Teaching Reading to EFL Students to Make Them Better Readers

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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 the 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 an effective way of teaching reading. To teach reading effectively, teachers should teach and make students use reading strategies and 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 the 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. Among them, 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 the first stage but, to learn a foreign language completely is dependent on developing reading ability.

Up to 1970s general tendency in a reading program was to study on the particular printed material and understand the message that was given by the author. No emphasis was placed on educating the learners to become independent and effective readers. After the 1970s, however, emphasis was placed on teaching students how to deal with unfamiliar texts on their own so that they could fully understand them. Nutall (1982) claims that the general aim of a reading program is to enable students to read unfamiliar authentic texts without help.

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 foreign language learners can go abroad and talk to 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. The foreign language learner can go on with his reading by himself without any assistance and guidance to reach a certain level of skill in reading. 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 includes approaching the text under the supervision of a teacher or a task that makes the student to give close attention to the text. The goal is to arrive at understanding, both what the text means and how the meaning is produced. The 'how' and 'what' are equally important. For the intensive lesson is intended primarily to train strategies which the student can carry on to use with other texts.

In extensive reading, it is often assumed that to comprehend the whole, let's say a book, firstly we must comprehend the parts (sentences, paragraphs, chapters) of which made up. Also, longer texts can be forgotten in class, as it is easier to process short texts that can be studied in one lesson or two lessons. However, the whole is not just the sum of the parts there is more, namely there are reading strategies that can only be learned by working on longer texts. Scanning and skimming uses of a contents list, an index-like apparatus are the obvious

ones. The more complicated and more important are the relationships between the diverse parts of the ability to tell apart the longer text, each makes the contribution to the plot or argument, the collected evidence of an author's point of view and etc. These are matters which seldom get much attention to expect in the literature class, but they apply to read any kind of book. If students are to become competent readers they cannot be neglected. But class time is always not sufficient and to get fluency and efficiency the amount of reading needed is very much even much greater than most students will engage if left to themselves. So we need to encourage reading out of class. (Nutall, 1996)

2.2 Scanning

This contains looking at a text quickly to find a particular symbol or group of symbols, eg. a specific word, phrase, name or date. By doing this, the aim is to focus on local understanding and ignore most of the text. Reading speed is fast and sequencing is usually not observed. It is surface level rather than deep rendering of text and is primarily reader driven rendering. 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 contains processing a text selectively to get die 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 reading speed is likely to be fast, but some care must be taken. The text is quickly processed to find important information that can be read more carefully later. Purposes for using this strategy might include:

. to establish a general sense of the text

. to fast set up a macro propositional structure as an outline summary

. to define 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

In search reading the purpose is to find information on the topic(s) that was decided in advance, for example; for writing purposes in selective reading. It is often an important strategy for completing written assignments. The process, such as skimming, is quick and selective and is likely to involve careful reading once the relevant information is found. Different from skimming, sequencing is not always seen in the processing of text, although it is likely to be better than scanning. A closer look at text tends to be more frequent and longer than scanning. It normally goes far beyond matching words to search through and may include the following stages of processing where appropriate:

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

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

. using formal knowledge of the text structure for locating information

. using titles and subtitles

. reading abstracts where convenient

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

2.5 Receptive reading

In receptive reading, to find out what the writer is trying to deliver, the supporting ideas are paid attention by the reader to validate the arguments and uses strategies during reading paragraph by paragraph, summarizing the main ideas of each paragraph, underlining, taking notes, and writing a summary after reading the text. (Dubin, 1982)

2.6 Critical reading

Reading a text critically means making judgments about how a text is discussed. This skill is a very reflective skill that requires reader to stop and step away from the text he is reading. Reader may need to read through a text to gain a basic understanding of the content before embarking on intense critical reading.
. should not be read only for information
. should be read to look for ways to think about the topic

When reading, underlining, or taking notes, avoid extracting and compiling lists of evidence, fact sheets, and examples. (http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/researching/critical-reading/)

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 to get the whole message of the author, together with main points and supporting details. It is the level of comprehending at which the reader is able to paraphrase the writer's ideas however has not made a critical evaluation of those ideas yet.

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. The 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 acquired 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 the 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 previous knowledge of the subject. Then readers take a glance at another part of the text to make sure about 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 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, the 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 in the reading process.

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 way. And one of the basic skills of reading is the elimination of alternatives through redundancy." To clarify the point, (Gephard 1987) 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 (1987) 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 attract interest in the topic

2. to motivate learners by creating a reason for reading

3. to supply some language preparation for the reading text.

Of course not all of these aims will be relevant to all texts. In some cases, the language might already have been introduced, or there might be no specific language problems. By any means, the teacher should not explain every possible unknown words and structure in the 'text to have a language preparation but he should be sure that the students will be able to handle the text tasks without being trapped 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?

These questions answers will give hints to ways of introducing the reading text, stimulating

the learners into it, and for all that will contain language preparation. Visuals (e.g. diagrams, maps, and photographs), drawing up of lists, or the setting or answering oral or written questions 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 the author's purpose

2. to help understanding 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 student might 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 the diagrams or maps, making lists, taking notes are other types of while-reading activities. 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 students' goals.

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

a. What is the mission of this text?

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

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

d. What might the reader conclude or figure out from the text?

e. What language might be informed from the text?

f. What reading types might 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 goals of post-reading work are:

1. to intensify 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-reading 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 performed 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. Second, the three phase approach leads to a consistent integration of skills so that the reading session is not simply isolated. (Williams, 1984)

4. The Purpose of the Reading Lesson

Absolutely, 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.

In reading, the focus of attention is both language and content. We want our students to learn how language is used to convey content. We want them to develop the skills they need to be effective independent readers.

An ideal reader would be able to get the content from any text at all, but surely 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 about 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 to "how should an 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 the traditional method, for example they simply say "open 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, a teacher who is teaching reading 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 is more successful than the reading lesson which applies the 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 the second term at Sakarya University Foreign Language Department 15 for the control group and the other 15 for the testing group. They are all in the 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 the control group and the testing group T-test was used

For the purpose of this study, a pre-test has been given to both the control group and the

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. During 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 has 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 read 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 fourth 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 students' reading comprehension. It has two sections. In the first section pre-test results of both the control and the testing group were explained and the results were shown by statistical diagrams. And also in the second section post-test the results of both the control and the 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.

Pre- Test		
	Control Group	Testing Group
1	30	30
2	33	30
3	34	34
4	34	38
5	42	42
6	42	43
7	46	46
8	48	48
9	53	54
10	56	56

11	56	56
12	62	60
13	64	60
14	66	63
15	73	78

Total: 15   739   738

Mean: 15   49,27   49,20

Table 2. Pre-test statistics of two groups

Group Statistics

	CONTROL G	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
pre-test results	Control group	15	49,27	13,49	3,48
	Testing group	15	49,20	13,53	3,49

Table 3. Pre-test statistics of two groups

		t-test for Equality of Means			
		t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
pre-test results	Equal variances assumed	,014	28	,989	6,67E-02
	Equal variances not assumed	,014	28,000	,989	6,67E-02

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 4. Post-test results of two groups.

Post- Test		
	Control Group	Testing Group
1	35	46

2	40	48
3	43	52
4	43	54
5	50	55
6	51	59
7	52	59
8	58	67
9	59	70
10	59	73
11	63	75
12	65	77
13	67	79
14	69	83
15	71	87

Total:	15	825	984
Mean:	15	55,00	65,60

Table 5. Post-test statistics of two groups

	CONTROL G	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
post-test results	Control group	15	55,00	11,22	2,90
	Testing group	15	65,60	13,22	3,41

Table 6. Post-test statistics of two groups

		t-test for Equality of Means			
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
post-test results	Equal variances assumed	-2,367	28	,025	-10,60
	Equal variances not assumed	-2,367	27,281	,025	-10,60

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 adequate and insufficient readers is the knowledge of strategies. Adequate 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 must 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 the strategies and how to apply them in any reading area.

According to 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 the 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, the testing group that was taught the reading strategies was more successful than the control group that was not taught these strategies.

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