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University students for using the summarizing strategies

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Abstract

Summarizing helps students to comprehend knowledge, transferring it to long-term memory significantly. Summarizing, which is one of the metacognitive strategies, leads to effective using of mental skills, and increases remembering and understanding. The purpose of this study is to find whether the university students effectively use the summarizing strategy as a reading comprehensive strategy or not. Taking the properties into consideration of a qualitative summary, we assessed in this study summaries of the university students. In the study, we used “document analysis method” which is one of the qualitative research methods. In the study with 4th Year students of Dokuz Eylül University, Department of Turkish Education, Turkish Teaching Program, we assessed 234 summaries as a qualitative data set, using “Assessment Criteria Form” for assessment of these summaries. These summaries were assessed within the criteria, and scored by both researchers. We found that the consistency coefficient of the scores was, 84 for the first criterion; 78 for the second; 82 for the third; and 71 for the third. In the light of data obtained from the study, the codes we reached were “setting the main theme, digression from the main points of the text, and superficial summarizing.” And we set the theme of “getting in touch with the main and secondary points” by gathering these codes. In general, we may say that the students are successful in stating the main idea, but they project their own ideas and thoughts into these summaries.

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1. Introduction

Summarizing helps students to comprehend knowledge, transferring it to long-term memory significantly because it leads students to a) reading to understand, b) to distinguish important ideas, and c) to express the information by using their own words (Senemoğlu, 2001:569). A superficial grasp of the meaning in sentences is not sufficient for summarizing. One of the most important priorities is comprehensive reading of the text; on the other hand, this needs using mental skills effectively. “For writing good summaries, students must interrelate these new ideas with old ones, and put forward authentic ideas.” (Friend, 2001:320). To learn summarizing, we must take these steps: 1. Setting main and secondary ideas of each paragraph within the text. 2. Setting the most important paragraph within the text. 3. For writing a good summary, in general, discovering and setting of the main idea of the text. 4. In the

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summary, referring the concepts and the ideas of the text, and paraphrasing, that is, using his/her own words (Wormeli, 2004; Garcia&Michaelis, 2001).

In recent years, the importance of the reading comprehension strategies has been understood better; therefore, works on the summarizing strategy training have increased. We can list some of these as follows: With his study which includes the summarizing strategies, Hamman (1995) researched the effect of the strategy training on students' achievement. During the study which lasted 4 weeks with 14 interviewees, the students worked on summarizing, picking the main idea, discerning the wrong thoughts, and predicting strategies. Palinscar and Browns' (1984) reciprocal teaching method was used in these strategy training. According to the results of the study with pretest and posttest experimental design, we found a significant difference on the level of students' reading achievement. In his study on the primary education, Hess (2004) assessed the metacognitive strategies, in particular summarizing and explaining strategies within the Success for All Reading Wing Program. Cooperative learning and reciprocal teaching methods were used in the training. During ten-week study, we observed that students made progress in the use of metacognitive strategies, in particular summarizing and explaining strategies. In her study, Susar Kırmızı (2006) used Cooperative Learning Method Based on the Multiple Intellect Theory in the training for summarizing strategy. This study with 4th Grade students of the Primary School has been lasted fourteen weeks. As data obtaining instrument, "Open Ended Reading Comprehension Success Test" has been used for the summaries written by these students. The study has been carried on with 178 students by using pretest and posttest experimental design. At the end of this process, we found a significant variance in the use of summarizing strategies for the group studied with Cooperative Learning Method Based on the Multiple Intellect Theory.

Purpose of the study is to understand whether university students effectively use summarizing strategy as a reading comprehensive strategy. A subprogram has been set related to this study: Could students put forward the relation between the main and secondary ideas in their summaries?

2. Method

In this study, we used the document analysis method which is used in the qualitative research strategy. Document investigation includes the analysis of fact or facts which were the aims of the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). We wanted the students to write a summary of the text, "Düşünmeyi Öğretmek [Teaching to Think] (Özdemir, 2000: 79)" by Mümtaz Soysal. In these summaries, we searched whether the "summarizing strategies" were used qualitatively to meet the established criteria.

2.1. Research group

The study was carried out with students of 4th Grade, İzmir/Dokuz Eylül University, Educational Faculty, and Department of Turkish Language Teaching. Summaries of 234 students who were participated to the study were assessed as a qualitative data set.

2.2. Data collecting instruments

To research whether summarizing strategies used qualitatively or not, we made use of Assessment Criteria Form which was developed by Akkaya and Susar Kırmızı (2008). This form consists of four separate criteria and points given to these criteria.

2.3. Data analysis and comment

First of all, each summary written by students has been listed and numbered. Subsequently, the researchers separately read these summaries four times. During these readings, they formed codes, and then set themes by gathering these codes. The consistency of scales/points given by the researchers for each criterion of summaries has been examined. We found the consistency coefficient of scales for the first criterion was, 84; second, 78; third, 82; and fourth, 71.

3. Findings and comment

In this part, subproblems have been solved; and students' views on the codes within themes have been exposed. In the light of data we obtained from the study, we found the codes as "picking the main idea, digression from the text's main point, and superficial summarizing." With gathering these codes, we set the theme "to interrelate the main and secondary ideas." Within "setting the main idea" code, we cite the following excerpts and comments:

“They try to open new schools in our country. However, the problem how to think cannot be solved ever. So, these new schools have no importance for the training about how to think” [Female, 95]. “Without teaching thinking to lead the young according to our own clichés is wrong” [Female, 95].

When we examine these summaries in general, we see that students have grasped the main idea. Certainly, successful summaries of the 4th Year students of Department of Turkish Language Teaching can be assessed positively. Besides, students expressed the main idea in their own words. This shows an important behavior for strategy using. We can say that students that participated in the study successfully set the main idea. When we examine the summaries for “alienation from the text code,” we see very interesting excerpts because students put down completely unconnected ideas in these summaries.

“The system brings up extremely harmonious people with the regime. Individuals who try to conform cannot be themselves from now on” [Male, 99]. “If they want to make a change in our education system, firstly examination system has to be removed. So long as the examination problem cannot be solved thinking problem will not be solved, too” [Female, 122]. “Yes, the young should study and be ‘great man.’ However, what can the young who does not know how to think do? How can he/she live decently? The young cannot think to take away their rights when they will lose these.” [Male, 156].

As you can see in these excerpts, there are many sentences contained exclusively the students’ own views unconnected with the text. A summarizing strategy is paraphrasing, but students must write the summaries with their own words; they must not put their own ideas in their summaries. When we examine these summaries for the “superficial summarizing” code, we see that these are very short and insufficient. The text which consists of five paragraphs is summarized and evaded within two short paragraphs. For example, some students [Female, 202], [Female, 204] satisfied with summarizing the text only in two paragraphs. Of course, the summary must be short, but the main and secondary ideas must be reflected. When we take this rule into consideration, we see that some students’ summaries are not long enough. According to this fact, we can say that some students are inadequate for setting and expressing the main ideas and themes of the text.

4. Discussion and Proposals

When we examine the previous studies in the screening of field literature, we see nothing on the qualities of summaries which students wrote; accordingly, this is an authentic study. When we examine these summaries in general, we can say that students have successfully grasped the main idea because they gave the main idea in their summaries. However, we also read their own views and ideas, and even examples in these summaries. They sometimes digressed from the main subject of the text, and wrote unconnected summaries with the theme. Of course, students must use their own sentences in their summaries, but digression from the theme and main ideas of the text is not the correct way. When we examine the written products for “superficial summarizing” code, we see that they sometimes write very short summaries. We find summaries which tried to express a whole text by two short paragraphs. Of course, writing short summaries is the rule, but the heart of the matter should be presented here. We can explain this failure by students’ lack of required sensitivity for summarizing, and their wish to make short work of the text. This result may show that teaching summarizing strategies is inadequate in schools. First of all, students must have a better reading comprehension in the use of summarizing strategies. Using this strategy requires an effective participation, focusing on the text and reading process; and this “constructive process” provides the significant learning in the educational course. Unfortunately, we had no glimpse of “constructive process” or significant learning in these summaries.

We have put forward the following proposals on the basis of this research: Students of Turkish Language Teaching Department must receive an effective education on summarizing strategies. They must do exercises for using these strategies. Summaries of students must be assessed in detail for “summarizing strategies.” For feedback, students must be informed of the assessment results on using strategies. When they write summaries, students also must develop thinking process. Researches on using summarizing strategies must be increased.

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