Reading Strategies Employed By Esl/Efl Students

Hakan Demiröz
Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi

Reading is one of the most important skills of language learners. In order to comprehend a text either in the native or non-native language, readers employ reading strategies. Skilled reading necessitates use of reading strategies. A good deal of research conducted reveal that some readers employ fewer strategies whereas others use more strategies. Therefore, researchers made a distinction between the good and poor reader, and they tried to determine the qualities of good readers. One of the most important qualities of good readers is that the good readers know what the reading strategies are, and they have a good command of where and how to use them. This article aims to review the vast literature on reading strategies employed by the ESL/EFL students, and draw pedagogical implications for the reading courses.

Keywords: reading, EFL/ ESL reading, reading strategies, reading strategy instruction.

İkinci/Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Öğrencilerinin Kullandığı Okuma Stratejileri

Okuduğunu anlama dil öğrenicilerinin en önemli becerilerinden biridir. Bir metni anlamak için hem anadilinde hem de yabancı dilde okuyanlar okuma anlama stratejileri kullanırlar. Beceriklice okuma okuma anlama stratejilerinin kullanımını gerektirir. Yapılan çok sayıda araştırma bazı okuyucuların az bazılarının ise daha çok strateji kullandıklarını ortaya koymuştur. Bu yüzden araştırmacılar iyi ve kötü okuyucu arasında ayrım yapmışlar ve iyi okuyucuların özelliklerini bulmaya çalışmışlardır. Bu özelliklerden en önemlisi ise iyi okuyucular okuma stratejilerini bilirler ve bunları nerede, ne zaman ve nasıl kullanacaklarının bilgisine sahiptirler. Bu makalenin amacı İkinci/Yabancı Dil olarak İngilizce öğrencilerinin kullandığı okuma stratejileri hakkındaki geniş alanyazını taramak ve okuma dersleri ile ilgili sonuçlar çıkarmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: okuma, ikinci/yabancı dil İngilizce okuma, okuma anlama stratejileri, okuma anlama stratejileri eğitimi.

Having a good command of a language necessitates acquisition and utilization of four language skills which are listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Learning to read in a language is critical not only to have access to written materials but also to provide comprehensible input in order to improve language skills. Reading is a skill that human beings need both in their daily and academic lives. In our modern world, we have to read more than ever before as the information and communication technology armed us with accumulation of knowledge which changes rapidly. Grabe (2002) states that reading ability, in a second language (L2), is one of the most important skills in academic settings as we learn new information, and we have chance to obtain alternative explanations and interpretations about this information through reading. According to Grabe and Stoller (2001), reading is also one of the most inevitable mediums for independent learning "whether the goal is performing better on academic tasks, learning more about subject matter, or improving language abilities" (p. 187). Likewise, Anderson (2003) states that reading is the most important skill to master in order to ensure success in learning and strengthened reading skills facilitates making greater progress in other areas of language learning.

Reading is a complex and multifaceted activity. It is both a psychological and a linguistic activity. The readers, either of a native language (L1) or a second or foreign language (L2), perform the activity of reading through orchestrating cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and social processes. Reading is a cognitive process in that it requires mental capacities such as attention, memory, ability to analyse, inference, and visualise (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). Reading requires metacognition as the readers usually are aware of and regulate their cognition. It is also a motivated activity because there is a need for a stimulus to start and sustain the reading activity. It is a social process in that it is carried out in and shaped by the society.

Singhal (2006) provides the definition of L2 reading as "a dynamic and interactive process in which learners make use of L1 related knowledge, and real-world knowledge as well as their own personal purposes and goals, to arrive at an understanding of written material" (p. 7). Another definition of reading which has a process approach is "extracting meaning from written texts through interaction of complex cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and social processes" (Demiröz, 2008). In order to fulfil these processes, the product of which is reading comprehension, the readers use reading strategies to some extent during different phases of reading. Reading comprehension is a complex activity as it depends on many factors such as cognition, metacognition, motivation, attention, skills and strategies. The orchestration of these factors may only lead to desired outcomes of comprehension.

Hakan Demiröz, C.Ü. Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, Sivas.
E-posta: hdemiroz@cumhuriyet.edu.tr

Seeing the importance of the actions that take place during the reading activity, the researchers of reading started to approach reading as an interactive process which in turn led to process-oriented research mainly focusing on the strategies used by the readers. The extant literature on reading strategy research shows the consensus among the researchers that reading strategies play a crucial role in skilled reading (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). Paris, Lipson, and Wixson (1983) define reading strategy as deliberate, cognitive steps that the readers can take to acquire, store, and retrieve new information. Afflerbach et al. (2008) investigates the issues related to reading strategies and skills, and explains the reading strategies as "deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify reader's efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meanings of text" (p. 368). Researchers call the readers who are aware of what the reading strategies are and how and when to employ them "strategic readers" (Janzen & Stoller, 1998; Paris et al. 1983; Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991). According to Paris et al. (1983) the strategic reading process necessitates three elements: a capable agent (reader), an attainable goal, and an allowable action through which the reader can reach the desired end state. The strategic reader should have three types of knowledge. The first one is "declarative knowledge" which means knowing what the strategies are. The second type is "procedural knowledge" that stands for knowing how to use them. "Conditional knowledge" is the other type of knowledge that comprises knowing when and why to apply various actions. In a sense, this type of knowledge helps the reader combine the preceding two types by coordinating what strategy to use and how to use the reading strategies when encountered with a task of reading. Anderson (1991) explains that "strategic reading is not only a matter of knowing what strategy to use, but also the reader must know how to use a strategy successfully and orchestrate its use with other strategies. It is not sufficient to know about strategies; a reader must also be able to apply them strategically" (pp. 468-469).

As reading comprehension strategies research has flourished since the 1970s, researchers have proposed different classification schemes for the strategies readers employ during reading. Some classifications are made with regard to time of use of the strategies, others are based on meaning-construction from text, problems encountered during reading, and most classifications are related to the distinction between cognitive and metacognitive processes. Some examples for these classifications are provided below.

Studies on Reading Strategies Used by L2 Students

Scholars of second language reading research suggest that readers employ a variety of reading strategies to ensure their acquisition, storage, and retrieval of information (Singhal, 2006). Most of the researchers investigate the strategies of L2 readers in comparison with L1 reading strategies or some of them compare the strategies of good and poor; successful and unsuccessful; or skilled and not so much skilled L2 readers.

Hosenfeld (1977) attempts to identify the variations in strategy use of successful and unsuccessful L2 readers through the execution of think-aloud procedure. The study reveals that the successful reader keeps the meaning of the passage in mind while reading, reads in broad phrases, skips words that are seen unimportant, and has a positive self-concept. On the contrary, the unsuccessful reader loses the meaning of sentences as soon as they are decoded, reads in short phrases, seldom skips unimportant words, and has a negative self-concept (p. 120).

Block (1986) also uses think-aloud procedure to identify the strategies of L2 readers. She categorises reading strategies into two classes; general strategies and local strategies. She designates two groups of readers one of which is 'integrators' who are characterized by integration of information, being aware of text structure, dealing with the message of the text, and monitoring their comprehension. The other group 'non-integrators', unlike the former group, are not good at integrating information, cannot understand the text structure, and rely much on personal experiences. The latter group reveals less development in their reading skills and less success than the former group.

Padron and Waxman (1988) explore the relationship between students' use of cognitive reading strategies and their performance of reading comprehension with a sample of 82 Hispanic English as a Second Language (ESL) third, fourth, and fifth graders. The results of the study suggest that students' perceptions of cognitive strategies predict their reading comprehension.

Anderson (1991) investigates 28 Spanish adult ESL students' individual differences in reading strategy use through think-aloud protocol procedure. The findings of the study demonstrate that high scorers and low scorers of the reading measures seem to use the same strategies while performing the reading activity and taking reading tests. He concludes that "strategic reading is not only a matter of knowing what strategy to use, but also the reader must know how to use a strategy successfully and orchestrate its use with other strategies. It is not sufficient to know about strategies; a reader must also be able to apply them strategically" (pp. 468-9).

Tercanlioglu (2004) explores 11 non-native and 6 native English speaking British postgraduate students' reading strategy use in L1 and ESL contexts. The results of the study revealed that both ESL and L1 groups showed a clear preference for cognitive strategies. Moreover, native speakers of English reported higher and more frequent use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Another finding of the study is that ESL students are more in need of support strategies which are support mechanisms intended to help reader in the comprehension of the text at hand.

In a recent study, Pritchard and O'Hara (2008) investigate the processing strategies of Spanish-English bilingual eleventh graders. The participants consist of 100

proficient readers of both languages but native speakers of Spanish. It identified four categories comprising total 12 reading strategies. Their categories are monitoring comprehension, establishing intrasentential ties, establishing intersentential ties, and establishing intertextual ties. Their results indicate that there are no differences in the type or range of strategies used across passages in Spanish and English while they find differences in the frequency of strategy use. They use more strategies during reading the text in Spanish. Another finding of the study indicates that when the students are reading the English text they use more the strategies in the category of 'establishing intrasentential ties' than the strategies in the category of 'monitoring comprehension.' The study also concludes that it cannot be assumed that proficient readers will automatically transfer the ability to use strategies from Spanish to English.

He (2000; 2001) explore the effects of cultural schemata and goal orientations of 38 EFL Taiwanese college adult students on reading comprehension and strategy use. He employs think-aloud and stimulated recall procedures to explicate their strategy use. The findings of these experimental studies show that the cultural schemata and goal orientations have impact upon the frequencies of students' using strategies of processing intra-sentential comprehension, processing inter-paragraph comprehension, activating background knowledge, and accepting ambiguities. The combined mastery- and performance group's achievement is better on culturally familiar and culturally unfamiliar essays in comparison to mastery goal oriented group.

In a recent experimental study, He (2008) investigates the effects of achievement goals on 57 EFL college students' reading strategy use and reading comprehension from the perspective of multiple goals in Taiwan. He uses think-aloud and stimulated recall procedures to have the participants verbalize their strategy use while making sense of an English expository text. The findings of the study show that strong mastery and strong performance goal oriented students used intra-sentential, inter-paragraph, intra-paragraph and monitoring/evaluating strategies more frequently at a significant level. On the contrary, students with strong mastery but weak performance goal orientations employ these strategies more often than the students who are oriented with weak mastery but strong performance goals. He concludes that 'strong mastery and strong performance' goal orientation is a significant positive predictor of degrees of reading comprehension and frequency of strategy use (p. 238).

Some researchers directed their attention to the use of metacognitive strategies and metacognitive awareness of L2 readers. Flavell defines metacognition as "knowledge that takes as its object or regulates any aspect of any cognitive endeavour" (as cited in Baker & Brown, 1984, p. 353). For Baker and Brown, this definition covers two aspects; knowledge about cognition and regulation of cognition. Knowledge of cognition consists of the readers' knowledge about her or his own cognitive

resources, and the compatibility between the reader and the reading situation. Hence, if the reader is aware of the requirements of effective reading performance, then s/he can take steps to cover the demands of the reading situation. If the reader lacks this awareness and s/he is unaware of her or his limitations then s/he could not be expected to take precautions against or recover from problems (Carrell, 1989). The second aspect; knowledge of cognition, includes the self-regulatory mechanisms used by an active learner during a continuing trial to solve problems. According to Carrell, Gajdusek, and Wise (1998), "regulation in reading includes the awareness of and ability to detect contradictions in a text, knowledge of different strategies to use with different text types, and the ability to separate important from unimportant information" (p. 101). The researchers have investigated this aspect under the heading of 'metacognition' which includes checking the outcome of any trial to solve problems, planning the next action, monitoring the effectiveness of an action, and testing, revising, and evaluating one's strategies for learning (Baker & Brown, 1984).

Carrell's (1989) study attempts to explore the metacognitive awareness of L2 readers about their reading strategies in their L1 and L2, and the interplay between their metacognitive awareness and comprehension in both L1 and L2. The participants of the study are grouped into two; one comprising of 45 native speakers of Spanish enrolled in an intensive ESL program at a university and the other group is formed by 75 native speakers of English studying Spanish. Data of the study come from the participants' responses to a metacognitive questionnaire and reading comprehension texts in two languages. The results show that local reading strategies such as focusing on grammatical structures, sound-letter, word meaning, and text details tend to be negatively correlated with reading performance in their L1. In L2 reading, she expresses significant differences between the Spanish L1 and English native speakers. The ESL group of Spanish students, who are at a more advanced proficiency level, seem to be more "global" (such as using background knowledge, text gist, and textual organization) or top-down in their perceptions of effective and difficulty-causing reading strategies. The other group, Spanish-as-a-foreign-language group, who are at lower proficiency levels, tend to be more "local" or bottom-up. The reason for this difference can be due to their lower level proficiency and they might have been more dependent on bottom-up decoding skills.

Other studies also reveal interesting findings about the metacognitive strategy use of students. Li and Munby (1996) report that the participants (2 ESL students) of their qualitative study are found to draw strategies from various sources, they share the profiles of the competent readers in both L1 and L2 reading, and the participants are quite aware of their cognitive processes. The results of Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) indicate that ESL students report a higher use of strategies, which is in congruence with the implication that ESL/EFL students are likely to

need support strategies. This study also reveals that the students who self-report higher reading ability used a higher frequency of strategies than the ones that have a low self-report rating. Another study by the same researchers, Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), report that skilled readers can better reflect on and monitor their cognitive processes and also can regulate their use of strategies during reading.

Good and Poor Strategy Use

The reading research depending on the outcomes associated with the use of strategies and reading comprehension has defined good and poor, successful and unsuccessful, skilled, unskilled, and not-so-much skilled, and high-proficient readers. However, generally researchers try to identify the positive counterparts of these dichotomies.

It should be emphasized that there is a clear relationship between the readers' proficiency level and their strategy use, and the outcome of the reading process. The good readers are also good strategy users because by using the cognitive and metacognitive operations, they enhance their reading comprehension. They not only use a number of reading strategies but also employ them more frequently than less successful or poor readers. Good strategy users not only benefit from bottom-up but also top-down reading strategies (Singhal, 2001; 2006). Moreover, good strategy users are better at declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge which assist them to employ which strategy or strategies, when and how to apply. Also, orchestrating strategies is another characteristic of good strategy users (Anderson, 1991). On the other hand, poor strategy users have misconceptions about the reading process, in other words, they are not aware of what the reading process demands. They also make use of their mental capacities less because they show less cognitive effort. They are not good at monitoring comprehension. They apply less effective reading strategies and during processing the text they employ fewer reading strategies.

Reading Strategy Instruction

A number of reading strategy researchers, seeing the positive effects of good strategy use and negative effects associated with poor strategy use, have attempted to experimentally investigate the possible outcomes of reading strategy instruction on readers' comprehension achievement. Their aim is grasping an understanding of what kind of contexts that the instruction takes place in improving comprehension, which instruction processes are most influential, and the variables affecting strategy instruction. Their results indicate that students' comprehension abilities improve by means of strategy instruction. When the learners are instructed to use a repertoire of reading strategies, they develop more positive attitudes toward reading which is very crucial (Auerbach & Paxton, 1997).

Carrell, Pharis, and Liberto (1989) investigate the effects of strategy instruction on 26 ESL level four university students by means of semantic mapping which is a method that uses "a variety of strategies designed to graphically display information within categories related to a central concept" (Johnson, 1986, as cited in Carrell et al. 1989, p. 651) and ETR (experience, text, relationship), a method that "uses discussion to link what the reader already knows to what will be encountered in the text" (p. 654). The study depicts that metacognitive strategy instruction through the use of semantic mapping and ETR methods is effective in enhancing second language reading.

Pressley and his associates developed a program that they called Transactional Strategy Instruction (TSI) as the program emphasizes transactions among teacher, student, and text (Pressley, El-Dinary, et al. 1992). The instruction of the program is characterized by the strategy instruction including thinking aloud, story grammar analysis, text structure analysis, and strategies that are instructed in reciprocal teaching like activating prior knowledge by making predictions and relating what is being read, questioning, constructing mental images, clarifying and summarizing. The students take the strategy instruction in small groups and use the strategies all the day. The students are told that the strategies may help them get beyond literal understanding of the text. Likewise, coordinating strategies when necessary is taught to them in order to have them be self-regulated strategy users (Pressley, 2002).

In a similar program, Students Achieving Independent Learning (SAIL), developed by the same research group but executed in a different school with the same concerns, students were taught a package of comprehension strategies including predicting, visualizing, questioning, clarifying, summarizing, making associations between the text and the students' experiences (Pressley et al. 1994). The goal of this program was to develop successful and independent readers. SAIL students were taught to read for meaning and to adjust their reading behaviour according to their purposes, genre, content, and difficulty level of the text. They were also taught to anticipate what might happen, to evaluate and adjust their expectations, and to solve problems when confused. Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, and Schuder (1996) reported the results of a quasi-experimental study on transactional strategy instruction with low-achieving second grade readers as there was a clear evidence of greater strategy awareness and strategy use, learning of information from material read, and superior performance on standardized reading tests by the experimental group.

Likewise, Kern (1989) reports strong positive effect of strategy instruction on L2 readers' comprehension scores. In a one year strategy instruction study with low-level bilingual readers, Jimenez and Gamez (1996) conclude that use of culturally relevant texts and instruction in and practice of reading promote and foster the reading ability of students. The study also reports indications of changes

in the students' motivation and their ability to verbalize their reading strategies.

As the above cited studies on strategy instruction demonstrate, strategy instruction improves the reading comprehension of students. They suggest that students can be taught what strategy to use, how to use them, and when to use strategies to achieve better comprehension of the text at hand.

Reading Strategies Used by Turkish EFL Learners

Salataci and Akyel (2002) investigate the effects of reading strategy instruction on L1 and L2 reading in a Turkish university with 20 students enrolled in a one year intensive English course. The findings of the study indicate that the frequency of employing the prediction, summarizing, and using prior knowledge strategies increased both in Turkish and English. Moreover, their reading comprehension scores increased.

Saricoban (2002), with a three phase approach to reading respectively; pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading, aims to determine the difference in the strategy use by both successful and less successful readers at an upper–intermediate level English Language Teaching (ELT) department at a Turkish university. The study reports that successful readers differed in some strategies as analyzing in the during-reading stage, evaluating and commenting in the post-reading stage. The replication of this study (Yiğiter, Sarıçoban, & Gürses, 2005), the participants of which were advanced level ELT students, states that the good readers differed in the strategies such as finding answers to given questions based on the text, predicting the continuing text, finding the reason the author is writing about the topic in the pre-reading stage; reading through the passage and underlining difficult words and phrases, trying to see what point the writer is attempting to establish, trying to see what reasons or evidence the writer gives for his claim, analysing the language through repeated descriptions, consistent ways of characterizing people or events, repeated words and phrases, examples or illustrations in the during reading phase; summarizing, commenting and reflecting in the post-reading phase.

Tercanlioglu (2002-2003) investigates the relationship between reading strategy use, EFL reading efficacy and success. The participants of the study are 184 pre-service teachers enrolled in a four-year ELT department at a Turkish university. The result of the study indicate that pre-service teachers' efficacy beliefs and strategy use are correlated with each other, and academic achievement is linked to their use of learning strategies and academic beliefs.

Cubukcu (2008) explores the effectiveness of systematic direct instruction of metacognitive strategies and their impact on reading comprehension of Turkish ELT students. The study concludes that "the impact of the metacognitive strategy training is important in developing vocabulary and bettering reading comprehension skills (p. 8).

A recent study, Yaylı (2010), investigates cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies of 6 proficient and 6 less proficient readers who are enrolled in an ELT department through think–aloud and verbal protocols. The findings of the study reveal that the proficient readers used cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies more frequently than the less proficient readers in both text types, and both groups mainly used the same strategy types.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

As the above mentioned studies' results delineate, reading strategies are useful and necessary for better L1 and L2 reading comprehension. There is a link between the employment of reading strategies and success. Through the use of the reading strategies, readers of a text may extract the intended meaning better. They can solve the comprehension problems when encountered during reading a text. Hence, reading becomes a more pleasing activity either to the readers of L1 or L2. This relative pleasure from reading may enhance the engagement in reading. However, there is a gap in the extant literature how and when the students should be taught these strategies. In order to solve this issue, the first step to be taken is to determine which reading strategies should be taught to the students, and they should be integrated in the reading course syllabus. The teachers of reading courses not only should inform the students about these strategies, but also teach how to and when to use them during the reading process. In addition, they may model how to use the strategies, practice and discuss them with students. The reading course teachers should be encouraged to teach students not to read the texts directly. The teachers, through introductory questions, explanations and discussions about the topic before reading the text, may enhance the students' interest in reading. Hence, students may themselves use these activities while reading a text on their own. Students can be asked to identify their reading difficulties, and appropriate strategies that are proposed in the literature can be taught to them by the teacher to solve their reading difficulties.

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