

The Students' Attitudes in Preparatory Classes towards the Effectiveness of Silent Reading in Terms of Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is the gateway to acquire knowledge, therefore, it has attracted attention in academic environment. Silent reading is accepted as the major reading mode, and it is associated with the idea of reading for comprehension. In the related literature there exist contradictory studies on the efficiency of silent reading. Thus the present research investigates students' attitudes towards silent reading in terms of its effectiveness in reading comprehension, reading for pleasure, and concentration. The present study was conducted with 120 preparatory school students from different levels at a state university in Bursa. In the study, a mixed method research design was used. Quantitative data were gathered via a questionnaire and qualitative data were gathered via an interview from 12 participants for a deeper understanding of the students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of silent reading. According to the results, the participants have a moderately positive level of agreement that they can grasp the meaning easily and concentrate better while reading silently.

Keywords: silent reading, attitudes towards silent reading, modes of reading, reading comprehension, reading aloud



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INTRODUCTION

Reading is a complex skill, and it includes various skills that entail the reader to have a simultaneous coordination (Logan, 1997). Reading involves an understanding of challenging concepts and making sense of written language (Yıldırım & Ateş, 2012). That is why, learning to read is claimed to be a complicated process (Boer, Bergen, & Jong, 2014). Among academics reading has always been a central topic of research since reading comprehension is thought to be the basic means to acquire knowledge and reach academic success (Fuchs, 2006). There has been common interest in determining which mode of reading yields higher comprehension level among students, hence the effect of the reading mode (silent and other modes of reading) in students' comprehension level has been a critical and controversial issue (Giacomo et al., 2014). Research in the area of the roles of silent reading and reading aloud in comprehension has presented mixed results (McCalum, Sharp, Bell, & George, 2004). While Fletcher and Pumfrey (1988) assert that students gain higher comprehension while reading aloud, there are some researchers who assert that there is no significant difference between reading aloud and silent reading with respect to reading comprehension (McCalum et al., 2004). Furthermore, the studies focusing on gender differences claim that girls have a higher level of achievement in terms of reading skills in general and they receive more satisfaction from reading (e.g. Arellano, 2013; Garbe, Holle & Weinhold, 2010; Uusen & Mürsepp, 2012). As another aspect of the issue, Van Den Boer (2014) suggests that learners with higher proficiency level may regard silent reading as the primary reading mode. The findings related to silent reading, the role of gender differences in terms of reading habits and the relation between proficiency level of learners and their preferences for reading modes indicate that researchers in this field have not come up with a common view towards the effectiveness of two reading modes in reading comprehension. This study is significant in that it focuses on this controversial issue from a broader perspective to find out the students' attitudes towards silent reading in terms of its effectiveness in reading comprehension, reading for pleasure, and concentration while reading a text. Thus, the following questions are raised in order to meet these objectives:

1. What are the students' attitudes towards silent reading in terms of reading comprehension?
2. What are the students' attitudes towards the effect of silent reading on their concentration?
3. Does silent reading enhance students' pleasure in reading?
4. Is there a significant difference in students' attitudes towards silent reading in terms of their genders?
5. Is there a significant difference in students' attitudes towards silent reading in terms of their proficiency levels in English?

Literature Review

Reading comprehension has been viewed as a way to capture meaning out of a text (Sadeghi, Afghari, Gholam, & Zarei, 2015). Jiang (2015) argues that it is not a simple task, and readers may have serious troubles in construction of meaning from a written text. Ability to read for comprehension is assumed to be based on students' cognitive, linguistic and social abilities. Therefore, it becomes necessary for readers to decode the meaning fluently, and this requires using reading skills effectively (Turkylmaz, Can, Yildirim, & Ateş, 2014). Glenberg (2011) states that skilled readers have the ability to grasp meaning from a text accurately. He also maintains that it is essential to recognize words as well as to have the ability to comprehend a text. In addition, Woolley (2011) argues that the goal in reading comprehension is to attain an overall understanding of a text rather than focusing on catching meaning from individual words or sentences. Glenberg (2011) asserts that comprehension is more than a mental activity and that readers may react actively to the situations provided in a text. In other words, he claims that the reader finds a way to communicate with the text while reading.

Silent reading is a mode of reading without making movements with lips, and in this process the reader avoids vibrating vocal cords. This mode of reading includes written and graphic forms which are visually perceived and later turned into meaningful units and ideas. This process occurs without the vocal step. Silent reading is usually seen as the major reading behaviour, and for decades it has been associated with the idea of reading for comprehension (Alshumaimeri, 2011). Kailani (1998) maintains that the main concern with silent reading is grasping meaning from a text and catching the writer's message. According to him, silent reading requires the reader to follow the organization of words and sentences by concentrating on the meaning. In addition, silent reading is claimed to include an imagery speech activity, and in this process the reader follows his / her inner voice (Bertolotti et al., 2012).

Jiang (2015) states that readers can improve their overall competence in comprehension when they read silently. In addition, silent reading has been found to be more effective than reading aloud since it is faster (Mccallum et al., 2004). Furthermore, Van Den Boer (2014) indicates that proficient readers prefer silent reading as the primary reading mode. Moreover, readers have been claimed to use their cognitive capacity better while reading silently than reading aloud since their comprehension is hindered due to finite cognitive resources while reading aloud (Hale et al., 2007). Yoon (2002) claims that creating a love for reading is the main purpose of silent reading, and this may be achieved through this mode of reading. Silent reading gives students the opportunity to pace their reading. As a result, silent readers may regulate the speed of reading and go through the text, and this may facilitate reading and comprehension (García, Melero, & Izquierdo, 2014). Ali (2012) has found that the application of silent reading has a significant and positive impact on improving students' reading comprehension.

On the other hand, García, Melero, & Izquierdo (2014) have found that reading aloud and silent reading are not different from each other in terms of reading comprehension and that following a pace which is determined by someone other than the reader does not hinder comprehension. García, Melero, & Izquierdo (2014) have also found that students reading aloud with the obligation to articulate clearly and appropriately comprehend in the same level as they do while reading through silent mode.

There are also findings that highlight certain weaknesses of silent reading. For instance, Hale et al. (2011) maintain that it is hardly possible to monitor students' reading development when they read silently. In addition, the student may skip difficult words and avoid focusing on key words which may be a reason for poorer comprehension (Mccallum et al., 2004). Furthermore, the teacher may have a difficulty to observe the student's reading behaviour since they may miss some important information when they read silently (Jiang, 2015). Another drawback to silent reading may be that the teacher may have no chance to know (of knowing) whether the student is actually reading the text or not (Hale et al., 2011).

Taking all those controversial views towards the topic into account, this study may be regarded as significant in that it attempts to find out the students' attitudes towards silent reading in terms of its effectiveness in reading comprehension, reading for pleasure, and concentration while reading a text in the light of collected data.

METHOD

Research Design

A sequential mixed method research design was implemented in order to gain a deeper understanding of the students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of silent reading. Quantitative data were gathered via a questionnaire which consisted of 20 items, and qualitative data were gathered via an interview for the purpose of identifying students' attitudes toward silent reading. The students were taught the skills like summarizing and guessing vocabulary from the context previously since they needed to respond to some of the items in the questionnaire based on their knowledge on those skills.

Participants

The study was conducted with five groups of participants from three different levels in preparatory classes at a state university in Bursa. The participants consisted of 120 preparatory-school students whose ages ranged between 18 and 36. In addition, 22 students contributed to the pilot study. In this study, 49% of the participants were females and 51 % of them were males. Out of 120 students, 29 of them (25%) were intermediate level students while 19 (15%) were pre-intermediate and 72 of the participants (60%) were elementary level students. The students were from different departments such as Engineering, Economics and Administrative Sciences, Veterinary Science and Vocational High School (Office Management, Foreign Trade, Public Relations and Private Security Services).

Convenience sampling method was used while choosing the participants. Convenience sampling is a sort of sampling in which members of the target population are easily accessible due to their geographical position, readiness at any time, and their eagerness to participate (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Before the implementation process, the participants were given information about the aim of the study.

Instruments

Quantitative data on the students' attitudes towards silent reading and its effectiveness in reading comprehension were collected through a questionnaire designed by Lin, Choo, & Pandian (2012) after their consent was taken through an e-mail. Some of the items in the questionnaire were modified by the researchers. The first part of the questionnaire aimed to gather demographic information such as participants' gender, age, and level of English. For the sake of content validity of the research, expert opinions were gathered. By using the Lawshe technique (1975 cited in Yurdugül, 2005) five experts from a state university in Bursa shared their opinions about the appropriateness of the items to determine the students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of silent reading. Content validity ratio (CVR) for each item was determined. According to Veneziano and Hooper (1995) CVR should be equal or bigger than 0.99 at $\alpha = 0,05$ level for five experts. As all the items reached this value, none of them were excluded from the instrument. The items were categorized into three groups in order to find out the participants' beliefs, feelings, and behaviors towards the effectiveness of silent reading. This categorization of the items was adopted to gain a full understanding of the participants' attitudes. The questionnaire included 20 five-point Likert Scale items, and the scale ranged from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

The questionnaire was piloted on 22 students to make sure whether the items included were clear, reader-friendly and reliable. The items were translated into the participants' native language in order to prevent any possible language barriers. As a result of the pilot study, the research tool was found highly reliable with a 0.95 alpha value. The participants in the pilot group were not included in the study. Upon completion of the validity and reliability analysis of the instrument, the data were gathered from the main participant groups. The participants were assured about the confidentiality of the data they would provide and they were informed that the results of the study could be shared with those who would be interested in the findings at the end of the process.

Following the questionnaire, the researchers conducted a structured interview with 12 participants randomly chosen from three different levels so as to gain better and deeper insights into the findings obtained from the questionnaire. The participants' responses were recorded and then transcribed. Participants' consents were taken in advance for being recorded during the interview. Subsequently, the interview was conducted with 12 participants chosen randomly from three different proficiency levels. It was a structured interview and aimed at finding out information about the issue at more depth.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed by using SPSS Statistics 23. Skewness and Kurtosis values were used to determine whether the data were normally distributed. As the data were not normally distributed non-parametric tests were used in this study. Mann-Whitney U Test was computed for dual and Kruskal-Wallis Test was computed for multiple comparisons.

For the analysis of the qualitative data the interviews were recorded, and the researchers conducted content analysis by determining the common and repeated responses obtained from the interviewees. Those responses were used to interpret the data obtained from the questionnaire.

FINDINGS

The first research question (RQ) aimed to identify students' attitudes towards silent reading in terms of reading comprehension (Table 1). The findings suggest that the participants have moderately positive attitudes ($M=3,73$) towards the effect of silent reading on reading comprehension. In this study mean scores between 1-2,4 are considered to indicate negative attitudes, 2,5-3,4 are considered to indicate dubious thoughts of participants, 3,5-4 are considered to indicate moderately positive attitudes and finally 4,1-5 are considered as positive attitudes.

Table 1
The students' attitudes towards silent reading in terms of reading comprehension

Questionnaire Items	N	M	SD
6. I can understand the text better when I read silently.	120	3,84	1,06
8. I can retain more words when I read silently.	120	3,47	1,19
10. I can grasp the main idea more easily when I read silently.	120	3,76	1,05
14. I can remember more information after silent reading.	120	3,74	1,09
15. Reading silently makes it easier for me to visualize the text.	120	3,90	1,11
16. I can see the connections between sentences better during silent reading.	120	3,76	1,07
17. I can summarize the text more easily after silent reading.	120	3,65	1,05
18. It becomes easier for me to follow the flow of ideas in the text while I am reading silently.	120	3,87	1,03
20. I can understand the text more quickly when I read silently.	120	3,89	1,17

As seen in Table 1, the participants agree that silent reading contributes to visualizing the text, whereby they can internalize the meaning of the text and therefore silent reading facilitates the process (M=3,90). Also, four of the participants out of twelve in the interview have reported that they can visualize the text better while reading it silently as a response to the question, "What is your attitude towards silent reading in terms of your level of understanding? How do you assess its efficiency in your ability to comprehend a text in English in comparison to reading aloud?" Besides, the participants in the questionnaire think that it is possible to understand the text more quickly while reading it silently (M=3,89). They agree that it is easier for them to follow the ideas in the text in silent reading mode (M=3,87). This finding has also been confirmed by four of the interviewees. One of them stated as "I can follow the events better because I can internalize the events and make judgements on the characters." and another interviewee reported as "I understand the text better when I read silently because I can be involved in the text while doing so." In addition, the participants accept the benefit of silent reading in terms of comprehension (M=3,84), and they agree that understanding the main idea of the text is easier when they read silently (M=3,76). Likewise, eight of the interviewees have asserted that their comprehension level increases while reading a text silently. The majority of the participants have a consensus on the effectiveness of silent reading with respect to its role in their ability to see the connections among sentences better (M=3,76). Additionally, they agree on the benefit of silent reading in remembering the information after reading the text (M=3,74). The participants agree on the effectiveness of silent reading in terms of the ability to summarize the ideas in the text (M=3,65). However, as it can be seen in the table their attitudes are only moderately high. The participants are dubious about the idea that they can keep more vocabulary items in their memory after reading silently (M=3,47). Similarly, the interview has showed that there is not a strong agreement about the effectiveness of silent reading in terms of remembering more vocabulary items after finishing the text except the two.

The second RQ aimed to identify the students' attitudes towards the effect of silent reading on their concentration. The item total mean of this sub-group is 3.92, indicating the participants' agreement on the positive effects of silent reading on their concentration. As shown in Table 2, there is a strong agreement among the participants that concentration on the text is enhanced during silent reading mode (M=4,05), and the same point of view is also held about the benefit of silent reading in leaving the reader more time to understand the unknown vocabulary items that appear in the text (M=3,90). Also, six of the interviewees out of twelve have stated that they can focus on the meaning better during silent reading mode as a response to the questions "Does silent reading have a positive effect on your concentration while reading? Can you concentrate better while reading silently or reading aloud?". The participants assert that they can

catch more details in the text while reading silently (M=3,82), and agree that they can use their mind at the maximum level when they read a text in this mode (M=3,76). However, four of the interviewees out of twelve have asserted that they miss some of the details while reading silently and claimed that they can concentrate better while reading aloud since they can hear their own voices and catch more details thanks to their increased concentration.

Table 2

The students' attitudes towards the effect of silent reading on their concentration

Questionnaire Items	N	M	SD
3. I can use my mind to the maximum when I read silently.	120	3,76	1,09
4. I will have more time to understand unknown words when I read silently.	120	3,90	1,19
7. I can catch more details when I read silently.	120	3,82	1,17
19. I can concentrate on the text better when I read silently.	120	4,05	1,06

The third RQ sought to find out the students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of silent reading in terms of the pleasure they get from reading. The findings assert that the participants' attitude on this issue is moderately high (M=3,80).

As observed in Table 3, the participants have a common point of view on their preference for silent reading because of the calm setting it provides (M=4,12). During the interview, two of the participants out of twelve have reported that they feel bored while reading a text in silent mode while the others have not mentioned about such a feeling as a response to the question "Do you think silent reading has an impact on the pleasure you get from reading?" Likewise, a lot of the participants accept that they feel more comfortable while reading a text in the silent mode (M=4,03). Six of the participants in the interview have also reported that they feel more comfortable with silent reading mode and internalize the events that occur in a text, particularly in a story or novel. According to the results of the questionnaire, participants have moderately agreed that they prefer silent reading over other modes of reading (M=3,80). This was similar to the interview results as such four out of twelve have reported that they prefer reading aloud to silent reading. Enjoyment of a text when it is read silently has also been agreed at a moderate level among the participants (M=3,71). The participants agreed moderately that their motivation for reading increases while reading silently (M=3,69) and that they feel more confident in silent reading mode (M=3,68).

Table 3

The effectiveness of silent reading in terms of the students' pleasure in reading

Questionnaire Items	N	M	SD
1. I prefer reading texts silently.	120	3,80	1,24
2. I like the calm setting of silent reading.	120	4,12	1,17
5. Reading silently enhances my interest in reading.	120	3,55	1,20
9. I feel more comfortable when I read silently.	120	4,03	1,10
11. I enjoy the text more during silent reading.	120	3,71	1,21
12. My motivation for reading increases while I am reading silently.	120	3,69	1,15
13. I feel more confident during silent reading.	120	3,68	1,22

When we look at the mean scores for each sub-group, it can be seen that the participants have more positive attitudes towards the effects of silent reading on concentration (M=3,92). This was followed by pleasure in reading (M=3,80) and reading comprehension (M=3,73) consecutively.

RQ 4 aimed to look for the relationship between gender and their attitudes towards the effectiveness of silent reading. Therefore, Mann-Whitney U Test was used so as to compute the relationship. Accordingly, there is no statistically significant difference between gender and attitudes towards the effectiveness of silent reading ($U=-053$; $p=, 958$ $p>0,05$).

When the relation between proficiency level of the participants and their attitudes towards the effectiveness of silent reading was investigated, the results from the Kruskal-Wallis Test showed no statistically significant differences (Table 5) between the participants' proficiency levels and their attitudes towards the effectiveness of silent reading [$p=,118$; $p>0,05$].

Table 5
Language proficiency levels of participants and their attitudes towards the effectiveness of silent reading

Level	No	Mean Ranks	Std. Dev.	χ^2	p
Elementary	73	59,93	2	4,276	,118
Pre-intermediate	18	74,53			
Intermediate	29	53,22			

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, the aim was to determine the attitudes of preparatory school students towards silent reading in terms of its effectiveness in reading comprehension, concentration, and reading pleasure. The findings from the study show similarity with the previous studies conducted by other researchers (see, McCalum et al., 2004). According to the current study, the participants have a consensus about the contribution of silent reading to comprehension. They agree that they can follow the ideas and meaning in a text more easily and see the connections among sentences better in silent mode since they can visualize the text and internalize what is mentioned by following their inner voice. Similarly, Bertolotti et al. (2012) found that silent reading includes an imagery speech activity in which the reader follows his /her inner voice. The students also accept that silent reading has a positive effect on fluency in reading. In other words, the participants agree at a moderately high level that they can read faster when they read a text silently. In a previous study, Mccallum et al. (2004) indicated a similar result, and claimed that silent readers have the chance to regulate the speed of reading which contributes to comprehension. It was also claimed in previous studies that silent readers can obtain more information compared to others (Mccallum et al., 2004) and this idea is confirmed by the findings of the present research. There is a moderate level of agreement among students that they can understand better and grasp the main idea of a text more easily in silent mode. Also, they believe that they can remember more information and summarize the text more easily after silent reading, but they are not quite sure about whether they can keep more vocabulary items in their memory after reading silently or not. This may be related to the finding that they may be skipping key words and difficult vocabulary items as suggested by Mccallum et al. (2004). On the other hand, it has been found that there is a moderately high agreement ($M=3,73$) among the students on the effectiveness of silent reading in terms of comprehension, and this confirms Garcia, Melero, & Izquierdo's (2014) finding that silent reading is not different from reading aloud in terms of comprehension and that students who read aloud with the obligation to articulate clearly and appropriately understand a text in the same level as they do in silent mode. In their study, Mccallum et al. (2004) found that the student may skip some words, especially difficult ones and avoid focusing on key words, which may lead to poorer comprehension, and this finding is consistent with some of the students' ideas that they may avoid some parts of the text, and this may result in troubles in comprehension. In their research, Hale et al. (2007) state that readers can concentrate better by fully using their cognitive capacity while reading silently in comparison with reading aloud and that their comprehension is hindered while reading a text aloud because of the other aspects of the language like pronunciation. Similarly, the students have a moderately positive agreement ($M=3,76$) in the current study that they can use their mind to the maximum, and they can concentrate on the text better in silent mode. They state that in silent mode they merely concentrate on understanding the meaning of the text but rather they feel the pressure of making pronunciation mistakes or have troubles with appropriate vocalization. The participants also think that silent reading is effective in terms of its role in reading pleasure. They prefer silent reading because of the calm setting it provides and they feel more comfortable while reading in this mode. Also, the students believe that their motivation for reading increases and agree that they feel more confident during this mode of reading. The study also indicates

that the participants have a moderately positive agreement about their preference for silent reading over other modes of reading, the idea which is supported by Van Den Boer (2014) who maintains that proficient readers prefer silent reading as the primary reading mode. However, the current research showed that there are no statistically significant differences between students from different proficiency levels. Thus, that claim is not supported in this study, but more participants with equal numbers from each level could be included in the study in order to support the current data and make stronger claims about the issue.

The study has contributed to the literature by finding out the attitudes of preparatory school students towards silent reading in terms of its effectiveness in reading comprehension, concentration, and reading pleasure. In this respect, the students had moderately positive attitudes toward the effects of silent reading on comprehension, concentration, and reading pleasure. On the other hand, there is a partial agreement among the interviewees (five out of twelve) that reading aloud may be more effective. They claimed that it may enable the teacher to enhance students' understanding by means of modeling strategies to clarify meaning, teach vocabulary, and develop fluency (Johnston, 2015). Therefore, it can be concluded that silent reading is effective in terms of comprehension, concentration, and reading pleasure, but it cannot be claimed that there is a strong agreement among students on this point of view. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the topic, more participants could be included in further studies with the participation of equal number of participants from each level, and qualitative aspect of the study may be enhanced through more interviews and observations. The research has implications for teachers in seeking ways to increase students' level of comprehension, concentration, and pleasure they get out of reading classes and how reading classes might be carried out in a more effective manner.

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