

The importance of reading activities in reading comprehension

Okuduđunu anlamada okuma alıştırmalarının önemi

Serda GÜZEL^{1*}

¹ English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Istanbul Arel University, Istanbul, Turkey.

serdaguzel@arel.edu.tr

Geliř Tarihi/Received: 06.12.2021

Bölüm/Section: Social Sciences/English
Language and Literature

Kabul Tarihi/Accepted: 28.12.2021

Arařtırma Makalesi/Research Article

Abstract

For many years researchers and educators have focused on reading comprehension skill but still many students do not comprehend the reading text efficiently. In this sense, this study deals with the improvement of students' reading comprehension through pre reading while reading and post reading activities. The research focuses on reading activities in reading class. In reading processes, the researcher applied series of student centered reading activities. The data has been collected through of reading comprehension activities in reading class. Twelve university students in Turkey participated in the study. The results display that the activities as pre, while and post reading are effective to foster learners' reading skill.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, reading skill, pre reading, while reading, post reading.

Özet

Uzun yıllardır arařtırmacı ve eğitimciler okuduđunu anlama ve okuma becerisine odaklanmıştır, ancak yine de birçok öğrenci okuma metnini verimli bir şekilde anlamamaktadır. Bu bağlamda bu çalışma, okuma öncesi ve sonrası etkinlikler yoluyla öğrencilerin okuduđunu anlamalarının geliştirilmesini ele almaktadır. Bu amaçla yapılan arařtırma, okuma dersinde okuma etkinliklerinin işlevlerine odaklanmıştır. Bu çalışmada, okuma süreçlerinde veri toplamak için öğrenci merkezli bir dizi okuma etkinliđi uygulanmıştır. Bu arařtırmada veriler okuma dersinde okuduđunu anlama etkinlikleriyle toplanmıştır. Arařtırmaya Türkiye'de üniversite düzeyinde öğrenim gören altısı erkek, altısı kadın on iki üniversite öğrencisi katılmıştır. Arařtırmanın sonucu göstermiştir ki okuma öncesi ve sonrası yapılan okuma etkinliklerini öğrenen bireylerin okuma yeterliliklerini olumlu anlamda güçlendirmesine katkı sağlamıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Okuduđunu anlama, okuma becerisi, okuma öncesi, okuma sırasında, okuma sonrası.

1. Introduction

The reading skill is the most important skill in language [1]. In this sense, teachers have great importance role to increase learners' reading comprehension. To achieve this, teachers use reading activities and strategies when they teach reading in reading class. Based on this discussion; reading comprehension can be achieved by means of reading activities in reading instruction. Reading activities play an important role in reading comprehension for creating and consturcting the meaning in written text. Many researchers give importance to pre reading, while reading and post reading activities in order to promote students' reading comprehension [2]. This study attempts to examine the role of reading activities in reading comprehension, and stimulating reading activies will be applied in reading class in order to evaluate and examine and check students' comprehension while they are reading a written text. Good readers make sense of text and if reading comprehension is improved by teachers, students become purposeful active readers so that they can control their own reading comprehension.

* Yazışılan yazar/Corresponding author: Serda GÜZEL

¹ orcid.org/0000-0001-5212-9891

2. Literature review

Reading is the most stable ability in the second language learning [1]. In other words, reading is the most important skill in second language acquisition; in order to improve language acquisition, readers or students decode the text and try to understand writer's message, in this sense grammar and vocabulary are important factors for understanding the reading passages [1]. For many years, teachers think that the reason why the learners have difficulty understanding the text the reasercher have tendency to suppose learners have poor grammar and limited vocabulary, but today researchers think that there are many essential factors for interpreting the written text [2]. If teachers focus on only grammar and vocabulary in reading process this is the traditional view on reading and reading teaching [3]. Teachers should use activities and strategies for increasing the reading comprehension so teachers should observe and examine their instructions and they should determine the activites which are useful for promoting students' reading comprehension [2]. Researchers have focused on reading process for many decades and they focus on nature of reading [4]. Language educators can use various methods and techniques for reading skill. In reading activities teachers should focus on reader's interpretation of text and teachers should prevent poor understanding in reading process [5]. Reading activities divided into three stages, pre reading while reading and post reading [6].

They are related to one another but each of these stages has its own property [2]. Students can use their knowledge in three stages [5]. In three stages action readers are ready for reading a text and making or constructing sense of text and learning new concepts, new ideas and opinions in reading process [7]. In three stages teachers should train the students to be efficient and active readers in target language, teachers should design student centered reading activities and by means of these student centered activities teachers improve students' reading comprehension and ability; while designing a student centered activities pre reading while reading and post reading stages should be taken consideration by the teachers in reading class [8].

Pre reading stage focuses on knowledge and exprience of the reader. In order to activate background knowledge and exprience of the reader; researchers give importance especially pre reading phase [9]. In pre reading phase teachers intoude topic by means of pre reading activities. Students' background and existing knowledge can be activated by pre reading acitivites so in this sense students can acquire new information and construct the meaning in the target reading text [7]. There is a general aggrement that teachers build and activate background knowledge in pre reading phase [10]. Pre reading tasks focus on students' attention to a text and students make predictions on the text content by activating their prior knowledge in this sense pre reading acvities are related with background knowledge and teachers can build new knowledge and activate bacground knowledge by means of pre reading activities [3]. Pre reading stage breaks readers' barrier and reader can engage in reading in other words this stage increases reader's interest and motivation, so teachers can activate students' background knowledge in target text [6]. Based on this discussion students can familiarize the topic and prepare the reading text by means of pre reading activities. Pre reading stage fouses on students' background knowledge, language preparation, and motivation of the learners [10].

In while reading stage; students can develop reading strategies and try to decode and understand problematic text passages; this stage focuses on text but pre reading stage focuses on students' ideas before reading [9]. Functions of unknown words, analyzing reference words, grammatical functions of sentences and learning to use dictionary effectively can be emphasized by the teachers in while reading stage; the subject Lale also revealed that she even improved her vocabulary skills by reading which demonstrates how important reading is [11]. It can be stated that while reading stage focuses on text structure and organization of reading passage, also it focuses on text content, general and specific information of the text [8].

In post reading stage teachers can check sudents' comprehension and deeper analysis of text can be performed in this phase [9]. In this stage students can produce language relate to topic [12]. In post reading stage students make connections, review the pre and while reading stages, they are able to use prior knowledge acquired from pre and while reading stages, they can evaluate, synthesize and analyze the written text and they can ask critical questions for constructing the meaning in the text [6]. By means of these three stages students backgorund knowledge can be activated by the teachers; speaking, writing and listening can be combined with reading skill in a suitable manner, students can use reading strategies so they gain critical thinking for understanding the text in process of reading [4]. It can be mentioned that pre reading tasks focus on text and students can make predictions about text content by means of their prior knowledge and while reading activities focus on decoding skills and post reading activities focus on discussing and analyzing the text content, and these activities related with understanding of the text [2]. In these three stages students learn how to read for meaning and how to think in reading process [13]. In this research paper researcher uses brain storming tecnique in order to activate students' prior knowledge and key words and concepts are introduced by brainstorming tecnique. Students generate new ideas and opinions and students develop their cognitive skills while they are generating ideas related to topic [14]. In pre reading stage previewing and predicting activities are also used by the researcher; students look at the title, headings and pictures and students read the first and last paragraph in this activity; and students activate their background knowledge and students are getting familiar too the topic before reading [15]. In this study in while reading stage making prediction, making use of context or guessing, and breaking words into their component parts, paraphrasing activities are used in this

study, these activities are used because these activities focus on content of the text and decoding skills [16]. In this research in post reading stage group discussion is used by the researcher; in group discussion students focus on information in the text and they evaluate and analyze their comprehension in this stage [17].

3. The study

3.1. Aim of the study

The aim of the paper is to interpret learners' experiences on reading comprehension through pre reading while reading and post reading activities in classroom language learning.

3.2. Research questions

This study focused on these research questions;

1. How do pre reading activities affect the learners' reading comprehension?
2. How do while reading activities affect the learners' reading comprehension?
3. How do post reading activities affect the learners' reading comprehension?

3.3. Subjects

Subjects were divided into two groups: one control group and one experimental group for this study. This study dealt with the experience of reading activities by observing both groups. Twelve students from a foundation university in Turkey were analyzed in this research. The first semester students of compulsory English class university were examined by the researcher. All the students were between the age of 17 and 18 and all were native Turkish speakers. The subjects studied English at university 2 periods per week (50 minutes per period). These learners were in their usual reading class they were supposed to read a reading passage and to focus on some reading comprehension questions. Subjects shared the same native language and same educational background and age.

3.4. Instrument of the research

Field notes by the researcher at the end of the observation of each class were used to interpret the experience of the learners in both control and experiential groups.

3.5. Procedure

Table 1. The procedure of Pre, While and Post Reading Strategies

Reading stages	Lecturer activities	Learners' activities
Pre Reading	The lecturer asks questions to the learners in order to activate background knowledge of the topic	The learners try to activate their schemata about the topic of the text. The learners try to express their ideas about the topic of the text.
While Reading	The lecturer asks the learners to read the text.	The learners read the text.
Post Reading	The lecturer asks the learners work in a group and the lecturer sets classroom discussion in order to construct learners' understanding.	The learners will work in groups and they express their ideas about the topic of the text.

This study focused on the importance of reading activities in reading comprehension and the researcher applied series of reading activities; as pre, while and post stages (Table 1). That's why, the researcher tried to increase students' reading comprehension in reading class. In the first part of the study control group was analyzed for the research in reading classes in which researcher did not use activities as pre, while and post reading. Researcher did not use any methods or techniques or activities in order to create stimulating atmosphere in reading class. There were six students in the reading class in control group, and students read the reading passage and the researcher asked comprehension questions and only one student answered the questions in a correct way. On the other hand, in the second part of the research experimental group was analyzed the research in which the researcher applied series of reading activities divided into pre, while and post reading stages. For pre reading stage; researcher explained purpose and goal of reading activity. Then, Brainstorming activity was used for activating prior knowledge so students looked at titles, headings, and pictures of the text and the researcher asked basic questions related with the reading text. The questions were asked for activating background knowledge such as "What comes to your mind when you read title of the reading passage?" "What information might be in this text?" Four students explained their beliefs and opinions about the topic, two students explained their beliefs and opinions in native language. The rest of the class did not participate the activity. In teaching process the students looked

happy but some students looked confused. The researcher tried to teach reading strategies, identifying details and main ideas are important factors for perceiving the text. Skimming and scanning techniques were explained by the researcher. By means of skimming, learners tried to find out the main idea of a text. Students read the title and first and last paragraph. Initially students did not understand the main idea and later students read quickly first and last sentence in the paragraph and by means of scanning, learners found out specific information in the text, students did not read every word they moved their eyes quickly across the text. Sentences were written on the board by the researcher and students marked the sentences main idea or details of the reading passage. Previewing and predicting are another important element for pre reading stage. Subheading, picture, and title are essential factors for predicting, recognizing reference words in the reading passage and main idea of the reading passage were explained by the researcher. "It" "them" "that" "these" are common reference words in this reading passage for example the researcher wrote on the board "that way" was used in first paragraph. The researcher used this method to find what these words referred to, and the researcher focused on topic sentences and repeated words, key words and phrases. In while reading stage, learners summarized the main point and wrote only major details in piece of paper students tried to write own words as much as possible for understanding the paragraph. By means of summarizing students determined what was important in the reading passage, they tried to connect the main ideas and eliminate unnecessary information. Learners read the text and tried to predict what was going to happen in next paragraph, and in this period students were not encouraged to understand every single unknown words in a text. They tried to guess the meaning from the context. In while reading stage; learners paraphrased and interpreted each paragraph orally and students re read the text for perceiving the text effectively; and guessing from the unknown words from the context was used in this period; while guessing the meaning, learners tried to analyze unknown words and researcher broke the unfamiliar words into their affixes and suffixes.

By means of this activity, learners tried to guess the meaning of the words later the researcher asked reading comprehension questions and three learners answered the questions in a correct way and then words related to text were introduced by the researcher in order to expand and build vocabulary in target language.

In this sense, the researcher introduced unfamiliar vocabulary and constructed mental framework for perception. In this activity students were encouraged to write definitions for new vocabulary and researcher showed unfamiliar vocabulary (synonyms, antonyms, definitions, derivatives, associated words, contextual clues) By means of these activities; the students studied basic meaning of the words. These words were written on the board and then explained by the researcher. The learners made up sentences using key words, and created new words based on affixes and roots. In this stage students did not deal with only comprehension skills they also focused on vocabulary and they tried to apply strategies in order to decode the text. After this activity, the same comprehension questions were asked to the students all students answered the comprehension questions in a correct way. We can state that while reading stage; plays an important role for analyzing and interpreting the reading text. In post reading stage, classroom discussion was used for the research, students participated actively so they were able to improve their English efficiently, the researcher used group discussion so students expressed their ideas, beliefs and opinions in the discussion. The researcher gave a well designed topic related to the text and students discussed the topic in small groups and they presented their ideas and beliefs after discussion. By means of this activity learners' reading comprehension was checked by the researcher and in this stage they produced the target language and constructed meaning by using their prior knowledge related to topic.

3.6. Method of data collection

Qualitative method was used this research. The researcher collected the data by observing the learners during reading comprehension activities in both groups and writing down field notes depending on reflection.

The study was conducted among twelve students; six students for control group and six students for experimental group were observed for this study. Inquiry based methodology was used to make a comparison between these two groups according to three pre, while and post reading stages. Control group did not receive any practical and effective reading activities including these three stages. However, experimental group received pre, while and post reading activities during the research. It should be stated that informed consent was taken from the all attendees.

3.7. Method of data analysis

In the first part of the study, control group was interpreted; There were six students in the reading class, just one student answered the questions in a correct way in control group.

In the second part of the research; experimental group was interpreted in terms of their experiences based on fields noted resulted from the observations researcher used during these series of reading activities in three stages.

4. Findings

RQ1. The study indicates that by means of learner centered pre reading activities learners' involvement and motivation can increase. This research also finds out that learners can anticipate the topic, vocabulary and important lexicogrammatical features in the texts.

RQ2. The study indicates that while reading activities prepares the learners to reading passages. In this sense, learners can activate their background knowledge and relevant schemata so they are motivated for reading and constructing meaning.

RQ3. The study indicates that post reading activities increase learners' deeper understanding of the texts, so they can control their usage of English.

5. Conclusion and discussion

Reading can be defined constructing meaning in text [1]. Readers can construct meaning and evaluate text through the author's opinions. In these three stages (pre, while and post reading) students become active, efficient, effective, and independent readers. Based on this discussion; reading activities play an important role for reading comprehension and deeper level of understanding can be achieved by means of these reading activities and students read and understand the text easily. As we stated before, teachers should teach to students how to think how to use strategies and techniques in reading process so students can identify their needs and goals in reading classroom. We can state that students can use cognitive skills in reading activities. In this research we focus on functions of reading activities and students are activated by series of reading activities by the researcher. The results of data analysis showed that the experimental group that received the pre reading while reading and post reading activities did better in their reading comprehension than the control group. In this sense we can state that students are motivated by student centered reading activities. This paper indicates that students can construct the meaning, and integrate information in the text through reading activities; they synthesize the information in this sense they are motivated while perceiving the passage. We can state that teachers should focus on the reading material they should use suitable and effective techniques and methods in reading class.

It can be stated that in pre reading stage teachers focus on predicting and guessing, teach new vocabulary and they can set the scene and in while reading stage teachers can focus on content and language of the written text, and also teachers can focus on underlining, questioning and rhetorical organization for explaining the text. In this period students can analyze the arguments in the text and analyze the characters and the setting and they can study usage of words while they are reading a text and in post reading stage teachers can focus on many strategies such as summarizing, evaluating, synthesizing, commenting. In conclusion pre reading, while reading and post reading activities play an important role for reading comprehension so students are stimulated by these activities and these activities increase the students' skills and strategies and abilities for reading comprehension. In conclusion; the study indicates that if practical and effective reading activities are applied in reading classes students can create, relate, organize and realize meaning in written text.

The research was applied at University in Turkey and six students were examined and observed during the research so we cannot draw definite conclusion because we had limited students and limited time for this research. We can state that the researcher did not use all kinds of pre while and post reading activities in reading class because of lesson time restrictions so these are limitations of this research.

This study reveals the importance of reading activities for understanding the text; further researches can focus on other reading activities for increasing students reading comprehension. For further research In pre reading stage pre questioning techniques can be used and in while reading stage knowledge of the text organization and rhetorical organization and textual signals are important factors for understanding the content of the text and decoding skill. Based on this discussion text diagram can be used for further research and for post reading stage four linguistic skills can be combined in a natural manner so in this sense individual creating writing tasks, classroom communicative activities, role playing, research projects related to topic and videos related to topic can be used for further research papers in order to improve and evaluate the reading comprehension in reading class; we can state that researchers can create more and better methods and activities for improving the reading comprehension in reading class.

6. Author contribution statement

The scope, content arrangement, writing and editing of this article were done by Serda GÜZEL.

7. Ethics committee approval and conflict of interest statement

This study does not need ethics committee approval and author declared that this article has no conflict of interest.

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