A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF READING STRATEGIES USED BY PROSPECTIVE LANGUAGE TEACHERS[1]

Research article

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Abstract

The study investigated reading strategies used by prospective foreign language teachers studying at a foreign language department of an education faculty in Turkey. It was explored how these strategies differ in view of the variables such as gender, department, education experience, and proficiency levels. For this aim, the Reading Strategy Use Scale is implemented to prospective foreign language teachers studying at a German and English as a Foreign Language Department in a state university in Turkey. The data were collected from prospective foreign language teachers majoring at two departments (English and German) during the academic year 2020 – 2021. The data were analyzed by using the PASW Statistics 18 program. As the data showed normal distribution, the parametric statistical analyses Independent Samples t-Test and one - way ANOVA were used. The findings revealed that reading strategies used by prospective language teachers differ in terms of gender, but do not differ in terms of the department majored. Regarding education experience there were significant differences in planning and assisting strategies. Sophomores and seniors use more assisting strategies, while preparatory class student's use less planning strategies compared to freshmen. Furthermore, prospective foreign language teachers with proficiency levels of C use more reading strategies in the construction category compared to A level. Based on the findings of this study, it can be recommended to provide explicit instruction on reading strategies in language teacher education.

Keywords: Reading, reading strategies, language learning, prospective language teachers.

1. Introduction

In language education, it is of vital importance that learners develop skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Out of these skills, reading is outstanding as it functions in two ways: as a means of learning a language and reading as a purpose. Because of its importance, reading gets special attention in literature. It is emphasized that "High level of reading proficiency guarantees a more effective process of cognition not only linguistically, but socially" (Kung, 2017, p. 1-2). Besides that, when learners are exposed to comprehensible input by reading texts in the target language, their achievements are higher compared to learners' without such an exposure. Hence, reading has positive effects on learners' achievement (Krashen, 2007; Krashen, 2013). Moreover, written text incorporates various aspects of language and culture, which can be explored by learners and can enrich their learning experiences.

Reading in general is described as "a complex undertaking and an impressive achievement" (Afflerbach, Pearson and Paris, 2008, p. 364). This statement refers to reading

in a native language; nevertheless reading in a foreign language seems to be a much more complex undertaking and impressive achievement as texts need to be decoded and messages understood in a foreign language. However, the view that reading is just text decoding and extract meaning is highly debated in literature, as it takes not the process but the product into consideration. It is emphasized that the nature of reading is much more sophisticated as to confine it to simple reading definition, and it is a dynamic process that needs readers' active involvements (Roomy and Alhawsawi, 2019, p.34). From this point of view, reading in a foreign language is a process, which requires learners' active involvement and the ability to extract the intended meaning in a desired way. Learners' prior knowledge, interpretation capacity, knowledge in grammar, vocabulary and syntax are decisive and crucial components of this process (Lutjeharms, 2010, p.977 - 978). Yet, to understand messages containing aspects of language are a challenging issue for learners. Moreover, "As reading is viewed as a dynamic process not just a final product, it means that the process of reading calls for a wide range of strategies of which most inefficient readers are unaware" (Roomy and Alhawsawi, 2019, p.34). In this regard, strategies assist readers during the reading process and facilitate reading comprehension. Besides that, strategies can make learning efficient and effective (Oxford, Lavine and Crookall, 1989). But, what are strategies?

When the meaning of strategies is examined in literature, it is evident that there are various definitions. Rubin (1975) defines it as "The techniques or devices, which a learner may use to acquire knowledge" (p.43). And, Garner explains it as "generally deliberate, planful activities undertaken by active learners, many times to remedy perceived cognitive failure" (1987, p. 50; cited in Tuncer, 2011, p.13). Oxford (1993) states it as "Tools for active, self-directed involvement that is necessary for developing L2 communicative ability" (p. 175). But, reading strategies in special are defined as "Mental operations involved when readers approach a text effectively and make sense of what they read" (Barnett, 1988, p. 150). Afflerbach, Pearson and Paris state it as "Deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meanings of text" (2008, p. 368).

When the literature on reading strategies are viewed, it is evident that reading strategies are classified in different ways. Some researchers (Barnett, 1988; Saricoban, 2002) suggest reading strategies for three different stages: Pre -, while - and post- reading. Among suggested pre – reading activities are brainstorming for appropriate background knowledge or imagining text content from a title or illustrations. For while – reading activities discussing word formation and word meanings in context are given as examples. Post – reading requires global comprehension activities such as summarizing and getting the gist of a text (Barnett, 1988).

Anderson (1991) defines several categories for processing strategies. These categories are supervising strategies, support strategies, paraphrase strategies for establishing coherence in text, and test – taking strategies (p.463). Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) summarize reading strategies under the aspects global, problem – solving and support strategies. They describe global reading strategies as "Intentional, carefully planned techniques by which learners monitor or manage their reading, such as having a purpose in mind, previewing the text as to its length and organization, or using typographical aids and tables and figures", problem solving strategies as "Actions and procedures that readers use while working directly with the text" and support strategies as "Basic support mechanism intended to aid the reader in comprehending the text such as using dictionary, taking notes, underlining, or highlighting textual information" (p.4). Examples for problem solving strategies are given by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002, p.4) as "Adjusting one's speed of reading when the material becomes

difficult or easy, guessing the meaning of unknown words, and rereading the text to improve comprehension". Whereas to Barnett (1988), problem solving techniques include "Guessing word meanings from context and evaluating those guesses, recognizing cognates and word families, skimming, scanning, reading for meaning, predicting, activating general knowledge, making inferences, following references, and separating main ideas from supporting details" (Barnett, 1988, p. 150).

No matter how different the approaches in classifying the reading strategies are, the importance that these strategies favor learners reading achievement and should be explicit thematised in language education is undisputable. It is pointed out that reading strategies "Can and should be learned to the point of automaticity, after which they become skills, and that learners must know not only what strategies to use, but also when, where, and how to use them" (Mokthari and Reichard, 2002, p.250). Hence, it is suggested to provide explicit instruction on reading strategies (Afflerbach, Pearson and Paris, 2008, p. 370). But, arranging learning contexts appealing learners' needs require knowing learners' actual state.

It is stated that far more research have been conducted on reading in L1 contexts (especially in English as a first foreign language) than in L2 contexts (Grabe and Stoller, 2002; cited in Yaylı, 2010). When research on reading strategies in L2 contexts are examined, it is evident that these studies mainly focus on reading strategies in English language learning (Huang and Nisbet, 2014; Kung, 2017; Madhumati and Ghosh, 2012; Roomy and Alhawsawi, 2019, Salataci and Akyel, 2002).

Also, the studies on reading strategies of prospective foreign language teachers especially in Turkish educational context are limited and focus mainly on ELT students reading strategies. For instance, Ozek and Civelek (2006) investigated the use of cognitive reading strategies used by ELT students. Solak and Altay (2014) examined the metacognitive awareness of prospective English teachers regarding reading strategies. Yaylı (2010) investigated metacognitive and cognitive reading strategies of ELT students. Few studies were conducted with prospective German language teachers. Sönmez Genç and Ünal (2017) questioned to what extent explicit instruction on reading strategies affect reading comprehension of prospective German language teachers. Çelikkaya and Balkaya (2020) examined the pre- while- and post-reading strategies usage of prospective German language teachers in their first year of education.

Hence, in-depth research on reading strategies used by prospective foreign language teachers is needed, as they are not just students but also prospective teachers. As students they need to know how to use reading strategies effectively and as prospective teachers they need to know, which reading strategies can be implemented in class. From this point of view, it is essential to find out to what extent prospective foreign language teachers use reading strategies and how these strategies differ in terms of some variables, which can give evidence on the state of reading strategies use and their preferences. Based on the findings, suggestions could be made for the use of reading strategies in language teacher education.

This study is based on the following questions:

1. Do the reading strategies used by prospective English and German language teachers differ in terms of the variables gender?
2. Do the reading strategies used by prospective English and German language teachers differ in terms of the department majored?
3. Do the reading strategies used by prospective English and German language teachers

differ in terms of education experience?

4. Do the reading strategies used by prospective English and German language teachers differ in terms of proficiency levels?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The sample for this study consists of prospective foreign language teachers. The groups were determined with random sampling method. The data were collected from prospective foreign language teachers studying at Foreign Language Teaching Department of German and English languages at a state university in Turkey during the academic year 2020 – 2021. The study involved 160 participants. Out of the participants, 32 ones (20.3%) were at the preparatory class at the school of foreign languages. 139 of the participants (87.97%) attended one-year extensive language education at the preparatory class prior to their faculty education. Of the participants, 118 (74.7%) were females and 40 (25.3%) were males. Regarding their department, 66 (41.8%) participants were in German language teaching department and 92 (58.2%) participants in English language teaching department. When considering their education experience, 32 (20.3%) were at the preparatory class, 32 (20.3%) were freshmen, 31 (19.6%) sophomores, 32 (20.3%) juniors and 31 (%19.6) seniors.

2.2. Instruments

The aim of this study is to examine prospective foreign language teachers' reading strategies use. For this purpose, the Reading Strategies Use Scale was used, developed by Deane and Pereira – Laird (1997), adapted and developed by Tuncer (2011) so as to assess Turkish students' usage of reading strategies while reading in a foreign language. The Reading Strategies Use Scale is in Likert - type form and consists of 28 items and six sub – categories. The sub – categories represent reading strategies in construction, management, assisting, visualization, self – regulation and planning. Respondents rated each item from 'never' (1) to 'always' (5). The Cronbach's alpha value of the Reading Strategy Use Scale was found to be .89 in the adapted and developed form, and in this study the reliability was found to be .72, which indicates a sufficient reliability level. Furthermore, to evaluate participants' demographic features a questionnaire was prepared and implemented to the participants. The consents of the participants, showing that they voluntarily participated in the study, were obtained, and necessary permissions for the implementation were officially taken from the institution.

2.3. Data Collection And Analysis

The data were analyzed by using PASW Statistics 18. As the data showed normal distribution, the parametric statistical analyses Independent Samples t-Test and One - Way ANOVA were used. In case of statistical significant differences between groups in the One - Way ANOVA analysis results, the source of differences was examined with Post Hoc Scheffe test.

3. Results

3.1. Findings On Descriptive Statistics Of Reading Strategies Use

In Table 1, the descriptive statistics based on the findings of reading strategies use are presented.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics results of reading strategies use*

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Constructing	158	1.20	5.00	3.55	.69
Planning	158	1.17	5.00	3.43	.68
Management	158	1.00	4.40	2.27	.70
Assisting	158	2.80	5.00	4.16	.52
Visualization	158	1.00	5.00	3.61	.90
Self - regulation	158	1.00	5.00	3.70	.73
RSU	158	2.39	4.57	3.43	.35

When the means are examined (See Table 1), it is evident that the assisting strategies category has the highest mean with an average of 4.16, and the management category has the lowest mean with an average of 3.43.

3.2. Findings On Reading Strategies Use According To Gender

Independent Samples t - Test was applied to determine the differences between female and male participants in terms of reading strategies.

Table 2. *Results of the independent samples t – Test on reading strategies use according to gender*

	Gender	N	$\overline{x}$	Sd	t	p
Constructing	Female	118	3.67	.67	3.86	.000*
	Male	40	3.22	.62		
Planning	Female	118	3.50	.70	2.28	.025*
	Male	40	3.25	.56		
Management	Female	118	2.17	.70	-3.25	.002*
	Male	40	2.56	.62		
Assisting	Female	118	4.22	.52	2.35	.021*
	Male	40	4.01	.47		
Visualization	Female	118	3.79	.77	4.22	.000*
	Male	40	3.06	1.01		
Self - regulation	Female	118	3.73	.75	1.04	.300
	Male	40	3.60	.67		
RSU	Female	118	3.49	3.49	3.78	.000*
	Male	40	3.27	3.27		

*p< .05

When Table 2 is examined, it is evident that the reading strategies use mean of females has been found ($\overline{x}$ = 3.49) and males ($\overline{x}$ = 3.27). In the comparison of mean points of two groups, significant differences has been found at *p < .05 level (p = .000) in favor of females. This finding reveals that reading strategies used by females are higher than males.

3.3. Findings On Reading Strategies Use According To Department

Independent Samples t - Test was applied to determine reading strategies use in terms of the variable department.

Table 3. *Results of the independent samples t – Test on reading strategies use according to department*

	Department	N	$\overline{x}$	Sd	t	p
Constructing	German	66	3.44	.76	-1.77	.080
	English	92	3.64	.62		
Planning	German	66	3.46	.71	.40	.687
	English	92	3.41	.66		
Management	German	66	2.22	.76	-67	.501
	English	92	2.30	.66		
Assisting	German	66	4.22	.54	1.09	.278
	English	92	4.13	.49		
Visualization	German	66	3.59	.94	-.18	.860
	English	92	3.62	.87		
Self - regulation	German	66	3.72	.66	.36	.722
	English	92	3.68	.79		
RSU	German	66	3.42	.33	-.41	.684
	English	92	3.44	.37		

* $p < .05$

The results of the independent samples t – Test on strategies use according to department revealed that there were no statistical significant differences of prospective foreign language teachers' reading strategies use in terms of the variable department (See Table 3).

3.4. Findings On Reading Strategies Use According To Education Experience

One - Way ANOVA was applied to determine the differences of reading strategies use mean points in view of education experience.

Table 4. *Results of the variance analysis on reading strategies use according to education experience*

	Source of Variance	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	p
Constructing	Between Groups	4	2.453	.613	1.32	.266
	Within Groups	153	71.241	.466		
	Total	157	73.693			
Planning	Between Groups	4	5.807	1.452	3.36	.011*
	Within Groups	153	66.079	.432		
	Total	157	71.886			
Management	Between Groups	4	2.742	.686	1.42	.230
	Within Groups	153	73.892	.483		
	Total	157	76.634			
Assisting	Between Groups	4	3.967	.992	4.01	.004*
	Within Groups	153	37.835	.247		
	Total	157	41.802			
Visualization	Between Groups	4	.410	.102	.12	.973
	Within Groups	153	125.377	.819		
	Total	157	125.787			
Self - regulation	Between Groups	4	1.080	.270	.50	.737
	Within Groups	153	82.873	.542		
	Total	157	83.953			
RSU	Between Groups	4	.521	.130	1.04	.389
	Within Groups	153	19.201	.125		
	Total	157	19.723			

*$p < .05$

When Table 4 is examined, it can be seen that there are significant differences between prospective foreign language teachers' planning and assisting strategies use in terms of education experience at $p < .05$ level (planning: F=3.36; p=.011; assisting: F=4.01; p=.004). Post Hoc Scheffe test was applied in order to find out the source of differences. Post Hoc Scheffe test results revealed that there were mean differences between preparatory class students and sophomores related to assisting reading strategies. There were also mean differences between preparatory class students and seniors in this category. Sophomores and seniors mean points were higher than of preparatory class students. Furthermore, the test revealed that there were mean differences between preparatory class students and freshmen in the planning category. Planning reading strategies of preparatory class students was found higher than of freshmen.

3.5. Findings On Reading Strategies Use According To Proficiency Level

One - Way ANOVA was applied to determine the differences between the mean points of reading strategies use in terms of the variable proficiency level.

Table 5. *Results of the variance analysis on reading strategies use according to proficiency level*

	Source of Variance	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	p
Constructing	Between Groups	2	3.871	1.935	4.30	.015*
	Within Groups	155	69.822	.450		
	Total	157	73.693			
Planning	Between Groups	2	.095	.047	.10	.903
	Within Groups	155	71.791	.463		
	Total	157	71.886			
Management	Between Groups	2	.219	.109	.22	.801
	Within Groups	155	76.415	.493		
	Total	157	76.634			
Assisting	Between Groups	2	.252	.126	.47	.626
	Within Groups	155	41.550	.268		
	Total	157	41.802			
Visualization	Between Groups	2	1.754	.877	1.10	.337
	Within Groups	155	124.033	.800		
	Total	157	125.787			
Self - regulation	Between Groups	2	2.622	1.311	2.50	.085
	Within Groups	155	81.331	.525		
	Total	157	83.953			
RSU	Between Groups	2	.364	.182	1.46	.236
	Within Groups	155	19.359	.125		
	Total	157	19.723			

*$p < .05$

When Table 5 is examined, it can be seen that there is a significant difference at $p < .05$ level of prospective foreign language teachers' reading strategies use mean points in terms of proficiency level regarding constructing (F=4.30; p=.015). Post Hoc Scheffe test was applied to figure out the differences in means of constructing strategies of groups. The test results revealed that the differences in means are between prospective foreign language teachers on C and A level. Prospective foreign language teachers on C level used reading strategies in the category constructing more than prospective foreign language teachers on A level.

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine reading strategies used by prospective foreign language teachers. The findings of this study indicated that reading strategies used by prospective foreign language teachers differ in some sub – categories. According to mean points, not all reading strategies are preferred equally. Furthermore, the study revealed that females use on overall more reading strategies than males. When considering the results of reading strategies in constructing, planning, management, assisting, visualization categories it is evident that there were significant differences especially between females and males. However, regarding the self – regulation strategies, there were no significant differences between females and males. When this finding is compared with the finding of the study conducted by Tuncer (2011), it can be seen that the employed reading strategies in the sub – categories differ in terms of gender. In the study there were no significant differences in constructing, assisting, self- regulation and planning, but in management and visualization strategies used by females and males (Tuncer, 2011, p.41). Hence, the findings of this study

and the findings of Tuncer's study, where the same Reading Strategies Use Scale is used to specify reading strategies used by prospective foreign language teachers, differ in view of their results in the sub – categories constructing, assisting and planning. But the results on management and visualization strategies differences in terms of the variable sex shows consistency in both studies. Whereas, Solak and Altay's (2014, p.86) findings elucidate that both gender prefer to take advantage of similar strategies in common, in the present study there seems not to be such a preference.

With regards of department the study showed that there were no significant differences between prospective German and English language teachers' reading strategies use. Hence, reading strategies used by prospective German and English language teachers are similar.

The examination whether there is a significant difference in reading strategies usage in terms of education experience revealed that there were significant differences in planning and assisting strategies. But, in constructing, management, visualization and self - regulation there were no significant differences. Hence, it can be inferred that reading strategies in these categories are not developed during education. In this regard study results on reading strategies used by prospective foreign language teachers show similarities. Ozek and Civelek (2006) found that certain reading strategies are not employed by 1st and 4th year students effectively (p.23).

The findings of reading strategies use in terms of proficiency level revealed that there were significant differences in the category constructing, but not in the other categories. Prospective foreign language teachers on a proficiency level C used constructing strategies more frequent compared to participants on level A. This finding is not consistent with the findings of prior studies, where it is stated that advanced learners use reading strategies more frequent than intermediate (Tuncer, 2011, p.51) and that high intermediate adult learners use the most strategies and advanced learners use the least strategies (Huang and Nisbet, 2014).

5. Conclusion

The study conducted on prospective foreign language teachers' reading strategies use revealed that there were significant differences in terms of gender, but not in terms of department. Whereas education experience affected reading strategies in the categories planning and assisting, proficiency level influenced reading strategies use in the category constructing. The study revealed that prospective foreign language teachers overall reading strategies use are moderate and not all strategies are preferred equally. Sönmez Genç and Ünal's (2017) study indicated that explicit training of reading strategies has positive effects on the general use of strategies. Prospective German language teachers used after reading strategies training the trained strategies more frequent and adequate. Hence, explicit instruction on reading strategies are recommended.

6. Limitations and suggestions

This study is limited to reading strategies defined in the Reading Strategies Use Scale (Tuncer, 2011) under the categories construction, management, assisting, visualization, self – regulation and planning. Further studies may examine other reading strategy categories and their development during language teacher education. This study was also limited with determining the state of reading strategies use and how they differ in terms of some variables. Further studies may investigate how these strategies can be implemented with activities supporting the use of reading strategies in these categories in class. Madhumati and Arijit (2012, p.137) state that high proficiency students are good at choosing appropriate strategies than compared to low proficiency students. The dissimilarities of study results regarding proficiency may be based on learning experiences, which may influence reading strategies

usage. But, this assumed relation needs to be proved by research findings. Hence, research, which are examining this relation, are recommended.

For the development of reading skill in a foreign language, it is suggested to present different types of reading strategies to learners and to encourage them to use them actively for reading texts in a foreign language. Above all, prospective foreign language teachers need to be trained regarding reading strategies, not just to use them for reading texts, but also to use them as prospective foreign language teachers in their own classes. Raising awareness in this regard may contribute to develop positive attitude towards reading in the foreign language.

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