



## Reading Comprehension Strategies Taught by Turkish EFL Teachers\*

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify to what extent Turkish teachers of English teach the given reading comprehension strategies in their classes. Data were collected through a survey instrument which was adapted from the Survey of Reading Strategies (the SORS) created by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002). Data collected from 48 teachers were analyzed. Results indicate that scanning, guessing the meaning of unknown words, previewing the text, using context clues and skimming are the five most frequently taught reading strategies, respectively. Furthermore, using graphic organizers, dictionary use, adjusting reading speed, making notes, and paraphrasing are the least frequently taught reading comprehension strategies.

Keywords: Reading comprehension strategies, reading in a foreign language, EFL Teachers.

### Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türk İngilizce öğretmenlerinin sınıflarında verilen okuduğunu anlama stratejilerini ne ölçüde öğrettiklerini belirlemektir. Veriler, Mokhtari ve Sheorey (2002) tarafından oluşturulan Okuma Stratejileri Anketinden (SORS) uyarlanan bir anket aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. 48 öğretmenden toplanan veriler analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, tarama, bilinmeyen kelimelerin anlamlarını tahmin etme, metni önizleme, bağlam ipuçlarını kullanma ve göz gezdirmenin sırasıyla en sık öğretilen beş okuma stratejisi olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca, grafik düzenleyici kullanmak, sözlük kullanma, okuma hızını ayarlama, not alma ve başka kelimelerle ifade etme, okuduğunu anlama stratejileri arasında en az öğretilen stratejiler arasında yer almaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Okuduğunu anlama stratejileri, yabancı dilde okuma, EFL Öğretmenleri.

### Introduction

Reading is one of four skills necessary to become a competent user of a second language. It was regarded as core component of second language learning and teaching during Grammar Translation Method where the purpose of learning a second language was to read the literature in target language. Additionally, Audiolingual Method which was a reading-based approach to language teaching suggested reading texts in second language as primary source of L2 input and proposed that teaching the target language would be possible by teaching the comprehension of the texts in that language. Although these approaches to second language teaching and learning lost popularity in time due to their lack of some aspects of second language learning, reading comprehension is still considered one of the key components of second language teaching and learning mainly because reading itself is a means for language acquisition.

Reading has been considered the most essential skill among four skills in foreign and second language acquisition field. Because, before anything else, instructional materials-whether it be books or technology-based learning and teaching tools- are heavily depended on reading skill. In other words, in language classrooms, learners are required to develop certain reading skills to actively participate in learning process and achieve their goal of becoming a successful user of the target language. Furthermore, reading enables language learners to expose to a great deal of input in target language. For example, while reading, learners are exposed to new vocabulary, linguistic forms, cultural information etc. For learners to get most out of the written materials, they must comprehend the message that the text conveys. At this point, it is vital for language teachers to help their students to acquire essential reading comprehension skills that will benefit learners throughout the language learning process and beyond. This would be possible by teaching learners necessary reading comprehension strategies in language classes and provide learners with adequate opportunities to develop and improve these strategies with practice. In other words, teachers should plan their lessons in a way that they should explain, model these strategies; they should create contexts for learners to use and monitor the strategies they just learned.

## Reading Comprehension in Foreign/Second Language

Reading comprehension is a process where learners understand a message conveyed through a written text (Snow, 2002). Furthermore, it is a process of extracting and reshaping meaning out of any written material (Bamford, 2000). Thus, reading comprehension shares a fundamental part in teaching and learning contexts. It enables learners to access to the information in written sources and create a brand new meaning by incorporating their prior knowledge during the process (Koda, 2005). The traditional view approached reading as a receptive skill and viewed reading process as mere decoding of the information give in the texts (Nunan, 1991), additionally, it viewed the reader as a passive recipient of the information in the text and a bottom-up approach to reading was adopted. After 1970s, this approach was abandoned due to its over-reliance on structural aspects of reading materials. Goodman's (1967) psycholinguistic model of reading which viewed reading as an active process where the reader interacts with the text to make meaning out of it (Psaltou- Joyce, 2010) has an impact on reading in foreign/second language. With the introduction of this model, a top-down approach to reading has been adopted.

In language classrooms, reading materials constitute rich sources for target language input, therefore, through reading, learners gain opportunity to reach and acquire a variety of linguistic forms, vocabulary and cultural concepts by comprehending the written materials in that language. According to Jeon and Yamashita (2014), there are four most influential factors that affect the reading comprehension in a foreign/second language, these are: ability to decode, vocabulary, grammar knowledge and L1 reading comprehension. To become a good reader, learners must master the aforementioned skills and also know how to overcome the obstacles they face while reading employing these strategies. In order to achieve this, students should be introduced to the reading comprehension strategies which will enable learners to actively participate in reading process.

## Reading Comprehension Strategies

Reading comprehension occurs only when the learners are aware of the strategies that they need and know how to apply them while reading (Blachowicz and Ogle, 2001). Furthermore, by applying these strategies effectively, learners become autonomous learners who take responsibility for, monitor, evaluate their own learning (Medina, 2012). In other words, by successfully implementing these strategies, learners not only increase their comprehension but also their achievement and proficiency levels in general (Borkowski, Carr, & Pressley, 1987). Thus, to help learners to grow as strategic readers and autonomous language learners, language teachers should address and emphasize these strategies in language classes. It is often assumed that the more we read the better our reading comprehension gets. However, Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Mistretta-Hampston, & Echevarria, (1998) found that simply reading more is not sufficient for better comprehension, but using only one reading comprehension strategy could benefit comprehension more than just increasing the text we read. Given that second and foreign language learners may fail to comprehend the texts due to the lack of linguistic background information, it is highly recommended to teach reading comprehension strategies explicitly in language classrooms (Ediger, 2001). By utilizing the appropriate reading comprehension strategies, learners aim to get the message and idea in the text accurately, effectively, and quickly. What's more, once they reach the message successfully, they compare the information they obtained to the prior knowledge they had. As a result, they create a new meaning. Given the fact that, L2 learners are required to interact with a variety of genres in reading classes, acquiring comprehension strategies benefits greatly and accelerates the language learning process.

Reading comprehension strategies are mainly divided into two groups as cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Lopera, 2015). Cognitive strategies are used to achieve a particular reading goal such as finding the main idea of a text whereas metacognitive strategies are used to evaluate our understanding to see whether or not we reached our goal. In other words, metacognitive reading strategies -also referred to as "thinking about thinking"- regulate our use of cognitive strategies (Livingston, 1997). Activating what we already know about the information in the text, inferring the meaning, questioning, searching-selecting specific information in the text to understand the message, summarizing, organizing the new information using a graphic organizer or chart etc. could be listed among the mostly used reading comprehension strategies. In order to become successful readers and learners in a foreign/second language, it is essential for students to acquire and apply these skills.

## Purpose and Importance

In last a few decades, a large body of research has been conducted to find out if the reading comprehension strategy training actually benefits the reading comprehension of learners. Fan (2010) conducted a study with 110 Taiwanese college students to reveal if the strategy instruction has an impact on their comprehension. Findings from this study revealed that learners who received strategy instruction performed better comprehension test in terms of finding the main idea and supporting details. In a similar study carried out with young learners of French, Macaro and Erler (2008) found out that reading strategy contributed to the comprehension of learners, moreover, an improvement towards reading was observed among these learners. Similarly, findings from a study where participants are explicitly taught summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting strategies, reported that strategy instruction enhanced the reading comprehension of learners (Song, 1998).

As research findings suggest reading comprehension strategy instruction plays a fundamental role in building and improving comprehension skills in language learners. Learners who are explicitly taught the reading strategies not only improve their reading comprehension but also gain an understanding of monitoring and evaluating their use of these strategies. The primary purpose of this study is to identify to what extent Turkish teachers of EFL teach given strategies in their classes. In other words, this study aims to find answer to following research question:

To what extent English teachers teach selected reading comprehension strategies in their classrooms?

## Methodology

### Design and Procedures

This study uses a non-experimental descriptive research method. Since the primary purpose of this study was to identify the extent to which Turkish teachers of English teach reading strategies, this research methodology was selected over others. As the population is quite large, this study used a convenience sampling method to recruit the participants. In other words, all the teachers participate in this study are volunteers and selected based on their availability to access and proximity to the researcher. In this study, an online survey instrument was used to collect data. The researcher contacted the teachers via e-mail where she included a link to the survey. Teachers were first explained the purpose of the study and the content of the survey tool. Then they were asked to respond to the online survey as honestly as possible. They were also informed that their responses would be anonymous. Survey begins with questions asking for demographic information in multiple choice format. Once they finished answering demographic information section, they were asked to answer questions about the reading strategies they teach. Teachers were asked to respond to a total of 19 items and each item corresponds to a reading strategy. Participants were asked to rate each item based on a 5-point scale (1-Never, 2-Occasionally, 3-Sometimes, 4-Usually, 5-Always). The data were collected in 2017-2018 academic year in fall semester.

### Participants

The research participants consist of 48 English language teachers employed in public and private schools in Turkey. The sample included 34 female (70.8%) and 14 male (29.8%) English teachers. Most of the participating teachers were between the ages of 30 to 40 (70.8%). Table 1 below shows the frequency distribution and percentages of participants by age.

**Table 1** Frequency Distribution of Participants by Age

	Frequency	Percent
20 through 30	13	27.1
31 through 40	34	70.8
41 through 50	1	2.1
	48	100.0

The teachers participating in this study were asked to report their teaching experiences in years. More than half of the participating teachers have 6 to 10 years of teaching experience (25, 52.1%). Likewise, more than half of the participants reported that teaching English in state university (27, 56.3%). Table 2 and Table 3 below shows the frequencies and percentages of participants by teaching experience and school type respectively.

**Table 2** Frequency Distribution of Participants by Teaching Experience

	Frequency	Percent
0 through 5 years	10	20.8
6 through 10 years	25	52.1
11 through 15 years	11	22.9
16 through 20 years	1	2.1
More than 20 years	1	2.1
	48	100.0

**Table 3** Frequency Distribution of Participants by School Type

	Frequency	Percent
State Elementary and Secondary School	13	27.1
Private Elementary and Secondary School	1	2.1
State High School	6	12.5
State University	27	56.3
Private University	1	2.1
	48	100.0

Participants also were asked to respond to report their education level. Only 15 (31.3%) of the participants were holding bachelor's degree. In addition, 5 (10.4%) and 15 (31.3%) of the participants reported that they are continuing their master and doctorate degrees respectively. Moreover, 7 (14.6%) of the participating teachers hold master's degree and 6 (12.5%) hold PhD degree.

### Instruments

Instruments used to collect data included a questionnaire consisting of two parts. First part of the questionnaire contains questions about demographic information such as gender, age and questions about experience in teaching, highest degree earned, type of the school that teachers work and English proficiency of the students they teach. The second part of the questionnaire contains 19 reading strategies and teachers were asked to indicate to what extent they teach these strategies in their English classrooms. The reading strategies questionnaire used in this study is adapted from the Survey of Reading Strategies (the SORS) created by Kouider Mokhtari and Ravi Sheorey (2002). The SORS was originally developed to identify the reading strategies used by students who learn English as a second language. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the adapted survey to determine if participants were consistent in their responses to the survey. The survey had a reliability estimate of .90. This result indicates that participants were consistent in their responses and adapted survey is reliable.

### Data Collection and Analysis

### Results

This study was conducted in 2017. The primary purpose of this study was to identify to what extent Turkish teachers of English teach given reading comprehension strategies in their classes. In order to answer this question, participants' responses to 19 reading strategies were analyzed through SPSS 21.0. Overall frequencies of responses provided by English teachers for the reading strategies in the survey were in a positive direction. Table 4 shows the number of the responses and percentages for each selected reading strategies in the survey.

**Table 4** Frequency Distributions of each Reading Strategy

Not at all <1-2-3-4-5> To great extent	1	2	3	4	5	Total
	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	N
1-Pre-viewing the text	-	1 (2.1%)	10 (20.2%)	14 (29.2%)	23 (47.9%)	48
2-Predicting	-	2 (4.2%)	8 (16.7%)	24 (50%)	14 (29.2%)	48
3- Looking up unknown words	1 (2.1%)	4 (8.3%)	13 (27.1%)	12 (25%)	18 (37.5%)	48
4-Dictionary use	1 (2.1%)	8 (16.7%)	19 (39.6%)	12 (25%)	8 (16.7%)	48
5-Guessing the meaning of new words	-	-	7 (14.6%)	18 (37.5%)	23 (47.9%)	48
6- Deciding what to read closely	1 (2.1%)	1 (2.1%)	16 (33.3%)	17 (35.4%)	13 (27.1%)	48
7-Reading aloud	3 (6.3%)	6 (12.5%)	9 (18.8%)	12 (25%)	18 (37.5%)	48

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8-Adjusting reading speed	3 (6.3%)	9 (18.8%)	8 (16.7%)	22 (45.8%)	6 (12.5%)	48
9-Making connections	-	3 (6.3%)	13 (27.1%)	13 (27.1%)	19 (39.6%)	48
10-Using charts/graphic organizers	5 (10.4%)	9 (18.8%)	13 (27.1%)	15 (31.3%)	6 (12.5%)	48
11-Making notes	2 (4.2%)	11 (22.9%)	10 (20.8%)	15 (31.3%)	10 (20.8%)	48
12-Skimming	-	5 (10.4%)	7 (14.6%)	16 (33.3%)	20 (41.7%)	48
13-Paraphrasing	2 (4.2%)	7 (14.6%)	12 (25%)	17 (35.4%)	10 (20.8%)	48
14-Summarizing	3 (6.3%)	4 (8.3%)	10 (20.8%)	21 (43.8%)	10 (20.8%)	48
15-Making comparisons	-	3 (6.3%)	13 (27.1%)	22 (45.8%)	10 (20.8%)	48
16-Using text features	1 (2.1%)	5 (10.4%)	12 (25%)	11 (22.9%)	19 (39.6%)	48
17-Context clues	-	-	10 (20.8%)	21 (43.8%)	17 (35.4%)	48
18-Highlighting/underlining	2 (4.2%)	4 (8.3%)	5 (10.4%)	16 (33.3%)	21 (43.8%)	48
19-Scanning	-	2 (4.2%)	4 (8.3%)	15 (31.3%)	27 (56.3%)	48

Findings reported in table 4 shows that significant number of the participants responded the items more than 3 in 5-point Likert scale. In order to better represent central tendencies and variance, means and standard deviations were calculated for each reading strategies.

The overall mean of responses to reading strategies was 3.84 with standard deviation of 0.6. At the item level, the lowest mean score for all reading strategies was Item 10 (Using graphic organizers) with (M=3.17, SD= 1.19) and the highest one was Item 19 (Scanning) with (M= 4.4, SD= 0.82). Table 5 below show the means and standard deviations for each selected reading strategies in the survey.

**Table 5** Means and Standard Deviations of each Reading Strategy

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
19-Scanning	48	4,4	0,82
5-Guessing the meaning of new words	48	4,33	0,72
1-Pre-viewing the text	48	4,23	0,86
17-Context clues	48	4,15	0,74
12-Skimming	48	4,06	0,99
2-Predicting	48	4,04	0,8
18-Highlighting/underlining	48	4,04	1,13
9-Making connections	48	4	0,97
3-Looking up unknown words	48	3,88	1,08
16-Using text features	48	3,88	1,12
6- Deciding what to read closely	48	3,83	0,93
15-Making comparisons	48	3,81	0,84

7-Reading aloud	48	3,75	1,26
14-Summarizing	48	3,65	1,1
13-Paraphrasing	48	3,54	1,11
11-Making notes	48	3,42	1,18
8-Adjusting reading	48	3,4	1,13
4-Dictionary use	48	3,38	1,02
10-Using charts	48	3,17	1,19

### Discussion and conclusion

This study explored the teaching of reading strategies by Turkish teachers of English. Teachers were asked to rate given reading strategies based on how frequently they teach these strategies in their classrooms. Results indicate that scanning, guessing the meaning of unknown words, previewing the text, using context clues and skimming are the five most frequently taught reading strategies, respectively. On the other hand, using graphic organizers, dictionary use, adjusting reading speed, making notes, and paraphrasing are the least frequently taught reading comprehension strategies.

Findings from this study revealed that Turkish teachers of English mostly teach reading strategies that students need to understand the unknown vocabulary, main idea and important information in the text. It could also be concluded from the findings that in Turkish EFL classrooms, students are taught strategies used in pre-reading and during-reading phase. For example, previewing the text and scanning, skimming, guessing the meaning of unknown words. On the other hand, reading strategies used in post-reading phase such as paraphrasing, using graphic organizers, making connections between experience/knowledge and information in the text are among the least frequently taught reading strategies. This finding gives the impression that in Turkish EFL classrooms, in reading lessons, students are taught to comprehend a specific text rather than constructing new meaning by incorporating prior knowledge and experience. Furthermore, it is also clear from the findings that EFL teachers in Turkey mostly teach cognitive reading strategies and at some point, neglect metacognitive reading strategies in their classrooms. Given that the sample of this study included only 48 teachers, the findings from this study may not be representative of the reading comprehension teaching in all EFL classrooms in Turkey. Thus, this study could be replicated with a larger sample of EFL teachers.

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