

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The effect of reading strategies on reading comprehension in teaching Turkish as a foreign language

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Accepted 4 October 2013

The purpose of this study is to determine which reading strategies students use while learning Turkish as a foreign language and investigate the effects of these strategies on reading comprehension skill. Conducted in compliance with “pretest-posttest control group model” as the experimental design, this research involved totally 36 students who were learning Turkish as a foreign language at Istanbul University Language Center; the experimental group and the control group both consisted of 18 students who were at B2 level in accordance with the Common European Framework. While the experimental group was subjected to activities involving the usage and instruction of the strategies, the control group received education through the traditional model. The data were collected through the “Reading Comprehension Achievement Test” developed by the researcher and the “Metacognitive Awareness Inventory of Reading Strategies” developed by Karatay; the data obtained were later analysed in SPSS. The results of the study revealed that students use reading and pre-reading strategies the most, whereas they use post-reading strategies the least. It was also discovered in the research that in parallel with the increase in the students’ level of reading strategy use, their comprehension achievement increased as well.

**Key words:** Language learning strategies, reading comprehension strategies, teaching Turkish as a foreign language, reading comprehension skill.

## INTRODUCTION

Reading can be construed as the coordinated execution of a number of processing stages such as word encoding, lexical access, assigning semantic roles, and relating the information in a given sentence to previous sentences and previous knowledge (Just and Carpenter, 1980: 331). In other words reading is an activity in which meaning is deduced from written symbols by the mutual work of cognitive behavior and psychomotor skills (Demirel, 2003: 77). Although there are a lot of definitions of the reading concept, it is seen that in all of them reading and understanding are combined (Akyol, 2010; Duke and Pearson, 2002; Grabe, 1995; Just and

Carpenter, 1980; Kırkkılıç and Akyol, 2007; Nuttall, 1996; Öz, 2001; Özbay, 2006; Yalçın, 2002, vb.). Reading is not just decoding words from print: the essential point is understanding. In other words reading does not mean anything unless there is comprehension. When thought in this sense, to be a good reader one needs to learn how to combine his/her background knowledge with what she/he is reading, understanding what he/she is reading and interpreting it, understanding the full text by establishing a relationship between the pieces of the text and evaluating the text by looking at it with a critical eye.

In the students’ native and foreign language reading

process, there are differences in their vocabulary knowledge, grammar, metalanguage and discourse knowledge (Grabe and Stoller, 2002: 59). While the students know the vocabulary, grammar and discourse of their native language, they do not have the sufficient knowledge of the target language, so their reading process in the foreign language reading is more difficult and complicated. For this reason, to improve foreign language reading skills, there is a need for different learning processes in addition to vocabulary and grammar teaching. The use of reading strategies is one of the activities which improve reading comprehension skills in foreign language learning.

According to Mokhtari and Reichard (2002: 249), “good readers” are aware of what they are reading and why they are reading it; in addition they use some plans and strategies to monitor their own understanding and overcome the problems they face while reading. Referring to Pressley (2002), the characteristics of “a good reader” can be summarized as follows: Good readers:

- a. are active while reading and they have explicit aims related to the text.
- b. look through the text before reading and while reading they always make guesses about what is going to happen in the next session.
- c. look through the passages and they try to guess the meaning and structure of words from the context.
- d. use their background knowledge and check their understanding.
- e. restructure the meaning, repeat it and question it.
- f. think about the characters and events when reading fictional texts. They tend to summarize informative texts.
- g. assume reading as a productive process.

When the characteristics of “good readers” are analysed, these people apply some cognitive activities pre-reading, during reading and post reading. Thus, the cognitive strategies that the reader uses pre-reading, during reading and post-reading can be labeled “reading comprehension strategies”.

Reading comprehension strategies are the cognitive strategies that the reader uses pre-reading, during reading and post-reading to understand the text better. There are some strategies that the reader uses consciously and unconsciously. Ellis (1994:533) uses this distinction to distinguish strategies from skills: if such cognitive activities occur consciously, he calls them “strategies”; if they occur unconsciously, he calls them “skills”. Williams and Morgan (1989: 223) support Ellis’ view. They state that a skill is an automatic and sub-conscious capability and a strategy is a conscious process used to solve a problem. For this reason, we can say that the students use the skills that they acquire in normal conditions automatically and they apply strategies when they face a problem in the text.

Reading comprehension strategies are plans that

readers use to solve the problems they are faced with while deducing meaning (Duffy, 1993: 232) and the cognitive processes they choose to overcome their reading responsibilities (Cohen, 1990: 83). The main reason for using reading comprehension strategies is to ensure that the text is understood correctly and easily. According to Kırkkılıç and Akyol (2007: 33), reading comprehension strategies help the students understand the general content and the structure of the text, participate in the reading process actively, establish connections between the content of the material and personal experience and keep the gist of the text in long term memory and recall it easily.

Yiğiter and Gürses (2004: 210-211) have evaluated the aims of reading comprehension strategies under three titles as pre-reading, during reading and post-reading. The aims of using pre-reading strategies are to activate the background knowledge of the students about the subject, motivate them, raise their interest by preliminary evaluations and draw their attention to new words. The strategies used during reading help students interact with the text, help them understand the aim of the author and the logical order of the text, provide clues for them to infer the meaning of unknown words from the context, guide them to get the main idea. The aims of using post-reading strategies are to make a deep analysis of the text, help the students combine the information in the text and their background knowledge and evaluate what they have already learnt.

### Classifications of reading strategies

When the literature is reviewed it is seen that in general reading strategies are classified as pre-reading strategies, during reading strategies and post-reading strategies (Bezci, 1998; Karatay, 2007 and 2009; Lau, 2006; Mihara, 2011; Mokhtari and Reichard, 2002; Özbay, 2009; Sallı, 2002; Shih, 1991; Tankersley, 2003; Yang, 2006). Pre-reading strategies are based on student’s using background knowledge and guessing the content of the text that she/he is going to read. Readers who possess background knowledge of the content area of the text should comprehend its content. Thus to help students activate appropriate schemata, pre-reading strategies are considered useful (Mihara, 2011: 52). During reading strategies are used with the aim of deducing the main idea and important details of the text. In addition, during reading strategies make unconscious processes more explicit and show the interactive nature of reading. Post-reading strategies give the chance to evaluate whether the text has been understood or, in other words, to what extent the aims of reading have been realized. Based on previous studies (Bezci, 1998; Karatay, 2007 and 2009; Lau, 2006; Mihara, 2011; Mokhtari and Reichard, 2002; Özbay, 2009; Sallı, 2002; Shih, 1991, Tankersley, 2003; Yang, 2006) pre-reading,

**Table 1.** Strategies that can be used pre-reading, during reading and post-reading.

<b>Identifying the aim of reading</b>	
Pre-reading strategies	To understand the topic reading the first sentences of each paragraph
	Looking through the text
	Activating background knowledge
	Guessing the topic of the text by looking at title and subtitles
	Deciding on which points to focus
	If there is a picture looking at it and guessing the content of the text
	Determining the reading pace
	Developing a reading plan
	Making connections between the parts of the text.
	Visualizing what is being told in the text
During-reading strategies	Taking notes while reading
	Controlling the reading pace
	Going back to already read part when distracted
	Underlining important parts
	Using dictionary when unknown words cannot be deduced from the context
	Not doing verbal translation
	Skipping unknown words which do not contribute to understanding
	Reading over the difficult parts of the text.
	Utilizing visuals like graphs, tables and pictures
	Using other clues (punctuation, bold, italics and transitions)
Post-reading strategies	Looking through the text again if there is contradictory information.
	Guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context
	Anticipating what is going to be told and making guesses during reading
	Making connections between previous knowledge and knowledge acquired from the text
	1.Questioning whether the content of the text is appropriate for the reading aim.
	Summarizing the text
	Looking through the text again to see the connections.
	Reading over the text if it sounds difficult.
	Checking whether guesses about the text are correct or not.
	Evaluating the main idea of the text with a critical eye.
Summarizing the main idea of the whole text.	
Discussing the text with others to check whether one has grasped the gist or not.	
Retelling the important ideas deduced from the text.	
Retelling the text with her/his own words loudly.	
Taking notes to use later and to remember.	
If there are prepared questions about the text, answering them.	

during reading and post-reading strategies are ordered in Table 1.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to determine which reading strategies students use while learning Turkish as a foreign language and investigate the effects of these

strategies on reading comprehension skill. To this end, the research questions of the study were formulated as follows:

1. Does the instruction of reading comprehension strategies affect the students' use of reading comprehension strategies?
2. Does the use of reading comprehension strategies affect the students' reading comprehension

**Table 2.** Experimental pattern.

Group	Tests and scale	Experimental pattern	Tests and scale
Experimental group	Reading Strategies Scale and Reading Comprehension Achievement Test	Teaching reading strategies	Reading Strategies Scale and Reading Comprehension Achievement Test
Control group	Reading Strategies Scale Reading Comprehension Achievement Test	Traditional teaching	Reading Strategies Scale and Reading Comprehension Achievement Test

achievement?

## METHOD

### Research model

In this study, a pre-test post-test control group model was used to determine the learning strategies that the students use and to measure the differences between the groups before and after learning strategy training. According to this model two groups are formed as control group and experimental group (Table 2). In both of the groups evaluations are done before and after the experiment.

In this study, in the experimental group, reading strategies are taught and in the control group, education is given without reading strategy teaching. In the experimental group, pre-reading (identifying the aim of reading, guessing the topic of the text by looking at title and subtitles to understand the topic, reading the first sentences of each paragraph, guessing what the text is about by looking at the pictures), during reading (making connections between the parts of the text, taking notes while reading, using clues such as punctuation, bold, italics and transitions, skipping unknown words which do not contribute to understanding, underlining important parts, guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context, anticipating what is going to be told and making guesses during reading) and post-reading (summarizing the text, evaluating the main idea of the text with a critical eye, retelling the text with one's own words loudly, retelling the important ideas deduced from the text, checking whether guesses about the text are correct or not) strategy teaching was given. In the control group, the students were first asked to read the text silently, unknown words were explained by the teacher and at the end of reading the questions related to the text were answered. Experimental tasks were carried out in both groups by the researcher during 8 weeks (8 h for each week) from April 22, 2013 to June 14, 2013. In the institution that the experiment was carried out each course level is completed in 8 weeks.

### Universe and sampling

The universe of this study is composed of the students learning Turkish as a foreign language in Turkey and sampling is composed of 36 students, 18 in the experimental group and 18 in the control group, whose level is B2 according to Common European Framework (CEF). For sampling the groups, before starting the experimental tasks, Reading Comprehension Achievement Test was conducted in 5 groups of B2 level students at Istanbul University Language Center. The result of this test was analysed and the 2 groups whose average was close to each other were chosen. Randomly, one of these groups was specified as control group and the other as experimental group. The students in the

sample group were the ones who took Turkish preparation class to study at one of the universities in Turkey and all of these students completed A1, A2 and B1 levels at Istanbul University Language Center. Thus, their Turkish readiness level is close to each other.

### Data gathering tools and data analysis

The data of the study are collected with the "Reading Comprehension Achievement Test" which was developed by the researcher and the "Reading Comprehension Cognitive Awareness Scale" which was developed by Karatay (2009). The Reading Strategies Cognitive Awareness Scale is an equally spaced scale which is graded between 1 (I never do it) and 5 (I always do it) ranges. The scale measure used for strategies which is composed of 32 items includes 9 pre-reading strategy items (planning reading), 14 during reading strategy items (arranging reading) and 9 post-reading strategy items (reading evaluation). In the evaluation of the level of reading strategy use the grading is between the ranges 1 which is the lowest and 5 which is the highest. By taking the evaluation that Oxford (1990:291) did on the use of language learning strategies as an example, it is evaluated as 3,5 and above is *good*, between 2,5 and 3,4 ranges are *medium* and 2,4 and lower are *weak*. When the Reading Strategies Scale was used, the students were asked to fill it in by taking the reading strategies they use while reading Turkish texts into consideration.

The Reading comprehension achievement test is composed of 50 items which include 5 Turkish texts with 10 items for each of 2 articles, 2 essays and 1 narrative. The texts and questions in this test are arranged according to the reading criteria of Common European Framework B2 level. These criteria are as follows: "I can understand the reports and articles about daily subjects in which the author cites his/her own opinions and views. I can understand the texts related to my academic area or area of expertise in detail. I can understand the articles outside my profession or academic area with the help of a dictionary if there is a need. I can read the comments and criticisms about cultural subjects such as cinema, theatre, books or concerts and summarize them. I can evaluate the attitude and behavior of characters in the development of a narrative or theatre". The reliability co-efficient of Reading Comprehension Achievement Test is calculated as .80 according to KR-20 formula. In this test for each of the correct answer 2 points and for each of wrong answer 0 is given. Thus, the highest point that can be taken in this test is 100.

The Reading Strategies Scale and Reading Comprehension Achievement Test were administered to both groups as a pre-test and a post-test. The gathered data were analysed in the SPSS 11.00 program. The Reading Strategies Scale and Reading Comprehension Achievement Test were used on the same day in both groups (pre-test: April 22, 2013; post-test: June 14, 2013) by the researcher; the Reading Strategies Scale was completed in 20 min and Reading Comprehension Achievement Test, in 90 min.

**Table 3.** The average value of pre-test strategy usage for the experimental and control groups.

Group	Strategies	X	Sd	Group	Strategies	X	Sd
Experimental group	Pre-reading	3.16	.788	Control Group	Pre-reading	3.21	.742
	During-reading	3.40	.793		During-reading	3.47	.744
	Post-reading	2.90	.791		Post-reading	2.76	.735
	Average	3.15	.790		Average	3.14	.741

**Table 4.** The comparison of the average of pre-test strategy use of experimental and control groups.

Group	N	X	Sd	Df	t	p
Experimental group	18	3.15	.79	17	.11	.90*
Control group	18	3.14	.74			

\*p> 0,05 (insignificant).

## FINDINGS AND COMMENTS

### Findings and comments regarding the first sub-problem

The first sub-problem of the research was presented as “Does the instruction of reading comprehension strategies affect the students’ level of using reading comprehension strategies?” To solve this problem, the Reading Strategies Scale was administered to the students both in the experimental group and the control group as pre-test.

The average values of pre-test strategy usage for the students in the experimental and the control groups are given in Table 3:

When Table 3 is analysed, the students in both the control group and experimental group used the strategies during reading the most and post-reading the least. In addition, the table shows that the average strategy use of control and experimental group students is close to each other before the experiment and that the students use reading strategies at medium-level.

When Table 4 is analyzed, it is seen that there is not a statistically meaningful difference between the average of pre-test strategy use of experimental and control group. This shows that the level of strategy use of both groups were close to each other before the experiment.

Reading Strategies Scale, which was formerly administered as a pre-test, was administered again at the end of the experimental study, both in the experimental group having been taught about reading strategies and in the control group.

The average values of post-test strategy usage for the students in the experimental and the control groups are given in Table 5:

When Table 5 is analyzed, at the end of the experiment, it is seen that the average of strategy use of experimental group students is more than the average of control group students. To test whether this difference is

statistically meaningful or not, t-test was conducted between the average of post-tests of control and experimental groups.

When Table 6 is analyzed, it is seen that there is a meaningful difference in the average of post-test strategy use of experimental group to whom strategies were taught and the average of control group. This situation shows that strategy use can be taught in a planned way and that instruction can direct the students to use strategies that would facilitate their learning.

When Table 7 is analyzed, a difference is seen in the average strategy use of experimental group students between pre- and post-test. The average strategy use of students, which was 3,15 before the application, had increased to 3,89 at the end of experiment. As a result of t-test, it is seen that the experimental group students who were taught strategies showed a statistically meaningful difference in the average of pre-test and post-test strategy use.

When Table 8 is analyzed, the control group showed an increase of .01, which does not cause a statistically meaningful difference. This implies that in the control group, in which traditional teaching methods were used, there was no change in the average strategy use.

### Findings and comments regarding the second sub-problem

The second sub-problem of the research was presented as “Does the use of reading comprehension strategies affect the students’ level of reading comprehension achievement?” To solve this sub-problem, the Reading Comprehension Achievement Test was administered in both the experimental group and the control group as pre-test and post-test, and the results were compared.

When Table 9 is analysed, it is seen that the average of pre-test of experimental group is 61,23 and the average of pre-test of control group is 59,48. As a result of t-test which was conducted to see whether this difference was statistically meaningful or not, it is seen that there is not a meaningful difference between the the average of pre-test of reading comprehension achievement.

When Table 10 is analysed, it is seen that the average of post-test of experimental group is 82,14 and the average of post-test of control group is 62,45. As a result of t-test which was conducted to see whether this difference was meaningful or not, it is seen that there is a

**Table 5.** The average value of post-test strategy usage for the experimental and control groups.

Group	Strategies	X	Sd	Group	Strategies	X	Sd
Experimental Group	Pre-reading	3.88	.614	Control Group	Pre-reading	3.24	.788
	During-reading	3.96	.608		During-reading	3.41	.793
	Post-reading	3.85	.609		Post-reading	2.81	.792
	Average	3.89	.611		Average	3.15	.791

**Table 6.** The comparison of average of post-test strategy use of experimental and control groups.

Group	N	X	Sd	Df	t	p
Experimental group	18	3.89	.61	17	3,12	.00*
Control group	18	3.15	.79			

\*p< 0,05 (significant).

**Table 7.** The comparison of the average of pre-test and post-test strategy use of experimental group.

Experimental group	N	X	Sd	Df	t	p
Pre-test	18	3.15	.79	17	3.12	.00*
Post-test	18	3.89	.61			

\*p< 0,05 (significant).

**Table 8.** The comparison of the average of pre-test and post-test strategy use of control group.

Control group	N	X	Sd	Df	t	p
Pre-test	18	3.14	.76	17	.11	.90
Post-test	18	3.15	.74			

p>0,05 (insignificant).

**Table 9.** The comparison between the experimental and control groups' average of pre-test of reading comprehension achievement test.

Group	N	X	Sd	Df	t	p
Experimental group	18	61.23	10.34	17	0.86	.41*
Control group	18	59.48	9.62			

\*p> 0,05 (insignificant).

meaningful difference between the average of post-test of reading comprehension achievement of experimental and control groups. This shows that reading strategy teaching in the experimental group has a positive effect on students' reading comprehension achievement.

When Table 11 is analysed, the achievement average which was 61.23 before the application increased to 82.14 at the end of experiment and it is seen that this difference is at a statistically meaningful level, implying

**Table 10.** The comparison between the experimental and control groups' average of post-test of reading comprehension achievement test.

Group	N	X	Sd	Df	t	p
Experimental Group	18	82.14	8.74	17	4.63	.00*
Control Group	18	62.45	9.44			

\*p< 0,05 (significant).

**Table 11.** Pre-test and post-test results of the experimental group in reading comprehension achievement test.

Experimental group	N	X	Sd	Df	t	p
Pre-test	18	61.23	10.34	17	4.65	.00*
Post-test	18	82.14	8.74			

\*p< 0,05 (significant).

**Table 12.** Pre-test and post-test results of the control group in reading comprehension achievement test.

Control group	N	X	Sd	Df	t	p
Pre-test	18	59.48	9.62	17	0.88	.39
Post-test	18	62.45	9.44			

p> 0,05 (insignificant).

an effect of reading comprehension strategies on the achievement of reading comprehension. Pre-test and post-test results of the students in the control group in Reading Comprehension Achievement Test are given in Table 12:

Table 12 shows an increase in reading comprehension achievement between pre- and posttest. However, this difference was not statistically significant.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Students from time to time face problems when reading texts in their native language or in a foreign language. In general under the problem of reading comprehension lies a lack of interest towards the subject of the text, not being able to understand a word or a sentence, not being able to establish connection between the beginning and

end of the sentence if the sentence is too long, not being able to relate background knowledge with the information in the text, not being able to make connections between the paragraphs, not being able to understand the gist of the text, not being able to reach the main idea of the text because of being lost in the details and examples of the text. Studies conducted on reading comprehension (Baker and Boonkit, 2004; Belet and Yaşar, 2007; Block, 1986; Duke and Pearson, 2002; Grabe, 1995; Janzen, 2001; Karatay, 2007; Mokhtari and Reichard, 2002; Nuttall, 1996; Pilten, 2007; Taraban, Rynearson, and Kerr, 2000; Salli, 2002; Temizkan, 2007) signal the importance of reading strategies to overcome the above mentioned problems.

When the findings of this research are analysed, it is seen that the students learning Turkish as a foreign language use reading comprehension strategies at an average level ( $X: 3,15$ ). Among all reading strategies, the students most frequently use during-reading strategies (guessing the unknown words, re-reading the difficult parts of the text, making use of the clues given in the text, using a dictionary, taking notes while reading, etc.) and pre-reading strategies (setting the purpose of reading, overviewing the text structure before reading, guessing the subject of the text by looking at the title, determining the points to focus on in the text, etc.), while they least commonly refer to post-reading strategies. The observation that students least frequently refer to post-reading strategies was also made in the studies carried out by Abdulaziz (2011), Anderson (2003), Erdem (2012) and Karatay (2007). The less frequent use of post-reading strategies by the students means that activities done once reading is over, such as returning to the text and interpreting it, summarizing the text, discussing and exchanging ideas with others to check and verify comprehension, are not involved as much as needed. As the basic three procedures of reading all have the same level of importance for the act of reading to achieve its purpose, teachers should introduce activities encouraging the students to use post-reading strategies as much as they do for pre-reading and during-reading strategies. In this study, as a result of experimental tasks, while the average strategy use of experimental group students increase (pre-test average: 3,15; post-test average: 3,89), there is no meaningful difference in the control group (pre-test average: 3,14; post-test average: 3,15). This outcome shows that strategy use can be taught and improved. When the positive correlation between reading comprehension achievement and the use of strategies is taken into consideration, it can be said that in order to improve the students' reading skills, teachers should know what reading strategies are, they should precisely determine when and how to utilize these strategies, and they should provide a model for the behavior of strategic reading. Besides the context of the target language, the activities that can improve the language learning process should take place (Anderson, 2003: 11; Janzen, 2001:

369; Nunan, 1996: 41).

Another conclusion of this research is at the end of experimental tasks there is an increase in the reading comprehension achievement in parallel with the increase in the average of strategy use of experimental group. In other words, as the strategy use of students increases, their reading comprehension achievement increases as well. This finding of the study corresponds with other research findings. In their study on the rate of successful students' strategy use in comparison to weak students, Taraban et al. (2000) reached the conclusion that successful students use more reading strategies in comparison to other students. Block (1986) also signals the difference in the use of reading strategies between successful and weak students. Belet and Yaşar (2007) have seen that there is a meaningful difference between reading comprehension and learning strategies. Pilten (2007) found out that main idea finding strategy affects reading comprehension in a positive way. Temizkan (2007), in his experimental study, in which he investigated the effects of cognitive reading strategies on the comprehension of informative texts in Turkish lessons, observed an increase in the reading comprehension achievement of experimental group. Anastasiou and Griva (2009), in their study in which they compare the use reading strategies of good and poor readers, reached the conclusion that good readers use cognitive and metacognitive strategies more efficiently and reading strategies have a positive effect on reading comprehension achievement. Bimmel and Schooten (2004) and Poole (2008) have also investigated the relationship between the reading strategies and reading comprehension achievement, and reached the conclusion that there is a significant relationship between the strategy use and reading comprehension achievement.

Considering the influence of the use of reading strategies on reading comprehension, students should be encouraged and guided to use reading strategies. If the students do not know what they are going to learn, which part of the offered learning material is important for them and which strategies they are going to use, they become dependent on the teacher. This situation is an obstacle especially for acquiring a comprehensive skill like a foreign language. For this reason, firstly there is a need for "teaching how to learn". Through strategy teaching the students will be better learners. The teachers' responsibility is to determine the strategies that the students use and need and adjust them to his/her own teaching method.

## LIMITATIONS

This study was conducted with only 36 students who learn Turkish at B2 level at Istanbul University Language Center. During the experiment, only the texts at B2 level are used. The reading achievement of students is

evaluated with a 50-item test which includes 2 articles, 2 essays and 1 narrative. In this study only one self-report measure of strategy use is implemented. For further studies, implementing this study with the students at different levels of the language, with different types of texts and with different measuring instruments can be suggested.

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