We Read but How: Research on Reading and Reading Comprehension Skills

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Abstract

Reading and reading comprehension skills are among the most basic language skills. Therefore, these skills should be acquired at an early age. Although there are studies in terms of reading in Türkiye, it was seen that reading comprehension skills are insufficient in the exams. This study investigated how reading and reading comprehension activities were carried out at the primary school level and how this situation reflected on students. This study was designed as a case study to reveal the subject to be examined in depth. The participant group of this study, which was carried out at the primary school level, consisted of 207 students and eight primary school teachers. Data were collected from students with a reading comprehension test and teachers with a semi-structured interview form. The data obtained from the achievement test are presented descriptively. The interviews with the teachers were analyzed by content analysis. According to the data obtained, it was seen that the teachers preferred the reward method in gaining the habit of reading, and they carried out activities that would improve the students' cognitive skills for their reading comprehension skills. The result that 70.53% of the students in the research made the profound understanding question wrong was also a remarkable situation.

Keywords: Turkish, reading, reading comprehension, primary school

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Introduction

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk underlined the importance of reading as follows: *"I was poor as a child. When I had two dimes, I would buy a book with one dime. Otherwise, I would not be able to do any of these things."* (Granda, 1973, p. 267). As stated by Atatürk, reading is a vital instrument in a person's life and is one of the basic skills that must be acquired. This essential skill is helpful in both daily and academic situations. In addition to the importance of reading skills, Akyol (2005) defined this process as the person communicating with the author of the text they read based on their prior knowledge and making sense of it by reading in line with the target they have set. Therefore, individuals will encounter new and different resources in their readings, leading to varied circumstances and experiences (Özbay, 2007). These contacts with unfamiliar circumstances and experiences will untail the learning process and provide them with fresh perspectives. Hence, reading and comprehending what is read are essential determinants that impact an individual's everyday existence and educational endeavors. For this reason, reading is one of the skills children first aim to acquire when they start school.

Reading education begins in 1st grade and considerably affects a person's academic life. For example, The World Bank (2019) states that the child will suffer from "learning poverty" if his/her reading and comprehension proficiency is not at the desired level. This means that if a child is not proficient in reading and comprehension, he/she will be unable to understand other courses. For example, he/she has to understand instructions wholly and correctly so that a student can solve a problem in the mathematics class or experiment in the science class. Studies have revealed the positive effect of developed reading skills on mathematics and science (Akbaşlı, Şahin, & Yaykıran, 2016; Ding & Homer, 2020). Although reading is essential, national and international exams show that students' reading skills are insufficient. For example, according to the Monitoring and Evaluation of Academic Skills (2019) report, approximately 60% of 4th-grade students in Türkiye are at intermediate or lower levels regarding reading comprehension proficiencies. Therefore, it is critical to develop these skills.

According to research on reading comprehension skills, good readers do the following things during the reading process (Duke & Pearson, 2009).

- They are active readers.
- They set clear goals before starting and evaluating their progress throughout the reading process.
- Before reading, readers evaluate and take notes on essential parts of the book.
- They predict the future chapters while reading.
- They are conscious of how they should read (quickly, carefully, by repeating, etc.) and make their choices accordingly.
- They question the meanings they create about what they read.
- They learn words or concepts whose meaning they do not know.
- They research about the author of the text.
- They determine the value of the text they read and react to the text emotionally and intellectually.
- They read different types of texts.
- They analyze the plot and characters in the text well.

When we look at what good readers do in the reading process, it is seen that variables such as the characteristics of the reader, the characteristics of the text, and the goals that affect this process are influential (Lorch & van den Broek, 1997; van den Broek & Kremer, 1999). When it comes to reader characteristics, individual differences come into play. People's lives, vocabulary, correct reading, letter recognition, fluent reading, etc., affect reading comprehension proficiencies as individual differences (Akyol, 2005; Davey, 1998). In addition, to understand what the author wants to tell in the text, it is necessary to know some factors, such as the period in which the author lived and his/her perspective on life (Beydoğan, 2010). As a result, reading and reading comprehension skills are complex processes influenced by several variables. Therefore, to develop these skills properly, teachers must be competent in giving reading and comprehension skills to students.

Collins and Smith (1980) stated that monitoring comprehension, forming hypotheses, and evaluating points are essential for developing reading comprehension skills. Regarding monitoring comprehension, the teacher should follow the ongoing comprehension process while the student reads the text and guide the solution point when there is a problem. While the reading process continues, the student interprets what they have read and makes predictions about the following chapters based on the clues in the text. The teacher's guidance in these parts is essential for the student's reading comprehension. In schools, there are projects such as reading hours (Köksal & Değirmenci, 2015) or book reading hours determined at certain hours and days to help students gain reading habits. These activities are sometimes covered by national and local press as "reading days" or "reading festivals" (see. Erzincan Governship, 2023). Despite the activities performed, reading comprehension skills are not at the desired level at exams (E.g., Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2019; OECD, 2023).

Research Questions

This study examines how primary school teachers perform reading activities, their activities related to reading comprehension skills, and how they reflect on students. For this purpose, answers to the following questions have been sought:

1. How do primary school teachers perform activities related to reading and comprehension skills in their classrooms?
2. How do the activities of primary school regarding reading and reading comprehension skills reflect on the reading comprehension skills of students?

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study approach. Yin (2008) describes a case study as empirical research that thoroughly investigates a current event, particularly when the distinction between phenomena and context is blurred. On the other hand, this study is designed by the descriptive case study elaborated by Yin (2008). A descriptive case study aims to define the phenomenon within the context in which it occurs (Yin, 2008). In this study, effort has been paid to reveal how reading activities at the primary school level were conducted and how they reflected on students' reading comprehension skills. Thus, the study examined the targeted phenomenon in its real-life context. In addition, how teachers develop reading and reading comprehension skills and measure students' reading comprehension skills constitute two separate units of analysis. Therefore, the current research is a single-case embedded design.

Study Group

The study group included 207 primary school students and eight primary school teachers. The research was carried out by approximately 5000 students and 144 teachers in the primary school. This study was carried out at the primary school level and aimed to provide diversity by including students and teachers from all grade levels. Therefore, the maximum diversification method was used to determine the participants in this study. The maximum diversification method is recommended to reveal better the situation examined in case studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Information about the participants in the study is presented in Table 1. Teachers were given code names.

Table 1.

Case Study Participant Characteristics

Grade Level	Number of students		Teacher's name	Gender	Professional seniority
	Girl	Boy			
Grade 1	25	29	Yasemin	Female	8
			Fatih	Male	25
Grade 2	24	20	Oğuz	Male	15
			Dilara	Female	18
Grade 3	26	26	Büşra	Female	11
			Cansu	Female	6
Grade 4	29	28	Beyza	Female	17
			Elif	Female	4
Total	104	103			

As shown in Table 1, 104 girls and 103 boys from all grades participated in the primary school study. In addition, interviews were conducted with the classroom teachers of the students who took the reading comprehension test. Six of the participating teachers were female, and two were male.

Data Management and Analysis

Multiple data collection tools were employed to display the research case in depth. First, the researcher developed a test to measure the reading comprehension competencies of primary school students. The texts in this test were taken from coursebooks approved by the Ministry of National Education, which the students had not seen before. After selecting texts from coursebooks at all grade levels, four simple comprehension and two deep comprehension questions were asked. After examining the questions, two academicians and two primary school teachers who are experts in the Turkish field gave suggestions for removing similar questions. Following these suggestions, four simple-meaning questions were reduced to two, and two deep-meaning questions were reduced to one. In addition, the students were asked, "Do you like reading books?" in writing. The students were asked to mark their answers as a) I like it because... or b) I don't like it because .... and explain why. Another data collection tool is a semi-structured teacher interview form. Following the literature research, a list of 12 topics was developed, and pilot interviews with two primary school teachers were done to see whether the interview questions were valid. After these interviews, the number of questions was reduced to 10.

The study used content analysis to obtain data from interviews with the teachers. Content analysis is a way to reach fundamental consistencies and meanings from the qualitative data obtained (Patton, 2002). The primary meanings reached by the content analysis method are called themes (Patton, 2002). The data collected in this research were conceptualized first, and then themes were formed by organizing the concepts. The themes obtained are presented in the findings section. The data obtained from the reading comprehension test were scored, and the results were reached. The results are presented descriptively.

Validity and Reliability

The texts in the tests created for the student's reading comprehension skills were selected from texts approved by the MoNE to be valid and reliable, taught in public schools, and which the students have not yet encountered. A Ph.D. level primary school teacher assessed ten randomly selected examinations to assess the dependability of the student's scores. It was observed that the scoring by the researcher and the teacher were similar. One of the methods used to ensure internal validity or credibility in qualitative research is member checks (Merriam, 2009). In this study, the results of the interview analysis were presented to the participants, and approval was obtained. Reporting the data obtained in qualitative research in detail and explaining how the results were reached is one of the criteria for validity. It is essential for validity to give direct quotations from the participants of the research and to explain the results based on these quotations (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In this study, direct quotations from the interviews with teachers are presented.

Findings

In the findings section, the data collected from the teachers were presented. When the interview data with the teachers were analyzed, the following themes emerged: "Students' reading habits, factors in acquiring reading habits, methods used to evaluate reading comprehension skill, reading comprehension skill."

Reading Habits of Students

In the interviews with the teachers about the reading habits of the students, it was determined that some students saw reading as their duty and read because of fulfilling the given task, whereas others read by enjoying it.

> *"Some students enjoy reading, while others read purely out of duty or do little reading."* (Yasemin)

It was stated that the reading habits of the students could improve somewhat with the influence of the primary school teacher and the school in the elementary school period but weakened in the post-elementary school stages.

> *"Although the rate of reading a book increases slightly during the primary school years with the influence of the school and the primary school teacher, it gradually decreases afterward."* (Fatih)

In support of Fatih, Oğuz stated that the children's reading habits weakened when they were away from school. For example, the reading habits of the students weakened during the pandemic:

> *"For the past two years, they have been away from school due to the pandemic. Therefore, I think that their reading habits have declined."*

Büşra stated that no matter how hard she tried, her students' reading habits were not sufficient, and accordingly, even if they read, the students' readings were not qualified. For example, she stated that students had difficulties expressing information about their reading.

> *"I make an effort for my students to develop the habit of reading. However, I can say that they are not at the level I desire. They cannot analyze exactly what the text they read wanted to tell them. They have difficulty expressing it."*

Beyza, on the other hand, stated that the students' readings are not qualified because reading activities are done as an obligation at school. For this reason, Beyza thinks that students see reading books as an obligation and cannot discover their desires for reading books.

> *"Reading is like an obligation for them throughout their school life. The number of students who voluntarily discover their style or read for a specific purpose is quite low. Therefore, they cannot do quality reading."*

It was stated by the teachers that the students with reading habits read the books with love and scrutiny, and they enjoyed talking about the book they read, whereas the students who did not have the habit of reading did it only as a duty. In addition, it was stated that the students who consider reading a book as a duty focus on finishing the book as soon as possible instead of understanding what they read.

> *"I think the readings of my students who enjoy reading are qualified. They examine what they read, think about what they want to be told in the book, and get excited about it. Students who do not have the habit of reading or do not like to read do not read to understand the book, but to finish the book as soon as possible."* (Yasemin)

When we look at the activities carried out by the teachers to help students gain reading habits, it is evident that they created a library in the classroom and took into account the characteristics of the students while creating the library. On the other hand, they mentioned that they also read during the reading activity to provide a role model in gaining reading habits and that they differentiated the reading environment.

> *"Yes, there is. First of all, we created a classroom library with the students in line with the age and interests of my students. We changed the books we read, and I gave interesting little clues about the book's content so that students were curious and excited about the events in the new books. While the children are reading, I do some reading as well".* (Yasemin)

> *"I'm talking about how much I enjoy reading. I try to make them enjoy this process and reading in the classroom, and sometimes by reading outdoors in the school's garden."* (Yasemin)

Fatih stated that he reads a book where the students can see it. He also stated that being a children's book writer, besides being a teacher, is effective in developing the habit of reading books in his students.

> *"First of all, I read a book in front of them in my spare time in the classroom. I think that being a writer also affects them considerably."*

Teachers try to be role models to develop the habit of reading books among students. In addition, they follow the books they read by making a list. It was stated that conversations were held among the students about the books they read to encourage them to read and observe their reading quality.

> *"We take notes on the books we read, so the student becomes more enthusiastic by seeing how many books they read in a semester. I want them to arrange small conversations between students reading the same book. I allow them to talk about the book in the garden."* (Yasemin)

Oğuz stated that he used words encouraging students to read books so that they could acquire the habit of reading. He stated that he was reading a book and provided some information about the book for encouragement. In addition, he used different reading methods in the classroom. For example, students act out a part of the book with drama.

> *"When I put a new book in the library, I say to encourage them: "Children, I read this book. I liked it very much. I recommend you read it, too. It is a fun book." I read aloud to them in class; sometimes, a student reads aloud to the whole class. I'm making a reading circle. We are turning a popular part of the book into a play."*

Dilara's teacher stated that they make weekly reading by having all the students buy a book set to gain the habit of reading. She stated that he evaluated the books read at the end of the week; thus, he tried to instill in the students a reading habit.

> *"I make all students in my class buy the same stories appropriate for their level. Then, we read one storybook every week. On Fridays, I make an assessment test on this storybook."*

In addition, Dilara stated that she also uses gamification to help students gain reading habits.

> *"I am giving you a map of Türkiye. We have provinces on this map. My students paint a province after each book they read. There is a competition among my students; I reward those who complete the map."*

Another method that teachers use to develop reading habits is the reward system. Teachers stated that they give awards to students with various activities according to the number of books they read.

> *"We are doing a Türkiye map painting activity to determine the number of books students read. We choose a "bookworm" of the month and post his/her photo in the corner of the classroom."* (Cansu)

Factors in Acquiring Reading Habits

Two of the reasons that will make the students develop the habit of reading are the structure of the books and the family. It has been stated that the fact that children's books are suitable for the level of the students that will attract their attention and appeal to them is an essential factor in encouraging the students to read. On the other hand, it was stated that the home environment and family members' attitudes towards reading also affect the child.

> *"Based on myself, I think that the most important factor is choosing a book that will attract the child's attention, arouse his curiosity, not tire him, and is suitable for his age. Another important factor is that the family is a model and encourages the child to read. No matter how effective the teacher seems to be in this regard, I believe that it will be difficult for the child to acquire the habit of reading when he sees a family that watches TV all the time when he goes home and a disinterested parent attitude that does not wonder what they have been reading."* (Yasemin)

It was stated that another factor that influences students' acquiring reading habits is the environment in which they live. It was customary for children to fail to acquire reading habits, considering the low reading rates in Türkiye. The teachers stated that not only should the environment understand the family, but every one the students see as an example should also be evaluated in this sense.

> *"People perceive the environment they live in as the normal of life. In other words, this action will be a normal and indispensable life routine for a student who reads a book at home. Considering that the rate of regular book reading in Türkiye is one in a thousand, it is easy to understand what kind of habitat our children grew up in."* (Fatih)

> *"Everyone who has a place in the child's life, brother, sister, neighbor, relative, even the bus driver, has importance. Because from time to time, there are people the child takes as a role model, that is a school. If that person is reading a book, the child will read a book."* (Oğuz)

Reading Comprehension Skill

Teachers stated that they do activities for creative thinking skills in order to improve students' reading comprehension skills. In this sense, they organize activities such as designing book covers and creating different endings for the texts read.

> *"Making them think of different endings to the book being read. Drawing different cover designs for the book they read."* (Fatih)

The teachers stated that students should have sufficient vocabulary to understand the books they read, make inferences from what they read, and express their inferences. Therefore, it is clear that students must have sufficient cognitive development and vocabulary to understand what they read. The importance of family support for the development of these skills was emphasized.

> *"The cognitive development of the child is significant. For the child to understand what he reads, he must have a certain vocabulary and be able to make inferences and summarize them. Activities with this purpose can support this process. I think it is important that the parents accompany the child's reading. It is essential to ask the child questions about the book and the family to practice with the child on this subject. In this way, the child will read more guided towards understanding."* (Fatih)

Oğuz stated that students' love of reading, being able to read fluently, and developing their cognitive skills are essential factors in improving their reading comprehension skills.

> *"Mind games, listening skills, fluent reading, and love for reading."*

Beyza stated that technology negatively affects reading comprehension skills. She stated that children are too busy with technological tools, negatively affecting their reading comprehension. She claimed that this negative effect of technology is more evident with the new generation.

> *"The potential for reading comprehension changes according to the reading rate. Children's comprehension skills have generally declined since they became immersed in technology. It is quite low compared to the previous 4th-grade students. In short, technology significantly affects reading rates."*

Teachers have stated that sound-based letter teaching in elementary schools negatively affects students' reading comprehension skills. As the reason for this situation, the teachers stated that the students missed the meaning of the text or sentence because they only focused on reading the letter or word.

> *"Children are quick to read using the sound-based letter method, but it takes time to see the whole as we move from part to whole. Reading comprehension is meaningful when we see the whole, so it affects children's reading comprehension and can prolong the process of acquiring reading habits."* (Yasemin)

> *"I think that the sound-based sentence method delays the development of reading comprehension skills. These skills are acquired later, especially considering sense-making issues and being aware of the content."* (Elif)

Methods Used to Evaluate Reading Comprehension Skill
It was stated that the most popular method in evaluating students' reading comprehension skills was short-answer question-answer activities. Availability of rooms and curriculum density were cited as reasons for doing this activity.

> *"Due to the crowdedness of the class and the high intensity of the courses, the method I use most for reading comprehension is the short question and answer activity."* (Yasemin)

Oğuz, on the other hand, stated that he used tests consisting of a small number of questions about the text to measure his students' reading comprehension skills. In addition, he tries to determine whether students understand what they read by conversing with students about the book.

> *"I give short texts to students and 2-3 questions to determine their reading comprehension skills. I make practices that enable them to talk and ask questions about enjoyable parts of the book."*

Büşra stated that in the assessment tool, she prepared to evaluate her students' reading comprehension skills, and she asked students questions that allowed them to comment with information instead of simple questions.

> *"The questions are not at the level of remembering, but rather in a way that supports their creativity. For example, what would you do if you were that character? Can you change the*

ending of the story and rewrite it? Can you draw a picture of your favorite part of the story? Shall we find a new title for the story?"

Dilara stated that she also uses peer learning in addition to exams to evaluate students' reading comprehension skills.

"Every student prepares a question about the text we read in Turkish lessons. He asks his friend to answer his question. Their motivation is higher through peer learning."

Student's Perspective on Reading

Student data were analyzed and presented in the second part of the findings. The form given to students consists of two stages. In the first stage, students were asked whether they liked reading, why/why not, and which family members read books. In the second stage, students were given a reading comprehension achievement test. The data collected from the students were described and presented. Firstly, findings regarding whether they liked reading were presented in Figure 1.
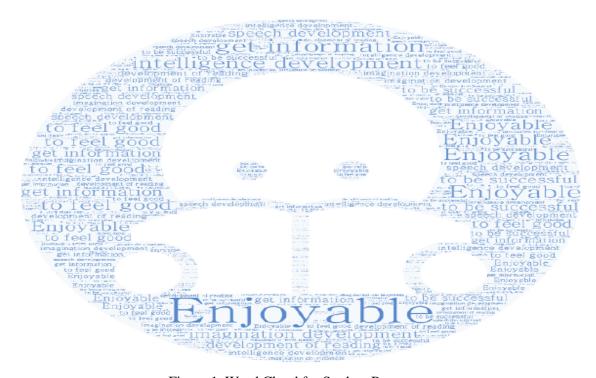

Figure 1. Word Cloud for Student Responses

Most of the students who participated in the research stated that the books gave information, and that's why they liked them.

"I am learning new things," "Informative and fun."

On the other hand, most students stated that they like to read books to improve their reading.

"I like it because my reading is improving," "To accelerate my reading."

Students said they liked to read books because they relaxed mentally, and reading books improved their imagination.

"Feels good," "I am distracted, "Relieves boredom," "It makes us dream."

A few of the students stated that they did not like to read books. This was because books took their time, and they were bored while reading them.

"I don't like it because I get bored reading it."

"I don't like it because it's boring."

The number of 1st-grade students who answered correctly and incorrectly to the test consisting of 2 simple comprehension and one profound comprehension question in the second part of the form is shown in Figure 2.
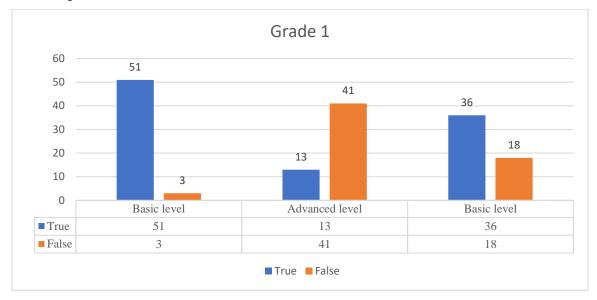

	Basic level	Advanced level	Basic level
■ True	51	13	36
■ False	3	41	18

Figure 2. Number of First-Year Students Who Answered Correctly and Incorrectly

When Figure 2 is examined, it is seen that 51 of the 54 students gave correct answers to the superficial level 1st question, and 36 gave the correct answer to the superficial level 2nd question. Simple-level questions are questions that have direct answers in the given text. On the other hand, only 13 of 54 students answered the deep comprehension questions correctly. Finally, it was observed that the students did not add their comments to the simple-level questions, and they answered directly by writing their expressions in the text. For example, in response to the question, "Where did the workers take the tree?" many students answered, "They took me to the printing house," which was in the text. The answers given by the 2nd-grade students are shown in Figure 3.

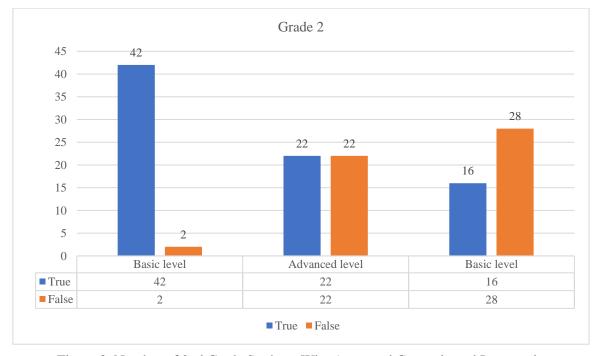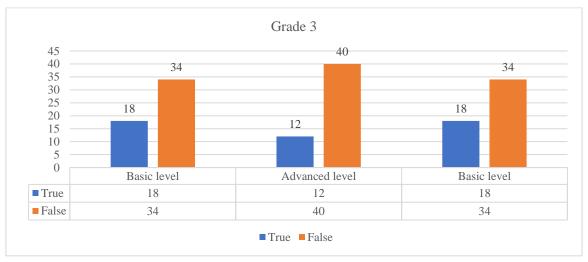|	Basic level	Advanced level	Basic level
■ True	42	22	16
■ False	2	22	28

Figure 3. Number of 2nd Grade Students Who Answered Correctly and Incorrectly

When Figure 3 is examined, it is seen that while 42 of 44 students answered the superficial level 1st question correctly, 16 answered the simple level 2nd question correctly. On the other hand, 22 students

answered the profound understanding question. While examining the answers the students gave, it was seen that the 2nd-grade students gave answers to simple questions, like the 1st-grade students, by directly writing expressions in the text. For example, to the question, "What does the child compare the chicks he sees the next day?" they answered, "They looked like live balls with their pinky toes and white and black hairs." The number of 3rd-grade students who answered correctly and incorrectly is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Number of 3rd Grade Students Who Answered Correctly and Incorrectly

When Figure 4 is examined, it is seen that 18 of 52 students answered the superficial level 1 and 2 questions correctly. On the other hand, it is seen that 12 students gave correct answers to the advanced question. Finally, a situation similar to that seen in the 1st and 2nd-grade students' responses was also seen in the 3rd-grade students' responses. They answered the superficial level question "What was Atatürk's source of strength?" by directly quoting the expression "the love of these pure hearts is my source of strength," which is in the text. The number of 4th-grade students who answered correctly and incorrectly is shown in Figure 5.
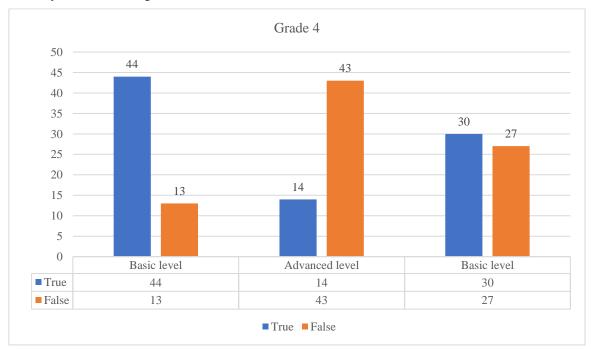

Figure 5. Number of 4th Grade Students Who Answered Correctly and Incorrectly

When Figure 5 is examined, it is seen that 44 of the 57 students answered the superficial level 1st question correctly, whereas 30 answered the superficial level 2nd question correctly. It was observed that only 14

students could answer the advanced-level question correctly. Finally, the phenomenon of directly quoting the expression in the text seen at other levels was also seen in the responses of the 4th-grade students. For example, the question "What kind of person was Koca Yusuf considered to be?" was answered by students by directly quoting the statement, "he is considered by many to be the most powerful person the world has ever known." The percentages of all students' answers to basic comprehension questions are shown in Figure 6.

Basic Level Comprehension Questions

38,41

61,59

■ Percentage of Correct Answers ■ Percentage of Wrong Answers

Figure 6. Percentages of Students' Answers

When Figure 6 is examined, it is seen that 38.41% of all students answered correctly to two simple-level reading comprehension questions. On the other hand, the percentages of student responses to the advanced reading comprehension question are shown in Figure 7.

Advanced Level Comprehension Question

29,47

70,53

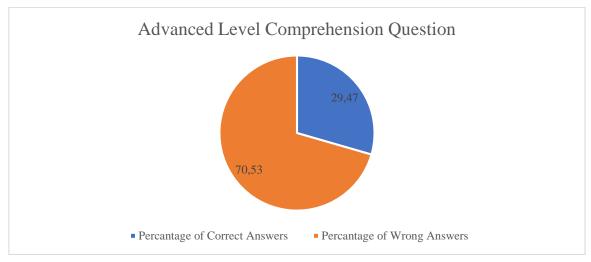■ Percentage of Correct Answers ■ Percentage of Wrong Answers

Figure 7. Percentages of Students' Answers

When Figure 7 is examined, 70.53% of the 207 students participating in the study answered the advanced reading comprehension question incorrectly.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Suggestions

There are many activities related to reading books in schools. Despite these activities, Türkiye is not at excellent levels in reading comprehension skills in international exams. From this point of view, the research concluded that a significant number of students saw reading as a duty. In addition, statements supporting this situation were found in the interviews with the teachers. To understand what you read, it is necessary to be a good reader; for this, it is necessary to read consciously and willingly (Duke & Pearson, 2009). Similarly, the OECD (2010) report mentions that motivation and personal characteristics are essential for students to perform quality reading. Rogiers, Van Keer, and Merchie (2020) stated that reading activities that students love to do positively affect their reading comprehension

skills. As a result, as in any activity, reading will be compelling when done with love and consciously. Therefore, in order to make students love to read and acquire reading habits, first of all, it is necessary to overcome the perceptions such as obligation and duty among them. According to Gambrell (2015), to help children acquire reading habits, reading activities should be organized by considering the principles of motivation, reading should be made meaningful by combining it with real life, and texts of medium difficulty should be used to stimulate their curiosity.

The study concluded that teachers used the reward system to develop reading habits among the students. It was observed that the students prepared a chart to follow their reading, and based on this chart, they rewarded the students with adjectives such as "bookworm" according to the number of books they read. Reward is an application that emerged with the behaviorism approach. Although it is stated that this concept, which is frequently used for behavior acquisition in education, is effective in helping students acquire certain behaviors (Landrum & Kauffman, 2014), this effect is temporary and short-lived (Wehe, Roedes & Seger, 2015). On the other hand, problems may arise, such as if the reward is perceived as a bribe for the behavior, and if the same people are winners all the time, negative attitudes towards them may arise (Ilegbusi, 2013). When we consider that a prize is awarded to one or three students, meaning to a small number of people in the classroom, it is clear that most students will be non-winners, which can negatively affect the classroom climate. However, rewards such as food or gifts conditioned to a behavior can eliminate students' intrinsic motivation for that behavior (Dollinger & Thelen, 1978). Therefore, it can be claimed that although rewards have a short-term effect, they are not very effective in acquiring reading behavior since they do not affect students' intrinsic motivation in the long run.

It has been concluded that the most critical factors in developing reading habits in students are the family, the teacher, and the structure of the children's books. The teachers stated that the most important factor among these factors is the family and that the children's reading habits decline, especially when they are away from school. In his social learning theory, Bandura (1977) suggested that the people around him influence the individual, and he learns by observing and imitating their behavior. Therefore, it seems unlikely that a child who receives education at the elementary school level will not be affected by his family and primary school teacher. Studies conducted in the literature argue that teachers (Çelik & Karakullukcu, 2019) and families (Aslan & Harput, 2017) are effective in helping students acquire reading habits.

One factor that negatively affects students' reading comprehension skills is that students spend a lot of time using technological tools. Other studies concluded that technological devices decreased reading habits (Bircan & Tekin, 1989; Yılmaz, 1989; Obaidullah & Rahman, 2018). With the developing technology, the attractiveness of technological devices, more advanced applications, and digital games distract children from traditional street games (Sapsağlam, 2018) and reading books (Çizmeci, 2017). As a result, although the decline in the habit of reading books may not be directly related to the use of technology, the correct use of technological tools can be an essential factor in acquiring the habit of reading.

It was concluded that the sound-based teaching method did not affect the reading comprehension skill of the students, especially at the 1st and 2nd-grade levels. In the sound-based teaching method, students ignore the meaning of what they read because they focus on vocalizing and combining letters and reading the words. In Türkiye, a sound-based teaching method was adopted in 2005. With the sound-based teaching method, students recognize the sounds corresponding to the letters, switching from syllables to words and words to sentences. In this process, they use all language skills, not just one language skill. When we review the literature, it is seen that there are studies indicating that there is no difference between the sound-based sentence method and the sentence analysis method in terms of reading comprehension skill (Vatansever, 2008) or that the sound-based sentence method is more effective (Akyol & Temur, 2008; Şahin, İnci, Turan & Apak, 2006).

Finally, when the reading comprehension skills of the students in this study were examined, it can be seen that six out of every ten students were able to answer the superficial level questions correctly. In comparison, 3 of every ten students answered the deep comprehension questions correctly. Therefore, within the scope of this research, it can be interpreted that 7 out of 10 students at the elementary school level do not understand what they read. In international studies, findings parallel to this result have been

reached. For example, OECD (2016) stated that forty percent of adults in Türkiye do not understand what they read. The Monitoring and Evaluation of Academic Skills (ABIDE) 2019 report prepared by the Ministry of National Education determined that forty percent of the students in the 4th grade cannot comprehend what they read in advanced questions (Parlak, 2019). On the other hand, according to the results of the PISA tests, approximately 50% of the students in Turkey answered the advanced reading comprehension questions incorrectly (OECD, 2019), and this situation was similar in the 2022 test, with 29% of Turkish test takers falling below the basic level (see. OECD, 2023). As a result, it can be said that we are not at a sufficient level of reading comprehension skills. Considering that reading comprehension skills are essential tools for individuals in daily and academic life, the insufficiency of this skill is a negative picture for our education system.

Although reading comprehension skills are so critical, international exams and studies show that this skill is insufficient. Instead of relying on external motivation sources such as rewards and homework, students should be motivated internally to acquire the habit of reading. Researchers can organize intervention studies on students' intrinsic motivation to read books. Therefore, it is necessary to organize training to increase teacher competencies and improve students' reading comprehension skills. Similarly, applied research can be conducted to improve their reading comprehension skill and ensure teachers' professional development. Finally, families are essential stakeholders in this process. Therefore, seminars can be organized to increase families' awareness of the importance of reading comprehension skills, and practical activities can be carried out with the participation of parents.

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