An Investigation of Reading Strategies Employed by Trainee Teachers

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Abstract

Reading strategies vary from comparing and contrasting to organizing information, experimenting with grammar, forming mind mapping, making errors work for them, using linguistic knowledge of the first language in second language, using contextual cues and sentential relations, identifying the grammatical category of words, demonstrating sensitivity to a different word order, making intelligent guesses, examine illustrations and seeing similarities and dissimilarities in the text. This article focuses on the reading strategies of teacher trainees by presenting the results of the study conducted in a teacher-training department at a state university in Western Turkey. It highlights the importance of strategy training and why the strategies should be taught to enhance the reading of the learners.

Keywords: reading strategies, strategy training, success, motivation, metacognitive and cognitive strategies

Background of the Study

A strategy is an individual's comprehensive approach to a task; it includes how a person thinks and acts when planning and evaluating his or her study behavior. A strategy consists of guidelines and rules related to selecting the best tactics and making decisions about their use. In effect, successful people are good strategy users; they know how to use a variety of goal-specific tactics, to execute them in a planned sequence, and to monitor their use (Weinstein and Mayer, 1985; Weinstein and Underwood, 1985; Gettinger and Seibert 2002; Adams and Hamm, 1994; Henley, Ramsey and Algozzine, 1996). There are so many reading strategies employed by successful language learners (Rubin and Thompson 1982; Hosenfeld 1984) who are able to find their own way, organize information, experiment with grammar, make errors work for them, use linguistic knowledge of their first language in their second language, use contextual cues, identify the grammatical category of words, demonstrate sensitivity to a different word order, make intelligent guesses, examine illustrations, learn how to chunk language, keep the meaning of the passage in mind, skip inessential words, have a good self concept as readers, read the title and make inferences from it, use the glossary as the last resort, recognize cognates, use their knowledge of the world, follow through with a proposed solution to a problem, draw conclusions and form cognitive mapping.

Successful language learners know how to use such reading strategies efficiently. In language learning, students read to learn the language, to read to learn something, and to do assignments. The purposes of reading strategies are to have general knowledge, to get

a specific detail, to find out the main idea or theme, to learn, to remember, to delight, to summarize and to do research (Hyland 1990). Based on a review and detailed analysis of more than 40 verbal protocol studies, Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) compiled a comprehensive list of strategies and cognitive processes that individuals execute in order to understand and facilitate retention of information. Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) identified several key strategies that were evident in the majority of verbal protocols they reviewed. These included: (a) overview before reading; (b) look for important information and pay greater attention to it (which often requires jumping forward or backward to process information); (c) relate important points to one another; (d) activate and use prior knowledge; (e) change strategies when understanding is not good; and (f) monitor understanding and take action to correct inaccuracies in comprehension. Conversely, students with low academic achievement show inadequate reading strategies (Wong 1994; Decker, Spector and Shaw, 1992). Researchers consistently have reported a positive relationship between effective reading strategies and academic success (Agnew, Slate, Jones and Agnew, 1993; Elliot, Godshall, Shrout and Witty, 1990; Jones, Green, Mahan and Slate, 1993; Jones, Slate and Kyle, 1992; Jones, Slate and Marini, 1995; Kleijn, van der Ploeg and Topman, 1994) by claiming that the relationship between strategies and academic achievement has been found at many academic levels.

Having known all about the importance of the reading strategies and their impact on students, the main aim of the study is to investigate whether teacher trainees are good at reading strategies and whether the strategy use changes depending upon the class, academic achievement and gender of the teacher trainees.

Methodology

Two hundred and twenty-nine undergraduate teacher trainees (59 male and 170 female) aged 19 to 21 participated in the study, and the Reading Strategies Scale was administered to them. The participants were second and fourth year students at an English Language Teaching Department of a state university in Western Turkey. The sophomores were chosen because they took the course entitled Reading Skills and learned how to study a passage and the senior students were selected to see whether they developed their strategy use throughout time or not.

The Reading Strategies Scale was developed to determine the reading strategies used by the students of the English Language Teaching Department while they were reading some passages in English. Based on the literature review (Brown and Palincsar, 1984; Weinstein and Mayer, 1985; Weinstein and Underwood,1985; Adams and Hamm, 1994; Henley, Ramsey and Algozzine, 1996; Hoover and Patton, 1995; Lenz et al., 1996; Strichart, Mangrum and Iannuzzi, 1998; Waldron and McLeskey, 2000; Ley and Young, 1998; Purdie and Hattie, 1996; Purdie, Hattie and Douglas, 1996) a draft was prepared and the expert opinion (n:10) working at the Department of Educational Sciences was taken for the content validity. In the light of the recommendations of the expert opinion, some changes were made and the scale was administered to the students at the department (n: 229). The reliability is 0.91 and the split half is 0.85.

Secondly, a semi-structured interview was constructed to find out which strategies students use. The researcher designed open-ended questions and used these questions systematically. Twenty students participated in the pilot study. To ensure validity of the instrument, the researcher asked the opinions of 10 experienced teachers who were experts in the department of Educational Sciences. Since the data was gathered through the interview, the emphasis was upon the precise and honest answers of the teacher trainees and the researcher getting right and reliable answers. The reliability of the instrument was 0.92.

The following steps were taken after the preparation of the data gathering instruments. First, the sample population was selected. The Reading Strategies Scale was administered to the sophomores and senior students; then interviews were held with 33 sophomore and 24 senior students who volunteered for the research.

Analysis of Findings

Table I presents the means and standard deviations of the answers given by the teacher trainees. There are some differences of the frequency of the students' using reading strategies. The most frequently used strategies are underlining, visualizing, guessing, reading according to the questions, and finding out the main theme. Table I shows that students do not make use of strategies such as questioning, analysis, summarizing, clarifying, but they focus on keeping the vocabulary in mind. Schunk (2000), Bos and Anders (1990), Collins (1991) and Hosenfeld (1984) showed that successful learners use such strategies more frequently in language learning.

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of the reading strategies of the teacher trainess

Reading Strategies	**Mean**	**Std Dev**
1. Underlining the important parts in the passage	4.23	0.90
2. Learning the vocabulary in context	3.97	0.81
3. Reading the passage silently	3.96	1.04
4. Underlining the unknown vocabulary	3.94	1.07
5. Visualizing the events in the passage	3.86	1.03
6. Studying the picture and guessing what the passage is about	3.82	1.06
7. Guessing the meaning of the unknown vocabulary and then looking up in the dictionary	3.81	1.06
8. Answering the questions	3.76	1.06
9. Wondering what the passage is about and guessing	3.69	1.04
10. Finding out the main theme	3.68	1.10

11. Guessing what the passage is about by looking at the title	3.59	1.19
12. Understanding the unknown vocabulary through the context	3.58	1.15
12. Guessing the vocabulary without a dictionary	3.58	1.11
13. Finding the sentential relationships	3.56	1.03
13. Finding the connection with the daily life	3.56	1.03
14. Reading the first sentence and guessing the rest	3.55	1.15
15. Finding out which forms of the words are used	3.44	1.01
16. Finding out the inferences	3.36	1.05
17. Writing down the English equivalents of the words on the page	3.32	1.06
18. Writing the English equivalents of the words on another sheet	3.31	1.24
18. Finding out the most useful word to be used in the daily life	3.31	1.23
19. Reading English books and articles	3.23	1.06
20. Finding out the similarities among sentences	3.19	1.09
21. Finding out the synonyms in the passage	3.18	1.12
22. Correcting the mistakes of my friends	3.13	1.15
23. Summarizing to friends in Turkish	3.10	1.16
24. Summarizing by myself	3.09	1.24
25. Answering the questions and then discussing	3.08	1.21
26. Skimming	3.07	1.15
27. Memorizing the words in lists	3.04	1.17
28. Finding the supporting ideas	3.03	1.14
29. Thinking of how to tell the passage	3.02	1.12
30. Writing down the unknown vocabulary with the Turkish equivalents on another sheet	3.00	1.25
31. Finding out antonyms	2.97	1.13
32. Finding out the opposite thoughts	2.93	1.15
32. Finding out the hardest vocabulary	2.93	1.23
33. Finding out adjectives for the characters	2.86	1.09
33. Seeing the humor	2.86	1.18
34. Finding out the differences between sentences	2.81	0.99
35. Practising the new words immediately	2.80	1.10

35. Posing myself questions	2.80	1.10
36. Listing the ideas in the passage	2.78	1.15
37. Making the passage fun	2.65	1.18
38. Practicing with the other textbooks	2.64	1.10
39. Reading aloud	2.62	1.32
40. Summarizing in English	2.55	1.16
40. Reading in different tones	2.55	1.23
41. Asking questions in English	2.39	1.08
42. Translating	2.37	1.17
43. Summarizing it to friends in English	2.35	1.09
44. Forming semantic mapping	2.34	1.10
45. Preparing questions	2.24	1.04
45. Writing down the meanings of the words on small pieces of paper	2.24	1.09

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations and the results of t-test of the teacher trainees according to gender. The result of the t-test shows that the difference between girls and boys in using the reading strategies is insignificant. It can be said that boys and girls employ the same strategies with the same frequency.

Table 2: Means, standard deviations and results of t-test of teacher trainess according to gender

Gender	**n**	**Mean**	**Std Dev**	**Sd**	**t-value**	**Importance**
Girls	170	167.11	28.78	1507	.736	Insignificant
Boys	59	165.74	26.16			

*Sd=significance of difference

Table 3 shows the results of the means and standard deviations of the teacher trainees according to class level. It indicates that the freshmen (M:172.30) have the highest mean in using the reading strategies whereas the senior students (M:163.42) have the lowest score. There is a decline in the use of the reading strategies as students go up the educational level.

Table 3: Means and standard deviations of teacher trainees according to class

Class	**n**	**Mean**	**Std Dev**
Freshmen	56	172.30	30.99
Sophomores	72	166.12	25.47
Junior students	56	164.73	25.61
Senior students	45	163.42	30.96

In order to understand whether there was a difference among the means of the teacher trainees, the analysis of variance was conducted and the results are presented in Table 4. Table 4 shows that although there are some minor differences regarding the means, there is not a great gap among the frequencies of the reading strategies. These results show that teacher trainees do not employ a variety of reading strategies which may suggest that they are either unaware of the importance of the strategy used or that they do not know anything of the strategies and they play by ear.

Table 4: Analysis of variance according to class

Class	**D**	**Sum of squares**	**Mean Square**	**f**	**Significance**
Between groups	3	2481.59	827.19	1.05	Insignificant (0.371)
Within class	225	1772	787.55		
Total	228	1796			

Table 5 shows the strategies that teacher trainees used in understanding difficult texts. It demonstrates that sophomores employ more strategies (total: 80) than senior students (total: 41) in understanding texts. The most frequently used strategies are guessing (20%), looking up in the dictionary (18.75%), and underlining (15%). Sophomores use less important strategies more frequently. Senior students employ skimming (27.25%), looking up in the dictionary (21.95%), and guessing (14.63%) more frequently.

Table 5: Strategies used in understanding difficult texts

Strategies	**Sophomores (33 students)**		**Senior (24 students)**	
	f	**%**	**f**	**%**
Skimming			11	27.25
Simplifying	2	2.29	0	0
Reading slowly	5	6.25	0	0
Finding the conjunctions	3	3.75	1	2.43
Main idea	5	6.25	3	7.31
Asking somebody	3	3.75	0	0
Discussing	2	2.29	0	0
Looking up in the dictionary	15	18.75	9	21.95
Trusting himself	3	3.75	1	2.43
Underlining	12	15	4	9.75
Translating	3	3.75	1	2.43
Breaking up the structure	3	3.75	3	7.31
Paraphrasing	2	2.29	0	0
Analyzing grammar	3	3.75	2	4.87
Guessing	16	20	6	14.63
Total	80	100	41	100

Table 6 shows the strategies that teacher trainees used in understanding easy texts. These are answers to the question "What do you do to understand an easy text?" It demonstrates that sophomores (27.27%) and seniors (68%) said that they read carefully when asked which reading strategies they used in understanding easy texts. Senior teacher trainees use less reading strategies and pay more attention to reading the text carefully and reading between the lines.

Table 6: Strategies used in understanding easy texts

Strategies	**Sophomores (33 students)**		**Senior (24 students)**	
	f	%	f	%
Reading carefully	9	27.27	17	68
Taking notes	3	9.09	1	4
Translating	2	6.06	1	4
Guessing	1	3.03	0	0

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Underlining	2	6.06	0	0
Looking up in the dictionary	2	6.06	1	4
Trusting oneself	7	21.21	1	4
Reading according to the questions	7	21.21	2	8.16
Analyzing grammar	0	0	2	8.16
Total	33	100	25	100

The distribution of answers to the question "Which suggestions do you give in order to understand the text better?" is shown in Table 7. The results show that both sophomores and seniors give the same suggestions about understanding the text better (such as reading for gist, guessing vocabulary, grammar knowledge). It seems that teacher trainees are aware of which strategies are appropriate in comprehending a text.

Table 7: Teacher trainees' suggestions in order to understand the text better

Suggestions	**Sophomores (33 students)**		**Senior (24 students)**	
	f	**%**	**f**	**%**
Reading for gist	16	22.22	8	18.60
Reading a lot	7	9.72	5	11.62
Looking for key words	2	2.77	1	2.32
Dictionary	7	9.72	3	6.97
Trusting oneself	3	4.16	1	2.32
Translating	1	1.38	1	2.32
Grammar	8	11.11	7	16.27
Guessing vocabulary	17	23.61	10	23.25
Breaking up the sentences	3	4.16	1	2.32
Underlining	6	8.33	4	9.30
Asking questions	0	0	2	4.65
Listening to music and Watching movies	2	2.77	0	0
Relating to one's life	1	1.38	0	0
Total	72	100	43	100

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study disclose an unmarked degree of difference in terms of the strategy used by senior and sophomore teacher trainees. This is closely related to the students' lack of knowledge of the reading strategies. In view of the studies conducted to show the significance of the reading strategies on the achievement, it is advisable to teach such strategies to the teacher trainees and make them practice them in texts. According to Gersten (1998), many students with academic difficulties are not aware of "tricks of the trade" that are used by academically competent students when they study. High achievers are seen to be using 13 or 14 study strategies, indicating they used them more

than twice as often as low achievers (Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons, 1986). In addition, many L1 and L2 reading researchers have demonstrated that strategy use and awareness of reading strategies are different in more and less proficient readers, and that more proficient readers use various types of strategies, and they use them in more efficient ways (Jimenez, Garcia and Pearson, 1995). In another survey conducted by Lau and Chan (2003), 83 good readers and 76 poor readers were compared on their ability to use reading strategies in Chinese reading comprehension and on various reading motivation variables. Poor readers scored lower than good readers in using all reading strategies, and especially in using sophisticated cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

A strategy training program is essential to raise strategic readers because it is possible to teach them how to build their own background knowledge about the topic, and to determine ways for reading according to their purposes. During reading, learners should give complete attention to the reading task, check their own understanding constantly, monitor reading comprehension, and use a fix-up strategy (compensation strategy if one strategy does not work), use semantic, syntactic and graphophonic cues to construct meanings, synthesize during reading, and ask questions. After reading they should decide if they have achieved their goals for reading, evaluate understanding of what was read, summarize the major ideas, seek additional information from outside sources, distinguish between relevant and irrelevant ideas, paraphrase what they have learned, reflect on and personalize the text, critically examine the text, and integrate new understanding and prior knowledge.

On the other hand, some symptoms of poor readers are that they start reading without any purpose in their minds, do not eliminate distractions, do not know whether they go on comprehending the text or not, are unaware when comprehension has broken down, skip or ignore the crucial words, do not integrate text with prior knowledge, read without reflecting on meaning and rely on the author's words, and cannot go beyond the surface meaning of the text (Pressley, 1995).

Thus, strategy teaching is an important part of teaching a second language. Constructing meaning is the goal of comprehension (Walpole and Mc Kenna, 2007:123) and the main aims of the strategy training are monitoring understanding, enhancing understanding, and acquiring and actively using knowledge and developing insights (Harvey and Goudvis, 2007:14). One way of helping teacher trainees is to incorporate some of the following techniques into language classes (Garner, 1980; Henley, Ramsey and Algozzine, 1996).

Predict/Infer – Good readers try to figure out what is going to happen next in the story. Readers comprehend better when they make connections and construct their own knowledge using prior experiences, visualization, predicting and inferring to interpret the big idea. Here is how to use the predict/infer strategy:

1. Think about the title of the story, illustrations, cover, and what you have read so far.
2. Tell what you think will happen next.
3. Try to find any clues the author may have left.

4. What do you think the story will be about?
5. What is going to happen?
6. What makes you think that?
7. What clues helped you make that choice?
8. How did you know that?
9. Look at the cover and pictures then make predictions.
10. Does it remind you of anything?
11. How do you think the character feels? Why?

Phonics/Decoding – Good readers are able to sound out words. They cover part of the word to help them to see the base word. They look for words that belong to the same word family that they already know. Here are the ways to use this strategy.

1. Look at the word carefully.
2. Look for parts of the word that you know.
3. Think about the sounds of the letters in the parts of the word you do not know.
4. Blend the sounds to read the word.
5. Ask yourself: Is this a word I know? Does it make sense with what I am reading?
6. Read the entire sentence again with the word. Ask yourself if that make sense?

Monitor/Clarify – Good readers reread a sentence when they do not understand it. Here is how to use this strategy.

1. Ask yourself if what you are reading makes sense.
2. If it does not make sense, re-read it to see what is happening and tell what is happening.
3. What clues in the story have led you to think that?
4. What do you know that is similar to this story?

Making Connections – Good readers are able to connect what they are reading to experiences. Readers can comprehend better when they actively think about and apply their knowledge of the book's topic, their own experiences, and the world around them.

1. What does the book remind you of?
2. What do you know about the book's topic?
3. Does this book remind you of another book?

Question – Good readers read and carefully think about every page they read. They are always asking themselves questions. By questioning, children understand the text on a deeper level because questions clarify any confusion the child may be experiencing. Questions also stimulate further interest in a topic.

1. Ask yourself questions about the important ideas in the story.
2. Ask yourself if you can answer these questions.
3. If you cannot answer the questions, re-read the story and look for the answers.
4. What is the main idea of the story?

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5. What details support the main idea?
6. What are the most striking events of the story?
7. What else do you recall?

Visualizing – Good readers are able to create mind pictures and visualizations of what they read. The readers use the text and their own prior experiences to create mental pictures of the story

1. Ask the associations of the crucial words.
2. Make frequent stops while reading aloud to describe the pictures in your minds.
3. After reading, have students draw a picture about the story.

Evaluate – Good readers evaluate what they have read. They decide what they like or did not like about what they have read.

1. Decide if the story was informative, entertaining, or useful.
2. Think about how well you understood the text.
3. Decide if you enjoyed reading the text, and what has made you enjoy it and why.
4. What does the story make you think about?
5. Does the story remind you of anything?

Summarize – Good readers are able to tell about what they have read in their own words. Good readers can clearly and accurately retell the story they have read to someone who has not read the story.

1. Think about the characters.
2. Think about the setting or where the story takes place.
3. Think about the problem in the story.
4. Think about how the characters solve the problem.
5. Think about what happens in the beginning, middle, and end of the story.

Compare and contrast – Good readers are able to tell what is being compared to when they have read a text.

1. Look for cue words
2. Identify what is being compared
3. What's the same?
4. What's different?
5. Which cue words help readers see the similarities and dissimilarities?

According to Pressley and Afflerbach (1995), it is useful to develop a mindful strategy training program for students. He maintains that strategy instruction needs to match students' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, the tasks must be just beyond students' current capabilities. If they are too easy or students make rapid progress, they never understand that they have limits and what those limits are. Students who read independent-level texts, where they can breeze along on their own, feel no need

to be mindful or strategic to understand. However, the tasks can't be too difficult either, because too little success reduces students' self-confidence and motivation. Students reading texts at a frustration level might give up rather than try strategies to help themselves understand. The asks must be just challenging enough to give students the opportunity to develop their strategy use in order to increase their confidence in their own abilities. In other words, texts used for strategy training should be at the student's instructional level.

Teachers should model the strategies they are teaching and provide much practice using authentic, real-world tasks. Students should learn and practice only one or two new strategies at the same time. This could take more time but they will be more durable, transferable to different disciplines, and more likely to be used when needed. Students must be able to use the strategy automatically before they are taught to monitor how well it is working, because taking attention away from learning the strategy itself can interfere with its acquisition (Rhoder, 2002).

When they are able to use a strategy automatically, students should monitor their learning on a regular basis. They must also understand that their assessment of how well they are doing may be flawed; they may have been better or worse than they thought they were. They need to keep making the connections between their perceived success and their real success.

It is important to raise teacher trainees as strategic readers who actively construct meaning and interact with the text. They set purposes for reading, select methods of accomplishing these purposes, monitor and repair their own comprehension as they read, and evaluate the completed task. Strategic readers construct, examine, and extend meaning before, during, and after reading for a variety of texts. Teachers who believe that reading is a strategic process establish environments that provide opportunities for learning a language and learning about language while they are using language for real purposes.

Conclusion

Good strategy use minimizes failure and enables students to take advantage of learning opportunities. To be effective learners, students must have a wide array of reading strategies at their disposal, and know where, when, and how to use these strategies. We do not acquire everything at once. The mind learns in layers, in patterns, through senses and cues (Benjamin, 2007:4-7) so it takes time to build strategy use. The importance of strategy use in terms of academic competence underscores the need for a strong emphasis on the development and maintenance of effective reading strategy use across the curriculum and for all grade levels. Although not using the right strategy in reading is just one reason for educational failure, research on classroom implementation of strategy instruction and how to promote effective studying among all students should remain a high priority. Future research is needed to identify instructional conditions that are most conducive to the successful integration of strategy instruction with classroom learning. For example, it is unclear whether strategies are more readily learned if strategy training

is embedded within content instruction (in which students witness first-hand the immediate application and benefit of strategies for learning and remembering content), or if learned in isolation. Research should also identify characteristics of students who do not benefit from strategy instruction in general education classes. For some students, it may be necessary to receive more intensive instruction provided in a resource room or other support setting. Finally, further research is needed to identify factors that contribute to maintenance and generalization of strategies to other similar tasks. For example, given the relationship between the right strategy use and other academic enablers, effective strategy training should include some means of motivating students to engage in strategy usage, and to reinforce engagement in studying.

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