with each other without solving or providing alternatives to certain problems. It follows that the conversations were left open.

The following extract, for instance, shows clearly this kind of talk. Students were trying to describe some photos:

Extract 15:

> *Ali: what do you think those people doing?*
> *Hamad: fishing, I suppose*
> *Ali: no they all talk and enjoy their time*
> *Adel: they seem to be on trip*

It is salient that every member gave a different answer without saying why he thought so. This did not appear to be productive. In other conversations, another type of talk was identified in which students were building on others' answers, which was more productive but still lacked being constructive and critical. The following extract is an example for this type:

Extract 16:

> *Fahad: fruits and vegetables are good for mental health*
> *Muhammad: and physical health*
> *Hamad: yes enough food*
> *Adel: doing exercise*

In the above conversation, it seems that students were in full agreement with each other but there was no critical reasoning. Fahad initiated the talk and the rest added to what he had said. No one asked him about his answer or justified it. However, Hamad's contribution entailed that Fahad and Muhammad's answers were not accurately correct. Hamad suggested that enough food is good for mental and physical health which implied that too much food was not good. A final type of talk seemed to be more productive and exploratory but took take place the least. The two speakers were negotiating the value of a system of installing speed cameras.

Extract 17:

> *Fahad: I think such system is nothing but money making or stealing*
> *Muhammad: but this system saves people's life and saves money as well. I do not think as you said stealing*
> *Muhammad: got my point?*
> *Fahad: how they save money and if you do not pay in due time they double the fine*
> *Muhammad: they do so because they want to prevent you not to do that*

The flow of the above conversation was more likely purposeful and incomplete because every speaker was trying to state his point of view with justifications. Fahad was against such a system and Muhammad supported it. Fahad and Muhammad gave their reasons but when Muhammad made sure that his message got across the conversation continued and needed more critical engagement. This analysis of group talk corroborates a body of research that has taken place in a variety of educational settings.

Therefore, in cycle two I continued with implementing CSR and integrated it with group work training based on the idea of exploratory talk. Exploratory talk would help students to construct knowledge and agree or disagree with others, but in a more critical and constructive way.

6.7 What is exploratory talk?

Douglas Barnes (1976) is considered the first to coin the term 'exploratory talk' in his seminal book 'From Communication to Curriculum'. Barnes distinguishes between two kinds of talk: presentational talk in which speakers give a short prepared answer, and process or exploratory talk. Exploratory talk is described by Barnes as 'frequent hesitations, rephrasing, false starts and changes of direction (Barnes, p.28). Barnes (2008) points out that while in presentational talk the focus of speakers is on a listening

audience, in exploratory talk the focus of speakers is directed to how they organise their ideas and thoughts. Mercer (2000) notices the strong relationship between language and thought and the need to comprehend the context of each talk to see how people use language together in order to make meaningful senses. However, he adds that little attention has been paid to the role played by collective thinking and its ability to build new understanding and solve problems. Talk is divided into three main types; disputational, cumulative and exploratory. In disputational talk, speakers are involved in individual disagreement, with short answers and the talk seems to be pointless. In cumulative talk, speakers are involved in a conversation and building their thought on others' ideas but not in critical way. In exploratory talk 'partners engage critically but constructively with each others' ideas' (Mercer, 2000, p.98).

The value of exploratory talk is based on the ideas of Vygotsky (1978) of sociocultural perspective to cognitive development, who points out that the relationship between learning and development should be tackled first in order to sort out the problems which might emerge in the educational settings (see section,3.2.10) .

6.7.1 Exploratory talk in the classroom

Many studies have examined the effect of exploratory talk in different educational settings. Webb and Treagust (2006) examined the impact of exploratory talk on learners. They noticed that students did better in the exam, were able to use authentic language by getting involved in meaningful discussion and they improved their problem-solving and reasoning skills as well. Sutherland (2006) conducted another study to investigate the usefulness of exploratory talk in English lessons. She concluded that by practising exploratory talk students developed higher-cognitive processes by being more focussed while engaging in the talk and asking different higher-order questions. Robins (2011) found that students who implemented exploratory talk, were more confidence in their answers and able to transfer their problem-solving and reasoning skills to other learning settings.

Another study was carried out by Rojas-Drummond and Peon Zapata (2004) to investigate the effect of exploratory talk as a learning tool on primary Mexican students to improve their collective reasoning and problem-solving strategies. They concluded that with adequate training, exploratory talk promoted the argumentative capacities, problem-solving capacities as well as knowledge construction.

Chapter Seven

Second Intervention: First year group

7.1 Introduction

Like chapter five, this chapter describes and analyses the deployment of Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) to teach reading comprehension, this time with a group of first year students. With this group however there was an additional intervention of introducing the students to the notion of exploratory talk, to improve the quality of the group work. It follows a similar structure, first identifying the reading strategies used by students at the start of the course, then analysing the way that both reading and talk developed during the intervention and finally examining the impact on the students at the end of the course. The findings were drawn from similar sources to those used in the remedial programme: audio taped semi-structured interviews to explore students' reading habits, video and audio recordings of the students' interactions while reading, field notes, questionnaire surveys of attitudes to reading distributed at the end of the course, and the results of a reading comprehension test, which was taken both before and after the course.

7.2 Reconnaissance with the first year group

7.2.1 Contextualisation

The participants of the second phase were all first year students who had just joined the Medical College. Most students came from the same social and educational background. They had studied general English for six years at intermediate and secondary public schools. Their ages ranged between 18 and 20 years. They had been taught by university graduates (BA holders) who were Saudi, and other native speakers of Arabic. However, at least two students had different school educational experiences. Their parents were well paid hospital doctors who had sent their students to good private schools in the country or for short English courses abroad. The first year is part of the pre-professional phase which high school graduates have to take before they go on the professional medical phase of their education. It lasts for three semesters and includes intensive English courses and basic science courses (chemistry, physics, biology, Arabic and religion). In English, each semester contains academic reading and vocabulary, communication skills and language structure and drills. All students are required to pass the pre-professional programme in order to be able to pursue their study.

7.2.2 Strategies for Reading

7.2.2.2. Comprehension versus memorisation

Students were more likely to view reading as a memorisation process than a comprehension one suggesting that the educational system students came from gives predominance to lecturing, and consequently students see their role as to sit and listen and then to memorise the information. In the interviews, for instance, there were similar responses which gave priority to memorisation over understanding. For example, Omar pointed out the role of memorisation in reading 'I understand reading better by listening to those who read. I like to listen more than to read and try to retain the ideas' (interview, Omar, 26, 9, 2010). Like Omar, Basel gave another way which is based mainly on memorization 'I close the book and try to remember the main things, and write them down' (interview, Basel, 26, 9, 2010). Memorisation as a tool for comprehension raises the question of what is the amount of information students will be able to memorise or at least, will students be able to retain the most important ideas of the text. It is true that some students have good memories, but memorisation cannot guarantee understanding. The process of retrieving information may result in some sort of confusion with the already stored information. That is to say, some pieces of information may be easily understood in the short memory but in the long run they may be hardly remembered.

7.2.2.3. Dealing with unknown words

How students handle difficult vocabulary was another way of looking at how they define reading comprehension. In the interviews, they intimated though that translation does not assure comprehending the text. Muhammad referred to his inability to understand 'I am unable to understand the meaning of some sentences although I translated the meaning of difficult words in the text' (interview, Muhammad, 26, 9, 2010). One possible reason is the way teachers tend to teach reading comprehension with a heavy emphasis on the word level. In one of the book written for Arab students, Alkhuli (1996) defines intensive reading as

> The purpose of intensive reading is to teach new words and new patterns……in preparation for intensive reading, the teacher presents to the class unfamiliar words and unfamiliar patterns. (Alkhuli, 1996, p.66)

Some students connect meaning with pronunciation. In the following extract, a student refers to pronunciation and compares it to Arabic.

If I do not know the meaning of a word, I try to pronounce it
I try to read quickly, the reading text is always long,
I do not know I move on but at least I finish reading (Interview Sa'oud, 26, 9,
2010).

It is clear from this excerpt that the student did not know any useful way to figure out the meaning of difficult words such as paying close attention to the surroundings or using punctuation marks. Focusing on pronunciation might be of value in Arabic to figure out the meaning of difficult words.

Familiarity of content plays an important role in approaching the reading text but difficulties are made worse when students stop reading because of the unfamiliarity of the text. Adel pointed out this clearly 'before I read, I look at the title and words if they are familiar to me, if they are not; I stop reading because I know that I will not understand anything' (interview, Saleh, 26, 9, 2010).

A few students defined reading by paying attention to the grammatical relations in order to understand the meaning of the unknown words. Rashed described the way he tended to read by saying 'when I read I look at the part of speech for unknown words and try to figure out the problematic meaning' (interview, Rashed, 26, 9, 2010). Syntactic cues are important for understanding the reading text and some authorities urge teachers to teach students to be aware of the grammatical signals by doing more drills and exercises (Al-Mutawa and Kailani, 1998). However, Gascoigne (2005) maintains that focusing on only grammatical competence to comprehend the text in a word to word fashion is a strategy used by poor readers. Instead, more skilled readers rely more on finding out meaningful relations to and within the materials to process reading. Sometimes the grammatical relations cannot indicate the meaning of words. For example, if a student knows that the word 'fruitful' is an adjective; it is not necessarily the case that he knows what it means. Words carry meaning when they are used in context, not in isolation. As Cook (2008, p.54) comments 'words do not exist by themselves, however, but are always in relationship to other words'.

7.2.2.4. Absence of dialogue between the text and the reader

Another angle of examining how students read is by looking at how they communicate with the text. From the the interviews, when Abdullah was asked about how he preferred to read he reported 'I try to read quickly by reading a lot and try to translate

unknown words' (interview, Rashed, 26,9,2010). Abdullah's reply indicates clearly that he did not interact with the text in a way that allowed him to exchange his ideas and thoughts with the writer.

Aebersold and Field (1997) suggest that reading is not just a matter of looking and identifying meaning from written symbols. It is the construction of the meaning in a two-way process via interaction. Aebersold and Field observe

> The text and the reader are the two physical entities necessary for the reading process to begin. It is, however, the interaction between the text and the reader that constitutes actual reading. (Aebersold and Field, 1997, p.15)

7.2.2.5. Focusing on written materials

In the interview, Salem indicated clearly how some students defined reading as a process of word identification, focusing on only graphical clues 'I use (تهجئة), /tahg'ah/ which means recognising the sound of each letter individually and then combine all letters together' (interview, Salem, 26,9,2010). Saleh gave similar method and replied 'before reading I preview vocabulary used in the text' (interview, Saleh, 26, 9, 2010). The way of previewing vocabulary led to an additional problem found in Muhammad's reply. Muhammad claimed that what worried him most before and while reading were having long words in the text (interview, Muhammad, 26, 9, 2010).Nevertheless, the letter method prevents students from reading globally, that is, reading larger units at a glance instead of focusing on cutting words into individual letters. More importantly, due to the differences between Arabic and English, students are more likely to experience some problems related to the English spelling/sound system. For example, in Arabic, the sound /p/ does not exist in the Arabic sounds system. Instead Arab students will pronounce it by resorting to the nearest sound which is /b/ sound. This will lead to having mispronunciation.

There was not a single response which gave an indication that students, apart from written print, made use of the text structure, punctuation marks or even pictures to deepen their understanding of the written materials.

<u>7.2.2.6. Reading aloud</u>

In the interviews some students said that they derived their definition of the process of reading from their teachers at intermediate and high schools. Students appreciate the role of being aware to pronounce words in reading. For example, Muhammad stated that 'I like to study by reading aloud, and then I see if I can pronounce all words'. When he was asked for the reason, he replied 'this what we do in the classroom, the teacher asks some students to read one or two sentences, when I read aloud I can understand better, I connect what I hear with my understanding' (interview,Muhammad,26, 9, 2010). Abdurhman gave a similar reply and added that 'like in Arabic, I underline the unknown words and leave them till I finish reading and then try to pronounce them aloud and check their meaning' (interview,Abdurhman,26, 9, 2010).

Although reading aloud is good for students to know how to pronounce letters and words accurately, it has its pitfalls. For example, reading aloud will slow reading speed in general because students are obliged to stop after each difficult word to pronounce and repeat it again and again. Even if they are able to pronounce each word correctly, reading aloud will limit their eye span when reading and therefore lead to slow reading. Another important pitfall is at what level correct pronunciation is achieved. Is it at the individual phonemic level or at the sound manipulation level such as the awareness of adding, deletion and so on and so forth. This might be attributed to the influence of the mother tongue. From the early stages, students recite the noble Quran loudly and word by word. By the same token, if students are able to read words will this guarantee comprehension. Huang (2006) states

> In an oral reading situation, if word identification precedes meaning identification, the reader is probably lost and he is unable to recall what he was reading. Since reading is for information and for meaning, the reader should get messages conveyed through the text rather than to read word for word. (Huang, 2006, p. 81)

According to Huang the words are just the medium that conveys the intended messages. The focus has to be placed on the text as a whole. If the emphasis is only on recognising the individual words, there will be a high possibility that the message will not get across.

7.2.2.7 Teacher as a source of knowledge

Many students preferred asking the teacher because they think he or she is the only reliable source of knowledge. This can be illustrated in the following quote:

> *I prefer asking my teacher, he has more expertise, my classmates look like me they come to learn, and they might provide me with the wrong answer (interview, Abdullah, 26, 9, 2010).*

Abdullah seemed not to ask his friends because he believed that they had nothing to offer. They are all at the same level which means they all share the same learning obstacles. Bader agreed with Abdullah and added another person to be asked 'I try myself to fix it if I failed I ask my teacher or my older brother, that is all' (interview, Basel, 26, 9, 2010). On the other hand, when asking Sa'oud that teachers cannot be available all the time to answer his questions, he replied ' yes, but for some courses especially English and maths I look for tutors who come to my home' (interview, Sa'oud, 26, 9, 2010). However, when Sa'oud was confronted by whether or not he asked his friends for help, he was hesitant but then stated that sometimes he asked them only before the exam to discuss the expected questions (interview Sa'oud, 26, 9, 2010).

7.2.2.8 Self-awareness of the used strategy

Being aware of which strategy to be used has a major implication to learning Similarly, in the interviews most students' responses showed that they were not sure about what strategies they were using for studying different subjects in general and in reading comprehension in specific. Abdullah, for example in an interview made it clear that he was being asked for the first time about his way of studying and had given it little thought beforehand 'what you mean by studying, when, do you mean preparing for exam or doing homework'. He added 'I study the main points the teacher explained at home and repeat reading important points' (interview, Abdurhman, 26, 9, 2010). Meshal gave the most unexpected answer 'give me some options so that I can answer your questions, nothing in my mind right now, I know how to read but how I do not know how that happen'. Finally Meshal explained how he reads but in a mechanical way that is, he starts from left to right and then pauses after each sentence (interview, Meshal, 26, 9, 2010). Two students said that they read by starting from the beginning, but when they were asked 'how', no one reported that he reads the title first (interview, Muhammad and Saleh 26, 9, 2010). Similarly, Basel reported that he needed to speed up his reading

so that he can catch up everything in the text. However, by asking him how he can do so, he replied 'by reading a lot' (interview, Basel, 26, 9, 2010).

According to Rubin et al., (2007) in order for students to become more successful, they should be conscious about their learning strategies which facilitate the learning process. Like the above responses, Omar gave this answer 'I study by opening the book and start reading, sometimes I read the questions at the end of each lesson and look for their answers from the text' (interview, Omran, 26, 9, 2010). Another response is a frequent reply to students' preference of studying, 'I underline difficult words, and then write them in a separate sheet, after that I translate them and go back to the text (interview, Sa'oud, 26, 9, 2010).

Although there were some good strategies students used such as highlighting some pieces of information and taking notes, these strategies were not implemented well in the appropriate situation. The process of reading was stopped because the student needed to first look for difficult words, underline them, writing them in a separate sheet and finally look up a dictionary for translating unknown words. The students had to reread from the beginning to connect ideas and make sense of the text every time. The reason for not having certain and clear strategies for tackling reading breakdowns may be attributed to the fact that most if not all students had not received any training on reading strategies. Only one student mentioned that he received training but in Arabic. Muhammad described the training as 'the presenter gives us an Arabic text then we have to look at it as one picture, when I asked him about his view, he replied 'in my opinion it works if you have many words' (interview, Muhammad, 26, 9, 2010). Poor learners might feel frustrated because they do not know how to perform like good learners, and strategies good learners make use of. However, due to the nature of Arabic, reading in English is different from Arabic. For example, Al-kulafi (2012) asserts that (الطلاقة)/ atalaka/ which is translated into English as fluency is essential for creative reading. She defines 'fluency' as the ability to generate high numbers of alternatives, synonyms, ideas and techniques, to solve problems while reading. In other words, fluency is about the strategies to be used when encountering problems. In English fluency is more or less about the ability to read quickly and accurately. Not having enough strategies prevents students from being independent learners as well. One student mentioned that even at home he could not study independently.

> *'I cannot do anything without a tutor, he comes to my home, explains and summarise things' (interview, Saleh, 26, 9, 2010).*

A key element of independent learning is the students' awareness of different learning strategies. According to Cohen (2007) one of the main purposes of learning strategies is making learning more self-directed. Being self-directed means that students should take responsibility for their learning and find different ways to solve learning problems.

One clear factor which led students not to see the importance of reading lies in the fact that reading was not taught as a separate skill at high and intermediate school. It was integrated in one book with the four main skills as well as grammar drill activities. As a result, teachers did not focus on teaching reading comprehension but rather they gave more weigh to building vocabulary and practising grammar (see section 2.2.4). Another reason might be attributed to how reading is looked at in the society and at schools. Students came from a background which historically gives priority to speaking skills over written skills (see section 2.2.5).

7.2.2.9 Failure to solve problems

The importance for these students of having sufficient strategies was underlined by what they said about when they failed to solve problems while studying. Omar, for instance, showed his feelings by saying 'I try many times to understand. If I fail and there is no one who can help me, I start hating the subject, and I do not know what to do' (interview, Omar, 26,9,2010). A similar reply was given by Meshal 'I feel upset, and I leave it for a while till I come down and start again' (interview, Meshal, 26, 9, 2010). Students' failure to handle problems imposes a severe limitation on the learning process. When students stop studying not because they are uninterested or lack confidence but because they lack the appropriate study strategies, it creates a bad feeling toward the subject to be learnt, in this case towards English. This feeling can lead to a direct impact on students' motivation to learn. Brown (1994) asserts the importance of motivation for non-native learners and the need to build, boost and maintain it and he states

> Motivation is probably the most frequently used catch-all term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any complex task. It is easy to figure that success in a task is due simply to the fact that someone is 'motivated. (Brown, 1994, p. 152)

7.2.3 Attitudes towards reading

Students attitudes' toward reading were looked at as well. Rubin et al., (2007) point out that teachers should examine what strategies students have because this might affect their motivation and observes:

> In order to address the issue of motivation, they also explore their students' beliefs about learning and whether they believe that learning occurs as a result of effort, native intelligence, luck, or the systematic application of strategic technique. (Rubin et al., 2007, p.143)

In the interviews, all students said that they had a negative attitude towards reading. Muhammad justified his answer by referring to the issue of interest 'if I am interested in the topic, I never mind to carry on even if the reading text is five pages long, (interview, Muhammad, 26, 9, 2010). Rashed cited another response which clarified his attitude toward reading. Rashed linked reading to exams by stating that he just need reading to read questions in the exam (Interview, Rashed, 26, 9, 2010).

Most students believed that skills in speaking and listening were what they need most to learn English and for their study in general. No response regarded reading as the most needed skill. There are several reasons why students give priority to speaking and writing while reading is lagging behind. First, the status of reading and speaking in the Arabic language, which is the mother tongue of all students, is an essential factor. Second, reading is a receptive skill while speaking and writing are productive skills. It is much easier for teachers and students to monitor and evaluate a productive skill than a receptive one (Macro, 2003). Basel emphasised that speaking was the most important skill and explained 'look at good students at the class they can all speak' (interview, Basel, 26, 9, 2010). Third, students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Therefore, they like to practice their English orally inside the college. Once they can speak in English that means they are good learners. Saleh chose speaking because he seemed to rely on his preferred learning style. Saleh said that he was an auditory learner, that is, he learns best by listening first then interacting with the teacher most of the time (interview, Saleh, 26, 9, 2010). The final reason stems from the assumption that the basis for teaching a foreign language is speaking not writing. Cook (2008) argues that many teaching methods give priority to speaking over writing such as audio-lingual and audio- visual methods as well as the communicative approach. Cook adds that many linguists believe that the written form of language is learnt only after acquiring the spoken form. Few teaching methods treat speaking and writing equally. When

teaching English at the college, some courses were specifically taught by native English speakers (NS), while others by non-native English speakers (NNS). For example, a grammar course was given to a non-native English teacher and a communication skills course to a native English teacher. Students might think that because communication skills are taught by native speakers, that implies that speaking is the most important skill they need in their study.

7.2.4 Attitudes toward group work

Students gave different opinions about group work and its impact as a learning tool. However even those who regarded group work as beneficial thought that it cannot be helpful unless good students give them a chance to participate and accept what they are suggesting. Abdurhman makes this point clear by stating 'I like group work but I know some students in the class are better than me, will they listen to me' (interview, Abdurhman, 26, 9, 2010). Salem looks at group work from a different angle. Sami reported that in group work there are different ideas and different answers – in group work he felt more comfortable to ask as many question as he wanted which would be not possible if he asked the teacher (interview, Salem, 26, 9, 2010).

Sami's reply and his fear of asking the teacher many questions relates to one of the important characteristics of group work. Working in groups enhances a student-centred environment, helps them to feel more comfortable when learning English and gives students more opportunity to learn from each other.

However Muhammad found that group work was not usually well directed 'in group work students always find their ways to chat and waste their time' (interview, Muhammad, 26, 9, 2010). Simply put, students implemented different reading strategies depending on the way they were taught and their own definitions of reading comprehension. It is not surprising then that students had negative feelings toward reading and to some extent towards group work.

7.3 Implementing Collaborative strategic reading with training in exploratory tal

7.3.1 Introducing CSR

As with the remedial group, I started by explaining CSR and its strategies to the whole class. I wrote the four strategies (previewing, click and clunk, get the gist and wrap up) on the board after choosing a topic from students' book to work on as an example. The

first strategy was considered a before reading activity, while the second and third were during activities, and the fourth strategy were regarded as an after reading activity. I used modelling and role play to explain what was meant by each strategy. After that students were assigned specific roles to act while working in groups and asked to use the four strategies.

However, I was required to stick much more closely to the prescribed text book than when I was teaching the remedial group. In the remedial programme there was only one group at the college, while in the pre professional programme there were two other groups aside from mine, and I was required to ensure that the different groups' curricula were similar. For example, in the students' book there were some activities which more or less had nothing to do with implementing CSR such as reviewing grammatical rules or previewing vocabulary about the reading text by just checking the words students knew. The former two examples were regarded as before reading activities. Yet, in the previewing strategy, students had to activate their predictions about the topic and make use of their background knowledge in general rather than focusing on reviewing specific grammatical items or knowing words.

Nevertheless, there was a significant advantage of such constraints. Whilst, the constraints put on me to teach the course according to the text book made the overt teaching of CSR more difficult, it had the effect that CSR and with it exploratory talk were more fully integrated into data activities.

7.3.2 Introducing Exploratory Talk

At the beginning, I presented to the class what is meant by exploratory talk, why it is most effective for learning and how exploratory talk is operationalised. The introduction of exploratory talk included the three kinds of talk suggested by Mercer (2000) i.e., disputational, cumulative and exploratory talk. I then asked them to decide on a ground rule sheet they will be using while talking together. The ground rules were translated into Arabic and written on the blackboard. After that I reviewed and evaluated the ground rules with students and the ways we should work on to improve the talk and help them to speak productively. Ground rules were a set of regulations that make a framework students have to work within while talking. Mercer (2008) identifies the value of ground rules:

> Ground rules for talk are important: they reflect the need for social order of a certain kind to be maintained in classrooms, and the teacher's responsibility for ensuring that the talk and other activity follow an appropriate, curriculum-relevant agenda and trajectory. (Mercer, 2008, p.3)

The following table show these rules which were adapted from Grugeon and Hubbard (2006, p. 245).

Table 7.1: Ground rules

- everyone in the group is encouraged to contribute;
- contributions are treated with respect;
- reasons are asked for;
- everyone is prepared to accept challenges;
- alternatives are discussed before a decision is taken;
- all relevant information is shared;
- the group seeks to reach agreement.

I then gave students a topic to discuss together as a training lesson by using the ground rules. After three classes I noticed that most of the talk was cumulative with little exploratory talk. I asked students in the fourth class about exploratory talk and I found out that most if not all students did not understand the meaning of it and what is used for. As a result, I decided to repeat what I had said in Arabic and then I asked them to choose any topic to discuss reminding them not to forget to use the ground rules. My aim of that was some of the concepts I explained were not found in Arabic or they were there with different names. Students started discussing a chosen topic; 'the bad effects of smoking' in groups for 15 minutes. I went around the groups and made sure that they were all taking part.

Finally, we started a whole class discussion and I initiated the talk by asking ' do you think smoking is good or bad, how?' I intentionally raised this question because I did not want to direct the talk and wanted to hear from the other side, who might think that smoking is good. By doing this, students offered different opinions, giving different reasons, building on others' ideas and reflect in a critical way. I wanted to encourage students to explore their ideas and give the opportunity to as many students as I could to

participate, as participation was one of the important modes of exploratory talk. Here are an extract from the training activity.

Extract: 18

> *Omar: I will talk about the bad effects of smoking, smoking is very bad because it causes dangerous diseases like cancer, and some young people think it is connected with manhood*
> *Teacher: what do you thing guys is that right, is smoking a manhood sign?*
> *Salem: no I think that is wrong, this is caused by the influence of movies*
> *Teacher: do you all agree with that if you have something different please say it*
> *Basel: I think that belief is wrong, I want to add that smoking is a way of wasting money you spend 10 Riyals to buy a packet.*

Through the explanation and analysis in Arabic, students understood better what exploratory talk was and were able to operationalise it.

As with CSR the intervention involved continuing to emphasise and to talk about exploratory talk with the students not just to assume that once they had been initiated they would use it unproblematically.

In order to evaluate data gained during and after implementing collaborative strategic reading combined with exploratory talk, I will give some instances of learning that occurred frequently while students were involved in group work practicing CSR. I will also scrutinise data gained from pre-test and post-test given to students before and after the intervention as well as questionnaire I distributed at the end of the term.

7.4 The intervention in process

7.4.1 Introduction

I found it difficult to separate the two interventions i.e., CSR and exploratory talk so that they are analysed together. As described above, in the first week, I introduced CSR and exploratory talk to students and asked them to practice exploratory talk while implementing each single strategy. Although the intentions of the intervention were to improve reading comprehension and quality talk of students, I saw some effect on further reading which impacted on all the study. In this review, data will be analysed to investigate the efficacy of CSR on improving reading comprehension and more specifically by integrating CSR with exploratory talk.

Some recurrent patterns of learning emerged from the data showing how students engaged actively in group work tasks. The focus of analysis will be more on presenting the patterns developed and occurred as a result of implementing exploratory talk in CSR. The following ten sub sections are recurrent patterns found in CSR after I drew on the three types of talk suggested by Mercer (2000) i.e., disputational talk, cumulative talk and exploratory talk.

7.4.1.1 Critical thinking

Students were able to make inferences (read between the lines / look for implied information) to deepen their understanding of what was not directly said by the text. For example, students were reading the following sentence 'however, I became so immersed in the films that I completely lost track of time. When the last movie had finished, I looked down at my watch. It was six o'clock. I was two hours late'. As they were stimulating discussion, the following conversation took place:

Extract: 19

> *Omran: what is immersed mean?*
> *Muhammad: I am not sure, read the surrounding sentences, I think enjoying*
> *Basel: may be' focussed' because he was two hours late*
> *Meshal: may be because he said I lost time.*

The above conversation was an example of how students work while practising click and clunk strategy. Although students did not know the meaning of 'immersed', by critically examining what came after the unknown word, they were able to infer the general meaning which fitted in the context of the sentence. Students processed a few sentences provided in the text in order to find out the meaning of a single word and they gave a rough meaning. They suggested: if someone focuses on something that means he is fascinated or interested in doing it. Another example related to critical thinking is drawn from the following conversation in which students were supposed to contribute to a situation and expect what would happen:

Extract: 20

> *Sa'oud: 'I do not remember this but my relative told me that when I was little I took some chalks and drew some pictures outside the house. My grandfather was the first to see the picture and he……….*
> *Saleh: grandfather, he should be a wise man, he is old*
> *Rashed : that is right, what do you think if he your father*

In the above quote, students were reflective and drew on their previous knowledge to

predict how the situation would turn out. Similarly, students in another discussion made inferences in the form of predictions while using click and clunk strategy. They were reading this sentence 'I have taken a few friends to my sanctuary, but it is not a place I share with many'.

Extract: 21

> *Muhammad: what does sanctuary mean?*
> *Saleh: the title of the passage is 'private lives', it might mean something special*
> *Abdurhman: yes, that right, not a place I share...., it is like (ملجأ)/ malga/ in Arabic which means shelter.*

Muhammad looked at the title out figure out the word 'sanctuary' which students worked on in previewing strategy while Saleh made use of the context and looked at the words around the unknown word.

7.4.1.2 More focussed questions

The following quote reported how students used questions to look for convincing answers. They were discussing the reading by answering some questions to practice get the gist strategy.

Extract: 22

> *Salem : if your grandfather was alive, what he will do?*
> *Muhammad: laughed, he will ask me why I did that*
> *Salem: just like that what comes next?*
> *Muhammad: well, then he will give me a piece of advice.*

Salem did not accept the answer of Muhammad because it did not make sense to him without asking him for more clarification in order to make the situation more meaning focussed. In some situations, exploratory talk enabled students to ask more genuine questions. For example, exploratory talk helped students to change the way they raised questions. Lightbown and Spada (2010) differentiate between two types of questions i.e., display questions and genuine questions when discussing some issues related to teacher-student interaction. Display questions occur when teachers and students ask questions they have answers to in order to see whether or not learners know their answers, while genuine questions occur when teachers and students ask questions they have no answer to in advance. Students were working on previewing strategy.

Extract: 23

> *Basel: it is a kind of car which is run by fuel and diesel at the same time*
> *Teacher: what is its model, I have not heard about that*

Basel: it is Lexus I do not know it number
Basel: but this will not work here in Saudi Arabia because the fuel is still cheaper than most of countries.

In the above conversation it is shown how the students raised questions to which no one already knew the answers to make the talk more fruitful. Another pattern was that Sami himself became more critical to his argument and evaluated what he was saying.

7.4.1.3 Answering questions by questioning them

It was found that students did not accept what was offered in the discussions at face-value in a non-critical way. In some conversations, there were some questions raised which needed to be answered. Students started examining these questions by evaluating or analysing them instead of giving direct answers. In the below conversation, students were discussing the advantages and disadvantages of new technologies.

Extract: 24

Abdurhman: why do not we just make use of new technology in our daily lives? No need to look for its disadvantages
Omran: wait a second, who invented new technologies at first place?
Muhammad: I think that is right because new innovations by inventors led to new technologies.
Abdurhman: look for instance to Photoshop programme, anyone can be an artist.
Omran: but if you compare two pictures drawn by this programme and a real artist, how do you feel?
Sa'oud: of course the real one which has life is the second one; the one drawn by computer has no feeling.

Students evaluated Abdurhman's question which suggested that new technologies were useful at all levels by looking at the issue from different perspectives. Omran asked another question in order to make sense of Abdulla's question. After that, the two members in the group got involved in the discussion and supported Omran's point of view. The repeated use of words 'why, no, how,' shows that students were not in agreement with each other and therefore they tended to challenge others' views. When students co- reason together, they not just test their knowledge but also they become more aware of the development of their understanding (Mercer, 2008). Here is another transcript which might be a good example of how students were engaged in the development of their understanding.

Extract: 25

> *Muhammad : what makes a team successful*
> *Abdullah: mmm every one helping each other*
> *Muhammad; how everyone help each other*
> *Abdurhman: maybe if you have a thought and I have another thought, we put them together*
> *Muhammad: what do you mean by a thought?*
> *Sa'oud : he means ideas that we share*
> *Muhammad: but what if I do not agree with your ideas, can you explain what will you do?*
> *Rashed: I think the team should write don ideas on papers first*
> *Omar: why*
> *Rashed: to have clearer views and start, see what they agree and disagree*
> *Basel: yes, and then they all think together and discuss ideas*
> *Muhammad: ok, that is good*

When students say words like 'maybe' or I think' they know about themselves and the limit of their knowledge. Therefore, they welcome suggestions from others.

7.4.1.4 Active learning

Active learning is another observed pattern which refers to the amount of students' participation in each group and how they perform it. While students were discussing issues, there was a high level of engagement among members for exchanging information and helping each other. Active learning will lead to high quality learning because students can learn much better by doing things themselves, being provided by feedback and taking part in the process of learning (Felder and Brent, 2007). The role of students in the classroom and in reading comprehension activities is central. Nuttall (2005) asserts that reading is more likely learnt than taught by teachers and therefore students should take full responsibility for what they are doing and be active.

In collaborative strategic reading, students engaged in active learning by reading, talking, asking questions and reflecting. For example, the following quote showed how students interacted actively to accomplish a given task while working on get the gist strategy. They were discussing this topic 'is the whole better than the parts'.

Extract: 26

> *Sa'oud: ok what do you think?*
> *Abdurhman: of course many hands are better than one*
> *Sa'oud: no that is not it, it means many groups with many leaders, or one group with only one leader*
> *Omran: it means if something was done by individuals or a group, which one is better*
> *Muhammad: yes, I think parts refers to individuals and whole refer to groups.*

In the following quote students were answering some questions after working in a group by interacting with the teacher which might not have been possible if they were only listeners.

Extract: 27

> *Teacher: ok, is sugar good or bad for your physical and mental health*
> *Salem: it is bad*
> *Muhammad: I think too much sugar is bad, but your body needs it*
> *Teacher: ok if your diabetes for instance*
> *Salem: in some cases it is bad*
> *Saleh: yes, in some cases you can use alternatives*
> *Abdurhman: yes, I agree, the doctor can tell you about your condition*

In the above conversation, all members took part in the conversation and it is obvious how they helped each other to reach the best answer. Students implemented reasoning skills to state their positions which enabled them to discern and make good decision on the issue. Salem and Muhammad started offering their points of view and after asking a question by the teacher all members gauged Muhammad's response and came up with new answers.

7.4.1.5 Giving feedback

Students provided one another with good feedback which included more than just stating their answers. They suggested more alternatives and ways to get their message across. For instance, students were answering a question related to previewing strategy: What makes some teams more successful?

Extract: 28

> *Abdurhman: I think some teams are smarter than others, so they come up with new ideas*
> *Salah: I do not think this is the only reason, they are better because they are planning well.*
> *Abdurhman: how they are planning well?*
> *Salah: maybe they have good leader and active members*
> *Omar: I think good planning start from having clear objectives, any team should write down their objectives clearly on a piece of paper.*

Salah was not only saying that what Abdullah had offered was not enough but he provided some information for more clarification. Salem gave feedback as well and suggested another way which gave further explanation. Ur (2003) refers to two approaches when defining what is meant by feedback and states:

> In assessment, the learner is simply informed how well or badly he or she has performed. In correction, some specific information is provided on aspects of the learner's performance: through explanation or through elicitation of these from the learner. (Ur, 2003, p.110)

The second type i.e., correction is more effective and positive because students can learn from it. The above quote carries two good characteristics of good feedback. On the one hand, Salah was very specific about why he disagreed with Abdullah. On the other hand, the feedback was constructive because Abdullah offered an alternative to Abdulla's point of view.

7.4.1.6 Self-assessment

In a traditional classroom setting, teachers assess students by giving homework, quizzes, tests, or through question-response activities to check students' understanding. However, the most common method that teachers rely on is testing. In collaborative strategic reading students were assessed in different areas by several means. They can be assessed on their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, ideas, reading comprehension and so on. When students work in groups, they act with specific behaviours and follow certain techniques in order to get the most benefit. Such behaviours include the awareness of certain skills such as learning, physical, problem solving, thinking and so on. For assessing different skills, students could be assessed by other members in the groups, by the teacher when going around, by tracking their achievement in the learning log or after finishing the given tasks and sometimes by themselves when they listen to the right answer. The interviews carried out the intervention showed that students' interaction with the text was absent which might resulted in losing the value of on-going assessment.

The process of on-going assessment might lead to changing students' attitudes and feeling toward the subjects being learnt or toward learning in general. If students are happy with the way they are assessed after knowing how to monitor their reading they will be more motivated and know their areas of weakness in the appropriate time. Some of students' responses indicated that they started hating the studied subject simply because they failed to solve some reading problems (interview, Rashed, 26, 9, 2010).

7.4.1.7 Turning personal skills into academic skills

This pattern of behaviour takes place when students draw on their own experiences as a source of knowledge and link them to the classroom as part of deploying previewing strategy. Saleh reflected on past experience and then tried to relate it to the discussion in order to support his view.

Extract: 29

> *Saleh: the new technology might be bad as well, when I was a high student, a friend of mine asked the school's head to give him his certificate, but he was been told that he had to wait for one week because there was a technical problem in the computing system.*

7.4.1.8 Setting clear goals

Exploratory talk did help students to decide on the goals of each talk before starting the talk. In the following conversation students were give a broad topic and they had to limit the focus to practice previewing strategy.

Extract: 31

> *Meshal: ok let start what we will be focusing on?*
> *Omaran: let talk about our neighbourhood*
> *Abdurhman: or what is in neighbourhood,*
> *Omran: the problem of leaking from drainpipes*
> *Salem: let talk about saving the natural environment*
> *Omran: what want you to say?*
> *Salem: for example hunting animals who are endangered*

It is clear how much time students spent to choose the topic for discussion and how they justified their choice. If students were clear about their goals from the beginning, this would lead to clear understanding of the structure and content of the interaction.

7.4.1.9 Informal learning styles

What I mean by this pattern is that students were convincing others by referring to some ways of learning they would not do in the classroom. Students tended to use informal learning styles and strategies to solve problems they encounter and support their points of views. Students in the following example were discussing the application of electronic government.

Extract: 32

> *Omar: how the computer changed everything around us*
> *Muhammad: now computers make our life easier, you can surf the internet at home to look for information about different things you find many new things*

Muhammad told the group about his point of view about computers and used an informal learning strategy i.e., surfing the internet to persuade the others of his argument. Surfing the internet in this respect is regarded as an informal strategy because it is neither structured nor intentional. However, Muhammad could encourage students to implement his strategy of surfing the internet to study independently.

7.4.1.10 Building self-esteem

Shy students are thought to have low self-esteem because they are afraid of making mistakes. The following quote illiterates how Hamad, who told me in the interview that he did not like to speak in front of the class because he was shy, did his best to convey his message after practising exploratory talk within the course .

Students were working on how parents can teach their children some lessons for not behaving well.

Extract: 33

> *Sa'oud: may be his mother ,mmm, do not like that, ere r, the correct way, like punishing him, mmmm it means in Arabic…*

It is clear above that Sa'oud although his poor English how he tried to express himself and the how he switched to using the mother tongue to support his point of view.

7.5 Success of the intervention

Compared to pre test data, students scored high marks in the post test in all questions which probed the four reading strategies (see Appendix Fifteen). Students' achievement improved in the reading test as a cohort. For example, when students know the meaning of key words using contextual clues found in their ability to figure out words in context, it becomes easier for them to summarise the main points and move a higher level of comprehension i.e., from the basic or word level to the whole or global meaning and, therefore, answer questions testing their ability to summarise and interrogate the text. The picture of students' achievement is clearer when considering their responses to the questionnaire which was posted by five questions (see section 4.9.1).

The overall responses in favour of CSR instruction are 243 and without CSR are 42. This clearly indicates that students had a positive attitude toward CSR and its strategies. By triangulating students' responses with what they reported in interviews carried out before the intervention, CSR helped students to be more strategic and changed the way

they define reading comprehension by enabling them to deploy other strategies such as extracting the meaning of difficult vocabulary from the text. Another example is seen in the view that some students in the interview before the intervention raised the concern of not having enough opportunity to participate because good students might not give them the chance. After implementing CSR, all students mentioned that they were able to express themselves clearly without hesitation and be involved actively in the process of leaning.

Most students agreed that the four strategies of CSR were useful and improved their reading comprehension. For instance, they reported that the implementation of fix up strategy was beneficial to understand the meaning of unknown words. This result supports that CSR promoted reading comprehension by focusing more on meaning in context than individual words.

The interviews prior to the intervention highlighted that students limited themselves to some ways of figuring out difficult meanings which might be problematic such as translation into Arabic, finding out the lexical relations or relying on pronunciation. On the other hand, fix up strategy improved the awareness of students by being more strategic to grasp the meaning of new vocabulary without relying on the literal meanings.

With regard to problems that students met while CSR instruction, the majority of respondents agreed that CSR was problematic because of the time limitation for fulfilling tasks and the worry that not all members took part in the groups. Another concern had to do with the different roles given to each member. Most students favoured to stick to one role all the time. This might be attributed to the fact that good students in each group liked to take the lead and became leaders. If they played any role other than that of leader, they might get bored and start taking control once again. The average student enjoyed playing roles which did not require much effort such as time keepers or reporters. Finally, most students agreed that CSR instruction was problematic because some students were chatting while working. This confirms what some students expressed in the interviews before the intervention. They argued that group work was not beneficial because students often chat with each other. Wringe (1989) raises the concern that students should be given the chance to choose the groups they like working with and the teacher should not intervene in composing the groups unless there is an

obvious advantage in intervention. However, based on my observation, students always chose the same members every time. As a result, they were told to keep changing their group before starting new lessons.

The preferred strategies for comprehending new vocabulary were clarified in the questionnaire. All respondents expressed their preferences to using either paper or electronic dictionaries. However, the majority of students revealed that they benefitted from some CSR strategies such as using words in context and using contextual clues to figure out the meaning of the target words. It seems that students changed the way to approach reading texts after utilising CSR. In the questionnaire and interviews carried out before CSR instruction, most students reported that they focussed mainly on the written materials. Almost half of informants agreed that using grammatical clues was a good strategy for knowing the meanings. The grammatical clues were implemented in click and clunk strategy to deal with unknown words and more specifically in fixe up strategies.

Finally students showed the strategies they liked to broaden their vocabulary. The majority of students agreed that they preferred to focus on learning high frequency words which appear in the materials they read. The reason for this might be that high frequency words enable students to read faster because they tend to know such words by sight. They do not know to sound them or read them separately. Another reason is that students need to implement these words when they communicated in groups. Students expressed interest in making use of synonyms and antonyms as well. The least popular response was given again to using cross words to increase vocabulary, although each chapter students studied contained a crossword puzzle. Students had to use words from the reading text to complete the crossword puzzle. All students reported that they did not enjoy doing crosswords even in Arabic but they had to complete it because it was an activity in prescribed the book.

7.6 Conclusion

Chapter seven has discussed the findings of the qualitative and quantitative data gained from combining exploratory talk with CSR with the first year group. Before starting teaching, data from semi-structured interviews were analysed to investigate how

students defined reading and to find out their familiarity with group work. Students were found to implement many strategies to approach reading texts. However, students lacked some important strategies needed for reading because of their way of defining reading and their negative attitude to group work. After the intervention, the qualitative data demonstrated that there were some good learning patterns emerging from group work and exploratory talk. These patterns included being more critical, active, organised and focussed. The statistical analysis also showed that students' performances were better in post test. Overall there was large improvement in reading comprehension by the student group. In all strategy areas the overall marks showed a large improvement. In the questionnaire students expressed positive attitudes towards CSR and its strategies. However, it is not possible to say whether any student did worse in the post test than the in the pre-test as all the scripts were unnamed.

Having said that, there were some difficulties while carrying out CSR in the two interventions. The institutional dimension was one of them. The rigid adherence to the curriculum prevented me from teaching the way I had planned to, although there was an advantage while teaching the remedial group. Students in the remedial group were starting from a lower level but there was less constraint by the department as they were the only group in the remedial programme. In the second group, when combing exploratory talk with group work there was an extra complexity of focusing more on group work. I observed students while they were implementing CSR and using exploratory talk at the same time.

Chapter Eight

Summary and Discussion

8.1 introduction

This chapter presents a summary and discussion of findings of the whole action research project, carried out over a period of nine months. It synthesizes findings for both phases of the project.

8.2 Discussion of the main findings

The main findings are discussed here according to the research questions that the thesis addressed (see section 1.3) based on the data collected and on reflections and insights drawing from my experience as an English teacher. The first section (8.2.1) deals with why English was problematic to students. The second section (8.2.2) focuses on interviews results gathered from the pre-intervention phase. The third section (8.2.3) focuses on evaluating CSR as a way of boosting reading comprehension. The final section (8.2.4) examines exploratory talk as a complementary strategy to improve the quality of discussions while using CSR. It presents problems with exploratory talk in this context leading to an alternative typology which might be suitable for Saudi Arabian and other students from the Arab world.

8.2.1 Problems encountered by Saudi medical students in learning to read in English

This section looks at discussing the first sub question, which is *why and how is English problematic to Saudi Medical students*? English is often considered challenging by students both before and after they join the college and begin their course. Based on findings from the study and data gained from the literature review, students found English problematic because they had negative experiences which led to negative attitudes when learning English.

To begin with, this review shall here consider the situation after college entry. The college students at the centre of this discussion, as discussed in the research context and the related review chapter (see section 3.3.1, and section 4.2), were all ESP (English for Specific or Special Purposes) adult students. That means their studying English was to prepare them to demonstrate professional skills needed for their jobs; as medical

students their motivation for learning to read in English was instrumental as opposed to integrative. Students need to know the relevance of what they study to their expectations. Therefore, the focus of teaching English should be on the subject matter rather than on the intrinsic aspects of the English language (Dudley-Evans and John 2003). However, a close examination of teaching English at the college showed a disjuncture between curriculum objectives and teaching practices (section 5.2). Based on the syllabus given to teachers, there were four reasons to teach English, namely to pass the examination, to gain sufficient proficiency in English to study, to use English fluently in the workplace and to use English in general. In practice, only the first and (slightly less) the second expectation were being met. If the teachers' teaching practices did not meet the expectations of the course, then it is difficult to see how they wanted students to match their expectations. English teachers at the college paid special attention to exams which is similar to other educational institutions in Saudi Arabia (Alsughaer, 2009). Alsughaer claimed that the aim of education system is to evaluate students' academic achievements via exams. The consequent focus on results led students to study competitively rather than collaboratively. It also led teachers to play an authoritative role and to prepare students to be exam takers, giving them the course summaries and encouraging the examination strategies described about. Therefore, the teacher-student relationship was reduced to a mere seller-customer relationship. Such concern was noticed by data collected before implementing CSR. Some students expressed their worries about not having high marks in the exams.

Another point is that the emphasis on the teachers' primary role prevented students from perceiving the value of English as a means of communication. Students were not allowed to make decisions about what and how to learn and remained passive. One noticeable reason for this was related to the structure of the institution. Although teachers seemed to be authoritative in classrooms, they were powerless to choose the prescribed books or to participate in setting their exams. As a result, many of them were not enthusiastic about developing and exploring their teaching and just stuck to their books. The traditional structure of the settings, which more or less ignored students as contributors to their own learning, was a major obstacle.
This was connected with the way that issues connected with whether the teacher is a native or non native speaker of English (Medgyes, 1994, Mousavi, 2007, Braine, 2010).

At the college, there are some courses which were only taught by native speakers of English such as communications skills. Many students complain about how difficult it was to get familiar with native speakers of English. In learning, some of the difficulties to learn a foreign are caused by the differences between the two languages. That is to say the more the teacher knows about the two languages the better learning occur. Responses from interviews showed that students' attitudes toward reading were negative as they regarded speaking as the most important skill they needed in their studies. Part of this problem is caused by the teachers who taught different courses. I noticed that in the remedial programme some courses were specifically taught by native English speakers (NS), while others by non-native English speakers (NNS). For example, the grammar course was given to a non-native English teacher and communication skills course to a native English teacher. The way of drawing such a distinction has its pitfalls. Brain (2010) criticises such division and states

> However, the NS/NNS distinction is not as simple as that. The term 'native speaker' undoughtly has positive connotation : it donates a birthright, fluency, cultural affinity, and sociolinguistic competence, in contrast, the term 'non native speaker' carries the burden of minority, of marginalization and stigmatization, with resulting discrimination in the job market and in professional advancement. (Brain, 2010, p.8)

Another reason for negative attitude is that there was a relationship between students' conceptions of learning English from students' perspective and the strategies they were deploying. Before joining the college, all students had studied English for six years in the intermediate and high schools. There was evidence that students' previous premises about English were the main drivers for the strategies they adopted. Richards and Lockhart (2002) observe that as it is important to examine teachers' beliefs about teaching it is essential to do so with learners.

In the pre-intervention phase, both sets of students showed that they had attitudes and beliefs about learning English and particularly about reading in English that were not helpful to their learning.

 Nevertheless, both native and non-native English speakers should have an equal standing in teaching English to non-native English students, and can be equally effective. It is important to consider not only the teacher's knowledge of the language but also factors such as their familiarity with their learners' cultural and educational backgrounds. What is clear is that if both native and non native English teachers look at

more than just the meaning of the language, and more at the cultural backgrounds of their different students, then both can become even more effective. Besides, both teacher groups should be well-prepared before teaching by attending pre in- service programs that can equip them with the knowledge and skills needed in the classroom.

It is clear from the above that the influences negatively affecting students' learning are numerous, and cover not only psychological and cultural factors but also environmental factors such as the institutions' culture and teachers' motivations. It would seem wise to consider these problems holistically and diachronically in the search for solutions; it is unlikely that they can be broken down into disparate units and dealt with piecemeal. The intervention with CSR was shown to have the merits of assisting the development of healthy, positive premises and expectations of the students, and would also seem to offer teachers and institutions a helpful, meaningful and successful approach to tackling an important aspect of English learning.

8.2.2 Students' reading strategies and attitudes at the pre-intervention phase
This section aims at discussing the sub questions *which reading strategies do students bring with them from their previous work?* and *what are students' attitudes towards group work?*
To start with, students were all ESP students. Being an adult learner implies that students have already developed their own ways of learning and might adopt them later. However, an adult can be less willing to try out new ways of learning (Harmer, 2007). Another issue is that being an adult presupposes that students are expected to take more responsibility and make judgments about what they are doing. This leads to self-directed learning where exchanging experiences are appreciated. So, as Harmer argues (2007) teachers have to examine their students' past experiences before they start using and modify or change the bad experiences to maximize learning. Before joining the college, all students had studied English for six years in the intermediate and high schools. There was evidence that students' previous premises about English were the main drivers for the strategies they adopted. Richards and Lockhart (2002) observe that as it is important to examine teachers' beliefs about teaching it is essential to do so with learners.

In the pre-intervention phase, both sets of students showed that they had attitudes and beliefs about learning English and particularly about reading in English that were not helpful to their learning. Answers to interviews about reading strategies carried out prior to the intervention suggested that students used less beneficial strategies to read. However, when students came to discuss and negotiate meaning while implementing CSR strategies and think more critically while utilising exploratory talk, they were involved in metacognitive processes to think about their thinking. For example, Bruce and Robinson (2000, p.6) argue that 'shared knowledge' is essential in enabling students to gain the metacognitive insights as they plan, monitor, evaluate and finally modify what they are learning, as a result, they can tell which strategy is needed and when they have to use it. While teaching CSR I used some medical texts and found that students were more motivated to read these than the general ones in the textbook. They told the head of the department about medical materials and how they benefited from them. This is not surprising as students were regarded as ESP students. Such findings incorporates with other findings found by Zahid Javid et al., (2012) who examined the motivation of Saudi undergraduate students to learn English in order to enhance the possibilities of learning. The participants were male and female students majoring in English, information technology and medicine. That research students reported that students had highly extrinsic motivational orientations in compared with intrinsic ones.

Finally, the role of socio-cultural factors is important in considering either motivating or demotivating students to learn English. For instance, in the Saudi context, there are some issues discussed in the English textbook curriculum which might lead to negative attitudes toward the target language. Al Fraidan (2012) notes that some books taught at university level are not culturally appropriate for Saudi students. This is because that these books contain some topics and visuals which contradict with Islamic and Saudi culture. Therefore, teachers should rely on their professional experiences to bridge the gaps between Arabic and English. Teachers can use authentic reading texts in line with textbook which are related to students' interests and concerns.

 8.2.3 Students' performance in the intervention and post-intervention stages of using CSR

This section addresses the following research questions: *how does CSR improve reading comprehension; to what extent does CSR promote active learning; how does CSR help students to acquire new strategies for solving problems and apply them in other subjects; what are students' attitudes toward CSR.* The pre-post tests, questionnaires, interviews and field notes as well as audio and video taped observations all contributed data towards this. Generally speaking, the findings of this study indicate that CSR helped students to be better readers and good problem solvers by deploying different strategies to overcome reading breakdown.

8.2.3.1 The efficacy of CSR on reading comprehension

The results of this study are largely consistent with findings by Vaughn et al., (2011) and Klingner et al., (2004) which also revealed that CSR improved reading comprehension and led to positive attitudes towards reading and group work. It can be argued that the academic success of the students in this study is a testament to the efficacy of CSR on reading comprehension. At the end of the semester, all except two students of group one passed a departmental exam as well as the post test. The two students who did not pass had not been attending my class or their other courses regularly; one of these students explained that his irregular attendance was due to the fact that he was thinking of discontinuing his medical studies. Similarly, the overall mean CSR scores of Group two students on the post-intervention test indicated that all students performed fairly well and there was a significant difference between their achievements compared with the pre-test. In Group two, students' performance on the post-intervention test was better than the pre-intervention test. In the post-intervention questionnaire as well, students' responses were also positive and suggested that CSR and its strategies improved students' approach to reading. However, students of the two groups did not score equally in relation to the four comprehension strategies. Students attained the highest marks for dealing with unknown words ('click and clunk' in CSR) and finding main ideas ('get the gist') strategies which is similar to the findings of Chi Fan (2009). Chi Fan's results concluded that students outscored in relation to getting the main idea and finding the supporting details. This is attributed to the fact that these strategies are more or less mechanical; students may solve problems using these

strategies without critically engaging with the solutions. For example, in order for students to know the meaning of unknown word, they might use fix up strategies such as affixes or reading the surrounding words to figure it out or try to guess its meaning from the context by using logic after reading sentences before and after the unknown words. In the same way, students tended to read the first and second sentences and sometimes the final sentence of each paragraph to catch the main ideas.

Nevertheless, previewing (brain storming) which required going beyond the reading texts because students had to relate their previous knowledge with what the text was saying, and to fully understand the reading texts and moving a step further to summarize them and to generate questions about what they read. There are three possible reasons for having such results. First, students needed more time to get familiar with the four strategies especially previewing and wrap up strategies. All students stated that they had not tried out group work prior to the intervention. Click and clunk strategies were deliberate and more goal directed while previewing (had to do with planning) and wrap up had to do with evaluating the outcomes) required a higher level of thinking. The intervention lasted for three months and half for each group. Second, the allotted time for practising each strategy was not enough. While working on different questions, students had to spend about five minutes to complete the tasks. The time for each class was 45 minutes and some students would come five minutes later if they were attending another class outside the building. One of the two teachers who kindly observed my class told me that I was rushing students to hurry up from time to time. Perhaps that was because the large amount of content I had to cover in each lesson. My focus was on both allowing students to practice the CSR strategies as well as the content. Some activities were assigned as homework due to the shortage of time.

Yet that created an additional problem because students either used to copy from each other or there were few who waited for the coming class to get the right answers from the teacher. More importantly, the post test results showed that students of Group 1 even scored better in 'previewing' and 'wrap up' strategies than Group 2 who had scored lower marks in the pre-test before the intervention. This is a good indication that students of group (1) improved their English proficiency to a level that made them ready to start the pre-professional programme. To tackle the problem of familiarity and

timing, students can work on CSR utilising computer-assisted collaborative strategic reading programme especially in the first week suggested by Kim et al., (2006). I can download it to library's computers where students can go and work in pairs in break times.

Students' responses to the questionnaire distributed at the end of the intervention suggested that they had a positive attitude towards CSR and its strategies which also supported the results of Kim et al., (2006) regarding students' attitudes toward collaborative strategic reading. In that study, most students regarded working collaboratively positively. 12 of students who worked collaboratively reported that they had a good experience working with a partner and 4 said they did enjoy CSR and considered it boring. In the present study, most students had positive responses toward CSR. In the present study, while the overall responses in favour of CSR were 257 and without CSR were 28 in the remedial group, in the first year group the overall 'agree' responses were 243, while the 'disagree' responses were 42.

A comparison of students' interview responses prior to the intervention to the pos-intervention questionnaire indicated that students became more positive about group work. For example, some students initially said that they did not see the value of group work due to the potential passivity and lack of involvement of some group members; following the intervention, all students reported that CSR motivated students to work collaboratively, and so enhanced active learning.

8.2.3.2 The efficacy of CSR on enhancing active learning

As students spent a large amount of time working together, there were some salient learning norms associated with CSR which led to active learning. Therefore, students' comprehension of reading texts had been increased. CSR required students to be engaged in the subject matter while discussing the reading materials. According to Harmer (2007), engagement is one of the main elements that guarantees successful language learning in the classrooms. This is because that students are interested in what they are doing that means they would understand better and, therefore, long-retention of materials would take place. Such practices might not be found if the class was a teacher-centred. By comparing the study's results, some patterns of helping behaviour were in

agreement with the findings of Klingner and Vaughn (2000) who noticed the positive impact of CSR on improving students' helping behaviours such as elaboration and offering prompts. Data in chapter six indicates how students helped each other to build up knowledge (see Chapter Six, extract 1).

That explains why in the questionnaire, distributed after the intervention, most students liked to stick to one role each time which did not require high levels of involvement and to choose their partners. For example, in Group 1 13 students reported that they did not like the role given to them. Prior to each lesson, I tended to choose the groups and assigned different roles to each group member. Giving students the opportunity to choose the members to work with led to two problems. First, some students liked to work with good students because they knew the right answers. Second, sometimes the choice was based on social grounds as some students liked to work with their close friends (see section 6.2.3).

Active learning was noticed as well when practising the click and clunk strategy to tackle unknown words. It was clear that all members of the group were taking part in the discussion by using different ways to demonstrate meaning to each other (see Chapter Six, extract 4).

The mutual support led Adel to seek the help of the group although they explained the meaning in four different ways. This incorporates what Dornyei (2001) calls 'norm of tolerance'. Dornyei states

> What is important to mention here is that in a safe and supportive classroom the norm of tolerance prevails and students feel comfortable taking risks because they know that they will not be embarrassed or criticized if they make a mistake. (Dornyei, 2001.p41)

If a member did not know the meaning of that word in a traditional teacher-led classroom, he might not be able to keep asking the teacher for explanation several times. Many students do not ask teachers and pretend that they understand because they are either afraid of making mistakes or exposed to be laughed at by their classmates. In the reconnaissance phase while I was observing a teacher class, a student asked a question and the teacher asked him to delay that to finish what he was explaining. After a while, the teacher asked if any one got any question, no one raised his hand which suggested

that they all understood what has been presented. It seems that the teacher way of receiving questions led students not to ask him because of three reasons. First, some teachers do not like to be asked in front of the class. Instead, they prefer to answer questions to individuals. Second, some teachers do not like to be distracted while explaining because they might lose what they are saying. Third, few teachers think that when students ask them while they are presenting new knowledge, students want to challenge them and see if they know more about the presented matter.

A good example of how CSR facilitated active involvement in learning was the behaviour of Hamad (see Chapter Six, extract 1). At the beginning, Hamad who belonged to group one reported that he did not like talking in front of others for several reasons. The classroom observations and video recordings as well indicated that he was an active member and he negotiated a lot for meanings. Another example clarified how Fahad from Group two, who stated in the interviews before the treatment that he was reluctant to speak in front of the class because he was shy, was taking the lead to negotiate meanings and challenge others' ideas.

With regard to reading as a process, there were patterns of improved learning practices while actively implementing CSR evident in both Group one and Group two. These patterns included students changing their reading habits, and deepening their understanding of the nature of reading as a complex process rather than an isolated behaviour. In the interviews carried out before, most students viewed reading as the ability to pronounce single letters and words or to understand the meaning of individual words (see section 6.2.1.4, and section 7.2.2.5). After doing the course, students looked at reading as getting the meanings from the texts even if they were not literally written. For example, students learnt how to supplement information, use text or typological features, interact with texts and discover their own ways to solve different problems. These strategies indicated that students were defining reading in a more sophisticated manner (see section 6.4.1.1. At the start, most students in the questionnaire and interviews reported that meaning only relied on print when they read.

Students in both groups also began to perceive reading comprehension as an evaluative and interactive process, rather than focusing on the decoding of symbols or reading on a

literal level. By interacting with texts and other members of their group simultaneously, students became engaged and more confident, sharing their own experiences and relating them to the texts. As a result, students were able to see the social effects of reading; relating their own ideas and experiences to the content of the text facilitated new learning in the sessions. This process of critical thinking also enabled students to experience a sense of ownership of the reading process even before they start reading (see Chapter Six, extract 27).

Apart from the advantages of pre-reading activity mentioned earlier, as ownership developed, students were able to shape their learning process while and after reading which increased as well autonomous learning. The final aspect of active learning was identified in the way that students monitor their reading. Before the intervention, twelve students of group (2) indicated that they used 're-reading strategy' to check their comprehension. Similarly, in the interviews, a response from Khaled confirmed how students knew that they were reading properly. Khaled was sure about his reply which might be the cause of the long time for implementing such activity.

> *That is easy, if I can answer all the questions related to the reading text, I can read, if I don't I will start reading the text again (Khaled, 26, 9, 2010).*

This quote implies that students would not be able to assess their reading comprehension unless they finished reading and answer questions written by others. If they could not answer any question that means their reading comprehension had broken down at a certain stage and thus they started re-reading the texts. CSR enabled students to gain different strategies to build comprehension of the reading texts as an ongoing process which took place very time and in every stage. This coincides with Gilani et al's. (2012) conclusions who point out the need for considering monitoring comprehension as well as other reading strategies by teachers because not all textbooks do. They suggest that students should be trained to ask themselves several questions while reading to view reading as ongoing and interactive activity.

8.2.3.3 The efficacy of CSR on acquiring new strategies to solve reading problems

This notion requires using different strategies to tackle different problems. Ur (2003) points out that efficient readers utilize varied strategies with different texts while inefficient readers tend to stick to the same strategy for all texts. While working in

groups, students assisted one another by making use of CSR strategies. They learnt from socialization and drew on their areas of weakness and strengths. For example, students solve certain problems by paraphrasing them first into their own words. They wanted to know that they all had the same understandings before looking for solutions. Surprisingly, although CSR aims at helping students to guess meaning from context; students yet reported that they preferred to use the dictionary for getting the meaning of difficult words. In some cases students gave a brief translation to explain the unknown meanings. However, this contradicted students' responses in the same questionnaire to the statement that fix up strategies can facilitate finding out the meaning of unknown words.

8.2.4 The efficacy of exploratory talk on students

The use of 'exploratory talk' with Group two was generally successful; it had a positive impact on the quality of students' language, and helped them to think more critically (see Chapter Six, extracts 19, 20 and 21). This provides an answer to the final sub question, *How can group work training through exploratory talk improve the quality of students discussions*? This study has implications for research into combining exploratory talk with CSR to improve the quality of discussion in a bilingual setting; Arab medical students who implemented exploratory talk while working in groups to improve their reading comprehension.

However, as suggested in Chapter Six, although CSR had a positive impact on students' performance while reading, there were some examples of language use amongst the students which could not be clearly classified based on Mercer's (2000) 'types of talk' . These examples of language use arose either when students spoke in Arabic, or spoke in English while enacting Arabic cultural norms. This might be attributed to the reason that while exploratory talk has been shown to have significant benefits within different contexts (for example, Edwards, 2005, with British students, Rojas-Drummond and Mercer, 2003, with Mexican students) the literature review indicates that no single study has been carried out with Arab students. Further analysis of my data suggested that although Mercer's typology of talk worked textually, pragmatically it did not.

8.2.4.1 Problems with exploratory talk: Is it agreement or disagreement?

On some occasions, it was not clear whether or not students agreed or disagreed with each other. Consider the following extract which took place while students were discussing the impact of new inventions in our daily life.

> *Fahad: how the planes were in the past, they were small and slow; now although they become very big, they can carry tonnes of goods.*
> *Abdullah: as Fahad said about the planes, the most important thing is how they invented the plane one hand cannot clap, the two Wright brothers worked together to fly...*

The first look at this extract suggests that Abdullah is in full agreement with Fahad by saying 'as Fahad said'; however, Abdullah moved to a totally new point and he is likely interested more on the way than the role of invention planes. If I rely on Mercer's typology, this kind of talk is characterised as cumulative which is defined as

> ….speakers build on each other's contributions, add information of their own and in a mutually supportive, uncritical way construct together a body of shared knowledge and understanding (Mercer 2000, p.97)

It seems that such a pattern of speech emerged because of the effect of the mother tongue and Arab cultural expectations when being involved in a dialogue. In Arabic, this pattern is a descriptive and imaginative way in which the listener may say to the speaker that he or she agrees with a certain point to show mutual respect and simplifies the idea but what comes afterwards shows the disagreement. I would argue that the pragmatic effect of this kind of talk is exploratory. The speaker is inviting people to discover the difference between this point and the previous one.

8.2.4.2 Problems with exploratory talk: Is it disputational or exploratory talk ?

Similarly, in Arabic it is common to answer a question by raising another question. The answer to the first question is implied in the second question which makes the argument becomes stronger. In one conversation Abdullah asked this question 'how will you react if you have a problem in your PC?' Tariq answered Abdullah's question by raising another question, what about if a technician in the hospital encountered a problem in x ray machine?'. The second question implied an implicit answer to the first question which suggested that the situation in the hospital would be worse than the situation with a PC, although in English it might be a way of avoiding answering questions. Another issue is that in few conversations, students pointlessly took a long time to discuss some topics because they were disagreeing with each other in a disputational way. However,

according to Mercer, disputational talk is characterised by short answers from speakers which prevents students' involvement (Mercer, 2000).

8.2.4.3 The need for a new typology

Based on Mercer's three typologies of talk, I have developed a new typology of exploratory talk which is particularly relevant to Arabic-speaking students in Saudi Arabia and might be suitable for Arab speakers elsewhere as well. This typology was developed by observing and reflecting on the ways in Arabic-speaking students negotiated reading in English; as it often proved problematic to translate some patterns of speech from Arabic to English, I allowed students to speak in Arabic when they struggled to express themselves in English. These difficulties of translating from Arabic into English tended to arise due to differences within the two languages. The data show that it was similar when these students spoke in English partly because they might be thinking in Arabic but mainly because, although using English, they remained within an Arabian culture. Understanding the cultural context in which different types of talk are used is crucial in order to grasp the intended meaning and significance. Differences between cultural norms affect the pragmatic rules of language use in different societies, and a failure to account for these differences will inevitably lead to challenges when learning and using a different language.

This typology does not account for all the unique characteristics of Arabic, but it instead focuses on those that I found particularly relevant from my observations of students' talk and their critical capacities as well as attending to some literature data.

Mercer's 'disputational talk' can be identified in Arabic as *bezantee* or *socratee* (literally Byzantine or Socratic); however, while equivalent examples of disputational talk can be found in English and Arabic, there are important cultural and linguistic differences between the two languages which could lead to examples of disputational, cumulative and exploratory talk being confused in translation. For example, disagreement can be expressed in Arabic by repeating someone's ideas; this could be mistaken as an example of uncritical, cumulative talk in English, but in fact is an example of potentially confrontational disputational talk in Arabic. Once again, to

identify this use of language as cumulative talk, significant awareness and knowledge of cultural and linguistic practices is required. On the other hand, in Arabic, repetition in the form of words, sentences or ideas can be regarded as exploratory if the intention of the speakers to make a link and then present new ideas not to build on what has been said as a shared knowledge (Al-Jawzi, 2005). This can be seen in the section 8.2.4.1 on page 182.

Second, in English, the passive voice is commonly used when the focus is on the action and the agents are not interesting, unknown or irrelevant (Borjars and Burridge, 2001). In Arabic, passive or indirect forms are often used in written and spoken languages (both formal and informal). For example, when referring to the opinion of someone you are speaking to, you might say 'some people think that…' rather than directly saying 'you think that…'. However, the main reason for using indirect forms is that it is considered a more polite, respectable way of engaging with other people's ideas or if the subjects are either known from the situation or unknown (Muhammad, 2006). While this indirect form of speech may appear to be an example of cumulative talk in English if it is used as what Borjars and Burridge (2001) describe as a 'sneaky strategy' to reduce the engagement in something to avoid confrontation with someone, it could be part of exploratory talk in Arabic. It is according prestige to the ideas by suggesting more engagement.

Third, further confusion could arise from the direct translation of incongruous phrases. While phrases such as 'are you sure?' or 'really?' could be examples of encouraging, exploratory talk in English, these phrases would be considered impolite in Arabic. Instead, phrases such as 'who told you that?' or 'let us make sure first' or 'from where you get this' would be used in Arabic which, perhaps, could be seen as disputational talk in English. Reversely, although some kinds of talk seem to be exploratory, they might be not acceptable in English and considered impolite. Tawalben and Al-Oqily (2012) observe this when they examined the in-directness and impoliteness among Saudi learners who speak English as a foreign language. They maintain

> ...however, directness was the most preferred strategy among Saudi students in intimate situations where directness is interpreted as an expression of affiliation, closeness and group-connectedness rather than impoliteness. (Tawalben and AL-Oqily, 2012, p. 85)

Fourth, although disputational talk is seen as unproductive in English, it may encourage greater participation when informal Arabic is being used. Rather than using short, unreflective statements, Arabic students may use lengthy responses to disagree with each other. This kind of disputational talk can in fact become productive and purposeful, as it can encourage more students to get involved in the discussion and to respond to the challenge laid down by the first speaker.

Finally, sometimes the answers in Arabic are given by raising other questions or correcting the asked questions and yet are considered exploratory (Nazal, 2009) while in English it might be a kind of disputational as the speaker avoids answering the raised question. For instance, students were discussing the value of technology and this conversation took place:

> *Khaled: now we can play football even without going to field, is that right?*
> *Ali: I agree with that 100 per cent, but why we have to rely on technology although we do not need it?*

In the above conversation Ali mentioned he agreed with Khaled at the beginning but the rest of his talk implied that he did not because he addressed another question to him to show that the use of technology was not always good. Another example has to do with formality and informality in Arabic and English. Khaled was trying to convince Abdullah by saying 'why you say this, why you do not say .....?' Using why twice in the same sentence might be seen as a kind of blame in English while in Arabic it is acceptable and direct way of communicating. The above quote illustrates how Khaled was direct and less formal when suggesting something because Abdullah was his friend. Nevertheless, the degree of formality and directness changed when students were interacting with the teacher. Hamad, for instance, did not understand something. He addressed a question to teacher by saying 'teacher, sorry what does this word mean'?. In English, it would be more acceptable if a student call a teacher by his name and omit the word 'sorry'. It is clear in the above example how pragmatic differences between Arabic and English led Hamad to resort to his cultural background while requesting. In conclusion, Mercer's characterisation of disputational, cumulative and exploratory talks seem to work textually but not pragmatically with Arabic speaking learners of English. For this reason, I have come up with new varieties of talks to account for such demands.

Table 8.1 below provides a summary of the key ways in which types of talk may differ from Mercer's.

Table 8.1: The three typologies of talk in English and Arabic

Mercer's typology of talk

Name of strategy	Description	Consequences for group work
Disputational (unproductive)	Speakers give short answers and disagreements lead to a competitive rather than cooperative atmosphere	Unconstructive and uncritical
Cumulative (unproductive)	Speakers uncritically build on each other's talk	Positive engagement but uncritical
Exploratory (productive)	Speakers engage in a critical and constructive way	Critical and constructive engagement among members

The alternative typology

Name of strategy	Description	Consequences for group work
Disputational (unproductive and might be productive)	Speakers do not necessarily give short answers and disagreement but it can encourage more speakers to participate	Generally speaking, uncritical but it can be constructive when offering solutions and encourage more engagement
Cumulative (unproductive and might be productive)	Speakers build on each other's talk constructively and unconstructively. It depends on the characteristics of Arabic	Critical or uncritical
Exploratory (productive and might be unproductive)	An understanding of cultural linguistic patterns (such as classical Arabic, formal and informal Arabic) is required in order to speak respectively and avoid causing offences.	Critical

The students who were observed in this study used both classical and informal Arabic, and it was clear that Mercer's typologies of talk had to be reconsidered in light of their combined use of Arabic and English. This analysis became apparent only after the second intervention was completed and so was not able to guide my setting up the

ground rules for the group work. However, in future it will help me to encourage constructive group work with Arab students.

The suggestion I am making may be controversial in the teaching of English. With a focus on communication and more specifically communicative competence an awareness of cultural norms of the target language is sought. Genc and Bada (2005, p. 80) point out that teaching English as a foreign language without introducing students to its culture is incomplete because students are expected to find difficulty to communicate with English native speakers and the observe 'for students of ELT, studying English culture is not an arbitrary but a necessary activity'.

According to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment (2003), communicative competence embraces three main components which also include sub-features:

1- Linguistic competence, i.e. knowledge of lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competences.

2- Sociolinguistic competence, i.e. knowledge of linguistic markers of social relations, politeness conventions, expression of folk wisdom, register differences and dialect and accent competences.

3- Pragmatic competence, i.e. discourse competence and functional competence which consists of microfunction and macrofunction features as well as interaction schemata.

However, the participants of the study were studying English for specific purposes and were mainly expecting to use it with non native speakers from in Arab professional contexts. The point about encouraging exploratory talk is about making group work in a Saudi classroom work better. For this reason, sociolinguistic competence as it relates to the UK and USA or other English speaking countries is less important than linguistic and pragmatic competence.

In fact I would start first with Mercer's typology and then draw students' attention to the differences between the communicative aspects between native Arab and native English speakers. This would both serve to improve the quality of the group interaction and alert students to the fact that cultural norms amongst native speakers of English are different.

8.3 Conclusion

The discussion of the results of both the qualitative and quantitative findings reveals the positive impact of CSR when answering the research questions. Typically, CSR helps to improve students' reading comprehension as indicated in, the during and after phases. Similarly, students' attitudes towards group work improved during the period in which the CSR was used with the two groups. However, there are some issues that need to be considered which limited CSR. Students' beliefs about English learning need to be identified and addressed. If this is not done it can limit the potential for CSR as a potent strategy to improve reading and comprehension skills. Again, adult learners come with some previous strategies to reading comprehensions. This represents both potential and a challenge. The potential is that such skills, if useful, can be built upon in CSR settings. However, if such skills are not appropriate they may become inhibiting to the successful application of CSR to improve reading comprehension. The argument of Harmer (2007) is that adult learners may cling to those previous strategies. The issue for those interested in using CSR is the need to identify those skills and premises that students have in order to develop strategic responses such as undoing premises and building potential where necessary. Nutall (2005) raises the concern that the needs and interests of students will influence their motivation toward learning. For such reason, the proposition will be to further explore CSR with a view to getting its potential including for the philosophy of instruction and the goals and objectives of teaching English in the college and some beliefs about English from students' points of views.

In addition, CSR is of great value when combined with exploratory talk to assist students to think more constructively and critically while they were working on CSR strategies. However, some problems emerged while implementing exploratory talk as a result of cultural norms of talk between English and Arabic. Care should be taken when implementing Mercer's classification of talk as it textually works but practically it does not. For this reason, English should be taught with emphasis on communicative competence. Finally, there is a need for further theoretical development of Mercer's work. The data gathered from this study might help in showing the differences between the socio-linguistic norms of Arabic and English.

Chapter Nine

Conclusions and Implications

9.1 Introduction

This chapter consists of six sections: section 9.1 justifies the reason for conducting this study and how it was implemented, section 9.2, offers the three claims to knowledge of this study, section 9.3, provides an account of implications and practical recommendations, section 9.4, gives some suggestions for further research, section 9.5, states reflection on the action research project, section 9.6, is about showing how the action research project was rewarded.

This study was carried out to investigate how I might help Saudi medical students to improve their reading comprehension skills through the intervention of CSR. In the second intervention, exploratory talk was taught in addition to improve the quality of students' talk and thinking while using CSR. In addressing the research questions through the two interventions different issues emerged about the use of reading strategies and exploratory talk while using action research as a way of change in Saudi context. The study also helped me to look at my own professional development as a teacher and researcher. Three claims to knowledge arose from the action research which enabled me to understand in a way which I could not have had if I only been a teacher. These are all of significance to me as a teacher of English in this institution and potentially to other practitioners in similar educational contexts, but they derive from the systematic collection and analysis of data. They would not have emerged therefore without action research. These claims to knowledge respond to the main research question and its sub questions of the study. The understanding of knowledge included both substantive issues i.e., practice and theoretical issues i.e., 'making sense of things'. This makes action research a valid and powerful approach to researching (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006).

9.2 Conclusions

9.2.1 The nature and the purpose of learning English in the college and the way it constrains the practice of the department

The first claim relates to the context in which the research was carried out and has to do with the conceptualisation of and the purpose for students of learning English and the

way that this conceptualisation constrains the practice of the study of English in this college. Although it relates directly to this one college, it is likely to resonate with other contexts in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Arab world. The assumption is that a programme of English programme which aims to improve students' competence in a general way will enable them to succeed in a medical education that requires extensive use of English medium. However, students on a special programme such as the one in this medical college have different goals and needs from students studying English for general purposes. ESP has a training function which is directed to the development of restricted competence. The teaching of general English, on the other hand, seeks to develop general competence.

The reasons for learning English (see section 4.2) raise the issue of the need for students to have a clear vision about learning English. The students in the study are only learning because they require it in order to qualify and practice in their chosen career. The issue is that what is required falls somewhere between EAP and ESP and this is not taken account of in the way that the course is constructed or taught. The course that they are doing is confused. The students are learning English for Academic Purposes in that they need to pass an examination in English in order to proceed. However those academic purposes are to study something specific – they need to know a particular vocabulary and type of English.

The research has shown that the college course fails to gain the advantages of focusing not only on what they need but also on what excites their interest in learning English. All the text books are intended for teaching general English. This is in part justified with reference to the low level of English of the students as evidenced when an English teacher in an interview about the prescribed books stated that he was against introducing students to medical English. He claimed that medical terminology might confuse and frustrate them. However, when I taught the remedial group, students showed an interest in medical articles even though the presented materials were far more difficult than the general textbook material at their level. They also told the head of the department about medical English I had introduced them to and how it was beneficial.

Moreover the contradictions found in the syllabus, the English programme overview and the colleges' general goals, leads to using certain methods of teaching English. These methods only help students to pass the exams. This does not encourage students to explore their own ideas or ways of approaching the language, which is also true of the teachers. It also leads to an instrumental approach to their study of the language, so that they see the usefulness of English only in terms of how it will help them to achieve examination results. The way that assessment works in the college reinforce this instrumental approach. Thus, all the teachers have to stick closely to the prescribed textbooks, and not stray from them, such as by using any authentic materials. Everything gives the impression of treating the students with a "safety-first" approach, taking them as a group (rather than individually) together, with the goal of guiding them to pass the exams. The feeling given was that standardisation leads to less risk of failure. There is much emphasis on teaching discrete items of grammar and vocabulary, with a deductive approach (i.e., it is important to teach form, and that an understanding of form will allow students to come to a correct assessment of meaning). English is taught as a subject, a university requirement, no different in this regard from other subjects in the college. Students in this case focus on remembering the things they have been shown. In the intervention when I used authentic medical books as texts with my students, the result was that they were more interested in the work.

This view that the best way to teach English requires instructing students on grammar and vocabulary points, with the aim of the students remembering enough to get them through examinations, is not the only issue. Another important limiting factor is the socio-cultural practice of education in Saudi Arabia, especially of how students look at English and their conceptions of effective learning. Before joining the college, students had adapted different approaches to learn English and to approach reading texts as well as having different attitudes toward group work. Their replies to questionnaire items and interviews before the intervention indicated that they implemented some learning strategies, either by personal experience or as a result of teachers' understanding of the appropriate ways of teaching. Some of the learning strategies and methods of teaching were insufficient. As a result, students held negative attitudes which led to having low motivation to learn English.

9.2.2 The effect of collaborative strategic reading with Saudi medical students

This section and the following one responded to the following sub-questions:

>4. How does CSR improve reading comprehension?

>5. To what extent does CSR promote active learning?

>6. How does CSR help students acquire new problem-solving strategies that can be applied in other subjects?

>7. What are students' attitudes towards CSR?

The approach of collaborative reading through group work is potentially successful in changing the way that students go about reading in English and this is shown as follows: First, students changed their attitudes toward group work from seeing it as a waste of time and effort to viewing it as helpful and effective. This encouraged them to change their attitudes toward reading and English in general. Before teaching CSR, students expressed negative attitudes toward reading and group work which adversely affected their motivation to learn English. Lack of interest in the reading matter was accompanied by poor reading habits. The potential of reading was there but because students lacked skills, the reading they did was frustrating. This corresponded with Ahuja and Ahuja's (2010) observation that interest in reading is based on how students read. If students have enough reading skills and 'know how' and know when to use them, their enthusiasm toward reading will rise.

Second, students in the remedial group and first year group, who were exposed to collaborative strategies, showed very strong gains in the post-test. This improved achievement in the tests, could be attributed to students' enhanced learning strategies to comprehend reading texts. Reading comprehension can be processed in a number of ways that are not all necessarily related to lexical knowledge. They developed a welcome distance from the "look it up in a dictionary" or "ask the teacher" approach. Before the intervention, most students in the two groups defined reading as recognising the meanings of unknown words. CSR helped students to interact with different levels of reading comprehension, moving from the very basic level i.e., a literal level (more or less just translation of words) to interpretative and evaluative levels. Reading came to be seen, and was taught, as a complex process that required more than just paying attention to individual words. As a result, students assisted each other by building up knowledge and offering different answers to account for reading problems. By exchanging information, they became more confident and able to assess themselves. In

addition, students learnt patterns or norms of learning that were helpful to them and that had occurred often while they were involved in group work. For example, as evidence in the group discussions over texts, they become more critical readers, knowing how to read between lines and beyond lines and not to limit themselves to the literal. Some students complained before CSR that although they knew the meanings of all words in the texts, yet they found difficulty in comprehension. That is to be expected because not everything in the text is explicit or has only one meaning. Reading between the lines was noticed as students made inferences to deduce the meanings of words, sentences or paragraphs. At the word level, they implemented some problem solving strategies the 'fix up' strategies of CSR to capture the meaning of unknown vocabulary. At the sentence and paragraph levels, they made use of contextual clues and the structure of the read materials (see extract 22, Chapter Six). In one activity students were asked to give the main idea of a paragraph, they all read the first two sentences and the final sentence and got the right answer. Reading beyond lines was observed in students' ability to bring together their own knowledge before starting reading when they work on a brainstorm activity to make use of their experiences and learn to set a purpose for the read texts.

Third, there were some learning skills students gained beyond CSR as a result of working within the structure of group work. These were skills that are useful not only for reading classes and academic success but also for studying, and in their personal and professional lives. Students learnt how to be organised and focussed while working in groups. Before the intervention some students complained that they did not have enough time to study because they were overloaded. Others expressed their frustration that although they had time they could get nothing done. Therefore, the main issue is not only about time but also about the ability to organise time. Another important skill was found in students' ability to give feedback and assess themselves while working together. Such skill trained them to have a sense of formative assessment which is essential for successful learning and teaching (Harder and Gibson, 2001). However, although the intervention of using CSR was successful it was not without problems. One problem has to do with the capability of keeping the track throughout the discussion. When students are engaged in debate, they were not always able to remain focused on their task.

Another problem is related to students' reading speed. CSR did not help them to accommodate their reading with what was demanded from each task. Flexibility in reading can solve this problem. In my opinion, part of this problem is caused by how much comprehension is needed for each task. In some activities students did not need to know all the meanings of the unknown words to answer given questions and the availability of strategies for this may have given the impression that this was needed. They might have thought that CSR is a package where they have to follow everything in order to reach the intended outcomes. Another logical reason is that I did not teach students some reading skills such as skimming and scanning to read faster.

The final problem is the efficacy of the language group. CSR is based on the assumption that group work will be productive and will enable students to read well together. In the remedial group, while group discussions enabled students to have better understanding and knowledge construction, some of their talk was argumentative or unproductive. These might be characterised for example by utterances which were short and did not provoke further reasoning. In the first year group I continued with CSR and added training in group work skills through thinking about the language of group work. This issue is spelled out in the next subsection.

9.2.3 Teaching group work practices and talk

This sub section provides an account of the final research sub question which is 'How can group work training through exploratory talk improve the quality of student discussions?' The adaptation of exploratory talk (talk which displays a level of critical thinking and judgement) with CSR made group work much better. Such adaptations improved the quality of the students' interaction and thinking. A criticism of group discussion in group one was that in some conversations students easily lost the track along the discussion and produced less productive talk. I suggested that the teacher presence was a necessity to monitor the flow of the talk. On the other hand, in group two, setting ground rules at the beginning of the course and highlighting- exploratory talk made the discussion more focussed and fruitful (see extract 18, Chapter Six). Students reminded each other about these rules from time to time. This is because when students follow ground rules they know what others expect from them and at the same

time know what they expect from others. I gave students the opportunity to establish some rules which they thought to be efficient as well.

However, cultural attitudes towards agreement, disagreement and politeness strategies used for offering or requesting and ways of argumentations created an additional problem. I had to consider how students discuss things in their mother tongue because students thought in Arabic at first before they spoke. Mercer's typology of talk was of great help to me in classifying students' talk; I attended to it while observing the way students discussed things. Although I found it useful to show students overtly the differences in diagrammatic form and giving examples, some characteristics seem to be problematic because what is considered to be cumulative in English might be exploratory in Arabic.

Here comes the need to teach Arab students the cultural dimension of communicative competence in order to account for communication failure (Umar, 2004). Using language as a learning tool is the notion of Vygostky's theory of cognitive development (1979). However, Vygostky emphasises that social interaction is essential for learning with reference to social and cultural factors. Learning takes place socially as collective thinking enables learning to give meaning to what is being learnt. Later learners can make use of the skills and strategies they have developed when learning together as they work alone. Learners use their linguistic ability to develop their basic structures of verbal thinking. After that, what they have learnt becomes internalised leading to a higher level of thinking. The process of internalisation takes place as a result of transforming shared experiences from outside into psychological phenomena.

Before the CSR, students were poor readers and they stated they struggled greatly when they were reading. They lacked the needed strategies for reading comprehension and had poorly developed definitions of the process of reading as a whole. Group work and strategies implemented in CSR were a good way of teaching because what students did socially was carried over into individual practices. That was confirmed by the achievement test and students responses to the questionnaire. CSR also helped students to gain other study skills needed in their studies and might be essential for their professional lives. In addition, CSR both encouraged learning and enjoyment which was seen to be important to enhance students' motivation to learn. As exploratory talk

suggested by Mercer (2000) had some problems when introducing it to students, care should be taken when teaching exploratory talk in the Saudi Arabian context. Exploratory talk can be better adapted for Arab learners with reference to the unique characteristics of Arabic and the socio-cultural norms in Arab society. The new typology I suggested might fit in the Arabic context (see section 8.2.4.3).

9.3 Implications and practical recommendations

In the light of the findings of the present study regarding the effect of CSR on developing the reading comprehension skills of Saudi students at Riyadh College of Medicine, and the utilisation of exploratory talk, there are several pedagogical implications and recommendations for Saudi English teaching, especially at the university level. These implications are:

1- It is important to attend to the fact that students who study in preparatory year programmes are not solely regarded as ESP students. They also need English for their academic studies and are therefore considered to fall into the ESAP category i.e., studying English for specific academic purposes. What is happening is that students are introduced to general English and suddenly study medical English after completing the first year. The two categories are better combined in the first year to prepare students for medical English.

2- The study has established the efficacy of directly teaching reading strategies and giving students opportunities to practice them through group work, in this case using CSR. This approach needs to be encouraged at all levels. Curriculum designers at Ministerial and University level in should encourage teachers to implement activities that require this kind of group work approach.

3- Similarly, this approach should be both adopted and advocated as part of the agenda for teacher training in Saudi Arabia.

4- However, this approach should not be seen as producing instant success. Teachers are to take into account that students need more time and effort to get familiar with CSR gradually, as well as with each other, because all students would work together

when fulfilling a given task. Most students reported that they had not experienced group work before and they struggled with group work in the first two weeks. They need to have time to adapt to new ways of working. However providing and explaining what strategies they can use encourages metacognition – thinking about the thinking. It is also part of the group training whereby getting them to think about their language and group interaction is not just metacognitive but meta-social. This means that the analysis of the approach and the opportunity to discuss it is built into its own process.

5- Group work is more beneficial when it is combined by exploratory talk suggested by Mercer (2000) in order to guarantee the quality of students' interactions and is likely to be more successful when used in the adapted culturally more appropriate form.

9.4 Suggestions for further research

It is hoped that this study will contribute to current research in the field of higher education in Saudi Arabia and, more specifically, teaching English to medical students. This study is the first, to the best of my knowledge, to implement CSR combined with exploratory talk for medical students, using action research as a methodology. The following are suggestions for further research of issues related to this study:

1- It would be worthwhile to explore the effect of CSR on reading comprehension skills with different sex, age, and fields of study at different stages in a Saudi context.

2- It would also be important to examine both students' and teachers' expectations, as well as the department's, about teaching English. If the goal of ESL instruction is students' acquisition of communicative competence, there is an urgent need of further investigation of how its many components including, linguistic, pragmatic, strategic and fluency can be developed in the classroom when non-native speakers participate in group work.

3- It would also be worthwhile to carry out this study on a larger scale so that the findings become more representative. This study used only 30 students from two different groups.

4- If I could repeat my study project, I would make some changes to my research plans. For example, I would negotiate the action research and the involvement of the institute and colleagues more clearly before the intervention. I would encourage the head of the department to allow other teachers to teach the same course with different students using CSR but as an optional choice. I would offer help to anyone by explaining CSR and how to implement it. The second intervention would have been more productive if I had shown the department students' results of the remedial group and how they were involved in group activities. Similarly, it would be of great help for me to keep in touch with students, even in an informal way via email, to see their enthusiasm going forward, toward with CSR. Students may be a good way to change the structure of the department. When students told the head about what they thought about the grammar teacher and his way of teaching, the head responded immediately and spoke to him. In the same way, other students might go to the head again and express their positive experience of CSR. Hopefully, this would influence the head to reconsider group work in teaching English.

9.5 Reflection on the process of conducting action research in a Saudi University

In many ways this was a successful action research project in that it researched the situation and found ways through two interventions of improving that situation. However, the change which the project succeeded in provoking was more limited than originally intended, a feature which I would ascribe to the difficulties of the research context. This raises the question of to what extent can change be achieved in the context of Saudi higher education through action research? Examining the literature review, it was striking to notice that there was no evidence of even a single study which used action research as a methodology for conducting educational research into teaching English to Saudi medical students. It seems possible to list a number of factors which have the effect of preventing or at least discouraging change from taking place. The first of these relates to the way institutions are structured. When discussing the way of teaching reading comprehension in the department, and the way of assessing students, I included some critical comments. I felt that nobody liked nor was able to respond positively to the ideas I was expressing, which were made in a constructive spirit. In fact, I felt a certain hostility or resentment. Following the meeting, I was asked by the

head of department to write and present to him a report which could summarise my concerns. This was submitted, but I did not receive any subsequent feedback. Also, when I attended one departmental meeting it became obvious to me that there were no discussions about problems. That was before the mid-term examinations (apart from this, there is only one other meeting, which takes place after the final examination). The agenda only included a focus on the rules, for example reminding the staff the various protocols and procedures and answering any questions regarding them. The point to be made here is that the administration of the course was not structured to encourage, promote or facilitate any kind of dialogue between the department heads and the teachers. The only scheduled meetings to discuss the course were around the implementation of the rules which had already been set by the department, not about anything that might lead to discussion about changing or improving them. There was no framework provided for the teachers to explore any such issues. In fact, the whole decision making process, whatever the subject, was entirely "top-down", being devised and delivered by the department. Furthermore, these meetings were only scheduled to last one hour, allowing no real time to do anything outside the narrow, prescribed agenda.

Secondly, there was no dialogue at all going around in the department, on either a teacher-to-teacher basis or on a teacher-to-student (or indeed, student-to-teacher) basis. On a number of occasions, students who I taught asked me to speak to other teachers about a range of issues. It seemed that students were not allowed to discuss anything except questions which were directly related to the prescribed teaching books and matters such as the timing of their exams or submitting homework. Some students told me that many teachers did not welcome students who visited their office. If students need anything teachers prefer to be asked in the classroom or in the corridors.

It is clear from discussions with them that teachers in the College have approaches to teaching which are not discussed openly, such that they might learn from each other and be encouraged to make changes to their belief systems or their work practices. They often seem to want to teach students in the same way they were taught, using the same techniques and methods that they were exposed to in their own schooldays. This does not suggest that there will be a development or evolution in the teaching processes at

many institutions. The matter is compounded by the culture among institutions which sees any acceptance of any need to change, or any admission that things were not perfect, as weakness. Some teachers are sensitive about discussing how they teach and how their students perform.

Furthermore, there seems to be some degree of professional jealousy which acts against the development of progressive, change-friendly atmosphere in higher education institutions. Around 80% of teachers are non-Saudi, and are hired on fixed-term contracts. I reach the conclusion that any challenge to the establishment is dangerous for them, as it might reduce their chances of getting a contract renewal, so they prefer to simply do things the way they have always been done, and do not wish to be seen joining in discussions about making changes. It must also be remembered that the institutions are traditionally very conservative and not predisposed towards seeing change as a good thing. Also, there is no culture of conducting research into teaching approaches, nor to responding to such research.

A third factor that acts against progressive change is the educational background of the teaching staff employed by the institutions. Often, they are educated only to Bachelor's degree level, and some of them came from the English training unit associated with the university, and therefore were not perhaps endowed with the training that would have helped them to be more critical of teaching practices in general and, more specifically, their own .

Turning attention briefly to how institutions themselves could be encouraged to make positive changes, it is interesting to reflect upon the pre-professional programme where this research was located. Among other universities, the pre-professional programme has two advantages. First, it lasts for one and a half years which gives students more opportunity to learn English, although this has created some tension between the university and the ministry of higher education. Second, unlike other universities, students in this programme know exactly which route they are going to take from the first day, which lets them feel more relaxed. Are they going to be in Medicine or Medical Sciences streams?

Yet, there has been some debate as to whether studying in Saudi universities is of value to learners. All Saudi students who want to join one of the fields of medicine, computing, science or business and administration, should join the preparatory year-as it is called by other universities- which does not count towards their degree but is needed in order to enter the main programme. They study for six hours a day either in the morning or in the evening. Some educators point out that students who joined the preparatory year had benefited from this programme. To illustrate this, Al-brahem (2010) advocates that the preparatory year fills the gap between what students have studied in high schools and what they are expected to study at university. This is because students will need to improve their English level and expand their knowledge of other skills and subjects. Al-fardan (2010) agrees and adds that the preparatory year enables students to know to what extent they are prepared to join the different colleges they will apply to. This awareness results in a better matching of candidates to universities, and therefore a better level of graduates for the job market. However, some studies suggest that the preparatory year is nothing but a hindrance. In one study, Mahmood (2010) investigate the main problems in the preparatory year from students' points of view. Mahmood concluded that among several problems, teaching English was the main obstacle as teachers were not qualified and curricula were not well designed. More importantly, the Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia, also known as Majlis al-Shura or al- Shura Council, has put in its agenda a comprehensive evaluation of the preparatory year similar to the pre-professional programme, as it is very costly, yet, it is claimed yields few positive results. This has become a subject for debate in society generally and has featured in the national press. Many parents and students complain about this programme claiming that it is distracting and frustrating and leads many students to quit study. Besides, it is not credited from the overall progress (Alhusani, 2012).

It seems that because of this close scrutiny and debate regarding the programme some change is inevitable, so it can be seen as an opportunity for the college and the department to be proactive, introducing improvements which will enhance the reputation of the college with both the government and with other, competing institutions, and save an institution that has become part of their identity – and which, practically, provides employment for their teachers. The college is in a better position to

do this as unlike other universities and tertiary institutions the pre-professional programme is run by the university rather than by outside private contractors.

As a teacher, I have gained from the experience of taking time to examine reflectively different aspects of teaching. Naturally, this has been fuelled by my close contact with teachers and my need to consider their approaches, and the effectiveness of those approaches, in detail. I used my own teaching for a specific purpose other than just teaching the class – as a way of researching . It was necessary to do this, as it was important for me to develop my own ideas, based on my findings and experiences as well as the literature, and not to wait for ideas to be assessed by others from a distance. For me, one of the preconditions for a deeper and greater understanding of my students and their needs (in the context of my classes) is the ability to evaluate my own teaching with insight. Of course, it is also helpful that my strengths and weaknesses will be given assessment from the department, but I believe it is important for me to form my own opinions and reach my own conclusions first.

I have had to play dual roles, as both teacher and researcher simultaneously. This brought benefits but also challenges, which I enjoyed. However, I experienced some tensions while playing roles at the students' level and at the departmental level. Students were looking to me as a teacher (insider) whose role was to teach them and help them to pass their exams, while the department was looking at me as an insider (colleague and teacher) and as an outsider (PhD student and researcher).

As a teacher I focused more on the experience of doing things. Classroom observations enabled me to reflect upon what I had done in a systematic way and learn and explore new approaches and methods to apply to different problems. Teaching and learning are two-way processes- interactions, both involving sending and receiving, and this should, in my opinion, be a permanent part of teaching pedagogy. By recognising this link and building it into the pedagogical practices of institutions in Saudi Arabia, I would be able to make a contribution to filling in the gap between theory and practice which now exists. As an example of how positive change could be promoted, teachers could be encouraged to look at the success of students in other teachers' classes, possibly through a peer observation program, and also get ideas from each other. They could then be

allowed to tacitly adopt best practice as they see it from their peers, without any "top-down" intervention or prescription.

As for the reflections which helped me to come to a better understanding, this was enhanced by my own observations and also with help from my students and comments from colleagues, the course coordinator, the head of department and so on. When I talk to students, listen attentively and join or monitor their group work, I receive immediate feedback from them, enabling me to form an opinion of their ability in the areas of self-evaluation and self-improvement. As a teacher I learnt what my students think of me and what I was doing. It is not necessary that they give me feedback directly but the way they respond to my messages and the way they interact with each other's tell a lot. When I carry out research I become very close to students and consider things more from other perspectives. I learnt professionally from the experience of watching myself and listening to audio-tapes when interviewing students. The dynamics of the classrooms enabled me to capture many details of the lessons and scrutinise the interviews because the tapes can be replayed. There are some aspects of teaching which cannot be recognised by me or my students while in the middle of a lesson. Reflection can help me to understand and categorise these, allowing the possibility of preparing remedial activities and approaches next time. Teaching medical English showed that it was not a precondition of success to have a wide knowledge of medical terminology when teaching a class in the medicine department.

As a researcher, I focussed more on the analysis of the results. Access as a micro-political issue is of great importance for me as an action researcher because of the nature of action research: it requires generating knowledge for the sake of bringing about change, which is more than likely to be met with some level of resistance. Participation of all the stakeholders is at the heart of action research. The uniqueness of each situation leads to the need to consider power relations.

It was easy for me to gain access because I did the field work in the college to which I belong but I was afraid of losing the access when I had some resistance to my data collection. This required me to be creative about this and be sensitive to issues of space on some occasions. For example, I had chat with students in the library instead of

classrooms or with colleagues in cafeteria. I had to consider others' feelings and privacy. Not intervening in others' issues.

Change needs time and effort, and it is important to try to help others to see for themselves the benefits of change; if it comes from inside, it will be more effective. I benefited a great deal from attending different classes and observing other teachers while they were teaching. At the beginning, I was totally focussed on observing certain things related to my research, but as time went by, I began to understand that rather than being a mechanical process, this included using the data to "be a student", to put myself in their shoes and so to see how a student may feel when they do not understand things. The approach of triangulation helped me deepen my understanding of the researched which would not be able if I were not researching. However the fact of doing the research influenced the way I teach and made me more responsive to students' perspectives.

9.6 Final words

This study has established that within this Saudi medical school collaborative strategic reading, especially where it involves texts that are relevant to students' interests and future needs is a suitable approach towards teaching reading, as students are able transfer strategies learned in groups into individual assessed reading. The effectiveness of this is enhanced when students are also taught culturally appropriate ways of interacting in the CSR groups. In addition it has also shown that action research can be a very suitable method of both studying and improving educational practice. Before I embarked on this project I saw educational research in a reductive positivist way. In this, I think I was typical of the educational community in Saudi Arabia. Most research in education is based on statistical analysis and seems to take a simplistic view of the social and psychological issues that were problematic in implementing the interventions. It is my hope that my action research project will be the first of many as I see it as a path to understanding teaching and learning and to instituting educational improvement.

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Appendices

Appendix: One

The structure of English Language Programme

1. Oral Skills (5 hours credit)
2. Supplementary Reading and Discussion (3 hours credit)   Eng. 101
3. Writing Workshops (2 hours credit)

4. Academic Reading and Vocabulary (5 hours credit)   Eng. 102

5. Language Structure and Drills (5 hours credit)   Eng. 103

1. Oral Skills (2 hours credit)   Eng. 111
2. Writing (2 hours credit)

3. Language Structure and Drills (4 hours credit)   Eng.112

4. Academic Reading and Vocabulary (4 hours credit)   Eng. 113

1. Medical Terminology (2 hours credit)   Eng. 201

2. Writing (2 hours credit)
3. Language Structure and Drills (5 hours credit)   Eng. 211

4. Advanced Reading and Vocabulary (3 hours credit)   Eng. 212

Appendix Two:

Courses taught in each semester (Adapted from ELUP, 2010)

SEMESTER 1 (Fall)
Lower Intermediate Level

ENGL 101: COMMUNICATION SKILLS I
- Oral Skills – Lab — 5 hrs/wk
- Supplementary Reading / Discussion — 3 hrs/wk
- Writing I: Elementary Composition — 2 hrs/wk
- 10 hrs/wk — 5 credits

ENGL 102: LANGUAGE STRUCTURE AND DRILLS I — 5 hrs/wk — 4 credits

ENGL 103: ACADEMIC READING AND VOCABULARY I — 5 hrs/wk — 5 credits

(20 classroom hours/week)
14 CREDITS

SEMESTER 2 (Spring)
Upper Intermediate Level

ENGL 111: COMMUNICATION SKILLS II
- Oral Skills – Lab — 2 hrs/wk
- Writing II: Intermediate Composition — 2 hrs/wk
- 4 hrs/wk — 2 credits

ENGL 112: LANGUAGE STRUCTURE AND DRILLS II — 4 hrs/wk — 2 credits

ENGL 113: ACADEMIC READING AND VOCABULARY II — 4 hrs/wk — 2 credits

(12 classroom hours/week)
6 CREDITS

SEMESTER 3 (Fall)
Advanced Level

ENGL 201: MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY — 2 hrs/wk — 2 credits

ENGL 211: ADVANCED GRAMMAR AND WRITING
- Writing III: Introduction to Academic Writing — 2 hrs/wk
- Advanced Grammar — 3 hrs/wk
- 5 hrs/wk — 2 credits

ENGL 212: ADVANCED READING AND VOCABULARY — 3 hrs/wk — 2 credits

(10 classroom hours/week)
6 CREDITS

Appendix Three:

Sequence of Taught Materials

Chapter No.	Content	Reading skill	Building vocabulary	Language focus
Chapter 1 A long walk home	Father teaches son a lesson	Using context	Phrasal verbs	Past perfect
Chapter 2 Culture shock	An exchange student in the US	Topic vs. main idea	Learning new expressions	Used to, get used to, be used to
Chapter 3 A young blind whiz	Disability leads to success	Inference	Compound nouns	Reduced clauses

Source: Lee and Gundersen (2001).

Appendix four:

The gross enrolment ratio for Saudi students (2012)

Summary Statistics on General Education In K.S.A
Academic Year 2011/2012 العام الدراسي ١٤٣٢/١٤٣٣هـ
خلاصة إحصائية عن تعليم البنين والبنات في المملكة حسب المراحل وأنواع التعليم
Summary Statistics on Male & Female Education by Stage & Type of Education

شاغلو الوظائف التعليمية Academic Staff	الطلاب Students	الفصول Class-Rooms	المدارس Schools	الجنس Gender	المرحلة Stage
0	44,413	0	0	ذكور Male	رياض أطفال Kindergarten
12,705	97,009	9,089	2,323	إناث Female	
12,705	141,422	9,089	2,323	جملة Total	
115,319	1,285,270	69,433	6,897	ذكور Male	ابتدائي Elementary
117,134	1,245,474	65,142	6,948	إناث Female	
232,453	2,530,744	134,575	13,845	جملة Total	
62,770	636,354	30,143	4,326	ذكور Male	متوسط Intermediate
62,585	575,675	29,333	3,915	إناث Female	
125,355	1,212,029	59,476	8,241	جملة Total	
53,935	681,085	30,934	2,914	ذكور Male	ثانوي Secondary
60,690	545,120	30,341	2,744	إناث Female	
114,625	1,226,205	61,275	5,658	جملة Total	
0	8,139	1,216	766	ذكور Male	تعليم كبار Adult Ed.
7,899	41,520	5,418	2,213	إناث Female	
7,899	49,659	6,634	2,979	جملة Total	
4,631	17,471	3,555	1,136	ذكور Male	التربية الخاصة Special Ed.
3,443	9,968	1,796	567	إناث Female	
8,074	27,439	5,351	1,703	جملة Total	
236,655	2,628,319	135,281	16,039	ذكور Male	المجموع Total
264,456	2,559,179	141,119	18,710	إناث Female	
501,111	5,187,498	276,400	34,749	جملة Total	

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Appendix Five:

The materials taught to both courses

The selected reading texts used for teaching in this study (Cycle One)
English 101

Time Schedule	Reading texts
Week 1 23-27 Feb 2010-	Course Outline and Overview Goals and Objectives + semi-structured interviews and questionnaire
Week 2 30-3 Feb-Mar	Interactions Access Chapter 1, Nebourhoods, Cities and towns
Week 3 6-10 Mar	Interactions Access Chapter 2, Shopping and E-commerce
Week 4 13-17 Mar	English for Health Sciences Medical reading; The History of Medicine
Week 5 20-24 Mar	Interactions Access Chapter 3, Friends and Family
Week 6 27-3 Mar-Apr	Interactions Access Health care Chapter, 4
Week 7 6-10 Apr	English for Health Sciences Medical reading; How People Move
Week 8 13-17 Apr	Interactions Access Sleep and Dream Chapter, 5
Week 9 20-24 Apr	English for Health Sciences Medical reading; How Disease Affect the Body
Week 10 27-31 Apr	Interactions Access Food and Nutrition Chapter 6,
Week 11 3-7 May	Interactions Access Chapter 7, Great Destination
Week 12 10-14 May	Interactions Access Our Plan Chapter 8,
Week 13 17-21 May	Interactions Access Our Plan Chapter 8,

The following table include the teaching plans and topics of the second phase:

The selected reading texts used for teaching in this study (Cycle Two)

English 101

Time Schedule	Reading texts
Week 1 25-29 Sep. 2010	Course Outline and Overview Goals and Objectives + semi-structured interviews and questionnaire
Week 2 2-6 Oct.	Selected Reading Chapter 1, Introducing People
Week 3 9-13 Oct.	Selected Reading Chapter 2, A Long Walk Home
Week 4 16-20 Oct.	English for Health Sciences Arab Hospitals
Week 5 23-27 Oct.	Selected Reading Chapter 3, Student Learning Team
Week 6 30 Oct.-3 Nov.	Selected Reading Chapter 4, A Young Blind Whiz
Week 7 6-10 Nov.	English for Health Sciences Structure and Function of the Heart
Week 8 11-18 Nov.	Selected Reading Chapter 5, How to Make a Speech
Week 9 19-26	Selected Reading Chapter 6, Future Talk, A Conversation with Bill Gates
Week 10 27-1 Dec.	English for Health Sciences Medicine and Drug
Week 11 4-8 Dec.	Selected Reading Chapter 7, Public Attitudes Toward Science
Week 12 11-15 Dec	English for Health Sciences Americans' Use of Medication
Week 13 18-22 Dec.	English for Health Sciences Infections

Appendix Six:

Semi-structured interview

Q 1. I am really interested in what you are doing now can you tell me about that please?
Q2. In brief, how do you prefer to study, could you talk a little bit about that?
Q 3. If you do not mind, could you tell me how do you feel when you fail to solve certain problems in your study?
Q 4. Do you usually ask the help of others in your study?
Q5. Do you feel uncomfortable when you speak in front of the class.
Q 6. Do you think working in groups is different from working individually, how?
Q 7. What is the most important skill you need in your study, why?
Q8. Do you receive any training on strategies for reading comprehensions?
Q 9. Do you use certain strategies for reading comprehension? If yes how can you apply that to other subjects?
Q 10. If you have anything to add or comment on I will be glad to hear from you?

Appendix Seven:

Learning log

CSR Learning Log

Name: Saud masoud					Date:		Topic:		
Preview		What you already know?				What you predict to know?			
		student Learning Teams				get new skills. student Learning to author help another			

Click and clunk	Ways of tackling difficult clunk						Modifications by		
Difficult clunks you got	Contextual clues	Grammar clues	Fix up strategies	Using pictures, tables	Dictionary help	Word handout	Yourself, or group	Teacher's help	
peers						✓			
effectively							✓		
satisfaction									
revealed					✓				
senior					✓				
immediately					✓	✓			
highlighting					✓	✓			
points					✓				
location					✓				
additional					✓				
preparing					✓				
receiving					✓				
identify					✓				
maximum					✓				
assignments			✓						
insufficient					✓	✓			
Include			✓						
versatility					✓				

Get the gist	What are the main points you learnt from the text?
	I learnt team activities to deal with different things.

	Summarize the main ideas of the text?
	1- students learn more from their class mates. 2 team activities will be useful if each one does has done his or her duty.

Wrap up	Generate three questions related to the text?
	- How do members of the team help each other in reviewing test results? - who students a person should look for in a team?

Appendix Eight:

Students' questionnaire after implementing CSR

(English Version)

Questionnaire Items	Agree	Disagree
A. Your general perceptions of CSR instruction		
CSR :		
1. motivates students to learn English		
2. helps students to feel more comfortable when learning English		
3. helps students to understand the reading text in a better way		
4. helps students to ask each other without hesitation		
5. helps students to learn more vocabulary		
6. helps students to work in a competitive atmosphere		
7. adds some fun to the process of learning		
8. saves time and effort		
9. motivates students to work collaboratively and help each other		
10. helps students to take responsibility of what they are doing		
11. makes students convinced about the right answer		
12. helps students to express themselves freely		
13. helps students to extract the meaning of difficult vocabulary from the text.		
14. helps students to be part of the process of learning		
15. is useful in classes with different levels		
16. enhances student-centered environment		
17. enhances active learning		
18. makes students sure about their answer due to the time and effort they spend while working		
19. improves reading comprehenstion		
Total		
B. Using previewing strategy		

20. helps you in reading comprehension		
21. helps in knowing what the reading text is about		
22. helps in generating questions about the text		
Total		
C. Using click and clunk strategy		
23. helps in understanding difficult words and sentences		
24. helps in attracting students' attention to solve comprehension problems		
25. helps in understanding the reading text		
Total		
D. Using fix up strategies		
26. Helps in understanding difficult vocabulary and sentences		
E. Using get the gist strategy		
27. helps in extracting the main idea of the reading text		
28. helps in recognizing the important people, places or things in the text		
Total		
F. Using wrap up strategy		
29. is useful when students employ wh-questions to summarize the whole text		
30. helps students to generate their own questions to check their understanding of the reading text		
Total		
G. Students' self evaluation of their reading comprehension after using CSR		
31. after CSR, I do not need to understand the meaning of all words to understand the text nor to use a dictionary		
32. after CSR, I can read faster. I can read groups of words, not one word at a time		
33. after CSR, I can benefit of its strategy with other subjects.		
Total		
H. The problems students encountered in CSR		

34. I do not have enough time to finish a given task		
35. Some members keep silent and do not participate		
36. I did not understand the four strategies well		
37. Some members chat while they are working		
38. I sometimes do not like the role given to me. I prefer to stick to a certain role		
39. The size of the group is not suitable either big or small		
40. The instructions were not clear		
Total		
Others……………………………………………………		

I. The strategies you use for understanding new words		
41. using the dictionary or electronic dictionary		
42. using grammatical clues such as affixes		
43.using words in context		
44. using punctuation clues such as brackets or dashes		
45. using contextual clues such as examples, pictures, titles and subtitles.		
Total		
J. the strategies students prefer to enrich vocabulary		
46. focusing on high frequency words		
47. using cross words		
48. using synonyms		
49. using antonyms		
Total		
Others …………………………………………….		

Appendix Nine:

Questionnaire of students' perceptions after implementing CSR
(Arabic Version)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

<u>استبيان طالب</u>

عزيزي الطالب/...

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

يهدف هذا الاستبيان إلى معرفة ميول واتجاهات الطلاب نحو استخدام القراءة التعاونية الإستراتيجية في تطوير مهارات الاستيعاب المقروء. إن النجاح في رسم صورة واضحة لهذه الميول والاتجاهات يعتمد اعتمادا كليا بعد الله على تعاونك بالإجابة بشكل دقيق حيث انك الركن الأساسي لنجاح التجربة من عدمه.

شكرا لتعاونك المسبق مع تمنياتي لك بالتوفيق والنجاح الدائم.

- ضع (أوافق) أو (لا أوافق) مقابل العبارات التالية.

القراءة التعاونية الإستراتيجية

	لا أوافق	أوافق
1. تزيد الدافعية لدى الطالب لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية		
2. تشعر الطالب براحة اكبر لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية		
3. تساعد على فهم النص المقروؤ بطريقة أفضل		
4. تساعد الطلاب على طرح الأسئلة فيما بينهم بدون تردد		
5. تساعد على حفظ كثير من المفردات اللغوية		
6. توجد روح التنافس بين المجموعات حيث تسعى كل مجموعة للتفوق على الأخرى		
7. تضيف على العملية التعليمية شئ من المتعة		
8. تحافظ على حفظ الوقت والجهد		
9. تعزز من روح التعاون والتقارب بين الطلاب		
10. تنمي روح المسؤولية لدى الطالب		
11. تقنع الطالب بالحل الصحيح من زملائه		
12. الأسئلة المباشرة تساعد على أن يعبر الطالب عن رأيه بحرية		
13. تساعد الطالب على استنتاج واستخراج معاني المفردات من النص المقروؤ		
14. تزيد من اندماج الطلاب في العملية التعليمية		
15. مفيدة جدا في الصفوف ذات القدرات المتنوعة		
16. تقلل من دور المعلم ويزيد من دور الطالب في العملية التعليمية		
17. المشاركة في الحصول على الإجابة ترسخ المعلومة لدى الطالب نتيجة للجهد الذي يبذله		
18. تزيد من مستوى الطلبة في اللغة المستهدفة		
19. تحسن القدرة الاستيعابية للنص لدى الطلاب		
استخدام إستراتيجية ماقبل القراءة (Previewing)		
20. يساعد على فهم النص		
21. تساعد بشكل كبير على استخراج الفكرة الرئيسية في النص		
22. تساعد على طرح الأسئلة المتعلقة بالنص.		
استخدام إستراتيجية افهم لا افهم (click and clunk)		
23. (تساعد على فهم الكلمات والأجزاء الغير مفهومة في النص		
24. تساعد على معرفة نقاط الضعف وحل المشكلات وجذب انتباه الطلاب للمواضع المفهومة وغير المفهومة في النص		
25. تساعد على فهم النص		
استخدام إستراتيجية التصليح (fix up strategies)		
26. تساعد على فهم الكلمات والجمل المبهمة		

		استخدام إستراتيجية استخراج الفكرة الرئيسية (get the gist)
		27. يساعد على فهم الفكرة الرئيسية من النص
		28. (يساعد على التعرف على أهم الأشخاص والأشياء والأماكن في النص
		استخدام إستراتيجية التلخيص (wrap up)
		39. مفيد في عملية التلخيص
		30. مفيد في مساعدة الطلاب لكتابة أسئلتهم والتي تبين مدى فهمهم للنص
		تقييم الطالب لنفسه في القراءة بعد استخدام القراءة التعاونية الإستراتيجية
		31. بعد استخدام القراءة التعاونية الإستراتيجية لا احتاج أن افهم كل الكلمات لفهم النص أو أن استخدم القاموس
		32. بعد استخدام القراءة التعاونية الإستراتيجية استطيع القراءة بسرعة أكبر
		33. استطيع أن استخدم استراتيجيات القراءة التعاونية مع باقي المقررات
		ماهي المشكلات التي واجهتها عند استخدام القراءة التعاونية ؟
		34. لا يوجد لدي وقت كافي لحل التمارين
		35. بعض الطلاب يبقون صامتين طوال الوقت
		36. لم أفهم الإستراتيجيات الأربع بشكل جيد
		37. بعض الطلاب يتحدثون خارج الموضوع عند الحل
		38. أفضل أن أبقى على دور واحد طوال الوقت
		39. حجم المجموعة غير ملائم إما صغير أو كبير
		40. التعليمات غير واضحة
		مشاكل أخري أرجو التحديد
		ماهي الطريقة المفضلة لديك لتعامل مع الكلمات الجديدة
		41. استخدام القاموس
		42. استخدام القواعد
		43. استخدام الكلمة في السياق
		44. استخدام علامات الترقيم
		45. استخدام الصور الموجودة في النص والعناوين الرئيسة أو الفرعية
		ماهي الطريقة المستخدمة لزيادة محصول الكلمات
		46. التركيز على الكلمات الاكثر استخداما
		47. استخام الكلمات المتقاطعة
		48. استخدام المترادفات
		49. استخدام المتضادات

Appendix Ten:

Students' test

Most mothers have a good piece of advice: Never go into a supermarket hungry! If you go shopping for food before lunchtime, you'll probably buy more than you plan to. Unfortunately, however, just this advice isn't enough for consumers these days. Modern shoppers need an education in how—and how not—to buy things at the grocery store. First, you should check the weekly newspaper ads. Find out the items that are on sale and   decide if you really need those things. In other words, don't buy anything just because it's cheaper than usual! Next, in the market, carefully read the information on the package, and don't let words like "New and Improved!" or "All Natural" on the front of a package influence you. Instead, read the list of ingredients on the back. Third, compare prices; that is, you should examine the prices of both different brands and *different* sizes of the same brand.

Another suggestion for consumers is to buy generic items instead of famous brands. Generic items in supermarkets come in plain packages. These products are cheaper because manufacturers don't spend much money on packaging or advertising. The quality, however, is usually identical to the quality of well-known name brands. In the same way, in buying clothes, you can often find high quality and low prices in brands that are not famous. Shopping in discount clothing stores can also help you save a lot of money. Although these stores aren't very attractive, and they usually do not have individual dressing rooms, not only are the prices

low, but you can often find the same famous brands that you find in high-priced department stores.

Wise consumers read magazine advertisements and watch TV commercials, but they do this with one advantage: knowledge of the psy-chology behind the ads. In other words, well-informed consumers watch for information and check for misinformation. They ask themselves questions: Is the advertiser hiding something in small print at the bottom of the page? Is there any real information in the commercial, or is the advertiser simply showing an attractive image? Is this product more expensive than it should be because it has a famous name? With the answers to these questions, consumers can make a wise choice.

I. Answer the following questions

a. Do you buy generic items? Why or why not?

……………………………………………………………………………

b. How is shopping in North America different from shopping in your country?

....

c. What advice can you give a foreigner who wants to go shopping in your country?

……………………………………………………………………………..

d. What are the words on products that seem to attract our attention?

……………………………………………………………………………

e. What a wise consumer should do before going shopping?

....

II. Guess the meaning of the underlined words by matching the words in column A with their meaning in column B. one extra choice is given in column B.

A	B
1. Attractive	a- Well-informed
2. Famous	b- Well-known
3. Brand	c- Good-looking
	d- Name of product

III. Find words in the text which mean the same as by matching the words in column A with their meaning in column B. One extra choice is given in column B.

B	A
1- To make something better	a. free
2- That pleases or interests you	b. attractive

3- To keep something in a place   c. improve

                                                     d. hide

IV. Find words in the text which mean the opposite by matching the words column A with their meaning in column B. One extra choice is given.

    A

1- Save   a. different

2- Cheap   b. spend

3- Same   c. fast

4-Artifical   d. natural

5- Old   e. individual

6- Group   f. new

                                              g. good

V. Write whether the following statements True or False?

1. Items on sale are usually more expensive than usual. (   )

2. Generic products are usually cheaper than famous brands (   )

3. To save money, you should buy clothes in discount stores rather than expensive department stores. (   )

4. An intelligent shopper knows something about consumer psychology. (   )

5. It isn't a good idea to read the ingredients on the back of a package. (   )

VI. Circle the best choice to complete the statements below.

1- The best title for the reading text is:

a. shopping in big malls   b. shopping through the net   c. smart   shopping

2- The main topic of paragraph two is……….

a. advice for consumers   b. generic items   c. intelligent consumers

3- The main topic of paragraph three is………

   a. advice for consumers   b. generic items   c. intelligent consumers

VII. Choose the best summary for the text

a. in order to be a wise consumer, you have to read carefully what is written on the product before buying things.

b. all consumers should look for cheap stores, read magazine, watch TV commercials, buy generic items and check the weekly magazines.

c. there are many ways that shoppers can do before going shopping. One example is to buy only what they need.

VIII. Generate two questions related to the above text.

……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………..
....
....

Appendix Eleven:

A transcript of an interview with a student carried out before teaching
Duration of the interview: 14 minutes

Interviewer: 1- I am really interested in what you are doing now can you tell me about that please?

 Interviewee: I am taking this programme because I failed in the first year because I was bad at English. When a teacher explained things I did not know a single word of what he was saying. Then step by step I was able to catch few words but unfortunately that was too late. I was very sure that I would not be able to pass the exam and I failed. When they told us about the programme I was happy about that but I thought it to be more intensive, we take more hours of teaching. Right now I am trying to enrol in an English institute to take more English classes in the evening.

Interviewer: in brief, how do you prefer to study, could you talk a little bit about that please?

Interviewee: any book, yes, first I try to understand the general rules then do some examples and try to answer them.

Interviewer: so you know the rule and take some examples to check your understanding.

Interviewee: yes that is true, sometimes when I could not understand the general rule I stop studying because I know for sure that I am wasting my time if I go on.

Interviewer: ok that is good

Interviewer: if you do not mind, could you tell me how do you feel when you fail to solve certain problems in your study?

If I fail to solve something I try it out once and twice may be three times but if I could not my blood pressure goes up and I become very sad. I stop doing things. For example, once I was preparing for a grammar exam I had some difficulty with chapter three because I missed some classes. I could not carry on with chapter four and five after that

Interviewer: ok good

Interviewer: do you usually ask the help of others in your study?

Interviewee: I ask anyone at home, older, younger than me for help, even if they know little.

Interviewer: so you never mind asking others for help

Interviewee: yes that is right

Interviewer: excellent

Interviewer: do you feel uncomfortable when you speak in front of the class?

Interviewee: it depends on whom I am speaking to, do I know the audience well.

Interviewer: let us focus on the classroom

Interviewee: I feel no harm speaking in front of them regardless of the topic.

Interviewer: why what is the reason for that?

Interviewee: because I know them well, I know the way they are thinking and what they might accept and not accept.

Interviewer: that sounds great.

I**nterviewer: do you thing working in groups is different from working individually how?**

Interviewee: in studying English yes but when doing other things I prefer individual work.

Interviewer: can you give an example about other things

Interviewee: for example mathematics if I know three thousand words and my classmate knows three I do not know I can benefit from him but in mathematics it depends on how you understand the rule

Interviewer: so you thing working in groups is better only in studying English because you can enrich your vocabulary from others you do not already know

Interviewee: that is right

Interviewer: that is fine

Interviewer: what is the most important skill you need in your study, why?

Interviewee: I think it is translation

Interviewer: no I mean the four main skill reading, writing, listening and speaking

Interviewee: speaking for me how to speak

Interviewer: do you think you need speaking all the time, for example do you really need it in doing homework or in writing reports

Interviewee: I thing speaking as a student is important but sometimes I need writing as well

Interviewee: what are the skills again?

Interviewer: reading, writing, listening and speaking

Interviewee: I changed my mind I think it is writing, my writing should be grammatical without grammatical mistakes

Interviewer: why do you thing that?

Because if you know how to write that means you know lots of things

Interviewer: what is about if you have multiple choice exam and there is no writing

Interviewee: I do not like multiple choice questions because sometimes you do it randomly and yet you got the right answer

Interviewer: d**o you receive any training on strategies for reading comprehension**?

Interviewee: how reading…..

Interviewer: reading a book attending a course about reading and so on

Interviewee: I used just to read Arabic stories, I once read short English stories but I could not understand anything

Interviewer: wha**t** do you thing the difference between Arabic and English stories

Interviewee: in English I think there is only one main idea and many supporting ideas but in Arabic there are many main ideas and this is according to my understanding of the two

Interviewer: which one you prefer?

interviewee: Arabic stories of course because I can understand them

interviewer: good

interviewer: do you use certain strategies for reading comprehension, if yes how can you apply that to other subjects?

Interviewee: first of all I read the title and then I try to grasp the main idea. If it is interesting a carry on or I stop reading

Interviewer: now let us just focus on subjects you have to study what are the skills you use?

Interviewee: I try to translate all the time

Interviewer: ok do you use these strategies with all subjects?

Interviewee: for sure I use them automatically

I**nterview**: fine

Interviewer: if you have anything to add or comment on I will be glad to hear from you?

Interviewee: I hope to have more hours for studying because sometimes I come here to the college for only one or two hours

Interviewer: what is about reading do you think you need more hours

Interviewee: yes of course I need to know more vocabulary but I thing looking for the meaning of difficult words takes more time

Interviewer: I promise you we will learn some strategies which help you in reading comprehension

Interviewee: ok thanks

Interviewer: thanks

Appendix Twelve:

Observation Guide of Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR)

The Classroom Environment	The Teacher Behavior	The Student Behavior
The classroom is well organized and comfortable	Teacher provides students with the objective of the lessons	Students are clear about what to do
It is equipped with visual and audio aids like blackboard ,smart board etc.	Teacher gives clear and direct instruction to students	Students are active and motivate while working together
	Teacher keeps checking and helping students while they work	Each student knows his role
	Teacher is able to keep records efficiently like students' performance, taking attendance etc.	Students implement the four strategies efficiently
	Teacher is able to arrange anticipated and unanticipated interruption like equipment set up and take down, materials shortage etc.	Students brainstorm what they have learnt before starting reading
	Teacher provides students with feedback	Students predict what they think the reading passage will be about
	Others :	Students use click and clung to identify the meaning of words

	Comments:	Students gets a gist for extracting the main points
		Students review the important points by summarizing, answering questions and creating their own questions
		All students take part in their group
	Others	
	comments	

Appendix Thirteen:

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

SUSSEX INSTITUTE

RESEARCH ETHICS CHECKLIST

The Standards apply to all research undertaken, whether empirical or not.
When planning non-empirical work, you will need to consider how specific standards and guidelines may best be applied to your research approach, processes and potential impact. Where there is no equivalent for non-empirical work, tick 'not applicable', explaining briefly why in the comment box for each standard.

<u>IMPORTANT RULES</u>
If you want to EMAIL this document with your choices, please double click on your CHOICE CHECKBOX, save the document and email it.

If you want to just PRINT this document and fill it out manually, go to File and then Print. It will print it out in Landscape format.

Standard 1: Safeguard the interests and rights of those involved or affected by the research

	Yes	**No**	**N/A**
1.1 Will you consider the well-being, wishes and feelings, and best interests of those involved or affected?	☑	☐	☐
1.2 Will written and signed consent be obtained without coercion? Will participants be informed of their right to refuse or to withdraw at any time?	☑	☐	☐
1.3 Will the purposes and processes of the research be fully explained, using alternative forms of communication where necessary and making reference to any implications for participants of time, cost and the possible influence of the outcomes?	☑	☐	☐
1.4 Where covert research is proposed, has a case been made and brought to the attention of the School Research Governance Committee and approval sought from the relevant external professional ethical committee?	☑	☐	☐
1.5 Does the proposal include procedures to verify material with respondents and offer feedback on findings?	☑	☐	☐
1.6 Will conditional anonymity and confidentiality be offered?	☑	☐	☐
1.7 Have you identified the appropriate person to whom disclosures that involve danger to the participant or others, must be reported?	☑	☐	☐
Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above			

Standard 2: Ensure the safety of researchers undertaking fieldwork

	Yes	No	N/A
2.1 Have you identified any physical or social risks to yourself in undertaking the fieldwork?	☑	☐	☐
2.2 Will you have access to an administrator who will keep a diary of any fieldwork visits and your whereabouts?	☑	☐	☐
2.3 Have you considered how you will collect your material and whether this could make you vulnerable?	☑	☐	☐
Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above			

Standard 3: Uphold the highest possible standards of research practices including in

research design, collection and storage of research material, analysis, interpretation

and writing

	Yes	No	N/A
3.1 Will literature be used appropriately, acknowledged, referenced and where relevant, permission sought from the author(s)?	☑	☐	☐
3.2 Is the research approach well suited to the nature and focus of the study?	☑	☐	☐
3.3 Will the material be used to address existing or emerging research question(s) only?	☑	☐	☐
3.4 Does the research design include means of verifying findings and interpretations?	☑	☐	☐
3.5 Where research is externally funded, will agreement with sponsors be reached on reporting and intellectual property rights?	☑	☐	☐
Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above			

Standard 4: Consider the impact of the research and its use or misuse for those involved

in the study and other interested parties.

	Yes	No	N/A
4.1 Have the short and long term consequences of the research been considered from the different perspectives of participants, researchers, policy-makers and, where relevant, funders?	☑	☐	☐
4.2 Have the costs of the research to participants or their institutions/services and any possible compensation been considered?			

4.3 Has information about support services that might be needed as a consequence of any possible unsettling effects of the research itself been identified?1Where is the note to which this number refers?	☑	☐	☐
4.4 Are the plans flexible enough to take appropriate action should your project have an effect on the individuals or institutions/services involved?	☑	☐	☐

Standard 5: Ensure appropriate external professional ethical committee approval is granted where relevant

	Yes	No	N/A
5.1 Have colleagues/supervisors been invited to comment on your research proposal?	☑	☐	☐
5.2 Have any sensitive ethical issues been raised with the School Research Governance Committee and comments sought?	☑	☐	☐
5.3 Has the relevant external professional ethical committee been identified?	☑	☐	☐
5.4 Have the guidelines from that professional committee been used to check the proposed research?	☑	☐	☐
Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above			

Standard 6: Ensure relevant legislative and policy requirements are met

	Yes	No	N/A
6.1 Do you need an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check?	☑	☐	☐
6.2 Are you certain about implications arising from legislation? If not has contact been made with the designated officer (Chair of the SI Research Governance Committee)?	☑	☐	☐
Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above			

Appendix Fourteen:

Analysis of the reading comprehension test (group one)
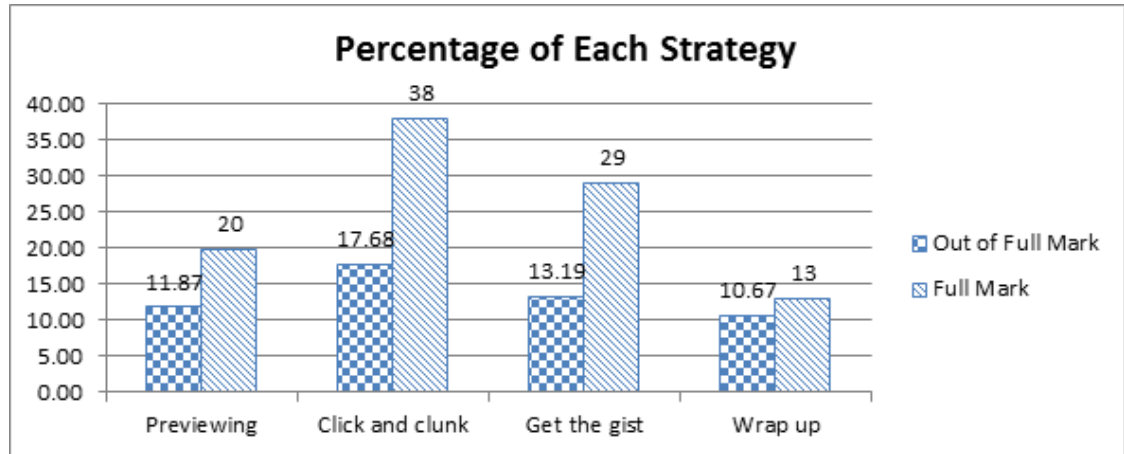
Appendix Fifteen

Students' results of the exam (group two)

Pretest

Posttest