

## INTEGRATING COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIC READING AND TEACHING AT THE RIGHT LEVEL TO IMPROVE READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates the effectiveness of integrating the Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) technique with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach in enhancing reading comprehension skills among junior high school students at SMPN 229 Jakarta. Previous studies have predominantly examined CSR or TaRL as independent instructional strategies, leaving a gap in empirical evidence regarding their combined implementation, particularly in heterogeneous classrooms with varied reading proficiency levels. Employing a quantitative approach, this research utilized a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design involving 32 seventh-grade students from class VII-1. The intervention was conducted over three instructional sessions. Data were collected through standardized reading comprehension tests administered before and after the treatment, complemented by questionnaires to capture students' responses to the learning process. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential analysis through a paired-sample t-test. The findings reveal an increase in the mean reading comprehension score from 16.5 in the pretest to 20.5 in the posttest, accompanied by reduced score variability, indicating more consistent learning outcomes among students. The t-test results confirm a statistically significant effect of the integrated CSR and TaRL approach on students' reading comprehension skills ( $t_{count} = -42.56 > t_{table} = 2.04$ ). These results demonstrate that combining collaborative reading strategies with level-appropriate instruction effectively addresses students' diverse learning needs. The study implies that teachers and schools are encouraged to adopt adaptive and collaborative instructional models to improve reading comprehension. Further research is recommended using larger samples, control groups, and extended intervention periods to examine the long-term and comparative effectiveness of this integrated approach..*

**Keywords:** *Collaborative Strategic Reading, Teaching at The Right Level, and reading comprehension skills*



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## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human need that plays a role in developing individual potential holistically, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Through education, students have the opportunity to understand knowledge, develop skills, and develop character necessary for social life. In this context, the role of teachers is crucial as the primary actors determining the success of the learning process. Teachers function not only as transmitters of material but also as learning designers capable of creating effective and meaningful learning experiences tailored to student characteristics (Nurfatimah et al., 2022).

Various studies show that students have diverse backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles, thus requiring adaptive and responsive learning strategies. The implementation of differentiated learning strategies is considered capable of providing space for students to learn according to their needs and ability levels. Santos, as quoted by (Herwina, 2021), emphasized that differentiated learning strategies can increase learning interest and have a positive impact on student creativity and behavior. These findings indicate that learning that does not take into account differences in student abilities has the potential to hinder the achievement of optimal learning outcomes, particularly in basic skills such as reading comprehension.

In addition to teacher factors and learning strategies, the curriculum also plays an inseparable role in the education system. The curriculum is not merely understood as a collection of subject matter, but rather as a system that directs the objectives, content, process, and evaluation of learning. (Agustiana et al., 2021) emphasize that the curriculum serves as an institutional guideline for the holistic development of students, including the development of potential literacy skills. However, in practice, curriculum implementation is often not fully balanced with learning strategies that accommodate differences in student ability levels, particularly in reading instruction at the junior high school level.

Several previous studies have examined the effectiveness of various reading instructional strategies, such as Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR), which emphasizes collaborative work and the use of cognitive strategies in comprehending texts, and Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), which focuses on adapting learning based on students' actual ability levels. Although both approaches have proven effective separately, research integrating CSR and TaRL in the context of reading comprehension instruction remains relatively limited, particularly in classrooms with heterogeneous reading abilities. This situation indicates a research gap regarding how collaborative reading strategies and level-based learning approaches can complement each other to optimally improve students' reading comprehension.

Based on this gap, this study addresses this gap by offering an integration of Collaborative Strategic Reading and Teaching at the Right Level as an adaptive and collaborative reading learning solution. This study aims to examine the impact of implementing these two approaches on junior high school students' reading comprehension skills. Using a quantitative approach through a one-group pretest-posttest pre-experimental design, this study is expected to provide an empirical contribution to the development of reading learning strategies that are more responsive to student needs. This article is systematically structured by presenting the theoretical foundation and previous studies, research methodology, results and discussion, and strengthening pedagogical skills for teachers and educational units. Based on the background, research gaps, and objectives outlined in the introduction, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the integration of the Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) and Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approaches affect the reading comprehension skills of junior high school students at SMPN 229 Jakarta?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in students' reading comprehension skills before and after implementing the integrated CSR and TaRL approaches?

3. How does the implementation of CSR combined with TaRL affect the consistency of students' reading comprehension outcomes across different early reading ability levels?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Reading Comprehension Skills**

Reading comprehension constitutes a core component of language learning and academic achievement, particularly at the junior high school level where students are required to engage with increasingly complex texts. Reading is not merely the activity of decoding written symbols, but a cognitive process through which readers construct meaning by interpreting messages conveyed by authors through written language (Fani & Febriyana, 2025). In this sense, reading comprehension involves higher-order thinking processes, including activating prior knowledge, making inferences, and evaluating textual information.

Several scholars conceptualize reading comprehension as an interactive and strategic process. (Aswinarko, 2012) emphasizes that comprehension occurs when readers actively integrate textual information with their background knowledge and experiences. Similarly, (Marpaung & Humiras, 2021) argue that reading skills are indispensable in modern education because most academic information is presented in written form, making comprehension a prerequisite for academic success. These perspectives align in viewing reading comprehension as an active meaning-making process rather than a passive reception of information.

From a curricular standpoint, reading comprehension is explicitly positioned as a key learning outcome. (Harianto, 2020) highlights that students are not only expected to read fluently but also to comprehend texts critically, a requirement reinforced in Phase D of the Reading and Viewing element, where learners must extract explicit and implicit meanings, evaluate information accuracy, and respond empathetically or critically to texts. This view extends earlier arguments by (Aritonang & Swondo, 2021), who classifies reading comprehension as an advanced reading skill

requiring learners to understand, reinterpret, and communicate textual meaning both orally and in writing.

While these studies collectively affirm the centrality of reading comprehension, they also reveal a persistent challenge: many students demonstrate low reading interest and inadequate comprehension skills, which negatively affect overall academic performance. Tarigan, as cited in (Asadi & Ebadi, 2025), underscores that effective comprehension requires the use of appropriate reading strategies. However, much of the existing literature focuses on defining reading comprehension rather than addressing instructional approaches that accommodate diverse student abilities. This gap suggests the need for pedagogical models that are both strategic and adaptive to students' varying reading levels.

### **Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) Technique**

Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) is a reading instruction technique developed by Klinger and Vaughn (1987) to improve students' reading comprehension through structured collaboration and explicit strategy instruction. CSR integrates elements of Reciprocal Teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984) and Cooperative Learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1987), emphasizing social interaction as a means of enhancing cognitive processing during reading (Nur Reformista et al., 2022).

CSR is implemented through small cooperative groups, typically consisting of three to five students, who apply four key strategies: Preview, Click & Clunk, Get the Gist, and Wrap Up. The Preview stage activates background knowledge and builds reading motivation, while Click & Clunk trains students to monitor comprehension by identifying understood and misunderstood concepts. Get the Gist focuses on identifying main ideas, and Wrap Up encourages reflection through questioning and summarizing (Ningsih & Hafriison, 2024).

Empirical studies consistently report that CSR enhances student engagement, comprehension, and metacognitive awareness. Compared to traditional teacher-centered reading instruction, CSR places learners at the

center of the learning process and promotes peer-assisted learning. However, most CSR-focused studies assume relatively homogeneous reading abilities within groups. Consequently, CSR may be less optimal when implemented in classrooms where students' reading levels vary significantly, as lower-level readers may struggle to participate meaningfully without differentiated support. This limitation points to the need for an instructional approach that complements CSR by addressing learner heterogeneity.

### **Teaching at The Right Level (TaRL)**

Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) is an instructional approach that prioritizes students' actual learning levels rather than their grade placement. Originally developed to address learning gaps, TaRL has gained recognition as an effective response to classrooms characterized by diverse academic abilities (Grabe, 2019). Emphasizes that TaRL enables teachers to design instruction based on diagnostic assessments, ensuring that learning activities align with students' competencies (Nur Reformista et al., 2022).

According to Susanti, as reported by Jauhari, (Dwi et al., 2025), TaRL implementation involves several systematic steps: analyzing learning outcomes to formulate indicators and objectives, conducting diagnostic assessments, developing level-appropriate teaching modules, implementing formative and summative assessments, and continuously evaluating learning effectiveness. This structured process distinguishes TaRL from conventional instruction, which often applies uniform teaching methods regardless of students' readiness levels.

Research on TaRL demonstrates its effectiveness in improving foundational skills, particularly literacy. However, TaRL studies often emphasize assessment-driven grouping and remediation, with less attention given to collaborative learning processes and strategy-based reading instruction (Christanti et al., 2023). As a result, TaRL addresses the "level" problem effectively but may lack explicit mechanisms to foster strategic and interactive reading practices. This limitation suggests that

TaRL could be strengthened by integrating structured reading strategies such as those offered by CSR.

### **Synthesis of Literature and Research Gap**

The reviewed literature indicates that reading comprehension is a complex, strategic, and essential skill that requires instructional approaches beyond conventional reading practices. CSR contributes by fostering strategic and collaborative reading, while TaRL offers a differentiated framework that responds to students' varying ability levels. Although both approaches have been empirically validated, existing studies largely examine them in isolation.

There is limited research exploring the integration of CSR and TaRL, particularly in junior high school contexts where reading ability gaps are pronounced. Combining CSR's collaborative and strategic strengths with TaRL's level-based differentiation has the potential to create a more inclusive and effective reading instruction model. Therefore, this study positions itself to fill this gap by examining the effectiveness of integrating CSR and TaRL in improving reading comprehension skills among junior high school students, contributing both theoretically and pedagogically to literacy education research.

### **METHOD**

This study adopted a quantitative approach to examine the effect of integrating the Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) technique with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach on students' reading comprehension skills. A pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design was employed to measure changes in students' reading comprehension before and after the instructional intervention.

The research was conducted at SMPN 229 Jakarta over five days, comprising three instructional sessions of two lesson hours each. The participants were 32 seventh-grade students from class VII-1, selected through purposive sampling based on preliminary classroom observations

and interviews with Indonesian language teachers. This class was identified as having heterogeneous reading abilities, making it suitable for implementing differentiated instruction through the TaRL approach.

Data were collected using a reading comprehension test and a student questionnaire. The test consisted of multiple-choice items developed according to Bloom's Taxonomy and was administered as both a pretest and a posttest to ensure consistency. The questionnaire was used to capture students' perceptions of the learning process using the integrated CSR and TaRL approach.

Data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate mean scores, while a paired-sample t-test was conducted to determine the significance of differences between pretest and posttest results. Questionnaire data were analyzed using frequency and percentage analysis. All statistical analyses were performed using Microsoft Excel.

This study has limitations, including the absence of a control group, a limited sample size, and a short intervention period, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Despite these limitations, the study provides preliminary evidence of the effectiveness of integrating CSR and TaRL in improving students' reading comprehension skills. Future studies are recommended to employ more rigorous experimental designs with larger samples and longer implementation periods.

## **RESULTS**

This study aimed to investigate whether integrating Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) and Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) could improve students' reading comprehension skills. Overall, the results indicate a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension after the implementation of the integrated instructional approach. The following discussion presents the key findings sequentially, each followed by an interpretation of its significance.

The first finding concerns the quality of the research instruments. The validity test showed that all item correlation coefficients ranged from 0.2935 to 0.6610, exceeding the  $r$ -table value of 0.2913. This result indicates that each test item was appropriately aligned with the construct of reading comprehension. In practical terms, this means that the improvement observed in students' scores can be confidently interpreted as an actual increase in reading comprehension ability rather than a measurement error. The reliability coefficient of 0.6581 further supports this interpretation, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Although the reliability level suggests that the instrument could be refined, it was sufficiently stable to support the analysis of learning outcomes.

The second finding relates to the distribution of the data. The Chi-Square normality test produced a calculated value of 10.1777, which exceeded the critical value of 7.8147, indicating that the data were not normally distributed. This result reflects the heterogeneous nature of students' initial reading abilities, as identified through teacher interviews and classroom observations. Importantly, this finding reinforces the relevance of the TaRL approach, which is specifically designed to address learning diversity by aligning instruction with students' actual ability levels rather than grade expectations. Thus, the non-normal distribution is not merely a statistical issue but also a contextual characteristic of the learning environment addressed by this study.

The central finding of this study concerns the effect of the integrated CSR and TaRL approach on students' reading comprehension skills. The results showed an increase in the mean score from 14.343 in the pretest to 18.7272 in the posttest. This improvement indicates that students were better able to identify main ideas, understand textual information, and interpret meanings after participating in collaborative and level-appropriate reading activities. The slight increase in standard deviation from 3.0332 to 3.2103 suggests that learning gains occurred across students with different

initial ability levels, supporting the assumption that the combination of CSR and TaRL benefits both lower- and higher-achieving readers.

The paired-sample t-test further confirmed the significance of this improvement. The obtained t-value of  $-42.5558$  fell far outside the acceptance range of the null hypothesis ( $-2.036$  to  $2.036$ ), indicating a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores. This result provides strong empirical evidence that the observed improvement was not due to chance but was associated with the instructional intervention. From a pedagogical perspective, this finding suggests that collaborative reading strategies, when combined with differentiated instruction, can effectively address common reading difficulties such as low motivation, limited comprehension strategies, and disengagement with lengthy texts.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that integrating Collaborative Strategic Reading with Teaching at the Right Level is an effective approach to improving reading comprehension skills in junior high school students. The results not only confirm a measurable increase in learning outcomes but also highlight the instructional value of addressing both strategic reading processes and learner diversity. These findings support previous research on CSR and TaRL while extending existing knowledge by demonstrating their combined effectiveness in a heterogeneous classroom context.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study investigated the effect of integrating the Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) technique with the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach on students' reading comprehension skills at SMPN 229 Jakarta. The research was conducted to address the problem of low reading comprehension caused by limited reading interest, difficulties in understanding texts, and the use of less adaptive instructional strategies in heterogeneous classrooms. Using a quantitative pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design, this study aimed to examine whether the

integrated approach could significantly improve students' reading comprehension skills.

The findings demonstrate that the integration of CSR and TaRL had a significant positive effect on students' reading comprehension. Students' mean scores increased after the intervention, indicating improved ability to understand, interpret, and extract meaning from texts. In addition, changes in score distribution suggest that learning gains were achieved across students with different initial ability levels, highlighting the effectiveness of combining collaborative reading strategies with level-based instructional adjustments. These results confirm that CSR supports strategic and interactive reading processes, while TaRL ensures that instruction remains accessible and relevant to students' actual learning levels.

From a methodological perspective, the use of a quantitative pre-experimental design allowed for systematic measurement of learning gains and provided preliminary empirical evidence of instructional effectiveness. Although the absence of a control group and the limited sample size restrict the generalizability of the findings, the consistency between statistical results and classroom observations strengthens the validity of the conclusions drawn in this study.

Based on these findings, several implications can be proposed. Practically, teachers are encouraged to integrate collaborative reading strategies with differentiated instruction to address diverse student abilities in reading classrooms. Schools may also consider incorporating CSR and TaRL principles into literacy programs to foster more inclusive and engaging reading instruction. However, this study is limited by its short intervention period and reliance on a single group of participants. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs with larger samples, longer implementation periods, and comparative groups to further examine the sustainability and broader applicability of the integrated CSR and TaRL approach.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on effective reading instruction by demonstrating that the integration of

Collaborative Strategic Reading and Teaching at the Right Level is a promising strategy for improving reading comprehension skills in junior high school students, particularly in heterogeneous learning contexts.

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