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## The Effect of Pre-task Activity Types (SRE, PALS, and CSR) on L2 Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Recognition and Recall

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### Abstract

To investigate the comparative effects of pre-task activities in terms of three types of instructional frameworks, namely Scaffolded Reading Experience (SRE), Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR), and Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) on L2 reading comprehension and vocabulary recognition and recall, a sample of 108 Iranian Intermediate level EFL students in a private language institute in Karaj was selected. Then, the participants were randomly assigned to four different treatment conditions. One class served as the comparison group and the other three acted as the treatment groups. A pretest was also given to make sure that the participants had no prior knowledge of the target words prior to the study. A reading comprehension and two vocabulary post-tests were administered after the experimental period. Three separate one-way ANOVA procedures were employed to analyse the obtained data. The results showed that the CSR group significantly outperformed the other groups in their reading comprehension performance. The results also showed a significant difference between the PALS group and the comparison group regarding vocabulary recognition; the PALS group outperformed the latter. Regarding vocabulary recall, no statistically significant differences could be found among the experimental groups.

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*Keywords:* Scaffolded Reading Experience; Collaborative Strategic Reading; Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies; Reading; Vocabulary

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### 1. Introduction

A number of researchers (Alderson & Urquhart, 1984; Chai, 2001; Hudson, 1982; Yusuf, 2010) have stated that the reading skill is one of the most crucial skills for educational and professional achievement. Langer (1981) states

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that reading is the most important activity in any language class, not only as a source of information and a pleasurable activity, but also as a means of consolidating and extending one's knowledge of the language. Reading adds more strength to learners' other skills.

### *1.1. Statement of the Problem*

Despite the fact that some texts are rejected on the ground that the information they contain is too unfamiliar to the students, activating prior knowledge is often forgotten or ignored in the discussion of reading texts, but the linguistic difficulty of texts has always been under debate as the only existing obstacle to the process of comprehending reading texts. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to produce empirical evidence of the importance of activating prior knowledge through pre-task activities and its relationship with the level of learners' reading comprehension and vocabulary recognition and recall.

### *1.2. Research questions*

The following research questions are the guiding forces in this study:

1. Are there any significant differences among the effects of pre-task activity types on learners' reading comprehension?
2. Are there any significant differences among the effects of pre-task activity types on learners' vocabulary recognition?
3. Are there any significant differences among the effects of pre-task activity types on learners' vocabulary recall?

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.2. The notion of task and pre-task activities*

The notion of 'task' has become an undeniably crucial parameter for syllabus designers and language teachers in the process of assessing language learners (Nunan, 2004). Many definitions of tasks exist in various perspectives; a clear-cut definition of each has become an issue by itself (Abdollahzade, 2008). Ellis (2009) states that a task is a work plan that involves a primary focus on meaning, has some kind of 'gap', the participants choose the linguistic resources needed to complete the task and more importantly, has a clearly defined outcome. On the other hand, Abdollahzade (2008) suggests that the basic building blocks in any language learning activity from either a language acquisition or a communicative view are defined as tasks. Nunan (1991) also offers particular definitions of 'task', exhibiting that they are all similar in one feature: they all signify that tasks are involved with communicative language use in which the user's focus of attention is on meaning rather than on linguistic form.

### *2.3. Reading comprehension frameworks*

#### *A. Scaffolded Reading Experience (SRE): Building a purpose for reading*

Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) first used the expression scaffolding to symbolize mothers' literal interaction while reading to their young children.

#### *B. Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR): A systematic and explicit approach for teaching strategies that improve reading comprehension*

Klinger and Vaughn (1998) were the ones who first developed Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR). These strategies are aimed at involving students in cooperation in small cooperative groups, including three to five group members, and employing four strategies for reading namely, Preview, Click and Cluck, Get the Gist and Wrap Up.

#### *C. Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS): The Potential and Promise of Peer-Mediated Learning for Struggling Readers*

Peer-assisted learning (PAL) is a student-to-student assistance scheme for academic and personal accomplishment. Evidence reveals that peer-assisted learning schemes assist students to establish social communications that influence their learning achievements positively (Huijser, Kimmins, & Evans, 2008).

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Participants

In the present study, a sample of 120 Iranian EFL students studying English at Intermediate level of proficiency (both males and females) in a private language institute in Karaj was selected.

#### 3.2. Procedures

According to the procedures for teaching reading comprehension to the CSR group suggested by Liang and Dole (2006), the procedures in the present study were as follows:

1) Small group work: The students in the class were divided into six cooperative learning groups of five members each including students of mixed abilities. 2) Silent reading (10 min.) 3) Paraphrasing the passage (10 min.) 4) Asking general questions about the passage (5 min.)

In line with what a number of researchers (Mathes, Howard, Allen, & Fuchs, 1998) suggest, the following procedures were used to teach reading comprehension to the PALS group (Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies group):

1) Pair work: Students got in pairs. 2) Reading the passage in pairs: (10 min.) 3) Retelling the passage in pairs (10 min.) 4) Asking questions and prompting the answers (15 min.)

### 4. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 Investigation of the First Research Question

The first research question sought to investigate the effects of various pre-task activities on EFL learners' reading comprehension. A one-way ANOVA procedure was used to investigate the result of the participants' post-test scores. Descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, etc. are summarized in Table 4. 1.

Table1. Descriptive Statistics for the ANOVA on Reading Comprehension

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CSR	27	20.48	5.78	18.19	22.77
SRE	26	17.03	7.43	14.03	20.04
PALS	25	20.24	6.64	17.49	22.98
comparison	30	15.06	6.46	12.65	17.48
Total	108	18.09	6.90	16.77	19.40

As it can be seen in the table, the CSR group has the highest mean (mean = 20.48), followed closely by the PALS (mean = 20.24), and the SRE (mean = 17.03) groups. The comparison group has the lowest mean (mean = 15.06).

The graphical representation of the results (Chart 4. 1) shows the differences among the groups more clearly.

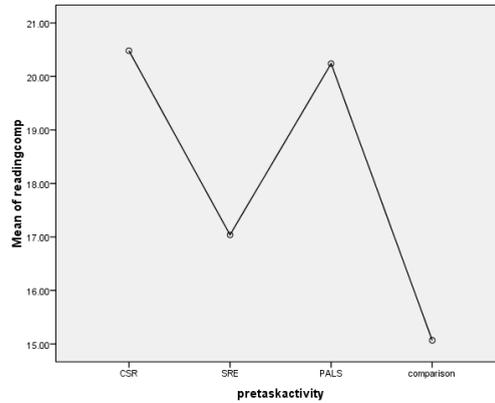


Figure1. Performance of the Participants on Reading Comprehension Test

In order to see whether or not the differences among the means are statistically significant, the one way ANOVA procedure was run. The results of the ANOVA procedure are given in Table 2.

Table 2. The Results of the ANOVA Procedure on Reading Comprehension

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	572.94	3	190.98	4.39	.006
Within Groups	4522.12	104	43.48		
Total	5095.07	107			$\omega^2 = .08$

Based on Table 2, since the F-value is statistically significant ( $F = 4.39, p < .05$ ), we can safely claim that there are significant differences among the groups. So, the first null hypothesis developed in chapter one is rejected. Besides, based on this table, only 8% of the total variance in the dependent variable is accounted for by the independent variable, namely pre-task activity ( $\omega^2 = .08$ ). This means that the remaining 92% of the variance remains unaccounted for. To locate the differences among the means, a post-hoc Scheffe' test procedure was run, which yielded the following results.

Table 3. Multiple Comparisons of Means for the Learners' Reading Comprehension

(I) pre-task activity	(J) pre-task activity	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CSR	SRE	3.44302	1.81186	.234	-1.2878	8.1739
	PALS	.24148	1.83023	.999	-4.5373	5.0203
	comparison	5.41481*	1.74924	.013	.8474	9.9822
SRE	PALS	-3.20154	1.84707	.312	-8.0243	1.6213
	comparison	1.97179	1.76686	.681	-2.6416	6.5852
PALS	comparison	5.17333*	1.78569	.023	.5108	9.8359

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

A look at Table 3 makes it clear that although the differences among the CSR, the SRE, and the PALS groups as well as the difference between the SRE group and the comparison group are not statistically significant,

both CSR and PALS groups are significantly better than the comparison group. Therefore, it can be claimed that the pre-task activity types in the CSR and PALS groups have positive effects on EFL learners’ reading comprehension. This means that whichever activity type (CSR or PALS) is used, it can improve EFL learners’ reading comprehension.

4.3. Investigation of the Second Question

The aim of the second question was to investigate the effects of various pre-task activity types on learners’ vocabulary recognition. To this end, another one-way ANOVA was used. Descriptive statistics are given in the following table:

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for the ANOVA on Vocabulary Recognition

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CSR	27	19.33	7.47	16.37	22.28
SRE	26	16.65	7.26	13.72	19.58
PALS	25	20.00	6.07	17.49	22.50
comparison	30	15.36	4.07	13.84	16.88
Total	108	17.74	6.50	16.49	18.98

As it can be seen in Table 4, the PALS group participants have the highest mean (mean = 20.00), followed closely by the CSR group (mean = 19.33), and the SRE group (mean = 16.65). The participants of the comparison group have the lowest mean (mean = 15.36).

The graphical representation of the results (Chart 4. 2) shows the differences among the groups more clearly.

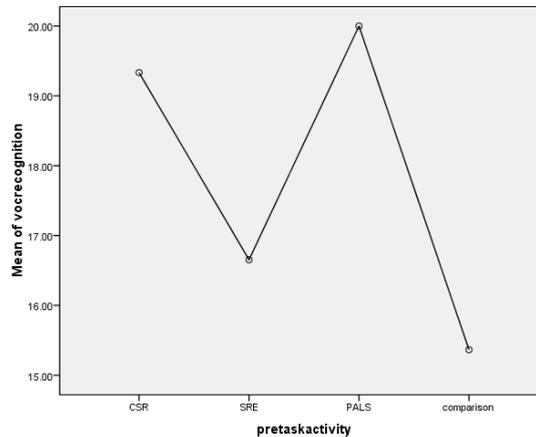


Figure 2. Performance of the Participants on Vocabulary Recognition Test

In order to see whether or not the observed differences among the means are statistically significant, another one-way ANOVA procedure was run. The results of the ANOVA procedure are given in Table 4. 5.

Table 5. The Results of the ANOVA Procedure on vocabulary Recognition

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	395.88	3	131.96	3.31	.023
Within Groups	4136.85	104	39.77		
Total	4532.74	107			$\omega^2 = .06$

Based on Table 5, since the F-value is statistically significant ( $F = 3.31, p < .05$ ), we can safely claim that there are significant differences among the means of the groups. So, the second null hypothesis developed in chapter one is also rejected. Moreover, based on Table 5, only 6% of the total variance in the dependent variable is accounted for by the independent variable, namely pre-task activity ( $\omega^2 = .06$ ). This means that the remaining 94% of the variance remains unaccounted for.

To locate the differences among the means, a post-hoc Scheffe' test procedure was used, which yielded the following results summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Multiple Comparisons of Means on Vocabulary Recognition

(I) pretaskactivity	(J) pretaskactivity	Mean Difference			95% Confidence Interval	
		(I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CSR	SRE	2.67949	1.73296	.414	-1.8454	7.2043
	PALS	-.66667	1.75052	.981	-5.2374	3.9041
	comparison	3.96667	1.67307	.089	-.4018	8.3351
SRE	PALS	-3.34615	1.76663	.237	-7.9589	1.2666
	comparison	1.28718	1.68992	.871	-3.1253	5.6996
PALS	comparison	4.63333*	1.70793	.038	.1738	9.0928

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 6 shows that of all the comparisons, only the difference between the means of the PALS and the comparison group is statistically significant, suggesting that the participants of the PALS group have outperformed their counterparts in the comparison group.

#### 4.4. Investigation of the Third Question

The third research question attempted to investigate the effects of various pre-task activity types on EFL learners' vocabulary recall. To this end, another one-way ANOVA was used. Descriptive statistics are given in the following table:

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for the ANOVA on Vocabulary Recall

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CSR	27	17.40	7.47	14.44	20.36
SRE	26	12.46	7.72	9.34	15.58
PALS	25	14.48	6.79	11.67	17.28
comparison	30	15.40	4.73	13.63	17.16
Total	108	14.98	6.86	13.67	16.29

As it can be seen in the table, the CSR group has the highest mean (mean = 17.40), followed by the comparison (mean = 15.40), and the PALS (mean = 14.48) groups. The SRE group has the lowest mean (mean = 12.46).

The graphical representation of the results (Chart 4. 3) represents the differences among the groups more obviously.

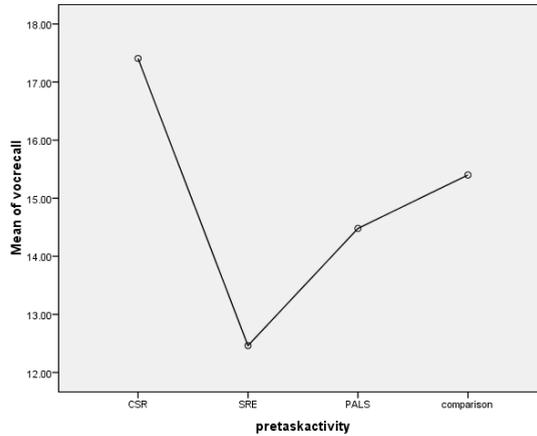


Figure 3. Performance of the Participants on the Vocabulary Recall Test

In order to see whether or not the differences among the means are statistically significant, another one-way ANOVA procedure was run. The results of the ANOVA procedure are given in Table 4. 8.

Table 8. The Results of the ANOVA Procedure on Vocabulary Recall

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	335.54	3	111.84	2.47	.066
Within Groups	4702.42	104	45.21		
Total	5037.96	107			

Based on Table 8, since the F-value is not statistically significant ( $F = 2.47, p > .05$ ), we can conclude that there are no significant differences among the means of the groups. Thus, the third null hypothesis developed in chapter one is supported.

**5. Discussion**

The results of the present study are different from those of Scharlach (2008), who believes that SRE’s main purpose is to enhance learners’ level of reading comprehension. At the same time, this study corroborates the results of Klingner and Vaughn (1998) indicating that applying CSR techniques facilitates reading comprehension.

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