

READING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY ELT LEARNERS AT THE ADVANCED LEVEL

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Abstract

This article is designed to identify what strategies good readers employ in pre-, during- and post reading stages in classroom language learning. This study is a replica of the study conducted by Sarıçoban (2002) in which the setting was EFL upper-intermediate preparatory school of English at Hacettepe University. The underlying reason of this study is to see if there would be any difference in strategy use by both good and poor ELT readers at advanced level through the Three Phase Approach in reading. The preparatory ELT students at Atatürk University were administered an inventory of strategy use. The data were analyzed through a percentage study. It was found in the study that good readers differed in some strategies (S1, S3, S4 in pre-reading stage, S7, S10, S13, S21, S22, S23 in during-reading stage and S35, S38 and S39 in post-reading stage) whereas the EFL good learners did not differ in pre-reading stage, but differed in both while-reading stage (S11, S17, S21, S31 and S32) and post-reading stage (S36 and S38). As can be seen, there are surprising results in both groups. Therefore, it can be said that the two groups, namely the ELT and EFL learners, may have different reading strategies depending upon their needs and interests. This study will, therefore, improve the view and focus of language teachers on the use of reading strategies of good readers through the Three Phase Approach.

Introduction

Reading is a psycholinguistic process in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs (Goodman, 1971, p.127). There is also an important interaction between language, thought and student's background knowledge (schema). That is why, language teachers should enhance students' ability to read with comprehension.

Without comprehension, reading would be empty and meaningless. To achieve this, teachers should aid learners in understanding and developing reading strategies such those in the Three Phase Approach and processes as well as schema theory which plays an significant role especially in pre-reading stage. This stage will later give rise to the rest two strategies.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Schema Theory

This theory focuses on the learner's background (existing) knowledge. The reader's background knowledge is the reader's previously acquired knowledge. It is also stated that the organization of reader's past experiences directly influences the comprehension and retention of

materials in a passage (Johnson, 1982, p.504). Thus, readers understand a text by analyzing the text according to their schema.

Since prior knowledge is essential for the comprehension of new information, teachers should help learners build schemata and make connections between ideas with the help of discussions, songs, role-plays, illustrations and visual aids.

According to the schema theory, comprehending a text is an interactive process. This process can be divided into three parts.

A. Bottom-up Process: In bottom-up processing, reading is a matter of decoding a series of written symbols. The readers are expected to get the meaning by recognizing letters and words. Nevertheless, the students sometimes could not comprehend the text they read (Nuttall, 1996, p.5). Thus, bottom-up processing is inadequate for clarifying the reading process.

B. Top-down Process: This process emphasizes the reconstruction of meaning rather than the decoding of linguistic form. The interaction of the reader and the text is the main aim of the process. As the top-down process bases on schema theory, the reader brings to this interaction his knowledge of the subject at hand, knowledge of and expectations about how language works, motivation, interest and attitudes towards the text and the content it contains (Nunan, 1985, p.44). Instead of decoding each symbol or word, the reader should form hypotheses about the possible identification of text elements.

C. Interactive Process: Interactive process gives importance to previous knowledge and prediction as well as accurate processing of the actual words of the text. According to this process, clues are taken from the page by the eye and transmitted to the brain. Then, the brain tries to match existing knowledge to the data to facilitate the further processing of new information. On the basis of this previous experience, predictions are made about the content of the text (Celce-Murcia, 1991, p.197).

Reading Activities through a Three Phase Approach

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

Pre-reading Stage

1. to activate the students' knowledge of the subject,
2. to provide any language preparation that might be needed for coping with the passage,
3. to motivate the learners to want to read the text,
4. to help the students feel confident that they have prior knowledge about the text (Frager, 1993, p.616),
5. to promote student's engagement and interest by providing them with means to preview and anticipate the text,
6. to comment on the visuals,
7. to draw student's attention on the new vocabulary (Sarıçoban 2001, p.77),
8. to set the scene,
9. to talk about the title,

During-reading Stage

1. set ways for students to interact with text by providing directions and questions (Kang, 1994, p.649),
2. to help understand the writer's purpose and intention,
3. to help understand the text structure and the logical organization in a reading passage,

4. to clarify and comprehend the text content,
5. to help students use inferencing and judging,
6. to help students discover cross-cultural differences in reading,
7. to survey the general information,
8. to look for specific information,
9. to find the answers of questions given at the beginning of the text (pre-reading questions),

Post-reading Stage

1. to make connections,
2. to extend the reading experience,
3. to review the first two stages,
4. to lead students to a deeper analysis of the text, Sariçoban (2001, p.78) lists the goals of post-reading as in the following:
5. to outline,
6. to use classroom games,
7. to use the focus words or structures in a controlled writing situation (summarizing),
8. to answer some of the comprehension questions and the critical questions,
9. to be able to use what has already been learnt,

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to determine what strategies good ELT readers employ in pre-, during-, and post reading stages of instruction in classroom language learning.

METHOD

This study was conducted to find out the difference in the strategy use by both good and poor readers at advanced level. To do this, an inventory on reading strategies was developed as identified below and administered to the prep students of ELT at Atatürk University. To get information about the case, the following students were consulted.

Subjects

The subjects of this study consisted of 123 preparatory students for language studies in English at Atatürk University during 2001-2002 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. What strategies do good ELT readers mostly employ through;
 - a. pre-reading stage
 - b. during-reading stage
 - c. post- reading stage
2. What strategies do good readers differ from poor readers through;
 - a. pre-reading stage
 - b. during-reading stage
 - c. post-reading stage

Instrument

To determine the sort of reading strategies of both good and poor readers at proficiency level, a reading strategy inventory (see Appendix 1) adopted from Varaprasad (1997, p.24) 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 (Sarıçoban, 2001, p.43)
 - a. Predicting/ guessing
 - b. Commenting on the illustrations
 - c. Teaching new vocabulary
 - d. Setting the scene
2. During-reading stage
This stage consists of such issues as;
 - a. *Annotating*: This part focuses 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*: It includes analyzing arguments in the text, analyzing characters, the setting, the focusing on the use of words and other aspects of language use such as 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

Procedures

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 determine the good and poor readers. This section was graded 30 over 100. According to the requirement of the department, the students who got 70 and over were considered good readers and the others between 0 and 60 were considered poor readers.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data were analyzed through a percentage study to determine the differences in terms of strategies employed by these two different readers. To clarify the issue the following figure was prepared (Figure 1). Other 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-, during- and post reading strategies. As a result of the answers given by the two groups, the students differed in (Figure 1).

STUDENTS			Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
S1	Poor	29	,8621	,35093	,06517
	Good	32	,7813	,42001	,07425
S2	Poor	29	,2759	,45486	,08447
	Good	32	,3750	,49187	,08695
S3	Poor	29	,4138	,50123	,09308
	Good	32	,6250	,49187	,08695
S4	Poor	29	,5862	,50123	,09308
	Good	32	,8438	,36890	,06521
S5	Poor	29	,4138	,50123	,09308
	Good	32	,2813	,45680	,08075
S6	Poor	29	,3448	,48373	,08983
	Good	32	,4688	,50701	,08963
S7	Poor	29	,9310	,25788	,04789
	Good	32	,8750	,33601	,05940
S8	Poor	29	,6207	,49380	,09170
	Good	32	,6875	,47093	,08325
S9	Poor	29	,7586	,43549	,08087
	Good	32	,6250	,49187	,08695
S10	Poor	29	,8621	,35093	,06517
	Good	32	,9375	,24593	,04348
S11	Poor	29	,7586	,43549	,08087
	Good	32	,6250	,49187	,08695
S12	Poor	29	,5517	,50612	,09398
	Good	32	,6250	,49187	,08695
S13	Poor	29	,8966	,30993	,05755
	Good	32	,8438	,36890	,06521
S14	Poor	29	,6552	,48373	,08983
	Good	32	,7500	,43994	,07777
S15	Poor	29	,7241	,45486	,08447
	Good	32	,6563	,48256	,08531

S16	Poor	29	,5862	,50123	,09308
	Good	32	,2813	,45680	,08075
S17	Poor	29	,4828	,50855	,09443
	Good	32	,8125	,39656	,07010
S18	Poor	29	,3103	,47082	,08743
	Good	32	,5313	,50701	,08963
S19	Poor	29	,8276	,38443	,07139
	Good	32	,6875	,47093	,08325
S20	Poor	29	,5862	,50123	,09308
	Good	32	,5313	,50701	,08963
S21	Poor	29	,7931	,41225	,07655
	Good	32	,7188	,45680	,08075
S22	Poor	29	,8966	,30993	,05755
	Good	32	,8750	,33601	,05940
S23	Poor	29	,7586	,43549	,08087
	Good	32	,8125	,39656	,07010
S24	Poor	29	,5172	,50855	,09443
	Good	32	,4688	,50701	,08963
S25	Poor	29	,4483	,50612	,09398
	Good	32	,5938	,49899	,08821
S26	Poor	29	,4483	,50612	,09398
	Good	32	,5313	,50701	,08963
S27	Poor	29	,4483	,50612	,09398
	Good	32	,6875	,47093	,08325
S28	Poor	29	,5862	,50123	,09308
	Good	32	,6250	,49187	,08695
S29	Poor	29	,4483	,50612	,09398
	Good	32	,5938	,49899	,08821
S30	Poor	29	,6207	,49380	,09170
	Good	32	,6875	,47093	,08325
S31	Poor	29	,6897	,47082	,08743
	Good	32	,6250	,49187	,08695
S32	Poor	29	,4828	,50855	,09443
	Good	32	,6875	,47093	,08325
S33	Poor	29	,6897	,47082	,08743
	Good	32	,6875	,47093	,08325
S34	Poor	29	,5172	,50855	,09443
	Good	32	,7813	,42001	,07425
S35	Poor	29	,6552	,48373	,08983
	Good	32	,7188	,45680	,08075
S36	Poor	29	,6552	,48373	,08983
	Good	32	,6875	,47093	,08325
S37	Poor	29	,6552	,48373	,08983
	Good	32	,7188	,45680	,08075
S38	Poor	29	,6207	,49380	,09170
	Good	32	,7813	,42001	,07425
S39	Poor	29	,4483	,50612	,09398
	Good	32	,7188	,45680	,08075

*s: Strategy

n1: 29 (The number of poor readers)

n2: 32 (The number of good readers)

1. Pre-reading stage: The poor and good readers differ in the following three strategies:
 - a. find answers to given questions based on the text (S1: good readers 83%, poor readers 17%),
 - b. predict the continuing text (S3: good readers 61%, poor readers 39%),
 - c. the reason the author is writing about the topic (S4: good readers 73%, poor readers 27%)

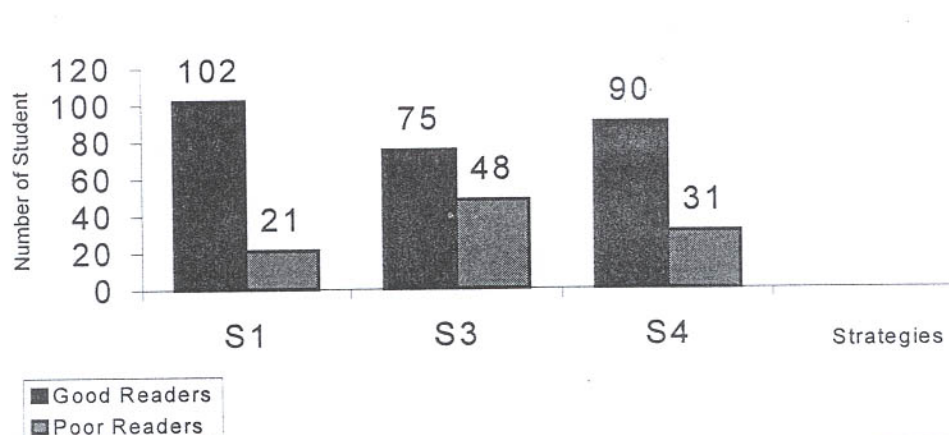


Figure 2. Strategy Difference Between Good and Poor Readers in Pre-reading Stage

As seen in Figure 2, finding answers to given questions based on the text, predicting and figuring out the author's aim in the reading material contribute to the overall understanding of the text. These strategies are the most preferable ones employed by good readers, which means that what students already know is a major determinant of what they will learn. Therefore, it is crucial to help students recall previously learned subject matter or general information from personal experience that relates to a new reading text and that leads to comprehending.

Another surprising result in this stage is that poor readers are not able to brainstorm ideas about the meaning of the title or an illustration and discuss what they know. As the poor readers do not use the pre-reading strategies effectively, they do not make connections on their own which causes them lack of guessing the continuing text, answering the questions and catching on the author's reason to write the text. There is no doubt that poor readers should be spent time on encouraging to use their background knowledge and should be highlighted the cultural or unknown concepts inherent in the reading text by foreign language teachers.

2. During- reading stage: The difference in some of the strategies during this stage are as follows:
 - a. 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. (S7: good readers 95%, poor readers 5%)
 - b. what point the writer is attempting to establish (S10: good readers 92%, poor readers 8%)
 - c. what reasons or evidence the writer gives for this claim (S13: good readers 91%, poor readers 9%)
 - d. repeated descriptions (S21: good readers 76%, poor readers 24 %)
 - e. consistent ways of characterizing people or events (S22: good readers 82%, poor readers 18%)
 - f. repeated words and phrases, examples or illustrations (S23: good readers 80%, poor readers 20%)

As observed in figure 3, there are different strategy uses by good and poor readers in during reading stage. It is clear that good readers try to read and react to content and language of the text by annotating and analyzing. As efficient readers focus on certain kinds of descriptions, words, phrases, examples and illustrations, they understand the purpose and the message conveyed by author. By employing these strategies, good readers find ways to interpret the message and characterize people and events in the written text. When getting the meaning of text, good readers have no obstacle to guess the meaning of unknown words and expressions.

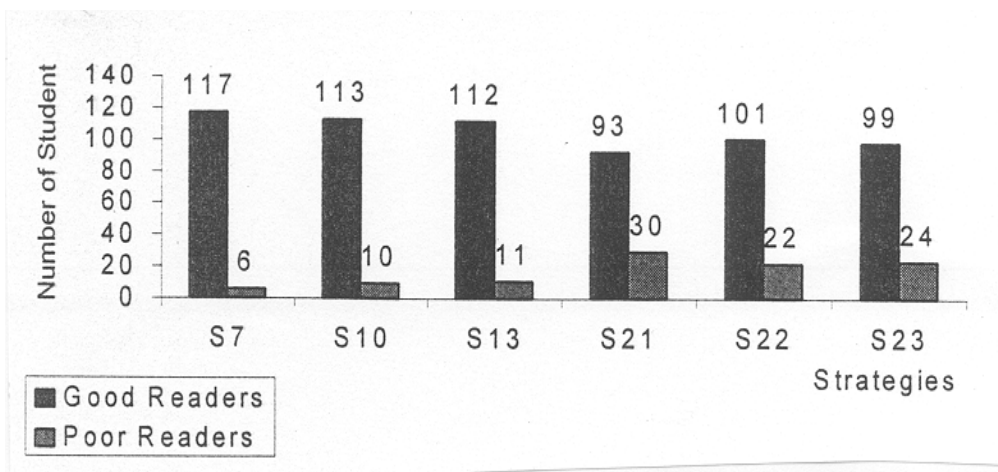


Figure 3. Strategy Difference between Good and Poor Readers in During-reading Stage

On the other hand, less able readers do not utilize the structural cues, often found in text purposefully. According to the figure 3, poor readers have also difficulty in figuring out the meaning of new words as they do not employ underlining, questioning and outlining to analyze the written text. They usually misunderstand or misinterpret the clues to grasp the message. Moreover, this surprising result may indicate that words are not enough alone to be a strategic reader. Readers should also employ the strategy of arguments and others to decode the encoded message.

3. Post-reading stage: During post reading stage the two groups seem to differ only in three strategy use:
 - a. summarizing (S35:good readers 77%, poor readers 23 %)
 - b. commenting (S38:good readers 77 %, poor readers 23 %)
 - c. reflecting (S39:good readers 65%, poor readers 45%)

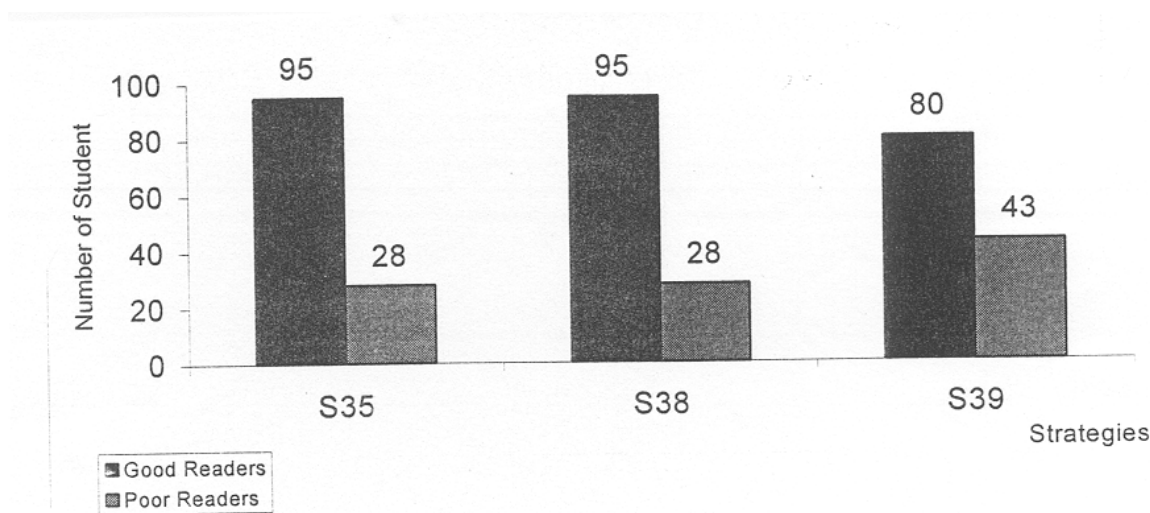


Figure 4. Strategy Difference between Good and Poor Readers in Post-reading Stage

As is seen in figure 4, good readers usually summarize, employ reflecting 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 summarizing, reflecting and commenting play a key role in developing one's interpretation and understanding a written text. These strategies also contribute to the integration of the skills in a coherent manner so that the reading session is not simply isolated.

CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Reading must be defined as a process of building meaning (Anderson, 1985, p.637). In other words, reading is an active, participatory process in which readers make use of what they already know, are sensitive to the variety of contexts that affect meaning and think about and think through the author's ideas (Matthews, 1993, p.500). That is why, the three phase approach reading strategies (pre-, during-, post-reading) are used to improve reading comprehension as well as efficiency in reading. By using these strategies, students will be good and mature readers. Furthermore, those strategies help readers to process the text actively, to monitor their comprehension, and to connect what they are reading to their own knowledge and to other parts of the texts.

It is another fact that effective teaching of reading depends on a teacher who is enthusiastic about reading. Additionally, teachers are sources of ideas for developing reading strategies. To do this, teachers should prepare students to reach a deeper level of understanding in reading process. They should help students to read understand the texts easily by the help of the strategies in three phase approach in reading. Learning the three phase approach, therefore, gains importance in reading skill.

It is the teachers' task to teach students how to use strategies, approaches, and techniques in their exact place in reading classroom. Then, students meet their needs and goals by using strategies in pre, during and post reading. It is also clear that there are superficial differences in comprehending a text in pre-, during-, post reading of good and poor students. As a result, students

with good versus poor reading skills demonstrate distinct cognitive behaviors in the three phase of reading process.

In conclusion as the foreign language teachers have responsibility for students, some recommendations will be made on teaching reading through the three phase approach. To do this, each phase will be handled separately.

Pre-reading Stage

It is an undeniable fact that the pre-reading phase has various goals and advantages for both teachers and learners. It is good for teachers as a guide. If teachers know what to do at the beginning of a reading lesson, they can easily handle the lesson and students. As for students, they can be mature readers if the techniques, key points and rationale of this phase are taught perfectly.

This strategy also helps students develop a purpose for reading as a part of the pre-reading phase of the reading process. In developing and using of initiating question, teachers have the power to overcome the three most common complaints of poor readers. These are boredom, the inability to concentrate, and the failure to recall what was just read. If the students use the right kind of question, they create their own interest in what is being read. If they try to select question, they force themselves to concentrate. Finally, if students classify information in the attempt to answer their question, they will be using the principle of association to acquire new information and will be able to remember the information for a much longer period of time (Simpson, 1991, p.166).

Additionally, students should also be guided to find answers to given questions based on the text, to give their personal opinion about the topic and predict the continuing text by their teachers (Varaprasad, 1997, p.24). Some of the 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 this 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?

As a result, the techniques in pre-reading stage should be used by both teachers and students in a reading classroom which are listed;

- 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 the pre-reading (Gebhard, 1993, p.56).

- In the contextualization step, learners are provided with information about the situation and the nature of the text (e.g. a travel brochure). This gives learners a context from which they can relate to past experiences they have encountered with this type of text.

- In anticipation step, students identify what they might expect to find in this type of text. In this technique, the students guess based on past experience.

- Rather than explain every possible unknown word and the structure in the text, the teachers should ensure that the learners would be able to tackle the text task without being totally frustrated with language difficulties.

- Discussions can be used to activate what students know and enhance their knowledge of the subject.

- Another activity to involve poor readers to work with good 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 (Sarıçoban, 2001, p.43). This may lead to further individual effective reading habits.

During-reading Stage

The second stage of the reading process is called during reading. During reading exercises help students develop reading strategies, improve their control of the second language and decode problematic text passages (Barnett, 1989, p.102). In this stage, texts are brought into the classroom or are reproduced in a textbook. These texts are then used for various forms of analyses such as asking students to provide answers to multiple choice questions, true or false statements or particular questions. Shortly, this phase gives attention to the text, rather than the learner's ideas prior to reading.

This stage also requires the teacher's guidance to ensure that students assume an active questioning approach to the material (Celce-Murcia, 1991, p.203). The simplest technique for this purpose is to provide the students questions to direct their attention to the major ideas to the text. Moreover, there are questions that the teacher can ask himself as a guide to during-reading work listed as;

- What is the function of this text?
- How is the text organized or developed?
- What content or information is to be extracted from the text?
- What language may be learned from the text?
- What may the reader infer or deduce from the text?
- What reading styles may be practiced? (Sarıçoban, 2001, p.43)

Teachers should select or devise appropriate exercises according to the answers of these questions.

The other useful techniques used in during-reading are considered as annotating and analyzing. The technique of annotating is essential to reading because it focuses the reader's attention on the content and language of the text. There are three effective ways of annotating called as underlining, questioning and outlining. After the students understand the writer's ideas by outlining, the students next should be guided to analyze arguments and language. As a result, during reading stage should begin with a general understanding of the text, and then move to smaller units such as words, sentences or paragraphs.

Post-reading Stage

Stage three of the reading process is called post-reading. During this stage, teachers give students ways to express their ideas of what they have read. Like pre and during reading stages, post reading stage has also advantages and aims which are given in previous chapters. Additionally, a lot of different techniques and strategies are applied to help students in reading comprehension. The aim of these techniques and strategies is to extend the understanding obtained from texts at the pre and during reading stages into writing tasks, such as summarizing, evaluating, synthesizing, commenting and reflecting.

Teachers may get the idea in post reading work by asking themselves the following questions:

- Do the learners know of a similar situation to that presented in the text?

- Does the text present a situation that calls for recommendations?
- Does the text present a situation that invites completion? (Sarıçoban, 2001, p.44)

Depending on the answers to these questions, the teacher can decide what to do.

Obviously, the three-phase approach cannot be applied mechanically on every occasion. The teacher may curtail one or more of the stages if it is not necessary. For example, if the students know a lot about the text, it may not be necessary to spend much time on pre-reading stage. Shortly, the advantage of the three phase approach is:

First, it motivates students by making use of their background knowledge.

Secondly, it combines reading skill with other skills such as writing, speaking and listening in a coherent manner (Sarıçoban, 2001, p.68).

Thirdly, it embodies students' mind to be a good and strategic learner by the help of critical thinking.

In conclusion, the primary responsibilities of teachers are to train students to determine their own goals and strategies and how to utilize all these reading strategies according to their levels, interests and needs. If the students know what they are doing and the benefits, they are going to enhance their efficiency of reading comprehension to become independent which is the aim of the foreign language teachers in a reading environment.

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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 organized 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 characterizing 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.