ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS' READING HABITS AND STRATEGIES IN LEARNING EFL

ЧИТАЦЬКІ ЗВИЧКИ ТА СТРАТЕГІЇ СТУДЕНТІВ-ФІЛОЛОГІВ У ВИВЧЕННІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ЯК ІНОЗЕМНОЇ

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The article focuses on the implementation of reading in language learning. It reveals the stages of reading, including pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading stages, in addition to the reading habits and strategies which can be incorporated during the process of language learning. With the help of these habits and strategies (such as predicting, visualizing, skimming, and scanning, etc.), while taking into consideration the stages in which they can be implemented, learners can use the skill of reading as an effective and exceptional tool for language learning. The incorporation of reading not only broadens the learner's perspective about various concepts, but promotes vocabulary development and the internalization of sentence constructions and grammar rules among others. For this reason, the research aims to classify the useful habits and strategies in accordance with the different stages of reading and to highlight specific ones through explanation. Overall, the main focus of the research can be reflected in the following question: How can we implement reading as a great tool for language learning? The research was conducted in the form of a questionnaire among English major students, with 51 participants. The results show that most students spend at least 15–30 minutes reading daily, mainly for personal entertainment, language skill development, and personal growth. In the pre-reading stage, only a few apply specific strategies (skimming the title or activating prior knowledge). Primarily used strategies during reading included visualizing and skimming. While in the post-reading stage summarising and reflecting were among the most commonly used strategies. Most of the students considered extensive reading, annotating, inferring, scanning, skimming, and visualizing to be the most effective strategies. Furthermore, most of them found reading to be beneficial regarding vocabulary expansion, the improvement of reading comprehension, the understanding of grammatical structures, as well as the development of oral and written communication. All things considered, reading plays a significant role in language learning, and every strategy can be considered useful in its specific ways. However, the choice of strategies depends on individual learning styles.

Key words: language learning, reading, reading habits and strategies, pre-reading stage, while-reading stage, post-reading stage.

Стаття присвячена впровадженню читання в процес вивчення мови. У ній розкриваються етапи читання, включаючи етапи перед читанням, під час читання та після читання, а також звички та стратегії читання, які можна використовувати в процесі вивчення мови. За допомогою цих навичок і стратегій (таких як передбачення, візуалізація, швидке читання, сканування тощо), враховуючи етапи, на яких їх можна застосовувати, учні можуть використовувати навички читання як ефективний і винятковий інструмент для вивчення мови. Застосування читання не тільки розширює кругозір учня щодо різних понять, але й сприяє розвитку словникового запасу та засвоєнню синтаксичних конструкцій і граматичних правил, серед іншого. З цієї причини дослідження має на меті класифікувати корисні звички та стратегії відповідно до різних етапів читання та виділити конкретні з них за допомогою пояснень. Загалом, основна мета дослідження може бути відображена в такому питанні: Як ми можемо використовувати читання як чудовий інструмент для вивчення мови? Дослідження було проведено у формі анкетування серед студентів, які вивчають англійську мову, у якому взяли участь 51 особа. Результати показують, що більшість студентів щодня приділяють читанню щонайменше 15–30 хвилин, головним чином для особистого дозвілля, розвитку мовних навичок та особистого зростання. На етапі перед читанням лише дехто застосовує конкретні стратегії (переглядання заголовків або активізація попередніх знань). Основними стратегіями, що використовуються під час читання, є візуалізація та переглядання. На етапі після читання найпоширенішими стратегіями є узагальнення та рефлексія. Більшість студентів вважали, що найефективнішими стратегіями є екстенсивне читання, анотування, висновування, сканування, перегляд та візуалізація. Крім того, більшість з них вважали, що читання є корисним для розширення словникового запасу, поліпшення розуміння прочитаного, розуміння граматичних структур, а також розвитку усного та письмового спілкування. Враховуючи все вищезазначене, читання відіграє значну роль у вивченні мови, і кожна стратегія може вважатися корисною у своїх конкретних аспектах. Однак вибір стратегій залежить від індивідуальних стилів навчання.

Ключові слова: вивчення мови, читання, звички та стратегії читання, етап перед читанням, етап під час читання, етап після читання.

Statement of the problem. Throughout the process of language learning, it is essential to integrate all four skills. One of these skills, which plays a crucial role in language learning, is reading. During the implementation of reading as a useful tool for language learning, students should consider several key factors. This includes not only the utilised reading strategies and habits, but also the stages in which these can be incorporated. These elements not only play a big part in developing learners' comprehension skills but also facilitate their journey with language learning. The previously mentioned concepts are especially important because there are students who are not fully aware of the strategies they are using during the different stages of the reading process. Therefore, one of the first steps learners can take is to familiarise themselves with the previously mentioned concepts, actively utilise them, and in this way make an effort toward a more enjoyable and efficient way of language learning experience.

Analysis of recent research and publications. As Chandra states, there is a significant difference between the way children acquire a language and the process of learning a language later in life, as it requires the mastery of grammatical rules, vocabulary, and even sentence structures [4, p. 177].

In this context, it is also important to mention the two types of reading discussed in the research conducted by Celik. The two types of reading he mentioned were:

– Intensive Reading – which helps the reader to understand the text by delving into detail.

– Extensive Reading – which puts the focus on the general meaning of the text, rather than directing the attention to the separate meanings of words and sentences [3, p. 216–218].

Saricoban [10, p. 2] was one of the researchers who comprehensively examined the three stages of reading and the strategies that students can utilise during these stages in a classroom setting with the support of a teacher. He also highlighted how important it is for teachers to choose the right exercise for the lesson based on these stages and strategies of reading. Suggested activities include discussing the title of the text, commenting on a picture or illustration given with the text, implementing true-false statements, open-ended or multiple-choice questions. Apart from that, besides Saricoban, Lailiyah, Wediyantoro, and Yustisia also pointed out the schema theory in their collaboration, which proposes that during the reading process, an interaction is formed between the background knowledge of the reader and the text, which supports its comprehension [8, p. 82].

Based on Saricoban's framework, the three stages of reading are:
– Pre-reading stage
– Reading stage (while-reading)
– Post-reading stage

According to him, in the pre-reading stage, teachers should motivate the students and encourage them to connect the text with their background knowledge with the help of such strategies as predicting and guessing. Teachers can utilise pre-task questions in the classroom to encourage students to express their own opinions, discuss the topic or an illustration, etc. In this stage, the teacher can also provide opportunities for vocabulary expansion. [10, p. 3–4]. The aforementioned collaborative research also proved that this can have a great effect on the students, as it demonstrated that those who engaged in such activities in this stage performed better in reading comprehension [8, p. 86].

As Saricoban mentioned, during the next stage, the most important aspect is identifying the main idea of the text. This can be facilitated by teachers raising essential questions connected to the text. This stage not only develops the comprehension skills of the students, but also their judging abilities, and knowledge about the language structure among various linguistic and sociolinguistic elements. During this stage, students can also get acquainted with the importance of vocabulary knowledge. For this reason, other strategies can be incorporated as well. These strategies involve skimming, which promotes the exploration of general information within the mentioned text, and scanning, which facilitates locating specific information [10, p. 4]. According to the words of Toprak and Almacıoğlu, one of the most important components of this stage for teachers is to implement various activities in the classroom and to pay attention to the multiple intelligence types and individual styles of the learners [11, p. 34], which unfortunately frequently overlooked in research.

Moving on to the next stage, which is known as the post-reading stage, the strategies differ somewhat from those incorporated during the other stages. in this case, the main focus should be on summarising and outlining the text that was read, as Saricoban stated [10, p. 4–5]. In their collaborative work, Toprak and Almacıoğlu suggested that this can be done in two ways, which either include the joint work of the teacher and the learners, or it can be completed through pair work among students [11, p. 23–24]. However, there is another aspect teachers should consider, which is the integration of the other three skills (speaking, writing, listening) with students' reading comprehension. To accomplish this, Saricoban men-

tioned additional strategies as well, such as summarising, evaluating, synthesizing, reflecting, and commenting [10, p. 5].

Another researcher who dealt with the topic of reading in the context of language learning is Küçükoğlu. In the study he published in 2012, he discussed various reading strategies individually, giving reasons for their effectiveness. These strategies include predicting, visualizing, making connections, summarizing, questioning, and last but not least, inferring [7, p. 710–711].

She drew attention to the fact that successful or proficient readers have reading goals and a purpose for reading. Therefore, they make predictions based on their prior knowledge and experiences [7, p. 710–711]. Afflerbach also stated that the reader's background knowledge greatly influences how they make predictions about the text [1, p. 143].

Besides Küçükoğlu, there are many other researchers who conducted research on the implementation of reading in the context of language learning, and on the strategies, which facilitate this process. Damayanti, Fitriani and Marhaban, for example, highlighted that visualizing, as a reading strategy, can make the lesson more interesting for students and it also plays a big role in the development of their comprehension skills [5, p. 498]. While King, Biggs, and Lipsky emphasised the usefulness of summarizing, as it also improves learners' comprehension skills. Another strategy, which has a great effect on the improvement of comprehension and critical thinking skills, is questioning, as it was mentioned by Anisah, Fitriati, and Rukmini [2, p. 308–309]. Apart from that, Kulaç and Walters mentioned inferring (reading between the lines) as a strategy which not only promotes reading comprehension, but simultaneously helps students create a positive attitude toward reading [6, p. 486–487].

Besides that, further research was conducted by Chandra who examined the role of reading in language learning in recent years. During his research, one of the main aspects he focused on was the impact of reading on the language skills. As a result, he demonstrated that reading not only plays a big part in expanding the reader's vocabulary, but also develops clarity, as well as fluency and accuracy. Apart from that, it facilitates the effective use of the language by promoting communicativeness and interactivity [2, p. 171–183].

Another researcher who conducted research on this topic was Saricoban. During his research within this topic, he mostly focused on the strategies successful readers use in the three stages of reading. He investigated the subject among ELT students at Hacettepe University, and evaluated the data through a percentage study. The results suggested that it would be ideal for teachers to use lead-in and personalized questions during the pre-reading stage. In the while-reading stage, the focus should be placed on the general understanding of the text, while later on, the smaller aspects of the text should also be examined. Saricoban also concluded that ideally the post-reading stage should contain strategies, such as commenting, evaluating, and synthesizing [2].

Subsequent research was carried out among 1st and 4th year students in the ELT Department at Dicle University by Ozek and Civelek, during which they focused on the use of cognitive reading strategies. With the participation of the students, they observed the strategies employed by them while reading a text [9].

According to the results of this research, in the pre-reading stage, connecting the title to the text was the most commonly implemented strategy. Throughout the while-reading stage, students made use of looking up the unknown words in the dictionary, guessing the meaning of words from the context, bypassing unknown words, thinking aloud, and activating their background knowledge. While in the post-reading stage, students did not incorporate any strategy [9].

The results of the research we conducted among English major students also indicated that reading positively impacts multiple language skills, and the effectiveness of the implemented strategies depends on individual preferences.

Research objectives. The main goal of the research was to explore how reading can be implemented as an effective tool for language learning, taking into account the habits and strategies that facilitate this process. For this reason, the first step was to explore existing research and reviews on the topic. In addition, the research we conducted among English major students provided valuable insights and served as a great opportunity to gain a better understanding of the subject.

Presentation of the main material. The usefulness of reading in the context of language learning and the effectiveness of reading strategies became evident in the research we carried out as well. This research was conducted among English major students with 51 respondents. The age of the respondents varied, however, most of them were between the ages of 17 and 22.

During the research, the first aspect we focused on was their attitude and approach toward reading. As the results showed, most of them spend at least 15 to 30 minutes reading (mostly media posts, fiction, arti-

cles). It was also revealed that their primary reasons for reading are mostly for personal entertainment, language skill development, and personal development (most of them read at home, others while traveling). Additionally, we assessed the main difficulties they face when reading in English. In this case, two answers stood out to us the most: unknown words and lack of time.

After evaluating these aspects, we examined the strategies that they employ during the three stages of reading. The results showed that in the pre-reading stage, most of the students do not utilise any particular strategy; however, some mentioned skimming the title for better understanding, and using their background knowledge. In the reading stage, the strategies that were most commonly mentioned included visualising and skimming. During the post-reading stage, the most popular responses were summarising and reflecting.

Another area of focus was the strategies students employ when encountering unknown words and how frequently they utilise reading strategies in general. For the first question, the most common answers were the use of dictionaries and guessing the meaning from the context. Regarding the frequency, most of the respondents answered 'sometimes', 'frequently', and 'rarely'.

In addition, we were also interested in students' opinions on the effectiveness of reading strategies, with a focus on the understanding of grammatical structures, the development of reading comprehension, and the improvement of oral and written communication. The majority of the respondents considered reading strategies to be very helpful for vocabulary expansion (43.1%), the understanding of grammatical structures (45.1%), the development of reading comprehension (49%), oral communication (37.3%), and written communication (56.9%).

Regarding their opinions on the most effective strategies for language learning, extensive reading was the most commonly mentioned one among annotating, inferring, scanning, skimming, and visualizing. Regarding the least effective strategy, most of the respondents stated that there were no strategies they considered ineffective.

As for overall improvement and perceived changes in their language skills, some respondents stated that they do not consciously use reading strategies. However, a large percentage indicated that they have noticed slight or even significant improvement since using such strategies.

The participants were also asked for their opinions on which factors influence the effectiveness of reading strategies. The answers varied. Most of them highlighted interest in the topic as the most influential factor. While other commonly mentioned factors included the difficulty level of the text, the level of language proficiency, the time spent on reading, and the learning environment.

Conclusion. Reading is one of the four skills that has a great impact on mastering a foreign language. However, to integrate it effectively, learners and teachers should consider the three stages of reading and the strategies that can be incorporated during these stages. It is also important to recognise that what works for one person may not be the most efficient for another. For this reason, students should also be encouraged to experiment with different strategies and choose those that work best for them. Moreover, the role of reading in language learning still holds great potential for further research.

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