Teaching Reading to EFL Students to Make Them Better Readers

Ulvican Yazar (Corresponding author)

Department of Foreign Languages, Sakarya University, Turkey

Yabancı Diller Bölümü, Hazırlık Sınıfları, Esentepe, Sakarya, Türkiye

Tel: 264-295-5440   E-mail: uyazar@sakarya.edu.tr

Received: June 24, 2012      Accepted: July 3, 2013     Published: August 1, 2013
doi:10.5296/jse.v3i3.3895        URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/jse.v3i3.3895

Abstract

This study tries to offer basic reading strategies that have to be mastered to comprehend the text adequately. It discusses reading strategies at pre-reading, while reading, post reading.

In traditional teaching reading procedure teachers just read the reading passages and answer the comprehension questions with the whole class. By using this method, they think that reading lesson is thought effectively.

This kind of reading lesson is not effective way of teaching reading. To teach reading effectively, teachers should teach and make students use reading strategies and to choose the right one to understand the text. Only by doing this, reading lessons become effective.

And also using reading strategies makes the reading lessons more effective than those which do not use reading strategies. To support this thought, a pre-test was applied among four reading classes to form two homogeneous groups. During five weeks, the testing group was taught reading with reading strategies but the control group was thought without these reading strategies. With the control group only traditional way was used. After a five-week-study, a post-test was applied to evaluate the results. A t-test was used to compare the results of both groups and a statistically significant difference was found.

Keywords: Reading Strategies, Methods of Teaching Reading
1. Introduction

To teach a foreign language teachers should use four skills; speaking, listening, and writing. Of the four, reading plays the most important role in different levels of EFL students, such as elementary, intermediate, and advanced.

To speak a foreign language is important in first stage but, to learn a foreign language completely is dependent on developing reading ability.

Up to 1970’s general tendency in a reading program was to study on the particular printed material and to comprehend the message the author tried to convey. There was no emphasis on training the learners to be effective independent readers. However, after 1970’s emphasis has been put on teaching the students how to deal with unfamiliar texts on their own in order to achieve full comprehension. Nutall (1982) claims that the general aim of a reading program is to enable students to read without help unfamiliar authentic texts.

In language teaching the reading skill has got more important place after 1970. It is considered an essential component of foreign language teaching programs. A few of foreign Language learner can go abroad and talk to a native speakers but most of them can’t. Therefore foreign language learners, who cannot go abroad, are acquainted with language only by reading materials that are written in English.

Although Reading is an individual activity, it requires guidance to develop basic reading skills. Reaching a certain level of skill in reading, the foreign language learner can go on with his reading by himself with no guidance. To reach this aim, teaching reading skills are very important

2. Reading Styles

The basic ways of reading are as follows: 1) intensive and extensive reading 2) scanning 3) skimming 4) search reading 5) receptive reading 6) critical reading 7) reading for meaning 8) Prediction 9) Redundancy.

2.1 Intensive and extensive reading

In intensive Reading, the labels indicate a difference in classroom procedures as well as a difference in purpose. Intensive reading involves approaching the text under the guidance of a teacher or a task which forces the student to focus on the text. The aim is to arrive at understanding, not only of what the text means, but of how the meaning is produced. The ‘how’ is as important as the ‘what’, for the intensive lesson is intended primarily to train strategies which the student can go on to use with other texts.

In extensive reading, it is often assumed that in order to understand the whole (e.g. a book), we must first understand the parts (sentences, paragraphs, chapters) of which made up. Moreover, longer texts are liable to get forgotten in the classroom, since it is easier to handle short texts which can be studied in a lesson or two. But the whole is not just the sum of its parts, and there are reading strategies which can be trained only by practicing on longer texts. Scanning and skimming, the uses of a contents list, an index similar apparatus, are obvious
ones. More complex and arguably more important are the ability to discern relationships between the various parts of a longer text, the contribution made by each to the plot or argument, the accumulating evidence of a writer’s point of view, and so on. These are matters which seldom get much attention expect in the literature class, but they apply to reading any kind of book. They cannot be ignored if students are to become competent readers. But class time is always in short supply and the amount of reading needed to achieve fluency and efficiency is very great – much greater than most students will undertake if left to themselves. So we need to promote reading out of class. (Nutall, 1996)

2.2 Scanning

This involves looking quickly through a text to locate a specific symbol or group of symbol, e.g. a particular word, phrase, name, figure or date. The focus here is on local comprehension and most of the text will be ignored. The rate of reading is rapid and sequencing is not usually observed. It is surface level rather than deep processing of text and is mainly reader-driven processing. There is a rapid inspection of text with occasional closer inspection. Pugh (1978) describes it as: finding a match between what is sought and what is given in a text, very little information processed for long term retention or even for immediate understanding.

2.3. Skimming

This involves processing a text selectively to get the main idea(s) (to understand the main idea of a paragraph it is useful to find the topic sentences first.) and the discourse topic as efficiently as possible, which might involve both expeditious and careful reading. The focus may be global or local and the rate of reading is likely to be rapid, but with some care. The text is processed quickly to locate important information, which then may be read more carefully. Purposes for using this strategy might include:

. to establish a general sense of the text
.
. to quickly establish a macro propositional structure as an outline summary
.
. to decide the relevance of texts to established needs.

Readers would be taught to be flexible as not all strategies would work with all texts. (Urquhart & Cyril, 1996)

2.4 Search reading

This differs from skimming in that the purpose is to locate information on predetermined topic(s), for example, in selective reading for writing purposes. It is often an essential strategy for completing written assignments. The process, like skimming, is rapid and selective and is likely to involve careful reading once the relevant information has been located. Unlike skimming, sequencing is not always observed in the processing of the text although it is likely to be more linear than scanning. The periods of closer attention to the text tend to be more frequent and longer than in scanning. It normally goes well beyond the mere matching of words to be found in scanning activities, and might include the following
operationalisations where appropriate:

. keeping alert for words in the same or related semantic fields

  (unlike scanning, the precise from of these words is not certain)

. using formal knowledge of the text structure for locating information

. using titles and subtitles

. reading abstracts where appropriate

. glancing at words and phrases. (Urquhart & Cyril, 1996)

2.5 Receptive reading

In receptive reading, to discover what the author is trying to convey the reader gives attention to the supporting ideas that confirm arguments and uses such strategies as reading paragraph by paragraph, summarizing the main ideas of each paragraph, underlining, making notes, and writing a summary after reading. (Dubin, 1982)

2.6 Critical reading

To read a text critically is to make judgments about how a text is argued. This is a highly reflective skill requiring you to "stand back" and gain some distance from the text you are reading. (You might have to read a text through once to get a basic grasp of content before you launch into an intensive critical reading.)

. don't read looking only or primarily for information

. do read looking for ways of thinking about the subject matter

When you are reading, highlighting, or taking notes, avoid extracting and compiling lists of evidence, lists of facts and examples

2.7 Reading for meaning

This type of reading is the primary concern of most reading courses. But as Chastain (1976) notes, it may be the least teachable of the reading styles since the nature of reading is solitary. However, we believe in the need of concentration for meaning in the reading process and we argue that students should be encouraged to read for the content of the material. It should be made clear to the students that a concentration on the important elements that convey the meaning is needed.

Clarke (1979, 55) clarifies the concept of reading for meaning in the following manner: Reading for through comprehension is reading in order to master the total message of the writer, both main points and supporting details. It is that stage of understanding at which the reader is able to paraphrase the author’s ideas but has not yet made a critical evaluation of those ideas

Regarding what can be done to encourage the students to read for meaning, Chastain (1976) suggests speed reading which requires the students to read without looking up individual
words. Students are given short passages to be read in two or three minutes. When time is over, students summarize the content. In this way, he indicates that the class reads the entire passage together in a short time and also they learn to read for the general meaning of material without referring to the dictionary.

Additionally, Been (1979) proposes an EFL reading program which consists of two parameters: 1) Reading for Language and 2) Reading for Meaning. Along with the activities focusing on the use of vocabulary and grammar, she supports a reading for meaning program which contains two elements. The first of these is ‘context support’ which would be done by providing the students with some questions that precede the text and also direct the readers to search for specific information during the reading process. Second element is the use of cues that would lead the readers to ignore linearity and help them make use of redundancies.

Thus, we view reading for meaning strategy as one of the basic skills to be acquire by the reader because we believe that what is important is to understand the message the writer is attempting to convey. Therefore, readers should not be expected to comprehend each individual element at sentence or paragraph level. On the contrary, the readers should be trained to read for meaning and to read for enjoyment. It is obvious that the teacher has a great responsibility for preparing such reading activities. But we suggest that before these activities are presented, students should be aware of the fact that they are to read for appreciation and enjoyment. They should be told, if necessary over and over again, that dependence on the dictionary is unnecessary, and before they look up any words at the first sight, they should read the entire paragraph two or three times in order to get some idea of the total meaning.

2.8 Prediction

Goodman (1971) refers to reading as a ‘psycholinguistic guessing game.’ He argues that fluent readers do not process a text by identifying and interpreting each letter in the text. Instead, they look at a same of the text and predict the meaning of a larger part of it utilizing their prior knowledge of the subject. They then look at another part of the text to confirm their predictions. Furthermore, Smith (1971, 65) defines prediction as “the prior elimination of unlikely alternatives.” He states that the fewer the alternatives confronting the eyes, the harder it is to see or comprehend the text.

In accordance with the statements above, the ability to predict what the writer has to say is an aid to understanding the text and also ensures the reader’s active involvement. As Nuttall (1982) points out prediction may begin from the moment the reader reads the title and forms expectations of the content of the written material. This type of an activity enables the reader to predict the topic or the sequence of events in a story, or even the aim of the writer for the proposed argument.

Naturally, predictions of readers may not always be correct and may not be confirmed during the reading process. However, even these false predictions can be useful for the reader in thinking about the topic and the content of the material. Thus, the reader is actively involved
2.9 Redundancy

In addition to prediction skills, fluent reading also requires the use of redundancy, that is, information that is available from more than one source. Almost every printed text shows a degree of redundancy, which fluent readers exploit when they read for comprehension. Smith (1971) defines the good reader as the reader who can make maximum use of redundancy. He states that “there is redundancy whenever the same alternatives can be eliminated in more than one way. And one of the basic skills of reading is the elimination of alternatives through redundancy.” To clarify the point, (Gephard 1985) if students read a passage that includes “The man has no hair on his head” and “He is bald” they are not reading two complementary pieces of information because both sentences give the same information in different words.

Moreover, as Gephard (1985) suggests, a reading teacher can increase the amount of redundancy using different media other than the linguistic medium. For instance, nonlinguistic media (pictures, real objects) or paralinguistic media (gestures, facial expressions) could help serve this purpose.

Briefly, readers, especially at beginner’s level, depend more on visual information provided in the text than fluent readers. The reading teacher can aid foreign or second language students in a text and thus help them become more efficient readers.

3. The Three Phases in a Reading Lesson

There are three phases in a reading lesson. These are pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading.

3.1 Pre-Reading

'Please turn to page 34. Read the passage and answer the questions.' A teacher who starts the lesson in this way is hardly likely to motivate the learners. What the pre-reading phase tries to do is:

1. to introduce and arouse interest in the topic
2. to motivate learners by giving a reason for reading
3. to provide some language preparation for the text.

Of course not all of these aims will be relevant for all texts. In some cases the language might already have been introduced, or there may be no particular language problems. In any case, language preparation does not mean that the teacher should explain every possible unknown word and structure in the 'text, but that he should ensure that the learners will be able to tackle the text tasks without being totally frustrated by language difficulties. Furthermore, as we shall see, language preparation can often be carried 'out by the learners, as well as by the teacher.

In order to help prepare for pre-reading work, useful questions that the teacher can ask himself are:
a. What knowledge, ideas or opinions might the learners already have on the text topic, and how can this knowledge be drawn out and used?

b. Why should anyone want to read this text, and can the same, or similar, reasons be generated in the learners?

The answers to these questions will give clues to ways of introducing the text, motivating the learners, and at the same time will incorporate language preparation. Visuals (e.g. diagrams, maps, and photographs), drawing up of lists, or the setting or answering of questions (oral or written) may all play a part in pre-reading. (Williams, 1984)

3.2 While-Reading

This phase draws on the text, rather than the learner’s ideas previous to reading. The aims of this phase are:

1. to help understanding of the writer's purpose
2. to help understanding of the text structure
3. to clarify text content.

The traditional 'comprehension exercise' at the end of a text is a typical while-reading activity. In other cases the learner may be asked to find the answers to questions given at the beginning of the text (pre-text questions), or to questions inserted at various points within the text. Completing diagrams or maps, making lists, taking notes are other types of while-reading work. Course books and 'text collection' books generally provide plenty of while-reading exercises. What the teacher needs to do is consider what the effect of these exercises is, and whether this corresponds to both his and his learners' aims.

The sorts of questions that the teacher can ask himself as a guide to while-reading work are the following:

a. What is the function of this text?

b. How is the text organised or developed? (e.g. a narrative, an explanation with various examples, an argument and counter-argument)

c. What content or information is to be extracted from the text?

d. What may the reader infer or deduce from the text?

e. What language may be learned from the text?

f. What reading styles may be practiced?

Question (a) deals with the first aim of while-reading, question (b) deals with the second aim, while answers to questions c, d and e will help to clarify the text content. Depending on the answers to these questions, the teacher can select or devise appropriate exercises. As a rule, while-reading work should begin with a general or global understanding of the text, and then move to smaller units such as paragraphs, sentences and words. The reason for this is that the
larger units provide a context for understanding the smaller units - a paragraph or sentence, for example, may help the reader to understand a word. (Williams, 1984)

3.3 Post–Reading

Right! We've read the passage on page 34, and finished the comprehension exercises. Now turn to page 42.' Perhaps some passages deserve to be finished with and erased from the memory as soon as possible! But certainly not all of them.

The aims of post-reading work are:

1. to consolidate or reflect upon what has been read
2. to relate the text to the learners' own knowledge, interests, or views.

The work does not refer directly to the text, but 'grows out' of it. 'Post-reading may also include any reactions to the text and to the while-reading work, for example, learners say whether they liked it, and found it useful or not.'

Setting up and organising post-reading work depends very much on all the objectives of the programme as a whole. Post-reading work should thus contribute, in a coherent manner, to the writing, speaking and listening skills that the programme aims to develop.

Notice that the problems of motivation, language, and reading-related activities are not dealt with separately in each of the three phases, but are 'spread' throughout the three phases. Thus motivating the learners need not necessarily only take place in the pre-reading phase. It may occur in the while-reading phase, where an interesting task can often compensate for uninteresting text. A further point is that the pre- and post-reading in particular can make use of the fact that a class consists of a group of individuals to introduce interactive work.

Obviously, this three phase approach is not to be carried out mechanically on every occasion. Sometimes the teacher may wish to cut out the pre-reading stage and get learners to work on the text directly. Sometimes post-reading work may not be suitable. However, the advantage of the three phase approach is twofold. First it respects and makes use of the student's own knowledge of language and of the world and uses this as a basis for involvement, motivation, and progress. Secondly the three phase approach leads to integration of the skills in a coherent manner, so that the reading session is not simply isolated. (Williams, 1984)

4. The Purpose of the Reading Lesson

Of course as they read the students will improve their knowledge of the foreign language. But this ought to be considered an incidental bonus: it is not the purpose of the reading lesson. We are not saying language must not be taught, of course, but simply that this is not the kind of lesson we are talking about. In a reading lesson we are not setting out to teach language; alternatively, if we are setting out to teach language, we are not giving a reading lesson.

Certainly we want students to understand the content of the text, otherwise they cannot be considered to have read it in any real sense. Yet when we use a text for intensive reading, is it chosen because we want the class to learn more about the topic? Not really: the text may deal
with history, biology, economics, but we are not teachers of these subjects, and when we use these texts, any increase in the students knowledge of the subject is another incidental bonus, not our primary aim. We are interested in the understanding that results from reading because it is evidence that the students have completed the reading process satisfactorily. We choose texts that give practice in the process; but to improve students knowledge of the content is not our aim.

The focus of interest in the reading is neither language nor content, but the two together; we want our students to learn how language is used for conveying content. We want them to develop the skills they need in order to become effective independent readers.

An ideal reader would be able to extract the content from any text at all; but of course such a reader does not exist; he would have to have not only complete command of the language but also enough knowledge of every area of study to be able to tackle every ever produced. We do not expect to produce this ideal reader, but we cannot be satisfied with a reader who can tackle only a single text. We have to push him as far as possible towards becoming an ideal reader (or an ideal reader of, say, science text, if our aim is specialized); that is the target towards which we move, even if we do not reach it. Every text we handle in the reading course helps to move the students towards the goal; but that particular text is not itself the goal, it is just a step in the right direction. You have not exploited a text effectively unless you have used it to develop interpretive skills that can be applied to other texts.

When you choose a text, therefore, you need to be clear what sort of interpretive skills it demands, and what methods you will be able to use to help your students to develop them. But don’t forget that the first requirement is that the text should interest the students. (Nuttall, 1982,)

5. Method

In this study I tried to find the answer of “how should the effective reading lesson be and what can be done to make the reading lesson more effective. For me, even now most of the English teachers are not aware of reading strategies and they use traditional method for example they simply say ” open the page 24 read the passage and answer the following question.” In teaching reading lessons traditional method is not effective and out of date. To make reading lessons more effective and enjoyable, reading teacher should use reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, prediction and also three Phases in a reading lesson. Thus in this study, we tested the effect of reading skills in a classroom situation and it was hypothesized that the reading lesson which applies reading strategies are more successful than the reading lesson which applies traditional method.

The subjects of this study were 30 students at Sakarya University Foreign Language Department in Sakarya. 30 student subjects were selected from a preparation class in second term at Sakarya University Foreign Language Department 15 for control group and the other 15 for testing group. They are all in pre-intermediate level.

The materials used in this study were chosen from different reading books. Numerous reading passages were used during the period of teaching the strategies and during the last week of
the study ten reading passages were used. They were all rearranged through the aim of the study. Tables and figures were used to illustrate the success of students in both methods. To show the differences between control group and testing group T-test was used.

For the purpose of this study, a pre-test has been given to both control group and testing group to determine the students’ reading ability. This test was designed according to the students’ level that has enough reading strategies knowledge. And two homogeneous groups were created according to pre-reading exam results. At the one month process the same reading exam has been given to the groups to decide to what extent the application of the strategies defended in this study have contributed to the students reading comprehension.

During the application period the traditional method was applied for the Control Group. The instructor first reads the reading passage then students reads the reading passage and then explained unknown words, and answered the comprehension question.

The experimental group was taught in this way; in this group reading strategies were taught and practices were made on reading passages related to the strategies which were taught before. For instance, in the first week skimming and scanning were taught and practices were made. In the second week, search reading and receptive reading were taught and practices were made. In the third week, critical reading and reading for meaning were taught and practices were made. In the forth week, prediction and redundancy were taught and practices were made. In the last week of the study, the three phases in a reading lesson; pre-reading, while reading, post reading was applied with the passages related to the strategies which were also taught during the four weeks. The post test aimed at measuring the development of the reading abilities after the application.

6. Findings

In this study, the effects of reading strategies were examined on student’s reading comprehension. It has two sections. In the first section pre-test results of both control and testing group were explained and results were showed by statistical diagrams. And also in the second section post-test results of both control and testing group were explained and results were showed by statistical diagrams too. Independent Sample Test was used to reach the results.

Table 1. Pre-test results of two groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Test</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Testing Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Pre-test statistics of two groups

Group Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CONTROL G</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pre-test results</td>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49,27</td>
<td>13,49</td>
<td>3,48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Testing group</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49,20</td>
<td>13,53</td>
<td>3,49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was observed that there was no difference between the scores of the control group and testing group. A t-test was used to analyze the results and no significant difference was found, T Value=.014,  P>0.05. It means that these two groups are homogeneous.

Table 3. Pre-test statistics of two groups

t-test for Equality of Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pre-test results</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>6.67E-02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>28,000</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td>6.67E-02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Post-test results of two groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post- Test</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing Group</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. Post-test statistics of two groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTROL G</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>post-test results</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>55,00</td>
<td>11,22</td>
<td>2,90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing group</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>65,60</td>
<td>13,22</td>
<td>3,41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Post-test statistics of two groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>post-test results</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>-2,367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>-2,367</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was found that there was positive difference between the scores of control group and testing group checked and commented the instructor, too. Another t-test was used to analyze the post-test results and a statistically significant difference was found between two groups, T-value=−2,367, and P<0,05.

7. Results and Discussion
Teaching reading by using reading strategies is more effective and useful for students as it was tested and observed. In this study, the importance of the reading strategies was emphasised. According to the post test results, a statistically significant difference was found between two groups, T-value=-2.367, and P<0,05. Thus, it showed that these strategies are important as mentioned above. And also Libson and Wixon support this study. Libson and Wixon (1991) state:

Students are likely to develop strategies in order to facilitate learning in reading. It is obvious that reading strategies can vary from reader to reader; however, they can be modified for specific reading tasks. What makes the difference between good and poor readers is the knowledge of strategies. Good readers know how to approach a text and make a plan of reading in the light of strategy knowledge. In addition, they know how and when to use the strategies in order to get out of the problems. On the other hand, readers who lack the knowledge of strategies or the usage of them are more likely to be floundered when they encounter a text they are to read. Therefore, it is imperative that readers be taught how to use strategies, which help them to monitor their comprehension and they also suggest that thinking about one’s thinking is at the core of strategic behavior. Teaching reading comprehension, therefore, requires teaching readers good strategies and how to apply them in any reading area.

According the results of this study it is suggested that EFL teachers should teach the reading strategies to the students and apply them during the reading lessons. If it is done students will be adequate reader. They can easily understand, and make comments about reading passages. Without these strategies reading lesson doesn’t have much value. As it is seen from the results of this study, testing group that was taught the reading strategies was more successful than the control group that was not taught these strategies.

References


