



IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION LEVEL AND STRATEGY USE THROUGH STRATEGIES-BASED READING INSTRUCTION

Dr. Mehmet Emin Uslu
Turkish Air Force NCO College, Turkey
eminusluu@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Zühal Çubukçu
Eskişehir Osmangazi University, Turkey
zahal_cubukcu@hotmail.com

Abstract

The aim of this study is to find out the effects of strategies-based reading instruction on the students' strategy use and reading comprehension level. The study which was conducted with a Solomon four groups experimental design also focused on the long-term impact of the instruction. English Reading Strategies Scale and Reading Comprehension Test were used as the instruments for gathering data. The sample consisted of 111 second class students enrolled in English class at a state college in Turkey. Fifty-seven students comprised the experimental group and fifty-four students served as the control group. Results gathered on the post tests revealed that strategies-based reading instruction increased the students' strategy use and led to a statistically important improvement in their comprehension level compared with the control group. Also, results gathered on the delayed test revealed that impact of strategies-based reading instruction on the strategy use and comprehension level is maintained.

Keywords: Strategies-based reading instruction, English reading strategies, Solomon four groups experimental design.

INTRODUCTION

In learning a foreign language process, individual differences can become very important. Learning a foreign language may differ from acquiring the mother language in many ways. Generally people follow similar procedures while acquiring the mother language; however we cannot mention these similarities in learning a foreign language process especially if the learner is adult or older than a certain age. Some of these differences are the need and motivation for learning the language, learning styles that learners have in the process, strategies that are used consciously to facilitate learning, the experiences that the individuals have in the past, gender, and the sociocultural environment (Benson & Gao, 2008; Macaro, 2001).

Though using a strategy in the language learning process is not an individual difference like age, gender and motivation, using of different strategies by different students indicates a strong connection between strategy use and individual differences (Benson & Gao, 2008; Dörnyei, 2005). Learning strategies are steps taken by the learners to facilitate their own learning. Strategies are very significant in language learning because they contribute active self-oriented participation into the process which is necessary for developing communicative competence. Strategies which are used correctly and appropriately increase competence and self-confidence and will lead to more effective language acquisition (Rubin, 2001; Wong & Nunan, 2007; Macaro, 2001).

Language learning is generally considered as a secret process; so, many conscious activities that the learners perform during this process can be ignored. Language teachers may sometimes disregard learning strategies that learners use to comprehend a text, process new information and learn



structures of the language (Macaro, 2001). As a teacher, knowing, using and teaching language learning strategies can make a very important contribution to comprehensible language input.

Comprehensible input is the most important factor that influences language learning, especially at the beginning level. When intensive and comprehensible input is ignored and the effort is put into teach only linguistic elements, the desired efficiency cannot be obtained. Comprehensible input revealed using authentic materials will contribute to development of reading and listening skills. In this process, knowing and using the reading strategies will be beneficial to language acquisition.

Reading strategies

Reading strategies may be defined as a conscious process that the reader follows to solve the problems he/she encounters while reading and enhance their comprehension of the text. Reading strategies:

- are conscious techniques and skills,
- are used to enhance reading comprehension,
- can be behavioral or mental (Pressley, 2006; Brantmeier, 2002).

Though readers use different strategies for different situations, summarizing, asking questions about the passage, answering the questions, collaboration, activation of the existing knowledge about the content, awareness of the text structure, using the visual clues given in the passage, making inference, making mental image, translation, restatement of the sentences, guessing, paraphrasing and note taking are the most commonly used reading strategies (Pressley, 2006; Brantmeier, 2002).

Reading strategies are divided into two main groups: cognitive reading strategies and metacognitive reading strategies. Cognitive strategies like guessing the unknown word from the content, asking questions, finding the main idea and skimming perform directly on the input to make it more comprehensible. On the other hand, metacognitive strategies are about self-awareness and awareness of the passage. Setting goals and objectives, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-awareness, organizing and using multiple strategies to enhance learning are some of the metacognitive reading strategies (Pressley, 2006; Brantmeier, 2002; Dörnyei, 2005).

Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) divide the reading strategies into three sub-categories: global reading strategies, problem solving reading strategies and support reading strategies. Global reading strategies are related to the overall analysis of the text like guessing, evaluating and translating. Problem solving strategies are used to solve the problems which develop in understanding textual information like adjusting reading speed, reviewing the text, thinking about the text, paraphrasing, analyzing the information presented in the text, checking to see if the guesses about the text are right or wrong. Support strategies are functional strategies like taking notes while reading, reading aloud, using reference material, using tables, figure and pictures, underlying or circling information.

Strategies-Based Reading Instruction

Strategies-based instruction (SBI) is a student-centered approach and it consists of two main components: explicit and implicit instruction. In explicit instruction, students are taught when, how and why the strategies can be used directly in a separate or integrated sessions. Explicit strategy instruction essentially involves following steps: development of awareness, modeling, practice, evaluation of the strategies used and transferring to new tasks (Cohen, 1996; Chamot, 2004). One of the prominent features of SBI is that responsibility of learners increases when they move from one step to another. Also, according to the learners' knowledge and experience about the objective strategies teachers can adjust their time allocation and support that they give in each step (Nguyen & Gu).

Oxford et all. (2014) suggest many ways of strategy instructions to learners: direct strategy instruction, strategy instruction integrated into the lesson material, strategy instruction in the separate courses, strategy guidance woven into language textbooks and strategy guidance implicitly.

In the separate strategy instruction, teacher defines the target strategy, demonstrates its use as a model, asks students to give examples of their own learning experiences, guides the group or class discussion on the rationale behind the use and effectiveness of the strategy, and encourages students to use different strategies. Those who defend this instruction way argue that the target strategies are not specific to the subject and can be adapted to different topics. It's also more useful to focus on just the target strategy rather than focusing on both the subject and the strategy (Chamot & O'Malley, 1996; Cohen, 1996).

Another way of strategy training is to integrate the target strategies into the lesson materials. The teacher first determines the target strategies and then organizes activities within the course material to teach them. Those who defend this instruction way argue that learning in a context is more effective and permanent and it will be easier to transfer the strategies taught in an authentic linguistic content to the similar topics (Grabe, 2009; Macaro, 2001; Chamot & O'Malley, 1996; Cohen, 1996; Donsereau, 1985).

Many researchers agree on the importance of explicit instruction in strategy training. However, there is less agreement on the issue of whether strategies instruction should be integrated into the language curriculum or taught separately (Chamot, 2004; Oxford & Leaver, 1996).

Strategy training shouldn't be postponed until advanced level, because at the beginning level, students also need learning strategies to enhance their learning. Most probably, during the strategy instruction it will be inevitable to use first language for beginning level (Macaro, 2001; Wenden, 2002; Oxford et al., 2014). The main objective of the strategy training is to help students use the strategies consciously at first, and then gain autonomy (Anderson, 2005). The goal of this kind of instruction is to help the learners (Gascoigne, 2005):

- become more aware about how they learn more effectively,
- realize the ways in which they enhance their own learning,
- become more responsible for their own learning process,
- become more effective learners by individualizing the process.

In this study, the objective reading strategies are integrated with the reading activities and each session is designed according to the following O'Malley's strategies-based instruction procedures.

Table 1: Structure of a Strategies-Based Reading Instruction (SBRI) Session

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Preparation | |
| Presentation | Defining and explaining the objective strategy Modeling the objective strategy |
| Practice | Group discussion Group work / Collaboration / Think aloud |
| Evaluation | Discussion of the objective strategy in the classroom Keeping diary about the strategy Evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy |
| Expanding | Similar tasks for the assignment Following session |

There are some intervention studies to confirm the effect of strategy training on reading performance and strategy use. For example, Gürses (2011) carried out a study in which she tried to find out the effect of the reading strategy instruction based on Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach on the reading comprehension level and strategy use. Results of this study, which was designed as an action research, showed that strategies-based reading instruction affect the learners' comprehension level and strategy use in a positive way.

In an intervention study which was designed to ascertain the effect of the separate strategy instruction on reading comprehension achievement Aghaie and Zang (2012) revealed that strategy

instruction increased the learners' strategy use and autonomy significantly in acquiring reading skills. Also, Takallou (2011) and Whichadee (2011) came up with the similar result from their studies that strategies-based reading instruction increased the strategy use (especially the metacognitive ones) and significantly contributed to the learners' reading comprehension level.

In this section, we have reviewed what the literature has said on the strategies-based reading instruction and we found out the following highlights.

- Strategies-based reading instruction increases the students' strategy use (Kashef, Pandian & Khameneh, 2014; Takallou, 2011; Gürses, 2011; Razi, 2010).
- Strategies-based reading instruction improved the students' reading comprehension level (Aghaie & Zhang, 2012; Takallou, 2011; Whichadee, 2011, Gürses, 2011; Çubukçu, 2008).

The aim of this study is to find out the effects of strategies-based reading instruction which is integrated into the lesson material on strategy use, gaining autonomy and reading comprehension level.

Hypothesis of the Research

H1: Strategies-based reading instruction increases students' strategy use.

a: Strategies-based reading instruction increases students' global reading strategies use.

b: Strategies-based reading instruction increases students' problem solving strategies use.

c: Strategies-based reading instruction increases students' support reading strategies use.

H2: Strategies-based reading instruction increases students' reading comprehension level.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was designed as an experimental research and the Solomon four groups experimental design was used as the pattern. In Solomon four groups design, the subjects are assigned to two experimental and two control groups randomly. One of the experimental and one of the control groups are pretested on the dependent variable. The next step is to administer the intervention to the experimental groups but not to the control groups. Lastly, each group is posttested on the dependent variable (Kirk, 2009). The aim of the Solomon four groups experimental design is to control the effect of the pretest on the dependent variable. Posttests results of the experimental and control groups are compared. If two experimental groups have the similar results, and the two control groups have the similar results, it means that pretest doesn't have any effect on the dependent variable. However, if two pretested groups' results are different from the others, it means that pretest has an effect on the dependent variable (Neuman, 2006).

Research Sample

The sample consisted of beginner level 111 second class students enrolled in English class at a state college in Turkey. Fifty-seven students from this group comprised the experimental group and received strategies-based reading instruction for twelve weeks. Fifty-four students served as the control group. The objective reading strategies were incorporated into the regular classroom learning activities as the two sessions for each week.

Table 2: Characteristics of Research Sample

| Group | Program | N | Total |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|----|-------|
| Experimental Group 1 | Aircraft Technology | 27 | |
| Experimental Group 2 | Electronics and Communication | 30 | 57 |
| Control Group 1 | Aircraft Technology | 24 | 54 |
| Control Group 2 | Electronics and Communication | 30 | |

Instruments

English Reading Strategies Scale: English Reading Strategies Scale (Mokhtari, & Sheorey, 2002) is a 5-point Likert type reading strategies scale with 30 items. The scale contains three dimensions, namely: (i) global reading strategies, (ii) problem solving reading strategies and, (iii) support reading strategies. Its structural validity was analyzed in 120 students via main component analysis, and factor loads varied between .54 and .74. The Cronbach Alpha internal validity coefficients of the three dimensions varied between .72 and .77.

Reading Comprehension Test: The test is one of the parts of the proficiency test used by Oxford University Press. It is a multiple-choice achievement test with 20 questions about 8 different reading texts. Its structural validity was analyzed in 230 students via test and item analysis. The differentiation of the items varied between .35 and .58, and item difficulties are between .32 and .55. The KR-20 validity of the test is found to be .86.

Procedure

During the first stage of the study, the teachers who would instruct the reading strategies-based reading program were trained about the program and reading strategies for six sessions. After the teacher training program, the pilot version of the program was applied for four weeks in a group which was equivalent in feature to the research sample. Then, English Reading Strategies Scale and Reading Comprehension Test were applied to one of the experimental and control groups as a pretest. Table 3 displays the results of the independent t-test which was used to see if there was a difference between the experimental and control group in terms of the English Reading Strategies Scale and Reading Comprehension Test. According to the results, there wasn't any significant difference between the experimental and control groups ($p > .05$). Therefore, it could be deduced from this result that experimental and control groups were similar in terms of pretests scores.

Table 3: T-test Results of English Reading Strategies Scale and Reading Comprehension Test Means of Experimental and Control Groups

| Factors | Group | N | X | SD | T | P |
|------------------------------------|--------------|----|-------|-------|------|------|
| Global Reading Strategies | Experimental | 27 | 41.66 | 8.09 | .182 | .856 |
| | Control | 24 | 41.25 | 8.19 | | |
| Problem Solving Reading Strategies | Experimental | 27 | 29.88 | 5.94 | 1.22 | .227 |
| | Control | 24 | 27.87 | 5.77 | | |
| Support Reading Strategies | Experimental | 27 | 5.73 | 5.73 | .821 | .417 |
| | Control | 24 | 5.98 | 5.98 | | |
| Reading Strategies (Total) | Experimental | 27 | 96.33 | 18.34 | .211 | .833 |
| | Control | 24 | 95.25 | 18.17 | | |
| Reading Comprehension Test | Experimental | 27 | 26.66 | 10.53 | .00 | 1.00 |
| | Control | 24 | 26.66 | 9.40 | | |

DF=49

After the application of the pretest, the instruction of the objective reading strategies to the experimental groups began. The strategies were integrated with the 12 reading texts of the book "More True Stories" and each session is designed according to O'Malley's strategies-based instruction procedures: preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation and expanding. The experimental part of the study continued for 12 weeks, 2 hours per week. In each two-hour period one of the reading texts was taught. Summarizing, asking questions about the passage, answering the questions, collaboration, activation of the existing knowledge about the content, awareness of the text structure, using the visual clues given in the passage, making inference, making mental image, translation,

restatement of the sentences, guessing, paraphrasing and note taking are the reading strategies that were taught during the study.

After the two-week period, English Reading Strategies Scale and Reading Comprehension Test were applied to two experimental and control groups as the posttests. The experimental process was completed by applying retention tests to all groups two months after the instruction period. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to analyze the data gathered from posttests and retention tests scores. In order to prevent the effect of the pretests on the posttests and retention tests the significance of the differences between the means of two experimental and two control groups' posttests and retention tests scores were adjusted using the pretests results.

FINDINGS

Findings About The Hypothesis 1: Strategies-Based Reading Instruction Increases Students' Strategy Use.

Findings About Posttests Scores

Table 4: The Results of the Covariance Analysis for the Reading Strategies Scale Posttest Mean Scores, Adjusted According to the Pretest Scores

| Scale | Source | Sum Squares | of df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | Eta-Squared |
|------------------------------------|---------|-----------------------|-------|-------------|---------|------|-------------|
| Global Reading Strategies | Model | 3258.527 ^a | 2 | 1629.264 | 52.400 | .000 | .63 |
| | Pretest | .172 | 1 | .172 | .006 | .941 | .000 |
| | Group | 3249.602 | 1 | 3249.602 | 104.513 | .000 | .63 |
| | Error | 1492.453 | 48 | 31.093 | | | |
| | Total | 4750.980 | 50 | | | | |
| Problem Solving Reading Strategies | Model | 1551.088a | 2 | 775.544 | 42.167 | .000 | .63 |
| | Pretest | 72.629 | 1 | 72.629 | 3.949 | .053 | .076 |
| | Group | 1485.403 | 1 | 1485.403 | 80.762 | .000 | .62 |
| | Error | 882.834 | 48 | 18.392 | | | |
| | Total | 2433.922 | 50 | | | | |
| Support Reading Strategies | Model | 1442.214a | 2 | 721.107 | 39.043 | .000 | .62 |
| | Pretest | 2.835 | 1 | 2.835 | .153 | .697 | .003 |
| | Group | 1410.971 | 1 | 1410.971 | 76.395 | .000 | .61 |
| | Error | 886.531 | 48 | 18.469 | | | |
| | Total | 2328.745 | 50 | | | | |
| Reading Strategies (Total) | Model | 17930.706a | 2 | 8965.353 | 55.494 | .000 | .69 |
| | Pretest | 115.961 | 1 | 115.961 | .718 | .401 | .04 |
| | Group | 17911.748 | 1 | 17911.748 | 110.870 | .000 | .70 |
| | Error | 7754.706 | 48 | 161.556 | | | |
| | Total | 25685.412 | 50 | | | | |

In Table 4, the results of the covariance analysis for Reading Strategies Scale posttest scores which were adjusted according to the pretest scores were displayed. There was a statically significant difference in reading strategies mean scores of the experimental and control groups in favor of the experimental group after adjusting for pretest differences between groups. This difference supports hypothesis H1, H1a, H1b and H1c. These results show that strategies-based reading instruction increases the students' global reading strategies use, problem solving reading strategies use, support reading strategies use and as a whole reading strategies use. The strength of the relationship assessed with Eta-square was moderately strong with the treatment variable accounting for 70% of the variance in total reading strategies use, % 61 of the variance in support reading strategies use, %62 of the variance in problem solving reading strategies use and % 63 of the variance in global reading strategies use.

Findings About Retention Test Scores

In Table 5, the results of the covariance analysis for Reading Strategies Scale retention test scores which were adjusted according to the pretest scores were displayed. There was a statically significant difference in reading strategies mean scores of the experimental and control groups in favor of the experimental group after adjusting for pretest differences between groups. This difference supports hypothesis H1, H1a, H1b and H1c. These results show that strategies-based reading instruction increases the students' global reading strategies use, problem solving reading strategies use, support reading strategies use and as a whole reading strategies use. The strength of the relationship assessed with Eta-square was moderately strong with the treatment variable accounting for 78% of the variance in total reading strategies use, % 64 of the variance in support reading strategies use, %64 of the variance in problem solving reading strategies use and % 67 of the variance in global reading strategies use.

Table 5: The Results of the Covariance Analysis for the Reading Strategies Scale Retention Test Mean Scores, Adjusted According to the Pretest Scores

| Scale | Source | Sum Squares | of df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | Eta-Squared |
|------------------------------------|---------|-----------------------|-------|-------------|---------|------|-------------|
| Global Reading Strategies | Model | 2457.538 ^a | 2 | 1228.769 | 49.432 | .000 | .67 |
| | Pretest | .017 | 1 | .017 | .001 | .979 | .000 |
| | Group | 2451.938 | 1 | 2451.938 | 98.639 | .000 | .67 |
| | Error | 1193.168 | 48 | 24.858 | | | |
| | Total | 95897.000 | 50 | | | | |
| Problem Solving Reading Strategies | Model | 1128.635 ^a | 2 | 564.317 | 44.734 | .000 | .65 |
| | Pretest | 43.663 | 1 | 43.663 | 3.461 | .069 | .067 |
| | Group | 1089.571 | 1 | 1089.571 | 86.371 | .000 | .64 |
| | Error | 605.522 | 48 | 12.615 | | | |
| | Total | 1734.157 | 50 | | | | |
| Support Reading Strategies | Model | 1179.750 ^a | 2 | 589.875 | 44.035 | .000 | .65 |
| | Pretest | 3.801 | 1 | 3.801 | .284 | .597 | .006 |
| | Group | 1158.293 | 1 | 1158.293 | 86.467 | .000 | .64 |
| | Error | 642.995 | 48 | 13.396 | | | |
| | Total | 1822.745 | 50 | | | | |
| Reading Strategies (Total) | Model | 17993.185 | 2 | 8996.593 | 86.607 | .000 | .78 |
| | Pretest | 10.648 | 1 | 10.648 | .103 | .750 | .002 |
| | Group | 17993.119 | 1 | 17983.119 | 173.118 | .000 | .78 |
| | Error | 4986.148 | 48 | 103.878 | | | |
| | Total | 19421.176 | 50 | | | | |

Findings about the Hypothesis 2: Strategies-based reading instruction increases students' reading comprehension level.

Findings about posttests scores

Table 6: The Results of the Covariance Analysis for the Reading Comprehension Test Posttest Mean Scores, Adjusted According to the Pretest Scores

| Source | Sum Squares | of df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | Eta-Squared |
|---------|-------------|-------|-------------|--------|------|-------------|
| Model | 2103.890 | 2 | 1051.945 | 6.665 | .003 | .217 |
| Pretest | 44.385 | 1 | 44.385 | .281 | .598 | .006 |
| Group | 2059.504 | 1 | 2059.504 | 13.049 | .001 | .214 |
| Error | 7575.522 | 48 | 157.823 | | | |
| Total | 9679.412 | 50 | | | | |

In Table 6, the results of the covariance analysis for Reading Comprehension Test posttest scores which were adjusted according to the pretest scores were displayed. There was a statically significant difference in reading comprehension test mean scores of the experimental and control groups in favor of the experimental group after adjusting for pretest differences between groups. This difference supports hypothesis H2. These results show that strategies-based reading instruction increases the students' comprehension level. The strength of the relationship assessed with Eta-square was moderately strong with the treatment variable accounting for 21% of the variance in reading comprehension level.

Findings about retention test scores

Table 7: The Results of the Covariance Analysis for the Reading Comprehension Test Retention Test Mean Scores, Adjusted According to the Pretest Scores

| Source | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | Eta-Squared |
|---------------|----------------|----|-------------|--------|------|-------------|
| Model | 2440.021 | 2 | 1220.010 | 7.813 | .001 | .246 |
| Pretest Group | 133.893 | 1 | 133.893 | .857 | .359 | .018 |
| Error | 2306.127 | 1 | 2306.127 | 14.769 | .000 | .235 |
| Total | 7495.273 | 48 | 156.152 | | | |
| | 9935.294 | 50 | | | | |

In Table 7, the results of the covariance analysis for Reading Comprehension Test retention test scores which were adjusted according to the pretest scores were displayed. There was a statically significant difference in reading comprehension test mean scores of the experimental and control groups in favor of the experimental group after adjusting for pretest differences between groups. This difference supports hypothesis H2. These results show that strategies-based reading instruction increases the students' comprehension level. The strength of the relationship assessed with Eta-square was moderately strong with the treatment variable accounting for 24% of the variance in reading comprehension level.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the study show that strategies-based reading instruction increases students' strategy use and comprehension level. The eta-square values show that the experimental application significantly explained the variability of the post and retention test scores.

With this study, it was found that strategies-based reading instruction has a significant effect on the two dependent variables, namely strategy use and comprehension level. According to the post and retention tests scores, after the experimental application students' strategy use considerably improved in behalf of the experimental group. This result of the study was very similar to the previous study results that had revealed strategies-based instruction improved the strategy use (Çubukçu, 2008; Gürses, 2011; Arpacioğlu, 2007; Çiçekoğlu, 2003; Kashaf ve ark., 2014). The result of this study that strategies-based instruction improved the students' comprehension level was also consistent with the other study results (Durgun, 2010; Razi, 2010; Gürses, 2011; Vardar, 2011; Aslan, 2007; Kürüm, 2012; Arpacioğlu, 2007; Çiçekoğlu, 2003; Takallou, 2011; Aghaie ve Zang, 2011; Whichadee, 2011).

The main objective of the strategy training is to help the students use the strategies consciously at first, and then gain autonomy (Anderson, 2009). The goal of this kind of instruction is to help the learners become more self-awareness about how they learn more effectively, realize the ways in which they enhance their own learning, become more responsible for their own learning process and become more effective learners by individualizing the process. With the application of the strategies-based reading instruction the study can be said to achieve this objective. The use of the strategies increases during the experimental process, and this increase continued after the application. The results of the covariance analysis confirmed that strategies-based reading instruction has % 70 effects



on the reading strategies use after the experimental process. This amount became %78 after the retention test which was conducted two months later.

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