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Trends in reading education: An analysis of postgraduate theses written in Turkey

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Abstract

Academic studies related to teaching mother tongue in Turkey started in 1990s and picked up after 2000s. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the post-graduate theses in the field of reading education written between the years of 1981-2010 with an integrated view. In the study, the scan with 76 concepts related to reading education was performed in National Thesis Centre. 239 theses, which were determined after the scanning process, were encoded with ternary encoding method.

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Keywords: Reading education; post-graduate theses; Turkey.

1. Introduction

Reading is primarily a perception process involving the identification of symbols (letters). Together with the beginning of recognition of letters, the main characteristic of reading is the transformation of symbols into intellectual concepts and meanings starts. The comprehension process involves the stages of recognition, interpretation and evaluation. Due to these characteristics, reading is not a simple activity to recognize letters, but a complex intellectual process (Bamberger, 1990).

Reading is the meaningful interpretation of written language (Harris & Sipay, 1990). The basis of reading is "comprehension". Reading involves the recognition, recollection and perception elements of meanings from past experiences through written and printed symbols (Tinker & McCullough, 1968). The meanings from past experiences enable the construction of new meanings based on the effective interaction between the author and the reader in line with the appropriate method and purpose (Akyol, 2007). The current definitions regarding the quality of reading demonstrate the physical, intellectual and process oriented characteristics of the reading (Özbay, 2007).

Reading education constitutes one of the important steps of language teaching studies conducted in a planned way in schools. Individuals acquire the skills to read and comprehend a text at their level without the help of others over a period of between 2 months and 2 years (Yalçın, 2002). The reading skill continues to be one of the basic skill areas required in order to obtain knowledge regardless of the development level of technology (Sangkaeo, 1999). Deficiencies in reading comprehension skills cause many academic skills to deteriorate (Hughes-Hassell &

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Rodge, 2007). Stadler (1980) reported that reading helped students enrich their vocabulary, and this affected their skills in comprehending the grammatical structure of language. In addition, reading especially develops the skills needed by bilingual children for them to be integrated into school and in the wider environment, and for them to be able to think in both languages. "Comprehension", which is the most important aspect of reading, does not only involve the comprehension studies that form part of the academic learning process in school. Reading, and therefore reading comprehension, is a life-long process that forms the basis of learning in every area (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Reading and reading comprehension skills include the direct interaction and communication of the reader with the text. Skimming, in order to gain a general understanding of the text and to find the main idea, taking notes of important details in text, associating and remembering, perceiving the cause and effect relation in text, and remembering what was read are the skills that should be developed in order to achieve reading comprehension (Harris & Sipay, 1990).

Technological developments affect reading as well as other areas of life. Currently, people mainly read electronic texts rather than printed ones. Electronic texts may offer audio and visual elements (video, animation, etc.) in addition to the letters, graphics and images offered by printed texts. Reading via e-reading has expanded the limits of the printed page and has been transferred to many different mediums like the cell phone, computer, electronic board, etc. E-reading mostly involves unlimited texts (hypertexts). In hypertexts, readers can simultaneously read different texts without following a set sequence and order, through the use of links. However, this may distract the reader from the scope of the reading, to lose his/her way in the text, and it can lead to disorganization (Lankshear, 2009; Güneş, 2010; Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2010). E-reading can however, offer an interactive reading environment where readers can share their thoughts, feelings and comments (Tüzel, 2012).

Reading skill, which is a multifaceted and comprehensive skill area, should be developed through a planned education process. In this education process, many details such as attitude towards reading, the reading habit, reading interests and reading strategies should be paid attention.

Thurstone (1928) defines attitude in a complex integrity as people's inclinations, emotions, prejudices, pre-determined demands and inclinations, fears, and beliefs regarding a particular subject. Allport (1935) explains attitude as an affective and intellectual state of readiness which is organized as a result of experiences and has a direct and active effect on the responses of individuals towards a relative state or object (Allport, 1967). Attitudes change in time, even if it is difficult (Baron & Byrne, 2002). Efforts to make attitudes towards reading positively are important for reading education. Many studies have determined that reading attitude which is at a high level at the beginning gradually decreases (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Schatz & Krashen, 2006). This decrease should be controlled and transformed into a positive attitude. Attitude is even reported to affect comprehension in different studies (LePage & Mills, 1990; Kush & Watkins, 1996; Kush et al., 2005). A bi-directional relation is thought to exist even though studies try to explain the direction of studies, in other words whether reading affects attitude or attitude affects reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Wigfield & Asher, 2002; Morgan & Fuchs, 2007).

Another important factor for reading is interest. Since the positive effect of interest on reading is known, interest is regarded as a starting point in the text-based learning process (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Therefore, the concept of interest should be evaluated with reading and used in education. It is known that students mostly prefer reading texts that interest them (Ataya & Kulikowich, 2002).

In addition to attitude and interest, the reading habit is known to be important in this process. Making reading a habit does not only develop reading comprehension skills at a basic level but also enables individuals to exhibit behaviors of sharing and evaluating what they read with the people around them, and have an awareness in their choice of reading material, as well as reading comprehension skills (Dreher, 2002).

Attention should be paid to the entirety of these elements in developing reading skills and they are affected by the physical and environmental factors of individuals. Therefore, the programs organized for reading education should take many details and factors into consideration. The increase in the quality of reading education is highly related with the increase in the number and quality of studies in this area. In Turkey, the academic studies at postgraduate level regarding Turkish language education in general date back to the 1990s. Previous postgraduate studies primarily focused on literature and grammar, and research regarding language education is known to be

limited. The first postgraduate education program in Turkish language education started at Gazi University (Ankara-Turkey) in 1989 (Güzel, 2003). The studies in this area accelerated following the reconstruction process of education faculties for prospective teachers in Turkey in 1997 (Coşkun, 2003).

There is limited analytic research evaluating the studies concerning Turkish language education in Turkey. There are few bibliographic studies concerned with Turkish language teaching (Demircan, 1982; Demircan & Ersözden, 1990; Şenol, 2001; Coşkun, 2003; Özbay, 2008). The research of Demircan (1982) is limited to the teaching of the Turkish language as a foreign language. The "Turkish Language Education Bibliography" prepared by Demircan & Ersözden (1990) is more comprehensive but limited to only books and articles. Şenol (2001) conducted a literature review on articles concerned with reading and writing. The studies of Coşkun (2003) and Özbay (2008) are more comprehensive in terms of postgraduate studies. In the study of Coşkun (2003), it was made an evaluation of 434 theses (347 masters and 87 doctorates) in Turkish language education. The study by Özbay (2008) included information on 598 theses (497 masters and 119 doctorates) in addition to books, articles and web pages concerning Turkish language education. Coşkun, Özçakmak & Balcı (2011) evaluated postgraduate theses in Turkey between 1981-2010 by classifying them in terms of type, their years, universities, target groups and subjects. That study presents the exact number of postgraduate theses concerned with reading education. However, there is no analytic study evaluating postgraduate theses concerning reading education directly related to Turkey.

2. Purpose of study

The present study aims to evaluate postgraduate studies concerning reading education in Turkey between 1981-2010 by classifying them in terms of type, their years, universities, target groups and subjects.

3. Methods

For the purposes of the study a survey was made in the National Thesis Center (in Turkey) of the Council for Higher Education of theses concerned with reading education. A total of 239 theses were determined to be suitable for the purposes of the present research and were coded through a ternary coding method. The National Thesis Center Database of the Council Higher Education was the most used resource in the survey process. In addition, the web pages of some universities and previously published bibliographic studies were used for older theses.

Data on the determined thesis types (masters, doctorates) was transferred to computer in terms of the years they were completed and their universities. In addition, they were coded in terms of target groups (preschool, primary school, etc.) and subjects based on their titles. In the classification of theses in terms of their subject, theses on more than one subject were separately evaluated under each title.

In order to provide reliability of coding regarding the target audiences and the subject of the thesis, and whether they were about reading education (i.e. whether they should be listed), the coding made by the first researcher was separately checked by the second and third researchers. There were some differences between the codes, some were determined to be miscoded; full consistency was provided between codes following corrections.

4. Results

This section includes the distribution of postgraduate theses in the area of reading education in Turkey in terms of their type (masters, doctorates), their years, universities, target audiences and subjects.

Table 1: The distribution of theses in the reading education area in terms of year and type

	Masters		Doctorates		Total	
Years	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**
1981-2000	43	72.9	16	27.1	59	24.7
2001-2005	45	77.6	13	22.4	58	24.3
2006-2010	94	77.0	28	23.0	122	51.0
Total	182	76.2	57	23.8	239	100.0

As seen in Table 1, there is an increase in the number of theses in the reading education area in Turkey. While there were 59 theses between 1981- 2000 (20 years), there were 59 theses between 2001- 2005, a shorter period of time. The number of theses in the reading education area between 2006- 2010 is 122. The results indicate that more than half (51%) of the theses concerned with the reading education area in the 30 years period were completed between 2006- 2010. Considering the distribution of postgraduate theses in terms of type, the rate of doctoral theses (23.8%) is observed to be lower than the rate of masters theses (76.2%).

Table 2: The distribution of theses in the reading education area in terms of subjects

Subject	f	%
Reading comprehension	108	45.2
Teaching approaches, methods, techniques and strategies	82	34.3
Reading habit	38	15.9
Reading books, text types and text linguistic	35	14.6
Reading methods, techniques and strategies	35	14.6
Attitudes and motivation towards reading	16	6.7
Teaching programs	11	4.6
Measurement and evaluation in reading education	7	2.9
Difficulties in reading and reading mistakes	8	3.3
Reading skills and development stages	6	2.5
Reading interest	6	2.5
Reading education aimed at foreigners and bi-lingual individuals	4	1.7
Readability	2	0.8
Screen reading	1	0.4
General	5	2.1

As seen in Table 2, 45.2% of the theses are about “reading comprehension”; 34.3% about “teaching approaches, methods, techniques, strategies”; 15.9% about “the reading habit”; 14.6% “reading books, text types and philology”; 14.6% about “reading methods, techniques and strategies”; 6.7% about “attitudes and motivation towards reading”. Completed postgraduate theses are observed to be about “comprehension”, which is accepted to be the basic component of the reading process especially. These are followed by theses examining the effectiveness of a general education method or technique in the area of reading education. It can be understood that text, text structure, reading attitude and the reading habit, which are the indispensible elements of reading education process, attain prominence.

Table 3: The distribution of theses in the reading education area in terms of target groups

Target groups	f	%
Primary School 1st Grade Students	73	30.5
Primary School 2nd Grade Students	48	20.1
Students Requiring Special Education	24	10.0
University Students	14	5.9
Pre-school	10	4.2
High School	6	2.5
Non-formal Education	4	1.7
Turkish Language Education for Foreigners	3	1.2
Turkish Language Education for Bi-lingual	1	0.4
Uncertain	77	32.2

According to Table 3, the target groups of 30.5% of the postgraduate theses is primary school students (1st- 5th grades), 20.1% are elementary school students (6th- 8th grades) and 10% are the students requiring special education. However, it is understood that the number of theses related to the area of Turkish language education for foreigners and Turkish language education for bilingual individuals, the importance of which has been recently expressed, is quite few.

The study determined that postgraduate theses in the reading education area were written in 31 different universities in Turkey between 1981- 2010. Table 4 shows the distribution of theses in 8 universities where 10 or more theses were produced in the area of Turkish language education.

Table 4: The distribution of theses in the reading education area in terms of universities

			Total	
University	**Masters**	**Doctorate**	**f**	**%**
Gazi University	34	17	51	21.3
Ankara University	22	16	38	15.9
Hacettepe University	19	7	26	10.9
Marmara University	15	2	17	7.1
Selçuk University	11	2	13	5.4
Abant İzzet Baysal University	11	-	11	4.6
Anadolu University	7	3	10	4.2
Dokuz Eylül University	7	3	10	4.2
Other	56	7	63	26.4
Total	182	57	239	100.0

Table 4 shows that the postgraduate theses in the reading education area in Turkey were mostly produced at Gazi University (21.3%); Ankara University (15.9%) and Hacettepe University (10.9%). According to this result, approximately half (48.1%) of the theses completed between 1981- 2010 were produced at these three universities. An important percentage (37.2%) of the doctorate theses were produced at Gazi University and at Ankara University.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The number of postgraduate theses in the reading education area in Turkey increased, especially between 2006- 2010. The results of the present study indicate that more than half (51%) of the theses in the reading education area over the last 30 years were completed between 2006- 2010 (in 5 years). The target audience of 30.5% of postgraduate theses is primary school students (1^{st}- 5^{th} grades), 20.1% are elementary school students (6^{th}- 8^{th} grades) and 10% are the students requiring special education.

The fact that an important part of the postgraduate theses prepared in the reading education area in Turkey are from three universities (Gazi University, Ankara University and Hacettepe University) indicates that research is primarily conducted in certain centers.

The subjects of theses on reading education area are primarily “reading comprehension”, “teaching approaches, methods, techniques, strategies”, “the reading habit”, “reading books, text types and textlinguistic”, “reading methods, techniques and strategies” and “attitudes and motivation towards reading”. However, the number of studies on the subjects of educational programs, measurement and evaluation, reading mistakes, readability, reading education for foreigners and bilingual individuals is observed to be low.

Considering the total number of completed theses and the chosen subject areas, they can be seen to focus mainly on certain subjects, and the low number (f=239) of theses overall means that there is access to only limited data for determining problems in reading education and for offering solutions to those problems. An increase in the number of studies concerning reading education, which is one of the most important stages of language education, will lead to an increase in the quality of education in that area.

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