

Hacettepe Üniversitesi İngilizce Hazırlık Okulu Öğrencilerinin Okuma İhtiyaçları

The Reading Needs of The Students' at Hacettepe University.
English Preparatory School

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ÖZET

Öğrencilerin dil bilgisinin yeterli olmasına rağmen, becerilerin kullanılmasında problem yaşayabiliyorlar. Okullarımızda genelde öğrencilerin bilmesi gerekenin dil bilgisi olduğuna inanılmasından dolayı öğrenciler gerçek hayatta iletişim kurarken problem yaşıyorlar bu yüzden okuduklarını anlayabilmek üzere öğrencilerin okuma becerilerini geliştirmeye ihtiyaçları vardır. Bu araştırma Hacettepe Üniversitesi İngilizce Hazırlık Birimi öğrencilerinin okuma ihtiyaçlarını belirlemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu çalışmada veri toplama aracı olarak anket kullanılmıştır. Anket uygulanmadan önce çıkabilecek problemleri saptamak amacı ile pilot denemesi yapılmıştır. Pilot denemeye Gazi Üniversitesinden 173 öğrenci katılmıştır. Ana uygulama Hacettepe Üniversitesinden 300 öğrenci ile yapılmıştır. Ankette okuma ve okuma becerisinin alt becerilerini içeren 31 soru bulunmaktadır. Anket SPSS paket programı ile değerlendirilmiştir. Anketin analizi öğrencilerin ihtiyaçlarını şu şekilde ortaya koymuştur; öğrencilerin özetleme, not alma, çıkarım yapma gibi akademik okuma becerilerini geliştirmeye ihtiyaçları vardır. Kelime bilgilerinin yetersizliğinden dolayı öğrenciler okuduklarını anlamada zorlanmaktadırlar. Bundan dolayı parçadan bilinmeyen kelimeleri tahmin etme gibi çalışmaların sınıfta yapılmasına ihtiyaç duymaktadırlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: okuma, teknikler, anket, akademik okuma becerileri.

ABSTRACT

The students' grammar is generally adequate but when it comes to the skills the students generally have problems. In our schools, it is believed that the most important thing that students should know is grammar but in most cases, students can not communicate in real life although they may know about the grammar so the students should practice and develop their reading skills to understand what they are reading. This study aims at determining the reading needs of the students' at Hacettepe University English Preparatory School. In this study a questionnaire was used as a data

collection instrument. Before administering the questionnaire the pilot study was done to see the possible problems which might occur. The participants of the pilot study were 173 students from Gazi University. The main administration was done to 300 students from Hacettepe University. There are 31 questions related to reading in the questionnaire and the analysis of the questionnaire was done by the help of SPSS package programme. The analysis of the data collected from the students has revealed their needs as follows; the students need to practice academic reading skills such as summarizing, taking notes, making inferences...etc. The students have difficulty in understanding owing to the lack of vocabulary knowledge. So they need to practice guessing from the context.

Key words: reading, techniques, questionnaire, academic reading skills.

1. Introduction

Language is usually defined as a system of vocal symbols which are arbitrarily combined to convey meaning. This is how linguistics explains the way language works. This phenomenon has another important feature: Language is used for communication. In other words, language is a means of communication. As Hartley (1983 : 11) states, “communication can take place successfully if the means of communication is agreed upon by its users, and thus language has a social conventional aspect. Society as we know could not exist without language.” Then it is possible to say that language is a system of arbitrary symbols used for communication.

In a communication process, people use either one or more of the language skills- listening, speaking, reading, writing. This is also true in the use of native language as well as the second or foreign language. “ When people learn a foreign language, they usually want to make use of that language to communicate with people who speak the same language. They can find themselves in the need of understanding them, talking to them, reading what they have written and writing to them.”(Raimes, 1983:201) As Raimes mentions, reading is, regardless of who the people using the language are, at least as important as oral skills to communicate.

New developments in printing technology linked with the rapidly developing field of telecommunications mean that people will enter an era in which access to a world-wide

library of printed materials will be available in the form of print outs or video displays. As a result, these new developments will always have audiences and so the skill of reading will continue to be important in the new age.

Such technological innovations show the importance of our knowledge of the reading process, but unfortunately very little is known about how people learn to read, although a little more about what it is that a skilled reader is able to do is apparent. Furthermore, most of the investigations into reading both acquisition and performance have focused on the reader reading his own native language. Consequently, when it comes to considering the non-native language reader, it is even further away from having an adequate understanding of the reading process than with the native language reader.

One reads in order to obtain information which is presented in written form such as a set of instructions on how to use a piece of equipment. Secondly, and overlapping with the first purpose, people also read materials whose content is intellectual rather than factual as a way of arguing or developing our own intellectual skills so that ideas can be more effectively manipulated, possibly with the aim of influencing the behavior of others or of determining the outcome of a series of operations; e.g. making proposals for a project. Thirdly, people read for emotional gratification or spiritual enlightenment i.e., for pleasure or self improvement.

Reading is a basic and complementary skill in language learning. Second and foreign language students, similar to native speakers of the language, need to learn to read not only for communication but also for the pleasure of it. Students can probably learn to read more easily than they can acquire any other skill, and they can use reading materials as a primary source of comprehensible input as they learn the language.

Pearson (1985:87) makes the following recommendations to language teachers regarding the skill of reading.

1. Be sure to find out students' prior knowledge of a topic or text genre before beginning to read.
2. Encourage rereading.

3. Give students more opportunities to evaluate their own ideas, to consider others' views, and to recognize how their own past experiences and reasons for reading influence what they understand.
4. Spend more time helping students develop strategies for reading to understand and to accomplish various tasks and assignments.
5. Help students develop story maps for stories before they read.
6. Encourage students to consider why and to whom an author is writing.
7. Develop links between what students read and what they write.
8. Revise the small discussion group as a way to accomplish all these goals.”

As the above mentioned author state, language teachers should encourage students to predict, to tolerate ambiguity, to link ideas, to paraphrase, and to summarize so that they stop dwelling on isolated words often not vital for comprehension. They can also help students by discussing the title, theme, and cultural background before starting the reading activity. During the course they should cultivate positive attitudes toward reading and the students' ability to read. Prior to the first reading assignment they should teach students how to skim, find the main idea, develop and modify their hypotheses, and correct and learn from errors. They should give them practice on using the dictionary, taking notes, underlining, skimming and rereading.

Grellet (1981: 72) discusses useful reading practice techniques. One of these is to have students work their way through comprehension problems by inferring the meaning through word formation and context. They should also learn to pick out the important words that form the core of each sentence, and they need to be aware of the use of referent and connecting words to establish relationships in and among sentences and paragraphs. Another is to practice with timed readings to improve the reading speed. A third is to learn to use scanning and skimming techniques to preview reading material and to predict what the selection is about in order to develop expectations. Depending on his experiences he maintains that it is clear that looking every word up in the

dictionaries is not an example of good reading habits. On the contrary, students should be encouraged to understand the general meaning of the whole text and not try to understand it word by word.

Krashen (1981 : 331) outlines the following communicative reading strategies:

1. Read in order to get the meaning.
2. Do not look up every word.
3. Predict the meaning of unknown vocabulary items.
4. Make use of contextual clues to comprehend.

It is seen that Krashen's strategies sum up what Grellet says. Foreign language teachers can be advised to follow these strategies in the classroom. Generally teachers often use the word "reading" to refer to two entirely different processes: In the first case, they have in mind an activity in which students read aloud from the printed page, and in the other case, they refer to an activity in which students read a passage silently for comprehension. Both activities are worthwhile when used at the right time and for the right purposes. While choosing the activities, all types of written materials from advertisements to literature can be used. In their first language, students have ready access to language used in meaningful contexts, and they incorporate needed patterns from those models into their own changing and evolving the linguistic system. What they often lack in the second foreign language classroom is the opportunity to develop a sufficient language base from which to generate messages they would like to communicate to someone else. Classroom use of comprehensible reading materials can help to alleviate this problem. Thus, all reading activities should serve to facilitate communicative fluency.

In our schools, it is believed that the most important thing that students should know is grammar and owing to the curriculum and test types teachers' value grammar more but, in most cases, students cannot communicate in real life although they may know a lot about the grammar of the language. The most important thing for the students should be to understand what they are reading.

2. Method

This study aims at determining the reading needs of the students' at Hacettepe University English Preparatory School. In this study a questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument. Before administering the questionnaire to the students the pilot administration was done to see the possible problems which might occur. The pilot study was carried out at Gazi University as it was not possible to administer the same questionnaire again to the participants of the pilot study, they were chosen from another university. There were 173 participants who were chosen randomly. The researcher was with the students while administering the questionnaire to see the drawbacks of the questionnaire. In the pilot study, it is found that, the questionnaire has .97 reliability. After the administration of the pilot study the questionnaire was administered to 300 students from Preparatory School at Hacettepe University in order to see the reading needs of the students. There are thirty-one questions in the questionnaire which considers reading and the sub skills of it. The evaluation and the analysis were done by the help of SPSS package programme.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

In this section the analysis and interpretation of the questionnaire will be done. The questions were analyzed one by one and the analyses were done by the help of frequency and percentage results. The questions were written under each table.

Table 1: *I can understand what I have read in general.*

Question 1	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	47	15,7
Bad	168	56,0
Average	57	19,0
Good	15	5,0
Very good	3	1,0
Total	290	96,7
Missing	10	3,3
Total	300	100,0

168 (%56) of the students marked that they are bad at understanding what they have read.

Table 2: *I can understand the main idea of what I have read in general.*

Question 2	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	49	16,3
Bad	154	51,3
Average	69	23,0
Good	14	4,7
Very good	5	1,7
Total	291	97,0
Missing	9	3,0
Total	300	100,0

154 (%51,3) of the students stated that they are bad at understanding the main idea of what they have read.

Table 3: *My grammar is adequate to understand what I have read.*

Question 3	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	48	16,0
Bad	141	47,0
Average	81	27,0
Good	15	5,0
Very good	5	1,7
Total	290	96,7
Missing	10	3,3
Total	300	100,0

141 (%47,0) of the students stated that their grammar isn't adequate to understand what they have read.

Table 4: *My vocabulary is adequate to understand what I have read.*

Question 4	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	54	18,0
Bad	137	45,7
Average	80	26,7
Good	13	4,3
Very good	4	1,3
Total	288	96,0
Missing	12	4,0
Total	300	100,0

137 (%45,7) of the students marked that their vocabulary isn't adequate to understand what they have read.

Table 5: *I can guess the unknown words while reading.*

Question 5	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	23	7,7
Bad	118	39,3
Average	104	34,7
Good	37	12,3
Very good	8	2,7
Total	290	96,7
Missing	10	3,3
Total	300	100,0

118 (%39,3) of the students marked that they have difficulty in guessing the unknown words.

Table 6: *I can guess the parts that I could not understand while reading.*

Question 6	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	14	4,7
Bad	75	25,0
Average	129	43,0
Good	56	18,7
Very good	14	4,7
Total	288	96,0
Missing	12	4,0
Total	300	100,0

129 (%43,0) of the students marked that they are at the average level in guessing the parts that they could not understand while reading.

Table 7: *I have no difficulty in pacing of my reading.*

Question 7	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	16	5,3
Bad	111	37,0
Average	118	39,3
Good	40	13,3
Very good	5	1,7
Total	290	96,7
Missing	10	3,3
Total	300	100,0

118 (%39,3) of the students marked that they are at the average level in pacing of their reading.

Table 8: *I can answer the questions after reading.*

Question 8	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	108	36,0
Bad	115	38,3
Average	52	17,3
Good	13	4,3
Very good	3	1,0
Total	291	97,0
Missing	9	3,0
Total	300	100,0

115 (%38,3) of the students pinpointed that they are bad at answering the questions after reading.

Table 9: *I can take notes while reading.*

Question 9	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	26	8,7
Bad	120	40,0
Average	110	36,7
Good	29	9,7
Very good	5	1,7
Total	290	96,7
Missing	10	3,3
Total	300	100,0

120 (%40) of the students pinpointed that they are bad at taking notes while reading.

Table 10: *I can summarize what I have read.*

Question 10	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	32	10,7
Bad	136	45,3
Average	91	30,3
Good	28	9,3
Very good	4	1,3
Total	291	97,0
Missing	9	3,0
Total	300	100,0

136 (%45,3) of the students pinpointed that they are bad at summarizing what they have read.

Table 11: *I can use dictionaries.*

Question 11	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	32	10,7
Bad	101	33,7
Average	92	30,7
Good	50	16,7
Very good	14	4,7
Total	289	96,3
Missing	11	3,7
Total	300	100,0

101 (%33,7) of the students pinpointed that they are bad at using dictionaries.

Table 12: *I can read the tables, graph.....etc. correctly.*

Question 12	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	29	9,7
Bad	85	28,3
Average	106	35,3
Good	54	18,0
Very good	17	5,7
Total	291	97,0
Missing	9	3,0
Total	300	100,0

106 (%35,3) of the students pinpointed that they are at the average level in reading tables, graphs....etc. correctly.

Table 13: *I can understand the questions in the exams.*

Question 13	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	39	13,0
Bad	128	42,7
Average	84	28,0
Good	30	10,0
Very good	10	3,3
Total	291	97,0
Missing	9	3,0
Total	300	100,0

128 (%42,7) of the students pinpointed that they are bad at understanding the exam questions.

Table 14: *I can read references to prepare projects reports and homework.*

Question 14	Frequency	Percent
Very bad	22	7,3
Bad	91	30,3
Average	95	31,7
Good	59	19,7
Very good	23	7,7
Total	290	96,7
Missing	10	3,3
Total	300	100,0

95 (%31,7) of the students pinpointed that they are at the average level in reading references to prepare projects reports and homework.

The questions between 15 and 31 are related to the techniques that the students practice in the classroom and the results are as follows;

- 113 (%37,7) of the students stated that they generally do not practice finding the main idea of a text.
- 132 (%44,0) of the students stated that they generally do not practice making inferences after reading.
- 109 (%36,3) of the students stated that they do not generally read for the gist of information in the classroom.
- 106 (%35,3) of the students marked that they do class discussions related to the texts.
- 101 (%33,7) of the students pinpointed that they rarely practice summarizing after reading.
- 88 (% 29,3) of the students mentioned that they often practice reading in details.
- 100 (%33,3) of the students stated that they usually do presentations after reading in the classroom.
- 103 (%34,3) of the students stated that they often read the first part of a text and guess the other parts.
- 118 (%39,3) of the students marked that they rarely practice guessing the vocabulary.

- 120 (%40) of the students pinpointed that they rarely practice giving instructions after reading in the classroom.
- 96 (%32,0) of the students mentioned that they practice reading and filling in the tables and the graphs in the classroom.
- 106 (%35,3) of the students stated that they often practice reading and problem solving in the classroom.
- 99 (% 33,3) of the students marked that they practice reading and asking questions.
- 107 (%35,7) of the students stated that they practice reading and answering questions.
- 84 (% 28,0) of the students pinpointed that they rarely practice reading aloud.
- 96 (% 32,0) of the students stated that they sometimes practice reading and translation in the classroom.

4. Findings

The interpretation of the data collected is as follows;

1. The students have difficulty in understanding not only what they have read but also the main idea of the text.
2. The students' grammar is not adequate to understand what they have read.
3. The students have difficulty in guessing the vocabulary from the context.
4. The students have difficulty in answering the questions related to the text.
5. The students need to practice summarizing and taking notes after reading.
6. The students need to practice how to use dictionaries.
7. The students sometimes have difficulty in understanding the exam questions.
8. The students need to practice finding the main idea of a text.
9. The students need to practice reading for the gist of information.
10. The students need to practice making inferences after reading.
11. The students need to practice guessing the unknown words from the context.
12. The students' vocabulary is not adequate to understand what they have read.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the data collected from the students in the preparatory school has revealed their needs. The students need to practice guessing vocabulary from context. Students do not need to know all the vocabulary and the structures contained in a text to comprehend a major portion of the text. They can learn to read at a much higher level of proficiency than in the past when the preoccupation with grammar is used to deprive them of the opportunity to read for its meaning. They can learn about the reading strategies that can enable them to read at much higher levels of proficiency. Also, teachers can initiate activities that heighten students' motivation and increase their level of comprehension which will also develop their ability to understand the text and the main idea of it.

Grellet (1981: 91) discusses the problems that students have with reading. "They are afraid; they are more concerned with getting the correct answer than with the more important process of how to get the answer. They depend too much on the dictionary, and they have problems making the transition from short reading to long ones." To help students overcome these problems, she suggests that teachers ask them to read and underline unknown words without looking up the meaning in the dictionary; to use contextual clues to guess the general meaning, to skip unknown words, and to focus on cognates, roots, prefixes and suffixes. As she mentions; teachers should provide them with pre-reading activities which involve vocabulary, guessing, and skimming, scanning activities to encourage the students not to look up dictionaries for each word and thus be able to concentrate more on the meaning. When readers are not comprehending, they are not reading. However, implying that the reading objective has been achieved when students are able to read for the message may still be short of a satisfactory goal. Students may manage to ascertain meaning by painful efforts based on dictionaries. However, this process is not the type of reading that language teachers and students should have in mind. The students' role in reading is very important although they are sometimes erroneously thought to be passive, because the reader does not produce messages in the same sense as a speaker or writer.

Reading, nevertheless, requires active mental processing for communication to occur. As is true in the case of each of the other three language skills, the purpose of reading is grasping the meaning. The goal is communication. Written communication involves a writer, who activates his knowledge of the world to create a written message, and a reader, who activates his knowledge of the world to decode the message as closely to the original as possible.

Reading is a receptive skill in that the reader is receiving a message from a writer, but it should not mean that the reader is passive during a reading activity. Recent research in reading describes the reading process in a way that implies in active reader intent upon using background knowledge and skills to recreate the writer's intended meaning. Perfetti (1985: 41) for example, defines reading as "thinking guided by print". Writers should consider the reader, the effect they want to achieve, the relationship they want to establish with the reader, the creation of meaning; the use of language and the correctness of grammar. Foreign language students have to learn to deal with linguistic material over which they have no control. They must learn to interact with the reading in a productive fashion so as to determine meaning even when some of the words, ending and patterns are not immediately meaningful. The goal is to reach a level at which they have confidence in their ability to understand and to continue reading meaning and, they need to reach a reading speed that will enable them to use the reading skill realistically as a source of information or enjoyment. To help students achieve this objective the teacher has the responsibility as in the case of the other language skills, of leading them to overall and specific goals. The course goal is to be able to read without concentrating on structure or on translating into their own language.

As a result, academic reading skills should be integrated to the curriculum which means a more skill based syllabus to develop the reading skills of the students.

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