

The Effect of Reading Strategies Instruction on EFL Learners' Reading Performances

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Abstract

This study, using pretest-intervention-posttest, investigated whether instructing English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' in the use of reading strategies when they read English passages affects their English reading performances. The participants were 51 Turkish learners of English, who were at elementary level of language proficiency, based on the results of the Oxford Quick Placement Test. The whole treatment/control period lasted for 20 sessions during 10 weeks on a Reading course. The experimental group (n = 26) received instruction in reading strategies (i.e., previewing, finding the main idea, scanning, identifying examples, identifying definitions, identifying time and sequence words, reading numerical tables, making inferences, reading statistical tables, distinguishing fact from opinion) and the control group (n = 25) received instruction based on traditional teaching methods (i.e., reading, paraphrasing, translating, and answering the exercises). Data were collected via a reading proficiency test. The result of the independent samples t-test showed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control one.

Keywords: English as a foreign language (EFL), Reading strategies, English reading performance

Introduction

Reading process is conceptualized as the decoding of printed symbols into phonological forms in order to comprehend the meaning of the printed passage. However, a reader also needs to have sufficient vocabulary knowledge and the knowledge of how to make the sentences and how to process the information obtained from the passage with prior knowledge (Koda, 2007). As a result, linguistic knowledge, world knowledge, personal experiences, and necessary strategies are all essential factors to comprehend a text (Bouvet & Close, 2006).

Grabe (2002) argued that "reading for comprehension is the primary purpose for reading" (p. 277). Earlier studies have shown that teaching reading strategies to second language (L2) students can help improve students' performance on tests of comprehension and recall (Janzen, 2002). For example, Carrell (1985) found that training on the top-level rhetorical organization of expository texts significantly increased the amount of information that English language learners could recall. Recently, sustained silent reading in foreign language education has proved to help English as Foreign Language (EFL) students make considerable gains in both vocabulary and reading (Krashen & Mason, 2017). Moreover, implementing teaching methods such as multimodality in language teaching and learning, say via Films, is extensively utilized as a teaching material in foreign language (FL) classes, and research has shown its effectiveness on developing L2 students' comprehension skills in reading (Sarıçoban & Yürük, 2016).

As for the factors playing a role in developing a long-term pleasure reading habit in English language, Cho and Krashen (2016) found that long-term readers are first stimulated to read through a pleasant reading experience; they, then, “have access books and time and a place to read; they select their own reading material, feel free to stay with certain authors and genres if they want to, and do not profit from tests, workbook exercises and incentives” (p. 1).

Among the afore-mentioned factors, reading strategies are very important. Reading strategies contribute positively to learning process when they are employed effectively in various contexts (Grabe, 2009). Significantly positive relationships have been found among language learning strategy use and language proficiency in FL learners (Gahungu, 2007). A second language (L2) reader needs to utilize a number of reading strategies to comprehend a text (Kern, 1989; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). By consciously employing reading strategies, L2 readers will be good, active readers who have specific and clear objectives in mind, and utilize the strategies to regulate and enhance their comprehension (Zhang & Wu, 2009).

Therefore, explicit teaching of L2 reading strategies has been recommended (Williams & Burden, 1997) in order to help L2 learners increase their consciousness of the L2 reading comprehension strategies (Davis, 2010; Wright & Brown, 2006), enhance their performance on exams, and become more autonomous readers (Carrell, Pharis, & Liberto, 1989). Considering the importance of L2 reading strategies in successful L2 reading, a vast number of research has been conducted and indicated a strong positive relationship between reading strategies and reading comprehension achievement (Naseri & Zaferanieh, 2012; Tavakoli, 2014). Several studies also proved the effective role of teaching L2 reading strategies in improving L2 reading skills (Aghaie & Zhang, 2012; Akkakoson, 2013; Bakhtiari, 2020; Dabarera, Renandya, & Zhang, 2014; Fathi & Afzali, 2020; Liao & Wang, 2018; Manoli, Papadopolou, & Metallidou, 2016; Motallebzadeh & Mamdoohi, 2011; Shih & Reynolds, 2018; Zhang, 2008).

In Turkey, Cesur (2011) explored the relationship between the Turkish university EFL learners’

language learning strategies and their reading comprehension achievement. The results indicated that language learning strategies predicted the EFL learners’ achievement in reading comprehension. Cesur investigated the relationship and effects of cognitive, memory, and compensation learning strategies via Oxford’s (1990) Strategy Inventory of Language Learning and an English Language Placement Test, made by the researcher. However, in the present study, the researcher investigated the effects of direct explicit instruction of reading strategies on Turkish EFL learners’ reading performances.

In short, despite the pedagogical importance of the mentioned issue, it is under-investigated in the context of Turkey; therefore, the researcher of the present study investigated this issue and addressed the following question:

Is there any significant difference between the reading performance of the group that receives reading strategies instruction (RSI) and the group that receives traditional instruction of reading skill (TIRS)?

Method Participants

Seventy-eight EFL learners in Turkey, who were studying at elementary level, were informed about the research and invited to participate. Sixty-nine of them accepted. They were given the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). The score of 61 learners ranged from 16 to 23 out of 40; they were at the elementary level, based on Geranpayeh’s (2003) guideline. Ten out of 61 subjects agreed to participate in the test-retest process to validate the pre- and post-tests of reading proficiency, and the rest (51 subjects) participated in the study. Thus, those 51 learners (35 females and 16 males) were recruited as the participants and were assigned randomly to an experimental group, named, Reading Strategies Instruction (RSI) (20 females and 6 males) and a control one that received the traditional instruction of reading skill, including reading, paraphrasing, translating, and answering the exercises, (TIRS) (15 females and 10 males). The participants’ native language was Turkish and their ages ranged from 18 to 26 with an average age of 21.59 years (SD = 2.459).

Design

The study was a pretest-treatment-posttest as well as a comparison-group one. There were two independent variables called 'Reading Strategies Instruction' and 'Traditional Instruction of Reading Skill'. There was a dependent variable named, 'English Reading Performance'.

Instruments

To ensure the homogeneity of the participants in terms of their language proficiency level, the Oxford Quick Placement (OPT) was utilized.

The textbook *Inside Reading 1* (2nd edition) (Burgmeier, 2012) was mainly utilized for the training in selected English reading strategies. The experimental group received instruction in the following English reading comprehensive strategies: previewing, finding the main idea, scanning, identifying examples, identifying definitions, identifying time and sequence words, reading numerical tables, making inferences, reading statistical tables, distinguishing fact from opinion.

Tests of the book *Inside Reading* (2nd edition), prepared by Oxford University Press were downloaded from Inside Reading Teacher's Site (<https://elt.oup.com/teachers/insidereading/?cc=ir&sellLanguage=en>). Ten reading texts with their multiple choice questions were selected from the mentioned repertoire of tests. Five texts with their 20 multiple-choice questions were selected for the pretest and five different texts with their 20 multiple-choice questions were selected for the posttest. Therefore, each pre and posttest of reading proficiency consisted of five passages with 20 multiple-choice questions. The time allotted for taking each test was 50 minutes. The correct answer to each item received one point. Scoring of the items was done through coding the correct and incorrect answers (1) and (0), respectively. Each prepared test of reading proficiency was administered twice (after a lapse of 12 days) to the group of ten individuals (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991); subsequently, the reliability of each test was measured running the Pearson correlation. The time lapse of 12 days was decided according to Henning (1987, as cited in Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991). The Cronbach alpha coefficient, utilized to measure the reliability of the

pretest and posttest of reading proficiency, were .990 and .982 respectively, indicating a very good reliability (Pallant, 2013).

Data Collection Procedure

After administering the OPT and selecting the total participants, the pretest of reading performance was given and then the 51 participants were randomly assigned to two groups and received their intervention during 20 sessions (two sessions in each week, totally during 10 weeks). Each session lasted for one and half hour. The experimental group received instruction in the following English reading comprehensive strategies: previewing, finding the main idea, scanning, identifying examples, identifying definitions, identifying time and sequence words, reading numerical tables, making inferences, reading statistical tables, distinguishing fact from opinion. The control group received instruction based on traditional teaching methods (i.e., reading, paraphrasing, translating, and answering the exercises). Finally, on session 22 of the research study, the participants were given the posttest of reading performance.

Data Analyses and Results

The Normality Tests

The assumption of normality was examined using both the graphic of histogram, and numerical ways as Larson-Hall (2010) recommended. They indicated that the data were normally distributed. The values of skewness and kurtosis statistics were within ± 1 , based on Phakiti (2010); additionally, the outcomes of the ratio of skewedness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors were within the ranges of ± 1.96 , based on Field (2013). That's why the parametric t-test was used.

Ensuring the Homogeneity of the Groups

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of the RSI and TIRS groups in OPT. There was no significant difference in scores for the RSI group ($M = 19.65$, $SD = 1.979$, $N = 26$) and TIRS group ($M = 19.68$, $SD = 2.056$, $N = 25$); $t(49) = -.046$, $p = .963$. Therefore, the two groups were homogeneous in terms of their English language proficiency levels.

Then another independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of the RSI and TIRS groups in pretest of reading performance. There was no significant difference in scores for the RSI group ($M = 12.50$, $SD = 1.530$, $N = 26$) and TIRS group ($M = 12.60$, $SD = 1.633$, $N = 25$); $t(49) = -.226$, $p = .822$. Therefore, the two groups were homogeneous in terms of their English reading performances.

Finding of the Research Question

The study investigated whether there is any significant difference between the reading performance of the RSI group and the TIRS group. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of the RSI and TIRS groups in posttest of reading proficiency. There was a significant difference in scores for the RSI group ($M = 17.50$, $SD = 1.530$, $N = 26$) and TIRS group ($M = 15.40$, $SD = 1.633$, $N = 25$); $t(49) = 4.742$, $p = .000$. The mean scores indicate that the RSI group significantly outperformed the TIRS group in their reading performances. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 2.100, 95% CI: 1.210 to 2.990) was large (Cohen's $d = 1.327$), based on Cohen (1988).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated whether instructing Turkish EFL learners' in the use of reading strategies when they read English passages affects their English reading performances. The result showed that the group that received direct explicit instruction of reading strategies significantly outperformed the group that did not receive such instruction, suggesting that the reading strategy instruction was effective in enhancing L2 reading comprehension of the Turkish EFL learners. The finding of the current study is not in agreement with the findings of Shang (2010) who found that reading strategies were not related to reading achievement. Furthermore, the finding of the present study does not corroborate those of (Mehrpour, Sadighi, & Bagheri, 2012) who indicated that strategy reading instruction did not foster the Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension.

However, the result of this study is in line with several studies (Aghaie & Zhang, 2012; Akkakoson,

2013; Bakhtiari, 2020; Dabarera et al., 2014; Fathi & Afzali, 2020; Liao & Wang, 2018; Manoli et al., 2016; Motalebzadeh & Mamdoohi, 2011; Shih & Reynolds, 2018; Zhang, 2008). The improved reading performance of the participants of experimental group in the present study also confirms the findings of Yang (2006), suggesting that L2 learners can use reading strategies to compensate for their reading shortcomings and lack of language knowledge in understanding an L2 text. Explicit instruction of reading strategies can help L2 readers obtain effective reading habits, whereby they will be able to enhance their comprehension abilities (Fathi & Afzali, 2020). Such effective reading habits are not naturally acquired via implicit learning. Therefore, L2 readers need to be taught how to employ these reading strategies in their own reading process (Fathi & Afzali, 2020).

As a result, it is recommended that EFL instructors teach reading strategies to foster reading performance of their students (Ghaith, 2017) although it can be a burden for the teachers who are not adequately supported by teacher education programs (Fathi & Behzadpour, 2011; Khatib & Fathi, 2014). Moreover, it is worth noting that the EFL teachers themselves need to be trained on how to teach strategies effectively (Zhang & Wu, 2009). Consequently, teacher education programs need to plan to prepare pre-service EFL teachers to apply reading strategies in their own classroom (Fathi & Afzali, 2020).

As the concluding remarks, the researcher of the present study recommends some ideas for further research in this area, particularly in the context of Turkey. First, further studies should employ larger samples with various language proficiency levels to raise the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, longitudinal designs and delayed posttests can be utilized to reveal long-term effects of reading strategy instruction. Finally, interviews can be done with the participants in future studies to investigate the attitudes of the EFL learners towards the explicit instruction of reading strategies.

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