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Teaching and Promoting Independent Use of Reading Strategies in the Middle Schools

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Abstract
The aim of this study is to determine the effect of complex tasks on independent strategy use. For this purpose, a two-stage study was carried out. At the first stage, reading strategies were taught to the students who were assigned the experimental groups through Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, and at the second stage, some complex tasks were designed; and were tested in order to see if they would have an impact on students' independent strategy use without the guidance of anyone. This study is a quasi-experimental study; and the study group consists of a total of 72 middle school students, 24 of which are in the experimental groups, while the remaining 48 students are in the control groups. The research results showed that explicit strategy instruction through the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, and subsequently, that engaging students in complex tasks promote the independent strategy use.

Keywords: Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, Complex Tasks, Independent Strategy Use

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

The development of reading skill is one of the major areas in mother language education, particularly, with the objective defined as growing individuals being able to adapt to the changing world of today, having high order thinking skills, and having the capacity to renew themselves at any stages of their lives, reading skills has become more important as it plays a key role for all these qualities (Balcı et al., 2012; Gallik, 1999; Stevens et al., 2020). Therefore, reading skill takes an important place both in school practices and in scientific studies.

Although studies on reading skills started in 1800s, the most important developments in the field were experienced after 1950s (Venezky, 1984). After 1950s, studies on reading were prominently affected by behaviorist approach, psycholinguists, information processing theory, socio-cultural approach and constructive approach, respectively (Alexander & Fox 2013; Dignath & Veenman, 2021; Ensar, 2014; Pearson, 2009). In fact, it is possible to say that

all these approaches are still maintaining their influence today. Especially, strategy use, which emerged parallel to the developments in cognitive science, and has become a subject matter of the ongoing studies (Balcı et al., 2013; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Hong-Nam et al., 2014; Kragler et al., 2015; Lipp & Hefrich 2016; de Milliano et al., 2016). Since the first studies on this field, many strategies have been developed such as summarizing, question generating, determining text structure, visualizing, inferring, activating background knowledge and monitoring comprehension; and they have been employed in the classrooms (Buehl, 2009; de Milliano et al., 2016; Guthire et al., 1999; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; Moreillon, 2007; Zwiers, 2010).

Experimental studies carried out for years show that strategy instruction has an impact on the development of reading comprehension skill (Bean & Steenwyk, 1984; Bouchamma et al., 2014; Guthire et al., 1999; Homan et al., 1993; Hong-Nam et al., 2014; Kragler et al., 2015; Lin & Yu, 2016; Martin & Pressley, 1991; Suwantharathip, 2015; Taylor & Beach, 1984). And nowadays, the essential study subjects focus on two points. One of which is how to teach strategies. At the beginning, strategies were mostly taught via explicit instruction; however, although some studies report that explicit instruction is beneficial, some others suggest that students cannot benefit from explicitly instructed strategies (Paris et al., 1991). Later, with the impact of socio-cultural approach, practices which employed collaborative learning groups and peer learning emerged. Some of them are as follows: Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (Fuchs et al., 2001; Mathes et al., 1998), Collaborative Strategic Reading (Klinger et al., 1998; Klinger & Vaughn, 1999), Reciprocal Teaching (Pratt & Urbanowski, 2016), and Transactional Strategies Instruction (Pressley et al., 1992). In addition to these techniques, another popular way of strategy instruction is GRRM (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). In the current strategy instruction resources, it is emphasized that the model can be used in teaching strategies for reading (Buehl, 2009; Ensar, 2014; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007;). Furthermore, the GRRM is seen to be used by integrating it into certain practices mentioned above (for example, Peer Assisted Learning Strategies). One of the specific features making the GRRM an effective model is the teacher modeling. Teacher modeling in strategy teaching makes the strategy instruction more effective (Brown et al., 2013; Duffy, 1993). In fact, transfer of skills under the guidance of an adult is not a new method, and it is seen that different researchers use that method under different names (Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Randi & Corno, 2005). Furthermore, studying in collaborative groups can be deemed as another advantageous aspect of the method (Ensar, 2014).

Another issue that the studies focused on is how to promote students' independent use of strategies taught to them (Cromley & Wills, 2016; de Milliano et al., 2016; Lee & Schmitt, 2014; Marcell, 2007). The main issue that the researchers agreed upon is that when students feel they are comfortable in reading, they don't see the need for using strategies, and they use strategies when they have difficulty in understanding the reading passages (Guthrie & Taboada, 2004). From this point of view, tasks used in the classrooms should be designed in a way to motivate them to use strategies. Turner (1995) elaborated the tasks supporting students for independent strategy use, maintaining their motivation for the reading. Characteristics of these tasks which are referred to as complex tasks were also handled and described by different researchers in detail (Perry et al., 2004; Perry et al., 2008).

Gradual Release of Responsibility Model

Pearson and Gallagher first mentioned the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (GRRM) in their studies (1983). The Model was shaped in the light of opinions of the educational scientists such as Piaget, Bandura and Vygotsky, who suggest that learning occurs through interactions with the environment, and took its final shape that can be employed for skill education in the current classrooms (Buehl, 2009; Ensar, 2014; Fisher & Frey 2008) In the GRRM model, the following sequence is followed: first of all, teacher explains explicitly how the strategies are used. Then he/she models the strategies. After modeling, teacher provides students with the tasks which allow students to use strategies and gain experience under their teacher's guidance; and finally, students use the strategy independently. At the beginning, the main responsibility belongs to relatively more experienced teacher; however, at the end of the process, the responsibility is released to the students who get declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge of strategies and necessary experience; and at the intermediate stages the responsibility is shared between students and teacher (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Ensar, 2014; Fisher & Frey, 2008).

Complex Tasks

In the literature, it is argued that the tasks which are referred to as complex tasks (Turner, 1995) support strategy use in reading as well as students' motivation for reading. The complex tasks; (a) shouldn't be either below or far above the students' level, and should provide students with the opportunity to control the difficulty level; (b) should enable students to choose the text, etc. to read; (c) should allow students to control the process; (d) should make it possible for students to work with others (to receive help or feedback from their peers or teacher whenever they need); and (e) should enable students to evaluate their own products (Perry et al., 2004; Perry et al., 2008; Perry & Rahim 2011).

In general, the complex tasks should be slightly difficult for the students. However, the tasks that are far above the students' level and are impossible to be completed successfully will cause students to be disappointed and fed up with the tasks and to give up studying. Therefore, the tasks slightly above their level is the most appropriate ones. Perry and her colleagues note the followings for the complex tasks: they should involve "various information" (they should address information to be handled within a theme or unit – such as nature and universe, etc.); they should be intended for multiple purposes (to learn recent developments in space studies, to interrelate the texts they have read, to be able to work in groups); there shouldn't be any time limit (when necessary, teacher should give them a few weeks or months to enable them to access different texts, to read these texts, to analyze what they read, and to express what they learned in different ways); they should include cognitive and meta-cognitive processes (summarizing, making inferences, evaluating the process and the product created as a result of this process); they should make it possible to come up with different products at the end of the work (drafting a report, giving a verbal presentation, or preparing a booklet) (Perry et al., 2004; Perry et al., 2008).
The following information on reading education provided in Turkey is deemed to be beneficial; in demonstrating to what extent the treatment carried out within the scope of this study is different from the curriculum which is currently in practice.

Reading Instruction in Secondary Schools in Turkey

In Turkey, reading skill is addressed within the scope of Turkish courses from the first grade in the primary school to the eighth grade in the middle school. All the activities carried out in the classes are designed in accordance with the Turkish Instructional Program prepared by the National Ministry of Education on the basis of the principles of the constructive approach. The program defines the goals and the learning outcomes intended to be attained, teaching methods, assessment tools and evaluation techniques to be employed. Teachers are expected to work in accordance with this program. Furthermore, the texts to be read by the students are included in the course books; and the activities to be carried out by the teachers are involved in the same course books. In addition, teachers are not provided with teacher's books which describe how they will deliver the lessons and how they will implement the activities in classrooms. In brief, teachers often implement activities designed previously in accordance with the program.

Reading lessons aim at enabling students to learn the reading rules; and to understand, to analyze, to make sense of and to evaluate the text that they have read; and to adopt the habit of reading.

The instructional programs defining the content and quality of the reading education in Turkey do not include strategy instruction; but the workbooks include some activities (for example, organizing the information, making guesses, etc.) that require the use of some strategies. However, in such activities, students are not given an explanation that they are using a strategy; this strategy makes special contribution to comprehending the text, and they can use this strategy in similar reading passages in the future. Therefore, students don't know that there are some strategies they can use to understand the reading text; they don't think that what they have done in an activity during a lesson can be used in another similar text; more importantly they never learn how to implement a strategy even if they want to use a strategy. As a result, they cannot use reading strategies without guidance of the others.
Using teaching strategies effectively and supporting independent use of them are two important issues in reading instruction. In this study, and as a reading researcher, I have focused on these two issues. Accordingly, the first aim of this study is determining the effectiveness of explicit reading strategy instruction through GRRM in Turkish

middle schools. The second objective of the study is determining the effectiveness of designing complex tasks in supporting independent strategy use.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The researcher used a quasi-experimental model with pretest-posttest control group. In fact, experimental studies are ideal for such kinds of studies which aim at determining how the variables affect each other. However, the fact that the study was carried out in the real classes where the teaching-learning activities were going on impeded the formation of artificial groups for the study. Under such circumstances, it is convenient to carry out quasi-experimental studies where it is not likely to assign students in an unbiased way; but the available groups can be allocated as experimental and control groups in an unbiased way (Creswell, 2009).

The quasi-experimental studies are open to some threats since they are deprived of unbiased allocation which provides some advantages in terms of internal validity (Crano & Brewer, 2002). In such cases, certain techniques are employed in order to minimize the factors threatening the internal validity. One of these techniques is to work with matched sample groups (Creswell, 2012; Fraenkel et al., 2012). As an unbiased allocation is not possible in the matched sample groups; students selected for the sample groups are matched in terms of some characteristics which are likely to affect the study results such as gender, age, race, intelligence level, reading comprehension level, etc.; however, that is not a complete matching (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Also, in this study, the matched groups are used in order to increase the internal validity as much as possible.

2.2 Participant (Subject) Characteristics

Study group consists of a total of 72 students studying in the 6^{th} and 8^{th} Grades of three public schools in three villages, who are affiliated to a province located in the western part of Turkey. Having an aim to work with the matched groups in the study, firstly, the clustering analysis was performed in order to form the experimental and control groups from the students having very similar characteristics. In order to carry out this analysis, 102 students in the 6^{th} grade and 109 students in the 8^{th} grade of five primary schools were requested to take reading comprehension tests and attitude scales for reading. In addition to these tests, information on the demographical characteristics of the students was collected. As a result of the analyses, an experimental group and two control groups each of which includes 12 students were formed at the 6^{th} grade level and again an experimental group and two control groups of 12 students were formed at the 8^{th} grade level.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

Personal Information Form: All the students who were accessible were requested to fill the Personal Information Form in order to gather information on the demographical characteristics of the students included in the study group, and to be able to match the experimental and control groups given the data collected. The form consists of questions to gather information on the gender, family income level, number of siblings (including themselves), and educational status of the parents of the students.

Comprehension Tests: A total of four reading comprehension tests were used within clustering analysis carried out in order to determine the experimental and control groups in the study. Out of four tests, two tests were applied to the 6th grade students and the other two were applied to the 8th grade students. Tests consist of a reading text and eight multiple-choice questions concerning the text. One of the two texts used for each grade level is informative while the other one is narrative.

The tests applied to the 6th grade students were developed by the researcher. Reliability coefficients of these tests are .78 and .77. Comprehension tests applied to the 8th grade were developed by Balci (2009); and the reliability coefficients of these tests are .75 and .79.

Attitude Scale: Before determination of the experimental and control groups, the Reading Attitude Scale (6th, 7th, and 8th Grades) developed by Özbay & Uyar (2009), for the students in the second stage of primary education was employed in order to measure emotional readiness of the students included in the study for reading. This scale was prepared as a 5-point Likert-type scale of 25 items with a four-factor structure.

Reliability coefficient of the scale, in other words, Cronbach Alpha value is .93. Factor loading of the items in the scale ranges from .514 to .762. Furthermore, fit index values reported after the confirmatory factor analysis of the scale are as follows: RMSEA value 0.041; SRMR value 0.042; GFI value 0.91; AGFI value 0.90; CFI value 0.99; NFI value 0.97.

Independent Strategy Use Rubric: Independent strategy use of the students during reading was scored with the independent strategy use rubric. In the rubric, scoring ranges from one to four points. If it is not observed that a student uses strategy in reading, student gets 1 point; if a strategy use is observed but is not suitable for the text, student gets 2 points; although the strategy is suitable for the text, if it is not applied effectively, student gets 3 points; and if a strategy suitable for the text is used effectively, then student gets 4 points. This rubric developed by the researcher for this study has an inter-rater reliability coefficient of .91.

2.4 Data Analysis

In order to adapt the data collected during the study to the analysis, primarily, the average of the measurements carried out before and after the intervention was calculated. Pretest and posttest scores of each student were generated by calculating the averages of two measurements done before the study, and three measurements performed after the study. After that, these data were analyzed through SPSS package program. In data analysis, descriptive statistics and ANOVA test were used.

2.5 Experimental Interventions

After the experimental and control groups were formulated, students in the experimental group received an awareness education for approximately two weeks, and in the meantime, it was investigated whether the students in the experimental and control groups used any reading strategies independently. Then, strategy instruction was delivered in accordance with the principles of the GRRM for 10 weeks. Three weeks were spent on determining text structures, whereas, one week was allocated for each of the other strategies.

After all these, students were trained in order for them to understand all the strategies, for approximately two weeks, also, students were observed in order to determine if there was any time-dependent regression in learning (forgetting, misuse, etc.); and in the meantime, some students were given supportive education through mini-lessons. The mini-lessons used in supportive strategy instruction were 10-15 minute lessons prepared in order to be delivered individually to each student, who needed these lessons to remind him/her of the use of a specific strategy. In these short lessons, students were taught on just the issues they need to repeat unlike the essential strategy teaching practices. In designing the content of these lessons, they were planned to be consistent with the stages of the GRRM used in strategy instruction. However, as the lessons were delivered in a limited time, some time-consuming activities like group work were not included in the lessons. The lessons delivered in line with the mentioned considerations consisted of the following stages: (a) explicit instruction, modeling and think-aloud, (b) teacher-guided performance, (c) independent performance.

Strategies taught within the scope of this study are as follows: activating and using prior knowledge, organizing the information, determining and using text structures, question generating, making predictions and inferences, visualization, summarizing and monitoring comprehension. It is observed that the programs specifically designed to develop reading skills in the past also included instructions of these strategies (National Reading Panel 2000; Wigfield et al., 2004). In brief, 3 months were dedicated for the strategy instruction.

After the follow-up period used to determine whether the students learned the strategies, the final stage of the study was launched. At this stage, certain tasks enabling students to maintain their motivation and to promote

independent strategy use were designed; and students were engaged in these tasks. And approximately 14 weeks (3.5 months) were dedicated to that process.

While the experimental groups were subjected to the abovementioned treatment, the control groups went on with receiving education in accordance with the instructional program which is implemented all over the country as mentioned above. Furthermore, the required measures were taken to make experimental group and control groups to spend equal time in and out of the school for reading studies.

3. Results

As seen in Table 1, the average score of the students in experimental group in independent strategy use rubric was 1.17 before the treatment; this score increased to 3.50 after the treatment. In the first control group, the same scores were 1.08 and 1.11, respectively and in the second control group they were 1.13 and 1.08, respectively. Accordingly, it is observed that scores of the students in the experimental group which were subject to the treatment increased significantly, whereas, scores of the students in the control groups didn't exhibit a significant change.

Table 1: Descriptive information of 6th graders

	Pretest			Posttest		
Groups	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Experiment (Grade 6)	12	1.17	.39	12	3.50	.27
Control 1 (Grade 6)	12	1.08	.19	12	1.11	.26
Control 2 (Grade 6)	12	1.13	.22	12	1.08	.21

Accordingly, independent strategy use levels of the 6th grade students receiving education in different ways exhibited a significant difference from pre-treatment period to post-treatment; in other words, it was revealed that the joint impact of the factors of receiving different instructions and repeated measurements on independent strategy use is significant [$F_{(2, 33)}$=162.856, p<.001]. This result seen in the Table 2 shows that receiving strategy instruction through the GRRM and subsequent engagement in complex tasks had a positive impact on the independent strategy use.

Table 2: Pretest - posttest ANOVA results in independent strategy use at the 8th grade level

Source of Variance	SS	DF	MS	*F*	*P*
Between Subjects					
Group	24.311	2	12.155	166.065	.000
Error	2.416	33	.073		
Within Subjects					
Pre-posttest	10.760	1	10.760	159.864	.000
*Pre-posttest*group*	*21.922*	*2*	*10.961*	*162.856*	*.000*
Error	2.221	33	.067		

In Table 3, it is seen that students in the experimental group got a score average of 1.12 in the independent strategy use rubric before the treatment, while this score increased to 3.75 after the treatment. In the first control group, these scores were 1.25 and 1.17, respectively; likewise, in the second control group, they were 1.17 and 1.19, respectively.

Table 3: Descriptive information of 8th graders

	Pretest			Posttest		
Groups	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Experiment 2 (Grade 8)	12	1.21	.33	12	3.75	.25
Control 3 (Grade 8)	12	1.25	.26	12	1.17	.17
Control 4 (Grade 8)	12	1.17	.25	12	1.19	.27

Accordingly, it is observed that the scores of the students in the experimental group subject to the treatment increased significantly, whereas, scores of the students in the control groups didn't exhibit a significant change.

In the light of the data, independent strategy use levels of the 8th grade students receiving education in different ways exhibited a significant difference from pre-treatment period to post-treatment; in other words, it was revealed that the joint impact of the factors of receiving different instructions and repeated measurements on independent strategy use is significant [$F_{(2, 33)}$=227.919, p<.001]. This result presented in the Table 4 shows that receiving strategy instruction through the GRRM and subsequent engagement in complex tasks had a positive impact on independent strategy use.

Table 4: Pretest - posttest ANOVA results in independent strategy use at the 8th grade level

Source of Variance	SS	DF	MS	*F*	*P*
Between Subjects					
Group	26.715	2	13.358	175.105	.000
Error	2.517	33	.076		
Within Subjects					
Pre-posttest	12.087	1	12.087	1206.235	.000
*Pre-posttest*group*	*26.715*	*2*	*13.358*	*227.919*	*.000*
Error	1.934	33	.059		

4. Discussion

Considering the pretest-posttest scores of both experimental and control groups, it is clearly seen that students needs strategy instruction to learn why, when and how a strategy would be used properly. In the study, it is also revealed that strategy instruction through the GRRM is beneficial for middle school students. In the recent research conducted with several groups, researchers have found similar results (Concannon-Gibney & McCarthy, 2012; Lee & Schmitt, 2014; Nivala, 2016). Also, many researchers underlined that the GRRM allows effective teaching in many literacy subjects such as comprehension instruction, writing instruction, strategy instruction in reading and writing, and teaching critical-analytic thinking (Grote-Garcia & Frost, 2015; Murphy et al., 2016; Kozdras et al., 2015; Pratt & Urbanovski, 2015; Vaughn et al., 2015; White, 2016). After such an instruction, including teacher modeling with think-aloud, guided practice, and independent performance, students clearly learnt how to and when to use these strategies, and what to consider while using them. And this endows them with the strategy and knowledge required for the independent strategy use. Lee & Schmitt's (2014) empirical contributions showed that strategic behaviors of students need teachers' explicit instruction and support that is included by GRRM. Indeed, the effectiveness of the strategy instruction through GRRM has shown itself in the results of independent strategy use in this research. Nivala (2016), who reached similar results, also mentioned that students clearly reflect their learning in their products when they get adequate strategy instruction through GRRM.

Results of this research showed that solely having the strategy knowledge does not guarantee independent strategy use (Cromley & Wills, 2016; de Milliano et al., 2016; Lee & Schmitt, 2014; Marcell, 2007). No matter how they are taught, if students cannot use the strategies independently without guidance of another person after strategy instruction process, it is difficult to say that the strategy instruction has achieved its goals. Based on results of earlier research, we can say that independent strategy use is crucial in reading and writing (Almasi & Fullerton, 2012; Duke & Pearson, 2002). In the literature, it is stated that it will be beneficial to provide students with opportunities to show that they use the strategies (Guthrie & Taboada, 2004). Furthermore, it is argued that independent strategy use can be supported through some in-class practices like literature circle and R5 program (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2006, 2008). One of those classroom practices is designing complex tasks for students defined by Turner (1995), Perry et al., (2004), Perry et al., (2008) and Perry & Rahim, (2011). In this research, complex tasks were used to support independent strategy use in experimental groups. Results showed that, it is beneficial for their independent strategy use to engage students in complex tasks that are meaningful for them and where they can choose the texts to read and their friends to work with while performing the task, they can control the difficulty level and they can evaluate the products that they come up with. Findings of the other studies

performed on different grade levels also support the outcomes of this study (Perry & VandeKamp, 2000; Perry et al., 2004; Turner, 1995).

In conclusion the findings of this study showed that students need explicit instruction to use strategies in a proper way, and that GRRM is an effective way of such instruction. Especially, students highly benefit from teacher modeling with think aloud, guided practice and independent practice triad. GRRM also allows all students to get declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge of reading strategies that they need when they try to use strategies independently.

Having declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge of reading strategies is not enough to use these strategies independently. Because of that, teachers must design tasks and create classroom climate to support independent use of strategies. In summary, the combination of strategy instruction through the GRRM and complex tasks is beneficial for the middle school students in reading instruction.

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