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Students' usage of reading strategies in the faculty of education

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify the frequency level of reading strategies that the college students use while they are reading the academic materials and to examine these strategies according to some variables. The sample of the study consists of 230 college students attending the Faculty of Education in Pamukkale University. Metacognitive Reading Strategies Questionnaire (MRSQ) developed by Taraban and his collegues (2004) and adapted to Turkish by Cogmen (2008) was used as the data instrument of the research. In this study, statistical techniqes such as mean, standard deviation, correlation, the t-test, one way ANOVA, Kruskal Wallis and Mann Whitney U tests for independent samples were used. According to the findings; the frequency level of the reading strategies that the students use was found "I often use" level.
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Keywords: Reading comprehension; reading comprehension strategies; metacognition; metacognitive reading strategies.

1. Introduction

To catch up with the changing world, students are supposed to be life long learners and also critical self learners. Reading is in charge at that point. Supposing that most of the learning processes occur in terms of reading, students should have a meaningful and critical reading process. Without supportive skills of reading comprehension, desired level of learning may not be reached (Yalcın and Sengul, 2004).

At college, reading activities are made to comprehend the academic materials and to learn the conceptual framework. These materials are such complex ones with lots of concepts and information. Students are supposed to read and understand the assigned texts before coming to classes on their own. Such a reading process means to read beyond the lines and to think critically (Shelton, 2006). Pressley and his collegues reported that college students are not strategic and selective while they are studying a text for an exam although researches support that such a reader profile is beneficial for comprehension and remembering the information better (Taraban, Kerr and Rynearson, 2000). In this context, college students can perform an effective reading process by using reading comprehension strategies.

Routman (2003) defines reading comprehension strategies as "tools or plans for facilitating and extending comprehension (In: Hardebeck, 2006). Reading comprehension strategies can help readers remember the key points, distinguish the necessary and unnecessary information, think about the main idea and comment on the subject

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matter. Good readers use lots of strategies before, during and after reading (Dogan, 2002). There are strategies such as underlining, taking notes in the margins, highlighting mostly used to remember the desired information better. On the other hand, such strategies as evaluating the comprehension level, inferring the information from the text, anticipating what is coming next, searching for the reading purpose are more analytic and need to have a metacognitive awareness. El-Kaumy (2004) defines metacognitive strategies in there ways: planning, self monitoring and self evaluating. Planning is to have a reading purpose in mind and to read the text in terms of this purpose. Having a purpose helps reader be selective and focus on the desired information. Self monitoring is to regulate the reading process and use the appropriate strategy at the right time. The reader monitors his/her decisions about strategies. Self evaluation is the reform phase of the reading process such as; to change strategy if necessary, to control if the purpose is reached or not or to reread the text. In short, reading comprehension strategies are activities to let students control their learning; in other words think about thinking (Susar, 2006).

Researches found out that metacognitive reading strategies usage develops students' reading comprehension level (Eilers and Pinkley, 2006). According to these researches, not only using strategies increase the academic success but also successful students use strategies while reading. As a result of this, it is critical for a college student to use reading comprehension strategies while reading academic materials for an effective learning.

1. Method

The purpose of this study was to identify the frequency level of reading strategies that the college students use while they are reading the academic materials and to examine these strategies according to some variables. For this purpose these research questions have been asked:

1. What is the frequency level of students' strategy usage while they are reading academic materials?

2. Is there any significant difference between the reading strategy usage and the variables such as gender, class, department, number of books that a student read in a year?

3. What is the relationship between students' reading strategy usage and their academic success?

The population of this study consists of 812 1st and 4th class college students attending the departments of Primary Teacher Education, Science Education, Turkish Language Teaching and Fine Art Education during 2007-2008 academic year in Denizli. The sample was selected randomly.

1.1. Instruments

The instrument called Metacognitive Reading Strategies Questionnaire (MRSQ) was developed by Taraban and his collegues (2004). This instrument has 22 items and 2 dimensions called analytic and pragmatic strategies. While analytic strategies dimension is about the metacognitive strategies, pragmatic strategies dimension has the items about more practical strategies that aim to remember the information. An item as an example for analytic strategies dimension is that; "As I'm reading, I evaluate the text to determine whether it contributes to my knowledge/understanding of the subject." For pragmatic strategies dimension, the item of "I try to underline in order to remember the information" can be given as an example. The reliability coefficient of the original instrument was 0.84 (Cronbach Alpha). Cogmen (2008) translated this instrument into Turkish and performed factor analysis. The reliability coefficient of translated instrument was calculated as 0.81. As in the original version, the Turkish instrument includes 2 dimensions. Each item enables the respondent to assess the frequency which he or she does about that particular item. Items are rated on a Likert type scale ranging from 5 (always use) to 1 (never use). Total scores on this inventory could range from 22 to 110.

1.2. Data collection and analysis

The data gathered was analyzed by the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software. This study used statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation, correlation, the t-test, one way ANOVA, Kruskal Wallis and Mann Whitney U tests for independent samples. Significance level was .05.

2. Results

In order to test the first question that "What is the frequency level of students' strategy usage while they are reading academic materials?", the equation of n-1/n was used to find the frequency level of each dimension and total. According to this, the mean square between the scores of 4.20 and 5.00 is in "Always use"; 3.40-4.19 is in "Often use"; 2.60-3.39 is in "Sometimes use"; 1.80-2.59 is in "Rarely use" and 1.00-1.79 is in "Never use" level. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The frequency level of students' strategy usage

	Number of items	n	$\bar{X}$	Sd	Level
Analytic	16	230	3.75	1.223	I often use
Pragmatic	6	230	3.75	.878	I often use
Total	230	326	.3.75	.465	I often use

As seen in Table 1, the students informed that they often use the strategies for both dimensions. In order to test the second question, independent samples t-test, one way ANOVA test and Kruskal Wallis tests were used. According to gender, there is no significant difference on the analytic strategies dimension (p=.150, p>.05) but there is a significant difference on the pragmatic strategies dimension on behalf of girls (p=.00, p<.05). The same result was reached according to class such as; there is no significant difference on the analytic strategies dimension (p=.074, p>.05) but there is a significant difference on the pragmatic strategies dimension on behalf of the 4th class students (p=.009, p<.05). There is no significant difference on the analytic strategies dimension according to departments (p=.813, p>.05). However, on the pragmatic strategies dimension, there is a significant difference (p=.011, p<.05). To understand the reason of this difference, Tukey test was used and according to the results, students in Turkish Language Teaching Department use the pragmatic strategies less frequently than the students in Fine Art Education and Primary Teacher Education Department. According to the number of books read in a year, there is a significant difference on the analytic strategies dimension (p=.024, p<.05). Mann Whitney U-Test was used to understand the source of difference and results showed that students read 6-20 books in a year use analytic strategies more frequently than the students read 1-5 books in a year. There is no significant difference on the pragmatic strategies dimension (p=.305, p>.05).

For the third question, to test the correlation between strategy usage and academic success, a Pearson correlation coefficient was used. Results showed that, there is a significant and positive relationship between strategy usage and academic success (on analytic strategies dimension: r=.140, p<.05; on pragmatic strategies dimension: r=.145, p<.05).

3. Discussion

According to this reseach, students use both analytic and pragmatic strategies in "I often use" level. It can be concluded that they aim both to remember and construct the concepts while reading academic texts. In many researches made to examine the reading strategies of students, students are found to use the strategies in moderate or upper level (Berkowitz and Cicchelli, 2004; Muhtar, 2006). A significant difference was found on the pragmatic strategies dimension on behalf of the 4th class students (p=.009, p<.05). Oxford (1994) claims that students' strategies usage increases when they they are in upper classes (In: Gungor, 2005). This fixes the result of this research. In Turkish Language Teaching Department, students have such courses that need text analysis as Novel, Linguistics and Modern Turkish Literature. That can explain why Turkish Language Education Department students

use analytic strategies more while reading academic materials. Students read 6-20 books in a year use analytic strategies more frequently than the students read 1-5 books in a year. Fictional texts can contribute the students' analytic thinking skills so the more they read books the more they use analytic strategies while reading. According to Taraban, Kerr and Rynearson (2000), students who have upper grades inform more reading purpose and strategy usage while reading. Also, lots of researches emphasize the positive relation of using reading strategies and academic success (Berkowitz and Cicchelli, 2004; Belet, 2005; Eilers and Pinkley, 2006; Muhtar, 2006; Hardebeck, 2006; Williams, 2006, Canca, 2007). These also fix the finding of the third question.

In many classes, students are rarely asked to synthesize and evaluate about what they read. As a result of this, thinking skills for more complex processes can not be improved (Collins and Cheek, 1999). Moreover, according to the researches, college students have difficulty in selecting, organizing and commenting on key words when they read (Pressley and Blocks, 2002). So, it is essential for college students -in other words "adult readers"- to have such skills for their academic success. College students should know how, when and where to use reading strategies to comprehend the academic texts better. In this context, it is important to increase the awareness of college students about metacognition and metacognitive reading strategies.

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