THE READING STRATEGIES USED BY PROSPECTIVE ENGLISH TEACHERS IN TURKISH ELT CONTEXT

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Abstract:

The purpose of this research was to determine what types of reading strategies prospective English Teachers used to accomplish in their reading assignments and activities. The study was conducted at a state-run University, English Language Teaching Department in Turkey. The participants were 130 prospective English Teachers majoring English Language Teaching and taking up the lecture of teaching language skills. The Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) was used to collect data about the use of reading strategies while reading academic or school-related materials. The data collected was measured in SPSS program. The results indicated that participants used each strategy effectively. As the most striking strategy, subjects underlined or circled information in the text to help them remember the information. While both genders preferred to take advantage of similar strategies in common, they mostly preferred to use problem solving strategies compared to other strategies.

Key words: Reading strategies, prospective English teacher's reading strategies

1. Introduction

Reading was the primary focus of language learning and teaching via Grammar Translation Method till 20th century. At that time, the aim of language learning was to read scientific texts in Latin. The 1929 Coleman Report proposed a new approach to the reading and recommended that reading in the target language without any translation was encouraged. The aim was to develop an idea of independent silent reading and to increase reading speed of individuals. Krashen (1985) viewed reading skill as a comprehensible input and claimed that reading gave rise to competence in speaking and writing. Krashen (1985) also maintained that voluntary reading could be a means from communicative language competence to academic language competence. Goodman et al. (1995) highlighted a psycholinguistic view of reading in which reading was viewed as an interactive process between the reader and the writer.

Reading can be considered probably the most important skill for language learners to major in academic contexts. Reading is an interactive process because learners make use of several sub skills to reach an understanding of written material such as recalling background knowledge, having an aptitude of text schema, lexical and grammatical awareness, L1-related knowledge and real-world knowledge, including their own personal purposes and goals (Grabe, 1991).

Since the reading skill can be considered one of the most important skills in academic context, this research focuses on determining the types of reading strategies used by

prospective English teachers. By this means, it is believed that this study will have implications for syllabus designers, material developers and lesson planners in reading activities in English teaching context. This research is conducted in a Turkish setting on Turkish prospective English teachers which makes this study different from the current literature.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Reading, the Reading Process, Reading strategies

Ransom (1978: 14) defines reading as "a conversation between the writer and the reader." Nuttall (1996: 4) regards reading as "the process of getting out of the text as nearly as possible with the message the writer puts into it." Williams (1996: 2) states reading as "a process through which one looks at and understands a written text." According to Goodman (1995), reading is a psychologically guessing game. Reading is described as a complicated process of drawing meaning from a text for different purposes in various contexts (Allen & Bruton, 1998). Additionally, in the reading process, readers make use of their background and their linguistic knowledge about the topic to achieve their purpose for reading (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001).

Garner (1987) defines reading strategies "as an action or series of actions employed in order to construct meaning". Readers benefit from some strategies to help them with the acquisition, storage and retrieval of information. Readers can face some comprehension troubles and use strategies to get rid of the difficulties. Using these strategies lead to target in a faster and clearer way (Tercanlıo lu, 2004).

It has been observed that students, especially ESL and EFL learners, confront a variety of difficulties while reading. These difficulties comprise inadequate vocabulary, lexical inefficiency, structural complexity, language inaccessibility, poor reading skills, lack of schemata, and so on. Students' lack of interest is another major cause of their failure in reading.

Jeon (2011) investigated the role of second-language morphological awareness to reading comprehension in a foreign language. The participants were tenth graders (n= 188) at a South Korean high school and were tested on 6 reading- and language-related variables: phonological decoding, listening comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, passage-level reading comprehension, metacognitive reading awareness, and morphological awareness. The result revealed that morphological awareness was a significant predictor of L2 reading comprehension when other variables were controlled.

Park & Kim (2011) studied adult English language learners' reading-strategy use in online reading. The participants worked both individually and collaboratively in online Independent English Study Group. They found that "hybrid online reading" enhanced participants' various reaction patterns and preferences in their hypermedia learning atmosphere.

Takallou (2011) examined the role of metacognitive strategy instruction on learners' reading comprehension performance on authentic and inauthentic texts. Two tests and Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) were administered to 93 male and

female EFL learners in four phases. The results showed that experimental groups' awareness to metacognitive strategy awareness significantly increased after instruction.

2.2. Types of Reading

2.2.1. Academic Reading

A student has to pass various examinations during his/her whole course of academic life. Understanding a given passage is the goal for a reader to answer any kind of questions in the examinations because readers comprehend the text properly if they extract the required information as effectively as possible (Grellet, 1996).

2.2.2. Non-academic Reading

Besides academic reasons, there are various non-academic reasons for reading. In an academic reading, students tend to read texts because of the syllabus and the thought of passing the examinations. But non-academic reading is open and readers get an opportunity to choose from a vast range of books according to their interest, options for choice and opportunity to spending time.

2.2.3. Intensive Reading

In intensive reading, readers extract specific information in shorter texts. Brown (1989) resembles intensive reading to a zoom lens strategy and states that "intensive reading calls attention to grammatical forms, discourse markers and other surface structure details for the purpose of understanding literal meaning, implications, rhetorical relationships."

2.3.4. Extensive Reading

Williams (1984) describes extensive reading as the "relatively rapid reading of long texts." According to Nuttall (1996), extensive reading is essentially a private activity and the reader dwells in his/her private world of reading for his/her own interest. Nuttall (1996) has pointed out two reasons for extensive reading. The first reason is that extensive reading helps to improve the reading skills of the students. The second reason is that extensive reading not only serves a different atmosphere for the students but also provides them with enjoyment.

2.3. Approaches to Reading

Top-Down and Bottom-Up are the two ways which readers process the text. Bottom-up can be defined as processing a text to figure out the meaning by reading word for word and letter for letter. On the other hand, Top- Down processing is to comprehend the global meaning of the text through clues in the text and the reader's good schema knowledge. Expectations of the reader play a crucial role in this process. The reader brings his/her personal experiences and views with him/her, and those aspects largely affect the way of interpreting a text. While bottom-up process is text-driven, top-down

approach uses the meaning brought by the reader, namely, it is reader-driven. The most effective model is the interactive model which is a combination of both bottom-up and top down elements (Anderson, 1999).

3. Method

The purpose of this study is to determine what types of reading strategies the prospective teachers use to accomplish in their reading assignments and activities. It is believed that implications of the research will inspire syllabus designers, material developers and lesson planners in English teaching context especially in reading activities. This study will answer the following research questions:

1. What are the most and the least reading strategies used by the prospective teachers?
2. What groups of strategies do the prospective teachers prefer?

3.1. Subjects

The study was conducted at a State-run University, English Language Teaching Department in Turkey. The participants were 130 prospective teachers majoring English Language Teaching and taking up the lecture of teaching language skills during 2012-2013 academic year. The group had similar characteristics with respect to age and educational background. Gender distribution was 100 females and 30 males.

3.2. Instruments

In this research, Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) Questionnaire was used to collect data about the readers' awareness and use of reading strategies while reading academic materials. The MARSI Questionnaire (Mokhtari and Reichard, 2002) measures three categories of reading strategies including:
(1) Global Reading Strategies (GLOB), which can be classified as generalized or global reading strategies aiming to set the stage for the reading act.
(2) Problem-Solving Strategies (PROB), which can be defined as focused problem solving or repair strategies used when problems emerge in understanding textual information, and (3) Support Reading Strategies (SUP), which is composed of using the support mechanisms aimed at sustaining responsiveness to reading.

The 30-item questionnaire was validated by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) and the internal consistency reliability coefficient ranged from 0.89 to 0.93. Five point likert scale ranging from 1 (I never or almost never use this strategy) to 5 (I always or almost always use this strategy) was used to collect data about the reading strategies. The data collected was measured in SPSS program as frequency, means and standard deviation.

4. Findings and Results

The following table presents the most and the least used reading strategies by prospective English teachers.

Table 1. Reading Strategies Reported Being Used the MOST and the LEAST

Items	Reading Strategy	N	M	SD
I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	sup	130	4,28	1,02
When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading.	prob	130	4,25	0,93
When text becomes difficult, I reread to increase my understanding.	prob	130	3,97	1,05
I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading.	prob	130	3,95	1,18
I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	prob	130	3,89	0,94
I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read.	sup	130	3,02	1,27
I skim the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization.	glob	130	2,99	1,22
I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text.	sup	130	2,98	1,15
When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.	sup	130	2,92	1,38
I discuss what I read with others to check my understanding	sup	130	2,88	1,19

Table 1 shows the five reading strategies used most and least by the participants. There were totally 130 subjects participated in the study. The most used reading strategy used by the readers at an average of 4,28 was that readers were to underline or to circle information to help them remember it. The second most used strategy was that the readers paid closer attention to what they were reading when the text became difficult. This item had a rate of 4,25 mean. Similarly, subjects reread to increase their understanding when text became difficult and this was the third item marked most at a rate of 3.97. On the other hand, the item 'subjects discuss what they read with others to check their understanding' was the least used strategy by the participants at a rate of 2,88. The next least used strategy was that subjects read aloud to help them understand what they read when the text became difficult. Finally, the other least used strategy was that subjects asked themselves questions, they liked to have answered in the text and this item had an average of 2,98. While most used reading strategies were generally Problem-Solving Strategies (PROB), least used strategies were mostly Support Reading Strategies (SUP). Moreover, the average of all the reading strategies was 3,53.

Table 2. Three the Most and the Least Used Reading Strategies Reported by males and females

Items	Reading Strategy Group	N (male)	M	SD	N female)	M	SD
When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading.	prob	30	4,26	0,94	100	4,25	0,92
I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	sup	30	4	1,14	100	4,36	0,96
I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading.	prob	30	3,96	0,8	100	3,94	1,27
I discuss what I read with others to check my understanding	sup	30	2,8	0,92	100	2,91	1,25
I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read.	sup	30	2,76	1,04	100	3,1	1,32
I skim the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization.	glob	30	2,73	1,11	100	3,1	1,32

Table 2 indicates the most and least common three Reading Strategies used by male and female participants. Both groups paid closer attention to what they were reading when text became difficult. The mean for this item was 4,25 for two groups. The second item which had the highest rate of mean for both groups was that they underlined and circled information in the text to help them remember it. The next most marked item by two groups was that they adjust their reading speed according to what they were reading. The mean for this item was 3,95. On the other hand, as the least rated item, subjects discussed what they read with others to check their understanding. Following this, the item 'I take notes while reading to help understand what they read.' got the lowest mean together with the item 'I skim the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization.' Comparing this Table with Table 1, most and least rated items exhibited the same characteristics at a large extent. All of the most rated items in Table 2 were the same with those in Table 1. So were the least rated items. While most used reading

strategies by both genders were generally Problem-Solving Strategies (PROB), least used strategies were mostly Support Reading Strategies (SUP).

Table 3. Item Statistics of Global Reading Strategies

Items	N	M	SD
I have a purpose in mind when I read.	130	3,78	1,1
I use typological aids like boldface and italics to identify key information.	130	3,75	1,21
I think about what I know to help me understand what I read.	130	3,72	1,01
I preview the text to see what it is about before reading it.	130	3,63	1,11
I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.	130	3,63	1,14
I check my understanding when I come across conflicting information.	130	3,62	1,08
I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading.	130	3,58	1,18
I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.	130	3,53	1,28
I try to guess what the material is about when I read.	130	3,48	1,01
I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text.	130	3,39	1,07
I use tables, figures, and pictures in text to increase my understanding.	130	3,22	1,09
I skim the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization.	130	2,99	1,22
Total		3,53	

Table 3 presents 12 Global Reading Strategies from the highest to the lowest mean. The item which had the highest mean, 3,78, was that subjects had a purpose in mind when they read. Following this, the participants used typological aids like boldface and italics to identify key information. The mean for this item was 3,75. The next highest mean,3,72, belonged to the item ' I think about what I know to help me understand what I read.' On the other hand, the item which had the lowest mean, 2,99, was that participants skimmed the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization. The second item with the lowest mean, 3,22, stated that subjects used tables, figures, and pictures in text to increase their understanding. The next lowest graded item with a mean of 3,53 was that participants critically analyzed and evaluated the information presented in the text. Finally, the average of all the global reading strategies was 3,53.

Table 4. Item Statistics of Support Reading Strategies (SUP)

Items	N	M	SD
I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	130	4,28	1,02
I go back and forth in the text to find relationship among ideas in it.	130	3,73	1,17
I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.	130	3,45	1,08
I use reference materials such as dictionaries to help me understand what I read.	130	3,25	1,08
I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text.	130	3,08	1,09
I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read.	130	3,02	1,27
I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text.	130	2,98	1,15
When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.	130	2,92	1,38
I discuss what I read with others to check my understanding	130	2,88	1,19
Total		3,29	

Table 4 shows nine support reading strategies from the highest to the lowest mean. The highest mean, 4,28, belonged to the item ' I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.' Next, subjects went back and forth in the text to find relationship among ideas in it. This item had a mean of 3,73. Following this, the item 'I paraphrase to better understand what I read.' got the highest mean as 3,45. On the other hand, as the items which got the lowest means in this group, first, participants discussed what they read with others with a mean of 2,88. The next item getting the lowest mean, 2,92, was that ' When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.' finally, participants asked themselves questions they liked to have answered in the text. The mean for this item was 2,98. All in all, the mean for all support reading strategies was 3,29.

Table 5. Item Statistics of Problem-Solving Strategies (PROB)

Items	N	M	SD
When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading.	130	4,25	0,93
When text becomes difficult, I reread to increase my understanding.	130	3,97	1,05
I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading.	130	3,95	1,18
I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	130	3,89	0,94
I read slowly but carefully to be sure I understand what I am reading.	130	3,72	1,11
I try to picture or visualize information to help	130	3,68	1,13

remember what I read.			
I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading.	130	3,60	1,05
I guess the meaning of unknown words by separating different parts of a word.	130	3,59	0,99
I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose.	130	3,39	1,09
Total		3,78	

Table 5 presents nine problem solving strategies from the highest to the lowest mean. The first item which got the highest mean, 4,25, was that subjects paid closer attention to what they were reading, when text became difficult. Second highest mean belonged to the item saying ' I reread to increase my understanding, when text becomes difficult' with a mean of 3,97. Thirdly, subjects adjusted their reading speed according to what they were reading and it had a mean of 3,95. On the other hand, as the lowest three items, the first one was that participants thought about whether the content of the text fit their reading purpose with a mean of 3,39. Secondly, subjects guessed the meaning of unknown words by separating different parts of a word. Its mean was 3,59. Finally, as one of the items getting the lowest mean, 3,60, subjects stopped from time to time and thought about what they were reading. All in all, the average of all problem solving strategies was 3,78 which was the highest of three reading strategies group.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Reading is an essential skill to master in academic context. Since prospective teachers are exposed to reading in many efforts, they must be proficient good readers to fulfill requirements in academic studies. According to the data collected, there is a moderate awareness of all the strategies. In other words, there is a kind of balance about the choice of reading strategies and each skill is essential for the readers. As the most striking strategy, subjects underline or circle information in the text to help them remember the information. In addition, they pay closer attention to what they are reading and reread the text, when text becomes difficult. Hsu (2007) also investigated the English reading strategy use of four-year technical college students in Taiwan. According to the results, the most often used category is metacognitive strategy category. This category was followed by social/affective strategy category. In addition, he also found that the effective learners tend to use specific kinds of strategies and use strategies more frequently than ineffective learners do.

As of genders' choice of reading strategy, both prefer to take advantage of similar strategies in common. Although both groups mostly use problem solving strategies, they do not prefer to use support reading strategies. While both pay closer attention to what they are reading and underline and circle information in the text, they do not prefer to skim the text first. The reason for the similarity can be the same educational background. The findings of Amer et al. (2010) are in line with results of the present study and they revealed that there was no statistically significant difference with reference to gender. However, Li's findings (2010) are not in consistent with the results of the present study. He found that females show higher use of reading strategies than males in each individual category, as well as in the combined sub-categories. In addition, while the

males are more adventurous and bolder, the females are more careful and considerate. Moreover, Ozek and Civelek (2006) studied reading strategies used while reading a text by ELT students between the 1st and 4th year students in ELT Department at a state-run university in Turkey. They found that different reading strategies were used at pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading stages. The results proved that there were some significant differences on the use of cognitive reading strategies in term of students' gender, age, and proficiency in reading, school source, and duration in learning English. This finding is not consistent with the results of the present study. The findings of Hsu (2007) are in consistent with the results of the present study in terms of gender. He found no significant difference between male and female students in terms of overall strategy use. However, females use cognitive strategies and social/affective strategies more often than males do.

In the present research, participants mostly prefer to use problem solving strategies compared to others. They pay closer attention to what they are reading and reread the text to increase their understanding. Following this, as global reading strategies, they have a purpose in mind when they read and they use typological aids like boldface and italics to identify key information. As from the support reading strategies, participants underline and circle information in the text to help them remember better. Moreover, they go back and forth in the text to find relationship among ideas. The findings of this study are in line with Li's results. (2010) He investigated the students' awareness of reading strategy use at the senior middle school level in Cheese context. Based on his findings, there is a moderate awareness of all the strategies and the students hold a preference for Problem Solving Reading Strategies, followed by Global and Support Reading Strategies. On the other hand, Amer et al. (2010) investigated the online reading strategies of Omani EFL university first-year students and senior student teachers. Results of their study showed a statistically significant difference between fourth-year students and first-year students only in global strategies. In other words, while high-proficient readers use more global strategies than low-proficient readers do, first-year students reported using more support strategies than senior students did. In another study, Sarıçoban (2002) examined the strategies effective readers employ in pre-reading, reading and post-reading stages of instruction in classroom language learning at a state- run university ELT Department. The result proved that successful readers preferred global reading strategies first then moved to smaller units such as words, sentences and paragraphs.

The reading strategies analyzed above can be transferred to classroom setting and even to the free time activity as intensive and extensive reading. Since we consider the subject group as very good and good readers, following their choice of strategy can lead other readers to success in reading efforts. Adaptation of these strategies to each reading activity in the language classroom makes reading classes more meaningful and purposeful. However, which strategy is more appropriate for pre-, while and post reading stages for various ages can be the focus of other studies.

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