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THE EFFECT OF L1 READING COMPREHENSION, L2 GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE ON L2 READING COMPREHENSION OF 1ST AND 4TH YEAR ELT STUDENTS*

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is one of the main language ability and some studies have proposed that it is the most important skill needed by L2 students for academic success (McDonough and Shaw, 1993; Ostler, 1980). Being such an important skill for academic success, L2 reading comprehension is profoundly affected by various factors such as L1 reading comprehension, L2 grammatical knowledge, L2 lexical knowledge, decoding, and etc. The aim of this study is to find out the contribution of L1 reading comprehension, L2 grammatical knowledge, and L2 lexical knowledge to L2 reading comprehension of Turkish 1st and 4th grade ELT students. 91 Turkish ELT students participated in the current study. 4 different standardized tests were applied to measure L2 reading comprehension, L1 reading comprehension, L2 grammatical knowledge, and L2 lexical knowledge levels of the participants. Correlation matrix and multiple regression analysis were conducted and the analysis showed that there is high positive and significant correlation between L2 reading comprehension and L2 vocabulary, L2 grammatical knowledge, and L1 reading comprehension of 1st grade ELT students respectively. Similarly, L2 vocabulary, L2 grammatical knowledge have positive and significant contribution to L2 reading comprehension of 4th grade ELT students while L1 reading comprehension does not have significant contribution to L2 reading comprehension of 4h grade ELT students. The current study has been conducted with Turkish students who are learning English as a second language. Therefore, the results might be limited to Turkish ELF learners and might not be generalized to other L1 contexts. The findings of the study have been discussed with reference to the literature and pedagogical implications have been suggested.

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STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

1. Introduction

Reading is one of the main language skill required both for personal development and academic achievement. The factors that affect reading comprehension in first and second languages show similarities although there are certainly wide differences in perceiving the points peculiar to a specific language. The aim of this research is to explain the contingent impacts of L1 reading comprehension and L2 grammar and vocabulary knowledge on L2 reading comprehension of 1st and 4th year ELT students depending on the Interdependence and Threshold Hypothesis. Although similar studies with contradictory results have been conducted on the issue, this research is a rare one in Turkish EFL context in terms of comparing the effects of L1 reading comprehension and L2 grammar/vocabulary competency on reading comprehension in L2 in the context of theories which describe L1/L2 transfer.

Although there have been numerous studies dealing with the effects of L1 abilities on L2 competency, there is not a strong scientific consensus on this issue. In the matter of reading comprehension, Cummins' (1979) Linguistic Interdependence and Threshold Hypotheses also set the grounds of many researches to explain the positive transfer of literacy skills across languages. On the other hand, L2 reading comprehension is affected not only by L1 literacy skills, but also L2 grammar and vocabulary competency.

2. Method

91 Turkish EFL learners who are studying at English Language Teaching (ELT) department participated in this study (N=91). 42 of the students were 1st year students and the rest, 49 students, were 4th year students. Convenient and random sampling procedure was applied in the selection of the students.

The students were applied 4 different tests to assess their first language (L1) reading comprehension, Second language (L2) grammar knowledge, L2 vocabulary knowledge, and L2 reading comprehension skills.

The linguistics part of Academic Staff and Graduate Education Exam (ALES) was the assessment for L1 reading comprehension conducted by the Student Selection and Placement Centre (ÖSYM) in 2006. The exam contains reading comprehension passages, odd one out, and paragraph completion questions. The standardized test was chosen because it is similar to the corresponding L2 reading comprehension test.

The Foreign Language Examination Exam for Civil Servants (KPDS) was partly used in the assessment for the English reading comprehension, English grammar and English vocabulary. The test was deliberately chosen because it is a standardized one and it is equivalent to ALES in terms of reading questions. Grammar and vocabulary parts of the test were used to assess grammar and vocabulary knowledge of the students.

The first analysis was to calculate descriptive statistics of 1st and 4th year students' scores. In order to find out the relationship between all

the variables, Pearson Correlation was computed first for the 1st year then for the 4th year students. To find out the sole effect of each variable on L2 reading comprehension, Hierarchical Multiple Regression analysis was done.

3. Results

According to Pearson Correlation there is a high, positive and significant correlation between L2 reading comprehension and L2 vocabulary. In other words, L2 vocabulary score explains a total of 44% of variance in L2 reading comprehension score of 1st year ELT students. There is a high, positive and significant correlation between L2 reading comprehension and L2 grammar score of 1st year ELT students. The correlation between L1 reading comprehension and L2 reading comprehension is positive, moderate but statistically significant at .05 level. To put it differently, L1 reading comprehension score, on its own, explains 10% of variance in L2 reading comprehension score of 1st year ELT students.

As in the 1st year ELT students, there is a high, positive and significant correlation between L2 reading comprehension score and L2 vocabulary score of 4th year ELT students. According to the results, L2 vocabulary itself explains 63%, highest proportion of variance in L2 reading comprehension of 4th year ELT students followed by L2 grammar score. It can be concluded that for the 1st year and the 4th year students, the most effective factor contributing to L2 reading comprehension is L2 vocabulary score; however, the contribution of L2 vocabulary is higher in explaining L2 reading comprehension of the 4th year ELT students.

While there is a statistically significant correlation between L2 reading comprehension and L1 reading comprehension for the 1st year ELT students, this is not the case for the 4th year ELT students.

To reveal how students' performances on L1 reading comprehension, L2 grammar and L2 vocabulary can predict their performance on L2 reading comprehension, all the independent variables regressed against L2 reading comprehension first for the 1st year then for the 4th year ELT students. The contribution of L1 reading is smallest compared to other variables however still significant for 1st year students.

When reading comprehension is the only predictor of L2 reading comprehension, L1 reading comprehension on its own explains %6 of the variance of L2 reading comprehension; in other words, L1 reading comprehension is not statistically significant while explaining L2 reading comprehension for 4th year ELT students. However, as soon as L2 vocabulary was introduced to the regression equation, the regression weighted for L1 reading comprehension turned out to be significant. All the variables together explained 80% of variance in L2 reading comprehension of 4th year ELT students.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

The study showed that L2 vocabulary is the most important determinant in explaining L2 reading comprehension for both of the groups followed by L2 grammar. The findings are in line with the literature. The result of a series of hierarchical regression conducted by

Landi (2010) found that vocabulary remained the strongest predictor of comprehension ability for high-level and low-level reading skills. Lervag and Aukrust (2010) in their longitudinal study conducted on young learners found that vocabulary skills were a more important predictor of the growth of reading comprehension in L2 than in L1. So vocabulary based instructions may be helpful for improving L2 reading comprehension skills of the students.

The study showed that while L1 reading comprehension contributes significantly to L2 reading comprehension for 1st year ELT students, the contribution of L1 reading comprehension is not significant for 4th year ELT students. There are two important hypotheses in the literature explaining L2 reading comprehension: the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (LIH) and the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (LTH). Looking at the results although the mean score of L2 reading comprehension of 4th year students' is smaller than 1st year students, the contribution of L1 is smaller to the reading comprehension of 4th year students. This can be explained by the tests applied to the students. There are no standardized L1 reading comprehension test measuring Turkish reading comprehension and L1 reading test applied in this study is a part of Academic Staff and Graduate Education Exam (ALES), which may not give generalizable results.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, L1, L2 grammar, ELT students

İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMENLİĞİ 1. VE 4. SINIF ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN İKİNCİ DİLDE OKUDUĞUNU ANLAMA BECERİSİNDE ANA DİLDE OKUDUĞUNU ANLAMA, İKİNCİ DİLDEKİ SÖZCÜK VE DİLBİLGİSİNİN ETKİSİ

ÖZET

Bazı çalışmalar, yabancı dil öğrenmenin ana becerilerinden biri olan okuduğunu anlama becerisinin yabancı dildeki akademik başarıyı sağlamak için gerekli olan en önemli beceri olduğu görüşünü öne sürmektedirler (McDonough and Shaw, 1993; Ostler, 1980). Akademik başarı için bu kadar önemli olan yabancı dilde okuduğunu anlama becerisi, anadilde okuduğunu anlama, ikinci dildeki sözcük bilgisi, ikinci dilbilgisi, kodlama ve buna benzer birçok nedenden son derece etkilenebilir. Bu çalışmanın amacı İngilizce Öğretmenliği 1. ve 4. sınıflarındaki öğrencilerinin anadilde okuduğunu anlama becerisinin, ikinci dildeki sözcük ve dilbilgisinin, ikinci dilde okuduğunu anlama becerisine katkısını ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu çalışmaya 91 İngilizce Öğretmenliği öğrencisi katılmıştır. Katılımcıların ikinci dilde okuduğunu anlama, birinci dilde okuduğunu anlama, ikinci dil sözcük bilgisi ve dilbilgisini ölçmek için 4 farklı standart test uygulanmıştır. Test sonuçlarını korelasyon ve çoklu regresyon analizleri uygulanmış analizler sonunda 1. sınıf İngilizce öğretmenliği öğrencilerinin ikinci dilde okuduğunu anlama becerisine, sırasıyla ikinci dildeki sözcük bilgisi, ikinci dil dilbilgisi ve ana dilde okuduğunu anlama becerilerinin katkı sağladığı ortaya çıkmıştır. Bezer bir şekilde, 4. Sınıf öğrencilerinin ikinci dilde

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okuduğunu anlama becerisine ikinci dildeki sözcük bilgisi ve dilbilgisi katkı sağlarken, ana dilde okuduğunu anlama becerisinin katkısı olmamıştır. Bu çalışma İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrencilerle gerçekleştirildiğinden, sonuçlar farklı ana dile sahip bağlamlara genellenemez.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Okuduğunu anlama, anadil, İngilizce Öğretmenliği

1. Introduction

Reading skill is required not only for personal development but also academic achievement (Gömleksiz and Elaldı, 2011). It is one of the main language abilities, which is supposed to be simple for literate adults, but highly difficult for growing children (Rayner, Foorman, Perfetti, Pesetsky & Seidenberg 2001). As this is the case, overcoming the difficulties of reading comprehension has been one of the main issues in the literature, especially in second language learning. Reading comprehension - the process that is profoundly affected by various factors - is the interaction of a reader with the written codes and inferring meaning simultaneously (Snow, 2002). The factors that affect reading comprehension in first and second languages show similarities although there are certainly wide differences in perceiving the points peculiar to a specific language. For instance, Grabe (2009) focused on the roots of reading comprehension differences between L1 and L2, and stated that lexical, grammatical and discourse knowledge of L1 and L2 show variety in terms of reading comprehension. Having considering this fact, some researchers (Fitzgerald, 1995; Brisbois, 1995; Geva, 2006, Durmuşçelebi, 2013) have focused on the positive transfer from L1 to L2, and found out the positive effects of L1 reading comprehension on L2 reading comprehension.

In the lights of the previous studies, the aim of this research is to explain the contingent impacts of L1 reading comprehension and L2 grammar and vocabulary knowledge on L2 reading comprehension of 1st and 4th year ELT students depending on the Interdependence and Threshold Hypothesis. Although similar studies with contradictory results have been conducted on the issue, this research is a rare one in Turkish EFL context in terms of comparing the effects of L1 reading comprehension and L2 grammar/vocabulary competency on reading comprehension in L2 in the context of theories which describe L1/L2 transfer.

2. Review of Literature

Although there have been numerous studies dealing with the effects of L1 abilities on L2 competency, there is not a strong scientific consensus on this issue. However, “learnt knowledge has either positive or negative effect on language learning process (Oflaz and Bolat, 2012; Ömür, 2009). For instance, while some researchers have claimed that L2 reading comprehension is fostered by the already-existent language abilities (Vygotsky, 1986, p.197), others (Cohen, 1995; Uptown, 2001) have reported the interference effect of L1 on L2 because of the differences between two languages. In the matter of reading comprehension, Cummins’ (1979) Linguistic Interdependence and Threshold Hypotheses also set the grounds of many researches to explain the positive transfer of literacy skills across languages. On the other hand, L2 reading comprehension is affected not only by L1 literacy skills, but also L2 grammar and vocabulary competency.

2.1. The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (LIH)

Reading is an important ability in second language learning and poor reading skills is accepted as the main reason for poor academic achievement. Hence, transferring the L1 reading abilities to L2 reading abilities appears to be a strong motive for learners of English as a second

language. The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis is one of the hypotheses that try to explain how linguistic abilities are transferred among languages, while it presumes that cognitive abilities developed in L1 can be easily transferred to the L2 (Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995; Cummins, 1991; Snow, 1990).

There have been many researches in the literature to prove the effectiveness of the LIH. For instance, Langer, Bartolome, Vasquez, and Lucas (1990) conducted a study to compare English and Spanish reading comprehension abilities and their study indicated that students with higher level of Spanish reading scores performed better in English reading comprehension than the students with poorer scores in Spanish. In another study, Brisbois (1995) tried to find out the relationship among first language reading, second language vocabulary and second language grammatical skills on second language reading scores. In this study, first language reading abilities effected second language reading comprehension substantially, especially in upper level group. Similarly, Durgunoğlu, Nagy and Hancin (1993) conducted a study to define factors effecting English word identification or Spanish speakers. In this study, Durgunoğlu et al. (1993) suggested that first language learning and experiences may aid children in the beginning stages of second language reading. Reasonably earlier, Lambert and Tucker (1972) studied the effects of L2 reading comprehension on L1 reading ability, and as a result they concluded that students applied the skills they developed in French to English reading tasks. All these studies indicated that greater reading ability in a language has the tendency to foster greater reading ability in another language, which is actually called The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis.

2.2. The Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (LTH)

Another crucial hypothesis, which has been searched and discussed over in many studies, is the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (LTH), which looks at the academic skills from the perspective of second language development (August, 2006). The LTH suggests that the learners will have weak performance in transferring skills across languages until they reach a threshold of skills in second language, and this process has nothing to do with the first language.

The studies related to LTH have shown variety in terms of their findings. For instance, August (2006) criticized LTH for having theoretical limitations and operating differently in children and adults. Moreover, Carrell (1991) conducted a research and found out that there was a difference between two groups: first group consisted of Spanish students learning English and the second group consisted of American students learning Spanish. In this study, Carrell (1991) used multiple regression analysis which showed that, for native Spanish group, L1 reading and L2 proficiency affected L2 reading 35% while, for native English group, cumulative contribution of independent variables was 53%, with L2 proficiency contributing more than L1 reading. Carrell (1991) explained this difference with the level of exposition to L2 for both of the groups; that is, Spanish learners are exposed to English everywhere while American students are only exposed to Spanish in the classroom.

In a similar study conducted with 50 Turkish speakers learning Dutch, Bossers (1991), using multiple regression like Carrell (1991), found that L2 proficiency affected L2 reading 54% on average. However, Bossers (1991) showed that L2 proficiency was more effective on L2 readings of low-level learners while L1 reading was more effective on L2 readings of high-level learners, which proved that learners was able to transfer skills after they reached a linguistic threshold (Brisbois, 1995). These findings were exactly in accordance with Cummins' (1981) Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis.

As a summary, many studies in the literature support the LTH with various correlations and multiple regression analysis. The findings of several studies have indicated that skills transfer across

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languages and L2 readers should have a threshold of L2 proficiency in order transfer L1 abilities into L2 learning process.

2.3. The Effects of L2 Grammar and Vocabulary Competency on L2 Reading Comprehension

In some studies (e.g. Fitzgerald, 1995), it has been presumed that English vocabulary accounts for the primary determinant of the reading comprehension for learners of English as a second language. Moreover, these studies also have claimed that English word recognition enhance dramatically when there are more cognates between first and second languages, and more word recognition means a better understanding of second language reading texts (August, Calderon, &Carlo, 2000). On the other hand, Koda and Zehler (2007) focused on the awareness of phonological structure of a language to trigger overall literacy development in the second language. In terms of the effects of L2 vocabulary and grammar competency on L2 reading, Lee and Schallert (1997) defined second language proficiency as knowledge of vocabulary and of grammatical structures in L2.

As submitted by many researches, L2 grammatical and vocabulary knowledge of the learners might have an influence on L2 reading comprehension, and this assertion complies with the LTH, which suggests that L2 learners should have a threshold of knowledge in L2 in order to transfer L1 abilities positively in L2 reading comprehension.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

With the purpose of finding out the contribution of L1 reading comprehension, L2 grammar and vocabulary knowledge to L2 reading comprehension, the scope of the study has been decided as adult Turkish EFL learners who are attending English Language Teaching (ELT) program at Anadolu University. 91 students all spoke Turkish as their L1 participated in this study (N=91). 42 of the students were 1st year students and the rest, 49 students, were 4th year students. 25 out of 91 students were male and the rest of them were female. 11 of the 1st year students and 14 of the 4th year students were male. Convenient and random sampling procedure was applied in the selection of the students. All the students who enrolled in ELT program first took a national placement test and then a proficiency exam or (if necessary) attended the language preparatory program before coming to the faculty. The 1st year students had proficiency exam recently; at the beginning of the academic year of 2016 and had similar proficiency level: however, 4th year ELT students had their proficiency score when they were 1st year students and we assume that in progressing time, they improved their level of English.

3.2 Instruments

The students were applied 4 different tests to assess their first language (L1) reading comprehension, Second language (L2) grammar knowledge, L2 vocabulary knowledge, and L2 reading comprehension skills.

The linguistics part of Academic Staff and Graduate Education Exam (ALES) was the assessment for L1 reading comprehension conducted by the Student Selection and Placement Centre (ÖSYM) in 2006. This test consists of 40 reading comprehension questions with multiple-choice. The participants had 50 minutes to complete the exam. The exam contains reading comprehension passages, odd one out, and paragraph completion questions. The standardized test was chosen because it is similar to the corresponding L2 reading comprehension test. Also, there isn't any standardized test mainly measuring L1 reading comprehension of the students.

The Foreign Language Examination Exam for Civil Servants (KPDS) was partly used in the assessment for the English reading comprehension, English grammar and English vocabulary. The standardized test was administered by ÖSYM in 2006. The test was deliberately chosen because it is a standardized one and it is equivalent to ALES in terms of reading questions. In total there are 47 multiple-choice questions in the test and the participants were asked to complete all the questions in the test in one hour. The test consists of 3 reading comprehension passages, each followed by five multiple-choice questions and 5 odd-one out questions in the reading comprehension part. In the grammar and vocabulary part, students were given 27 multiple-choice questions and they were asked to choose the correct answer to complete each sentence. 20 out of 27 questions were English grammar questions requiring students to choose the best options and fill two passages of cloze test with five blanks each. In cloze test part, students were asked to choose one of the five alternatives that best fit the context. The grammar questions assess the knowledge of quantifiers, sentence connectors, verb tense, question words, articles, prepositions, word forms, adjectives, pronouns, relative pronouns, adverbs, and auxiliaries.

3.3 Procedures

All the tests were applied at the beginning of the academic year of 2016. First, students' L1 reading skills were assessed then one week later they were asked to complete L2 reading comprehension, L2 grammar and L2 vocabulary tests. After the administration of the tests, all the results were computed in Spss. The first analysis was to calculate descriptive statistics of 1st and 4th year students' scores. In order to find out the relationship between all the variables, Pearson Correlation was computed first for the 1st year then for the 4th year students. To find out the sole effect of each variable on L2 reading comprehension, Hierarchical Multiple Regression analysis was done.

4. Results

To describe the characteristics of the sample used in the study, mean, standard deviation minimum and maximum scores are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Measures for 1st Year ELT Students

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
L2 reading comprehension	42	8.00	20.00	14.16	2.79
L1 reading comprehension	42	15.00	40.00	34.57	5.95
L2 grammar knowledge	42	8.00	18.00	12.73	2.56
L2 vocabulary knowledge	42	.00	7.00	3.38	1.88

The table 1 above shows that 1st year ELT students' mean score of L2 reading comprehension is 14.16 ($M=14.16$). Comparing the minimum and maximum scores of L2 reading comprehension, we can assume that there are differences between the students in terms of their reading comprehension level; however, low standard deviation ($SD= 2.79$) indicates that the group is homogeneous. The range between minimum and maximum scores for L1 reading comprehension is 35.00, which is quite high for the students who speaks Turkish as their native language.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Measures for 4th Year ELT Students

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
L2 reading comprehension	49	5.00	20.00	13.95	3.67
L1 L1reading comprehension	49	17.00	40.00	35.26	3.76
L2 grammar knowledge	49	5.00	19.00	12.36	3.44
L2 vocabulary knowledge	49	.00	7.00	3.73	1.98

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It can be seen from the table 2 above, the range of L2 reading comprehension scores of 4th year students is higher compared to 1st year L2 reading comprehension score which may mean that 4th year students are more heterogeneous compared to 1st year students with regards to L2 reading comprehension scores. Looking at the descriptive statistics, one of the striking results of the study is that the mean scores of 4th year L2 reading comprehension ($M=13.95$) is smaller than 1st year L2 reading comprehension mean scores ($M=14.16$), which may indicate that 1st year students are better than 4th year ELT students in terms of their reading comprehension. The mean scores of L1 reading comprehension ($M=34.57$), L2 grammar ($M=12.73$) and L2 vocabulary ($M=3.38$) of 1st year ELT students are similar in terms of the mean score of L1 reading comprehension ($M=35.26$), L2 grammar ($M= 12.36$) and L2 vocabulary ($M=3.73$) of 4th year ELT students.

In order to show the relationship of all the variables used in the study, a Pearson Correlation was calculated. Table 3 below shows the relationship between all the variables of 1year ELT students' scores. The result indicates that there is a high, positive and significant correlation between L2 reading comprehension and L2 vocabulary ($r= .668, n= 42, p< .01$). In other words, L2 vocabulary score explains a total of 44% of variance in L2 reading comprehension score of 1st year ELT students.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix for All Variables for 1st Year ELT Students

	L2 Read. Comp.	L1 Read. Comp.	L2 Grammar	L2 Vocabulary
L2 Reading Comp.	1			
L1 Reading Comp.	.323*	1		
L2 Grammar	.581**	.146	1	
L2 Vocabulary	.668**	.297	.454**	1

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Looking at the table above, there is a high, positive and significant correlation between L2 reading comprehension and L2 grammar score of 1st year ELT students ($r= .581, n= 42, p< .01$). The correlation between L1 reading comprehension and L2 reading comprehension is positive, moderate but statistically significant at .05 level ($r= .323, n= 42, p< .05$). To put it differently, L1 reading comprehension score, on its own, explains 10% of variance in L2 reading comprehension score of 1st year ELT students.

As in the 1st year ELT students, there is a high, positive and significant correlation between L2 reading comprehension score and L2 vocabulary score of 4th year ELT students ($r= .795, n= 49, p< .01$). According to the results, L2 vocabulary itself explains 63%, highest proportion of variance in L2 reading comprehension of 4th year ELT students followed by L2 grammar score ($r= .617, n= 49, p< .01$). It can be concluded that for the 1st year and the 4th year students, the most effective factor contributing to L2 reading comprehension is L2 vocabulary score; however, the contribution of L2 vocabulary is higher in explaining L2 reading comprehension of the 4th year ELT students.

Table 4. Correlation Matrix for All Variables for 4th Year ELT Students

	L2 Reading Comp.	L1 Reading Comp.	L2 Grammar	L2 Vocabulary
L2 Reading Comp.	1			
L1 Reading Comp.	.258	1		
L2 Grammar	.617**	.260	1	
L2 Vocabulary	.795**	.241	.273	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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Comparing the table 3 and table 4, the most striking result is that while there is a statistically significant correlation between L2 reading comprehension and L1 reading comprehension for the 1st year ELT students, this is not the case for the 4th year ELT students. ($r = .258$, $n = 49$, $p > 0.1$).

To reveal how students' performances on L1 reading comprehension, L2 grammar and L2 vocabulary can predict their performance on L2 reading comprehension, all the independent variables regressed against L2 reading comprehension first for the 1st year then for the 4th year ELT students. The results are shown in table 5 and table 6.

Table 5. Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression on Reading Score of 1st Year ELT Students

Model	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SD	Change Statistics			
					R ² Change	F Change	df1	df2
1 L2 Vocabulary	.668 ^a	.446	.433	2.10	.446	32.256	1	40
2 L2 Vocab, L2 grammar	.737 ^b	.544	.520	1.93	.097	8.301	1	39
3 L2 Vocab, L2 grammar, L1 reading	.748 ^c	.559	.525	1.92	.016	1.372	1	38

a. Dependent Variable: L2 reading comprehension

b. Predictors: (Constant), L2 vocabulary

c. Predictors: (Constant), L2 vocabulary, L2 grammar

d. Predictors: (Constant), L2 vocabulary, L2 grammar, L1 reading comprehension

Model 1 in which L2 vocabulary is the sole predictor, accounted for 43% of the L2 reading comprehension score variance (adjusted $R^2 = .43$). As soon as L2 vocabulary was introduced to the regression equation, they together add a significant contribution to L2 reading comprehension with R^2 change of .097 and the F change of 8.30 ($p < .01$). L2 grammar accounted for 9% of variance of L2 reading comprehension of 1st year ELT students. The contribution of L1 reading is smallest compared to other variables however still significant.

Table 6. Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression on Reading Score of 4th Year ELT Students

Model	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SD	Change Statistics			
					R ² Change	F Change	df1	df2
1 L2 Vocabulary	.258 ^a	.067	.047	3.58	.067	3.355	1	47
2 L2 Vocab, L2 grammar	.625 ^b	.391	.364	2.92	.324	24.482	1	46
3 L2 Vocab, L2 grammar, L1 reading	.897 ^c	.804	.791	1.67	.414	95.209	1	45

a. Predictors: (Constant), L1 reading comprehension

b. Predictors: (Constant), L1 reading comprehension, L2 grammar

c. Predictors: (Constant), L1 reading comprehension, L2 grammar, L2 vocabulary

d. Dependent Variable: L2 reading comprehension

Looking at the table above, it can be seen that in Model 1 in which L1 reading comprehension is the only predictor of L2 reading comprehension, L1 reading comprehension on its own explains 6% of the variance of L2 reading comprehension; in other words, L1 reading comprehension is not statistically significant while explaining L2 reading comprehension for 4th year ELT students ($p = .73$). However, as soon as L2 vocabulary was introduced to the regression equation in Model 2, the regression weighted for L1 reading comprehension turned out to be significant (R^2 change .36, $p <$

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.01). All the variables together explained 80% of variance in L2 reading comprehension of 4th year ELT students ($p < .01$).

5. Conclusions and Discussion

The study showed that L2 vocabulary is the most important determinant in explaining L2 reading comprehension for both of the groups followed by L2 grammar. The findings are in line with the literature. The result of a series of hierarchical regression conducted by Landi (2010) found that vocabulary remained the strongest predictor of comprehension ability for high-level and low-level reading skills. Lervag and Aukrust (2010) in their longitudinal study conducted on young learners found that vocabulary skills were a more important predictor of the growth of reading comprehension in L2 than in L1. So vocabulary based instructions may be helpful for improving L2 reading comprehension skills of the students.

The study showed that while L1 reading comprehension contributes significantly to L2 reading comprehension for 1st year ELT students, the contribution of L1 reading comprehension is not significant for 4th year ELT students. There are two important hypotheses in the literature explaining L2 reading comprehension: the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (LIH) and the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (LTH). Looking at the results although the mean score of L2 reading comprehension of 4th year students' is smaller than 1st year students, the contribution of L1 is smaller to the reading comprehension of 4th year students. This can be explained by the tests applied to the students. There are no standardized L1 reading comprehension test measuring Turkish reading comprehension and L1 reading test applied in this study is a part of Academic Staff and Graduate Education Exam (ALES), which may not give generalizable results. Another important limitation of the study is that there is no proficiency score of 4th year students.

At the beginning of the study, one of the assumptions was that the mean scores of 4th year ELT students would be higher than 1st year students since they are more experienced and about to graduate to become a teacher. However, the findings have shown that the mean scores of 4th year ELT students in the descriptive analysis are below the mean scores of 1st grade ELT students. When the two groups of participants in this research are considered, the 4th year ELT students would seem more reasonable to get higher scores from both of the tests used to collect data. Since the assumption of the study did not turn out to be authentic, there might be some possible reasons to explain this finding.

The 1st year ELT learners have been exposed to an intense exam process to qualify for the university education. Therefore, their test taking strategies might still be vivid, and on account of this fact, they might get higher scores than the 4th graders did. Furthermore, it is well-known fact that university students in Turkey are usually motivated to be appointed at the end of the university education. Regarding this fact, the students mostly neglect developing their proficiency in first or second language; instead, they spend most of their times to learn pedagogical information on which they have to solve lots of questions in the exam to become a permanent teacher. All these issues suggest that teacher education in Turkey might be insufficient to motivate and increase ELT students' proficiency level. In summary, the fresh test taking abilities of 1st grade ELT students and the inadequacy of opportunity to motivate and increase ELT learners' proficiency levels at universities might be the base of the findings in this research.

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