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## THE EFFECT OF SUSTAINED SILENT READING ON IMPROVING THE LEARNERS' READING, GRAMMAR, AND VOCABULARY ACHIEVEMENT IN ELT

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### ABSTRACT

This research dealt with the effect of Sustained Silent Reading on improving the students' vocabulary, reading, and grammar achievements. The participants of the study were the students studying at two Secondary Schools in Turkey in Kahramanmaraş province. In the study, it was investigated whether Sustained Silent Reading Strategies helped the EFL Secondary School learners to develop their reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar knowledge in Andırın/Kahramanmaraş. In this regard, the researcher provided the students with a variety of reading materials consistent with their language proficiency level and interests so that they could read silently. At the end of this study, the researcher measured the participating students' reading, vocabulary, and grammar achievements on Sustained Silent Reading strategies and skills. The study consisted of two groups; an experimental and a control group. Both experimental and control groups consisted of 70 students studying at Torun Kastal and Şehit Yasin Höbek Secondary Schools. Totally the groups consisted of 140 students. The reading materials were handed out by the researcher and the experimental group students' number of pages that they read during the SSR sessions was recorded. The experimental group of students totally read 20 elementary-level books of their own choice. The control group kept on their regular online English classes because of Covid-19. The results revealed that students in the experimental group improved their achievement levels in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar knowledge. Moreover, the researcher applied different comprehension texts and multiple choice questions during two lessons of the time. The findings of the present study revealed that SSR could be a beneficial activity for ELT students to improve their reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar knowledge.

**Keywords:** Reading, Comprehension, Understanding, Grammar.

### ÖZET

Bu araştırmada, sürdürülebilir sessiz okumanın öğrencilerin dilbilgisi, kelime ve okuma başarısına etkisi üzerine çalışmalar yapılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın katılımcıları Kahramanmaraş'ın Andırın ilçesinden Torun Kastal Ortaokulu ve Şehit Yasin Höbek Ortaokulunda okuyan öğrencilerden olmuştur. Bu çalışma bağlamında araştırmacı olan öğretmen, öğrencilerin sessiz okumayı yapabilmeleri için dil seviyelerine uygun olarak çeşitli okuma materyalleri sağlamıştır.

Bu çalışmanın sonunda öğretmen, öğrencilerin okuma, kelime ve dilbilgisi başarılarını ölçmüştür. Çalışma deney ve kontrol grubu olmak üzere iki gruptan oluşmuştur. Deney ve kontrol grubu hem Torun Kastal Ortaokulu hem de Şehit Yasin Höbek Yatılı Bölge Ortaokulu olmak üzere iki gruptan her birinde 70 öğrenci olup toplamda 140 öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Okuma materyalleri araştırmacı yapan öğretmenin tarafından dağıtılmış olup sürdürülebilir sessiz okuma dersi boyunca okudukları sayfaların sayısı öğretmen tarafından kayıt altına alınmıştır. Deney grubu, kendi seçenekleri doğrultusunda toplam olarak 20 tane başlangıç seviyesi olan kitaplar okumuştur. Kontrol grubu ise Covid-19 salgınından dolayı düzenli olarak internet üzerinden İngilizce derslerine devam etmiştir. Bu çalışmanın sonuçlarında, deney grubunda bulunan öğrencilerin okuma, kelime ve dilbilgisi becerilerini geliştirilmesi beklenmiştir. Dahası araştırmacı olan öğretmen, öğrencilere iki ders saati boyunca çoktan seçmeli ve okuduğunu anlama sorularını uygulamıştır. Düşük seviyedeki öğrenciler okuduğunu anlama, kelime ve dilbilgisi başarılarını ortaya çıkarma konusunda sürdürülebilir sessiz okuma etkinliklerinden yararlanmışlardır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Okuma, Kavrama, Anlama, Dilbilgisi.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is a form of school-based recreational reading, or free voluntary reading, in which students read silently for a distinct period of time by reading constantly, so learners learn how to read by using SSR skills and techniques. It is related to the students' progress and students select the material according to their proficiency level and interest. It was found that the implementation of an SSR program increased the learners' skills, strategies, and techniques (Arthur, 1995).

Students had a capacity to develop their SSR skills in ELT (Kornelly & Smith, 1993). Kornelly & Smith (1993) explained that students could apply the SSR to develop their reading, grammar and vocabulary achievements. For instance, the learners did any SSR exercises related to their own 20 books consistent with three achievements (Kornelly & Smith, 1993; Weller & Weller, 1999).

The SSR program demonstrated that the learners could improve their own reading, vocabulary, and grammar achievement and the program has given fruitful and better results over longer periods of time for EFL Secondary School learners (Krashen, 1993). Most secondary school students could read about 1 million words and learn approximately 1000 new words because of sustained silent reading to improve these achievements (Krashen, 2001). However, Krashen has a different acquisition learning hypothesis except for developing reading, vocabulary, and grammar achievement in SSR. The **Acquisition-Learning** distinction is the most crucial of the five hypotheses in Krashen's theory and the most widely known among linguists and language teachers. According to Krashen; there are two independent systems of foreign language performance: 'the acquired system' and 'the learned system'. The 'acquired system' or '**acquisition**' is the product of a subconscious process that children undergo when they acquire their first language, but the learned system of the language is different from the acquired language because learning language is the product of formal instruction and linguistic rules are learned consciously such as knowledge of grammar rules.

On the other hand, the SSR sometimes could lead to some problems between students and teachers. When teachers did not adjust the reading materials according to their student's proficiency level, students did not benefit from the expected results of an SSR program. Firstly, teachers had to understand that SSR could be ineffective in improving the learners' vocabulary, reading, and grammar achievements if the reading texts were not suitable for the student's language proficiency level (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). Secondly, teachers should pay attention that the reading materials that the students are offered must be interesting and even compelling enough for the students' likes and interests. Finally; if the teachers select the reading material for SSR, they must select the material by taking regard to the learners' language proficiency level (Callahan & Drum, 1984).

Reading for pleasure had been started since man first started reading. The importance of SSR that was related to reading for pleasure was different between the individual and cultural context of SSR learners, but efferent reading focused on collecting information from the learning material being read. This reading referred to a critical skill for learners as they had progressed from primary to advanced grades. Aesthetic reading allowed the learners to participate in the reading lesson actively and engage with the material being read and interested in. On the other hand, the study demonstrated that most of the long term SSR programs were at least as effective as or more effective in increasing the learners' engagement in SSR and in improving reading strategies than teachers were using SSR in their classroom curriculum and teaching programs (Krashen, 2004).

### 1.2. Statement of Purpose & Problem

The purpose of this research was to find out if the implementation of Sustained Silent Reading led to an improvement in the students' reading, vocabulary, and grammar achievements. EFL Secondary School learners could use SSR strategies and techniques to reveal progress in these language skills. The participants in the study applied SSR strategies by reading at least 20 elementary level books. The teacher provided the books and helped learners read as many books as they could during the assigned period to make progress in their vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension.

### 1.3. Significance of the Study

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) was a period of uninterrupted silent reading strategies and skills. SSR was related to a single simple principle: Reading was a skill. Like all skills, the more you used it, the

better you got at it. Conversely, the less you used it, the more difficult it was. Like swimming, when you learned it purposely, you never forgot it. Nevertheless, in order to get better at either reading or swimming, you jumped into the book or the water and do it over and over. There were different guidelines for learners and teachers for SSR. For instance, students who chose reading material inside or outside of SSR time were encouraged to read for their own pleasure. However, teachers would provide a supply of reading material on hand for those who did not bring reading materials such as short stories, recommended newspapers, etc. They demonstrated that reading was a regarded activity, a life-long endeavor, and important to every field and content and should not begin class preparation or activity until SSR is completed.

Some teachers divided their classes into small groups so that students could share their thoughts about the books they had read. Sometimes teachers provided a question that would serve as the focus of the group discussion. The discussion question might support the curriculum, focusing attention on the author's point of view that the teacher had introduced in class. In some classes, teachers invited students to work in pairs. A pair of 'reading friends might select a book to read together and talked about their opinion of the reading materials.

In our practical life, we mostly read silently. What we did do at the coffee shop or restaurant? We read the menu silently. We read many instructions in the transportations, hospitals and in different public places silently. We did it naturally. Why? We didn't want to disturb any people. We just wanted to learn the message from the written words. Sustained Silent Reading helped us read faster. It helped us make the faster connection between words and it gives us the silence we needed to concentrate and process information.

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

In the present study the following questions are investigated:

- 1) How did SSR affect the EFL Secondary School learners' reading achievement?
- 2) How did SSR affect the EFL Secondary School learners' vocabulary achievement?
- 3) How did SSR affect the EFL Secondary School learners' grammar achievement?

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Aim**

The purpose of this study is to find out the likely effect of SSR implementation on the reading, vocabulary, and grammar achievement of students in an ELT program.

### **2.2. Subjects**

Based on much of the previous research conducted on SSR skills and strategies, the present study investigates how the skills and strategies are applied in Turkish two secondary schools for 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades in Kahramanmaraş/Andırın. As mentioned previously, it is aimed to develop the students' vocabulary, reading, and grammar achievements on SSR skills and strategies and provide different kinds of elementary-level texts by applying pre and post-tests. This chapter gives information about participants, settings, materials, pre and post-tests, procedure, design of the study, data collection, scoring, and data analysis procedure.

### **2.3. Materials**

The study dealt with the effects of sustained silent reading (SSR) on improving EFL Secondary School's learners' reading, vocabulary, and grammar achievements. The teacher, who works at Torun Kastal and Şehit Yasin Hübek Secondary School, provided elementary-level reading texts based on the learners' proficiency level. A pre-test and a post-test were used for assessing the learners' general reading comprehension and vocabulary skills. In the pre-test, the teacher applied vocabulary, reading, and grammar tests for experimental and control groups in accordance with their proficiency level. The post-test was similar to the pre-test in terms of both the skill areas investigated and the number of the test questions. The pre and post-tests included 35 questions each. 15 of these questions addressed reading comprehension questions, 10 grammar questions covering frequently used grammar structures contained in the story books students read, and 10 vocabulary questions covering the frequently used English words.

## 2.4. Procedure

The learners increased their reading, grammar, and vocabulary achievement for SSR. In this study; the learners read books that they are interested in and commensurate with their current proficiency level. The teacher provided different kinds of books in accordance with the learners' age groups and interests.

The teacher gave the learners a pre-test and a post-test at the beginning and end of this activity. The pre and post-tests included multiple-choice questions in accordance with the learners' proficiency level. In the pretest and posttest; the teacher measured the students' general reading comprehension achievements, and grammar and vocabulary levels by applying a general level test. The test questions were not directly asked as comprehension questions covered in the books that the students read. Based on the students' answers on the pre and post-tests, whether there is an improvement in the students' general reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar knowledge was investigated.

The teacher adjusted and keep 60 minutes for two lesson hours while the students do their SSR. They read 20 pages during each SSR activity. After that; I thought that there was an increase in the average number of pages per SSR activity. For example, students read 10 extra pages for distance learning in 60 minutes and they developed their SSR skills and strategies in time. So, learners adjusted their SSR strategies thanks to the teachers' positive effect.

## 2.5. Data Collection

The data for the present study were collected within 300 hours. The SSR sessions lasted 30 minutes per lesson. The classes included eight elementary levels from two schools that instructed on the basis of a communicative approach. The teacher used different kinds of books that they wanted to read and understand. The teacher gave information about the objectives of this study to the learners. In order to analyze the effects of SSR; the learners used the different kinds of this reading strategy that was suggested by the teacher.

## 2.6. Data Analysis

The data analysis of the Sustained Silent Reading strategies has revealed that the teacher used different kinds of strategies such as skimming, scanning, reading for fluency, and Deductive-Inductive Grammar Teaching.

1) **Reading for Fluency:** Reading for fluency is mastered through pre intermediate and elementary stages. It is the ability to read a text accurately, quickly, and with expression. Students' ability for SSR depends on learning to identify the large numbers of words (Baer, Kutner & Sabatini, 2009).

2) **Improving Vocabulary:** The term is related to encountering words in the context. Students can improve their vocabulary by using synonyms, doing crossword puzzles, using mnemonics and practicing using new words in a conversation.

3) **Deductive-Inductive Grammar Teaching:** Deductive Grammar Teaching Approach begins with the theory and grammatical rules and then gives an example about the theory and rules, but Inductive Grammar Teaching Approach begins with examples and observations about grammatical rules, theory, and then teaching rules and theories deductively. These different approaches may be suitable for different kinds of learners because learners are successful in different cognitive learning styles and are related to making some real examples for learners' progress (Krashen & Harnett, 1975).

1. **Skimming:** Skimming is a reading strategy technique for looking and getting the general idea or gist of the text (Harmer, 2001).

2. **Scanning:** Scanning is related to finding specific information instead of superficial reading and the general meaning of the text (Nunan, 1999).

## 3. RESULTS

To investigate if secondary school types affect the replies given to the pre and post-tests were used. The results indicated that pre and post-tests are about the relationship between SSR skills and secondary schools' successes. For all other items, significant differences were elected in both the teachers' and students' responses. The number of students for both schools was alike, but the rate of success between these schools was different from each other.

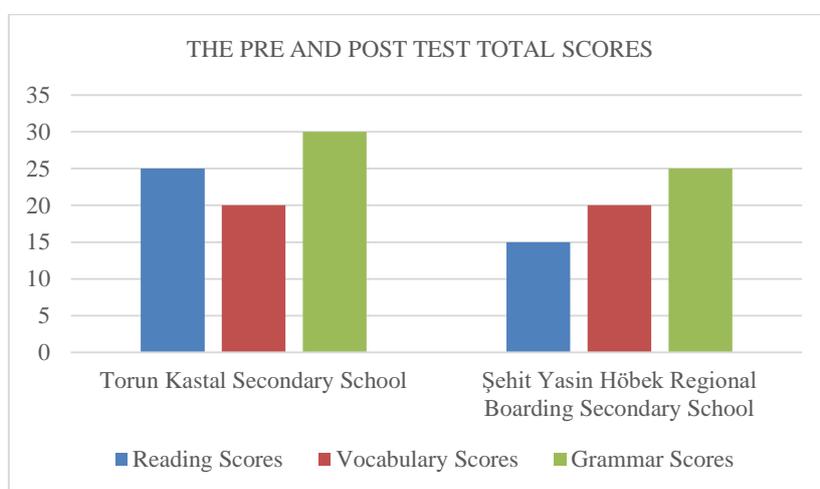
The number of participants in the study and their school names is revealed in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** The Number of Participants and the Schools They Study

School Names	The number of students	The number of successful students	The number of fail students
Torun Kastal Secondary School	70	45	25
Şehit Yasin Hübek Secondary School	70	35	35
<b>Total Numbers</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>60</b>

As seen in Table 1, the total number of students participating in the study is 140 students studying in two different schools. The pre and post-test scores of the students in the reading, vocabulary, and grammar sections of the exams are revealed in Figure 1 below.

Both experimental and control groups participated in the pre and post-test. The pre and post had a total of 70 questions. These tests helped to realize these two groups had different reading results in SSR ability. The chart above demonstrates that Torun Kastal Secondary School was more successful in reading and grammar scores, but vocabulary scores are equal between the two schools. According to this study, the researcher found that there was a significant effect of using SSR strategy on the learners' reading, grammar, and vocabulary skills. Krashen (2004) stated that learners were successful in different cognitive styles focusing on SSR skills and strategies.



**Figure 1.** The Pre and Post Test Scores

Figure 1 shows the learners' vocabulary, grammar, and reading achievements on Sustained Silent Reading Strategies. Thus, experimental and control groups were divided into 70 students. It is clear that these groups have similar scores for vocabulary skills in SSR. However, learners' achievement in SSR could be developed by using different SSR strategies such as increasing the opportunity to apply SSR strategies at schools and setting up a learning conducive environment on Sustained Silent Reading Strategies.

#### 4. DISCUSSIONS

The study showed that most teachers need supplemental current language programs in order to encourage free-voluntary reading for SSR programs. However, the amount of time provided for SSR doesn't support the professed belief in SSR. The time is adjusted according to the suitable day for class programs, but the availability of books can change the instructional lesson time. The books appeal to learners in both the classroom and school libraries according to the learners' proficiency level. On the other hand, the use of SSR ensures a more informed approach in order to the learners' reading engagement and increase the availability and sharing of the books between classrooms, but SSR points out that the lack of complete classroom commitment to read at specific times and unaccountability problems. Each teacher adapts a SSR style program to the learners' proficiency level and her/his individual classroom.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

The present study attempted to examine the effects of Sustained Silent Reading on Secondary School Learners' achievements. Reading and grammar scores in pre and post-test indicated that Torun Kastal Secondary School learners were more successful in Kahramanmaraş/Andırın. Moreover, some

feedback types were used by teachers in order to correct the learners' errors. The most frequent feedback types were formal, formative, and summative feedback. The results of the study highlighted the importance of SSR in developing the learners' reading success and score, but this study can be turned out to examine the effectiveness of different feedback types with different language proficiency levels. Furthermore, the teacher obtains their attitudes toward different feedback types and assesses the effectiveness of using introspected methods such as stimulated recall so as to produce fruitful results.

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