



## **Reading Strategies and Reading Diaries for Autonomous Learning in a Turkish Context**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper reports the findings of an action research that was conducted over the course of two years. The research investigated the role of using reading diaries and strategy instruction with English Language Teaching trainees to foster greater learner autonomy and looked into the language learning strategies used by these students. The findings indicate that the participants initially used fewer language learning strategies and in fewer combinations. Following the strategy instruction and use of reading diaries, they started using strategy clusters and chains. The results also show that reading diaries were instrumental in fostering learner autonomy and promoting use of metacognitive strategies, which in turn helped learners employ reading strategies more effectively. Finally, the results suggest that the students' initial use of ineffective reading strategies was a result of their approach to reading texts as input for L2, i.e. means to achieve their overall goals to learn the target language. The process of keeping reading diaries helped increase reflection on the effectiveness of the reading strategies used for actual reading goals.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Hudson remarks “the capacity to read is a truly wondrous human ability” drawing attention to the wide range of processes involved in making sense out of a written text (2007, p. 7). Indeed, it is widely accepted that reading is an interactive process where the reader is an active agent in the process of constructing meaning. It is also recognised that this process involves an interaction of both bottom-up and top-down processes (Hedge, 2000; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Hinkel, 2006). That is, the readers both process the information provided by the text, and use the background information they have collected and coded in schemas through their walks in life. This process is more demanding when reading in a foreign language. To understand the reading process and to help language learners become better readers, researchers and language teachers have been looking at what good readers do. Research investigating reading strategies (RS) used by good readers has been providing valuable insight into what is involved in reading in a foreign language and how to help less successful readers (Chamot, 2005).

### **Reading Strategies**

Zhang and Wu cite Cohen that RS are “those mental processes that readers consciously choose to use in accomplishing reading tasks” (2009, p. 39). Studies

looking into RS report that successful readers make inferences, use contextual clues to guess meaning of a vocabulary item, skip inessential vocabulary and use dictionary as a last resort, make predictions, read in broad phrases, scan, skim, summarise, paraphrase, simplify syntactic structures, activate background information and schemata, recognise genre and text structure, translate, use glossaries, visual information and imagery, keep meaning in mind, visualise and generate questions (Oxford, 2011; Erler & Finkbeiner, 2007; Malcolm, 2009; ; Carrell, Gajdusek & Wise, 1998; Zhang & Wu, 2009; McDonough, 1995). Research on RS also point out that successful readers use metacognitive strategies (Zhang & Wu, 2009). Metacognitive strategies help the learners plan their learning, select strategies and monitor and evaluate strategy use and learning (Anderson, 2002). Flavell and Wenden suggest that metacognitive knowledge includes person, task and strategy knowledge (Victori & Lockhart, 1995). Oxford proposes three more, i.e. group, whole process and conditional knowledge and claims that the first five types of metaknowledge contribute to conditional knowledge, i.e. “when, why and where to use a strategy” (2011, p. 21). Conditional knowledge, therefore, involves continuous monitoring, evaluation and planning of learning and is important in successful language learning (Anderson, 1991).

Oxford’s distinction of task knowledge and whole-process knowledge (2011) was a useful one for this research: While task knowledge is related to the learners’ task at hand, whole process knowledge is broader and is concerned with the learners’ knowledge of what is required in learning L2. Task knowledge is also commonly recognised to be influential in the selection of strategies to be used; more successful learners consider the task and use strategies appropriately (Oxford, 1990a). Hence, a strategy cannot be considered effective or ineffective on its own; instead a strategy can be used effectively depending on the context, task, purpose of reading, and so on (Zhang & Wu, 2009). Successful readers consider the context of their reading, their purpose, task at hand while selecting and employing RS in addition to monitoring and evaluating their reading (Zhang & Wu, 2009). To this end, language learning strategies should be goal oriented and involve combined use of strategies, “strategy clusters” or “strategy chains” (Cohen, 2007, p. 35) or “sequences of strategies” (Chamot, 2005, p. 116) depending on the nature of the task. Research findings consistently point out that less successful learners can use similar strategies to those used by more successful learners, however, the more successful readers use strategy clusters and monitor and evaluate their strategy use (Anderson, 1991; Vann & Abraham, 1990). Unsurprisingly, studies also report a positive correlation between high language proficiency and use of metacognitive strategies (Pinninti, 2016; Halbach, 2000). A study by Ikeda and Takeuchi (2006), for example, suggests that learners with higher proficiency has better conditional knowledge and can use strategy clusters compared to those with lower proficiency levels.

However, the relationship between language proficiency level and strategy use is not as clear cut as it may seem at first. Although research frequently points out that successful readers are those that use effective strategies or strategy clusters and metacognitive strategies; some studies point at a more complex relationship between strategy use and students’ context, purposes for reading, self-efficacy beliefs and past learning experiences. For example, Mihara (2011) reports a study where EFL learners were taught two pre-reading strategies: Vocabulary pre-teaching and pre-questioning. She found that although the pre-questioning strategy was more effective in the participants’ reading comprehension, the learners preferred pre-vocabulary teaching to pre-questioning, i.e., they chose to employ a strategy that had less influence in their

comprehension than a more effective one. Interestingly, higher proficiency level learners had higher preference for this less effective strategy than lower proficiency learners in Mihara's research (2011). This finding contradicts studies that report effective use of strategy clusters by higher proficiency learners and those that report a positive correlation between higher language proficiency and metacognitive strategies.

It is possible to see language learners using RS less effectively in other studies too. For example, in Ozek and Civelek's study (2006), EFL learners in Turkish context reported frequently using a wide range of RS. Yet, data from think aloud protocols showed a much less limited range of actual use of RS by these learners. In the same vein, in another study in Turkish context with English language teaching (ELT) students, infrequent use of RS for top-down processing, typically used by successful readers, was found (Akyel & Ercetin, 2009). Considering that ELT students are typically good language learners who have been learning English for at least nine years in the Turkish context, and that these students had to pass a very competitive reading oriented test to attend an ELT programme, this finding is surprising.

It is also possible to find similar findings in different contexts. Magogwe and Oliver (2007), report language learning strategies employed in Botswana context and warn us that the relationship between language learning strategies and learners' proficiency level is mediated "by a number of factors, including self-efficacy beliefs" (Magogwe and Oliver, 2007, p.350). In fact, Magogwe and Oliver's research (2007) is not the only one reporting learners' choice of strategy use influenced by factors other than their language proficiency level, age, learning style and gender, i.e. variables commonly researched in relation to strategy use. Zhang and Wu (2009), for example point out that their learners' strategy use might have been affected by the educational practices of the context in which learning takes place, drawing attention to the role of learners' past experiences in their strategy use. Similarly, He (2008) reports that EFL learners' motivational orientations for reading, i.e. mastery or performance orientation, play an important role in the strategies they use. Looking into the learners' motivational orientations and strategy use, Tercanlioglu and Demiroz (2015) point at an interesting direction with their finding that reading for improving English was the most commonly given purpose for reading in English for the participants of their study, i.e. ELT students in Turkish context. Improving vocabulary was another common purpose for reading, shared by all the participants in their study. Considering that metacognitive strategies and conditional knowledge are closely related to effective use of RS, and consideration of task at hand plays an important role in effective use of language learning strategies, the following question emerges: What happens to reading strategy use when the task of reading is underlain by the greater task of learning L2?

### **Strategy Instruction**

Research suggests that strategy instruction in reading result in better reading performance and higher degree of strategy use (Aghaie & Zhang, 2012; Zhang, 2008; Wichadee, 2011; Matsumoto, Hiromori & Nakayama, 2013; Sporer, Brunstein & Kieschke, 2009). There is evidence for a positive correlation between metacognitive strategy instruction and reading comprehension (Takallou, 2011; Cubukcu, 2008; Zhang & Wu, 2009); use of metacognitive strategies and successful reading (Wang, Spencer & Xing, 2009; Anderson, 1991; Mokhtari & Reichard, 2004) and level of language proficiency and use of metacognitive strategies (Block, 1992; Chamot, 2005; Malcolm, 2009; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). Salataci and Akyel (2002) report that following a reading strategy instruction, EFL learners in the Turkish context started

using fewer bottom-up strategies and more top-down strategies. In addition, they found that strategy instruction also increased metacognitive strategy use as the learners started monitoring their reading (*ibid.*). Similarly, Cubukcu (2008) looked specifically into effects of metacognitive strategy training on EFL learners' reading comprehension and vocabulary development in a five week study in Turkey and found that metacognitive strategy training improved reading comprehension.

Strategy instruction can be explicit or integrated, the former promoting metacognitive awareness to a greater degree (Chamot, 2005). Oxford (2011) suggests that effective strategy instruction is mostly explicit and that it involves demonstrating when a strategy would be helpful, modelling that strategy, creating opportunities for the learners to practice the same strategy and finally evaluating whether the strategy has indeed been useful for learning. Effective strategy instruction, Oxford (2011) suggests, should encourage learners to develop metacognitive awareness and self-reflection; encouraging the teachers and the learners to model LLS to each other. Similarly, Carrell et. al., (1998) suggest that strategy instruction should involve discussion of what a strategy is, why it is used, how, when and where to use that strategy, and the evaluation of it. Following the studies reviewed, this study too utilised explicit strategy instruction.

### **Learner Autonomy**

Learner autonomy (LA) is very frequently studied together with LLS, and for good reason: LLS play an invaluable role in learners assuming control of their own learning, be it through the use of cognitive, affective, social strategies to aid the learning process or through meta-strategies for continuous monitoring, goal setting, planning and reflection of their learning. Cotterall, for example, reports that her research indicates a relationship between metacognitive knowledge and readiness for autonomous learning (2009).

Research on LA has been generating interest for the last three decades in foreign language education. With growing recognition of human agency in foreign language education (see for example Vitanova et.al., 2015; Ryan & Irie, 2014; Norton, 2014; Gao, 2010; Mercer, 2011; Sealey & Carter, 2004; Benson, 2011), LA is still relevant in language learning and teaching because it operates within a framework where learners are recognised as conscious, active beings who are in need of making sense out of their learning, who are capable of reflecting on their actions and of making decisions regarding their learning. Autonomous learning entails a number of decisions to be made by the learner on what they would like to achieve and how, as well as decisions regarding one's progress and evaluation of their learning (Little, Ridley & Ushioda, 2002; Benson, 2011; Little, 2013; Benson, 2011). To do these, learners will need to monitor their learning and reflect on it continually. Indeed, studies on promoting LA utilise means to encourage reflection such as learner portfolios and diaries. Dam's studies, for example, suggest that use of learner logs increase reflection on learning (1995) and that learner logs are also valuable for creating room for learners to express their individuality (2009) and to exercise agency (Little, 2013).

### **Research Questions**

This study was a two year action research project. Initially the aim of the study was to answer the following question:

1) Do reading diaries and strategy instruction foster autonomous language learning?

Upon initial stages of data collection, as is the case with many action research projects, a second research question emerged:

2) Which reading strategies are used by the first year ELT students?

The course, which this study was conducted in, is a two academic term course aiming to improve students' reading and academic writing skills in English. Sixty five ELT first year students, over the course of 2 years, were asked to keep reading diaries to log their reading; recording their strengths and weaknesses in reading in English, weekly goals to work on their weaknesses and strategies used to achieve their goals both in and outside the lessons.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

All the participants, ELT students enrolled in Advanced Reading and Writing courses I and II at a university in Turkey, were highly motivated to learn English and were certified by the university as either B1 or B2 level learners. To attend the university, all students had to take a centralised university entrance exam, which measures students' grammar, vocabulary and reading skills through a multiple choice test. To prepare for this test, participants' language learning prior to entering the university had been shaped by multiple choice tests with grammar, vocabulary and comprehension questions for short reading paragraphs, as is the common practice for most students preparing to study language at university in Turkey. Unsurprisingly, in group interviews conducted at the beginning of each academic year, students reported that they believed reading was one of their strongest skills in English. Yet, they also reported that they were experiencing difficulties in reading authentic texts.

### Research Instruments

In this study, reading diaries, group interviews, Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) version 7.0 (1990b) and Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSİ) (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002) are used. The students were given SILL at the beginning of both academic years to investigate their LLS use prior to the strategy instruction in the study. At the beginning of the second academic year, the students were also given MARSİ to get a better insight into the students' use of metacognitive strategies prior to diary use as the data from the first year indicated an increase in participants' use of metacognitive strategies through the use of diaries. 65 participants in total from both years answered SILL while 37 participants from the second year answered MARSİ. Cronbach's Alpha for SILL is 0.917 and for MARSİ is 0.787, both of which are acceptable for exploratory research in social studies.

In addition to these, this research used reading diaries and semi-structured group interviews. As Chamot remarks, LLS are "identified through various self-report procedures" (2005, p. 113). Self-reports are admittedly subjective, thus, prone to low reliability, however, as Chamot (2005) puts forward, LLS are not observable and the only way to learn about them is to ask the learners themselves. Diaries are frequently used instruments to collect data on language learners' use of LLS as a method of self-report (Halbach, 2000; Chamot, 2005). Thus, the participants were asked to keep

reading diaries weekly and to answer a set of questions in their entries adapted from Dam (1995) inquiring the students' identified weakness(es) in reading; their goals for that week; their weekly plans to achieve their goals; how long they needed to read and/or study for their goals; whether or not they believed they achieved their goals at the end of the week; what grade they would give themselves out of 100 and what their next step in improving their reading would be. Students were expected to answer these questions in their reading diaries every week.

### **Procedure**

At the beginning of the first term of each year, the students were first given semi-structured group interviews. These interviews investigated participants' current reading habits in Turkish and in English in addition to their strengths and weaknesses in reading in English. In the second and the third weeks of the first academic term of each year, students were given explicit reading strategy instruction which involved modelling and practices of the RS instructed. These included underlining, highlighting, paraphrasing, syntactic simplification, guessing or skipping unknown words, visualisation, anticipating the content, taking notes, paying attention to headings, visual aids and text organisation, activating background information, finding keywords, summarising and re-reading. Next, the students were invited again to reflect on their weaknesses and adjust their plans accordingly. Then, the students were asked to work with four or five peers who reported to have the same weakness in groups, both in and outside the lessons. For the lessons, the participants were asked to find and bring reading texts that would help themselves and their group members improve their identified weaknesses. They were also encouraged to provide any activities, questions and materials that they believed their group members would benefit from. When the learners decided that they had achieved their goals and that they were ready to move on to working on another weakness, they were free to change their groups. Every week, the teacher-researcher held short discussions with individual learners on their diary entries for that week. The aim of this practice was to help the learners reflect on their progress and to provide guidance.

### **Data Analysis**

Students' reading diaries were collected at the end of each academic term and entries were discussed on weekly basis with the students. Students were made aware that their diaries would be analysed for their strategy use. Diary entries were analysed using content analysis. Strategies explicitly mentioned in each entry were tabulated. For example the entry "*I underlined the main clause*" was recorded as use of the underlining strategy while the entry "*I found the main clause first and then found the verb, skipped relative clauses*" was recorded as the use of syntactic simplification. Participants' goals and plans provided guidance at this stage. For example, "going to the library to read" was tabulated as a metaaffective strategy for a student who was using this strategy to avoid being easily distracted while reading. Yet, it was tabulated as a metacognitive strategy for another student whose goals was to integrate more reading time into her daily routine due to her problems with time management. Finally, descriptions of strategy use in entries were also analysed: For example, the entry "*Snuggle: 'When you snuggled up in bed, you grab the covers to pull them up and BAM! Your hand slips and you end up punching yourself in the face.' So I think it means 'nestle' here*" was recorded as guessing new words. Similarly, the entry

*“While I was reading, I looked up the dictionary for every word that I didn’t know the meanings of. But this took a lot of time and distracted my attention. I should find a solution to this”* was considered to be an example of monitoring.

## RESULTS

The results of SILL show that LLS were highly used by the participants (see Appendix 1 for the descriptive statistics of SILL). The least frequently used strategy was ‘writing down (one’s) feelings in a language learning diary, for which out of 65 participants, 38 students marked ‘never or almost never true’ while 16 students marked ‘usually not true’. The most frequently used strategy was ‘paying attention when someone is speaking English’ followed by ‘I watch English language TV shows in English or go to movies in English’ and ‘To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses’. The last strategy, together with another commonly used strategy, ‘I read English without looking up every word.’ stood out in conflict with the data from learners’ reading diaries, as will be discussed below.

MARSI returned similar results, participants’ overall use of RS was high (see Appendix 2). The most frequently used strategy was ‘When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I’m reading’ followed by ‘When text becomes difficult, I re-read to increase my understanding’ and ‘I try to get back on track when I lose concentration’. Guessing the meaning of unknown words or phrases is the fourth most common LLS, according to participants’ responses to MARSI. Fifteen participants reported that they always or almost always used this strategy and 14 reported they usually used it. Only two respondents answered they never, almost never or occasionally used this strategy. According to MARSI, the least frequently used strategy was skimming the text prior to reading it, followed by asking oneself questions they would like to be answered by the text.

As stated above, students were asked to keep reading diaries and a total of 65 diaries were analysed to find out about the participant’s reflections, goals and plans. For this, students’ identified weaknesses, plans, and RS used were also looked into. The group interviews held at the beginning of each academic year showed that the students’ most common strengths were their grammar and vocabulary knowledge and that they could identify the main idea of the text, they could skim and scan successfully, and read fast. The most commonly reported weakness in both years, ironically, also included vocabulary knowledge, getting bored, understanding long and complex sentences, missing details while reading, understanding colloquial English and lack of topic knowledge. Participants’ early entries in their diaries also show that getting bored, reported by 61 students, and vocabulary, reported by 60 students, were the most commonly identified reading weaknesses.

Analysis of the reading diaries showed that there was a pattern in the change of the participants’ strategies 4 weeks after the strategy training. Although some students started using a number of strategies from week 1, the majority of students, 38, report use of three or less cognitive, metacognitive or metaaffective strategies in conjunction with each other while reading a text in this period. Fifteen students reported using four strategies and 12 students reported using more than four RS within the initial four weeks following the strategy instruction. Metacognitive strategies of reflecting and planning were present in all entries in this period. Table 1 below shows the frequency of use of the cognitive and metaaffective strategies as reported in the diaries. Of 65 participants, only one student’s strategy use in these initial 4 weeks reported use of no vocabulary strategies.

**Table 1.** Initially used RS

<b>Strategy used</b>	<b>No of students</b>
Making vocabulary lists	37
Checking dictionaries	30
Guessing vocabulary	16
Selecting interesting texts/ topics to increase motivation for reading	13
Syntactic simplification	4
Studying grammar	3
Underlining	3
Noticing transition signals	2
Skimming	1
Reading about how to improve L2 reading	1

From week 5 on, 52 participants' diaries report an increase in the number of RS employed reading one text. This increase varies from individual to individual. While the lowest increase was by one to three additional strategies by 16 learners, the highest number of strategies used reading a text, 10-17, was employed by 12 students. Sixty participants' diaries report a wider range and distribution of RS use after week 4, that is, different RS used in different combinations with each other rather than a repetitive pattern of RS. Although vocabulary strategies were heavily used throughout the study, with the increase in the use of RS, they were not the only strategies used.

The findings from the diaries show a heavy use of checking dictionary while reading and this is in conflict with the results from both SILL and MARSİ. This also meant that the students were not trying strategies to deal with new vocabulary introduced in the strategy instruction such as guessing vocabulary items or simply skipping them. Therefore, further interviews were conducted to investigate this issue. The participants stated that they were aware of these strategies and that they used them while reading in Turkish. However, they also reported that they felt as though they had to learn each word in reading texts in English and that they simply could not leave a word without checking what it is, "it's like a compulsive disorder" one student suggested. Another explained why he could not just skip an unknown word in a text by saying the new word was "like an itch in his brain". Yet another student responded that he gets "very angry with himself" when he sees a word he does not know while reading; so much so that he just wants to "chuck the text in the bin." These responses suggest that although the participants are aware of more effective RS, they approached reading texts in English not as readers but as language learners, i.e. the text was a source of input for the target language rather than a means of communication. And this was influential in the RS they chose to use.

Reading diaries show that the less effective reading strategy of using the dictionary for every word was decreased after the initial period of 4 weeks, since it was found "time consuming" and "distracting". It should be noted here that in our weekly discussions of their diary entries, the participants were continually implored to monitor the effectiveness of the strategies they used to improve their identified weaknesses and to achieve their set goals. Below are some examples from the participants' diaries:

*"when I stop reading to look up unknown words, my concentration is easily disturbed"*

*"... actually looking up every word makes me get bored."*

(After looking up each new word in the dictionary) *“But it got me away from reading and made me forget the story. So I couldn’t concentrate. Then I solved this problem by just underlining the unknown words”*

In addition to the decrease in checking dictionary, after week 4, sixteen new students started guessing new words in a total of 125 entries. The successful use of this strategy, however, was mostly dependant on the ratio of the new words in the text and students’ background and topic knowledge. Below are some examples of students’ entries regarding the use of this strategy:

*“Generally, the words are connected to each other and all newspapers use similar words, so it’s getting easier to understand the words.”*

*“So I realised that if I have background knowledge about a subject or I don’t see vocabulary as a big problem ... I can understand the whole passage by guessing meaning of words.”*

Other vocabulary strategies adopted were categorising words, using semantic maps, skipping new words, semantic mapping, using corpus, selecting texts from a wide range of topics and genres for the purposes of vocabulary learning, noticing synonyms, antonyms and colloquial English and collocations in reading and using these in their vocabulary notebooks. The diary entries show that students planned for improving their vocabulary knowledge and chose reading texts according to their plans:

*“I like reading advertisements specifically because I can see different structures and words. For example ‘Jeans that instantly slim you.’”*

*“I’m going to find comics (to learn) words in speaking”*

*“(I’m going to find out) positive and negative personality words in horoscopes”*

Table 2 below shows the cognitive and affective strategies noted in the participants’ diaries.

**Table 2.** RS used after week 4

<b>Strategy used</b>	<b>No of students</b>
<b>Cognitive strategies</b>	
Making vocabulary lists	37
Guessing vocabulary	32
Checking words from a dictionary	30
Keeping a vocabulary notebook	15
Using vocabulary in diary, in a narrative or in sentences in writing or in speech	14
Dividing sentence into parts/ syntactic simplification	14
Finding/ developing/ activating background information about the text	13
Asking questions to the text	12
Underlining key words, new vocabulary, specific information, etc.	11
Noticing punctuation, transition signals, coherence	9
Reading about how to improve L2 reading	9
Noticing colloquial language	8

Semantic mapping	8
Word cards	8
Categorising vocabulary thematically	7
Skimming	7
Studying collocations, synonyms, antonyms	6
Skipping vocabulary	6
Making predictions (vocabulary and content)	6
Using corpus	5
Time management	5
Reading aloud	4
Analysing the language/ discourse/ text organisation	4
Studying grammar	3
Paying attention to and studying word formation, suffixes, prefixes, stems	3
Studying proverbs, idioms	2
Re-reading	2
Outlining	2
Summarising	2
Translating to L1	2
Timing oneself	1
Noticing grammar	1
Finding main idea	1
Reading for global understanding	1
Finding and answering comprehension questions	1
Reading for details	1
Reading slowly	1
Noticing visuals	1
Note taking	1
<b>Affective Strategies</b>	
Selecting interesting texts to increase one's motivation for reading	26
Persistence in reading even when one is bored	12
Arranging physical environment, removing distractions, finding a quiet place, taking breaks, etc.	3
Treating oneself for finishing reading	2
Highlighting sentences that one liked	1

Some excerpts from participants' diaries noting use of cognitive strategies are as follows:

*"I underlined/highlighted the words I found important/people's names/ examples."*

*"I made short notes next to the text."*

*"We (group members) wrote questions (about the text before they read) and made lists of words. It helped a lot to understand the text."*

*"We look at it (the text) first and if it's a newspaper then you see certain things like politics, economy."*

*"We read (a text) about ancient civilizations and we talked about the civilizations before we read (it). I was still bored while reading but I think it helps to learn about the topic of passage before reading it."*

*"It was a long article but I highlighted the benefits of the programme to keep them in mind"*

Reading diaries also showed that throughout the study, the most commonly used RS were metacognitive strategies for these participants, which was anticipated given the questions students were asked to answer in their diaries. The participants' plans to improve their reading included making a list of topics and genres to read to improve their topic and background knowledge; to find a genre they enjoy reading, making plans and schedule for the amount of time they needed to work on their weakness every week and the strategies they intended to use. Below are some examples of these strategies in use.

*"I must read different subjects (to improve my vocabulary)"*

*"I'll try skimming first"*

*"I'll use (computer and phone) software in English. It looks stupid but I believe (it is) really effective"*

*"I'll keep a vocabulary notebook"*

*"I pay attention to reading regularly. I mean (I read) every day even if it is for five pages."*

*"I'll find myself a peaceful place to read."*

*"From now on I will try to learn information about the place where the story takes place. It is also important to know about the author."*

*"My aim was to read for 6 hours a week. I did it this week, next week I'll read for 8 hours"*

The entries also included students' assessment of their reading and a record of their monitoring of their strategy use. It is possible to see that the students set themselves new goals as the old ones are achieved and that they constantly challenged themselves:

*"This week I decided to change my study team because I think I'm done with vocabulary. It (new vocabulary) doesn't prevent me from reading and I think there'll always be some words that I don't know the meanings of."*

*"While I was reading the news, I realised that I have difficulty in guessing the meanings of unknown words. I can confess that I got rid of one of my weakness that is getting bored, but another weakness appeared. It is unknown words."*

*"It was an easy story ... I have to find one which is much more challenging"*

*"I don't like reading about some topics, however, I know if I don't face my fears, I can't be successful in life. So I decided to choose one of (the topics I don't like)"*

Students' challenging themselves was most visible in the grades students' were asked to give themselves for their efforts for that week. On average students graded themselves between 50-85 out of 100 and worked towards their weekly goals between 2-10 hours every week outside the classroom. When asked what else they believed they needed to do to give themselves higher grades, they responded, they needed to 'read more, spend more hours studying, read more fluently, read more difficult texts, read for a longer period of time before getting bored, and read any genre/ topic with ease'.

The students monitored their reading with regard to their text selection, strategy use and overall reading comprehension:

*“The news about the earthquake in Turkey was easy to understand because I know the places and what happened but not the letter (written by Einstein to Roosevelt) because I don’t have the background information.”*

*“This (text) was not the right choice for me”*

*“I’m fine if I select the following topics”*

*“It’s more difficult to guess words when I don’t know much about the topic”*

*“I realise that if the reading text doesn’t have many new words, it’s interesting to read it”*

*“Actually I tried to read this book last year. But the first time, I got bored. This time, I read about WWII before I read it and I enjoyed the book.”*

*“I don’t know anything about the Big Bang. It’s very difficult to read when I don’t know the subject”*

*“Reading a novel is a good way for me to focus. As there is a line of events, I can focus and I’m more eager to read.”*

In addition to metacognitive strategies, participants also used affective and metaaffective strategies. Some participants identified getting bored and losing concentration as their weakness and chose to work on this. While some of these students decided that they were getting bored due to the level of their linguistic competence and chose to work to improve this, others planned to overcome their weakness through selecting topics and genres that they found engaging, yet others developed their own affective strategies. One participant, for example, treated herself to reading in Turkish every time she achieved her goals for that week. While two students found the library to be a good place to read in English, three others removed their mobile phones before they started reading to remove any distractions and one decided that having a light snack before reading helped her stay focused for longer. Similar to metacognitive strategies used, these students too monitored the effect of the changes they made in their physical environment to see if they needed to alter their plans for the following weeks.

## DISCUSSIONS

The participants in this study were highly motivated learners with high levels of proficiency. They had been learning English for at least nine years and they were good language learners who continued their studies in English to become language teachers. These learners were similar to that of Ozek and Civelek (2006) in that their responses to SILL and MARSİ also showed that these learners were aware of RS and that they did use them. However, data from their reading diaries showed that the participants were relying on a limited number of strategies regardless of the reading texts or their purposes in reading those texts. In other words, their diaries showed a lack of conditional knowledge, knowledge of ‘when, why and where to use a strategy’ and in combination of which others.

As reviewed above, good language learners use LLS in clusters or chains considering the task, purpose and context (Cohen, 2007) and in this study, the

participants started using a wider range of RS in clusters after the first four weeks of the first academic term of each year. In the first four weeks of the first academic term, 53 participants reported using four or less RS in each entry. After this initial period, there was an increase in the number of RS they used. Their initial strategies were not abandoned but were used less frequently and in combination with other RS, as shown in Table 2.

Data also suggests that strategy training and the use of reading diaries helped learners reflect on the effectiveness of the strategies they used for their particular weekly reading goals and this reflection led the learners to adopt different strategies and in different combinations. The diaries were vital in increasing reflection as the diary questions adapted from Dam (1995) and weekly sessions on individual students' diary entries, prompted the students to regularly use metacognitive strategies: monitoring, planning, evaluation of strategy use. Keeping reading diaries worked as a natural extension of strategy instruction in that it helped create a systematic framework encouraging the learners to practice metacognitive and metaaffective strategies, which is an essential aspect of strategy instruction as Oxford (2011) remarks.

This research also sought to answer whether or not keeping reading diaries would help foster autonomous language learning. As Benson (2011) suggests, measuring the extent of LA is problematic for a number of reasons. Autonomous learning, however, is often reviewed with, reflection, metacognition, LLS use, ability and willingness to locate resources and take action. The data from reading diaries show constant use of metacognitive strategies. Depending on their weekly reading goals, students looked for and selected texts to read and decided on the strategies and activities they would adopt to achieve those goals. The learners' diary entries also show continuous monitoring of their reading and strategy use. In fact, metacognitive strategies were the most commonly used RS in learners' reading diaries. The participants were also able and willing to control a number of issues in their learning both outside the classroom and in the reading lessons to achieve their weekly goals set in their diaries: The length and focus of their work both in and outside the lessons, the course materials, and assessment of their work. Diary entries show that the learners set themselves a number of goals to overcome their identified weaknesses in reading and were engaged in extracurricular work to achieve their goals. The findings also point out that the participants kept setting new goals for themselves as they believed they achieved the old ones.

One interesting finding was the heavy use of an ineffective reading strategy by the participants. Both SILL and MARSII results showed that the learners were aware of more effective strategies for particular tasks and interviews revealed that they used these more effective strategies while reading in their native language. Considering these participants were good language learners and had been studying English for at least nine years at the time of the study, overreliance on ineffective vocabulary strategies was an unexpected result. However, as reviewed above, there are studies that report ineffective use of LLS by language learners with high language proficiency (Akyel & Ercetin, 2009; Anderson, 1991; Mihara 2011; Ozek & Civelek, 2006). In the case of this study, further inspection pointed out the role of learners' approach to the text or their goal orientations on their use of RS. Similar to Tercanlioglu and Demiroz's findings (2015), the participants of this study too approached reading as a means to improve their English, and particularly their vocabulary. This inevitably affected their reading strategy use. As argued above, LLS should be goal oriented (Cohen, 2007), but in the case of these participants, their overall goals as language learners resulted in ineffective use of RS. It is reviewed above that Oxford (2011) suggests whole-process

knowledge in addition to task knowledge as part of metacognitive strategies. In this study, the participants' knowledge of the whole process of learning a language, arguably shaped by their past learning experiences, superseded their task knowledge and influenced their strategy use. The reading diaries were instrumental in helping learners see the discrepancy between their weekly reading goals and their RS use, drawing attention to the task. In other words, the reading diaries helped learners "stand back" and reflect on their reading (Ridley, 1997, p. 3).

Finally, the results of this study also suggest that researching strategy use and strategy training, there is a need to look beyond commonly researched variables such as gender, age and culture; and that there is a need to understand learners as active agents who engage in tasks with their own agendas, learning histories, goals, and plans. This will not only provide more insight into the successful use of LLS, but also will help improve the overall process of learning and teaching.

### CONCLUSION

This action research sought to look into the role of RS instruction and reading diaries in fostering greater learner autonomy and into the RS used by the participants. The results suggest that reading diaries and strategy instruction were instrumental in fostering LA. The diaries were influential in promoting use of metacognitive strategies. Also they were valuable in helping participants reflect on the effectiveness of the RS used, resulting in adaptations or change in these RS. Findings also point out that the learners made a number of decisions regarding their learning such as identifying weaknesses, setting goals and finding the resources as well as the time and method to dedicate to improve their weaknesses. Finally, the results of this study suggest that language learners' choice of LLS can be affected by their greater goals as language learners. Therefore, further research looking into understanding language learners as agents will be invaluable in understanding LLS too.

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## Appendix A

**Table A.** Descriptive statistics of SILL

Item no	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
item 1	I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	4.03774	0.831178
item 2	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	3.73585	0.943621
item 3	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help remember the word.	3.22642	1.203225
item 4	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	3.20755	1.203225
item 5	I use rhymes to remember new English words.	2.52830	1.102511
item 6	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	2.54717	1.202018
item 7	I physically act out new English words.	2.50943	1.170513
item 8	I review English lessons often	3.09434	1.060917
item 9	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	3.66038	1.300050
item 10	I say or write new English words several times.	3.47170	1.234189
item 11	I try to talk like native English speakers.	3.47170	1.119818
item 12	I practice the sounds of English.	3.71698	0.948224
item 13	I use the English words I know in different ways.	3.45283	0.798220
item 14	I start conversations in English.	3.30189	0.972406
item 15	I watch English language TV shows in English or go to movies in English.	4.24528	0.998184
item 16	I read for pleasure in English.	3.20755	1.080571
item 17	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	3.20755	1.245893
item 18	I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.	3.50943	1.249964
item 19	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	3.41509	1.063990
item 20	I try to find patterns in English.	3.13208	0.920655
item 21	I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	3.05660	1.215526
item 22	I try not to translate word-for-word.	3.67925	1.252284
item 23	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English	3.03774	1.192319
item 24	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	4.24528	0.806361
item 25	When I cannot think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	3.81132	1.038797
item 26	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	3.22642	1.250254
item 27	I read English without looking up every new word.	3.84906	1,081243
item 28	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	3.20755	1.080571

item 29	If I cannot think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	3.94340	1.026853
item 30	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	3.54717	1.048186
item 31	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	3.84906	0.863718
item 32	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	4.54717	0.666969
item 33	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	4.11321	0.973897
item 34	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	3.00000	1.255756
item 35	I look for people I can speak English.	3.62264	1.130460
item 36	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	3.09434	1.113970
item 37	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	3.67925	1.051987
item 38	I think about my progress in learning English.	3.98113	0.843312
item 39	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	3.69811	0.991985
item 40	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	3.32075	1.189272
item 41	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	2.56604	1.308396
item 42	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	3.90566	1.131101
item 43	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	1.66038	1.073158
item 44	I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	3.03774	1.270407
item 45	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	4.11321	0.933570
item 46	I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	2.84906	1.364329
item 47	I practice English with other students.	3.09434	1.274968
item 48	I ask for help from English speakers.	2.90566	1.417801
item 49	I ask questions in English.	3.67925	1.070111
item 50	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	3.69811	1.233895

## Appendix B

**Table B.** Descriptive statistics of MARSI

Item no	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
Item 1	I have a purpose in mind when I read	3.8571	0.75593
Item 2	I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read	2.6429	1.09593
Item 3	I think about what I know to help me understand what I read	3.1429	0.89087
Item 4	I preview the text to see what it's about before reading it.	3.7500	1.35058
Item 5	When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read	2.7500	1.53055
Item 6	I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text.	2.5357	1.31887
Item 7	I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose	3.5357	1.20130
Item 8	I read slowly but carefully to be sure I understand what I'm reading.	3.8571	0.97046
Item 9	I discuss what I read with others to check my understanding.	3.1429	1.17739
Item 10	I skim the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization.	2.3571	1.02611
Item 11	I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	4.1786	0.86297
Item 12	I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	3.8571	1.07890
Item 13	I adjust my reading speed according to what I'm reading.	3.7143	1.11744
Item 14	I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.	3.5714	0.92009
Item 15	I use reference materials such as dictionaries to help me understand what I read.	3.5000	0.96225
Item 16	When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I'm reading.	4.2500	0.96705
Item 17	I use tables, figures, and pictures in text to increase understanding.	2.7143	1.21281
Item 18	I stop from time to time and think about what I'm reading.	3.4643	1.03574
Item 19	I use context clues to help me better understand what I'm reading.	3.2143	1.06657
Item 20	I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.	2.6786	1.05597
Item 21	I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read.	3.3214	1.46701
Item 22	I use typographical aids like bold face and italics to identify key information.	2.5714	1.10315
Item 23	I critically analyse and evaluate the information presented in the text.	2.7857	1.10075
Item 24	I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it.	3.3571	1.28277
Item 25	I check my understanding when I come across conflicting information.	3.9643	0.88117

Item 26	I try to guess what the material is about when I read.	3.8214	0.90487
Item 27	When text becomes difficult, I re-read to increase my understanding.	4.2143	1.06657
Item 28	I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text.	2.5000	1.07152
Item 29	I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.	3.3571	1.28277
Item 30	I try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	4.0714	1.05158