

Jigsaw Reading as An Effective Strategy for Developing Reading Competence in Upper Secondary EFL Classrooms

Zarifa Kupaysinova

PhD Candidate at Namangan State University, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: Reading competence is a fundamental component of foreign language learning, particularly in upper secondary education where learners are expected to process longer and more complex texts. Traditional reading instruction often focuses on individual comprehension tasks, which may limit student engagement and collaborative learning opportunities. Jigsaw Reading, a cooperative learning strategy, offers an alternative approach by dividing texts into segments and assigning each student responsibility for mastering and teaching a specific section. This article explores the pedagogical foundations, classroom procedures, and educational benefits of Jigsaw Reading in developing reading competence among upper secondary EFL learners. The study discusses how the strategy promotes active participation, deeper comprehension, peer interaction, and critical thinking. Practical classroom examples demonstrate how Jigsaw Reading can be integrated into reading lessons to enhance students' motivation and communicative competence.

Keywords: Jigsaw Reading, cooperative learning, reading competence, EFL teaching, collaborative learning, secondary education.

Introduction: Reading is one of the most important skills in learning a foreign language because it provides learners with access to vocabulary, grammatical structures, and cultural knowledge embedded in texts. In upper secondary education, students encounter increasingly complex academic and informational texts that require higher levels of comprehension and analytical skills. Consequently, developing effective strategies for teaching reading becomes essential in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms.

Traditional reading instruction often relies on teacher-centered approaches in which students read texts individually and answer comprehension questions. Although this method can develop certain reading skills, it may not sufficiently encourage active engagement, critical thinking, or collaboration among learners. Research in language pedagogy suggests that cooperative learning strategies can significantly

enhance students' comprehension and motivation by encouraging interaction and shared responsibility for learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

One of the most widely used cooperative reading strategies is Jigsaw Reading. The strategy was originally developed by Aronson (1978) as a classroom technique designed to reduce competition and increase cooperation among learners. In language learning contexts, Jigsaw Reading allows students to become "experts" in one section of a text and then share their knowledge with peers, resulting in a collaborative reconstruction of the full text. This article examines the theoretical foundations of Jigsaw Reading and its effectiveness in developing reading competence among upper secondary EFL learners.

Jigsaw Reading is grounded in cooperative learning theory, which emphasizes learning through collaboration and social interaction. According to

Johnson and Johnson (1999), cooperative learning promotes positive interdependence, individual accountability, and interpersonal communication skills. These elements create an environment in which students actively participate in the learning process rather than passively receiving information.

The approach is also supported by social constructivist theory, particularly the work of Vygotsky (1978), who argued that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and collaborative problem solving. When students explain information to peers, they process and reorganize knowledge more deeply, which leads to improved comprehension and retention.

In the context of language learning, Jigsaw Reading aligns with communicative language teaching principles, which emphasize meaningful interaction and authentic communication as essential components of language development (Harmer, 2001). By requiring students to discuss, explain, and negotiate meaning with classmates, Jigsaw Reading integrates reading with speaking and listening skills.

Furthermore, research in reading pedagogy indicates that teaching others is one of the most effective ways to reinforce understanding. When students become responsible for explaining a part of the text, they must analyze the content carefully, identify key ideas, and present them clearly to their peers. This process strengthens comprehension and critical thinking.

Structure and Procedure of Jigsaw Reading

The implementation of Jigsaw Reading follows a structured cooperative learning framework designed to ensure that all students actively participate in the reading process and contribute to collective understanding of the text. The strategy is based on the principle of positive interdependence, where each learner becomes responsible for mastering a particular part of the text and sharing that knowledge with others. In this approach, reading comprehension is not achieved individually but rather through collaborative interaction and peer teaching. Researchers emphasize that the jigsaw technique allows learners to become “experts” on a specific part of a topic and later share that knowledge with classmates, enabling the entire group to reconstruct the complete meaning of the text collectively. Because of this cooperative structure, the reading process becomes interactive, socially

mediated, and cognitively demanding, which ultimately leads to deeper comprehension.

The first stage of the procedure involves text preparation and segmentation, which is carried out by the teacher before the reading lesson begins. At this stage, the teacher selects a suitable reading text and divides it into several meaningful sections that correspond to the logical structure of the content. Each segment should contain essential information that contributes to the overall understanding of the topic but can still be studied independently. The goal of this segmentation is to distribute the reading responsibility among students while maintaining coherence in the text. For example, a biographical reading passage may be divided into sections describing the individual’s early life, challenges, achievements, and influence. Similarly, an informational text may be segmented into parts such as causes, consequences, examples, and possible solutions. When texts are divided carefully in this way, students are able to focus more deeply on their assigned section and analyze it in greater detail before sharing their findings with peers.

The second stage of Jigsaw Reading is the formation of expert groups, which represents one of the most important phases of the strategy. In this stage, students who receive the same text segment form a temporary group known as an expert group. Within these groups, learners read their assigned section carefully and collaborate to identify the main ideas, supporting details, and key vocabulary. The purpose of this stage is to allow students to develop a comprehensive understanding of their portion of the text before they attempt to explain it to others. During the discussion process, learners clarify unfamiliar concepts, ask questions, and summarize the content collectively. Research on cooperative learning shows that such collaborative discussions enhance cognitive processing and enable learners to construct meaning together through interaction and explanation. As students negotiate meaning and support one another’s comprehension, they also develop important communication skills such as asking for clarification, paraphrasing information, and providing examples.

After students have developed sufficient expertise in their assigned section, the procedure continues with the home group stage, which represents the core collaborative phase of the jigsaw strategy. At this point,

students return to their original groups, which consist of members who have studied different sections of the text. Each student then assumes the role of an “expert” and teaches the content of their section to the other members of the group. Through this process, the group gradually reconstructs the full meaning of the text as each member contributes unique information. This stage requires learners to transform their understanding into explanations that are clear and accessible to others, which significantly strengthens comprehension and retention. Studies on cooperative learning strategies indicate that when students explain material to peers, they engage in deeper cognitive processing and develop stronger conceptual understanding compared to passive reading activities. In addition to improving comprehension, the home group stage also integrates multiple language skills, as students must read, speak, listen, and take notes while exchanging information.

Following the collaborative exchange in home groups, the lesson moves to the synthesis and consolidation stage, where students integrate the information they have learned from all group members. At this stage, learners collectively review the entire text and identify the main ideas, themes, and conclusions. Teachers may facilitate this process by organizing activities such as group summaries, concept mapping, comprehension questions, or short presentations. These activities help ensure that students have successfully combined the individual pieces of information into a coherent understanding of the full text. In addition, this stage provides an opportunity for teachers to clarify misunderstandings, reinforce important vocabulary, and connect the reading passage to broader learning objectives. According to recent research, structured reflection and synthesis activities are crucial in cooperative learning environments because they help students consolidate knowledge and transfer it to new contexts.

Another important component of the Jigsaw Reading procedure is evaluation and reflection, which allows teachers and students to assess the effectiveness of the learning process. Evaluation may include short quizzes, comprehension tasks, or reflective discussions about what students learned during the activity. Through reflection, learners become more aware of their reading strategies and collaborative skills. Teachers

may also encourage students to evaluate their own participation and the contributions of their peers. This metacognitive element is particularly valuable because it helps learners understand how cooperative learning strategies support their reading comprehension. Recent empirical studies have shown that when the jigsaw technique is implemented systematically, students demonstrate measurable improvements in reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and learning motivation compared to traditional reading instruction.

The structure of Jigsaw Reading involves several interconnected stages, text preparation, expert group discussion, home group teaching, synthesis, and evaluation that collectively promote active participation and deeper comprehension of reading materials. Each stage plays a specific role in guiding students from individual analysis to collaborative knowledge construction. By distributing responsibility among learners and encouraging peer teaching, the strategy transforms reading from a passive activity into an interactive learning experience. As a result, students not only develop stronger reading competence but also improve their communication, cooperation, and critical thinking skills. For these reasons, the Jigsaw Reading strategy continues to be widely recognized as an effective pedagogical approach for teaching reading in EFL classrooms.

Pedagogical Benefits of Jigsaw Reading

One of the most important pedagogical advantages of Jigsaw Reading is its positive impact on students' reading comprehension. In traditional reading lessons, students often read texts individually and answer comprehension questions, which may not always encourage deep engagement with the material. In contrast, the Jigsaw strategy requires each learner to become responsible for understanding and explaining a particular section of the text to their peers. This responsibility motivates students to read more carefully, identify key ideas, and clarify unfamiliar vocabulary before presenting their findings to others. As a result, learners engage in deeper cognitive processing, which enhances comprehension and long-term retention of information. Studies in cooperative learning show that the Jigsaw technique significantly improves reading comprehension because students actively construct meaning through discussion and

peer explanation rather than passively receiving information (Vives et al., 2024; Gillies, 2016).

Another significant pedagogical benefit of Jigsaw Reading is the increase in student engagement and active participation. In many traditional reading activities, students may remain passive listeners while the teacher explains the text. However, Jigsaw Reading transforms students into active participants in the learning process. Each student becomes responsible for a specific part of the text and must contribute to the group's understanding of the entire reading passage. This sense of responsibility encourages learners to participate more actively in classroom discussions and motivates them to prepare their section thoroughly. According to cooperative learning research, when students work in structured collaborative groups, their engagement and academic participation increase significantly compared to teacher-centered instruction (Johnson & Johnson, 2017; Gillies, 2016). Consequently, Jigsaw Reading creates a dynamic classroom environment in which students take ownership of their learning.

Jigsaw Reading also plays an important role in the development of communication and collaborative skills. During the jigsaw process, students interact with their classmates through discussion, explanation, and questioning. These interactions require learners to express their ideas clearly, listen carefully to others, and negotiate meaning collaboratively. Such communication practices are particularly valuable in foreign language classrooms because they provide authentic opportunities for students to use the target language in meaningful contexts. Research indicates that cooperative learning strategies like Jigsaw improve students' interpersonal communication skills and help them develop the ability to work effectively in teams (Johnson & Johnson, 2017; Slavin, 2014). As students explain their text segments to peers, they also practice summarizing information and organizing ideas logically, which further strengthens their language proficiency.

Another pedagogical advantage of Jigsaw Reading is its ability to promote critical thinking and higher-order cognitive skills. When students analyze a segment of the text and prepare to teach it to others, they must identify the most important ideas, evaluate the relevance of supporting details, and organize the information in a logical way. This process requires

students to go beyond simple comprehension and engage in deeper analytical thinking. Collaborative learning environments encourage students to compare different viewpoints, question assumptions, and develop well-reasoned interpretations of texts. Research in educational psychology suggests that cooperative learning strategies, including the Jigsaw technique, significantly enhance critical thinking and problem-solving abilities among students (Gillies, 2016; Vives et al., 2024). Through peer discussion and explanation, learners refine their understanding of the text and develop more sophisticated analytical skills.

Jigsaw Reading is also particularly effective in supporting diverse learners and creating inclusive classrooms. In many reading lessons, students with lower language proficiency may feel overwhelmed by lengthy or complex texts. The jigsaw approach addresses this challenge by dividing the text into smaller segments, allowing students to focus on manageable portions of the reading material. This structure enables learners with different ability levels to participate meaningfully in classroom activities. Each student contributes unique information to the group, ensuring that all members play an essential role in the learning process. According to Slavin (2014), cooperative learning strategies help reduce academic disparities among students by promoting peer support and shared responsibility for learning. As students work together, stronger learners assist weaker peers, creating a collaborative learning environment that benefits everyone.

Furthermore, Jigsaw Reading has been shown to increase student motivation and positive attitudes toward reading activities. Reading assignments are sometimes perceived by students as monotonous or difficult tasks. However, when reading is combined with interactive group work, discussion, and peer teaching, it becomes more engaging and enjoyable. The social aspect of Jigsaw Reading encourages students to participate actively and take pride in contributing to group success. Empirical studies indicate that students who participate in cooperative learning activities often demonstrate higher motivation, greater interest in learning tasks, and more positive attitudes toward reading (Gillies, 2016; Johnson & Johnson, 2017). As a result, learners become more willing to read texts carefully and participate in classroom discussions.

Finally, Jigsaw Reading contributes to the integration of multiple language skills, which enhances overall communicative competence. Although the primary focus of the activity is reading comprehension, the strategy naturally incorporates speaking, listening, and sometimes writing. When students explain their section of the text to peers, they practice speaking and organizing information clearly. At the same time, other group members develop listening comprehension skills as they process the explanations provided by their classmates. This integration of language skills reflects the communicative approach to language teaching, which emphasizes meaningful interaction and real-life communication (Harmer, 2001). Consequently, Jigsaw Reading not only improves reading competence but also supports the broader development of language proficiency in EFL classrooms.

In conclusion, Jigsaw Reading provides numerous pedagogical benefits that make it a valuable instructional strategy for teaching reading in upper secondary EFL classrooms. The method enhances reading comprehension by encouraging deeper engagement with texts, increases student participation through cooperative learning, strengthens communication skills, promotes critical thinking, supports inclusive learning environments, and improves student motivation. Because of these advantages, many scholars consider Jigsaw Reading an effective approach for developing both reading competence and collaborative learning skills in modern language education.

Classroom Applications in Upper Secondary Education

In upper secondary EFL classrooms, Jigsaw Reading can be applied effectively to a wide variety of authentic and semi-authentic texts, including biographies, scientific articles, news reports, environmental texts, and cultural descriptions. At this level of education, students are expected not only to understand the basic meaning of a text but also to analyze information, identify key ideas, and discuss the implications of the content. The Jigsaw strategy supports these goals by dividing complex reading materials into manageable segments and assigning each student responsibility for mastering and presenting a specific part of the text. This collaborative structure encourages learners to engage more actively with the reading material while also promoting interaction and communication among

peers. Research shows that cooperative learning strategies such as Jigsaw Reading are particularly effective in secondary education because they encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning while simultaneously supporting the learning of others (Johnson & Johnson, 2017; Gillies, 2016).

One common classroom application of Jigsaw Reading involves biographical texts, which are frequently included in secondary school English textbooks. Biographical readings about influential figures, athletes, scientists, or social leaders provide valuable opportunities for applying the jigsaw technique. For example, a reading text about a famous athlete may be divided into several thematic sections, such as early life, training experiences, major achievements, and social influence. Each student or group receives one section and studies it in detail within an expert group. During this stage, students identify key vocabulary, summarize the main ideas, and discuss the significance of the information presented. After mastering their section, students return to their home groups and explain their findings to classmates. Through this collaborative exchange, learners reconstruct the complete narrative of the athlete's life and achievements. This process not only improves reading comprehension but also encourages students to practice summarizing, explaining information, and asking clarifying questions, which strengthens both linguistic and cognitive skills.

Another important application of Jigsaw Reading in upper secondary classrooms involves scientific or informational texts, which often contain complex information that may be difficult for students to process independently. For instance, a reading passage about natural disasters or environmental issues can be divided into sections addressing causes, consequences, human experiences, and prevention strategies. Each group analyzes one aspect of the topic and later shares its findings with the rest of the class. Through this process, students learn to identify cause-and-effect relationships, interpret factual information, and synthesize multiple perspectives within a single topic. Studies in cooperative learning demonstrate that such collaborative analysis helps students develop deeper conceptual understanding and improves their ability to interpret informational texts (Gillies, 2016; Slavin, 2014). In addition, the process of explaining scientific

information to peers requires learners to clarify complex ideas and present them in a clear and logical manner, which strengthens both comprehension and communication skills.

Jigsaw Reading can also be effectively used with news articles and contemporary social topics, which are particularly relevant for upper secondary students. For example, a news report about technological innovations, global environmental issues, or cultural developments can be divided into sections such as background information, current developments, expert opinions, and future implications. Students working in expert groups analyze their assigned sections and discuss key information before presenting their findings to their home groups. This approach encourages students to evaluate information critically, identify different viewpoints, and discuss the potential consequences of social or technological changes. Such discussions not only enhance reading comprehension but also promote critical thinking and global awareness among learners. According to recent research on cooperative learning in language education, collaborative reading activities such as Jigsaw Reading encourage students to engage more deeply with authentic materials and develop stronger analytical skills (Vives et al., 2024).

Cultural texts and descriptive readings also provide rich opportunities for applying the jigsaw technique. For example, a reading passage about different cultures, cities, or traditions around the world can be divided into sections describing historical background, cultural practices, famous landmarks, and social customs. Each group explores one aspect of the topic and later shares their insights with the class. Through this collaborative process, students not only develop reading comprehension skills but also expand their cultural awareness and intercultural communication competence. Such activities align with communicative language teaching principles, which emphasize meaningful interaction and authentic content in language learning (Harmer, 2001). By combining cultural exploration with cooperative learning, Jigsaw Reading transforms traditional reading lessons into interactive and engaging learning experiences.

Overall, these classroom applications demonstrate that Jigsaw Reading can be adapted to a wide range of reading materials and learning objectives in upper

secondary education. By dividing texts into manageable sections and encouraging students to collaborate in analyzing and explaining information, the strategy transforms reading from a passive activity into an interactive learning process. As a result, students develop stronger comprehension skills, greater confidence in expressing ideas, and a deeper understanding of the reading material.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite its numerous pedagogical benefits, the implementation of Jigsaw Reading in upper secondary classrooms may present several challenges that teachers must carefully address. One potential difficulty is the issue of unequal participation among students. In cooperative learning environments, some students may rely heavily on their peers rather than actively contributing to group discussions. This phenomenon, often referred to as “social loafing,” can reduce the effectiveness of the activity if not properly managed. To minimize this problem, teachers should emphasize individual accountability by assigning specific roles to each student and monitoring group interactions closely. Research suggests that cooperative learning strategies are most effective when teachers clearly structure tasks and ensure that each learner is responsible for contributing to the group’s success (Johnson & Johnson, 2017).

Another challenge associated with Jigsaw Reading is time management. Because the strategy involves several stages: text analysis in expert groups, explanation in home groups, and final synthesis the activity may require more classroom time than traditional reading exercises. Teachers must therefore plan lessons carefully and select texts of appropriate length and complexity. Providing clear instructions and time limits for each stage of the activity can help ensure that the lesson proceeds efficiently. According to Slavin (2014), cooperative learning activities are most successful when teachers carefully organize tasks and maintain a clear structure throughout the lesson.

In addition, the successful implementation of Jigsaw Reading depends on the creation of a supportive and collaborative classroom environment. Students must feel comfortable sharing ideas, asking questions, and learning from one another. In classrooms where learners are accustomed to teacher-centered

instruction, it may take time for students to adjust to the more interactive nature of cooperative learning. Teachers should therefore introduce the jigsaw technique gradually and provide guidance on effective group communication and collaboration. By establishing clear expectations and encouraging respectful interaction, teachers can help students develop the interpersonal skills necessary for successful cooperative learning.

CONCLUSION

Jigsaw Reading is widely recognized as an effective cooperative learning strategy for developing reading competence in upper secondary EFL classrooms. By dividing texts into segments and assigning students responsibility for mastering and explaining specific sections, the method promotes deeper comprehension, active participation, and collaborative learning. Through the process of peer teaching and discussion, students engage more deeply with reading materials and develop important cognitive and linguistic skills.

In addition to improving reading comprehension, Jigsaw Reading supports the integration of multiple language skills, including speaking, listening, and summarizing. The strategy also encourages critical thinking, enhances student motivation, and promotes positive attitudes toward reading activities. Although the method requires careful planning and classroom management, its educational benefits make it a valuable tool for modern language instruction.

When implemented effectively, Jigsaw Reading transforms traditional reading lessons into dynamic and interactive learning experiences. Students become active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of information. As a result, they develop greater confidence in their reading abilities and stronger collaborative skills. Therefore, incorporating Jigsaw Reading into upper secondary EFL classrooms can significantly enhance both language proficiency and student engagement in the learning process.

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