CHAPTER - I

Introduction to the Scope of the Study

The dawn of the third millennium shines forth not only as an epoch of expanded globalization but also as an era of interdependence. The era of globalization has made interdependence an inevitable value. In the process, the spread of Information Technology has also facilitated English language as a multi-purpose instrument enabling human beings not only to use it for communication in trade, business, administration, and science education but for influencing human behaviour and facilitating social cooperation as well.

English is the most widely used language today in international communications. Enabling students, especially students of developing countries, to effectively communicate in English could be one way of facilitating cross-cultural communication and promoting mutual understanding and interdependence. As prospective travellers, entrepreneurs, public servants and promoters of multilateral relations, international peace and fellowship, they need to be equipped to communicate effectively and successfully. But learning the English language alone is not enough. As Dasan (2007) has observed, capacity building in terms of interactive

and participative learning and critical thinking lest hegemonic forces should overwhelm and overpower interpersonal or international discourses is a must. This is a prerequisite for ushering in a mutually benefiting era of interdependence, and this calls for new pedagogies and new approaches to learning.

Field study and research point out that the new generation of students, aspiring to be proficient in English and committed to achieve in life, are no longer satisfied with the present traditional modes of education, which are not effective enough to equip and enable them to attain the goals they have in mind or they have set as targets in the context of ongoing globalization, migration, and cross-cultural communication. Dramatic changes in theoretical foundations of learning in general, and language learning and language teaching in particular, happening in different parts of the world, may be viewed as a timely response to students' expectations. These changes have brought about a drastic shift in the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from behaviourists modes of instruction to more context-based, innovative, interactive, and experiential ways of learning. Such innovations are appreciated better in developed countries where teachers and students have greatly understood the importance of interactive and cooperative learning. A number of specialists like Brown (2001), Nunan (1988a), and Wright (1990) have directly or indirectly appreciated the significance of these approaches in view of the emphasis they put on the role of the learner and learning activities in language learning process. Yet, teacher-centred methods continue to prevail in several parts of the world including Iran and India, which serve as the context of the present dissertation. The

truth is that these traditional educational systems which, in a way, are conducive to hegemonic trends of market-economy in the context of ongoing globalization, benumb critical sensibilities of students who, in course of time, wittingly or unwittingly contribute to the capitalist modes of accumulation of wealth and to the perpetuation of a world order that does little good to the powerless and the voiceless. Therefore, pragmatic overhauling of syllabi and textbooks in these countries' education systems is the need of the hour if students were to develop critical thinking and face the challenges of globalization.

As Richards and Rodgers (1986) stated, proliferation of approaches and methods, a prominent trend in contemporary second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) teaching, reflects a commitment to finding more efficient and more effective ways of teaching languages. Many of these approaches and methods, however, have their acknowledged or unacknowledged affinities with linguistic, psychological, or educational traditions, besides underlying theories of language and language learning.

Cooperative Learning (CL), which is the focal point of the present study, may be viewed and projected as an alternate way of language learning in conjunction with other approaches and methods of learning. CL may be broadly defined as any classroom-learning situation in which students of potentially diverse backgrounds with different abilities work together and scaffold the learning of each other in structured groups to achieve shared or common learning goals. CL, as a unique and level-headed instructional approach, has been introduced in education in general, and in English

Language Teaching (ELT) sphere in particular, to compensate some of the deficiencies of the present traditional methods of teaching. CL is a way of appreciating affective aspects of learning, in addition to its cognitive aspects, and encouraging active engagement and contribution of all participants in the learning process. English language learning via CL has been viewed as an act of learning the language together through negotiation, and as an act of learning to share language learning skills and strategies by equipping students to learn it as a FL or as a L2 through critical and creative thinking. Cooperative language learning, as a collaborative venture, has been offered to enhance the process of language learning through a win-for-all dynamics ushered in by the role of the teacher as facilitator and creator of opportunities for comprehensible input-output treatment for learners' development, which comes about with their active participation in activities like clarifying, expanding, elaborating, synthesizing, paraphrasing, and summarizing. The significance of such situations is that they facilitate learners to realize new dimensions of aptitude, proficiency, and achievement, and contribute to learner autonomy.

The fact, however, is that CL is a general term that refers to teaching methods that focus on organizing and conducting classroom instruction in such a way that students become interested and engaged in the learning process, and respond proactively rather than reactively to their surroundings. Higher level cognitive objectives such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and application of concepts during problem solving in different and more complicated circumstances through activities like three-step interview, solve-pair-share, and thinking-aloud pair problem-solving

are highlighted in these methods. In spite of their similarities in their surface structures, CL methods have also their unique features. These methods, along with related activities, have been explained, compared, and analysed in Chapter Three of the present study.

The implementation of such methods in different contexts needs meticulous examination of their applicability in different countries. It is against such a backdrop that the present study attempts to critically evaluate the effectiveness of CL vis-à-vis its theoretical foundations, varied methods, comparative perspectives, and field experiments at the level of undergraduate learners in Iran and India with a focus on learning English language either as a FL or a L2. A historical overview and a critical understanding of the problems and perspectives related to CL methods and activities are integral part of this study. The major focus of the study consists of this researcher's effort to project CL methods in the context of individual accountability, team-conscious interdependent learning, and achievement, and discern the effectiveness of CL methods at the collegiate level field experiments in Iran and India.

Can competition or competitive spirit form part of CL? Is it worth developing a method which foregrounds the significance of competition in the arena of CL methods? While attempting to answer this twin question, this researcher essays to evaluate and compare the effectiveness of select two methods of CL, namely Cooperative Team-Based Learning (Cooperative T-BL) and Competitive Team-Based Learning (Competitive T-BL) with Traditional Lecture Method (TLM) on English

reading comprehension, language learning strategies, attitudes, and retention of information of Iranian and Indian undergraduate learners.

Contextual Background to the Study and an Overview of ELT in Iran and India

Cross-border higher education has been on the increase since the last two decades. To a number of Iranians, India has been one of the preferred destinations for cross-border higher education. Ongoing cultural exchange programmes and collaborative ventures in different fields between Iran and India are fine ways of promoting international mobility, cross-cultural interaction, mutual understanding and capacity building in the context of emerging global scenario on different counts. They also help Iranians identify the main drivers of change in higher education in terms of policy and future influence for the benefit of Iran's present and future generations. At present, more than 50000 Iranian students are pursuing their studies outside Iran on different disciplines. And India has been one of the host countries for many students from Iran to enrol themselves for Ph.D level advance research programmes in varied disciplines, particularly in social sciences and humanities. A considerable number of Iranian research scholars are pursuing their research programmes in English language teaching and learning, linguistics, and such other related fields in different institutes of higher learning in India.

As this researcher has observed via field study, both Iranian and Indian students at the collegiate level are in the category of mixed ability – combinations,

with exceptions here and there. Bilingualism, multiculturalism, multi-ethnicity, and rural-urban divide have been part of the characteristics of class combinations in both the countries. As this researcher has also observed via classroom interactions at the collegiate level, discussions with teachers and subject specialists, and participation in national and international conferences as indicated in the Appendix A of the present study, ELT in most of the academic situations in Iran and India seems to be ineffective and impractical. English language proficiency and communicative competencies of a majority of students are open to question. At the collegiate level, most of the students, who have passed university entrance exams by their cramming skills and survival stratagems, are not able to communicate either orally or in written form even their basic intentions effectively. This is the reality in spite of the fact that they have had nearly 1000 hours of formal language instruction in their language classes before their entry into the collegiate level during nearly seven years of schooling. Most of them have a very poor command of English.

In fact, Iranian/Indian education system is suffering from an out-of-date pedagogy and teacher dominated mode of presentation for more than a century. In this type of chalk-and-talk exam-oriented system of instruction, as Paulo Freire (1970), a Brazilian well-known educationist powerfully described, the teacher acts as a narrator who infuses knowledge into 'receptacles' (students) through a parrot-like imitative process. This process in language classes, which are mostly run through a hybrid of grammar-translation method and audio-lingual methods, entails translation, repetition, memorization, recitation, and reproduction.

In Iran, such an instructional system is based on individualistic competition among students. And testing sets up this competitive atmosphere, in which students strongly compete against one another. Their main task is to jot down as the teacher dictates and copy the answers from the black board in order to prepare their packages for the 'make-or break, year-end exam nights'. Their focus is on cramming the packages so as to get ready to regurgitate them whenever they are called upon, or disgorge them in their exam papers, which usually test nothing but their short-term memory power and their knack of working rapidly under extreme pressure. To put it another way, the manifestation of competitive ethics in education system has, in effect, made teaching subordinated to testing. This wash-back effect, in turn, has had pernicious impacts on learning process and consequently students' abilities for language use. Students' performance and grading in such exams, however, in reality, play the role of a gold key to their future success. Those who get the highest ranks enter first-class universities and pave the way towards their dream future.

That English is often taught through students' native languages aggravates the context in Iran because, in contrast to India, in Iran, English is taught as a FL, and therefore, students do not have ample opportunities for more natural acquisition of the language. The other big problem with ELT in Iran is that it focuses on merely 'reading', irrespective of the huge ripple the dawn of the third millennium has brought with it in the arena of education in general, and in ELT sphere in particular. In the present world context, English, as the international lingua franca, is considered as the language of economics, politics, survival, mobility, and prosperity rather than the

language of libraries, and hence the need for the development of all aspects of communicative competence of students. The situation becomes worse when one notices that Western cultural dominance is sought to be eliminated from English textbooks lest its hegemonic influence intrude upon the dominance of Islamic culture. The merits and disadvantages of this policy – teaching English through Persian culture – should be discussed in detail against the backdrop of expanding 'global culture', which is beyond the scope of this study, albeit it implicitly introduces a far more pragmatic and realistic solution to the phenomenon of 'invasion of cultures'.

Some prominent Iranian language specialists like Farhady, Jafarpoor, and Birjandi (1994) have confirmed the idea that Iranian university students do not have competence in 'language use and in its components' as they are expected to. No genuine learning occurs in the present language classes if students' ability to apply the language to new tasks and situations is considered as the criterion for real learning. The claim may be supported by the fact that a large number of Iranian students who are pursuing their studies outside Iran on different disciplines are more or less struggling to communicate effectively. Inability of even university teachers to share their knowledge in different subject areas of their expertise through, for instance, reading, and specifically writing, may also be deemed as another reason to justify the claim that language learning is not effective enough in the present traditional language classes. The call of some renowned Iranian language teaching professionals like Mirhassani, Ghafar Samar, and Fattahipoor (2006) and researchers like Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh (2004) for shifting towards learner-centred approaches, which focus

upon the process of learning, rather than the product of teaching, and accommodate the learners' needs and the socio-cultural context of English in the Iranian EFL setting, attest to the claim that ELT has not been a success in Iran hitherto.

The situation in India is not that different either. A field-visit to school or collegiate level institutions, particularly in government run or rural schools or colleges, and a careful observation would make one state that many teachers do not have the required training or proficiency to handle ELT classes. Traditional approaches are used where the classes are dominated with the lecturing of teachers with students listening and working individually on assignments. What worsens the situation is that language is taught through literature rather than every day discourse. With exceptions here and there, English is usually taught in the vernacular for the benefit of students who are not capable of comprehending or communicating in English even at the collegiate level. Even when teachers wish to teach English through English, they speak English with a concoction of regional words and local slants as if there were a lot of scope for Englishes and Hinglishes. Consequently, teachers are not able to sustain students' attention and interest throughout class time in such classes. Shortly after the commencement of the class, students' attention starts to waft, and by the end of the class, boredom is generally rampant. SMS-ing, chatting, emailing, listening to music, playing darts, yawning, dreaming, or even sleeping are common activities in the class. The fact that students are coming from different rural and urban areas complicates the situation in the so-called language-learning classes because their socio-cultural backgrounds create huge gaps in their communicative competencies.

Against this backdrop, Sudhakar Marathe (2000) opines that a considerable number of English language teachers are 'unmakers' of Indian English, trapping many learners of English often in aversion mood and mode. Teachers have a tendency to behave as if they were more literature oriented than language oriented. Regarding the fate of students at the collegiate level, Prashar (2001) has averred that lack of proficiency of learners in English that starts at school level continues at the undergraduate level, where students have English as a compulsory subject for two years in most of the universities. The point is that, as Gupta (2005) has commented, learners' needs are being constantly ignored. As a result, a number of learners either fail and try to get through as repeaters or pass with grace marks. These are part of the consequences of defective educational system and pedagogic approach to teaching English. Marathe also mentions about phoney politics, confused ideology, and dishonest pedagogic policy in the entire system of English education in India. These realities have stirred the National Council of Educational Research and Training, NCERT, (2006) in India to propose the integration of more effective innovations like those of 'Vygotskian, Piagetian, and Chomskian approaches' for the advantage of Indian English language classes. And educators like Pandian (2007) and Agashe have called for further research on the effectiveness of context-focused approaches.

Another problem in language classes, in both the countries – in Iran and India – is that all students are treated the same way. The differences between their skills, learning styles, learning strategies, and abilities are ignored. Likewise, active students' participation in the learning process is, knowingly or unknowingly, discouraged. Even

if students are given chances to illustrate their understanding, it is the high-level minority and the extroverts who dominate the class and thus deprive the majority from actual practice and real learning experiences. In fact, low performers and introverted students, who are almost always the majority, are overlooked and marginalized. As a result, they lose their interest and lack motivation for learning.

The other destructive impact of the traditional teacher-centred approaches, which are being applied from primary to college level, is that they continue to keep students passive. Under such circumstances, there is very little scope for genuine and meaningful interaction and effective language learning. In effect, the magnificent role of mutual interaction as the most influential critical factor, specifically in SLA, is greatly ignored. To be optimistic, the best result of this type of instructional system can be nothing but short-term mastery of the course material by students. Negation of negotiation among learners per se, for instance, as the immediate result of this system of education, lowers the opportunities for transference of academic strategies and social skills, and most notably, contributes to the elimination of creativity and critical thinking, which according to scholars like Birjandi and Naeini (2007) plays a significant role in effective language learning. It also affects students' retention of information and eventually their attitudes towards the curriculum in negative ways. Prashar's idea that, as a result of traditional methods of teaching, Indian undergraduate learners have 'aversion' to English may well justify this last claim for the language learning contexts in India. The same has been expressed by a number of researchers like Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh (2004) for the language learning situations in Iran.

This is how the present traditional education system wreaks havoc on the process, and accordingly, on the effectiveness of learning. Consequently, students are the losers. In this context, this researcher is reminded of Freire's critique of the 'banking' concept of such traditional systems of education:

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and parrot back. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filling, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is men themselves who are filled away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, men cannot be truly human. *Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other* [italics added]. (Ibid. p. 53)

In the long run, it is the society that is the victim of such a system of education because it fails to empower its citizens with the required academic skills and adequate social competencies. Lack of proficiency, and mediocrity become more or less routine norms. Performance suffers because a large number of people who occupy positions of authority and service to society lack proficiency.

In brief, the present instructional system which implies the idea of 'burn the midnight oil, pass the course, and forget after the exams' appears to be no more helpful in problem solving -- real world -- situation. The need of the hour is a thorough overhauling of the educational system, which has already failed to bring effective learning, values, morals, and skills, at all graded levels. The real problem in revamping the educational system of teaching and learning English so as to ensure that

students excel in proficiency for communication, creative expression, employability, and mutual understanding is the lack of collective awareness. Government agencies, policy makers, educators, teachers, and student-representatives need to sit together, deliberate, and arrive at concrete solutions. Positive thinking, commitment to capacity building of students, and openness to new and innovative approaches and methods of teaching and learning are to be encouraged and supported with a concrete plan of action at several levels. Teachers and students need to be enlightened and motivated so that they are open to new ideas and approaches and become better aware of the greater benefits likely to be reaped when new approaches and methods are adopted and followed.
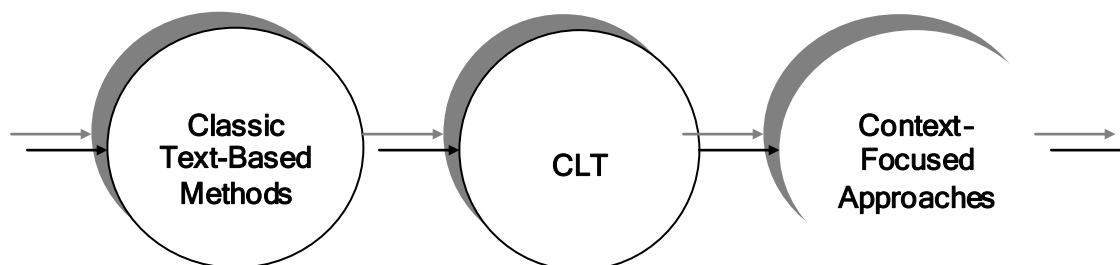
It is in such a context that the tendency of language teaching specialists has recently shifted towards Communicative Approach. But the fact is that the results facilitated by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) are falling short of expectations in the real world context in most parts of the world including Iran and India. The truth is that CLT does not have the potential to develop all aspects of communicative competencies of students. In practice, it fails to develop grammatical competence, strategic competence, socio-linguistic competence, socio-cultural competence, and discourse competence of students in parallel. This is a big problem because successful living in the present real and complex world settings demands something more than the use of the language.

The other big drawback of CLT is that it fails to appreciate the local economic, political, historical, and cultural factors of countries like Iran and India. As Harmer'

(2003) pointed out, it is negligent of the fact that "the very act of teaching pre-supposes some kind of moral position about the way knowledge and skill are passed on and acquired, and about the relationships that should exist in such an environment" (p. 290). In addition, in its theory of learning, CLT does not convey crystal-clear views regarding learning process and the mechanisms under which effective language learning occurs. Being limited to a particular view of language learning and particular type of syllabi may also be considered as another problem in this approach. Furthermore, it fails to realise the significant role of effective variables such as context of learning, students' attitudes, and cultural expectations in the learning process which are as important as the teaching method (Bax 2003). And finally, CLT fails to systematically cater to learners with different ability ranges and learning styles.

It is in such a backdrop that, as elaborated in the next chapter, ELT has recently shifted towards more flexible and realistic context-focused approaches which put the accent on learner, learning process, learning environment, and other effective variables in language learning such as students' attitudes, and socio-cultural expectations (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Paradigm Shifts in ELT

Such a context inspired this researcher to focus upon CL in the present research study. CL could be one of the effective methods that could provide contextual and concrete solutions at all levels, all the more at the collegiate level in Iranian and Indian classrooms by virtue of their mixed-ability combinations, and variety and diversity. The significance of CL is that it puts the emphasis on learner, learning process, learning environment, and other effective variables in language learning such as students' attitudes and socio-cultural expectations. Also, it has the potential to address all aspects of communicative competence of students more systematically. As noted, in CL settings, emphasis is on higher order of incisive and analytical thinking skills such as clarification, evaluation of causes and effects, analysis, prediction, comparison, synthesis, elaboration, generalization, and application of concepts during problem solving activities via, for example, paraphrasing, summarising, and negotiating. These activities are scaffold by authentic, relaxing, and motivating interactive environments, which ensure the involvement of all learners in the process of shared language learning. Such an environment is most likely to contribute not only to learning strategies and language skills, but also to objectivity, and critical and creative thinking. In this study, this researcher has tried to investigate the effectiveness of CL, which seems to have the potential to compensate some of the deficiencies of the traditional method of teaching so that it could contribute to the successful transformation of the current systems of teaching and learning English.

Review of Literature

This review of literature is in view of stating the problem of the present study. The review consists of two phases. The first phase presents an overview of evaluation of CL done by researchers with reference to its effectiveness on reading comprehension, learning strategies, students' attitudes, and retention of information. The second phase focuses upon research findings, which are divergent vis-à-vis efficacy of CL methods. It also sheds light on the findings of some researchers who have pointed out certain negative effects of CL. In the light of these findings, this researcher has tried to make a comparison of divergent views, and locate and highlight the gap between the contrary research findings.

An Overview of the History of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative Learning has an extensive history. Although its origin has been traced to the first century, it was first applied in education in the 1920s in Germany (Cooper, 1979). John Dewey (1940) who placed the emphasis on education as a means of teaching citizens the ways of living cooperatively so as to sustain a democratic society they long for has had its impact in the advent of CL, particularly in USA. It was, however, in accordance with the emergence of new philosophies of learning that the interest in CL re-emerged specifically in the early 1970s. Since then, the number of researches have dramatically increased in many parts of the world including America, England, Australia, Canada, Holland, Mexico, and Scotland to delve into inner layers of CL from different angles. Researchers like David Johnson and Roger

Johnson at the University of Minnesota, Shlomo Sharan and Yael Sharan, and Robert Slavin at Johns Hopkins, who have spearheaded the research undertaken in this area, have considerably contributed to the enrichment and development of CL and its methods. More than seven hundred systematic and scientific research studies have been done in the field of CL so far. Johnson, as quoted in McCafferty, Jacobs, and DaSilva Iddings (2006), has asserted:

> If there's any one educational technique that has firm empirical support, it's cooperative learning. The research in this area is the oldest research tradition …. The first study was done in 1897; we've had ninety years of research, hundreds of studies. There is probably more evidence validating the use of cooperative learning than there is for any other aspect of education. (p. 6)

Researchers have focused on bringing academically structured CL in different subject areas, though mostly in pre college settings. It is just recently, however, that CL movement is gradually being accepted in higher education. Hitherto, only a few studies have been conducted on the possible influences of CL at the collegiate level. Moreover, focusing on concerns under exploration in this dissertation has been limited. It is in such a context that this study attempts to see whether CL via teaching and learning of English as a FL or as a L2 is effective at the collegiate level.

Studies made by several scholars and proponents of CL since the 1900s, particularly studies done since the 1970s, have indicated greater benefits of CL to students in different parts of the world. Numerous studies have listed diverse outcomes across a wide range of curriculum areas for CL as opposed to TLM and individualistic competitive learning specifically after World War II. Johnson and Johnson (1975) pointed out certain merits of CL. In their view, CL brings in psychological supportive

environment, contributes to constructive ways of conflict management, and increases group cohesion. Johnson and Johnson (1999a) postulated that CL results in positive social behaviours and societal competencies such as reduction of stereotypes and prejudice, acceptance of cultural and individual differences, internalisation of values, coordination of effort and division of labour, and creativity.

Cooperative Learning situations are favourable to further generation of new ideas and solutions to problems and academic achievement of students. Elaboration of ideas in CL settings has been considered as one of the most influential variables in the success of CL. In her studies, Webb (1989) and Webb and Farivar (1994), for example, found that students who tried to elaborate the material more comprehensively for their peers significantly outperformed those who simply provided a brief careless explanation or those who were passive in this regard. Dansereau (1987) opined that in course of elaboration of ideas, students have the opportunities for identifying new patterns of learning and different learning strategies. Such contexts, as a number of researchers (e.g., Gillies & Ashman, 2003; Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, Nelson, & Skon, 1981) have confirmed, contribute more significantly to the development of meta-cognition levels of students, which, in turn, enhances effective learning.

Joyce and Weil (2003) have assumed that the synergy generated in CL settings brings in feelings of connectedness among students, particularly a feeling that their power in their teams is more cogent than when they are alone. This kind of feeling causes ripple effects generating more positive energy in them and motivates them for

further achievement of their shared learning goals. And the attainment of their goals enhances their levels of self-confidence along with a feeling that they are respected and appreciated. The two researchers are also of the view that such settings are conducive to the emergence of diverse and creative ideas, which contribute to the creation of more intellectual persons. Researchers like Pandian have appreciated the significance of such situations in CL settings especially for the education of physically disabled or mentally backward students.

Cooperative Learning and Language Classes

Kagan, as cited in Ghaith and Yaghi (1998), has argued that "language acquisition is determined by a complex interaction of a number of critical input, output and context variables" and that CL "has a dramatic positive impact on almost all the variables critical to language acquisition" (p. 223). McCafferty, Jacobs, and DaSilva Iddings have also commented that the significance of CL for language classes is that it focuses on boosting the effectiveness of group work. To emphasize the importance of the context of learning, within the scope of CL, for the acquisition of language, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL, 1997) declared:

> Language is learnt most effectively when it is used in significant and meaningful situations as learners interact with others to accomplish their purposes. Language acquisition takes place as learners engage in activities of a social nature with opportunities to practice language forms for a variety of communicative purposes. Language acquisition also takes place during activities that are of a cognitive and intellectual nature where learners have opportunities to become skilled in using language for reasoning and mastery of challenging new information. (p. 7)

Consequently, CL has received an extensive attention of ELT experts in recent years. Language specialists have focused upon the effectiveness of cooperative language learning in English -- English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) -- since the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) on the premise that language is best learnt when it is used for communication in social contexts.

Cooperative Learning is said to facilitate genuine communication (Yager, Johnson, & Johnson, 1985), which is one of the main concerns of TESOL for the attainment of its goals. A growing body of research has indicated that, compared to TLM and individualistic competitive learning, CL is more favourable to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Hatch, 1978; Long & Porter, 1985; Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987) and EFL learners' higher levels of communicative competencies (Bejarano, Levine, Olshtain, & Steiner, 1997). Liang, Mohan, and Early (1998) have suggested that the success of CL in language classes is by virtue of the fact that "cooperative learning offers L2 learners more opportunities for interaction in L2" (p. 14).

Jacobs (1988) has reported that CL, in comparison with traditional methods, increases the quantity of language students use, enhances the quality of the language they use, equalizes the learning opportunities for all students, and creates a less threatening learning environment for language use. Increased active communication, deeper comprehension, and development of language skills are among other results of CL in language classes that Kessler has discussed about. Tsui (2002) has stated that

cooperative language learning, compared to teacher-fronted or lockstep approaches, endows learners with more opportunities to initiate and control the interaction in order to produce a much larger variety of speech acts and to engage in the negotiation of meaning. Groarty, as cited in Richards and Rodgers (2001), has mentioned the following benefits of CL in EFL/ESL settings:

> a) an increased frequency and variety of L2 practices through different types of interaction, b) the possibility for development or use of language in ways that support cognitive development and increased language skills, c) opportunities to integrate language with content-based instruction, d) opportunities to include a greater variety of curricular materials to stimulate language as well as concept learning, e) freedom for teachers to master new professional skills, particularly those emphasizing communication, and f) opportunities for students to act as resources for each other, thus assuming a more active role in their learning. (p. 195)

And finally, researchers like Birjandi and Naeini (2007) have reported the contribution of CL to critical thinking, which they have mentioned to have positive relationship with language learning. This is possible because, as Angelo (1995) declared, "intentional application of rational higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, problem recognition and problem solving, inference, and evaluation" (p. 6), which are common practices in CL settings (Cooper, 1995), are characteristics of critical thinking. Beyer (1995) has also defined critical thinking as "making reasoned judgments" (p. 8), which are encouraged in CL settings.

Cooperative Learning and Reading Comprehension

Among the researchers who have worked on the effectiveness of CL on reading comprehension, Palincsar and Brown (1986) have argued that CL creates

situations wherein the text becomes more meaningful and important to students. Consequently, it encourages students to seek the help of others for understanding key points, which in turn increases their understanding of the whole text. Joritz-Nakagawa (2006) has stated that the significance of implementation of CL in reading courses is that it brings the opportunities for oral practice of language, in addition to reading skill. In his study, Cloward (1967) claimed that CL improved cognitive gains of students in reading skills. Researchers (e.g., Rabow, Charness, Kipperman, Radcliffe-Vasile, 1994; Totten, Digby, & Russ, 1991) have stressed that shared learning in CL situations gives students opportunities to engage in different discussion activities that engender critical thinking, which is favourable to their deeper understanding of the material. Similar results have been obtained by some other researchers like Hassinger and Via (1969). While commenting on a comparative study on CL with TLM undertaken by Abercombie, Dolan, Dolan, Taylor, Shoreland, and Harrison (1979) reported that students in CL settings improved the objectivity and flexibility of their thinking because they proved superior in the following four areas:

1   the ability to discriminate between facts and opinions;
2   the ability to resist false conclusions;
3   the ability to generate and consider alternative solutions to problems, and
4   the ability to consider each and every problem as if it were new, and to be less adversely influenced by previous impression which may not be relevant to the tackling of the problem in hand. (p. 230)

Cooperative Learning and Learning Strategies

Little attention has been paid to study the effectiveness of CL on language learning strategies of students. Johnson and Johnson (1975) asserted that CL

contributes to better information processing and acquisition of high quality reasoning strategies. Sharan and Sharan (1988) reported that CL settings contributed to cognitive strategies. In their studies, which compared CL and traditional classroom methods, Wedman, Kuhlman, and Guenther (1996) concluded that students developed a higher level of understanding of the strategy use and comprehension abilities in CL contexts, as compared to the traditional context. Rabow et al. (1994) and Totten, Digby, and Russ (1991) have argued that CL activities lead to the development of skills such as verbal, analytical, and interpersonal. And Flaitz and Feyten (1996) observed that students benefited from exposure to group activities designed to raise their general level of awareness of language learning strategies.

Cooperative Learning and Attitudes of Students

A considerable number of researches have highlighted the contribution of CL settings to the generation of favourable attitudes of students. Johnson and Johnson (1989) and Slavin (1995) found that CL brought positive attitudes of students towards subject areas and pedagogic experience. Singhanajok and Hooper (1998) reported that students in CL settings, compared to those in TLM, had a more positive impression of the lesson and CL itself. Rabow et al. and Totten, Digby, and Russ confirmed that CL gave students an opportunity to engage in different discussion activities that brought more personal satisfaction for participants. To test the relationship between attitudes and reading performance of students, Healy (1965) conducted some kind of group activities in his study and tried to change students' attitudes in order to assess the

effects of these changes on their reading achievements. The result of the study showed significant performance of the experimental group in comparison with the control group. He suggested that the achievement results enhanced the favourable attitudes of students in the experimental group, which, in turn, affected their motivation in positive ways.

Cooperative Learning and Retention of Information

Millis and Cottell (1998) declared that CL promoted effective learning and enabled students to commit information to memory more effectively. O'Donnell et al. (1988) observed that individuals working cooperatively outperformed individuals who were working alone on delayed recall tests. CL, compared to traditional methods, has been found to ensure in a more effective manner of the recall of not only texts' contents (Ames & Murray, 1982) but also information as a whole (Dishon & O'Leary, 1984; Falchikov, 2001). Elliott (1996) has opined that it is active involvement of participants in CL settings that enables them to retain the information for a longer duration of time. Researchers like Staarman, Krol, and Mejiden (2005) and Wittrock (1978) have maintained that the success of CL relies on the fact that when learners discuss to find a solution to a problem on a topic, they verbalize their thought and this verbalization plays a critical role in learning as it elicits elaborative cognitive process, which is conducive to more effective learning and better retention of information. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1986) have been of the opinion that CL situations are conducive to the enhancement of quality of understanding and reasoning and the accuracy of long term retention because they facilitate the

involvement of learners in some sort of cognitive restructuring or elaboration of the material.

Cooperative Learning and Undergraduate Learners

In their study, Beilin and Rabow, as cited in Rabow et al., compared CL with lecture method in introductory psychology. They observed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the final exam though in the mid-term exam there was no significant difference between the two groups. In a similar study carried out on 350 sociology students, they found that the experimental groups exceeded the control groups on the narrative questions of a test, which consisted of objective items and short answer questions, in addition to narrative questions. The researchers assumed that the results could be correlated to the nature of CL methods which stressed incorporating analysis, synthesis, application, and deeper levels of understanding that helped the experimental groups outperform their counterparts in tackling more challenging questions. They did not give any hint as to why their experimental groups did not outscore their counterparts in the other two types of questions.

In an interesting study, Astin (1993) completed a comprehensive longitudinal large-scale statistical study across more than 200 colleges. One of his goals was to locate the most influential predictors of positive student attitudinal changes at the collegiate level. He concluded that student-student interaction, which is the main concern of CL classrooms, was by far the best predictor out of nearly 200 environmental variables including a large number of curriculum factors. In another study, Cooper and Mueck (1990) reported on a questionnaire's results which had been

conducted on over 1000 university students in order to measure their attitudes towards CL courses and their previous traditional courses. They observed that 70 to 90 % of the sample population believed that their CL courses helped them to be more interested in the subject matter, enabled them to diagnose their own true knowledge of the subject matter, increased the general class morale, and ensured a better rapport with the teacher. In a similar study, Tjosvold, Marine, and Johnson (1977) also verified the effects of CL methods for the promotion of learners' positive attitudes towards both didactic and interactive methods of teaching science. They reported that students taught through these methods significantly outperformed those taught through traditional competitive strategies.

In a study carried out on 95 students in a general psychology class, Hall, Mancini, and Hall (1996) compared the effectiveness of CL with TLM on students' retention of information. They reported that students who experienced learning through CL improved their retention of information more significantly than those who were in control group. In another study, at the university of Oklahoma, McInnernery and Dee Fink conducted a 3-year long study on a group of microbial physiology students. They reported that after the application of team-based learning in their classes, students' abilities for retention of information increased significantly, when compared to the semesters they had been taught through TLM. They also observed that while a few students scored 70% and above in TLM, most of students improved their marks with 70% and above scores in CL settings. It has been posited that it is group activities (e.g., summarization, metacognitive activities, & elaborative

activities) and the availability of multiple sources of feedback (e.g., from partners and teacher) that improve retention of information in CL settings (Dishon, & O'Leary, 1984; Slavin, 1991).

The Other View

Apart from the advantages reported in favour of CL, a more close investigation into the related literature brings to light a fair number of counter arguments within research findings. Abu and Flowers (1997) conducted a study on 197 high school students in home economics to compare the effects of CL and conventional learning on their achievement, retention, and attitudes towards the teaching methods. They claimed that they found no significant differences among the dependent variables (students' achievement, retention, and attitudes) and the teaching methods used. Likewise, after a review on twelve studies, which compared CL to TLM, Tateyama-Sniezek (1990) reported that working together in groups did not result in greater academic achievement. In a similar study, Tingle and Good (1990) concluded that group work did not have a significant influence on problem solving abilities of students, in comparison with those who worked alone. In their studies Carrier and Sales (1987), Klein, Erchul, and Pride (1994); Peterson, Janicki, and Swing (1981), and Talmage, Pascarella, and Ford (1984) have not confirmed a positive relation between CL and learning outcomes and attitudes.

Likewise, whereas Olsen (1969) found significant influence of CL on language achievement of his students in his Ph.D level research study, Nederhood (1986) reported no significant results for academic achievement of students in CL classes.

Nederhood's study was a meta-analysis of 34 studies, which attempted to find out the effects of CL on reading comprehension, language arts, and mathematics of 1145 middle school students in 114 classrooms. While Nederhood reported significant effect of CL on students' attitudes towards learning experiences and environments, Olsen did not observe such significant results.

As regards different-level achievers, there are some incongruities in research findings on the level different achievers can gain or even lose in CL structured classes. Murfitt and Thomas, as cited in Topping (1998), have indicated that low performers benefit much more than high achievers out of CL situations. But others like Dalton (1990) have argued that working in CL groups benefits high achievers more than others. Yet scholars like Slavin (1995) have declared that CL has no significant influence on high achievers' academic performances. Even some like Allen (1991) have claimed that in CL situations high achievers are actually losing their precious time which they could use in other ways to better their prospects. Researchers like Webb (1989), however, do not agree with the idea that high achievers cannot reap advantages out of CL settings. Webb contended that high achievers also gain benefits out of CL. Experts like Richards and Rodgers have gone further and claimed that advanced students obtain more advantages from CL than others by virtue of the fact that they have more opportunities for articulation and explanation of their own ideas.

Inter-Group Cooperation versus Inter-Group Competition

While proponents of competition in CL settings take the stand that competition contributes to learning, opponents argue that it impedes learning. The counter-argument is that competition effects anxiety and some adverse effects. Shumway, Stewardson, Saunders, and Reeve (2001) conducted a study on eighteen classes from six schools (388 students) and compared the effects of Cooperative T-BL and Competitive T-BL on students' group problem-solving performances and attitudes towards their learning environments. The study was carried out within the context of a problem solving activity in a high school technology education laboratory. They reported no significant differences between the influences of the two methods of CL. The findings of the study indicated that the students participating in the inter-group cooperation environment generally expressed more favourable attitudes towards various aspects of their learning environment than students participating in the inter-group competition environment.

In their significant meta-analysis of 122 studies that examined the effects of cooperative-, competitive-, and individualistic-goal structures on students' achievements, Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, Nelson, and Skon (1981) found that CL was significantly more effective than individualistic or competitive learning in promoting students' academic achievement. Furthermore, they reported that inter-group cooperation promoted higher academic achievement than inter-group competition. In a similar meta-analysis of 43 studies, Qin, Johnson, and Johnson

(1995) found that inter-group cooperation was more conducive to problem solving abilities of students than inter-group competition.

In another noteworthy meta-analysis, Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne (2000) analysed 164 related studies to compare the effects of some popular methods of CL vis-à-vis TLM and individualistic competitive learning on the academic achievement of students in different subject areas. The studies were conducted with elementary to post secondary students in different parts of the world including North America, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. They confirmed the overall advantages of CL methods over TLM and individualistic competitive learning as the result of the analysis of the target studies. They noted more significant effects of Learning Together, which has been named as Cooperative T-BL in this dissertation, followed by Constructive Controversy and then Student-Team-Achievement-Divisions. They observed that Teams-Games-Tournaments and Group Investigation were the next most effective methods of CL. Jigsaw and Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition were reported to be the least effective methods of CL, albeit they were found to be better than traditional methods of teaching.

Conversely, in their review of similar studies, researchers like Slavin (1983/1991) have noticed positive effects of those methods which emphasize competition (e.g., Teams-Games-Tournaments) on students' achievements.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the abundance of research findings that verifies the advantage of CL over traditional methods of teaching, very few researches have essayed to compare the effectiveness of those methods of CL that stress pure cooperation with those that focus on competition. In general, the review of related literature confirms divergent and contrary views among such research findings. Johnsons and Stanne, for instance, reported on the dominance of inter-group cooperation on inter-group competition in their study: The results of their meta-analysis proved the advantage of those methods of CL which purely emphasized cooperation (e.g., Cooperative T-BL) over those methods which valued competition (e.g., Teams-Games-Tournaments). In contrast, few other CL specialists like Slavin have argued that competition has a more significant role in contributing to effective learning in CL settings. In summary, scholars like Johnson and associate have highlighted the contribution of pure cooperation to the success of CL. But experts like Slavin have focused on the role of competition in CL methods.

However, it is also interesting to note that some scholars who have been in favour of competition in CL settings like Topping (2000) and even Slavin (2000) have recently expressed doubts about the effectiveness of competition and the mechanisms (e.g., extrinsic reinforcements like group goals and incentives) that facilitate it in different CL environments. Topping, for instance, maintained:

> There is clearly considerable variety and conflict in the literature both within and between countries. To what extent is competition between working groups a necessary and desirable feature of the organization of cooperative learning, if achievement gains are to be as good or better than other pedagogical

procedures? Is some system of external accountability of the individual within a cooperative working group also necessary, or can activities be organized so that this action is carried out within the group itself? Is there really a need for extrinsic reinforcement, or does this vary according to societal and cultural expectations, and may its inappropriate insertion actually result in worse outcomes? (Ibid. p. 584)

Similarly some other researchers like Damon (1984) have plainly rejected the application of extrinsic incentives in CL situation arguing "there is no compelling reason to believe that such inducements are an important ingredient in peer learning" (p. 337). Such ideas are implicitly questioning CL methods, which underline competition, through prioritising the significance of extrinsic incentives.

Objectives of the Study

In the light of the review of literature accessed for the purpose of the present study and against the backdrop of divergent and contrary research findings on the effectiveness of CL in general and CL methods in particular, this study focuses on a comparison between the effectiveness of the two most important and debatable methods of CL, namely Cooperative T-BL and Competitive T-BL with TLM in two different contexts within Asia – Mashhad (Iran) and Mysore (India), with a focus on second-year Engineering majors' reading comprehension performances, language learning strategies, attitudes, and retention of information. The objectives of this research study, therefore, are to:

1. assess the effectiveness of Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM on Iranian and Indian second-year Engineering majors' reading comprehension in English;

2. find out the effects of Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM on their language learning strategies;

3. measure the influences of Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM on their attitudes towards English language learning and the select teaching methods, and

4. determine the effects of Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM on their level of retention of information.

All these objectives have been addressed with respect to different-level achievers of the target groups with the help of field studies and experiments in Iran and India.

Hypotheses of the Study

In order to see the effectiveness of the select teaching methods with respect to the objectives of the study, the following hypotheses are formulated:

1.1　There exist significant differences among the effectiveness of Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM on the target groups' reading comprehension in English;

1.2　The effects of Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM on the target groups' reading comprehension in English are significantly different in Mashhad (Iran) and Mysore (India);

1.3   Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM have significantly different effects on the reading comprehension of different-level achievers among the target groups;

2.1   There are significant differences in the effects of Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM on the target groups' language learning strategies;

2.2   The effectiveness of Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM on the target groups' language learning strategies are significantly different in Mashhad (Iran) and Mysore (India);

2.3   Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM have significantly different effects on language learning strategies of different-level achievers among the target groups;

3.1   There exist significant differences in the influences of Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM on the target groups' attitudes towards English language learning and the select teaching methods;

3.2   The effects of Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM on the target groups' attitudes towards English language learning and the select teaching methods are significantly different in Mashhad (Iran) and Mysore (India);

3.3   Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM have significantly different effects on attitudes of different-level achievers among the target groups towards language learning experiences and the select teaching methods;

4.1   There are significant differences among the effects of Cooperative T-BL,

Competitive T-BL, and TLM on retention of information by the target groups;

4.2   The effectiveness of Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM on retention of information by the target groups are significantly different in Mashhad (Iran) and Mysore (India), and

4.3   Cooperative T-BL, Competitive T-BL, and TLM have significantly different effects on retention of information by different- level achievers among the target groups.

(De)limitations of the Study

1.   The research study was confined to the students of only two colleges of two cities in Iran and India, Mashhad and Mysore;

2.   The study was also limited to a small number of second-year Engineering majors only (96 in each country, Iran and India);

3.   The actual duration of the study in which the target groups were taught the exts consisted of only 10 class periods of 45 minutes duration;

4.   The researcher did not have a comprehensive control on whether the target groups purely used English in their discussions, and

5.   No attempt was made to use qualitative methods for analysing the data.

Clarification of Relevant Terms

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative Learning is a structured group learning which focuses on a kind of social interdependence among a group of students who work together in teams of three or more towards certain shared learning goals. Individual members can only achieve their own goal(s) if others achieve theirs; therefore, they are motivated to contribute their efforts to the success of others. The kind of group learning this researcher has referred to as CL in the present study has been adapted from the works of scholars like Slavin (1983a), Johnson, and Johnson (1989), and Millis and Cottell (1998). CL, however, has a variety of names in literature. Learning groups (Bouton & Garth, 1983), collaborative learning (Hamilton, 1997; Bruffee, 1999), team learning, active learning, participative learning, peer assisted learning, peer assisted instruction, small-group instruction, and sometimes interactive learning or even problem-based learning are some among them.

Cooperative Learning Methods

Concurrent with the development of constructivism, a number of CL oriented instructional innovations, which aim at fostering learner interdependence as a route to cognitive growth and social development, have been projected in educational settings in recent years. In the related literature, these innovations are known in a variety of names such as CL models, CL strategies, and CL methods. Although most of them may not technically be considered as methods, this researcher refers to them as

methods in the present study. In general, in CL methods, as Slavin (1983a) has suggested, students earn recognition, grades, and sometimes rewards based on the academic performances of their groups.

Cooperative Team-Based Learning

Cooperative Team-Based Learning or Learning Together is a CL method in which both intra- and inter-group cooperation is emphasized simultaneously. In this method, students are motivated to cooperate not only with their own team members but also with other teams. According to researchers like Qin, Johnson, and Johnson, this goal structure has also been referred as a 'pure' cooperative goal structure in related literature.

Competitive Team-Based Learning

Competitive Team-Based Learning is a CL method, which accentuates inter-group competition. In this method, students are motivated to cooperate with their own team members in order to compete against other teams. As in the words of Qin, Johnson, and Johnson for example, this goal structure is also known as a 'mixed' cooperative goal structure.

Traditional Lecture Method

Traditional Lecture Method is when the teacher dominates the class. Due to absence of shared learning goals and lack of motivation towards interactive learning,

students are reluctant to interact with other classmates. They prefer to learn individually trying to outperform others.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a physical, intellectual, and emotional affair; it is a highly complicated process, which demands skills and abilities. McCullough (1962) defined reading as below:

> Reading involves the recognition of printed or written symbols, which serve as stimuli for the recall of meanings built up through past experience, and the construction of new meanings through manipulation of concepts already possessed by the reader. The resulting meanings are organized into thought process according to the purposes adopted by the reader. Such an organization leads to modified thought and/or behaviour, or else leads to new behaviour, which takes its place, either in personal or in social development. (p. 615)

Comprehension, therefore, is the main aspect of reading as a multipurpose activity. Vocalizing the print on the page, decoding, skimming, and scanning are some the other aspects of this skill. Comprehension may be defined as the understanding of what is written between and beyond the lines which entails mental reactions to the printed material at lexical, syntactic, pragmatic, and discourse levels. These mental reactions are the immediate results of interaction of co-text, text, context, and thought which in turn solicit the activation of higher and complex cognitive functions of the reader's mind. For this activation to take place, a wide range of abilities or skills and strategies are needed -- skills from recognition of words to evaluation of the writer's thought, and strategies from rereading a sentence to evaluating an implicit idea of the text. Therefore, reading comprehension involves the interaction of a number of

complex processes and knowledge bases that can broadly be divided into print decoding and comprehension process. Accordingly, Coady (1979) argued that comprehension is the result of interaction among higher-level conceptual abilities, background (cultural) knowledge, and process strategies during which the reader has to select, repress, soften, emphasise, correlate, and organize the information. Additionally, the significance of some other factors like affective factors in the process of comprehension should not be taken for granted because there is evidence that emotional involvement has significant influences on comprehension (Mathewson, 1976). In the present study, by reading comprehension, this researcher means the ability to understand the text for main and specific information.

Language Learning Strategies

In spite of the importance attributed to strategies in the process of language learning, there is no agreement on a clear-cut definition for learning strategies among researchers. For example, Weinstein and Mayer (1986) defined learning strategies as "behaviours and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning" which are "intended to influence the learner's encoding process" (p.315). Similarly, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) believed that learning strategies are "special thoughts or behaviors the individuals use to help them *comprehend, learn, or retain new information*[italics added]" (p. 1). Willing (1985) decribed strategies as 'methods' which the lerner uses in order to gain control of the complex input he or she recieves. For Taron (1983), language learning strategies are "attempts to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language" (p. 67). And Oxford (1994), whose survey has

been applied in the present study (Appendix H), has described L2 learning strategies as "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques students use -- often consciously -- to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing, and using the L2" (p. 1).

As there are varieties of definitions for strategies, there are also different ways of categorizing the strategies, although they do not have radical differences. According to Rubin (1975) and O'Malley and Chamot, for instance, there are three types of strategies used by learners that contribute to language learning: learning strategies, communication strategies, and social strategies. They are of the view that whereas the first category of strategies influences language learning directly, the last two categories contribute to language learning indirectly.

Similarly, Oxford (1990) has tried to develop a more comprehensive classification of various learning strategies. She has identified two main categories of learning strategies in her survey: 'direct' learning strategies and 'indirect' learning strategies. In her classification, direct learning strategies entail memory or mnemonic strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. Indirect learning strategies include metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. Whereas the former group refers to those strategies that are concerned with "language itself in a variety of specific tasks and situations" (ibid. p. 14), the latter refers to those for "the general management of learning" (ibid. p. 15).

According to Oxford, 'memory strategies' are used to facilitate remembering and retrieving of information. They include strategies like using keywords, employing word associations, placing new words into a context, creating mental images through

grouping and associating, and semantic mapping. 'Cognitive strategies' are the mental strategies learners use to directly process the information so as to enhance learning and make sense of their learning. Using context clues, predicting, reasoning inductively and deductively, self-reflection, translating, systematically note taking, summarizing, paraphrasing, and analysing are all cognitive strategies which are applied to facilitate the connection of new to already known information for the purpose of restructuring the information and meaning making. And 'compensation strategies' are defined as those strategies that are used for the purpose of compensating the gaps in knowledge. To cite some examples, guessing, and using reference materials such as dictionaries have been mentioned as compensation strategies.

Oxford has defined 'metacognitive strategies' as higher order supervisory skills, which learners apply in order to orchestrate and regulate other cognitive strategies and their learning. Such strategies demand careful thinking and reflective processes. Comprehension monitoring or the ability to monitor or judge one's understanding, error detection skills, selecting and using of learning strategies, monitoring strategy use, and evaluating strategy use and learning are among metacognitive strategies. 'Affective strategies' are concerned with learner's emotional requirements such as confidence. They include a wide range of strategies like self-encouraging behaviour in order to control affect, for enhancement of learning. And finally, 'social strategies' like co-operation with others, questioning, and asking for correction and feedback are believed to facilitate interaction with another person and consequently increase interaction with the target language, which is predictor of SLA.

Attitude

Wehmeier, Mclntosh, Turnbull, and Ashby (2005) have defined attitude as the way that one thinks and feels about or behaves towards somebody or something. Mathewson (1976), in his Acceptance Model, has asserted that the kind of attitudes of learners, which entails their interests, values, and beliefs towards subject matter and learning environments influences their comprehension of the material and their learning. If the attitude is positive, it can increase motivation of learners and thereby their level of attention. Therefore, favourable attitude is more likely to contribute to deeper learning. The reverse is also true: if the attitude is negative, it may have diverse effects on learning.

Retention

Retention is the ability to remember things after a period of time. In ELT the belief is that the quality of teaching, meaningfulness of material, interest and motivation of learners, and the way they encode and store the material (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, and themes of texts) impact the level and quality of retention (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992).

High Achievers, Average Scorers, and Low Performers

In the present study, the first eight top students of each class (of 32) who scored the highest in their International English Language Testing System (IELTS) reading test, as pretest, are defined as high achievers, and the eight students who scored the lowest are defined as low performers. Those 16 students who fell between

high achievers and low performers, based on their performance on the test, are defined as average scorers.

Interaction

With interaction, as the focal point of CL, this researcher does not mean merely action, reaction, and one-side response to an action, situation, or idea. Nor does interaction means participation where each individual takes a turn reciting the material or remembering them in a context in which no one pays attention to others. But rather, with interaction, he means a joint venture through proactive sharing which leads to the awareness and attainment of shared learning goals.

Methodology, Approach, and Method

Methodology, as Rodgers (2001) put it, comes to make class-level activities and practices avail of theories available in the field. Different approaches can be considered as the results of the attempts towards establishing these kinds of linkages. An approach, according to Richards and Rodgers, is a set of correlative suppositions and beliefs that deal with the nature of language teaching and learning which may be applied in variety of ways. For example, CLT and CL are considered as approaches. A method, as they posited, is a way of applications of suppositions and beliefs inherent in approaches in the classroom. To put it another way, approaches are the potential bases from which different methods can emerge. Methods thereby are inflexible on the grounds that they encompass a specific definition for language, the procedures for language learning, the roles for teachers and learners, the types of learning activities,

and the instructional materials as well as their orderly presentations. The prescription of predetermined techniques for use is another characteristic of methods (Richards, 1999). Thus, the notion of method implies prearranged systematic sets of teaching practices, which are based on a particular approach. To cite some examples, Situational Language Teaching and Counselling Learning or Community Language Learning are recognized as methods.

The Significance and Justification of the Study

The importance of the present study lies in the fact that it focuses on harnessing an approach in language classes that stresses systematic implementation of group work, which in turn contributes to language skills of students. It lays the emphasis on the process of learning and maximising the benefits of student-student interaction in order to master L2 acquisition which has been neglected in English language teaching and learning classes to a great extent until now both in Iran and India. Most researches conducted on CL, which prioritizes the significance of the context of learning, has heeded to general education and if any in language classes, they have been carried out in L1 (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1998), a few in ESL, and rarely in EFL situations (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Research on the effectiveness of CL at the collegiate level, especially in EFL/ESL situations, is rather scanty. Slavin (1990), for instance, is hesitant to state whether CL methods are effective at all graded levels. Further research is necessary and useful. The present study, as an attempt to go deeper in comparing different

effects of the two debatable CL methods, namely Cooperative T-BL and Competitive T-BL, seeks to investigate their effectiveness on four pivotal variables to SLA, namely reading comprehension, language learning strategies, attitudes towards English language learning and teaching methods, and retention of information at the collegiate level. Few researches have been done on these areas, and hence the significance of this study. In his attempt to find out the effects of the select teaching methods, with reference to dependent variables, on different achievers (i.e., high achievers, average scorers, and low performers) of the target groups, this researcher also tries to evaluate these teaching methods, which com from the West, in two different Asian contexts, in Iran and India. This investigation is important because, as Jacobs and McCafferty (2006) have argued, CL and group activities have not been a success in language classes in some Asian countries like Vietnam because such activities run counter to the 'Confucian roots' of their cultures. Therefore, from this angle too, this study can contribute to the enrichment of new literature on CL vis-à-vis theories, principles, approaches, methods, and target groups from Indian and Iranian point of view.

In this way, this researcher hopes that this study would be a contribution to knowledge building. The results of the present study may propose noteworthy benefits which researchers, curriculum policy makers, methodologists, material developers and syllabus designers, universities and institutes of higher learning, teachers, and students could take note of. Moreover, by virtue of the nature and the characteristics underlying CL, which develops skills essential for humanitarian ways of living, achievement, and even healthy competition, this researcher believes that CL, as a learning strategy, may

provide a powerful tool for educational reforms in Iran and India, and for certain humanist orientations in educational pedagogies.

Rationale of the Study

Rationale behind the Selection of Cooperative Learning

Partly inspired by Paulo Freire's notion of education, this researcher decided on CL because he too thinks that it can be applied as an effective strategy to enable students, particularly undergraduate learners, to confront Western hegemonic versions of globalization that are contributing to the ongoing clash of cultures, religions, and civilizations. The target group's proficiency in English language can serve, in course of time, as a way of decolonising the mind in the backdrop of hegemonic superimposition of value-systems and notions that safeguard the privileges of the powerful but seldom ensure and enhance the dignity of the powerless. Such a perspective is also in tune with the spirit of postcolonial pursuits, which give prominence to subaltern voices and empowerment of the Other.

Rationale behind the Selection of CL Methods

More specifically, the significance of interaction, which is the focal point of CL, propelled this researcher to focus on Cooperative T-BL and Competitive T-BL methods of CL because these two methods seem to be the two extremes of CL methods in relation to the type of interaction patterned among participants. The importance of interaction, especially in language classes, lies in the fact that it has the

potential to mediate between teaching and learning. The present study subjects these methods to painstaking and critical examination in order to evaluate their feasibility for pedagogic practices in the language classes in the target areas in Iran and India. This selection could be considered as a response to the call of researchers and specialists for investigating into the effectiveness of different methods of CL in language classes.

Rationale behind the Selection of Dependent Variables of the Study

The choice of reading comprehension as one of the dependent variables of the present study relates to its importance and significance in the era of information explosion. It is a known fact that most of the findings in the world of science and technology are often communicated in English. Furthermore, reading, especially at higher education, is a basic and complementary skill in any language class. It is an important means by which not only new information is gathered and comprehended but also new language skills are acquired. As the basic channel of communication for achieving academic goals, it helps students consolidate and extend their knowledge of subject matter as well as that of the language. More importantly, reading can be considered as a means of cultivating many techniques of thinking and evaluating, which are essential for understanding and solving problems in the real world. Reading instruction has not been a success so far, especially in Iran. Although undergraduate learners have far less problems in selecting the best alternative in a multiple choice test on reading comprehension, most of them are not able to locate or deduce an

implicitly mentioned idea in a given text demanded by open-ended questions. They do not have the ability for evaluative interpretation of the texts.

Based on a number of research findings, the common knowledge is that comprehension of a text, for example, means making meaning out of it and that it is language that provides the tool for construction of meaning. The point, however, is that, as Block (1992) has argued, L2 learners and specifically FL learners have more limited linguistic knowledge than L1 learners and so comprehension of material is more difficult for them. Therefore, language learning strategies would be more significant to these groups of learners in order to eliminate the gaps in their understanding. Learning strategies would enhance their abilities for integration of prior knowledge to new information, which according to advocates of cognitive theories, is the key for learning to occur. Furthermore, according to researchers like Marefat (2006), the significance of learning strategies is that they enhance "learner autonomy, independence, and self direction" (p.26). However, in spite of the importance attributed to language learning strategies in terms of their contribution to the development of language proficiency and higher achievement in specific skill areas, such as reading, (Oxford, Park-Oh, Ito, & Sumrall, 1993; Thompson & Rubin, 1993), available research on their effectiveness in EFL/ESL classes is limited (Akbari, 2001).

Fraser and Fisher (1983a, 1983b) have confirmed that students achieve better in the kind of classroom environments, which they prefer or have favourable attitudes towards. This is because students' perceptions of their learning environments have

direct influence on their cognitive and affective outcomes (Fraser, 1986, 1989, 1994; Fraser & Fisher, 1982). Oxford and Shearin (1994) have gone deeper into the reasons arguing that learners' attitudes towards teaching/learning environments greatly affects their motivations, which have direct impact on the level of their engagement in the process of learning. And the extent of learners' involvement in the learning process is predictor of their success or failure because according to Richardson and King (1998), engagement in the process of learning results in effective learning and retention which, in turn, influences learners' attitudes.

The logic behind the emphasis on retention of information in this study is by virtue of the fact that forgetting is one of the main problems that college-going students, especially in their FL/L2 learning courses, suffer from. Inability to retain information is a major barrier to college-going students to perform and excel both academically and in life. So locating an influential method to tackle this problem was also considered to be of a great value.

Rationale behind the Selection of Undergraduate Learners

This researcher opted for undergraduate students as his target group because they, in comparison with younger and less experienced students: (a) are in a better position to think aloud and explicate the process they go through in course of arriving at meaning, and (b) have more knowledge on the bases of language, and possess more acceptable language learning strategies and are more motivated to use these strategies. These characteristics could be best harnessed in situations that the emphasis is on

discussion and negotiation for meaning like those in CL methods, which aim at reaping favourable results through such activities.

Organization of the Study

The present study has been organized in the form of a dissertation with the following Chapters divisions:

Chapter I: Introduction to the Scope of the Study

The first chapter gives a perspective of this researcher's orientation, goals and plan of the research work. It briefly states and addresses the major concerns of the research-topic. It prioritizes the importance of collaboration in today's context. The chapter also gives a brief introduction to CL, and explicates the background to the study. The objectives and hypotheses have been formulated in the light of reading and reviewing of available literature related to the research-topic. This chapter also justifies the relevance and significance of the study not only in the present-day context but also for the future, for the benefit of future generations.

Chapter II: Theoretical Foundations of Cooperative Learning

Chapter Two elaborates the chronological development of language teaching methodology and illuminates the process under which interactive approaches, like CL, have emerged. It gives a brief introduction to CL and lays out the theoreies that support and justify the compnents and processes involved in CL settings for effective learning.

Chapter III: Cooperative Learning Methods

After highlighting certain common activities and salient features of CL, this chapter dwells at length analysing and comparing some popular methods of CL. Furthermore, certain misgivings regarding integrating the element of competition within CL settings have been discussed. The significance and relevance of Competitive T-BL against the backdrop of ongoing globalization that means a great of deal competitive spirit has been highlighted and underscored. Teachers' roles as well as students' responsibilities in Competitive T-BL settings

have also found a place in this chapter.

Chapter IV: Methodology

This chapter sheds light on methodology and design employed to pursue the objectives of the study. It renders information on the practices of methodology and design for selecting the sample, instruments utilized, resource materials, and design and procedures of data collection.

Chapter V: Results and Findings of the Data Analyses

Chapter Five presents the analysis of the data collected through the application of the tools of the study and highlights the results and findings.

Chapter VI: Summation, Interpretation, and Recommendations

The last chapter presents a summation of the research study, and the interpretations of the findings. The contribution of this research study to new

knowledge and information on the subject in question and the journey or evolution CL vis-à-vis ELT and learning is likely to take in the near future is indicated. In the light of the findings, suggestions to prospective stakeholders have been put forth.

At the end of the dissertation, a detailed bibliography of the select list of books, journals, and internet- resources has been included. This researcher has followed 'American Psychology Association' (APA) style in course of writing the dissertation and inserting works cited and references.

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