Reading Theories in Reading Education

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Abstract: *Reading has been an important concept throughout the history. Reading drawing the attention of the experts is of great importance. Some read for specific purposes such as academic whereas the others read just for pleasure. Regardless of what purpose it is, reading is a process and skill that can be improved. Each person has his/her own reading habit and methods. This study reviews an overall theoretical framework of reading. In this respect, nine different predominant theories in reading and reading education throughout the history will be examined in detail. Reading has been remarkably important today and unconscious reading strategies cause too much waste of time. This article aims to assist learners and instructors to overcome difficulties in reading and streamline reading habits.*

Keywords: *Reading, reading theories, reading education.*

Okuma Eğitiminde Okuma Teorileri

Öz: *Okuma tarih boyunca önemli bir olgu olmuştur. Tarih boyunca uzmanların ilgisini çeken okuma, günümüzde de çok büyük öneme sahiptir. Bazı insanlar akademik gibi özel amaçlar için okurken bazıları sadece vakit geçirmek için okumaktadır. Her ne sebeple olursa olsun, okuma geliştirilebilen bir süreç ve beceridir. Her insanın kendine özgü okuma alışkanlığı ve yöntemleri vardır. Bu makale, okumayla ilgili kapsamlı bir teorik çerçeveyi ele almaktadır. Bu bağlamda, tarih boyunca, okuma ve okuma eğitimindeki dokuz farklı temel teori detaylı bir şekilde ele alınacaktır. Okuma günümüzde son derece önemlidir ve bireylerin bilinçsiz okuma stratejileri oldukça fazla zaman kaybına sebep olmaktadır. Bu makale, öğrencilere ve öğreticilere okuma zorluklarının üstesinden gelmede ve okuma alışkanlıklarını geliştirmede yardımcı olmayı amaç edinmektedir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Okuma, okuma teorileri, okuma eğitimi*

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Introduction

Reading dates back to the invention of writing in Mesopotamia during the 4th millennium BC. Throughout the history, human beings have developed written symbols to present their spoken words. Sumerian logographs during 4000 BC were just pictures of activities and objects. Aristotle indicated the relationship between spoken language and written language as: "Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience, and written words are the symbols of spoken words." Speech is a natural and biological form of human beings over 6000 million years whereas reading is an invention synchronized with the invention of writing.

Written texts are now important for the humans to access information. "There is nothing outside the text." a pronouncement by Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), a French philosopher, shows the importance of written text. According to this pronouncement, humans perceive the world through the texts but each text means different things to each person. There are many reasons why human beings feel need to read. For example, people read for some specific purposes such as pleasure, academic, information and so on. For instance, people who read for pleasure use books or newspapers. They follow the latest books and novels. As for the academic purpose, academicians have to follow the update articles or books related to their topics. People reach the information through the texts. They read newspapers, books and they sometimes use the internet

1. Reading

It is usually considered that reading as a simple process and see it just reading the words in linear fashion and accept their meaning one at a time. In fact, it is more than this. In order to have a better understanding of how much complex the reading is, it will be useful to see what some experts have said about reading. It was stated that:

> *Literacy practices are almost always fully integrated with, interwoven into, constituted as part of, the very texture of wider practices that involve talk, interaction, values, and beliefs* (Gee, 1996, p. 41).

Another expert argued that:

> *Reading "...leads to recognizing 'the message' not as something given in advance - or given at all - but as something created by interaction between writers and readers as participants in a particular communication situation* (Harris, 2005, p. 214).

One of the earliest definitions of comprehension of process was made by Thorndike (1917) by using the thought process employed in mathematics:

> Understanding a paragraph is like solving a problem in mathematics.
> It consists in selecting elements of the situation and putting them

> together in the light relations, and also with the right amount of weight
> or influence or force for each...all under the influence of the right mental
> set or purpose or demand" (p. 431).

As it can be understood, reading is not just reading words, it is a complex process involving varieties of skills coming together. What might be the characteristics of a reader? It is stated that proficient readers are those who are aware of the purpose for reading and approach the reading with that purpose in their minds and they use variety of strategies that have attested useful for them in the past when reading similar texts for similar purposes, which puts the importance of the experience forward (Irvin, 1990). Reading is also a complex process in that being a good reader also requires vocabulary usage strategy (Irvin, 1990). They are well aware of when unknown words may affect their purpose for reading and when they may not. In such a situation, good readers have some strategies to decipher the meaning of the words by means of the whole text. They try to guess the meaning from the text by using their prior knowledge and experiences. Proficient readers make predictions which are made available by their prior knowledge and experiences (Irvin, 1990).

Reading in L2 is a dynamic and interactive process in which learners make use of L1 related knowledge and real-world knowledge as well as their own personal purposes and goals, to arrive at an understanding of written material (Aebersold & Field, 1997: ix). On the other hand, reading comprehension is "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002, p. 11).

Reading is described as having three stages: logographic, alphabetic and orthographic. In the logographic stage, readers apply non-phonemic visual, contextual or graphic cues to read words (Frith, 1985). Logographic readers associate the words with colour or shape (Bryne, 1992 & Ehri, 1994). They are not aware of grapheme-phoneme correspondence.

In the alphabetic stage, readers are aware of grapheme-phoneme relations. In other words, they make correspondence between the spelling and pronunciations of words. Alphabetic stage learners are those who are able to use phonological knowledge (Ehri, 1994). The last stage, orthographic stage, grows thanks to the sound understanding of the alphabetic principle and understanding of the grapheme-phoneme correspondence. An orthographic knowledge of a reader grows when s/he starts to decode words comprising of the same patterns.

In Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia in the Internet, reading comprehension is defined as the level of understanding of a writing. Regardless of which ethnic groups and socio-economic levels are the readers, as reading failure is experienced by many people, it is more than poverty, migration or first language interference (Lyon, 1997). Some researchers have studied the reading difficulties which stem from the deficits in phonemic awareness, poor decoding skills or word recognition problems (Adams, 1990, Bryne, 1992 & Ehri, 1994). Another reason for which the readers experience difficulties

in reading comprehension is poor word recognition or an inability to decode (Kingham, 2003). The general belief is that poor oral reading fluency is the primary cause of reading comprehension failure (Kingham, 2003). Notwithstanding, there were others who fail to comprehend in spite of being able to read accurately and fluently (Kingham, 2003).

According to Snow, Burns & Griffin (1998), in order to prevent reading difficulties, every child ought to take high quality balanced reading instruction at elementary levels. Torgesen (2002) carried out a research to provide practical advice about methods to prevent reading failure that is grounded in the new knowledge. Reading comprehension counts on readers' experiences, knowledge of language and syntactic structure and the redundancy of the text (Lipson, Mosenthal, & Mekkelsen, 1999). Hence, reading comprehension is a complex and difficult task which requires grasping the normal process and background before focusing on reading comprehension failure.

Reading has never been away from humans' lives due to the many reasons, some of which were stated above. It has always drawn researchers and language researchers' noteworthy attention since the advent of the alphabet. In today's information age, it is of crucial importance to make reading owing to the increasing globalization and need to gain information. Below, some major issues related to L2 reading and reading instructions will be explained.

1.1. Reading Education

Despite many theories, some of which date back to ancient time, "yet no theories exist which sufficiently describe and explain how people accomplish the complete task of reading real-world texts" (Moorman & Ram, 1994, p. 646). Most of the researches have been carried out over the last three decades have altered our view of reading as a sole process of decoding (Ball & Blachman, 1991). In the last few years, the phonological awareness and decoding skills of readers with reading disabilities have been identified as serious. In an attempt to improve comprehension, several theories have occurred to influence understanding of the teaching reading comprehension: schema theory, reader-response theory, and direct instruction. Brief descriptions of these theories will provide the background knowledge for interpreting the instructional practices related to teaching reading comprehension.

Schema theory (Anderson & Pearson, 1984) suggests that the amount of our knowledge about a topic influences how much we can learn by reading the target passage. In other words, our knowledge and experiences related to key ideas of the target text influence what we learn and recall about the text. The more the reader knows and learns about the topic, the easier s/he understands the latter passages on that topic. As for the reader-response theory (Beach, 1993), learners' experiences and interpretations of these experiences are put into initial point. The understanding of the reader is related to his/her experiences. Hence, readers' learning and their responses to texts are individualistic. The third one, direct instruction approach is associated with improved outcomes in reading

comprehension for students with learning disabilities (Darch & Kameenui, 1987). This approach is more explicit and systematic. For instance, since the text is composed of words and word meanings are related to understanding, it is required from the instructions or teachers to indentify key words in a passage and to give their meaning before the reading.

However, despite these recent reading theories, the reading education dates back to ancient times. Thus, it will be useful to give a brief picture of these theories (Tracey, 2006) from ancient times onwards.

1.1.1. Predominant Learning Theories in Reading Education

There are many learning theories in reading education but the dominant ones will be explained in this chapter. These theories are named as Mental Discipline Theory, Associationism, Unfoldment Theory, and Structuralism. Some sub-theories will also be mentioned here.

2.2.1.1. Mental Discipline Theory

Mental Discipline Theory was one of the first crucial historical theories. It dates back to the writings of the ancient philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. Despite the fact that many philosophers in ancient Greece tried to understand the universe, they were Plato and Aristotle who first tried to explain the universe by means of relational items (Gutek, 1972). Aristotle enlarged the theory of mind developed by Plato. They compared the mind to a muscle. A muscle needs to be practiced at regular intervals in order to function well and become strong, which has an important role for the sportsmen. They have to exercise regularly so as to function well and become strong. According to Plato and Aristotle, like muscle, mind also needs to be practiced regularly in order to function well, and become strong, which can be regarded as the earliest definition of Mental Discipline Theory. This theory is summarized as:

> "The central idea in mental discipline is that the mind, envisioned as a nonphysical substance, lies dormant until it is exercised. Faculties of the mind such as memory, will, reason, and perseverance are the "muscles of the mind"; like physiological muscles, they are strengthened only through exercise, and subsequent to their adequate exercise they operate automatically. Thus, learning is a matter of strengthening, or disciplining, the faculties of the mind, which combine to produce intelligent behaviour. (Bigge & Shermis, 1992, p. 21)"

This theory has been widely accepted and used by most of the educators since ancient times. Educators and learners are of the opinion that learners' minds need to be exercised and strengthened in order to develop like muscles. Philosophy has also dealt with the subject that learning occurs.

2.2.1.2. Associationism

Associatinism is the second educational and psychological theory, which can also be traced back to ancient times, and it deals with the subject how learning occurs. Again the earliest philosopher of this theory was Aristotle. There are three kinds of associations with regard to this theory identified by Aristotle: contiguity, similarity and contrast (Tracey, 2006).

Contiguity is related to things that occur together in space or time. These things can become associated with each other in mind. For instance, student, teacher, class, blackboard, director, school, oral exam, written exam and so on are the things that are associated with each other. These are very common at school. We can say that when we think of an item, we can remember other things that are related to the items we have in our mind. In other words, we think what the new item reminds us of. Similarity is the second type of association. Here people can easily remember the things that have common properties. For instance, if one has difficulty in remembering the family names, he can organize them: female ones and male ones. In other words, he can categorize them according to their characteristics. The third type of association is contrast. Learners learn the items with their contrasts: long with short, beautiful with ugly, strong with weak and so on. These associations are interwoven, so people sometimes could use all these three types at the same time.

John Locke (1632-1704) was one of the most popular associationists (Tracey, 2006). He challenged the idea that humans are born with the knowledge. His theory of learning was Tabula Rasa – "Black Tablet" Theory. What brings to this Black Tablet is the experience. People are born without any knowledge. According to this theory, all kinds of learning occur as a consequence of his / her interactions with the environment. To Locke, there are two kinds of experience: internal and external experience. In external experience, human beings experience the external world by means of his five sense organs. Here the human brain is totally a receiver and in a passive manner. On the other hand, human beings experience what goes on in his mind. According to him, all the ideas in human mind stem from either the first one or the second one. Unlike Aristotle, John Locke focused on the importance of external factors in learning more (Tracey, 2006). However, they both dealt with the knowledge on the grounds that the crucial issue was the way by which knowledge is constructed. Today most of the books, especially the vocabulary ones, are prepared with regard to associationism, which proves that a 2000 year-old- theory is still applicable.

2.2.1.3. Unfoldment Theory

From the 18th century onwards, some theorists have argued that learning occurs through a natural unfolding of the mind, which put the individual curiosity and interest into the initial point and J. J. Rousseau (1712-1778) was one of the earliest theorists who studied this theory (Tracey, 2006). According to this theory, educators should follow

children's leads with regard to learning. As he clearly showed in his prominent novel *Emile,* if a child is forced to learn something that does not interest him, he will not learn sufficiently. In his novel, a child away from the society is left to follow his own instincts and curiosity. The novel, *Emile,* consists of two parts. In the first part, Emile is a child living in a rural area and is breastfed. In the second part of the novel, Emile, who becomes an orphan child, is now given to a teacher who is regarded as a social representative and a social leader. In this part, he is let free in nature. Emile is to follow the nature in order to survive. In other words, J. J. Rousseau put the nature into the initial point, that is, children learn by means of play.

Tracey (2006) states that Pestalozzi (1746-1827) was influenced by Rousseau and he added the importance of informal instruction from adults. Furthermore, he built a school to implement his theory. In this school, everything designed for the needs of students and teachers was provided with necessary instructions. To Pestalozzi, children need formal instructions from the adults. He argued that it is not the nature that gives the social morality, intellectual information and good behaviours to human beings. According to him, the child takes instructions from his parents and teachers. Froebel (1782-1852) developed Pestalozzi's theory after his death and added the importance of play in children's learning (Tracey, 2006).

2.2.1.4. Structuralism

Structuralism is regarded to be the first major school in psychology. Structuralism was introduced to linguistics by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913). It is an approach to analyze a specific field as a complex system of interrelated parts. This theory was soon applied to nearly all other fields, and became popular in the second quarter of the twentieth century. This theory focused on the structure of mind through perception. Early scientific studies of research by Wilhelm Wundt dates back to the late 1870s. He dealt with the reading process such as letters and word recognition and so on. Raphael (1996, as cited in Tracey, D. 2006, p. 23-24) summarized the structuralism as:

> From the late 1800s through the early 1900s, psychologists focused on reading as a perceptual process, primarily measuring perception of print (i.e., single letters, words) through reaction time studies, or focused on areas such as eye–voice span, speed of reading, and lip movements during silent reading (see Venezky, 1984, for a review of this research). Within these lines of research, virtually no attention was paid to whether or not the readers had comprehended the text— either because connected text was not used or because meaning construction was beyond the purview of the study. Thus, despite research reflecting what Venezky termed "the golden years" (1984, p. 7), in hindsight, psychology had little to say about the complex processes of literacy that must be understood to influence the development of literate youngsters through formal education. . . . (as cited in Tracey, D. 2006, p. 23-24, p. 553)

According to this theory, someone's problem may derive from the factors that are related to the quality of print. This theory suggests that a learner's reading problem may derive from the factors related to print perception changing the size of the print and the type and colour of the font in the text may facilitate learner's reading.

2.2.1.5. Behaviourism

Behaviourism focused on the observable changes. There are three types of theories with regard to this theory: Classical Conditioning Theory, Connectionism and Operant Conditioning Theory (Tracey, 2006).

Classical Conditioning Theory is famous for Pavlov's dogs. Dogs begin to salivate when they hear the bell because they are always given the food after the bell. So, they associate the bell with the food. For instance, three years ago, I had five or six keys that were attached to my trousers, and the classes were at the ground floor of the Social Institute. I usually went down the stairs fast and my students got used to the sound of keys and they said that we could understand that you were coming as Pavlov's dogs in a humorous way. So, they could associate the sound of keys with me.

According to connectionism by Edward Thorndike, if stimuli occur after behaviour, it means that it has influence on future behaviours. Connectionism comprised four laws (Tracey, 2006):

1. The law of effect: If satisfying events follow behaviours, they are probably repeated and vice versa. For example, if a parent gives presents for the success of his child, this success is likely to repeat.

2. The Law of Readiness: According to this law, task should follow an order from the easiest ones to the most difficult ones. In other words, easiest aspects of any task should be given first, and then the difficult ones should come. For instance, a primary school child who is learning the four basic arithmetic operations should start the process with the addition, and subtraction. Then multiplication and division come. Anyone can do simple additions and subtractions by dint of help. For example, 2+2=4 (two plus two is equal to four) can be done by means of hand, and this operation can also be done in mind. The child adds two. In fact, multiplication and division require more than this: 3*3=9 (three times three is equal to nine). Here the learner can do addition in a different way. He should add three to three and then once more. It is a bit difficult process.

3. The Law of Identical Elements: Here the transfer of identical elements from situation to another one is the main point. According to this theory, the mind consists of some powers such as reasoning, attention, judgment, and the memory.

4. The Law of Exercise: It means that the more you exercise, the easier you learn. It reminds of the Mental Discipline Theory. Mind needs exercising to improve.

Operant Conditioning Theory by Skinner extended the behavioural approach by dint of focusing on the relationships between behaviour and its consequences (Tracey, 2006).

In other words, it deals with the use of reinforcement and punishment. According to this theory, the antecedents of the new behaviour involve the consequences of the previous behaviour. It can be shown as in figure 2.1.
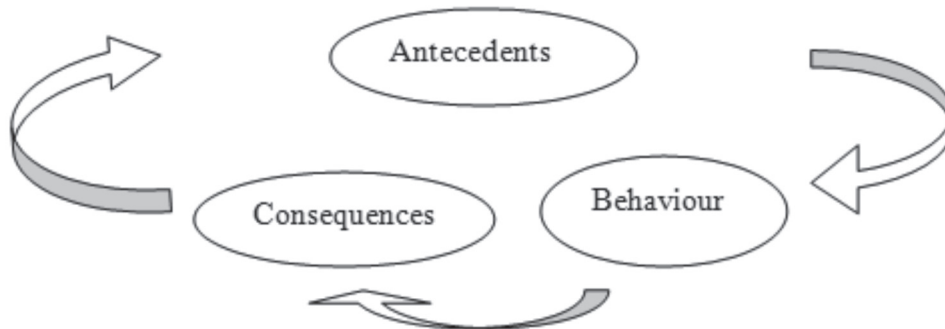

Figure 2. 1: Operant Conditioning Theory

Theories of Behaviourism dominated the American education system from 1900 to 1950. All the same, it still has some applications.

2.2.1.6. Constructivism and Reading

This theory focuses on the magnitude of active construction of knowledge by individuals (Woolfolk, 1998). In short, the desired learning occurs when the learners integrate the knowledge with the former one and of course when s/he participates actively in the learning process.

John Dewey, one of the first American constructivists, stressed the importance of anything that has influences in learning process such as learner himself, environment, teacher and so on (Tracey, 2006). Everything influences the learning process. So, we cannot distinguish one from the others. All these factors are interwoven.

Another Constructivist Theory is Schema Theory by Anderson and Pearson (1984). According this theory, the readers should have adequate background knowledge that he can use when reading the tests. This theory deals with different types of schemas such as content schema and cultural schema, namely the effects of content and culture on learning process. However, this theory is strictly criticized due to its deficiency to assess reading skills. This theory ignores the effect of motivation and the possible reflective thoughts of the people who prepare reading tests.

According to another constructivist theory, Psycholinguistic Theory (Goodman 1967), reading is a primarily learning process in which learners rely on cueing systems such as syntactic system (grammar structure and syntax of language), semantic systems (meaning of the words and sentences).

2.2.1.7. Developmental Theories

Developmental Theorist Piaget (1969) created Cognitive Development Theory. He put the maturity in the centre of learning. The more the child grows, the easier he can acquire the difficult tasks. Maturation Theory, on the other hand, suggested that the learning process should be waited until the child grows into a developmentally old stage. For instance, the primary school learners start with the alphabet, words and then simple sentences. The words are daily used ones. The sentences are simple. Complex sentences are taught in the second class, and nowadays many reading books are published in accordance with this understanding.

The final developmental theory is Family Literacy Theory (Tracey, 1995). This theory emphasized the importance of parents in learning process. The richer the environment is, the more the learning is. Family should provide their child with a literacy-rich environment so that their child can become familiar with school tasks.

2.2.1.8. Social Learning Theories

These theories focus on the importance of social influences and social interactions in field (Tracey, 2006). The first social learning perspective was Sociolinguistic Theory. It stresses the role of learner's language in reading. On the other hand, socio-Cultural Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, as cited in Tracey, 2006) focuses on the roles of society, culture and history in learning. According to Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), learners' development of knowledge is due to their interactions with others. Bandura (1969, as cited in Tracey, 2006) developed Social Learning Theory. According to this theory, people learn more from their observations of others rather than their experiences.

2.2.1.9. Cognitive Processing Perspectives

In the second half of the 20th century, there was a tendency from the study of observable thoughts to unobservable ones and they tried to study the knowledge in mind, and the storage of the data in mind. Holmes's (1953, as cited in Tracey, 2006) theory of Substrata-Factor was the first to put the specific application of cognitive approach into reading. It has variables and sub-variables. According to him, sub-variables and variables are correlated with each other. He stated sub-variables in the category of variables as individual factors such as eye movements, fine motor skills.

As for Rauding Theory (Carver, 1977), the texts level should be available to the learners. If it is more difficult than the learner's knowledge or above the maturity of the learner, it is likely that the learner has difficulty with understanding this text.

Interactive Model (Rumelhart, 1977) is a kind of interactive theory. For instance, it is better to evaluate the learner's reading with regard to the processing rather than one by one such as syntax, semantics and vocabulary. Stanovich's (1980) widened Rumelhart's model and renamed it as Interactive-Compensatory Model. According to this model, if there is something with one processor, then the others compensate for it. For instance, if

the learner has difficulty with the meaning of the words, then he should try to guess the meaning of those from the text.

Construction-Integration Model (Kintsch, 1994) comprised of three levels: linguistic, conceptual and situational. Linguistic level deals with the word meaning, conceptual level deals with the sentence meaning and the last situational one is about the message integrated to the text.

Parallel Distributed Processing Model (Rumelhart & McClelland, 1986) suggested that successful reading is related to the reader's abilities in four areas: automatic letter recognition, accurate phonemic processing, strong vocabulary knowledge, and the ability to construct meaningful messages during reading. In contrast to this model, the Dual-Route Cascaded Model (Coltheart, Curtis, Atkins & Haller, 1993) focused on the known and unknown words.

The Double-Deficit Hypothesis (Wolf & Bowers, 1999) deals with the reading disabilities. This hypothesis classifies the disabilities of reading into three categories for the children who have phonological deficits, children who have speeding problem and children who have both deficits at the same time. So, in order to cope up with the reading problems steming from these problems, something should be done immediately to overcome, at least to decrease the deficiency.

The last and the recent theoretical model is neuroscience that examines the functions of the brain (Tracey, 2006). The role of the brain in any learning process is of the most crucial importance in any learning. For instance, neurolinguistics is one of the recent sub-branches which investigate the connection between language and brain in terms of where various aspects of language are localized in the brain.

Conclusion

In this section, a short and semi historical background of the major perspectives such as models and theories are given. Most of the theories stated here are based on the work of Tracey (2006): "Lenses on Reading". Each learner uses at least one of these theories, but some use several of them. As mentioned above, though some of these theories date back to ancient times, they are still applicable in reading classes nowadays. There is no exact theory that can identify the learning process totally. Each has focused on one aspect of the reading process. Moreover, some certain theories such as behaviourism which claims that language is a habit and so is learnt like other habits, cognition which holds the fundamental view that language learning should be viewed within the perspective of human's cognitive and intellectual development, socialization which claims that learning is not enough by exposing or listening to the target language output but the available input should be practiced in a social setting and so on (Tracey, 2006).

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