

READING STRATEGIES OF SUCCESSFUL READERS THROUGH THE THREE PHASE APPROACH

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Abstract

This article examines the strategies effective readers employ in pre-reading, reading and post-reading stages of instruction in classroom language learning. Therefore, this study aims at determining the difference in the strategy use by both successful and less successful readers at an upper-intermediate level. The subjects of this study were preparatory ELT students at Hacettepe University. The students were administered an inventory of strategy use during their in-classroom reading studies. Data was analyzed through a percentage study. It was reported in the study that successful readers differed in some strategies (S11, S17, 21, S31 and S32 while reading, and S36 and S38 in post-reading stage). By recognizing the differences between the two groups during the reading stage, foreign language teachers were advised to begin with a global understanding of the reading material, and then move to smaller units such as words, sentences and paragraphs since the longer units provide a context for understanding smaller units. A sentence or a paragraph may also help the reader to understand a specific word (the contextual meaning). As for the post-reading stage, the students should be guided to make use of their background knowledge to reach and capture the meaning (the message) given in the reading material.

Reading is not only a receptive skill, but also an active one in that it primarily includes the cognitive abilities such as predicting and/or guessing. In the prediction process learners are asked to talk about the title of the text or comment on some illustrations

(pictures) if provided any to set the scene. Therefore, language teachers should improve their students' ability to infer through the use of systematic practice and questioning techniques. Doing so will encourage students to anticipate the content of a text from its title and illustrations or the end of a story from the preceding paragraphs (Grellet, 1987). Reading as we know involves a number of cognitive processes. Reading has a communicative value and functions as an active skill as cognitive processes are working during reading. The reader both reads and tries to work on the information in the reading itself. For this reason, foreign language teachers should design and prepare meaningful exercises, which will lead to assist communication between the writer and the reader. The activities should be flexible and varied. Reading comprehension activities should be chosen to suit the texts. It is fundamental to take the author's point of view into consideration for a full understanding of the text. This may be covered through open-ended questions, multiple-choice questions, true-false statements, etc. Otherwise text comprehension may simply turn into a non-linguistic activity such as matching pictures and paragraphs.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE OVERVIEW

There has been research in developing reading comprehension in the field of foreign language teaching for years. Although the studies on developing reading strategies are many in number in the ESL context, there are relatively few studies conducted specifically on the three phases of instruction in EFL context. Strategy training, therefore, is important in developing reading skills. At this point students' background knowledge is a contributory factor, especially in developing the pre-reading stage strategies since this knowledge will help the student on their predicting/guessing abilities. Solely, this stage will enhance the transition to the rest two strategies.

Schema Theory

This theory places heavy emphasis on the importance of the learners' background knowledge. In a sense, reading can be regarded as a psycholinguistic guessing game in

which the reader reconstructs, as well as he can, a message which has been encoded by a writer as a graphic display (Goodman, 1971).

The reader's background knowledge is the reader's previously acquired knowledge. This is supported by Hayes and Tierney (1982) who believe that presenting the background knowledge related to the topic to be learned assists readers in learning from the text. According to schema theory, comprehending a text is an interactive process between the readers' background knowledge and the text itself. This process can be divided into two parts;

A. *Bottom-up Process*: The previously acquired knowledge structures (Schemata) are hierarchically organized from most general at the top to most specific at the bottom. This is called "data driven." To do this a teacher can move from grammar points and vocabulary to direct the learners to focus on the message.

B. *Top-down Process*: Students are required to have general predictions and then seek for the input for the message. To do this, a teacher can give some ideas to form generalizations about the topic to process the information as an initiator. Then the students are required to process information.

In both modes of processing, students should develop and employ different strategies to improve their reading skills. The teachers can then contribute to the strategy training of their students in the three stages of reading instruction in classes.

Reading Activities through a Three-Phase Approach

In this part activities in three stages of reading will be examined.

Pre-reading Stage

The pre-reading stage attempts to:

1. improve students' interest in the topic, and motivate them,
2. provide some predicting/guessing activities for the reading passage,
3. make use of students' background knowledge about the topic,
4. prepare the students for the context of the reading passage,

5. build a bridge between the reading passage and the learners' background knowledge, and interests.

In pre-reading activities, students are asked to:

- a. find answers to given questions based on the text;
- b. give their personal opinion about the topic;
- c. predict the continuing text

In critical pre-reading activities, students can be asked to consider:

- a. the reason the author is writing about the topic;
- b. the whole range of ways to write a particular text;
- c. the generating of their own list of questions.

(Varaprasad, 1997)

Reading Stage

This stage aims to improve:

1. students' understanding the writer's purpose, the language structure and the logical organization in the reading text,
2. developing and helping comprehension for the reading text content,
3. helping students use their own inferring and judging abilities,
4. reminding the students of the importance of vocabulary for contextual clues for meaning and guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words,
5. helping students make use of cross-cultural elements,
6. helping students develop their linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge,
7. learning to generalize on the issue under discussion,
8. reading consciously,
9. skimming (looking for general information),
10. scanning (looking for specific information).

Post-reading Stage

The aims of post-reading work are:

1. to help students use their acquired knowledge in similar readings,

- 2.to help them integrate their reading skills with the other language skills:
listening, speaking and writing,
- 3.to help them integrate with the foreign culture,
- 4.to make use of key words and structures to summarize the reading passage,
- 5.to extract the main idea of a paragraph or a reading text,
- 6.to interpret descriptions (outlining and summarizing),
- 7.to make use of classroom games for reading.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to determine what strategies successful readers employ during the three phases of instruction in EFL. To do this, an inventory on reading strategies was developed as identified below and administered to the prep students of ELT at Hacettepe University.

METHOD

This study was conducted to see if any differences would exist in terms of the strategies employed by the successful and the less successful readers during their reading activities in language classrooms.

Subjects

The subjects of this study consisted of 110 preparatory students for language studies in English Department at Hacettepe University during 2000-2001 academic year. They were given a placement test prior to their preparatory language studies by the department and took a one-year intensive English language instruction.

Research questions

In this study answers to the following questions were sought.

- 1.In what strategies do successful readers differ from less successful readers?
- 2.Do reading scores and overall achievement scores correlate significantly or not?

Instruments

To determine the sort of reading strategies of both successful and less successful readers at proficiency level, a reading strategy inventory (see Appendix A) adopted from Varaprasad (1997) and designed by the researcher was administered to those subjects. The inventory included strategy types for the three reading stages during instruction.

1. Pre-reading stage

The strategies at this stage focus on:

- a. Predicting/guessing (talking about the title and/or commenting on the illustrations if provided any)
- b. Teaching new vocabulary,
- c. Setting the scene.

2 Reading stage

This stage includes such issues as:

- a. Annotating: focusing on content and language of the text. To do this, students are asked if they use the strategy of underlining, questioning and organizing information to understand the text.
- b. Analyzing: analyzing arguments in the text, analyzing characters, the setting, focusing on the use of words (kinds of verbs: action or mental) and other aspects of language use (e.g. connectors, etc.).

3. Post-reading stage

In this stage students are asked if they use such strategies as;

- a. summarizing,
- b. evaluating,
- c. synthesizing,
- d. commenting, and
- e. reflecting.

Achievement

Students were given a final (achievement) test which consisted of grammar, writing, vocabulary and reading. The reading section of the achievement test was used to distinguish the successful readers from the less successful readers. This section was graded 40 over 100. Established department guidelines were employed so those students obtaining a score over 28 were considered successful readers.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As for the data analysis, percentages were used to see if there is any difference in terms of strategies employed by these two different readers. The figures were used to comment on the strategy use. The students were given a strategy inventory in which they were asked to respond on pre-reading, reading and post-reading strategies. Results are presented in Table I. Strategies were numbered according to their order in the inventory from 1 to 39 (respectively S1 for the first strategy to S39 for the last one) as can be seen in the appendix.

Table 1. Reader Strategies through the Three-Phase Approach

STRATEGIES														
PRE-READING				WHILE READING				POST READING						
READERS				READERS				READERS						
SUCCESSFUL		LESS SUCCESSFUL		SUCCESSFUL		LESS SUCCESSFUL		SUCCESSFUL		LESS SUCCESSFUL				
f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%			
S1	72	94	24	72	A.ANNOTATING				S35	61	79	27	82	
S2	30	38	10	30	S7	71	92	30	90	S36	62	81	16	50
S3	47	61	19	57	S8	52	68	24	72	S37	33	43	14	42
S4	53	69	24	72	S9	55	71	27	82	S38	65	85	17	51
S5	19	24	9	27	B.ANALYSING				S39	27	35	11	33	
S6	38	49	17	51	S10	63	82	29	87					
					S11	57	74	19	58					
					S12	57	74	18	55					
					S13	72	94	30	90					
					S14	55	71	24	72					
					S15	57	74	23	70					
					S16	48	72	20	61					

	S17	53	69	17	42	
	S18	31	40	15	45	
	S19	58	75	21	64	
	S20	58	75	20	61	
	S21	62	81	21	64	
	S22	65	84	29	87	
	S23	65	84	25	76	
	S24	32	42	16	48	
	S25	61	79	27	82	
	S26	59	77	25	76	
	S27	54	70	24	72	
	S28	50	65	23	70	
	S29	49	64	19	58	
	S30	37	48	16	48	
	S31	45	58	24	72	
	S32	58	75	22	66	
	S33	63	82	27	82	
	S34	60	78	25	76	

*s:Strategy; n1:77 (The number of successful readers); n2:33 (The number of less successful readers)

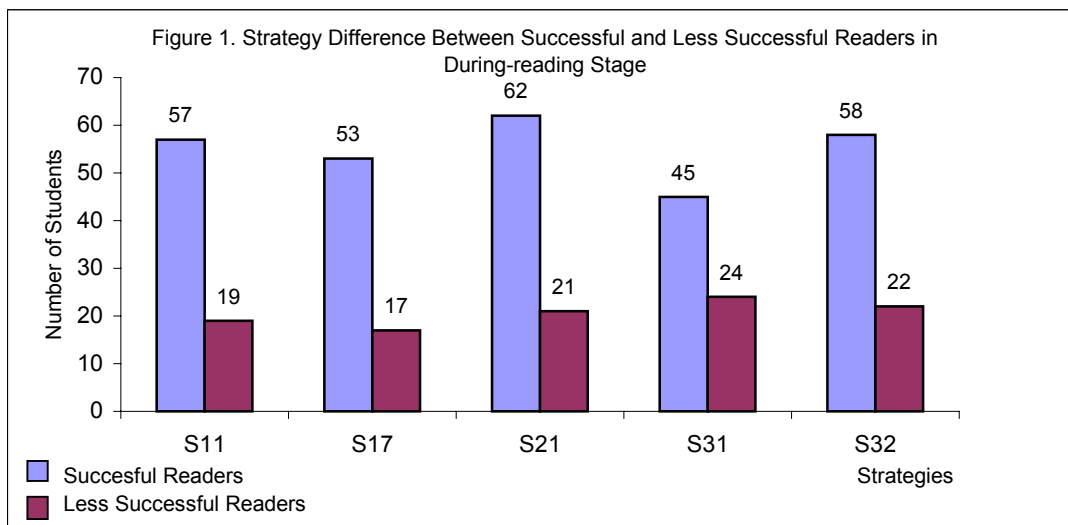
1. Pre-reading stage: As a result of the analysis of the above table, the successful learners and the less successful learners do not significantly differ in the use of the strategies at the pre-reading stage. This result shows that the strategies used at this stage are mainly the ones which lead to speculation making skill on the topic. Therefore, each learner will rightfully have a chance of presenting his own opinions and thus he will improve his communicative competence which is the issue in question.

2. During-reading stage: The difference in some of the strategies during this stage are as follows:

- a. what is being asserted as true (S11: successful readers 74 %, less successful readers 58 %),
- b. analyze arguments (S17: successful readers 69 %, less successful 42 %),
- c. repeated descriptions (S21: successful readers 81, less successful readers 54 %),

d. the kinds of verbs used: action verbs, verbs denoting mental process, etc. (S31: successful readers 58 %, less successful readers 82 %),

e. why the writer uses certain kinds of verbs, the purpose they serve, the meaning they convey (S32: successful readers 85 %, less successful readers 46 %).

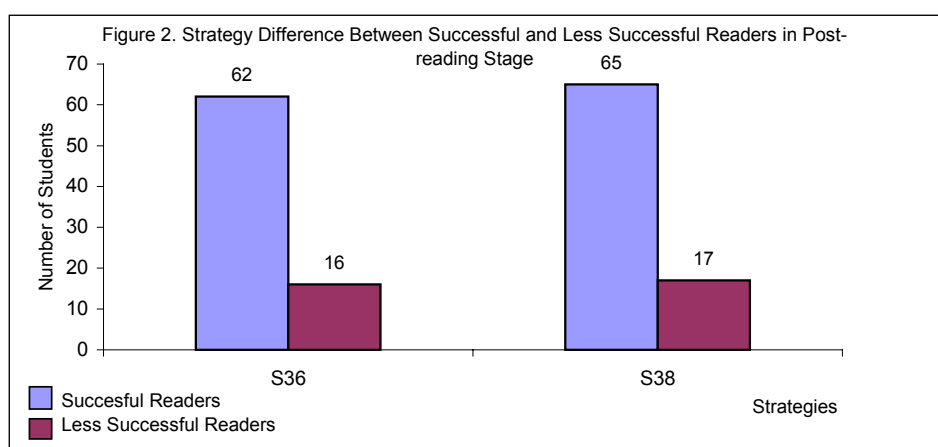


As seen in Figure 1, analyzing arguments, focusing on descriptions and certain kinds of verbs help readers understand the purpose and the message conveyed by the author. These strategies are the most preferable ones employed by successful readers, which means that readers find ways to the interpretation of the message in the written text. Another surprising result in this stage is that less successful readers do generally focus on the kinds of verbs; for instance, they mostly focus on verbs such as the ones which denote mental process and actions. There is no doubt that nothing can be conveyed without the corner stones of a language, the words. However, this surprising result may indicate that words may contribute to the message but they themselves fall short for a complete understanding of the gist. Readers should employ the strategy of arguments and others to decode the encoded message as can be seen in Figure 1.

3. Post-reading stage: The two groups differed only in the following two strategies.

These are;

- a. evaluating (S36: successful readers 81 %, less successful readers 50),
- b. commenting (S38: successful readers 85 %, less successful readers 51 %).



During post reading stage the two groups seem to differ only in two strategy use: evaluating and commenting. As observed in Figure 2 successful readers usually evaluate and try to comment on the encoded message by the author to extend their understanding the text as a whole. Therefore, it can be said that the strategies such as evaluating and commenting play an important role in developing one's interpretation and understanding of a written text.

CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

At this point of the study an overall conclusion about the strategy use by the two different reader groups will be presented. In addition to this issue some recommendations for foreign language teachers will be made. To do this, each stage will be handled separately.

Pre-reading stage

Language preparation does not mean that the teacher should explain *every possible unknown word* and *the structure in the text*, but that he should ensure that the learners would be able to tackle the text task without being totally frustrated with language difficulties. One way of stimulating interest and understanding their lacking points is to spend at least one or more lesson hours in this stage for arousing curiosity about the subject, message, characters and actions in the text (Greenwood, 1989).

The learners may be asked to find the answers to the questions given at the beginning of the text (pre-text questions), or to questions inserted at various points within the text. Another activity to involve less successful readers to work with successful readers for their improvement can be to compose mixed groups to complete diagrams or maps, making lists, and taking notes to develop their reading comprehension. This may lead to further individual effective reading habits.

Furthermore, language preparation can often be carried out by the learners, as well as by the teacher. In order to help prepare for pre-reading work, useful questions that the teacher can ask are: what knowledge, ideas, or opinions might be learners already have on the text topic, and how can such kind of knowledge be drawn out and used? Why should anyone want to use this text, and can the same, or similar reasons be generated in the learners?

The answers to the questions will give clues to ways of introducing the text, motivating the learners, and at the same time will incorporate language preparations. Visuals (e.g. diagrams, maps, photographs) drawing up of lists, or the setting or answering of questions (oral or written) may all play a part in the pre-reading. This can be handled through oral discussion and pictures (Gebhard, 1987).

Reading stage

The sort of questions that the teacher can ask himself as a guide to while-reading task can be the following:

1. What is the function of this text? (Aim)
2. How is the text organized or developed? (e.g. a narrative, an explanation with various examples, an argument and counter argument: Aim of organization)
3. What content or information is to be extracted from the text? (To clarify the text content)
4. What language may be learned from the text? (To clarify the text content)
5. What may the reader infer or deduce from the text? (To clarify the text content)
6. What reading styles may be practiced?

Depending on the answers to the questions, the teacher can select or devise appropriate exercises. As a rule, while-reading work should begin with a general or global understanding of the text, and then move to smaller units such as words, sentences or paragraphs. The reason for this is that the longer units provide a context for understanding the smaller units--a paragraph or sentence may help the reader to understand a specific word (the contextual meaning).

Additionally, learners can be asked to copy the excerpts from the text (a story reading) that have a significant effect on the development of the story and then write down their reactions to these selected passages (Zamel, 1992). Solely, the learners will be able to evaluate the text and better understand the words and grasp the message.

Post-reading stage

The work does not refer directly to the text, but grows out of it. Post-reading may also include any reactions to the text and to the while-reading work. For example, learners say whether they like it, and find it useful or not (evaluation and commenting on the reading).

Setting up and organizing post-reading work very much depends on all the objectives of the program as a whole. Post-reading work should, thus, contribute in a coherent manner, to the writing, speaking and listening skills that a foreign language program aims to develop.

Teachers may get ideas for post-reading work by asking themselves the following questions:

1. Do the learners know of a similar situation to that presented in the text?
2. Does the text present a situation that calls for recommendations?
3. Does the text present a situation that invites completion?
4. Does the text present views that might need to be counter-balanced?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'yes', then there is an opportunity for post-reading work. The work that the questions lead may be writing, interaction, drawing a diagram, or any combination of these.

Students can also be asked to evaluate, to synthesize, to comment, or to reflect upon what they have read in that lesson. All of these strategies will help students to consolidate in writing the critical understanding and interpretation that they have derived from their interaction with the text (Varaprasad, 1997).

Obviously, this three-phase approach is not to be carried out mechanically on every occasion. Sometimes the teacher may wish to cut out the pre-reading stage and get learners to work on the text directly. Sometimes the post-reading work may not be suitable. However, the advantage of the three-phase approach is two fold. Firstly, it respects and makes use of the students' own knowledge of the language and of the world, and uses this as a basis for involvement, motivation, and progress. Secondly, the three-phase approach leads to the integration of the skills in a coherent manner so that the reading session is not simply isolated.

The students should make use of their own background knowledge to reach and capture the meaning given in the reading passage. This recommendation agrees with Grellet (1987) suggesting that there should be a kind of bridge between what the reader already knows about the subject matter (his/her background knowledge) and the written text.

Finally, we can suggest that foreign language teachers should try to help their students develop effective reading strategies to make use of their own background knowledge

(cultural base) about the passage for them to understand it because when students are familiar with the topic, they are able to process the content better.

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Appendix A

Below is an inventory to see what sort of strategies you often prefer to employ in reading. Please write "Y" for "YES" and "N" for "NO" in the blanks provided on the left-hand side of each item. Thank you very much for your contributions.

A. Strategies for the pre-reading stage

In pre-reading activities, I try to;

- 1. find answers to given questions based on the text,
- 2. give their personal opinion about the topic,
- 3. predict the continuing text.

In critical pre-reading activities, I try to question;

- 4. the reason the author is writing about the topic,
- 5. the whole range of ways to write a particular text,
- 6. the generating of their own list of questions.

B. Strategies for the reading stage

At this stage I try to read and react to content and language in a text by

1. Annotating

I try to focus on the content and language of the text. As I read, I try to

- 7. read through the passage and *underline* difficult words and phrases, while getting a general idea of the whole passage. Next, I try to figure out the meanings of these words and phrases from context, and if necessary, look them up in a dictionary or another relevant book, encyclopedia, etc.
- 8. read the text again and solve doubts by *questioning*.

-----9. focus on the most important ideas of a text, separating what is central from what is peripheral. I try to see how information is organised and supported in a text.

2. Analyzing

I try to see

-----10. What point the writer is attempting to establish,

-----11. What is being asserted as true,

-----12. Why I should accept this claim as true,

-----13. What reasons or evidence the writer gives for this claim,

-----14. On what basis I should accept this claim, I seriously think about what I am reading. This means that I;

-----15. do not believe everything I read,

-----16. question everything that doesn't make sense to me,

-----17. analyze arguments,

-----18. discount arguments based on faulty reasoning,

-----19. have good reasons for believing some things and not believing others

Language: One way of analyzing language I believe is to look for patterns or repetitions of any kind such as:

-----20. repetitions or patterns of recurring images;

-----21. repeated descriptions;

-----22. consistent ways of characterising people or events;

-----23. repeated words and phrases, examples or illustrations;

-----24. reliance on particular writing strategies;

-----25. use of opposites/opposing ideas to reveal contrasting perspectives;

-----26. use of figurative language to reflect the authors' attitudes, tone, and feelings.

Moreover, I try to see if

-----27. the author writes emotionally,

-----28. s/he uses sentiment, name calling, or other emotional means to make his/ her point,

-----29. The use of inclusive and exclusive pronouns to represent self, subject, reader, etc.;

-----30. The way nouns function, and the reasons for their selection;

-----31. The kinds of verbs used: action verbs, verbs denoting mental processes etc.;

-----32. Why the writer uses them, the purpose they serve, the meaning they convey;

-----33. The use of modal verbs, what they convey about the writer's attitude and mood: affirmative, negative, imperative, or interrogative;

-----34. The use of connectors, not just to convey ideas, but also to convey the writer's stand or position on the matter.

C. Strategies for the post-reading stage

To extend my understanding obtained from texts at the pre-reading and while-reading stages into writing tasks,

I usually make use of such techniques as;

-----35. summarizing,

-----36. evaluating,

-----37. synthesizing,

-----38. commenting, and

-----39. reflecting.

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