

THE EFFECTS OF WEBQUESTS ON READING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, considerable attention has been paid to reading strategies. Proficient readers are thought to be strategic, constructively responsive; to take specific and conscious steps, and orchestrate their cognitive and affective resources to ensure maximum comprehension. The positive outcomes of extensive reading programs (ERP) have been widely reported in literature. The Internet has also been an available tool in language teaching. Many activities, such as Webquests can be conducted via the Internet. However, the effect of webquests on reading strategies has not been studied in detail. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the effects of ERP conducted via the use of webquests and graded readers. Thirty-six pre-intermediate-level students from Celal Bayar University, Department of Foreign Languages were classified as Graded Readers (GRG; n=12), Internet (IG; n= 12) and a control group (CG; n= 12). GRG followed a program composed of 6 graded readers; IG had an ERP of 6 webquests, for six weeks. Their pre- and post-reading strategy values were determined using a Likert-type scale called SORS (Survey of Reading Strategies). Despite a significant between pre- and post test SORS scores of the IG ($p < 0.05$), there were no other significant difference in the reading strategy use among the three groups. Therefore, we may conclude that ER alone is not enough to provide an increase in the reading strategy use of the learners. Teachers should include strategy building into their schedules.

Key words: Reading Strategies, Graded Readers, Webquests

İNTERNET PROJELERİNİN OKUMA STRATEJİLERİ ÜZERİNE ETKİLERİ

ÖZET

Son yıllarda okuma stratejilerine çok fazla önem verilmeye başlanmıştır. İyi okuyucular stratejik, olumlu tepki veren, özel ve bilinçli adımlar atabilen, maksimum anlama sağlamak için bilişsel ve duyuşsal kaynaklarını idare edebilen kişiler olarak kabul edilirler.

Yaygın okuma programlarının (YOP) olumlu sonuçları literatürde geniş olarak yer almıştır. İnternet de dil öğretimi için uygun bir araç olarak kullanılmaktadır. İnternet kullanarak, İnternet projeleri gibi pek çok aktivite gerçekleştirilebilir. Fakat bu tür aktivitelerin okuma stratejileri üzerine etkileri detaylı olarak incelenmemiştir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma İnternet aktiviteleri ve derecelendirilmiş kitapların kullanımı ile gerçekleştirilmiş olan bir YOP'nun okuma stratejileri üzerine etkilerini incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Celal Bayar Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Bölümü'nden Orta-alt dil seviyesindeki 36 öğrenci Derecelendirilmiş Kitap Grubu (DKG; n= 12), İnternet Grubu (İG; n= 12), ve Kontrol Grubu (KG; n= 12) olmak üzere üç gruba ayrıldı. DKG 6 kitap ve İG 6 İnternet projesinden oluşan bir YOP'na 6 hafta süreyle devam ettiler. Katılımcıların ön ve son test okuma stratejileri Likert Tipi bir ölçekle (SORS) belirlendi. İG'nun ön ve son test SORS puanları arasındaki anlamlı farklılık ($p < 0.05$) hariç, üç grubun diğer SORS puanları arasında okuma stratejilerini kullanma bakımından anlamlı bir farklılık belirlenmedi. Bu nedenle, YOP'larının okuma stratejilerini geliştirmek için tek başlarına yeterli olmadığı, öğretmenlerin programlarına strateji geliştirme çalışmalarını dahil etmeleri gerektiği şeklinde bir sonuca varabiliriz.

Anahtar sözcükler: Okuma stratejileri, derecelendirilmiş kitaplar, İnternet projeleri

1. INTRODUCTION

In general terms, learner strategies are the cognitive steps that learners use to process second language input. These cognitive procedures include retrieving and storing new input. According to Brown (1994), strategies are the specific "attacks" that learners employ when faced with a problem. In the context of second language learning, a distinction can be made between strategies that make learning more effective, versus strategies that improve comprehension. The former are generally referred to as learning strategies in the second language literature. Comprehension or reading strategies on the other hand, indicate how readers conceive of a task, how they make sense of what they read, and what they do when they don't understand. In short, such strategies are processes used by the learner to enhance reading comprehension and overcome comprehension failures. Since the early seventies, research in this area has concentrated on teaching second language students to use a variety of language strategies in order to read better. This process may involve skimming, scanning, guessing, recognizing cognates and word families, reading for meaning, predicting, activating general knowledge, making inferences, following references, and separating main ideas from supporting ideas (Barnett, 1988). Obviously, some strategies may be more useful than others with different types of reading texts and tasks.

Reading in any language is cognitively demanding, involving the coordination of attention, memory, perceptual processes, and comprehension processes (Kern, 1989). In many first language studies, the use of various strategies has been found to be effective in improving students' reading comprehension (Baker & Brown, 1984; Brown, 1981; Palinscar & Brown, 1984). Some studies have investigated the reading strategies used by successful and unsuccessful language learners. In a second-language study, Hosenfeld (1977) used a think-aloud procedure to identify relations between certain types of reading strategies and successful or unsuccessful second language reading. The successful reader, for example, kept the meaning of the passage in mind while reading, read in broad phrases, skipped inconsequential or less important words, and had a positive self-concept as a reader. The unsuccessful reader on the other hand, lost the meaning of the sentences when decoded, read in short phrases, pondered over inconsequential words, seldom skipped words as unimportant, and had a negative self-concept.

Many researchers believe that reading in a second language (L2) is more demanding (Czicko, 1980; Favreau, 1980; McLaughlin, Rossman, & McLeod, 1983). For example, while word recognition is automatic in the first language (L1) reading (Britton, et al. 1978), it requires conscious attention in L2 reading (Bruder & Henderson, 1986). In L2 reading, the readers generally use "bottom-up" manner, focusing on surface structure features and they try to build comprehension through analysis and synthesis of this visual input (Czicko, 1980; Hutch, 1974). The words the L2 readers perceive may be relatively or completely unfamiliar. If the reader is unable to use the strategies he uses in L1 reading, the

result may be a reduction in information storage, which means that less linguistic data can be analyzed simultaneously that results in inefficient use of redundancy and contextual cues (Kern, 1989).

Researchers have found out that the type of reading strategies a student employs is directly related to his/her level of linguistic competence in L2 (Cziko, 1980; Henning, 1973). Clarke (1979) talks about the existence of a "language competence ceiling", which determines the level of reading skill transfer from the first to the second language. According to his claim, learners who are below this critical level of language development tend to adopt ineffective reading strategies in L2 even though they can use effective reading strategies in their first language. However, there is evidence that language proficiency alone does not determine the level of transfer of native language reading skills to L2 (Clarke, 1979). In other words, the level of reading skill development in the native language may interact with the level of language proficiency in the second language to determine the level of effective skill transfer from the first to the second language. It is known that L2 readers are most attentive to the surface structure of the language and since their word recognition skills do not seem to be automatized until advanced levels of study, they are unable to reach higher-level interpretative processes effectively. As a result, comprehension is less optimal.

It has long been claimed that L2 readers may be made more efficient by means of extensive reading. The term "extensive reading" (ER) was originally used by Palmer (1917, quoted by Day and Bamford, 1998) to distinguish it from "intensive reading" –the careful reading of short, complex texts for detailed understanding and skills practice. The characteristics of ER generally include the relatively fast reading of a large amount of longer, easy-to-understand material, with the reading done mostly outside of the classroom and at each student's own pace and level. There are few, or no follow-up exercises, because the aim is for overall understanding rather than word-by-word decoding or grammar analysis. For the same reason, there is minimum use of dictionaries. Most importantly, instead of a fixed curriculum, the material is generally chosen by the students themselves. The material used is often graded readers. Indeed, the terms graded readers and extensive reading are often used almost synonymously. These simplified texts have been shown to have a number of benefits (Day and Bamford 1998, Waring 1997). The basic goal of extensive reading is to get students to read as much as possible. In recent years, an impressive body of evidence has appeared in favor of extensive reading as a means of improving not only students' reading level but also of raising their general proficiency. Day and Bamford (interviewed by Donnes, 1999) offered a simple summary of the theory behind extensive reading, saying that "students who read large quantities of easy, interesting material will become better readers and will enjoy the experience." In other words, "students learn to read by reading" (Grabe 1991, Smith 1985, quoted in Robb and Susser 1989, Bamford, interviewed by Donnes, 1999).

The integration of technology has been an important part in second language instruction in recent years. Many researchers have indicated the positive effects of computer use in second language teaching/learning (Gale; 1991; Klein, 1990; Watts and Lloyd, 2001). The latest invention, the Internet has also been an effective way in second language instruction (Andrews, 2000; Chen, Belkada, & Okamoto, 2004; Toyoda, 2000). Teachers can carry out many different activities based on the Internet. For example, in a recent study by Pino-Silva (2006), the benefits of an online extensive reading program were introduced. The researcher states that extensive reading through the Internet appears to be a very promising pedagogical approach that may strengthen students' learning in that they (a) capitalize on the opportunity to gain access and read from the vast amount of information available on the web, (b) ensure access to updated and varied information, (c) develop discipline in the use of their own time, and take the necessary risks to explore, evaluate and make their own decisions on what to read now and what to postpone for later.

Using the Internet, a great many activities can be conducted. "Webquests", the mini-projects in which a large percentage of the input and material is supplied by the Internet are the Internet-based activities (Dodge, 1995). According to March (1998) they are effective on incorporating the Internet into the classroom, fostering cooperative learning, motivation, and encouraging critical-thinking skills. However, to our knowledge, there is not evidence whether the effects of the webquests have been analyzed on the reading strategies of L2 readers. In addition, the studies carried out to determine the effects of ER through graded readers have generally focused on the gains on the language proficiency, vocabulary, affective variables, reading comprehension, and reading speed. The field lacks data that measure the changes in the reading strategies of the learners as a result of ER programs. It is also important to know how the Internet can be utilized as an ER source. The findings of this study are supposed to help scientists and instructors in the field of English language teaching to be aware that whether web-based activities or conventional ER activities by means of graded readers are more effective to enhance the EFL students' reading strategies.

2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

The universe of the study is the students of Celal Bayar University, Department of Foreign Languages, having pre-intermediate English level. The sampling of the study was chosen from among these students. The ones having the opportunity for computers and the Internet connection were randomly appointed as two experimental groups; the others formed the control group. The Graded Readers Group (GRG; n= 12; age= 17-20 years) followed an ER program prepared considering the characteristics of a conventional ER program. The Internet Group (IG; n= 12; age= 18-21 years) was exposed to an ER program supplied via the web-based activities (webquests). The control group members (CG; n= 12; 18-21 years) were not exposed to an ER program. They only

followed the foreign language instruction provided by their teachers and textbooks. All the members in the three groups were given a scale to measure their reading strategies as pre- and post-test. The translated version of a 30-item Likert-Type scale called Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS), developed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) was used as pre- and post-test to measure the participants reading strategies (see Appendix 1). The translated version was analyzed for reliability and the split half analysis for part one revealed an alpha coefficient of .7236, and for part two an alpha coefficient of .7313. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the whole scale was .8450. These results suggested that the translated version of the scale was reliable. The scale consisted of three sub-categories namely, global strategies (items 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 12, 15, 17, 20, 21, 23, 24, and 27); supportive strategies (items 2, 5, 10, 13, 18, 22, 26, 29, and 30); and problem solving strategies (items 7, 9, 11, 14, 16, 19, 25, and 28).

The first experimental group; Graded Readers group (GRG) started to follow a conventional extensive reading program composed of graded readers, prepared based on the criteria by Day and Bamford (1998). The table below shows the titles, authors, and the levels of the books they read within 6 weeks.

Table 1. The Titles, Authors and Levels of the Graded Readers

	Name of the Book	Author	Level
1	Tales of Mystery and Imagination	Edgar Allan Poe	4
2	The Picture of Dorian Gray	Oscar Wilde	4
3	The Doll's House and the other stories	Katherine Mansfield	4
4	The Firm	John Grisham	5
5	Brave New World	Aldous Huxley	6
6	Cry, The Beloved Country	Alan Paton	6

The learners were requested to read one book each week and to write a book report that was used as a control mechanism by the researcher.

The learners in the Internet Group were sent six webquests each to be completed within one week consisting of the same content as those of the graded readers given to the GRG. The webquests were prepared based on the criteria suggested by Dodge (1995). Each webquest included five sections namely, an introduction, task, process, resources, and a conclusion. In the task section, the learners were given a task to complete; in the process section what they had to do was explained step by step; the necessary web addresses were given in the resources section. The purpose of giving the sites in the resourced section is to limit the learners in the endless information world supplied by the Internet. If they are not guided, they get lost in this huge amount of information. The learners in this group were requested to send an end-product to the researcher via e-mail upon completing a project. The webquests sent to them are given in the table below:

Table 2. Titles of the Webquests Sent to the IG

	Title of the Webquest
1	Edgar Allan Poe: Father of Horror
2	The Picture of Dorian Gray
3	The Doll's House
4	The Firm
5	Brave New World
6	Cry, The Beloved Country

The CG members continued only their school routines. They did not follow any ER programs and they were requested not to read anything except for their textbooks.

The data collected throughout the study were analyzed using SPSS Package Program for Windows, Version 9.0. In order to analyze the difference among the gains of the three groups in terms of their reading strategy use the Kruskal Vallis Test, a nonparametric test, was used. Within group comparisons of the three groups were conducted using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test.

3. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Within group comparisons of the groups indicated that there was a significant increase in the strategy use of the IG ($p < 0.05$; Table 3). This finding can be interpreted as the positive effect of the treatment given to the IG on their reading strategy use and also confirm the literature indicating the positive effects of the Internet on the improvement of higher-order thinking skills. From this respect, our findings support the view by Chang (2005) whose study implied that teachers could shift responsibility for the learning process (web-based instruction) through helping students develop self-regulatory skills. Learners who develop their self-regulation skills are able to take more responsibility for their own learning and learn with less intervention for the teacher. Despite the known benefits of ERP through graded readers, we found no significant difference in the pre- and post-test SORS scores of the GRG. Similarly, those were not significant for the CG, either.

Table 3. Pre- and post test SORS Scores of the Groups

	Pre-test SORS	Post-test SORS	Difference	p
GRG (n= 12)	102.91±15.31	110.33±22.16	7.41±24.36	.272
IG (n= 12)	102.75±13.14	113.00±7.39	10.25±14.89	.041*
CG (n= 12)	101.50±15.32	100.58±11.08	-0.91±14.10	.689

* $p < 0.05$

The results of the analysis indicated that there were no significant differences among the three groups in terms of their neither pre-test nor post-test scores of reading strategies. When the difference obtained as a result of pre- and post-test scores of the groups was analyzed, the groups were not found different from each other, either.

The sub-categories of the scale (global, supportive, and problem solving) were also investigated, but no significant difference was found between the pre- and post-test scores of the experimental groups in neither of the sub-categories. However, there was a significant difference in the supportive reading strategy of the CG ($p < 0.01$), which indicated a reduction in the strategies learners use to support their comprehension while reading (Table 4).

Table 4: Pre- and post-test Sub-category SORS Scores of the Groups

Group	Strategy	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference	p
GRG (n=12)	GLOB	44.08±6.09	44.91±8.65	0.83±10.15	1.000
	SUPP	34.83±6.82	30.50±8.56	-4.33±8.86	.142
	PROB	31.00±3.24	31.66±5.51	0.66±5.72	.695
IG (n=12)	GLOB	44.33±7.20	45.75±4.24	1.41±7.48	.609
	SUPP	34.25±5.91	31.33±4.20	-2.91±7.68	.255
	PROB	31.83±4.42	32.25±2.34	0.41±4.48	.579
CG (n=12)	GLOB	43.58±9.26	40.50±6.54	-3.08±11.12	.326
	SUPP	35.08±4.99	27.33±3.79	-7.75±3.88	.002**
	PROB	29.58±5.33	29.91±3.91	0.33±5.21	.653

** $p < 0.01$; GLOB= Global; SUPP= Supportive; PROB= Problem Solving

4. CONCLUSION

Language teachers very frequently observe that teaching reading to college students brings about some problems because the students who lack control of reading strategies often have difficulties coping with academic reading materials such as textbooks. They spend more time and energy struggling with individual words than on constructing meaning from the text, which often results in a slow, labored, and choppy reading style that damages their attention and interest. Therefore, strategy instruction can help all students, especially struggling ones, become more active readers and thinkers. For example, when teaching a particular reading strategy the learners can be recommended to describe what the strategy is, to explain why the strategy should be learned and used, and to provide examples of the circumstances under which the strategy should be used. They can be advised to guess the meaning of unknown words from the context instead of using the dictionary very often. Such instruction can provide a useful way of increasing students' metacognitive awareness and use of reading strategies when coping with academic reading tasks. It is important for all readers, whether native or non-native, to be aware of some of the key strategies proficient readers use before, during and after reading. For example, their background knowledge

related to the topic, their purpose of why they are reading; concentrating on what is being read, monitoring their comprehension; understanding how pieces of information fit together or evaluating what one reads.

Despite the general thought that ER enhances reading skills, and “one can learn to read by reading”, we could not find a significant difference in the reading strategy use of the learners apart from the significant difference in the IG in their general strategy use. At this point, we can conclude that webquests may be used effectively to alter the reading strategy use of the learners positively. This result has shown that the nature of the web-based activities enables the learners to develop and use some reading strategies while reading. Contrary to this fact, the linear presentation in the graded readers did not cause a significant increase in the reading strategy use of the learners. However, for more comprehensive results, additional and long-lasting studies should be conducted using more crowded groups from different age groups with different language abilities.

The significant reduction in the supportive strategies of the CG emphasizes the role of reading to become better readers. These students were not exposed to any reading activities; as a result, they started to lose the abilities they had at the beginning of the program. In addition to the exposure to additional reading activities, teachers can play a key role in increasing students’ awareness of such strategies and in helping them become “constructively responsive”, since the learners cannot develop these strategies on their own in a short period of time. Teachers should carefully examine the responses to SORS statements and interpret them in the light of their own experiences with their students before making instructional decisions. Finally, strategy instruction may require the teachers work hard, but the benefits for the students who especially have difficulty in reading would make the extra effort worthwhile.

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Appendix: 1

OKUMA STRATEJİLERİNİ BELİRLEME ÖLÇEĞİ

Bu anket İngilizce yazılmış ders kitaplarını, hikaye ve romanları, dergilerde yayımlanmış olan makaleleri, sınavlarda yer alan okuma parçalarını okurken kullandığınız çeşitli okuma stratejilerini belirlemek amacıyla hazırlanmıştır.

Aşağıda

yer alan her cümleden sonra 1,2,3,4,5 olarak beş rakam verilmiştir. Bu rakamların anlamları şöyledir:

"1" bu cümlede ifade edilen şeyi **hiç yada hemen hemen hiç** yapmam

"2" bu cümlede ifade edilen şeyi **sadece bazı durumlarda** yaparım

"3" bu cümlede ifade edilen şeyi **bazen** yaparım (yaklaşık %50)

"4" bu cümlede ifade edilen şeyi **genellikle** yaparım

"5" bu cümlede ifade edilen şeyi **her zaman ya da hemen hemen her**

zaman yaparım

Bu ankette yer alan cümlelerin doğru veya yanlış yanıtları yoktur. **HER CÜMLE İÇİN SİZE UYGUN DÜŞEN RAKAMI (1,2,3,4, yada 5) YUVARLAK İÇİNE ALARAK İŞARETLEYİNİZ.** Katıldığınız için teşekkürler.

	Cümle	Ölçek				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Okurken aklımda bir amacım vardır.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Okuduğumu anlamama yardımcı olması için notlar alırım.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Okuduğumu anlamama yardımcı olması için bu konuda neler bildiğimi düşünürüm.	1	2	3	4	5

4	Okumadan önce ne hakkında olduğunu anlamak için parçayı gözden geçiririm.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Parça zor gelmeye başladığında, okuduğumu anlamama yardımcı olması için yüksek sesle okurum.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Parçanın içeriğinin benim amacıma uygun olup olmadığına bakarım.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Okuduğumu anladığımdan emin olmak için yavaş ve dikkatli bir şekilde okurum.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Parçayı önce uzunluk ve organizasyon gibi özelliklerine bakarak gözden geçiririm.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Dikkatim dağılıncı tekrar konuya dönmeye çalışırım.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Hatırlamama yardımcı olması için parçadaki bilgilerin altını çizerim veya yuvarlak içine alırım.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Okuduğum şeye göre okuma hızımı ayarlarım.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Okurken neyi daha dikkatli okuyacağıma, neyi okumadan geçeceğime karar veririm.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Okuduğumu anlamaya yardımcı olmaları için sözlük gibi başvuru kaynakları kullanırım.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Parça zorlaşınca, dikkatimi okuduğum şeye daha fazla veririm.	1	2	3	4	5
15	Anlamayı arttırmak için parçada yer alan şekil, tablo, resim gibi unsurlardan yararlanırım.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Ara sıra durarak ne okuduğumu düşünürüm.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Okuduğumu daha iyi anlamama yardımcı olması için parçadaki ipuçlarını kullanırım.	1	2	3	4	5
18	Okuduğumu daha iyi anlamak için okuduğum şeyleri kendi sözcüklerimle ifade ederim.	1	2	3	4	5
19	Okuduğumu hatırlamama yardımcı olması için okuduğum şeyleri zihnimde canlandırmaya çalışırım.	1	2	3	4	5
20	Anahtar bilgileri anlayabilmek için koyu renkli veya italik yazı gibi yazım özelliklerini kullanırım.	1	2	3	4	5
21	Parçada verilen bilgileri eleştirel olarak analiz eder ve değerlendiririm.	1	2	3	4	5
22	Parçadaki fikirler arasında bağlantı kurabilmek için parçayı okurken önceki ve sonraki bölümlere bakarım.	1	2	3	4	5
23	Yeni bilgilerle karşılaşınca anlayıp anlamadığımı kontrol ederim.	1	2	3	4	5
24	Okurken parçanın içeriğinin ne olduğunu tahmin etmeye çalışırım.	1	2	3	4	5
25	Parça zor gelmeye başladığında, anlamamı arttırmak için tekrar okurum.	1	2	3	4	5
26	Kendi kendime yanıtlarını parçada bulabileceğim sorular sorarım.	1	2	3	4	5
27	Parça hakkındaki tahminlerimin doğru olup olmadığını kontrol ederim.	1	2	3	4	5

28	Okurken anlamını bilmediğim sözcük ve sözcük gruplarının anlamlarını tahmin ederim.	1	2	3	4	5
29	Okurken İngilizce'den Türkçe'ye çeviririm.	1	2	3	4	5
30	Okurken bilgileri hem İngilizce hem de Türkçe olarak düşünürüm.	1	2	3	4	5

Kouider Mokhtari ve Ravi Sheorey (2002)'den uyarlanmıştır

Mokhtari, K., & Sheorey, R. (2002), "Measuring ESL Students' Reading Strategies", **Journal of Developmental Education** 25 (3), pp: 2-10.

