

Reading Strategy Use and Reading Interest in English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

This study investigated whether there was a significant difference in the use of overall cognitive and meta-cognitive reading strategies between the low proficient and high proficient English learners at a Turkish state university. The participants were 110 Turkish Finance department students. They were elementary level English learners between the ages of 18-22. The students were grouped into low proficient and high proficient learner categories according to their school exam results. Additionally, how well proficiency, reading strategy use, and the interest towards the reading passage predict the overall reading comprehension scores were explored. There was a significant difference in the reading strategy use for low proficient and high proficient learners. However; cognitive – metacognitive reading strategy use and reading interest didn't predict reading comprehension scores in the data. The main determiner of reading comprehension was found to be language proficiency. The exam scores (proficiency of the students) statistically significantly predicted the reading comprehension scores, $p= 0.001$. The results which are attained in this context give insights related to L2 reading strategy training. The results which were attained in this special context provide information about reading strategy training and providing different varieties of texts which is of interest to Turkish students who are English language learners.

Keywords: Reading strategies, reading interest, English proficiency

Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce'de Okuma Stratejisi Kullanımı ve Okuma İlgisi

Öz

Bu çalışma, bir devlet üniversitesinde düşük ve yüksek düzeyde İngilizce yeterliliğine sahip İngilizce öğrencileri arasında genel bilişsel ve üstbilişsel okuma stratejilerinin kullanımında anlamlı bir fark olup olmadığını arařtırmıştır. Ayrıca, yeterlilik, okuma stratejisi kullanımı ve okuma parçasına yönelik ilginin genel okuduđunu anlama puanlarını ne kadar iyi

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yordadığı araştırılmıştır. Katılımcılar 110 Maliye bölümü öğrencisiydi. Bunlar 18-22 yaşları arasındaki A2 seviye İngilizce öğrencileriydi. Öğrenciler okul sınav sonuçlarına göre düşük yeterliliğe sahip ve yüksek yeterliliğe sahip öğrenci kategorilerine ayrıldı. Ayrıca İngilizce dil yeterliliğinin, okuma stratejisi kullanımının ve okuma parçasına olan ilginin genel okuduğunu anlama puanlarını ne kadar iyi tahmin ettiği araştırıldı. Düşük düzeyde yeterliliğe sahip öğrenciler ile yüksek düzeyde yeterliliğe sahip öğrenciler için okuma stratejisi kullanımında anlamlı bir fark vardı. Fakat; bilişsel – üstbilişsel okuma stratejisi kullanımı ve okumaya ilgi, verilerdeki okuduğunu anlama puanlarını yordamamıştır. Okuduğunu anlamanın ana belirleyicisinin dil yeterliliği olduğu bulunmuştur. Sınav puanları (öğrencilerin yeterliliği) okuduğunu anlama puanlarını istatistiksel olarak anlamlı düzeyde yordadı, $p=0,001$. Bu bağlamda elde edilen sonuçlar ikinci dil okuma stratejisi eğitime ilişkin fikir vermektedir. Bu özel bağlamda elde edilen sonuçlar, okuma stratejisi eğitimi ve İngilizce öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin ilgisini çekecek farklı metin çeşitlerinin sağlanması konusunda bilgi vermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Okuma stratejileri, okuma ilgisi, İngilizce seviyesi

Introduction

In the realm of foreign language education research, literature underscores the significance of employing diverse reading strategies to enhance the effectiveness of reading comprehension. (Barzegar & Fazilatfar, 2019; Chodkiewicz, 2019; Hayashi, 1999). Rianto (2022) revealed that the overall metacognitive online reading strategies use and the global reading strategy use predicted students' online reading comprehension. It is also acknowledged that the strategies used by the proficient users of the language, and by the students whose command of language is restricted tend to differ from each other. The students with higher proficiency employ a greater variety of reading strategies compared to their less proficient counterparts (Cundawan, 2019; Setiawan & Tjitrakusuma, 2021). As the level of the students increase, their use of translation decreases while the contextual guessing strategy is used more often (Hayashi, 1999).

Hayashi (1999) suggests that although proficient users can discover reading strategies on their own, less proficient ones may need explicit teaching of the strategies to tackle with the texts more effectively. The meta-study conducted by Rajasagaran & Ismail (2022) highlighted consistent findings in the literature. Rajasagaran (2022) reviewed 23 studies and concluded that the explicit teaching of metacognitive strategies had a positive impact on enhancing reading comprehension skills. Köse & Güneş (2021) highlighted that the use of metacognitive strategies in reading was more in senior students than freshmen students. They imply in their study that apart from proficiency, strategy training is an important factor for this result. Therefore, investigating whether or not there is a significant difference in the in strategy use between the proficient learners and less proficient learners is important. It can help us to direct less successful language users to familiarize themselves with similar strategies that of more successful students to understand the texts better (Karimi & Shabani, 2013).

It is also voiced that, enjoyment significantly predict reading comprehension (Li & Gan, 2022). Intrinsic motivation has a positive role in L2 reading comprehension (Lin et al., 2012; Dhanapala & Hirakawa, 2016). When the students can choose the reading texts of their interests, they show higher reading comprehension and motivation (Zur et al., 2022). Öztürk & Aydoğmuş (2021) found that there is a positive significant relationship between pre-service

teachers' reading motivations and metacognitive strategy use. In his study Shnayer (1968) concluded that reading interest can enable most students to perform beyond their current reading ability and that this positive effect of reading interest in reading comprehension is more salient in low level readers.

Theoretical framework

In this study L2 reading is regarded as a self-regulated activity. Students' reading is inspected through an interactive perspective. Interactive approach takes both bottom-up and top-down strategies of reading into consideration while evaluating the reading strategy use of the readers. Bottom-up strategies are defined as the processes that are confined to the text, such as lexical and text based syntactic clues. On the other hand, practicing top-down strategies necessitate readers to make use of their prior subject and culture knowledge to be able to structure the information of the text. The bottom-up strategies can help students to simplify the information and employ general problem-solving strategies. Top-down strategies help students to activate prediction and association in decoding the texts (Tsai et al., 2010). Interactive approaches refer to the interaction between these strategies to compensate for knowledge deficits increasing comprehension (Rotko, 2023). It assumes that there is not a linear or sequential relationship between them and reading is a complex interaction.

The fact that learning is a self-regulated activity implies that along with the cognitive processes that are at play while comprehending the reading texts, affective factors must be taken into consideration as well. (Greene & Azevedo, 2007 et al. as cited in Lin, 2011). According to this view while reading, students actively determine their goals; they select and use their strategies and self-monitor how they are doing. Self-regulating learners are strategic and they are motivated. In the scope of this study reading interest is investigated as one of the key components of reader affect (Lin, 2011).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The aim of the present study is to find out whether there is a significant difference in the use of overall cognitive and meta-cognitive L2 reading strategies between the low proficient and high proficient English learners of Turkish students. Additionally, how well proficiency, reading strategy use, and the interest towards the reading passage predict the overall reading comprehension scores were investigated. The results which will be attained in this special context provide information about reading strategy training and providing different varieties of texts which is of interest to Turkish students who are English language learners. The research questions and the null hypotheses of the study are as follows.

RQ1. Is there a significant difference in the reading strategy use between high L2 proficient and low L2 proficient learners?

RQ2. How well do proficiency, L2 reading strategy use and the interest towards the reading passage predict L2 reading comprehension scores? Null hypothesis 1: There will be no significant difference in the use of overall cognitive and meta-cognitive reading strategies between the low proficient and high proficient English learners of Turkish students.

Null hypothesis 2: There will be no significant prediction of L2 reading comprehension scores by proficiency, interest towards reading passage and L2 reading strategy use.

Review of Related Literature

Reading strategies are defined by Erler et al. (2007) as “self-directed actions where readers flexibly take control with a certain degree of awareness to retrieve, store, regulate, elaborate, and evaluate textual information to achieve reading goals” (p. 1790 as cited in Wang, 2016). O’Malley and Chamot (1990) classify reading strategies as metacognitive, cognitive and social-affective strategies (as cited in Sun, 2011).

L2 reading strategy questionnaire by Phakiti (2003; 2008) categorizes the cognitive reading strategies into: “comprehension for understanding” for instance identifying main ideas, translation, prediction and inference etc..., “working memory information storage”, and “retrieval for activating prior knowledge”. The meta-cognitive category has the subcategories of planning, monitoring and evaluation (as cited in Lin, 2011).

In second language reading research there has been several models that attempted to explain L2 reading strategies. The three most used reading models are bottom-up, top down, and interactive process (Grabe, 1991). The bottom-up model views reading activity as deciphering the information linearly via scanning letters and combining them into words and sentences (Gough, 1972 as cited in Lin, 2011). According to this view the people who have the skills of accessing lexicon, letter recognition and syntactical parsing will arrive at the same meaning out of the same passage. Since there is no room for personal interest or prior knowledge, language proficiency is the only determiner of the reading comprehension success in this approach (Lin, 2011).

Top-down approach on the other hand proposes that reading is a prediction activity about the following information in the text according to what has been read in the current paragraph using prior knowledge and experiences. According to their background and interests the readers actively and dynamically create hypotheses, make predictions related to the text and these processes affect their comprehension. Interactive approach combines the two approaches together. The readers can compensate their lacking points of understanding related to text without- of -text knowledge or vice versa (Lin, 2011).

Psycholinguistic model of Goodman classifies reading strategies into process strategies, background knowledge, and conceptual abilities. It is stated that beginners use process strategies more frequently while more proficient users prefer other strategies. Proficient users use textual information only to confirm their derived information which they gathered from out of text strategies such as background knowledge, and conceptual abilities (Grabe, 1991). Green & Oxford (1995) investigated whether or not there was difference in overall strategy use by students of three language levels. 374 students who were categorized into Pre-basic, Basic, and Intermediate English at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez participated in the study. They made use of the Strategy Inventory for Language (Oxford, 1990). According to the ANOVA results the overall strategy use of the student was significantly different by their levels. ($F(2,371) = 10.41, p < .0001$). This result supports the assumption that language proficiency is a factor in reading strategy use.

Campos (2012) investigated whether there was a relationship between the use of metacognitive strategies and the reading comprehension process. He also tried to reveal whether there was a relationship between the successful and unsuccessful students and their use of metacognitive strategies. The participants were six students of the English Linguistics program at the University of Chile in their fourth year. After completing the reading tasks, the students were interviewed related to their strategy use. In the scope of the study metacognitive strategies were investigated and they were categorized as: “planning, directed attention, selective attention, self-management, self-monitoring, problem identification and self-evaluation” (p.128). They are related to top-down approach. The results indicated that the successful students used more strategies in number and variety.

Baldwin et. al. (1985) investigated the effects of prior knowledge and topic interest in reading comprehension with 52 seventh- and eighth grade students. The study found that for the male students, reading success was significantly higher on passages with high topic interest. Reading success was also significantly higher for passages with high prior knowledge. Lin (2011) inspected how L2 reading strategy use, sources of situational interest and perceived interest related to L2 reading comprehension. The participants were 36 eight grade students whose first language was Mandarin Chinese. He made use of think-aloud protocols and the Cognitive - Meta-cognitive Strategy Questionnaire (CMSQ) for reading strategy use and text free recalls, Source of Interest Questionnaire (SIQ) and Interest Experience Scale (IES) for reading interest. The researcher concludes that in the hierarchical regression analysis the use of reading strategy use has a stronger contribution to comprehension than reading interest. “Interest experiences do not produce significant contribution when language proficiency and reading strategy use are accounted for” (p.128).

Predictions

Interactive model and reading as a self-directed activity view predict that the three will be significant differences in the cognitive and meta-cognitive strategy scores of the high and low proficient learners. It predicts that the both top down and bottom-up strategies will be more implicated in high proficient learners. Additionally, proficiency, strategy use and reading interest will be good predictors of reading scores.

Since the bottom-up model states that reading comprehension is only dependent upon the in-text structures and the abilities such as deciphering the text with the vocabulary access and syntactical parsing, this model predicts that there will be a significant difference in the use of overall cognitive reading strategies between the low proficient and high proficient English learners of Turkish students. This model also predicts that only the proficiency of the students will significantly predict the reading comprehension scores.

The top-down model predicts that there will be significant differences in the reading comprehension scores between the readers who have previous background information and who make use of strategic guessing and planning skills and the readers who don't have background knowledge and don't use the stated strategies (items except 12, 13, 18, and 19). Psycholinguistic model predicts that the use of background knowledge, and conceptual abilities (related items are items except 12, 13, 18, 19) will be significantly different between the high and low proficient learners. For the high proficient learners, the total score of these items will be higher. The predictions were summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Predictions

Other Models	Predictions
Bottom-up model	1. There will be a significant difference in the use of overall bottom-up cognitive reading strategies (12, 13, 18, 19) between the low proficient and high proficient English learners
Top-down Model	2. There will be a significant difference in the use of overall top-down reading strategies between the low achievers and high achievers of reading test.
Psycholinguistic Model	3. Psycholinguistic model predicts that the use of background knowledge, and conceptual abilities top-down strategies) will be significantly different between the high and low proficiency readers. 3. Process strategies (bottom up) will be significantly different between the high and low proficiency readers low proficiency learners using more process strategies.

Methods

Participants

The participants were 110 Turkish Finance department students from a public university. They were elementary level English learners between the ages of 18-22. The students were grouped into low proficient and high proficient learner categories according to their school exam results. Since the passing grade was 60, the students who got a score which is under this threshold were labelled as low proficient learners (44 students) and the students who got 60 or more were regarded as high proficient. (66 students) The age means of the low proficient students were 18.36 (SD= 0.96) and the age means of the high proficient learners were 18.75 (SD= 1.06).

Materials

The data collection materials were a reading text related to chocolate with related comprehension questions (Lin, 2011), Phakiti's (2003; 2005) Cognitive - Meta-cognitive Strategy Questionnaire which consists of 27 items to measure reading strategy use (Lin, 2011) and a Reading Interest Questionnaire which consists of 9 items (Lin, 2011).

Procedures

Since the students would express their strategy use and their opinions and interests toward the reading passage in the task in their native language better, the questionnaires were translated into Turkish. The translated questionnaires were checked for understanding with 4 volunteers who did not take part in the study. The instruments were presented in paper. First the participants were handed the reading passage and the comprehension questions. After they completed this task, they were given the Turkish versions of the "Cognitive - Metacognitive Strategy Questionnaire and the -Reading Interest Questionnaire". The data were collected in the classroom setting and there was no time limitation neither for the reading passage task nor the completion of the questionnaires. The items in both questionnaires were scale items from 0

to 3, where 0 meant almost never and -3 meant almost always. For each student a total score of cognitive - metacognitive strategy use and a reading interest score were calculated. The reading passage had 8 comprehension questions and the total score that a student can get from the passage was 40 points.

Independent samples T test was used in order to analyse the first question which aimed to investigate the differences in the strategy use between the two proficiency levels. In order to reveal whether proficiency, cognitive - metacognitive reading strategy use and reading interest are good predictors of L2 reading scores, a multiple regression was run. The other predictions of the different models were analysed as well. For the first prediction of the bottom-up model the items which were directly related to bottom-up strategies (12, 13, 18, and 19) were aggregated into a continuous variable; for the second prediction of the top-down model the remaining strategies were aggregated as top-down strategies. Then an independent samples T test was used to reveal whether any significant differences between the low and high proficiency group in making use of bottom-up strategies. One Independent samples T test was also conducted to reveal whether there was a difference in the use of top-down strategies between the students who scored well and the students who scored badly. (The students who got higher than the mean in the reading scores were regarded as high achievers).

Results

The aim of the study was to find out whether there was a significant difference in the use of overall reading strategies between the low proficient and high proficient English learners of Turkish students. Additionally, it is aimed to reveal how well proficiency, reading strategy use, and the interest towards the reading passage predicted the overall reading comprehension scores. The means and standard deviations of the variables were presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics (n=44 for Low Proficient, n=66 for High Proficient group)

		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	St. Deviation
Low Proficient	Reading Strategies Scores	7,00	70,00	39,50	17,23
	Reading Interest Scores,	,00	30,00	12,88	6,62
High Proficient	Reading Comprehension Scores	5,00	35,00	14,88	6,945
	Reading Strategies Scores	18,00	103,00	49,74	14,90
	Reading Interest Scores	4,00	26,00	14,10	5,45
	Reading Comprehension Scores	5,00	35,00	17,65	6,15

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the overall reading strategy use for low proficient learners and high proficient learners. There was a significant difference in the reading strategy scores for low proficient ($M=39.5$, $SD=17.23$) and high proficient ($M=49.74$, $SD=15$) learners; $t(108) = 3.305$, $p = 0.001$. A multiple regression was run in order to predict the reading comprehension scores of the students from their proficiency (numerical exam scores), overall reading strategy use scores and reading interest scores. Table 3 indicates the descriptive statistics.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of Regression (n=110)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading Comprehension Scores	16.54	6.59
Exam Scores	58.70	20.66
Reading Strategy Scores	45.64	16.63
Reading Interest Scores	13.61	5.95

The model statistically significantly predicted Reading Comprehension Scores, $F(3, 106) = 4.172$, $p < .008$, $R^2 = .106$. The exam scores added statistically significantly to the prediction, $p = 0.001$. Reading Strategy Scores and Reading Interest Scores did not contribute to the multiple regression model. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the overall bottom-up strategy use (the items 12, 13, 18, and 19) for low proficient learners and high proficient learners. There was a significant difference in the bottom up reading strategy scores for low proficient ($M=4.8$) and high proficient learners ($M=6.9$); $t(108) = 3.483$, $p = 0.001$. A t-test was conducted to compare the overall top-down strategy for successful and for less successful students in the reading comprehension test. The T Test was run separately for high proficient learners and low proficient learners. There was no significant difference between groups in any of the level.

The independent-samples t-test which was run to test the prediction of Psycholinguistic model showed that there was a significant difference between the high and low proficient group in using of background knowledge, and conceptual abilities (top-down strategies); $t(108) = 3.146$, $p = 0.002$. The mean was 44.56 for high proficient learners and 35.86 for low proficient learners.

Discussion

Interactive approach to reading defends that reading ability not only requires lower level in text information processing skills such as automatic vocabulary recognition, making use of grammatical knowledge and parsing, but at the same time to compare, classify predict and infer and make use of background knowledge (Lin, 2011). These two sets of strategies interact in a complex way while the passages are comprehended. It is suggested that in the view of reading as a self-regulated activity affective factor such as reading interest can also increase cognitive interactions and effort therefore can affect reading scores (Hidi et al., 1990) as cited in Lin, 2011). In the study, the students of the different proficiency levels differed in using the total number of reading strategies. The study suggests that as the proficiency of the students increase, their overall use of strategies also increase. Both bottom up and top-down strategies were made use of by high proficient learners more frequently than the low proficient learners. The psycholinguistic model's prediction which was: while low proficient learners will use process strategies (bottom-up strategies) more, the high proficient learners will use top-down strategies more was not confirmed. The results showed that the high proficient learners made use of both strategies more frequently. The use of top-down strategies was not significantly different for the high and low achievers of the reading comprehension test in the study. In order to eliminate

proficiency of the students confounding variable t- tests were separately run for the high and low proficient group and both of the tests didn't yield significant results.

Contrary to the prediction of interactive approach which was the theoretical framework for this study the overall strategy use (both bottom up and top-down strategies) and reading interest scores did not significantly predict the reading comprehension scores. The reading scores were only significantly predicted by the proficiency level of the students. This result was consistent with bottom-up approach. The study suggests that rather than strategy use and interest, proficiency is the main determiner of the reading comprehension success. This finding supports the assumption of the bottom-up approach. This finding is in line with the synthesis of Al Raqqad et.al. (2019). The synthesis included 13 studies with the conclusion that there is not definitive support for the efficacy of reading strategies in improving EFL reading comprehension.

Summary and Conclusion

In the study it is found out that there was a significant difference in the reading strategy use for low proficient ($M=39.5$, $SD=17.23$) and high proficient ($M=49.74$, $SD=15$) learners; $t(108) = 3.305$, $p = 0.001$. However; cognitive – metacognitive reading strategy use and reading interest didn't predict reading comprehension scores in the data. The exam scores (proficiency of the students) statistically significantly predicted the reading comprehension scores, $p= 0.001$. In order to answer the question whether or not reading strategy use is important in reading comprehension success independent from proficiency need further exploration in future studies. Whether or not strategy use can be measured separately or whether it is a construct related to proficiency should also be studied in future studies. Additionally, further research is needed with different data tools and research method to investigate the relationships of strategy use, proficiency and reading scores.

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