CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0. Introduction

Cooperative learning strategies can enhance language learners' acquisition of the target language (Hill & Miller 2013). Despite these claims, the benefits of cooperative learning strategies in general and learning together in particular with Saudi EFL undergraduates at the higher education stages of reading comprehension achievement is not known; as a result, using cooperative learning strategy of learning together as a pedagogical practice was examined in this study.

Cooperative learning refers to different teaching practices and various instructional strategies including Learning Together strategy. A close in-depth critical review of the historical development of cooperative learning over a span of more than thirty years can provide useful insight into the evolution and implementation of these instructional strategies as they reflect changing theories and educational practices. An outline of various studies on the application of cooperative learning strategies will disclose the benefits, pros, and cons as they pertain to EFL reading comprehension. Research findings from a linear study of the employment of the cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together at different academic settings, contexts, stages and levels can provide a clear understanding of the profits of this student-centered instructional strategy.

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The goal of this literature review is to analyze the impact of cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together on students' reading comprehension achievement and identify specific cooperative learning techniques as effective in the classroom. Positive and negative components to cooperative learning will also be included in the review. This literature review aims to present the factors and structure present in effective cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together and how the implementation of Learning Together strategy can raise students' reading comprehension achievement. Cooperative learning is an educational situation where learning occurs while two or more students are working together to complete a common task (Siegel, 2005). Research on cooperative learning can be found in most academic subjects and at all grade levels (Slavin, 2011).

However, little research exists on cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together as a tool to improve EFL undergraduate students' reading comprehension in Saudi higher education setting. This study is conducted to explore the effectiveness of using the cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together in improving undergraduate EFL students' reading comprehension. In connection with this study, review of related literature includes the following topics: Studies related to cooperative learning and Cooperative Learning Strategy of Learning Together, Studies Related to Reading Comprehension and Studies Related to Cooperative Learning Effect on Reading Comprehension.

2.1. Studies Related to Cooperative Learning.

Cooperative learning refers to a diversity of instructional practices which include Learning Together. A critical review of the development of cooperative learning over a span of 30 years can provide insight into the evolution of this

instructional strategy as it reflects changing theories and educational practices. A summary of several studies on the application of cooperative learning will disclose the benefits, merits, and demerits as they pertain to EFL reading comprehension. Research findings from a linear study of the employment of the Learning Together strategy at various academic levels can provide an understanding of the benefits of this student-centered approach to teaching. This section focuses on the body of literature that addresses the history of cooperative learning; cooperative learning groups; the merits and demerits of cooperative learning; the use of a cooperative learning strategy to improve EFL reading comprehension skills; the benefits of the Learning Together cooperative learning strategy; working together in small groups to improve learning.

2.1.1. History of Cooperative Learning

Numerous studies were carried out on ways to enhance cooperative learning in the EFL reading comprehension classrooms. Lev Vygotsky, for instance, contributed the zone of proximal development to cooperative learning theory. Vygotsky believed that students gain knowledge by working within their zone of proximal development. He defined the zone of proximal development as tasks that a student cannot do alone but may be able to do with the assistance of more capable peers or teachers. In other words, the zone of proximal development describes tasks that a student has not yet learned but is capable of learning at a given time. Vygotsky also believed that higher mental functioning usually exists in conversation and collaboration among students before it exists within the student. Therefore, when working together in cooperative learning groups, students are likely to have a peer performing a given task at a slightly higher cognitive level within their zone of proximal development (Slavin, 2000).

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According to Piaget, students learn values, rules, morality, and symbols by interacting with others in cooperative learning groups (Slavin, 1987). Behaviorists indicated that the success of cooperative learning groups processing is rewarded by the idea of a group contingency, which is related to operant conditioning. According to social cognitive theory, students' self-efficacy is likely to increase when performing a given assignment while working together in cooperative learning groups. In addition, students model effective learning and problem-solving strategies. Also, scaffolding is used in cooperative learning groups when students create new ideas and strategies besides independently working on a task (Ormrod, 2003).

2.1.2. Cooperative Learning Groups

For over 25 years, David and Roger Johnson have researched the effectiveness of cooperative learning. They believed that students gain knowledge of the concepts by productively working together in cooperative learning groups (Snowman & Biehler, 2003). Learning Together, as one of the cooperative learning strategies, consists of a heterogeneous group of four or five students who work together on assignments. The group receives praise and rewards for outstanding group performance on assignments. The purpose of this strategy is to emphasize team-building activities before students begin to work together and to promote regular discussions among students within the group about how well they can work together (Slavin, 2000). Implementation of cooperative learning strategies requires the understanding that it cannot be successful without proper planning. Effective utilization of cooperative learning strategies requires teachers to make selective decisions when grouping students.

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To promote the growth of lower level students, teachers should not put friends together, and groups should include a low, a medium, and a high student (Eskay et al., 2012). Groups should be changed every two to three weeks to promote socialization within the classroom (Eskay et al., 2012). Cooperative learning groups and other peer tutoring strategies work best when students of different ability levels work together so that high-achieving students can reinforce their understanding through the assistance of lower level students, while the lower level students can receive additional support from the point of view of a fellow student (Eskay et al., 2012). The purposeful distribution of students and changing the groups frequently allows for the leveling of each team and promotes effectiveness and socialization within the classroom (Eskay et al., 2012). While in their groups, students should be encouraged to talk and listen, and engage in academic conversations.

These conversations are the center of effective cooperative activities because they require students on both sides of a discussion to participate and engage with each other. Cooperative learning requires students to actively listen to each other while they work to collaborate on their individual tasks as well as on their group assignments and group roles. Cooperative activities promote and encourage risk taking so that students form bonds with one another and gain the courage to become active participants in their groups (Ferguson-Patrick, 2012). Furthermore, taking risks allows students to trust in their ability and increase their academic performance. Increased academic performance is the goal for educators and successful implementation of cooperative learning techniques assist teachers in meeting these goals. Ideally, in a cooperative learning environment, students work together with little interference from the teacher on carefully planned and organized assignments so that the individuals and groups as a whole can meet their learning goals (Cziprok & Popescu, 2015).

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A successful cooperative learning team forces students to share individual knowledge regarding a particular task, and then allows them to discuss their knowledge within the team, correct any information, and come to a consensus regarding the conclusion or answers found (Hsiung, Luo, Lin, & Wang, 2014). The discussion between students will bring about new learning and new insights. How much a student learns or takes away from their small-group discussion will depend on the quality of student interactions. The more they discuss, subsequently, the more comfortable they are with their group members, and the more interactive and effective the activity will be (Boardman et al., 2015).

2.1.3. Merits and Demerits of Cooperative Learning

Many scholars have researched the merits and demerits of cooperative learning as an instructional strategy. Johnson and Johnson (1999) stated, "Working together to achieve a common goal produces higher achievement and greater productivity than does working alone" (p. 72). Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991) stated, "The heart of most jobs, especially the higher paying, more interesting jobs, is teamwork, which involves getting others to cooperate, leading others, coping with complex issues of power and influence, and helping solve people's problems by working with them" (p. 11). Similarly, Smith (1993) stated the following benefits of students who are taught using a cooperative learning pedagogy include:

> …longer information retention, better performance on exams, higher grades, stronger critical thinking and problem-solving skills, more positive attitudes toward the subject and greater motivation to learn it, better interpersonal and communication skills, higher self-esteem, and if groups are truly heterogeneous, improved race and gender relations. (p. 198)

Johnson and Ahlgren (1976) investigated the impact of cooperative learning on fifth graders' achievement, attitude, altruism, and prosocial behavior in language classes and found that the cooperative learning strategy provided positive results on student achievement and behavior (Chan, Shum, & Lai, 1996). Torchia (2012) explored the relationship between the use of cooperative learning strategies and student achievement on 49 fourth grade students and found that cooperative learning does influence student achievement in positive ways. Jolliffe (2015) suggested that as teachers use cooperative learning techniques more frequently in specific situations, the benefits of the approach will become more evident. Jolliffe (2015) also argued that teachers are expected to use cooperative learning as an educational strategy due to its significant benefits.

Hsiung (2012) theorized that cooperative learning creates equal opportunities for all students and promotes high achievement among all students. Students in cooperative learning groups do not compete with each other to learn but assist each other in learning new concepts. Fullan (2009) suggested that educators need to consistently work to include cooperative learning strategies in the classroom and recognize that students may respond differently to the strategy based on their learning and motivational needs. Furthermore, teachers must endeavor to direct learners toward positive peer collaboration (Kagan & Kagan, 2009).

According to Manning and Lucking (1991), cooperative learning increases academic achievement, enhances social skills, and improves self-esteem. They argued that the demerit is that students may not improve academically if they are placed in cooperative learning groups to compete for attention and grades. Al-Yaseen (2011) stated that other merits of cooperative learning include students' demonstration of better understanding of the assigned task by taking part in a social setting and by

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enhancing their learning process. Also, he indicated that cooperative learning improves students' assistance skills with their groups and encourages them to build a trustworthy relationship with each other. He detailed that the demerits of cooperative learning occur when teachers do not effectively implement cooperative learning by placing students in groups without assigning them a structured task.

According to Steiner, Stromwall, Brzuzy, and Gerdes (1999), cooperative learning has the merit of promoting higher student achievement than competitive or individualistic methods across all age groups and subject areas. This improves students' self-esteem, promotes critical thinking, and increases student retention. A meta-analysis revealed that 63% of 46 studies showed significantly positive academic results through the implementation of cooperative learning methods. The researchers argued that the demerits include students preferring to work alone rather than in a cooperative learning group so they may not be held accountable if their group members do not complete the assigned task, and complications may occur within the groups.

Manning and Lucking (1993) stated that cooperative learning improved intergroup and multicultural relationships because learners who worked together toward the same goal in an integrated education setting must effectively communicate with one another, understand the merits associated with positive group dynamics, recognize that differences are a form of enrichment rather than deficit, and recognize the value of helping others as opposed to working competitively. Manning and Lucking also stated that cooperative learning contributes to the improvement of interpersonal and multicultural relationships, culturally diverse learners' self-esteem, cultural identity, feelings of self-worth, and culturally diverse learners' academic achievement.

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Breneiser, Monetti, and Adams (2012) stated that cooperative learning tended to stimulate a type of interdependence that occurs in real-life workplaces that allowed individuals to work together to achieve a positive result. Also, they proposed that the merits of cooperative learning are improvements in student engagement, academics, and social skills. Melser (1999) investigated whether placing students in homogeneous or heterogeneous cooperative learning groups influenced students' academic achievement and self-esteem. The sample consisted of 6 fourth-grade classrooms in Midwestern school districts. The Gates-MacGinite Reading Test and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory were used in this study. The final results showed that both of the two groups, the heterogeneous and the homogeneous showed gains in the domain of reading comprehension achievement. On the reading posttest, the heterogeneous group's scores increased on average by 2 points, and the homogeneous group's scores increased on average by 2.64 points after the implementation of a cooperative learning strategy. The heterogeneous group and the homogeneous group differed in their self-esteem ratings. The heterogeneous group increased in self-esteem by 1.57 points, while the homogeneous group decreased in self-esteem by 2.42.

Nastasi and Clements (1991) stated that cooperative learning goals are well structured and more effective than individualistic or competitive structured goals for promoting a learning environment. They also stated that cooperative learning groups allow students to be actively engaged in learning, to use oral rehearsal strategies to facilitate retention, and to apply higher-level reasoning strategies to solve problems. Cooperative learning environments not only reveal increased student learning performance and academic progress, but also provide data regarding positive interactions and social abilities of the students (Hsiung et al., 2014).

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The dynamics begin to shift from an individual focus where students are competitive and self-seeking, to an environment fostered by unity and collaboration where the group success is as important as the individual success. Cooperative learning becomes more important than competition or individual activities (Yuretich & Kanner, 2015). Students engaged in group activities not only take their learning seriously, but also support their teammates' learning by sharing knowledge, learning resources, and ideas (Hsiung et al., 2014). The success of these groups depends on effective implementation. Implementation of cooperative learning techniques requires routine examination of team goals (Hsuing et al., 2014).

The success of achievement levels for team and individuals give way to dynamic and positive student behaviors and increased interpersonal skills. The benefits of cooperative learning and the ease of implementation make it a desirable education plan. Cooperative learning creates an environment where students can increase their academic achievement as they learn social skills. Students learn behaviors such as the ability to resolve disputes with other people, help their peers feel welcomed, listen to others who are speaking, and identify effective ways to contribute information. They also master ways to explain ideas clearly, encourage others, and criticize ideas rather than individuals (Eskay et al., 2012).

When implemented effectively, cooperative learning strategies teach students to care about the class they are in and keep students positively engaged in their lessons, while increasing their ability to succeed academically (Eskay et al, 2012). These factors lead to an increase in performance on tests and an increase in critical reasoning and thinking abilities (Eskay et al., 2012; Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Cooperative learning has contributed to advancing academic indicators and social

improvements. Peer tutoring and working with others is shown to decrease aggression and increase student achievement (Eskay et al., 2012).

When students engage in cooperative learning activities, they learn to respect their peers, simultaneously enhance their self-esteem, and develop harmonious interpersonal relationships without impeding the cognitive performance of any of the students working together (Slavin, 2015). Students learn to feel safe in their groups, focus on themselves, and concentrate on the success of the group unit as a whole. The environment sets up the students for success. Cooperative learning effectively reduces learners' anxiety, increases learner motivation, promotes teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships, and increase self-confidence (Han, 2015).

As a final point, George (2017) conducted a study on English language learners and found that teachers perceive that cooperative taught instruction reveals a positive impact on English language learners' academic performance. As indicated by the above mentioned research studies, cooperative learning has been shown to be an effective instructional method in various disciplines. Although cooperative learning strategies have many pedagogical benefits, if the cooperative learning teams become ineffective, the benefits are lost (Hsiung et al., 2014).

The functionality of the group becomes the crux of the success of the cooperative learning team. Many obstacles exist to hinder the effectiveness of the functionality of the cooperative learning team. Factors such as having team members with obstructive behaviors or students who dominate the conversation, teammates who refuse to participate in the conversation, or a lack of preparation can significantly affect the effectiveness of the cooperative learning activity (Hsiung et al., 2014). If inferior teams are established, it becomes increasingly difficult to fix the group dynamic and reinforce an organized group that will see academic performance

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increases. Ineffective groups halt student learning. Ineffective groups see a disruption in the group-to-individual knowledge transfer process, and the learning performance trends take a downward turn and are much different from a functioning team (Hsiung et al., 2014).

The success of a cooperative learning group can differ in a single classroom. Simply putting students together in a group, especially English language learners, does not necessarily lead to a gain in positive interdependence or individual accountability; structures must be preplanned and managed by the teacher (Sadeghi, 2012). When cooperative learning groups are unstructured or not monitored, results show that performance indicators do not rise (Chen, 2011; Yuewtich & Kanner, 2015). Cooperative learning structures are successful in classrooms with English learners when the essential elements of the cooperative learning methods mentioned earlier are present (Chen, 2011, Slavin, 2015).

A cooperative team requires both sufficient time and practice before the full benefits of the cooperative learning process can be seen. A single performance assessment cannot validate the claim that cooperative learning is or is not beneficial to all students because there will be enigmas that present themselves through various cases. Maintaining functional cooperative learning teams can increase student achievement, but maintaining dysfunctional cooperative learning classrooms will inevitably hinder the learning process (Hsiung et al., 2014).

Students in a dysfunctional cooperative learning team tend to exhibit more off-task behaviors such as being off task, walking around the classroom, engaging in outside conversations, or even sleeping during the assigned task. Once a team becomes dysfunctional and develops negative behaviors, the team members may consequently develop bad attitudes towards each other, their team as a whole, or even

the cooperative learning exercise they are currently engaged in (Hsiung et al., 2014). These behaviors and mentality shifts can result in lower performance at the individual or team level (Hsiung et al., 2014).

Adjusting materials and strategies, observing interactions closely, and making modifications to the groups as needed, allows teachers to ensure the effectiveness of their cooperative learning teams (Hsuing et al., 2014). When groups are engaged and effectively follow the elements of successful cooperative learning strategy of learning together, EFL students' academic performance, and more specifically, EFL undergraduates' reading comprehension achievement will increase.

2.1.4. Working Together in Small Groups to Improve Learning

According to Gillies (2014), small groups allow students to work together cooperatively to accomplish shared goals that help students to promote a learning environment and socialization in different subjects from kindergarten through college. Also, small groups improved students' writing and reading skills and enhanced students' willingness to cooperatively and productively work with diverse learners. Small groups can be utilized efficiently in teaching EFL reading comprehension. For example, working together in small groups and having lecturers offer feedback whenever necessary to scaffold students' learning can make students understand one-to-one correspondence when learning to comprehend any text.

Lecturers can offer exclusive and valuable opportunities through utilizing small groups as part and parcel of their teaching to improve students' reading comprehension skills. Working together in small groups helps students receive both the individualized attention and instruction that may not be possible in traditional instructional activities. Moreover, lecturers can make notes of their students' learning

improvement by observing how they interact with each other in small groups and by running an active learning atmosphere. Students with various learning skills can promote learning within the small group activities. Students who are placed in small groups benefit from each other's knowledge and skill. Lecturers also may assign a specific topic that allows students to cooperatively work together in small groups (Wasik, 2008).

Jansen (2012) conducted a qualitative study to examine the benefits of using small groups in sixth-grade mathematics classrooms to enhance students' learning. The sample consisted of 24 student participants and 2 mathematics teacher participants. Video recorded observations and interviews with students were analyzed to determine benefits. The video-recorded observations were used to evaluate how teachers facilitated small group assignments. Interviews were conducted to determine students' perceptions of working in small groups. The results revealed that students held a productive disposition, improved their understanding of mathematical concepts, and found multiple strategies for solving mathematical problems by working in small groups.

2.1.5. Definitions of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning has numerous definitions. It could be defined as "the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning" (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Another definition of cooperative learning could be a methodology that uses a variety of learning activities to develop students' understanding of a subject by using a planned approach which involves a sequence of steps, requiring students to build, analyze and apply concepts (Kagan, 1990).

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According to David W. Johnson, Roger T. Johnson, and Smith (1991) cooperative learning is, "Creating a setting that provides the means for operationalizing a new paradigm of teaching and provides the context within which the development of student talent is encouraged. Carefully structured cooperative learning ensures that students are cognitively, physically, emotionally, and psychologically actively involved together in constructing their own knowledge" (p.7). Riley and Anderson (2006) defined cooperative learning as pedagogical method that learners learn on their own through explaining the subject matter to others and learning from others.

Additionally, Jolliffe, (2007) defined cooperative learning as students working together in small groups to help each other improve their learning. Slavin, (2011, p.344) defined cooperative learning as "instructional methods in which teachers organize students into small groups, which then work together to help one another learn academic content". For Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul (2012), cooperative learning is a teaching strategy, with students of different levels of ability in small groups who use various learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. According to Yi and LuXi (2012) cooperative learning is students' working and studying together in a group to carry out tasks and accomplish expected goals. They added that it is not just working together so it needs accurate preparation, planning and guidance by the teacher.

2.1.6. Historical Foundation and Theories Supporting Cooperative Learning

The idea of cooperative learning has a long history in the field of education. In 1949, Morton Deutsch revived the ideas of cooperative learning in a study that compared it to a competitive learning environment. Subjects assigned to the

cooperative environment were more successful in group coordination, individual contributions, attentiveness to group members, communication, product quality, and discussion quality (Deutsch, 1949). In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, cooperative learning gained popularity as a topic of research. Two of the most prominent early figures in the field were David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson (2009). They produced numerous articles on the theoretical basis of cooperative learning, implementation, and research beginning in the 1970s. Robert E. Slavin (2011) developed his own approach to cooperative learning and began publishing his research and theories soon afterwards.

Several theoretical perspectives on cooperative learning exist and provide the bases for a multitude of activities and educational strategies found in the literature. According to Slavin (1987), the two predominant theoretical perspectives are centered on development and motivation. The developmental perspective stems from the work of Piaget and Vygotsky, promoting the importance of the task and the interaction around that task. The tasks are designed to create cognitive conflicts within students' zones of proximal development. The process of resolving these conflicts facilitates the learning of the content. The motivation perspective emphasizes the role of rewards and peer motivation for helping one another in order for the group to succeed. The groups are only rewarded if all members achieve the learning goals. The biggest difference between the two perspectives is the role of rewards in the cooperative learning activities (Slavin, 1987).

Those who adhere to the developmental perspective view rewards as unnecessary or harmful to the process and learning. In contrast, motivation proponents view the rewards as essential to the activity structures. Other significant theoretical perspectives in cooperative learning exist, including social cohesion, cognitive-

development, and cognitive elaboration. The social cohesion perspective, which is closely related to the motivational perspective, emphasizes the importance of group interdependence (Slavin, 2011). Tasks must be structured so that, in order for the individual to succeed, the group must succeed. Two perspectives exist that focus on the cognitive aspects of cooperative learning: cognitive-development and cognitive-elaboration (Slavin, 2011). Both of these perspectives fall under the general category of developmental perspective. They differ mainly in the belief of how learning occurs. Cognitive-development relies on the resolution of the cognitive conflict as the impetus for learning, whereas cognitive-elaboration asserts that students must restructure or elaborate upon the new material in order for learning to occur (Slavin, 2011).

Identifying characteristics that qualify activities as being cooperative learning is essential. Johnson & Johnson (1992) explain that "simply placing students in a group and telling them to work together does not in and of itself result in cooperative effects" (p. 177). In a meta-analysis of research on cooperative learning, Igel (2010) made a clear differentiation between collaborative/group-mediated learning and cooperative learning and suggested that the two are not the same. The author defined cooperative learning as "a group instructional technique whereby members work together toward a shared goal" (Igel, 2010, p.7). Igel (2010) insisted that cooperative learning must include positive interdependence and individual accountability among group members.

Collaborative or group-mediated learning is defined as "any instructional technique in which members work together", but positive interdependence and individual accountability are not required (Igel, 2010, p. 7). Cooperative learning is considered a subset of collaborative/group-mediated learning. The distinctions between the two types of activities were made by Igel (2010) based on the differences

in opinion found among the literature on what constitutes cooperative learning. The two most common factors identified by various cooperative learning scholars are positive interdependence and individual accountability. Positive interdependence is "a cooperative group goal structure wherein success on the part of one promotes success among others within the group" (Igel, 2010, p. 7).

Individual accountability occurs when a group's success depends "on the individual learning of all the group members" (Slavin, 1989/1990, p. 52). Understanding what constitutes cooperative learning can be helpful in analyzing and developing activities for the classroom. Based on Igel's (2010) definition of cooperative learning, if activities are not structured for individual accountability and positive interdependence, they are not truly cooperative learning. There have been reports on teacher frustration with implementing cooperative learning into their classrooms. A lack of understanding of what constitutes cooperative learning and all of the factors that must be addressed is one possible source for this frustration. Cooperative learning can appear in many forms in the classroom.

These activities generally fall into three functional categories: formal groups, informal groups, and base groups (Johnson & Johnson, 1992). A formal group involves students carefully assigned to groups by the teacher according to the needs of the activity and students. They are typically used for acquisition of specific content and students are together only for that single activity.

Informal groups are intended for brief interactions between students to clarify, discuss, or process information. These groups are assigned based on the proximity of students in a casual manner. Johnson & Johnson (1992) suggested that these types of groups are ideal for processing information given during lectures. Base groups recur

over time and are intended to provide a support system for students. These could be a study group, students assigned to a specific table, or teams.

It was believed by Deutsch (as cited in Johnson & Johnson, 2005) that there are two forms of interdependence: positive interdependence and negative interdependence. Positive interdependence was commonly defined as "a positive correlation among individuals' goal attainments; individuals perceive that they can attain their goals if, and only if, the other individuals with whom they are cooperatively linked attain their goals" (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, p.288) whereas negative interdependence was largely defined as being existent "when there was a negative correlation among individuals' goal achievements; individuals perceived that they can obtain their goals if, and only if, the other individuals with whom they are competitively linked fail to obtain their goals." (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, pp. 288-289).

The outcome of any cooperative learning instructional situation eventually is influenced by the social interaction that occurs among the group members, whether it encourages positive learning outcomes or negative learning outcomes (Deutsch, 1949; Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Group interaction includes direct contact with group members by means of oral communication or written communication, for instance (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Deutsch (as cited in Johnson & Johnson, 2005) made up this term "promotive interaction" (p. 292) to label the process through which members of a cooperative group expedite achievement of a group shared common goal through helping each other, supplying group members with required resources, or via implementing efficient group management measures when encountering any expected or unexpected arisen conflicts. Deutsch (as cited in Johnson & Johnson, 2005) utilized the term "oppositional interaction" (p.292) to clarify passive behaviors among group

members. Samples of passive behaviors involve mistrust, competitive actions among group members, or only concentrating on gaining a personal goal (Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

Structuring the task so students can be successful is arguably one of the most important and most challenging aspects of implementing cooperative learning (John-Steiner, Weber, & Minnis, 1998; Slavin, 1988). Igel (2010) insisted that positive interdependence and individual accountability must be built into the activity. Positive interdependence is "a cooperative group goal structure wherein success on the part of one promotes success among others within the group" (Igel, 2010, p. 7). Competitive activities set up a system of negative interdependence, where, in order to succeed, others must fail (Kagan, 2007). However, competition between groups can be used in a way that still promotes positive interdependence among group members.

The second key factor, individual accountability, is discussed in most books and articles on cooperative learning. Slavin (1989/1990) stated that for individual accountability "the group's success must depend on the individual learning of all the group members" (p. 52). According to Slavin (2011), "cooperative learning has been used and studied in every major subject, with students from preschool to college, and in all types of schools" (p. 344). The reported benefits of cooperative learning in classrooms are vast in number and variables. Some of the most commonly claimed benefits are increased academic achievement, more positive attitudes toward learning, increased self-esteem, increased motivation, and development of stronger social skills (Battistich, Solomon, & Delucchi, 1993).

Battistich et al. (1993) concluded that the effects of cooperative learning are dependent upon the quality of group interaction among students. They found that high quality experiences were associated with a positive classroom environment, increased

liking of school, increased motivation, higher concern for others, and a higher sense of self-esteem. The study also found that frequent low-quality student interactions were linked to more negative outcomes. In a longitudinal study, Greenwood, Delquadri, & Hall (1989) found that students who were engaged in class-wide peer tutoring spent more time engaged in higher-level academic behaviors, more time in group activities, and less time waiting for teacher assistance and in hand-raising. They also made greater gains in language, reading, and math skills. After four years, the experimental group, which consisted of students of a lower socio-economic status, scored closer to the national norm than the control and comparison groups.

Correct implementation of cooperative learning appears to be the most challenging aspect for educators (Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Sharan, 1999). Grading is one such issue that must be carefully considered and planned (Kohn, 1991). As discussed earlier, most of the literature on assessment in cooperative learning recommends individual accountability. When teachers attempt to use group grades, it can become a source of frustration for students and teachers (Gillies & Boyle, 2010). Other concerns that arise are the perceived time requirements, lack of "fairness" to high achieving students, too much socialization, and classroom management issues (Gillies & Boyle, 2010). Fiedler, Lange, & Winebrenner (2002) reported gifted students having a negative attitude towards cooperative learning.

An article that appeared in *ASCD Update* (Willis, 1990) expressed concern for the use of these strategies, suggesting that they will have a negative impact on gifted students by reducing the amount of challenging coursework they will encounter and reducing funding for gifted programs in schools. Slavin (1991) responded by reporting findings of studies that show gains for both high achieving and low achieving students.

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When investigating the effects of different types of cooperative learning strategies among 158 studies, Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne (2000) found that all the structures had significantly higher effects on achievement than competitive and individualistic strategies. In order of highest effect size to lowest, the strategies ranked: (1) learning together, (2) academic controversy, (3) student teams-achievement divisions, (4) teams-games-tournaments, (5) group investigation, (6) jigsaw, and (7) team accelerated instruction.

Cooperative learning research can be found in most core and elective subjects. Research into the use of cooperative learning in mathematics is especially extensive. A recent meta-analysis by Nunnery, Chappell, & Arnold (2013) found that Slavin's Student Teams-Achievement Divisions had a statistically significant positive effect on student achievement in math. The effect was stronger for adolescents than for younger children. An area of concern in mathematics is student anxiety towards math. A 2012 study by Daneshamooz & Alamohodaei compared 263 college students' anxiety, academic hardiness, and math achievement found that students with high and low levels of anxiety towards math performed better in math achievement when using cooperative learning strategies ($p<.01$).

When combined with metacognitive training, eighth grade students (N=384) who participated in cooperative learning performed better in math than the other three treatment groups (individualistic learning with metacognitive training, cooperative learning without metacognitive training, and individualistic learning without metacognitive training). Cooperative learning has shown to be effective in increasing children's mathematics achievement consistently (al-Halal, 2001; Brecht, 2000; Conring, 2009).

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An important consideration for cooperative learning is that results are not always immediate. Hsiung (2012) found that cooperative learning did not produce immediate improvement in academic achievement, was less effective in the early stages of implementation, and that teams matured over time. However, over the span of the study, students in the cooperative learning group performed better on homework and unit tests. When looking at performance in pre-calculus, Whicker, Bol, & Nunnery (1997) found that cooperative learning produced higher achievement over a span of three chapter tests. The initial test scores were similar between the control and treatment group, followed by the second test having larger, but not significantly different means. By the third exam, the differences between the two groups' scores were statistically significant.

An effective cooperative learning must meet a number of essential elements. For Sachs, Candlin, and Rose (2003), there are four elements including positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation, and simultaneous interaction. Johnson and Johnson (1994) posit five elements including positive interdependence, face to face promotive interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing.

Based on the studies of Maddinabeita (2006), ten cooperative learning strategies can be summarized as follows: 1) TGT: Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT), 2) Group Investigation, 3) Jigsaw, 4) Team-Assisted Individualization, 5) Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition, 6) Cooperative Learning and Teaching Scripts, 7) Cooperative Learning Structures, 8) Student Teams-Achievement Divisions, 9) Learning Together, and 10) Complex Instruction. Of these, cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together is of particular concern here.

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2.1.7. The Cooperative Learning Strategy of Learning Together

A cooperative learning group was defined by Berry (2003) as collaboration among individuals working together toward a common goal (p. 2). The cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together has been commonly defined as the strategy that permits a heterogeneous group of students, given specific roles, to achieve a common goal (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). Cooperative learning groups have been employed in diverse academic domains like computer programming, mathematics, music, social studies, business communication, and biological sciences (Cheng & Warren, 2000; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991; Slavin, 1990).

It was reported that Cooperative learning has assisted the individual learner to develop higher order critical thinking skills, acquire oral communication skills, and foster an in-depth understanding of content material if applied properly (Berry, 2003; P. E. King & Behnke, 2005; Mastropieri et al., 2007; Topping, 2007). Teacher-centered and lecture-directed instruction of content material might not let students participate in meaningful learning experience; these methods of instruction just promote rote learning (Saulnier et al., 2008; Zakaria & Iksan, 2007). Additionally, Berry (2008) stated that case concisely, commenting, "Although efficient in the delivery of large amounts of information in a short period of time, lecture lacks the effectiveness of an active learning approach" (p. 149).

2.1.8. Mechanism of Students' Grouping

Students who typically excel in EFL reading comprehension content areas may show group dominance and finish the classroom tasks and required assignments for the group. Yet, students with low EFL reading comprehension skills may lack the essential communication skills required to work effectively with their classmates. To

overcome such weak point in applying Learning Together strategy, offering prerequisite lessons or lectures to the whole students concentrating on leadership skills, active communication skills, as well as teamwork strategies was suggested (Gillies, 2006; P. E. King & Behnke, 2005). The significance of both effective communication skills and good teamwork skills was underscored by P. E. King and Behnke (2005), who inferred, "When students lack the communication and teamwork skills necessary to benefit from group assignments, the system breaks down" (p. 59).

Cooperative group behavior is an essential part that should be taken into consideration when applying Learning Together strategy to the EFL reading comprehension classroom. The course instructor can act as a good example and active model for effective learning performance and behaviors. As a portion of a research study that examined both student and teacher verbal communications while applying cooperative learning groups, Gillies (2006) discovered that teachers might be an indispensable factor in increasing positive social communication and interaction amongst students in the course of collaborative learning process.

The Gillies's (2006) research study results showed that when the cooperative learning, as a teaching strategy, was employed accurately and properly by the teachers, they applied more questioning strategies, demonstrated an increase in "mediated-learning behaviors" (p.284), and involved in keeping discipline affairs less regularly than acted teachers who implemented group work merely. The students' behaviors that were noted in the study resulted in similar findings, modeling or imitating the teacher's observed behavior. This study reinforced the belief that teachers can own a strong effect and power on smoothing positive social interdependence in the course of group work and can have a strong positive impact on learning outcomes (Gillies, 2006).

Therefore, sufficient preparation and in-service training for EFL instructors in general and reading comprehension instructors in particular on how to apply Learning Together strategy has become an urgent need. It is worth mentioning that the heterogeneous grouping procedure in the cooperative learning groups processing is thought to have expedited an increase of awareness of various learning needs inside the classroom (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). To learn the way of how to cooperate with one another effectively within cooperative learning groups is an essential factor for undergraduate EFL students to have the required social skills of meeting daily challenges on campus and off campus in the outside society.

It was clarified by Ghaith and Shaaban (2005) that employing cooperative learning based-instruction has given students opportunities to discuss meaningful ideas and construct sensible knowledge that has produced functional connection which stimulates them while at the same time smoothing the process of language acquisition (p.46). Cooperation can help students construct, develop and improve knowledgeable basis of content materials and ideas, practice proper social and communication skills, enhance critical thinking skills, in addition to gaining confidence in the domain of problem solving (Levy & Murnane, 2004; Zakaria & Iksan, 2007; Zywica & Gomez, 2008).

Bilgin (2006) elaborated that, on one hand, in conventional instruction approaches, students are treated as merely passive listeners and recipients, but, on the other hand, in the cooperative learning approach, students are seen to be in an active learning situation (p.33). Therefore, in the EFL reading comprehension achievement domain, cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together can foster success. It is worth acknowledging that students' heterogeneous grouping, as an essential element in cooperative learning groups, has benefitted students cognitively.

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A comparative analysis exploring the cognitive achievement of heterogeneous versus homogeneous collaborative grouping of students was carried out by Fawcett and Garton (2005). One hundred and twenty five second-grade students participated in the study. The participants were paired in a way that matched their cognitive ability. This process resulted in ten pairs of both high achievers, ten pairs of both low achievers, and twenty pairs of mismatched high and low achievers (Fawcett & Garton, 2005). The left behind forty five students, who were regarded as a basis for comparison in the study, had independent tasks inside the classroom. The pre- posttest results showed that participants of low cognitive ability, when paired with participants of high cognitive ability, made favorable gains in student achievement. The study did not show any considerable gains of cognitive achievement in students who had been paired with others of similar cognitive ability. Additionally, there were no significant cognitive gains noted in students who worked independently.

Gok and Silay (2008) carried out a study on some factors included the achievement, attitude, and problem-solving skills of 10th-grade physics students involved in cooperative learning instructional strategy. In this study, the experimental group consisted of twenty five participant students who received the cooperative learning instructional strategy, with twenty one participant students who served as the control group. Both pre- and posttests were applied throughout the course of the study, that was carried out for the duration of a single full fall semester. The study found that the scores of the groups who received the cooperative learning instructional strategy were significantly higher when compared with the sores of the control group in the domains of achievement, attitude, and problem solving (Gok & Silay, 2008).

The researchers stated that the success of the groups who received the cooperative learning instructional strategy was attributed to the interactive support of

group members who in the long run developed an effective learning environment. On the contrary, the control group, who received lecture-based instruction, individual problem solving, and isolation from peer support cultivated lower student achievement in the content area of science (Gok & Silay, 2008).

Each member in the group can be given a specific task or a definite role, such as a recorder, a timekeeper, a reader, or a materials manager, so that all group participant students have the opportunity to actively participate toward achieving a common shared goal (Boaler, 2006; Lin, 2006; Mastropieri et al., 2007). Additionally, each student group member's task or role could be assigned to be done or played in accordance with his or her academic abilities and social strengths (Mastropieri et al., 2007). In this approach, all participant students are held and considered responsible for the product and final outcome of the group's whole efforts, which creates accountability within the infrastructure of the cooperative learning group and lets all group member students to participate actively (Lin, 2006). Students in cooperative groups should never be placed in a row; rather, they should form a square shape (Wood, 2009, p.31). This formation entails students facing each other, which facilitates group interaction (Wood, 2009).

To ensure group members are working cohesively toward a common goal, the literature suggested periodically checking on each cooperative group (Tran, 2007). When applying the cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together, it is necessary to carefully monitor the groups so that competitive actions do not overshadow the cooperative effort. Three key factors that help facilitate effectiveness of social interdependence in the cooperative learning group are substitutability, cathexis, and inducibility (Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

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Substitutability involves enabling the work of one cooperator to replace the work of another so that they do not duplicate each other's efforts‖ (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, p.297). *Cathexis* is the inherent development of personal bonds among group members‖ (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, p. 297). As a result of cathexis, cliques are formed within the group, cultivating favoritism and having a negative impact on the group's collaborative efforts. *Inducibility* is excessive conformity with the views of others so that members no longer make their own, independent, unique contribution to the group (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, p. 297). When inducibility is involved, members forfeit their own personal viewpoints for the sake of the group's collaborative efforts. A study of psychological and social traits among undergraduate students attending a university in Turkey revealed that employing cooperative learning groups decreased social anxiety and student loneliness (Koçak, 2008, p. 779).

Participants in Koçak's (2008) study included 114 freshmen and sophomores enrolled in a mathematics class. Results of the Self-Monitoring Scale, The University of California-Los Angeles Loneliness Scale, and the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale, all administered to participants in the study, revealed an increase in happiness (Koçak, 2008). When referring to the teacher's role in supporting the cooperative behavior among groups, it can be said that the classroom teacher can serve as a model for effective learning behaviors. As part of a study in which both student and teacher verbal interactions while conducting cooperative learning groups were examined, Gillies (2006) found teachers may be an essential component in developing positive social interaction among students during collaborative learning. This study supported the notion that teachers can have a strong influence on facilitating positive social interdependence during group work and positively affect learning outcomes (Gillies, 2006).

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A study conducted by Gumos and Buluc (2007) examined the impacts of inquiry-based learning and cooperative learning on fourth-grade student achievement. Thirty students from each of two fourth-grade classrooms participated in the study, during which one classroom received the treatment of the cooperative learning strategy and the other received traditional methods of instruction. Pre- and post-achievement tests were administered to both the control and experimental groups for the duration of the study. Pretest scores for both the control and experimental groups displayed no significant differences in achievement scores, but the posttest scores revealed a significant difference in achievement between the two groups (Gumus & Buluc, 2007).

The classroom in which cooperative learning was conducted made the biggest improvements in achievement scores. Results indicated that students preferred the cooperative learning method over traditional methods of learning, such as paper and pencil tasks and listening to lectures (Gumus & Buluc, 2007). Additionally, results of a study conducted by Ellison et al. (2005) indicated that all students who participated in the study preferred cooperative learning over competitive and individualistic models of learning. Ellison et al.'s study findings that all students preferred the learning model of cooperative learning were confirmed by Viadero (2009), who stated that studies have long shown that students of all races but African-American students, in particular often perform better in cooperative learning groups (p. 6).

2.1.9. Cooperative Learning and Styles of Learners

Information from the literature supports the premise and the appropriateness of cooperative learning as a teaching strategy. It could be claimed that cooperative learning strategy can satisfy all cognitive, behavioral and emotional needs of all

learners' styles, kinesthetic learners, auditory learners and visual learners. Cooperative learning has given kinesthetic learners the opportunity of hands-on experiences, which allows these learners to fully comprehend concepts to be learned (Vondracek, 2009). Auditory learners have benefited from cooperative learning by facilitating discussions within their group, which could nurture deeper learning. Visual learners have been able to touch and see in a cooperative learning group, which has facilitated further comprehension of content material (Vondracek, 2009, p. 38). Speaking from experience as a teacher, Vondracek (2009) praised the advantages of cooperative learning, remarked. "As teachers; we know what a daunting job it can be to ensure that all students in a class learn effectively" (p.38).

2.1.10. The Students' Role in the Cooperative Learning Classroom

Sadker and Zittleman (2009) noted that students have many roles in the cooperative learning classroom that may enhance instruction delivery and learning. Students' in such classrooms are often asked to collaborate, assemble notes prior to a discussion, perform listening tasks, organize written responses, or complete related practice exercises. Regardless of their roles or tasks, DuFour (2011) declared that students should be active participants in their learning. Being active implies that learners take part in classroom debates, not only responding to inquiries made by the teacher but also responding to queries posed by their counterparts. Learners should ask questions freely or express their thoughts about a topic, not only to their peers but also their teachers. This allows learners to create individual ideas about their education, and relate those ideas to their learning exercises. Students should be motivated to learn as this is their ultimate role. For the collaboration process to work, the learner's role must also be intertwined with the teacher's role (Kagan, 2013).

However, if pupils are properly concerned with learning, it is their business to engage in every task they are faced with. Discerning learners ought to be capable of noticing when previous experience or knowledge relates to new learning. Kagan (2013) declared that an instructor's part in cooperative learning is that of a facilitator; the Students' job is to take given details or instructions and organize tasks within the group to complete the assignment. Students should monitor the task to be accomplished by examining themselves in relation to the task and even in relation to study time, noise level, and value of the assigned work.

In cooperative learning classrooms, learners take on the character of directors, taskmasters, sound monitors, and clean-up/maintenance supervisors. When the learners take on such roles, each learner is required to take part in the task assigned as part of the learning experience. However, it must be noted that in cooperative learning classrooms, if one student is assigned the task of noise monitor by the group, that does not absolve his/her teammates from responsibility to keep noise under control in the classroom. Students in cooperative learning classrooms do a great deal of collaborating. This can take the form of comparing and discussing their responses, reading and reacting to each other's written work and suggesting improvements that help each student to continue progressing (Kagan, 2013).

Students in cooperative learning situation can work simultaneously in dialogues or in role-plays, share thoughts, opinions, and experiences. Students in cooperative learning classrooms interact collectively with instructors and the whole class, as well as individually within their groups, asking questions or brainstorming ideas as learning takes place. The key to cooperative learning is constructive interdependence, the idea that students in each group are linked with other learners in that group in such a manner that none can thrive if all do not thrive. Students must

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perceive their group mates' work achievements as emotional payback for their contributions to the group as well as recognizing that the results of group assignments benefit both the individual student and the group as a whole (Johnson & Johnson, 2013; Kagan, 2013; Levy, 2008).

Spontaneous topic discussion inside cooperative learning groups is significantly better than in teacher-directed discussions as students obtain instantaneous feedback, therefore advancing the development of the topic under discussion. Through discussion of the topic students at varying cognitive levels are stimulated. The emphasis is placed on learning consensus in order to discover the best solution to a given problem. The constructivist methodology encourages students to articulate their personal approaches to a given problem and interact with the group to learn to think accurately and critically (Johnson & Johnson, 2013).

In such settings, students recognize that their success or failure is reliant on the capacity to collaborate as a group (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). Students in such units are more likely to encourage each other to do whatever is required to help the group succeed. Indeed, Jha (2012) acknowledged that learners are likely to inspire one another to participate in class activities.

2.1.11. Using Cooperative Learning Strategies with EFL Learners

Cooperative learning strategies have many techniques, and it has been used to teach native speakers and non-native speakers at various levels of the educational spectrum, but often for learners acquiring English as a second language and English as a foreign language (Joritz-Nakagawa, 2007). There are many cooperative learning strategies that can afford ELLs interaction and the ability to practice in groups.

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One of these is Think-Pair-Share, this allows members to share questions and find solutions by encouraging positive interdependence during which the learners sink or swim together. With Individual Accountability, learners learn together, but perform individually. Another technique is Face-To-Face Interaction; this strategy supports cognitive actions and social changes, while Interpersonal and Small Group Skills Techniques encourage students with learning subject matter and teamwork. With the Jigsaw Technique, there are several groups, and each group is assigned a specific task, then each is responsible to share what was learned in their specific group (Cerbin, 2010). Those who have appraised the effectiveness of placing students who are learning English as a Foreign Language in cooperative groups to boost their verbal participation, have discovered that learners who work in groups are more inspired to learn, more ready to lead, and less anxious about learning (Tong, 2010).

Cooperative groups encourage ELLs to engage in discussions that are aligned to what is currently taking place each moment in the group to complete a task, and more importantly, feedback and modification or adjustments are executed in a non-threating way without casting judgment on learners, and it is done instantly (Haynes, 2007). Cooperative learning strategies are purposeful and can be used as teaching strategies for all students. This includes learners who are acquiring a target language or those who are native speakers (Hill & Flynn, 2006). The flexibility of this instructional methodology can be beneficial for the instructor who has to teach a diverse group of language learners who are in the same classroom setting. The strategies will also work well if the students are all non-English speakers as well. Cooperative learning has been argued to assist ELLs interact more because of the nature of the techniques. Learners are able to learn both social skills and cognitive skills (Johnson & Johnson, 1970).

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Learners are able to work with one goal in mind, and that is to work together cooperatively instead of individually. Holt, Chips, and Wallace (1991) suggested that cooperative learning can be beneficial to ELLs because when they interact with peers, they can benefit by listening and speaking with their peers in the group setting. This level of interaction assists ELLs to construct language and build their skills. ELLs are also mutually reliant on each other, sharing in goal setting, building relationships, and showing respect for each other. Experts have suggested that for cooperative learning to be effective, it should cater for small group settings.

Macpherson (2015) posited that cooperative learning groups should be about four to six team members, as this will allow learners to be paired in two or three pairs. Millis (2014) noted that cooperative learning produced a deeper learning rather than surface learning for ELLs. When the strategies were merged, that experience delivered the best practices for instructors, and, as a result, the ELLs were pleased (Millis, 2014). Mahmoud (2014) also investigated the effectiveness of using cooperative strategies to enhance writing skills among university students. Second language students entering college usually struggle with writing as they navigate the college experience. The results confirmed that the students' writing scores were higher on their post-test, then they were for the pre-test after the cooperative learning strategies treatment was administered (Mahmoud, 2014).

2.1.12. The Effect of Cooperative Learning on Students' Achievement

In the past century, various researchers have conducted close to 500 studies that have shown positive effects of cooperative learning on student achievement (Crook 1993). Felder and Brent (2007) stated,

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> Cooperatively taught students tend to exhibit higher academic achievement, greater persistence through graduation, better high-level reasoning and critical thinking skills, deeper understanding of learned material, greater time on task and less disruptive behavior in class, lower levels of anxiety and stress, greater intrinsic motivation to learn and achieve, greater ability to view situations from others' perspectives, more positive and supportive relationships with peers, more positive attitudes toward subject areas, and higher self-esteem. (p. 1)

An increase of student academic performance results from organized cooperative group activities (Willis, 2007). Many cooperative learning theorists define cooperative learning as a methodology that will improve academic achievement and that consists of multiple parts (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). The parts of cooperative learning include positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, promotive interaction, teaching interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). When cooperative learning is structured utilizing the types and elements of cooperative learning, students will put forth greater efforts to increase their academic achievement as well as improve their relationships with others (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Johnson and Johnson (1999) stated, "Working together to achieve a common goal produces higher achievement and greater productivity than does working alone" (p. 72).

On the one hand, several studies investigated the impact of cooperative learning on student achievement and found that cooperative learning led to an increase in student scores. Clapper (2015) stated that there is an abundance of evidence to support the use of cooperative learning strategies and its effects on achievement and motivation. When properly implemented, cooperative learning can have several pedagogical benefits such as enhancing academic performance and promoting a better attitude towards learning (Hsiung et al., 2014).

The implementation of cooperative strategies show positive effects on many learning outcomes such as the quality of the learning environment and other domains, increased academic achievement, higher student self-esteem, and increases in social competency (Johnson et al., 1990). Zakaria et al. (2010) conducted a quantitative study comparing the methodologies of cooperative learning and traditional teaching and found that cooperative learning increased student academic achievement more than the traditional teaching approach. Theorist Slavin reported that there were academic achievement gains when analyzing six out of seven studies that consisted of cooperative learning (Whicker, Bol & Nunnery, 1997).

Theorists Madden and Slavin investigated mathematics elementary students in which cooperative learning was utilized and reported that student academic achievement in the experimental group outscored the control group significantly (Whicker et al., 1997). A meta-analysis that consisted of more than 375 studies concluded that cooperative learning resulted in higher-level reasoning, a greater transfer of knowledge, and an increase in academic achievement (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). According to Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne (2000), there were a total of 164 studies that examined eight methods of cooperative learning which were all found to have a positive influence on student achievement (Johnson et al., 2000, p. 1). Johnson et al. (2000) reported the results of the meta-analysis showing, "Cooperation promotes higher achievement than do competitive or individualistic efforts" (Johnson et al., 2000, p 12).

Mahmoud and Abdel (2014) used cooperative learning to encourage students at the university level to learn from their peers by developing their writing skills and linguistic competence. The researchers evaluated students' writings and focused mainly on analyzing their mistakes. The cooperative theory enabled students to work

in pairs, focusing on spelling, using vocabulary words, grammar, and punctuation. Mahmoud and Abdel (2014) posited that the theory enabled students' writing scores to improve significantly after being subjected to cooperative learning strategies. Additionally, Chin-Min (2012) compared individualistic and cooperative learning with engineering students. The students' learning methods were monitored along with their time and task. The researcher argued that given a sufficient period of time for the cooperative learning teams to mature, the students in the cooperative learning conditions performed substantially better in both the homework and unit tests than those in the individualistic learning conditions (Chin-Min, 2012).

Similarly, Bölükbaş et al. (2011) used the cooperative learning strategy to identify its effectiveness on students' reading comprehension skills with university students learning Turkish as a foreign language. Bölükbaş et al. (2011) contended that their findings supported their hypotheses that peer interaction can improve learning. The strategies used were more beneficial to learners who were developing their linguistic competency, and the strategies were more effective in improving the reading comprehension skills of learners when this was compared to traditional teaching methods (Bölükbaş et al., 2011).

The findings from Bölükbaş et al. (2011) could prove beneficial to Saudi undergraduates who are learning EFL because it would possibly help them improve both their English language skills in general and in particular, their reading comprehension skills. Aminloo (2013) used convenience sampling to gather data and examined the effect of group work to teach writing to students learning English as a foreign language. The findings suggested that both the treatment group and the control group improved significantly from the beginning of instruction to the end of the instruction (Aminloo, 2013).

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Results showed that there was significant difference in their post-test results for those in the cooperative group. These students had a wider range of differences in longer paragraphs, sentence structures, and better development, as a result of working and practicing collaboratively, and they surpassed the students who worked individually (Aminloo, 2013). Dooley (2009) encouraged instructors to ensure that the learning environment is a space where the learners' experience is stress-free and non-toxic so that they will want to be there. Instructors should also be conscious of all the participants within their sphere, so they show respect for their similarities and differences amid the language, ethnic and social groups.

This secure learning environment can be offered via using learning together strategy since when ELLs work together collaboratively in student-centered learning atmosphere, they are able to follow areas that are of interest to them, and this could lead them to achieve the set goal (Hepple, Sockhill, Tan, & Alford, 2014). Equally important, learners at the lowest level will find ways to add to the information and skills to the group inventiveness to help invest and involve those who might otherwise be ignored while they are engaged in this learning environment (Dooley & Thangaperumal, 2011).

On the other hand, there are few researchers who believe cooperative learning promotes limitations on student academic achievement. Flynn (2013) stated that research suggests that students may learn best through a step-by-step process. Slavin (1988) suggested that cooperative learning can be found to be ineffective. There may be cooperative groups that do not work effectively together. Tamah (2014) stated, "The benefits of using cooperative learning are well supported by theory and well established by classroom research, but the method is not without its problems, most of which have to do with individual student resistance and dysfunctional teams" (p. 7).

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According to Kagen (1999), "When we put students in groups, there is potential for all sorts of social interaction problems." Students may have feelings of apprehensiveness when teachers form cooperative groups. Felder and Brent (2007) stated that when high and low students are grouped together, the higher students feel as if they are not allowed to move forward and have to stay at the same pace as the lower students in their group which can affect student achievement (Felder & Brent, 2007, p. 2). According to Zakari and Iksan (2007),

> Teachers and students have to face various challenges. The main problems include: need to prepare extra materials for class use, fear of the loss of content, do not trust students in acquiring knowledge by themselves, lacks familiarity with cooperative learning methods, and students lack the skills to work in a group. (p. 38)

According to Tamah (2014), "Group grades cause negative feeling as high-achieving students will feel disadvantaged meanwhile the low-achieving students will feel guilty" (Tamah, 2014, p. 202). Individual accountability is extremely important in cooperative learning however it is minimally implemented due to the debatable issues of assessment and grades (Tamah, 2014, p. 200). According to Tamah (2014), in a cooperative learning setting, high achievers express a negative uncertainty when receiving a group grade that includes low achievers in the group (Tamah, 2014, p. 200). Felder and Brent (2007) stated, "The proven benefits of cooperative learning notwithstanding, instructors who attempt it frequently encounter resistance and sometimes open hostility from the students" (pg. 2). Flynn (2013) stated that teachers could have negative feelings about cooperative learning since it may require more time to plan effective lessons than direct instruction lessons. Teachers tend to use various forms of cooperative learning however they sometimes misunderstand how to correctly implement it within their curriculum.

Flynn (2013) stated that teachers must inform students of their role as a student, their goals, and procedures of the activity in order for the lesson to be effective. In order for teachers to successfully practice cooperative learning in their classroom, researchers suggest they endure professional development training.

2.1.13. Meta-Analysis of Cooperative Learning Methods

Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne (2000) carried out a meta-analysis of cooperative learning methods by reviewing 164 studies that explored the effect of a specific method of cooperative learning on student achievement‖ (p. 8). The goal of the study was to answer four research questions: (a) To what degrees has research been employed to examine cooperative learning techniques? (b) What various cooperative learning techniques have been employed? (c) How effective are the cooperative learning techniques that have been employed? (d) What are the characteristics of the most favorable cooperative learning techniques? (Johnson et al., 2000).

Results of Johnson et al.'s meta-analysis showed that if cooperative learning has been applied properly, cognitive and social gains are made. The number of cooperative learning techniques applied varied among studies, leading Johnson et al. to conclude that further evaluation in this area was needed. In terms of effective the cooperative learning techniques, Johnson and Johnson (2000) and Johnson et al. (2000) deduced that all of the cooperative learning models produced favorable outcomes, signifying higher cognitive gains over competitive and individualistic models of learning.

As far as the most favorable cooperative learning techniques were concerned, results of the study indicated that the more conceptual the method of cooperative

learning, the greater its impact on student achievement tends to be (Johnson & Johnson, pp. 22-23). The researchers recommended that further research was needed to determine how each of the studies in their meta-analysis had calculated achievement.

2.2. Studies Related to Reading Comprehension

2.2.1. Reading Comprehension Definition

Reading comprehension is understanding a text that is read, or the process of "constructing meaning" from a text. Comprehension is a "construction process" because it involves all of the elements of the reading process working together as a text is read to create a representation of the text in the reader's mind (Partnership for Reading, 2005). Reading comprehension is the process that exerts and, at the same time, creates meaning by having the student interact and be involved with written language (Watson et al., 2012).

Additionally, comprehension can be defined as “constructing meaning that is reasonable and accurate by connecting what has been read to what the reader already knows and thinking about all of this information until it is understood” (Learning Point Associates, 2004, p.30). “The National Reading Panel views comprehension as an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text” (Lerner, 2003, p.417).

Reading can also be defined as the ability to get understanding from written text. Second Language reading can best be understood as a combination of skills and abilities that individuals bring to bear as they begin to read (Grabe, 1991). According to Chang (2002), the 1980s was the shining decade in research on reading in a second language and efforts to improve Second Language reading instruction.

In the mid to late 1960s, reading was considered as little more than reinforcement for oral language instruction. Reading was considered as a means to an end. The end was oral language instruction. In the late 1960s, reading and writing instruction got more emphasis. Through the early to mid-1970s, importance of reading was felt by a number of researchers and teacher trainers.

An important development in theories about reading comprehension occurred in the 1970s. Reading comprehension was seen as an active process that engaged the reader. Reading comprehension was also seen as the construction of the meaning of a written text through an interaction between the reader and the text. Harmer (2007), stated that effective reading comprehension needs six types of knowledge including semantic knowledge, morphological knowledge, general world knowledge, socio-cultural knowledge, topic knowledge, and genre knowledge.

In a review of 203 studies dealing with text comprehension, the National Reading Panel (2000) identified six strategies that were more effective in improving the comprehension of readers: comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic organizer, question-answer, story structure, and summarization. Thus, cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together can be used to develop the undergraduate EFL students' reading comprehension skills.

2.2.2. Reading Comprehension Skills in the Saudi Educational Context

Saudi EFL classrooms struggle to teach reading skills and precise reading comprehension adequately (Al Abik, 2014). Reading aloud, in which the best student reads a text to the rest of his/her classmates, or different students take turns reading different parts of the text, occupies a major portion of the teaching time. According to Alshumaimeri (2011), oral reading is the most preferred reading method among Saudi

English teachers. Alsamadani (2012) asserted this point, stating that Saudi EFL teachers devote the designated class time to reading, practicing silent reading, and answering reading comprehension questions at the expense of teaching and practicing reading skills and strategies. Additionally, 75% of the EFL teachers in Alsamadani's study indicated that they knew nothing about metacognitive reading strategies and were only aware of cognitive reading strategies.

However, these teachers tended to avoid teaching cognitive reading strategies because they require tremendous effort and consume a significant amount of class time. With the same token, surveying in-service Saudi EFL teachers, Bamanger and Gashan (2014) identified scanning the text, reading the text aloud, explaining vocabulary items, translating words into Arabic, asking questions to check comprehension, and teaching students to guess the meaning of ambiguous vocabulary as common strategies used in the Saudi EFL reading comprehension classroom. The EFL teachers who took part in the study affirmed that these were the most significant strategies in teaching reading skills to Saudi EFL learners.

Similarly, Al-Rojaie (2011) found that oral reading instruction and decoding a passage word by word were common classroom reading practices. Favoring these practices, the Saudi EFL teachers in Al-Rojaie's study did not implement reading comprehension strategies such as detecting main ideas, activating students' prior knowledge, summarizing and retelling, or monitoring reading comprehension in the reading classes. Moreover, AlNooh (2013) identified oral reading as the most commonly practiced teaching method for reading comprehension skills and noted that the allocated class time of forty five minutes was not enough to teach EFL reading comprehension skills to Saudi students.

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2.3. Studies Related to Cooperative Learning Effect on Reading Comprehension

2.3.1. The Effect of Cooperative Learning on Reading Comprehension

Reading ability is a key factor in overall academic success, and people of all ages lacking literacy skills often find themselves powerless in today's society (Brozo, 2002). Additionally, figuring out the best instructional strategies and tools for improving reading comprehension with diverse learners can be a challenge and is a current focus in education (Tindall, 2010). As found by Kitano and Lewis (2007), researchers have found that cooperative learning is a successful method in improving reading comprehension. Many studies showed that there is positive effectiveness of cooperative learning within groups for reading comprehension.

Almanza (1997) compared the effectiveness of cooperative learning in small groups with the whole class discussion using directed reading-thinking activities during reading. The participants were sixth graders in New York. Whole groups were given stories with the same difficulty level for eight weeks. After each story, the teacher gave each child a reading comprehension test and made comments on them. Then each cooperative group met together, discussed the story, and worked together for four weeks. Therefore, they continued to read using the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) strategies. Afterward, they finished reading the story and answering the comprehensive questions independently. The results reported that children in the cooperative reading groups scored higher on their reading comprehension test than when they used the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA).

When comparing cooperative learning groups to control groups, Rojas-Dummond et al. (1998) investigated a study to explore the development of self-regulatory approaches for comprehension and learning from narrative and expository

contents. Participants included 97 students from fourth grade classes from two public primary schools. The results reported that experimental groups showed highly significant in using strategies for comprehending narrative and expository texts. The plan included summarization, posing and answering explicit and implicit questions and guessing information from a text. Cooperative learning groups also gained more sophisticated strategies for dealing with global unity. Slavin and Madden (1995) conducted a study to evaluate the impact of the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) program on students' reading comprehension in third and fourth grades during a school year. In this study, CIRC students did highly significant as they gain of almost two thirds of a grade alike more than control groups.

Ghaith (2003) investigated the effects of cooperative learning on reading achievement, academic self-esteem, and feelings of school alienation. The participants were 56 high school Lebanese EFL learners studying at a private school in Beirut. The result revealed that there were no significant differences between control and experimental groups regarding the dependent variables of academic self-esteem and feelings of school alienation. However, the results revealed that the reading achievement of EFL learners improved significantly as a result of implementing cooperative learning.

Seetape (2003) studied the effects of cooperative learning on English reading achievement and the students' behavior towards this learning method used in the English classroom. The samples were 29 Mathayomsuksa 3 students in Uthaithani School selected by means of purposive sampling. Students were taught for eight periods, each of which lasted fifty minutes. The instruments were English reading achievement test, cooperative learning behavioral observation sheet, and lesson plans using cooperative learning technique. The results of the study showed that the post-

test scores after learning English reading using cooperative learning were higher than the pre-test scores at the .05 level of significance. Most of the samples displayed very good behavior in cooperating in their tasks. Their cooperative behavior had increasingly developed. Some elements of poor behavior had decreased by up to 14.29 percent. Similarly, Jacobs and Hannah (2004), in integrating cooperative learning techniques with reading aloud, found that not only can they promote language learning, but they also promote active citizenship.

Almaguer (2005) studied the effects of cooperative learning on reading fluency and comprehension of 80 third grade English language learners in south Texas. Analysis of data through covariance revealed that peer assisted reading strategy improves reading achievement. Mohammadi and Salimzadeh (2009) investigated the effects of cooperative learning strategy training on reading comprehension and motivation of 72 Iranian intermediate EFL learners and found statistically significant differences between control and experimental groups. Demachkie and Oweini (2011) also used the collaborative strategic reading (CSR) strategy to improve the reading of Arabic seventh graders learning French and English as second languages. Teachers generally used traditional methods to teach these students reading, but decided to try cooperative learning strategies (Demachkie & Oweini, 2011). They found that the results were positive for those teachers and students who used cooperative learning strategies (Demachkie & Oweini, 2011). Bölükbaş, Keskin, and Polat (2011) attempted to identify the effect cooperative learning techniques have on the reading skills of students who were learning Turkish as a foreign language by comparing cooperative techniques and the conventional teaching. It was found that the cooperative learning group did much better than the conventional group (Bölükbaş et al., 2011).

The researchers drew on other studies that were carried out both locally and internationally, each with similar findings to previous researchers, such as Adams (1995), Ghaith (2003), Güngör and Açıkgöz (2005), and Stevens (2003; as cited by Bölükbaş et al., 2011). Jalilifar (2010) compared cooperative learning and conventional instructional strategies to identify which had a greater impact on reading comprehension with university students learning English as a foreign language. Jalilifar (2010) found that those instructed with cooperative learning strategies performed better than those who were taught conventionally.

2.3.2. The Effect of Cooperative Learning on Undergraduate EFL Students' Reading Comprehension

Numerous studies have shown the effectiveness of cooperative learning with university-level students in EFL reading classes (Ghaith & El-Malak, 2004; Law, 2011; Liao & Oescher, 2009; Suh, 2009). Classrooms that incorporate cooperative learning strategies facilitate a supportive environment for English language learners. Studies show that the effectiveness of cooperative learning on learner's academic achievement reflects both subject content areas and language learning (Chen, 2011). Cooperative-based instruction is becoming an increasingly popular model that provides a supportive learning environment and many opportunities for participation while lowering English language learner's affective filter and dissatisfaction with the content material (Chen, 2011; Nan, 2014). English learners reflect a positive impact of phonetic and phonological instruction with cooperative learning strategies, and given the benefits as mentioned above of cooperative learning strategies, the more a student receives cooperative-based instruction, the more successful they will be (Chen, 2011; Slavin, 2015).

The benefits of structuring cooperative learning in English language classrooms have far-reaching effects beyond academic and language proficiency levels. Not only are the advantages of cooperative learning seen with increased academic performance of English learners, but are also seen in their long-term social development as well (Chen, 2011, Slavin, 2015). Certain studies have shown that combining cooperative learning with English reading instruction creates student opportunities to interact with peers, increase peer communication and support, encourage reading-comprehension development, and lower anxiety (Gillies & Ashman, 2000).

However, other studies have disproved the advantages of cooperative learning in English reading comprehension compared to traditional lecture-based instruction (Gladwin, & Stepp-Greany, 2008; Zoghi, Mustapha, Maasum, 2010). In Saudi Arabia, however, English reading comprehension instruction within the framework of cooperative learning strategy of learning together pedagogy has remained under-explored in university level education. Kessler (1992) mentioned cooperative learning as a humanistic, pro-social form of education for second language learners. Consequently, in this study, the researcher created a "humanistic and pro-social" cooperative learning strategy of learning together environment for undergraduate EFL Reading Comprehension classrooms, and compared it with traditional lecture-based instruction to explore the effects of cooperative learning strategy of learning together instruction on undergraduate EFL students' reading comprehension.

2.3.3. The Learning Together Strategy and Reading Comprehension

Learning Together occurs when students are placed in groups where team building is emphasized and students learn together while completing worksheets

(Johnson & Johnson 1989). Learning Together strategy was developed by Johnson and Johnson in 1989 (Johnson et al. 1998). In this strategy, firstly the aims are indicated and define the groups for these aims. Students study together on subjects or work sheets in 2 or 6 members of groups. Group members decide how they study and what to do in accordance with group subjects and assignment with altogether. Ultimately, they put out a joint study. Students are rewarded according to achievements in the group and individual studies (Açıkgöz, 2011; Johnson et al. 1994).

Learning together is a cooperative learning strategy that consists of a heterogeneous group of four or five students who work together on assignments. The group receives praise and rewards for outstanding group performance on assignments. The purpose of this method is to emphasize team-building activities before students begin to work together and to promote regular discussions among students within the group about how well they can work together (Slavin, 2000). Berry (2003) defined cooperative learning groups as collaboration among individuals working together toward a common goal (p. 2). The cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together has been generally defined as one that allows a heterogeneous group of students, assigned specific roles, to achieve a common goal (Johnson & Johnson, 2002). Cooperative learning groups have been applied in diverse academic areas such as computer programming, mathematics, music, social studies, business communication, and biological sciences (Cheng & Warren, 2000; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991; Slavin, 1990). Cooperative learning is reported to have enabled the individual learner to develop higher order critical thinking skills, acquire oral communication skills, and foster a deeper understanding of content material if conducted appropriately (Berry, 2003; P. E. King & Behnke, 2005; Mastropieri et al., 2007; Topping, 2007).

Teacher-directed and lecture-based delivery of content material may not allow students to partake in meaningful learning experience; these methods of instruction promote rote learning (Saulnier et al., 2008; Zakaria & Iksan, 2007). Learning Together‖ is a cooperative learning strategy explored by Gungor and Un Acikoz (2004). Attitudes towards reading were also researched. Typically, when students have a difficulty in an area, they tend to develop a negative attitude. Cooperative learning helps promote positive attitudes and therefore can be a possible solution to improving comprehension. Learning Together was used to transform passive readers to active readers and processors while promoting positive attitudes towards reading. There were 56 sixth grade participants in that study. Treatment lasted for 30 hours. Results showed that students in the cooperative learning setting employed more learning strategies. This may be due to increased interactions in groups. Students were able to observe each other reading, explaining, questioning, criticizing and thinking aloud‖ (p.498).

Very little data was presented by Gungor and Un Acikoz (2004). While it was found that participants in a cooperative learning setting employed more comprehension strategies, there was no direct link made between increasing strategy use and improving comprehension. The present study aimed to look into this possible link between using the learning together strategy and Saudi EFL undergraduates' improvement in the domain of reading comprehension achievement as well as researching perceptional changes.

2.3.4. Learning Together as an Instructional Strategy

The various methods for employing cooperative learning strategies in the classroom were researched, tested, and used in practical applications for many years

(Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991). In 2000, a meta-analysis was conducted in an effort to validate the effectiveness of various widely-used methods of cooperative learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000). The methods reviewed were: *Learning Together, Academic Controversy, Student-Team-Achievement-Divisions, Teams-Games-Tournaments, Group Investigation, Jigsaw, Teams-Assisted-Individualization, Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition.*

All eight cooperative methods in the meta-analysis were reported to have a significant positive effect on academic achievement. When the cooperative methods were compared with competitive strategies or individualistic learning, the *Learning Together* model produced the highest results of all the cooperative methods. The authors of the meta-analysis concluded that the amount of research conducted in the area of cooperative learning methods was so extensive and could be generalized to such a variety of educational situations and outcomes, that the findings strongly validated the use of cooperative learning methods in teaching and learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000).

The learning together is a cooperative learning strategy developed by D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson (1991 a). This method was also referred to as *Circles of Learning* or *Cooperative Base Groups*. In this style of learning, students worked in groups of 4-5 as they completed worksheets together. Each group handed in a single sheet at the completion of the assignments and was graded according to the work done by the group as a whole. It was assumed that the students helped each other learn the concepts as they worked through the assignment (Johnson & Johnson, 1975). The most significant characteristics of this strategy are the existence of the group goal and sharing the opinion and materials, division of labor and the group reward.

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According to Johnson and Johnson (1975), when learning together strategy is applied, the following options must be taken into consideration and given due attention:

1- Determining of instructional objectives,

2- Deciding the group size,

3- Dividing the students into groups,

4- Arranging of the class,

5- Planning of educational materials to provide dependence,

6- Giving the roles to the group members in order to provide dependence,

7- Explaining of the academic work,

8- Creating the positive objective dependence,

9- Individual evaluation,

10- Providing the cooperation among the groups,

11- Being explained the criterions necessary for achievement,

12- Determining the required behaviours for success,

13- Guiding the student behaviours,

14- Helping to the group work,

15- Having students come together for being able to teach cooperation,

16- Finishing the lesson,

17- Evaluation for students learning qualitative and quantitative,

18- Evaluating the performance of the group,

19- Forming academic contrasts.

According to D.W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson (1991 b), in order to construct a lesson with cooperative learning model of Learning Together, five basic principles must be provided; positive interdependence, face-to-face primitive interaction,

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individual accountability, the appropriate use of social skills and processing how well the group is functioning, All these five principles of Learning Together model were taken into account when planning lessons and activities and observed by the researcher when applying this model in the Saudi undergraduates' EFL reading comprehension classroom.

When investigating the effects of different types of cooperative learning strategies among 158 studies, Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne (2000) found that all the structures had significantly higher effects on achievement than competitive and individualistic strategies. In order of highest effect size to lowest, the strategies ranked:

(1) Learning Together,

(2) Academic Controversy,

(3) Student Teams-Achievement Divisions,

(4) Teams-Games-Tournaments,

(5) Group Investigation,

(6) Jigsaw, and

(7) Team Accelerated Instruction.

Additionally, a review of literature established that of the 164 research studies that were examined, there were eight cooperative learning methods used. Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne (2000) found that learning together (LT) showed the highest effect. This was followed by academic controversy (AC), student team achievement divisions (STAD), teams' games tournaments (TGT), group investigation (GI), jigsaw, teams assisted individualization (TAI), and finally cooperative integrated reading and composition (CIRC; Johnson et al., 2000). The result provided strong

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support for its success and provided a strong corroboration of what it can do for ELLs (Johnson et al., 2000).

2.3.5. The Effect of Learning Together Strategy on Reading Comprehension

The support students receive while in their working groups effectively supports their reading, comprehension, and vocabulary, while promoting reading and writing achievements (Puzio & Colby, 2013). The functionality of the strategy gives more students the chance to talk and helps them actively struggle through new ideas while elaborating on their understanding and cognition (Boardman et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2000). Students develop a metacognitive awareness of their misunderstandings of the texts they read and are given the tools to work alongside their group members to discover discrepancies in their understanding to repair any misunderstandings they may have (Boardman et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2000).

"Learning Together" as a cooperative learning strategy was explored by Gungor and Un Acikoz (2004). Attitudes towards reading were also researched. Typically, when students have a difficulty in an area, they tend to develop a negative attitude. Cooperative learning helps promote positive attitudes and therefore can be a possible solution to improving comprehension. "Learning Together" was used to transform passive readers to active readers and processors while promoting positive attitudes towards reading. There were 56 sixth grade participants in this study. Treatment lasted for 30 hours. Results showed that students in the cooperative learning setting employed more learning strategies. This may be due to increased interactions in groups. Students were able to "observe each other reading, explaining, questioning, criticizing and thinking aloud" (p.498).

No much data was presented by Gungor and Un Acikoz (2004). Though it was found that participants in a cooperative learning setting employed more comprehension strategies, there was no direct relationship made between increasing strategy use and improving comprehension. According to the results of the above discussed studies, it is clearly proved that the more students work in cooperative learning groups, the better they will learn, the easier the retention of the material will be, and the better they will feel about themselves, the class, and their classmates.

The evidence presented by the above discussed related literature makes a compelling statement that cooperative learning strategy of learning together is a good way to establish best practices in EFL reading comprehension classrooms. The aim of the present study was to see if the cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together is effective for improving Saudi undergraduate EFL students' reading comprehension.

2.4. Critical Analysis of Related Literature and Conclusion

The above literature demonstrates that cooperative learning strategy of learning together has been found to have a positive impact on student achievement in some subject areas and some educational environments. However, there has been a limited number of studies as to its impact on EFL reading comprehension classrooms in the higher education context. This study attempts to fill that void by engaging in an analysis of the impact of the adoption of cooperative learning strategy of learning together as a pedagogy in one Saudi Arabian university district. Most above discussed related studies offer some insight for integrating cooperative learning strategies into the EFL classroom, particularly in the area of reading comprehension into other educational contexts.

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Therefore, Johnson et al. (2000), depending upon their meta-analysis, recommended additional research on the various methods of cooperative learning. As the researchers demonstrated, methodological shortcomings in some of the studies they reviewed compromised the value of those studies. In conclusion, Johnson and Johnson (2000) recommended that researchers should concentrate on conducting highly controlled studies that add to the confidence with which their conclusions will be received (p. 24).

The above-mentioned related literature on the topic of using the cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together to improve reading comprehension showed gaps in the research. Transformation from traditional lecturing method to other relative instructional strategies is needed in the undergraduate EFL reading comprehension classroom. Cooperative learning could be an asset in helping undergraduate EFL students to develop their reading comprehension achievement.

To sum up, the related literature review suggested that instructional intervention is an important factor that influences students' reading comprehension achievement. The current study is a simple step toward understanding how the cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together instructional intervention conditions within the Saudi undergraduate EFL reading comprehension classroom can affect students' reading comprehension achievement.

In this research study, quantitative and qualitative research protocols explored the outcomes of Learning Together strategy instruction in improving reading comprehension in a Saudi higher education EFL context. Also, Learning Together strategy instruction was hoped to encourage students to have positive response towards Learning Together while reading in English.

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2.5. Chapter Summary

Most Saudi EFL learners of various academic stages do not have a good command of efficient reading or comprehension of what they read. In fact, TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) reports for the past ten years shows that Saudi students' performance is the worst among Middle Eastern students, particularly in reading (Al Abik, 2014). He stressed that reading comprehension instruction in Saudi Arabia is not given appropriate attention and that there is an urgent need to change classroom practices in order to develop students' reading skills. Methods of instruction must be examined to move from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach (Brown, 2008).

Cooperative learning promotes reading comprehension skills and deepens students' understanding of content material, allowing EFL reading comprehension learners to become more active rather than passive participants. A review of the related literature indicated that if the cooperative learning employed properly, it can help individual learners to develop higher order critical thinking skills, gain oral communication skills, and foster a deeper understanding of content material (Berry, 2003; P. E. King & Behnke, 2005; Mastropieri et al., 2007; Topping, 2005). A specific cooperative learning strategy, Learning Together, was implemented for this study. Learning Together is generally defined as a cooperative learning strategy that allows a heterogeneous group of students, assigned specific roles, to achieve a common goal (Johnson & Johnson, 2002).

Guvenc and Acikgoz (2007) reported that "hundreds of research results have proved that cooperative learning has produced positive effects on various learning outcomes, in various fields, and countries" (p. 118). Collaboration allows students to develop a knowledge base of content ideas, practice appropriate social skills, hone

critical thinking skills, and gain confidence in problem solving (Levy & Murnane, 2004; Zakaria & Iksan, 2007; Zywica & Gomez, 2008). Traditional instructor-directed and lecture-based delivery of EFL reading comprehension course content material may not allow undergraduate EFL students to have meaningful learning experiences; these conventional methods of instruction just support and promote rote learning (Saulnier et al., 2008; Zakaria & Iksan, 2007). Adequate implementation of the cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together in the area of EFL teaching in general, and in EFL reading comprehension domain in particular can foster students' academic success and enhance their performance and achievement.

Before successful implementation of any cooperative learning strategy in the EFL reading comprehension classroom, there may be a need for instructors to be trained on how to foster cooperative groups in the classroom (Murphy et al., 2005). Change has become an urgent need in the Saudi EFL reading comprehension classroom. Cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together may be an asset in helping EFL undergraduate students to acquire and have a good command of EFL reading comprehension skills. It was also seen in the literature that cooperative learning strategy of learning together has been used to support language learners; however, using learning together as an instructive technique with Saudi undergraduates who are learning EFL is absent from the literature. The methodology and design of the present study to compare between the benefits of cooperative learning strategy of Learning Together and traditional lecturing instruction is presented in the following chapter, Chapter Three.

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