INSTRUCTORS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE FACTORS THAT AFFECT IMPROVING READING SKILLS IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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MASTER'S THESIS

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JÜRİ VE ENSTİTÜ ONAYI

Bu belge, Yükseköğretim Kurulu tarafından 19.01.2021 tarihli "*Lisansüstü Tezlerin Elektronik Ortamda Toplanması, Düzenlenmesi ve Erişime Açılmasına İlişkin Yönerge*" ile bildirilen 6689 Sayılı Kişisel Verilerin Korunması Kanunu kapsamında gizlenmiştir.

ETİK İLKE VE KURALLARA UYUM BEYANI

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Gülçin Erdoğan

September, 2021

ÖZ

ÖĞRETMENLERİN YABANCI DİLDE OKUMAYI GELİŞTİRMEYİ ETKİLEYEN FAKTÖRLERLE İLGİLİ GÖRÜŞLERİ

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Maltepe Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü, 2021

Okuma becerisini oluşturan öğeler ve bu becerinin nasıl geliştirilebileceği İngilizce öğretiminde her zaman dikkate değer bir konu olmuştur, çünkü bu beceriyi edinmek bir dile hakim olmak için gereklidir. Ancak, öğrencilerin okuduğunu anlama yeteneklerini kazanmalarını engelleyen çok sayıda etken vardır. Bu nitel çalışmanın amacı, İngilizce okutmanlarının görüşlerini araştırarak yabancı dilde okuma becerilerini geliştirmeye etki eden faktörleri ve okuma becerilerinin nasıl geliştirilebileceğini bulmaktır. Bu amaçla, okuduğunu anlama becerisini etkileyen unsurlarla ilgili bir literatür taraması sonrasında açık uçlu görüşme soruları oluşturulmuş ve en az 7 yıllık öğretmenlik deneyimine sahip 20 İngilizce okutmanı ile görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Elde edilen bilgiler kodlama yoluyla analiz edilmiş ve okuma becerisinin gelişiminde en büyük etkiye sahip olan 6 ana kategori belirlenmiştir. Sonuçlar, en önemli belirleyicilerin okuma alışkanlığı ve motivasyonu gibi öğrenicilerle ilgili faktörler, yabancı dil bilgisi, anadilde okuma becerileri, okuma stratejileri kullanımı, metinler ve öğrenme ortamı olduğunu göstermektedir. Buna göre, öğrenicilere daha iyi okuduğunu anlama becerileri kazandırabilmek için okuma dersleri tasarlanırken bu unsurlar dikkate alınmalıdır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Yabancı Dilde Okuma, Okuma Becerileri, Öğretmen Görüşleri.

ABSTRACT

INSTRUCTORS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE FACTORS THAT AFFECT IMPROVING READING SKILLS IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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What constitutes reading and how to improve reading skills has always been a noteworthy topic in English language teaching since obtaining this skill is required to become a competent speaker. However, there are numerous barriers impeding learners' ability to acquire comprehension abilities. The aim of this qualitative study is to investigate the factors that affect improving reading skills in a foreign language through researching ELT instructors' perceptions and to find out how reading skills can be improved. For this purpose, open-ended interview questions were formed based on a review of literature on the elements that influence reading comprehension skills and the interviews were conducted with 20 English instructors who have at least 7 years of teaching experience. The obtained information was analysed through coding and 6 main categories were determined as the factors that have the biggest influence on the development of reading skills. The results indicate that the most significant determinants are the components related to learners which are having a reading habit and motivation, L2/FL knowledge, L1 reading skills, use of reading strategies, texts and the learning environment. Accordingly, these elements should be considered when designing reading lessons in order to achieve better comprehension results.

Keywords: Reading in a Foreign Language, Reading Skills, Teacher Perceptions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ELT **:** English Language Teaching

L1 **:** Native Language

L2 **:** Second Language

FL **:** Foreign Language

L2/FL **:** Second or Foreign Language

CURRICULUM VITAE

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Reading comprehension ability is an essential part of adult language learning because skills such as understanding the written language and performing well at reading tasks are required in order to become competent in a foreign language. However, it is challenging for many learners since reading comprehension, which develops as a result of many components that come together, is a complex process. Different aspects of reading such as its components and the factors that affect comprehension must be studied to understand this complicated structure.

Although reading has some universal characteristics such as cognitive processes that occur during reading in any language, each language is unique and has a different way of applying the universal reading principles (Goodman, 1982; Grabe, 2009b). Learning and mastering reading skills in one language do not guarantee becoming proficient readers in another language. As a result, reading in a foreign language may involve some distinctive processes that must be studied separately.

Reading in a foreign language is different from reading in the first language for several reasons. Although there are similar processes involved in reading in any language, reading in native language (L1) and reading in a second or foreign language (L2/FL) have differences because foreign language learners usually have a literacy and reading skills background when they start learning another language. Therefore, reading in L2/FL involves literacy interactions with L1 and L1 reading has an influence on L2/FL reading success. Alderson (1984) notes that having inadequate reading skills in L2/FL might be caused by poor reading skills in the first language. That is to say, poor reading skills may result from not being able to apply the correct reading strategies in the foreign language. Students might transfer their L1 reading skills when reading a text in a foreign language and this may be useful for reading comprehension (Koda, 2005). Another hypothesis Alderson (1984) notes is that poor reading in a foreign language is the result of inadequate L2/FL linguistic knowledge. Alderson (1984) points out that students do not employ L1 reading strategies in L2/FL reading due to this inadequate linguistic knowledge.

According to Hedgehock & Ferris (2018), L2/FL reading has some unique processes such as achieving a linguistic threshold, metalinguistic and cognitive awareness, exposure to L2/FL print sources, having multiple linguistic systems, age and maturation. Foreign language reading includes a number of processes such as word recognition, identifying and interpreting words that have different meanings in different sentences, syntactic knowledge and using context, skills and strategies to comprehend a text. In addition, there are sociocultural factors that affect literacy (Grabe, 2009b; Hudson, 2007). So, it is affected not only by cognitive factors but also by psychological and contextual factors. To understand foreign language reading, the elements that constitute reading comprehension must be examined.

Reading involves multiple processes which enable comprehension of a text. First, learners should perform several cognitive activities. For example, letter-sound correspondence, which is the ability to match letters to sounds appropriately, is one of these activities. Then, learners ought to have automatic and accurate lexical access, which means the recognition of words. A large vocabulary knowledge is crucial for comprehension since second or foreign language learners need 5000-word families to understand most texts (Grabe, 2009a). Morphological information, which is knowing how derived words form and how morphology signals parts of speech, is also necessary for the growth of learners' vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, L2/FL learners should have the ability of processing clausal and phrasal information while reading and together with lexical access they allow the reader to form semantic meaning units. As a result, L2/FL readers can perceive the thematic main ideas and supporting ideas in a text. After these processes, the reader will be able to add attitudes, evaluations, inferences, connections to background knowledge in order to achieve comprehension. The use of attention and executive control mechanisms is needed in understanding a text as well. Understanding the text structure, using context to interpret words and sentences, responding to reading goals and purposes and applying strategies are among these cognitive processes. Reading is also affected by reader motivation, media, content of the text, text structure and form (Grabe, 2009b; Hudson, 2007).

This study aims to investigate the factors that affect improving reading comprehension skills in a foreign language. In order to find out what influences the

development of reading skills and how they can be improved, this study researches instructors' opinions on the subject of reading comprehension. The perceptions of teachers are valuable in that they not only have a background both as learners and teachers but also possess firsthand experience in the classroom. Therefore, their knowledge and observations contribute to the field of English language teaching immensely. Teacher perceptions on the development of reading skills benefit in understanding the foreign language reading process to a greater extent and help to improve reading teaching and learning.

1.2 The Aim of the Study

Teaching and improving skills and sub-skills are hotly debated issues in English language teaching. Many critics, researchers and teachers have been claiming that there are many impediments obstructing students' developing comprehension skills. They have been voicing different reasons and solutions for the failure of students to acquire sufficient comprehension skills.

Improved reading skills are required in order to become competent speakers of a foreign language. Therefore, factors that help improve reading skills and provide better reading comprehension should be examined. First of all, the elements that facilitate the advancement of reading skills and lead to better comprehension skills must be revealed. Only then, they can be honed in and improved.

In order to discover the factors in reading comprehension, this study concentrates on the perceptions of instructors as their opinions and experiences concerning reading can be an invaluable tool. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the perceptions of English Language Teaching (ELT) instructors regarding the reasons that affect foreign language reading comprehension in order to discover what influences the development of reading skills and how they can be improved.

1.3 Limitations of the Study

This study encompasses interviews with 20 participants who work as English instructors at universities. The aim of this study is to uncover the factors that affect the development of reading skills in a foreign language.

Due to the time restrictions, the data collected for this study is limited to the perceptions of 20 instructors. For further study, a bigger number of participants could be interviewed. This study specifically focuses on the perceptions of university instructors. The opinions of English teachers who work at primary or secondary schools could be collected for further research. Moreover, in order to discover the elements that have an effect on improving the reading skills in a foreign language, interviews with learners could be another information source.

1.4 Operational Definitions

Second Language (L2): It is a language that is not the speaker's native language but it is acquired later by the learner who lives in an environment where the language is spoken (Moeller & Catalano, 2015).

Foreign Language (FL): It is a language that is mostly acquired in the classroom and is not spoken in the society where it is taught (Moeller & Catalano, 2015).

Reading: It is the act of obtaining and comprehending information in a language from a printed medium (Urquhart & Weir, 2013).

1.5 Literature Review

1.5.1. Reading in a Foreign Language

Reading is one of the main skills to be mastered in order to be a competent speaker of a language and to be academically successful. Since understanding a written text is an essential step for being competent in a language, it is fundamental for the competency of a foreign language as well. Therefore, learners of English, especially those who will use

it for academic purposes, must become skillful readers. In order to improve the reading ability in English and help these learners become competent readers, it is vital to understand the reading process. Reading in a foreign language is a complex process and reading comprehension develops as a result of many components that come together. Defining and categorizing the cognitive components of the reading process, which have been the focus of many researchers (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Grabe, 2009b; Koda, 2005; Perfetti, 2007); are the first important steps towards understanding how reading comprehension occurs. In addition to the cognitive elements, some researchers (Aaron et al., 2008; Aebersold & Field, 1997; Durgunoğlu & Öney, 2000; Sparks, 2019) believe there are psychological and environmental factors that must be considered to understand the reading process. Although it is a complicated process with various cognitive, psychological and environmental factors involved, understanding the components and the factors that affect reading in a foreign language will result in understanding reading on the whole. Hence, it is important to determine these factors that help to achieve reading comprehension. There are various theories on what reading is, how reading comprehension occurs and which cognitive or other factors are involved in the process. A brief analysis of the theories about reading is essential because the aim of this thesis is to reveal the factors that affect reading comprehension in a foreign language and understand reading in a foreign language more broadly. Therefore, a summary of different reading theories that try to explain the reading process is required.

According to Grabe (2009b), there are some universal aspects of reading that are performed by all readers. Grabe (2009b) lists these cognitive processing skills as "integration of pattern recognition skills, working memory, long-term memory, inferencing capacity, drive for coherence of interpretation and general cognitive learning principles"; decoding; facilitative transfer; metalinguistic awareness and text interpretation (p. 124). However, there are some limitations to these universal aspects because each language is different in terms of their writing systems (orthography) and reading strategies that are appropriate for that language. As a result, although there are universal principles of reading, the ways that languages apply these principles differ. Moreover, the transfer between the first language and the second language and whether or not it will facilitate the reading process depend on exploring how the universal reading principles are applied in those languages (Grabe, 2009b).

Cognitive approach in reading assumes that reading comprehension is the result of various cognitive processes working together and interacting with each other. In order to achieve comprehension, first the reader must recognize words with their orthographic, phonological and semantic features and then associate them with each other to form syntactic meaning. After that, through inferencing and background knowledge, the reader achieves "a coherent mental representation of the text" (Kendeou et al., 2014, p. 10). According to this approach, reading comprehension is attained as a consequence of various cognitive processes collaborating with each other and therefore reading success can be achieved through successful cognitive processing.

There are different theoretical models that aim to explain how cognitive processes play a role in reading. Gough & Tunmer (1986) suggest the Simple View of Reading (SVR) model which hypothesizes that word decoding or recognition and language comprehension skills determine good or poor reading comprehension. According to this model, reading deficiency can occur as a result of lack of linguistic comprehension, lack of decoding skills or lack of both of these components.

According to Koda (2005), cognitive aspects of reading can be explained in two different ways by connectionism and component skills approach. Connectionism argues that skills improve through cumulative experience which upgrades and adjusts the connections between processing units. Thus, learners' performance advances as a result of repeated practice and trials. This experience-based theory suggests that L1-L2 distance might be the main factor for differences in L2 processing performance because, when the two languages require similar processing, learners will be able to learn with less cumulative experience (Koda, 2005).

Component skills approach, on the other hand, offers a more complex view of reading stating that reading consists of various components such as decoding, linguistic knowledge, syntactic and metacognitive processing. According to component skills approach, these components are the building blocks of reading and they must be studied to explain the reading deficiencies. Understanding these components and their role in detail can help to understand reading to a greater degree (Carr & Levy, 1990; Grabe, 2009b; Koda, 2005). Koda (2005) notes that comprehension occurs as a result of "closely related mental operations" which refer to lower level and higher level processes working

together to facilitate reading (p. 19). This approach helps to establish the necessary skills for reading and to understand the transfer process between L1 and L2.

Grabe (2009b) also divides the processes which are activated when reading into two groups, lower-level processes which are lexical access, syntactic parsing, semantic proposition formation, and working memory activation and higher-level processes which are text-model of comprehension, situation model of reader interpretation, background knowledge use, inferencing and executive control processes. Grabe (2009b) describes these processes as the components of reading abilities and they play an important role in understanding the complex process of reading.

According to Grabe (2009b), lower level processes are the skills that are related to cognitive activity and more likely to become automatized. One of these processes is word recognition, which transpires with the help of some sub-skills - orthographic, phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic processing and activation of lexicon. Word recognition is a building block for later skills and its speed and automaticity are very important for fluent reading. Syntactic parsing or word integration takes place simultaneously with word recognition and helps readers connect the words using grammar knowledge. At the same time, the information acquired from the words and structures is used to constitute meaning units.

As all these processes are conducted in working memory where information is stored temporarily, working memory capacity is considered as an important factor for individual differences in reading abilities (Grabe, 2009b). Erçetin (2015) notes that working memory enables executive processes such as choosing the correct meaning of a word in different contexts and directing attention to necessary information. It distinguishes between necessary information and unnecessary information from the long term memory and focuses attention accordingly. As a result, differences in working memory capacity can predict reading comprehension success in L2/FL.

Grabe (2009b) also argues that higher level processes, which include text-model of comprehension, situation model of reader interpretation, background knowledge use, inferencing and executive control processes, enable making connections across the text through using strategies, goals, inferences, background knowledge and comprehension

monitoring. Grabe (2009b) points out two models of comprehension: Text model and situation model. The text model "calls for understanding what the text itself is trying to signal. The situation model calls for the reader to combine background knowledge with text information and assists in an effective interpretation of the text in line with the reader's goals" (Grabe, 2009b, p. 46). Readers reach a text model of comprehension as they link every new information while reading the text and try to extract the meaning as it is presented in the text.

These higher level cognitive processes such as using background knowledge, making inferences, responding to reading goals and purposes, applying strategies and metacognitive awareness are considered important elements in reading comprehension by many scholars as readers do not act only as recipients of information when they read a text. Instead, they contribute to the process of constructing meaning through background information which is composed of the units of knowledge about the things that they experience. According to schema or schemata theory (Rumelhart, 1980), knowledge is stored in the human brain in the form of units. Rumelhart (1980) states that" all of our generic knowledge is embedded in schemata". These knowledge units in the reader's memory facilitate reading comprehension by activating relevant old information to make new information comprehensible. Researches have shown that learners read faster and remember more information when they encounter a text that is most close to their cultural background (Li & D'Angelo, 2016).

Background knowledge is also needed to make inferences which is a necessary skill to comprehend the implicit ideas in the text. Inferences can be categorized as coherence inferences and elaborative extending inferences. Coherence inferences construct meaningful connections through the text. Coherence, which is related to the organization of the content, and cohesion, which is about connecting the sentences and the paragraphs using linguistic devices such as conjunctions, are essential in understanding the text as they provide the reader with the connection of the ideas. Elaborative inferences, on the other hand, are usually knowledge-based inferences "that serve to enrich and extend the mental representation of text by connecting information to the reader's background knowledge" (Li & D'Angelo, 2016, p. 170). In addition to maintaining textual coherence and providing a better mental representation of the text by

connecting explicit and implicit ideas, inference making is also useful for L2 learners to deduce new word meanings (Li & D'Angelo, 2016). Therefore, it is a skill which is required to be a successful reader.

In addition to background knowledge and inference making, one's meta-linguistic and meta-cognitive awareness also play an important role in reading comprehension. As L2 learners receive an instruction in the classroom, they develop a meta-linguistic awareness which will help them in comprehension. Aebersold & Field (1997) argue that "those with a solid metacognitive knowledge of the structure of their own language will better apply such linguistic knowledge in L2/FL learning and reading" (p.27). That is to say, if foreign language learners have a previous experience in learning content and language from their L1 education, they can have a greater awareness of their learning process and how to improve it using strategies when they learn a foreign language. Meta-cognitive strategies can be regarded as procedures that enable learners to control their cognition through planning, organizing and evaluating the learning process. They can be defined as deliberate actions that are initiated and controlled by learners to facilitate learning activities such as obtaining, storing and retrieving new information (Aebersold & Field, 1997; Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Some of these strategies are "skimming and scanning, contextual guessing or skipping unknown words, tolerating ambiguity, reading for meaning, critical reading, and making inferences... building and activating appropriate background knowledge and recognizing text structure" (Carrell, 1989, p. 121). Since reading is goal-oriented and purposeful, readers must manage their text-information processes in a purposeful way through strategic reading. Several studies on using metacognitive strategies have shown that a better awareness of how to control comprehension and learning is the difference between successful and poor readers (Baker, 1989).

In order for these lower and higher processes to be activated, learners must first have a certain level of FL/L2 proficiency. Transferring L1 reading skills to foreign language reading requires crossing a linguistic threshold, which means being able to understand nearly all of the words and process the text fluently. If learners have limited FL/L2 knowledge, it will constrain the use of L1 reading skills. This is called Language Threshold Hypothesis (Alderson, 1984; Grabe, 2009b; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Koda,

2005). According to this hypothesis, “students must have a sufficient amount of L2 knowledge (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and discourse) to make effective use of skills and strategies that are part of their L1 reading comprehension abilities” (Grabe & Stoller, 2002, p.50).

Reading activity consists of repeatedly identifying words. As a result, successful word reading is required for reading comprehension and the differences in word reading ability is the cause of differences in comprehension ability (Perfetti, 2007). While Grabe (2009a) suggests that L2/FL students need 5000 word families to understand most texts, according to Nation (2006) 8000 to 9000-word family knowledge is needed in order for the L2/FL learners to understand a text. Moreover, learners’ lexical access must be automatic and accurate in order to achieve FL/L2 reading comprehension. Identifying words in a text or decoding is an important skill that is needed to achieve comprehension. Perfetti (2007) states that word identification skill should not only be evaluated in terms of speed. Instead, efficient word identification means having knowledge about word form and meaning and knowledge of word use. Word form knowledge is the knowledge about the grammatical class, spelling and pronunciation and the knowledge of word use is about its pragmatic features. Moreover, having morphological information, which is the knowledge of how derived words form and how morphology signals parts of speech, is necessary for the growth of learners’ vocabulary knowledge. L2 learners should also have the ability of processing clausal and phrasal information while reading and together with lexical access they allow the reader to form semantic meaning units. As a result, L2 readers can perceive the thematic main ideas and supporting ideas in a text. After these processes, the reader will be able to add attitudes, evaluations, inferences and connections to background knowledge (Grabe, 2009b).

Reading in a foreign language is different from L1 reading in that contrary to L1 learners who have been learning the language orally before they start to read, learners of a foreign language start reading as soon as they start learning the language. As a result, L2 learners may lack the linguistic resources which will be of great importance for an effective reading comprehension. In addition to linguistic knowledge, knowledge of text genres and structures is a significant factor in L2 reading comprehension (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). When reading in L2, readers transfer their previous knowledge and

abilities in L1 and this transfer is easier if the two languages share linguistic similarities (Grabe, 2009b).

Learners' L1 might be of importance in L2/FL reading as although cognitive processes in reading are universal, they may be affected by the differences across languages in orthography, phonology and morphology. Other aspects of languages such as vocabulary, grammar and strategies used when processing may also differ in each language. These L1 differences affect the reading fluency and word-recognition accuracy in L2 reading. Learners whose L1 alphabet and writing systems are similar to those in L2 that they are learning will learn and read faster. Therefore, learners' L1 literacy skills will be helpful in analyzing the difficulties in reading comprehension (Aebersold & Field, 1997; Grabe, 2009b; Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

Transfer between the two languages is a great facilitator that makes learning the skills such as reading much easier. Koda (2005) defines transfer as "the ability to learn new skills by drawing on previously acquired resources" (as cited in Grabe, 2009b, p. 122). When readers successfully transfer L1 capabilities such as phonological knowledge, background information, strategies and making inferences when reading in L2, there might be some positive effects of this transfer (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). According to Aebersold & Field (1997), having reading skills knowledge in L1, such as flexibility, adaptability, questioning and comprehension-monitoring, will benefit the reader in terms of developing these skills in L2/FL. Early transfer research suggests that "reading success depends on conceptual processing and strategic manipulations; such competencies do not vary from language to language; and, therefore, the more transfer, the easier and better L2 comprehension" (Koda, 2005, p. 14). Recent studies, however, challenge this idea and argue that information-processing is different in languages and readers with different L1 backgrounds use different strategies in L2 reading (Koda, 2005).

Decoding or visual-information extraction, for example, might not always transfer. Decoding efficiency, which is the ability to match letters to sounds appropriately, is an important factor affecting L2 reading performance. However, it is mostly dependent on L1-L2 orthographic similarities and differences. Learners of a foreign language transfer their L1 word processing abilities when they read in a foreign language. If the two languages have a similar orthography, word recognition will be faster. As

orthography and letter sound relationships differ across languages, reading abilities of learners with different L1 backgrounds will vary (Grabe, 2009b; Koda, 2005).

In addition to cognitive aspects of reading, there are psychological and environmental factors that have an effect on learners' reading achievement. Aaron et al. (2008) consider "Simple View of Reading" inadequate to explain reading success and include two more factors which are psychological and ecological factors. Environmental or ecological factors refer to the elements that are related to the learning environment such as home and school environment, dialect differences, peer influence and teachers, while psychological factors concern motivation, teacher expectations, gender and learning style differences.

As one of the ecological factors, the home environment affects learners' success immensely. According to Durgunoğlu & Öney (2000), "home literacy practices contribute to the development of metalinguistic insights" (p. 83). Therefore, they facilitate learners' reading practice by providing familiarity. More environmental factors such as the socio-economic status of the family, the number of books in the house and positive view of reading contribute to reading success, as well (Chiu & McBride, 2006).

Schooling is the next step that influences a learner's success in reading, as effective literacy instruction that involves adequate reading and writing practices is critical. Peer influence, classroom environment, teacher knowledge and the school's success are the other factors that are related to schooling (Durgunoğlu & Öney, 2000; Sparks, 2019). Furthermore, the socio-economic factors such as the country's economic state and its educational policies, which might benefit or worsen the schooling conditions, can also be included in the ecological factors.

Culture is another factor that affects how readers perceive reading texts and how they perform in reading tasks. Readers from different cultural backgrounds will have different attitudes towards texts. For example, while in some cultures, because of religious teachings, they believe that text equals the truth, other cultures encourage questioning and interpreting. Moreover, some cultures value literacy and written communication more than others. These different attitudes towards texts in L1 will have

an effect on the success of the L2 learners (Aebersold & Field, 1997; Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

Another difference that is caused by culture is related to the use of strategies. Readers develop different strategies depending on their cultural approach towards reading. Whether or not readers use reading strategies also depends on the school that they attend because, even in the same culture, some schools emphasize reading strategies while others do not. Another cultural factor is related to the teachers. If teachers' attitude towards reading is focusing on grammar points, they may not need to teach any strategies. However, other teachers might emphasize reading strategies if they believe they are important (Aebersold & Field, 1997; Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

Cultural orientation also determines text structures and background knowledge that are familiar for learners. The ways to organize texts and make an argument vary across cultures and they might be different than what learners are used to in their L1. This may hinder reading comprehension in L2/FL. According to Koda (2005), "when the two languages share similar text structure properties, L1 schema, presumably activated during L2 text comprehension can provide facilitative assistance in identifying key ideas and their semantic relations" (p. 173). Therefore, when readers study texts that are familiar in terms of form and content, they are more likely to comprehend the text and remember information (Aebersold & Field, 1997; Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

In addition to the factors that are related to the learning environment, there are psychological factors which have direct connections with the learners themselves. These factors, namely motivation, learners' self-concept as readers, their attitude towards reading and gender differences, might also affect reading comprehension success. Evidently, having a positive self-concept and an interest in reading contribute to reading success. Moreover, studies have shown that learners who have a positive view on L1 reading are more successful in L2 reading. Finally, gender, which is another psychological factor, also plays a role in reading success. Female learners tend to be more successful readers than male learners (Sparks, 2019).

To summarize, there are many different aspects to the reading process, ranging from the cognitive and meta-cognitive aspects to the environmental and psychological

aspects. In order for foreign language learners to be successful readers in a FL/L2, first of all, they must be able to execute necessary cognitive processes such as word-recognition and working memory capacity. These are called lower level processes and they are the first step to reading comprehension. There are also higher level processes that make the text accessible for the reader through making connections across the text. One of them is using background knowledge which is about activating the existing ideas to facilitate reading comprehension. Making inferences is also a higher-level cognitive process that is necessary to understand the implications in a text. Other skills such as using strategies and comprehension monitoring are meta-cognitive processes that are helpful in understanding a text. The readers with a meta-cognitive awareness that helps them monitor the reading process and use strategies become better readers than those who do not have this awareness. In addition, readers' performances in these processes might depend on their linguistic proficiency and L1-L2 similarities. FL/L2 proficiency refers to having the necessary grammatical and vocabulary knowledge and it is the first step to achieving comprehension. L1-L2 similarity is also important since similar languages require similar cognitive processing. An appropriate level of L2 knowledge and a high level of similarity between L1 and L2 increase the chance of transferring L1 reading skills to FL/L2. As FL/L2 learners start reading in FL/L2 after having a previous reading experience in L1, it is important that they are able to bring the L1 reading skills that they gain into FL/L2 reading practice. Last but not least, ecological and psychological factors, as well as the cognitive ones, have an impact on reading achievement. These are the factors such as home and school environment, socio-economic conditions, attitudes towards reading, motivation, gender and cultural differences. Culture and cultural differences between the speakers of L1 and FL/L2 might influence readers in different ways. Readers might have similar or different ideas in terms of reading strategies and text structures depending on their cultures. Accordingly, cultural familiarity, both in terms of content and structure, is a facilitator factor in understanding a text.

1.5.2. Studies on Factors that Affect Reading Comprehension

Although there are different theories on L2/FL reading comprehension, it is clear that cognitive elements are responsible for most of it. These cognitive elements can be grouped as lower level and higher level processes. Lower level processes are automatized

ones such as lexical, syntactic and semantic processes, while higher level processes refer to the ones that enable achieving a cohesive meaning through background knowledge, inferences and metacognitive strategies. Since it is possible to measure the cognitive components of reading and their effects through empirical studies, they have been the subject of many researches that aim to understand reading ability in a L2/FL. Most of these studies have focused on the cognitive components and their correlation with reading comprehension. Jeon & Yamashita's (2014) meta-analysis has evaluated numerous component studies and revealed which components are the most effective variables in L2/FL reading. Some of the studies have fixated on vocabulary and aimed to find out about the correlation between decoding skills, vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (Lervag & Aukrust, 2010; Perfetti & Hart, 2001; Susoy & Tanyer, 2018; Zhang, 2012). Some researchers have compared L1 and L2 knowledge to see the effect of transfer in reading (Bosch et. al., 2020; Khan-Horwitz et al., 2005). Others have intended to discover the effect of working memory, topic familiarity and metacognitive awareness (Alptekin & Erçetin, 2011; Leeser, 2007; Nergis, 2013). Finally, there are studies that focus on the ecological and psychological factors in FL/L2 reading (Chiu et al., 2012; Durgunoğlu & Öney, 2000; Sparks; 2019). As the studies that affect reading success clearly identify the most important elements in reading, they can be a great source for understanding reading comprehension in L2/FL. This study aims to uncover the factors that influence L2/FL reading ability. Thus, a review of the studies that examine different aspects of reading is required in order to determine the most effective factors in L2/FL reading and the extent of their effect on learners.

In a comprehensive study based on the component skills approach, Jeon & Yamashita (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of 58 studies on L2 reading comprehension in order find out the correlation between L2 reading comprehension and 10 reading component variables which are L2 decoding, L2 vocabulary knowledge, L2 grammar knowledge, L1 reading comprehension, L2 phonological awareness, L2 orthographic knowledge, L2 morphological knowledge, L2 listening comprehension, working memory and metacognition. As a result of this meta-analysis, grammar, vocabulary knowledge and decoding were the strongest components related to L2 reading comprehension. According to Jeon & Yamashita's (2014) study, L2 reading seems to be a language problem rather than a reading problem. However, they emphasize the importance of L1

reading, working memory and meta-cognition as well, as their correlation to L2 reading comprehension is not little in the empirical studies. About the effect of age, they have found that adult learners depend more on vocabulary knowledge for L2 reading comprehension compared to children, as they deal with more difficult academic texts. Their study also demonstrates that there is a strong correlation between L2 reading comprehension and L2 listening comprehension, which is in line with the fact that the same cognitive mechanisms are used for different language processes. Furthermore, L1-L2 distance seems to be a significant variable for reading comprehension, suggesting that there is more cross-linguistic transfer between similar languages.

Word recognition and vocabulary knowledge seem to be prominent factors in L2/FL reading and there are numerous studies that investigate their effects. In one of these studies, Perfetti & Hart (2001) examined the effect of lexical quality, which refers to having orthographic, phonological and semantic knowledge of a word so that there is an efficient retrieval of the word when reading. They used homophones, words that have the same pronunciation but different meanings, to compare decoding skills of skilled readers and less-skilled readers. The results have shown that variation in reading comprehension depends on the variation in lexical quality that the learners have (Perfetti & Hart, 2001).

Lervag & Aukrust (2010) investigated the predictors of L1 and L2 reading comprehension in young learners. They examined the differences between the reading comprehension of L1 and L2 learners. In the beginning, L1 learners, who read texts in their first language, were found to be more successful readers than the L2 learners who read texts in their second language. The reason for the initial comprehension differences between the two groups was due to the variance in decoding skills. After L2 learners reached an adequate level in decoding, it was observed that semantic knowledge gained importance in understanding the text. L1 learners were better at reading comprehension than L2 readers due to their decoding and vocabulary skills, proving the importance of vocabulary knowledge in reading.

Zhang (2012) researched the significance of grammar and vocabulary knowledge in FL reading. In the study, adult foreign language learners were tested on their vocabulary knowledge in terms of size and depth, implicit and explicit grammar knowledge and reading comprehension. Zhang (2012) concluded that vocabulary

knowledge is a stronger indicator of successful reading comprehension compared to implicit and explicit grammar knowledge.

Susoy & Tanyer's (2018) study focuses on the role of lexical and syntactic knowledge in L2/FL reading comprehension. The researchers conducted several tests to find out the correlation between the participants' vocabulary knowledge in terms of breadth and depth and their reading comprehension success. Breadth aspect of the vocabulary knowledge simply refers to the number of words that are known by the learner. Depth of vocabulary knowledge, on the other hand, means an extensive knowledge including different uses and morphological features of the word. The results of the study have shown that the strongest predictor of reading comprehension was the vocabulary depth. The effect of vocabulary breadth and syntactic knowledge was less significant. As a result, the study emphasizes the importance of a deep knowledge of vocabulary with different dimensions such as morphological and semantic knowledge.

In order to investigate whether the factors that affect reading success in L1 also influence reading in a foreign language, Khan-Horwitz et al. (2005) conducted a study among elementary school students whose L1 was Hebrew. The study's aim was to see if having difficulty in processing the core elements in L1 such as phonological, morphological and syntactic knowledge would predict reading ability in FL. In order to do that, they tested the students' phonological and morphological awareness, orthographic ability, word recognition, word attack, reading speed and vocabulary knowledge in Hebrew and also their word recognition and reading comprehension ability in English. The results have exhibited that basic processes that needed in reading in L1 such as phonological, orthographic and morphologic vocabulary knowledge, decoding ability and reading speed can predict reading success in FL, even though the two languages are not similar.

Similarly, in another study, Bosch et al. (2020) investigated how vocabulary knowledge affected early reading comprehension development and found out that L1 knowledge affects FL/L2 acquisition. In the study, they researched whether individual differences in L1 and L2 vocabulary can explain reading performance differences. They found out that L2 learners with a higher L1 vocabulary knowledge did better at reading lessons and learners with higher L1 and L2 vocabulary knowledge showed a better

performance in L2 reading. These studies demonstrate that the knowledge of vocabulary both in L1 and FL/L2 context is one of the crucial elements in explaining the comprehension differences among learners.

Contradictorily, researching the factors that affect reading comprehension in "English for Academic Purposes", Nergis (2013), discovered that syntactic and metacognitive awareness are more predictive of reading success than the depth of vocabulary knowledge. Nergis (2013) conducted four tests in order to measure the vocabulary depth, syntactic knowledge, metacognitive reading strategies awareness and reading comprehension of 45 undergraduate university students who supposedly have a high level of L2 proficiency. The results have demonstrated that the strongest indicator of reading comprehension success is metacognitive reading strategies awareness and the weakest indicator is the depth of vocabulary knowledge. Syntactic knowledge is also a strong predictor of reading comprehension. The results might suggest that when the learners are advanced L2 speakers, they depend more on metacognitive strategies while carrying out a reading task in L2, rather than vocabulary and syntactic knowledge.

Working memory capacity is another important factor in L2/FL reading as it means "the skilled use of storage in the long term memory" (Erçetin, 2015, p. 103). The studies that investigated the working memory, content familiarity and L2 reading comprehension relationship have also found positive correlations. Alptekin & Erçetin (2011) researched how content familiarity and working memory variables affect literal and inferential reading comprehension in L2. They have discovered that both working memory and content familiarity have a positive effect on inferential comprehension, which requires integrating the information across the text and making inferences using the implicit information in the text. However, they do not seem to have any effects on literal comprehension, which relies on the direct and explicit information in the text.

Leeser (2007) studied the effects of topic familiarity and working memory on reading comprehension in L2 and future tense form recognition. According to the results of the tests, topic familiarity and reading comprehension had a positive correlation, which emphasizes the importance of background knowledge. The effect of higher working memory on reading comprehension, on the other hand, was only positive if the topic was familiar. This might be due to the fact that learners with a higher working memory are

more successful at recalling pre-existing information. However, they need to have relevant background knowledge on the text topic.

Studies that are based on the Component Model of Reading (CMR), which posits that reading difficulties might be due to cognitive, ecological and psychological factors, consider factors such as the environment, peers, motivation and culture (Aaron et al., 2008). In their study, Chiu et al. (2012), examined the factors that affect reading success within the Component Model of Reading approach (CMR). They have found that country level and school level effects, which are both ecological, are the strongest effects in correlation with reading difficulties. Individual level effects were proven to be the least effective in this study, indicating that "low reading achievement is largely a societal phenomenon, rather than an individual one" (Chiu et al., 2012, p. 401). As an economic factor, for example, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of a country was responsible for the variance in reading ability on a great scale. In the same study, family attitudes towards reading, the number of books in the house and socioeconomic status of the family were found to be the most important ecological variables in reading achievement. School level factors such as peer achievement, school resources and positive home and school relationship were also important as ecological factors. Psychological factors that affect reading achievement the most were gender, reading attitude and self-concept. For instance, female learners were found to be more successful than males. Furthermore, enjoying reading and building a competent self-image had a positive correlation with reading achievement.

Based on the Component Model of Reading approach, Sparks (2019) suggests that the fact that L2 learners in the USA high schools cannot reach a basic proficiency level in L2 reading, even after taking Spanish lessons for three years, can be explained through cognitive, ecological and psychological factors. Sparks (2019) notes that living in a monolingual country where there is little or no interactions with L2 and ineffective L2 instruction and curriculum can be responsible for poor reading comprehension as ecological factors. In addition, some psychological factors such as lack of motivation, which happens due to failure in learning L2, might cause deficiency.

As a result, there are many variables that seem to have an effect on L2/FL reading success. In the above-mentioned studies, decoding and working memory, linguistic

proficiency, topic familiarity, environmental and motivational factors stand out as the most effective ones. Moreover, Jeon & Yamashita's (2014) meta-analysis of the earlier studies on reading comprehension suggests that reading success might be highly related to linguistic knowledge but it is also affected by L1 reading, working memory, meta-cognition and L1-L2 difference. These studies signify that in addition to the cognitive and meta-cognitive components and the knowledge of the language, ecological and psychological elements are also needed to be considered in L2/FL reading.

1.5.3. Studies on Teacher Perceptions

Teaching a foreign language involves many elements interacting with each other, such as the content, learning environment, teachers and students. Teachers are one of the most influential components in the learning process as they are the guides and facilitators. Their ideas and beliefs actively shape the teaching activity and are influenced by it in return. Studying teacher cognition might be beneficial for foreign language teaching in a couple of ways. For example, Bell (2005) states that it is important to look into teachers' beliefs in order to identify effective teaching and learning methods and make teacher education more competent in the light of this information. Moreover, several studies have revealed that teachers' beliefs are very influential in their decision making processes and the way that they practice teaching in the classroom (Breen, 1991; Burns, 1992; Nunan, 1992; Richardson et al., 1991). For instance, teachers' in-class decisions to abandon lesson plans depend on their principles or maxims (Bailey, 1996; Richards, 1996). As a result, teacher cognition is a gateway to understanding foreign language teaching through discovering teachers' insights, perceptions and the actual classroom practices. This study intends to discover teachers' perceptions about the factors that affect reading comprehension success in L2/FL to understand the L2/FL reading ability better. Therefore, it is required to clarify why teachers' perceptions must be studied and what the studies on teachers' perceptions have provided so far.

Borg (2003) defines teacher cognition as "unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching" (p. 81). Teacher cognition can be considered as assumptions, knowledge, theories, perspectives, images, hypotheses and perceptions about teaching and anything related to teaching and learning such as teachers, students, subject, curricula and materials. According to Borg (2003), teacher cognition consists of several components.

These are schooling or the learning experience of the teacher, professional education, contextual factors and classroom practice. To explain, teachers' cognitions are affected by their own experience as learners, whether or not they can employ a teaching style that they agree with and their experience in the classroom.

According to Clark & Peterson (1984) teachers' thought processes include teachers' interactive thoughts and decisions, their theories and beliefs and planning. Together with teachers' observable actions and their effects, these processes are essential parts of the teaching process. Moreover, teachers' thought processes affect each other reciprocally, meaning that the teachers' beliefs and theories both affect and be affected by their interactive thinking in the classroom and planning processes. Eventually, teachers' actions are largely influenced by these thought processes (Clark & Peterson, 1984).

Teachers' thought processes are important in that although they are concealed they facilitate the understanding of visible classroom practices (Clark & Peterson, 1984). They have been a valuable source of information for the researchers over decades and numerous studies have been conducted on the subject (Borg, 2003; Burns, 1992; Richards, 1996). In 1980s, Horwitz developed a questionnaire named "Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory" (BALLI) to investigate teachers' and language students' belief systems and found out that they agreed on some topics such as the importance of practice and being exposed to the target language (Kuntz, 1996). Using the same questionnaire, Kern (1995) researched the belief systems of teachers and students and found out that teachers' beliefs are one of the factors that influence beliefs of students on language learning.

In two studies Schulz (1996; 2001) conducted two extensive researches and studied teacher and student beliefs regarding explicit grammar instruction and error correction in foreign or second language classrooms. Their results demonstrated a substantial difference between the beliefs of teachers and students. For example, students valued formal grammar study more than the teachers and the number of students who believed spoken errors should be corrected is much higher than that of the teachers.

Çalışır Gerem & Ekşi (2019) examined the teacher beliefs on grammar teaching and their actual classroom practices. They have found that teachers' beliefs about

grammar instruction and their classroom practices differ substantially. Although the teachers in the study claim that they teach grammar in a communicative and inductive way and they do not consider grammar as the main component of their lessons, the classroom observations demonstrated the opposite. This discrepancy might be due to the teachers' own learning experience and the fact that they try to comply with the curriculum when expressing their opinions. In another study on teacher beliefs about teaching grammar, Uysal & Bardakçı (2014) have detected that the majority of the teachers in the study possess traditional views on grammar teaching and they prefer teaching grammar explicitly rather than in a communicative way. This is explained through the time constraints, curriculum requirements and overcrowded classrooms. These two studies show how the teacher beliefs are affected by various factors such as learning experience, curriculum and the physical environment. It is important that these factors are uncovered and understood in order to improve teaching environments, curriculums and teacher education.

Bell's (2005) study focuses on teacher perceptions about effective teaching and learning. The results of the study, which involved conducting a questionnaire with 457 foreign language teachers, have revealed that there is a consensus on what effective foreign language teaching is. All the teachers in the study seem to agree on the importance of "communicative approaches to foreign language teaching, small group work, negotiation of meaning, strategies for foreign language learning and teacher qualifications" (Bell, 2005, p. 267).

To conclude, in addition to teachers' observable practices in the classroom, there is an unobservable thought process, which consists of teachers' own ideas and knowledge about teaching. This imperceptible aspect, which includes perceptions, theories and planning, must be examined further since it directly affects teachers' classroom behaviors. Eventually, it also influences their teaching practice and student beliefs. Moreover, studies on teacher cognition can help to determine effective teaching methods and improve teacher education. Teachers' perceptions can be a valuable source in understanding the reading process and the various factors that affect it, as well. Teachers' observations of the cognitive, environmental and psychological factors that affect the reading success can provide a fuller understanding of the reading process.

1.5.4. Studies on Teacher Perceptions about Reading Instruction

Reading ability is an imperative part of foreign language learning and learners cannot be academically successful without being competent readers. Accordingly, more research is needed to understand and explain how reading comprehension occurs. Although there are many empirical studies on the components of reading and their effects on the reading ability, there has not been much research on teachers' perceptions. However, teachers' perceptions on the factors that affect reading can be helpful in understanding reading in L2/FL because their experience and observations in the classroom will help explain these factors in depth. Therefore, when examining the factors that influence reading in L2/FL, teachers' observations and ideas should be considered both to reach a better understanding of the L2/FL reading process and to understand students' reading behaviors better. Aebersold & Field (1997) argue that:

> Teachers need to understand their students' reading behaviors and be able to help students understand those behaviors as well. Textbooks and materials designed for the L2 reading class, however, seldom detail the kinds of reading behaviors teachers might observe in class, much less explain the causes for those behaviors. Skilled teachers have to be careful observers and need to know as much as possible about the linguistic and educational backgrounds of their students. (pp. 22-23)

Teachers' observations in the classroom and their classroom experience might provide an insight about different types of reading behaviors, the effect of linguistic knowledge and reading backgrounds of learners. Teacher perceptions might give information about the factors that play a role in successful reading comprehension. They may also help to understand the reasons behind poor reading abilities. Thus, teacher education and the design of the reading lessons might be altered in the light of this knowledge from teachers. A significant part of this thesis scrutinizes teachers' perceptions since teachers' perceptions have not been substantially researched with regard to reading skills in L2/FL. The findings of this study might reveal new information about teacher observations, student behaviors and classroom practices in reading lessons. It is important to discern the findings of previous studies concerning the teacher perceptions on L2/FL reading in order to discover new information.

In order to see the effect of teacher perceptions on teaching reading, Richardson et al., (1991) investigated the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in reading comprehension instruction. They interviewed and observed elementary school teachers to discover the effect of beliefs on teaching practice. The interviews aimed at revealing the beliefs related to how reading was taught and learned and the definition of reading comprehension. The results of the interviews demonstrated that the beliefs of the teachers who were interviewed ranged from believing that reading comprehension was the result of learning skills and vocabulary to the notion that reading had to be taught and learned through the use of literature. Those who believed learning through literature was more important did not think teaching skills was necessary. The research also uncovered that the teachers considered students' backgrounds and oral reading as important components of teaching and learning reading. In addition, the researchers were able to predict teachers' classroom behaviours based on their beliefs which indicates that there is a correlation between beliefs and practices.

Collie Graden (1996) conducted a study to identify the teacher beliefs regarding reading and reading instruction and the relationship between the beliefs and practices. Six foreign language teachers were observed and interviewed for the study. The results have signified an overall consistency between the teachers' opinions and classroom practices. The teachers believed in the importance of providing students with constant reading practice that is level-appropriate and interesting and the importance of using the target language during lessons. They also believed that oral reading is not beneficial for reading comprehension. The classroom observations demonstrated that the teachers had to deviate from their beliefs about appropriate reading instruction due to lack of student preparation and motivation.

Chou (2008) investigated teachers' beliefs about reading theories and strategies and their relationship with classroom practices. Chou (2008) used "The Teaching English Reading Questionnaire" to gather data from the participants who were English instructors at university level. According to the results of the study, the teachers believe cognitive strategy, meta-cognitive strategy and linguistic knowledge are the most important factors for reading comprehension. The study also looked into the differences between the beliefs of native and non-native speakers and the differences between the opinions of male and

female teachers. As a result, it has been revealed that non-native speakers of English are more likely to use holistic strategies, such as predicting the main idea of the following paragraph, and extra-aided strategies, such as using dictionaries and visual support. Moreover, female teachers tend to use aided strategies more than male teachers.

Nazari & Bagheri (2014) researched teachers' opinions about reading theories and strategies in foreign language teaching and their relevance to the classroom practice using a questionnaire and classroom observations. The teachers who participated in the study believe that finding the main idea, vocabulary and scanning are the most important reading strategies, meaning that the cognitive strategy and linguistic knowledge are considered the most significant. According to the results of the study, the least important theories or strategies include translating the text into Farsi, understanding the types of the text, and reading aloud the text. Nazari & Bagheri (2014) also discovered that mostly there is a consistency between teachers' beliefs about reading theories and strategies and their classroom practices.

Protacio & Jang (2016) investigated the perceptions of teachers regarding what motivates English learners to read in English and compared the perceptions with the general reading motivation literature. They held discussions in focus groups to find out about the perceptions. The results of the study has shown that participants consider accessible texts, students' reading proficiency and fitting in as the most influential factors in reading motivation. That is to say, students must read interesting texts and their self-concepts as readers must remain positive through reading level-appropriate texts to increase reading motivation. Furthermore, students are motivated if they are subjected to cultural texts that will help them learn about and adjust to the new culture, which is called integrative motivation.

Some researchers have investigated the teachers' views about using internet sources in reading lessons (Aydan, 2014; Koçak, 2010). Koçak (2010) has researched both student and teacher perceptions on using the internet sources in reading lessons and the results have revealed that internet sources are useful in terms of developing reading skills, accessing a wide range of reading resources, enhancing vocabulary and cultural knowledge and increasing motivation. Aydan (2014) has investigated teachers' views on blog use to improve reading instruction. Teachers in the study stated that using blogs in

reading lessons benefited them in terms of teaching reading and writing skills, learning vocabulary, critical thinking and increasing learner motivation. Both studies (Aydan, 2014; Koçak, 2010) suggest that the internet is a useful source for improving reading instruction through providing resources and increasing motivation.

The studies have signified that foreign language teachers' beliefs can be a rich source of information in understanding reading comprehension in a foreign language. It can be deduced that linguistic knowledge, frequent reading practice, use of the target language, use of literary texts, learning the reading skills and strategies are considered the most important factors in successful reading comprehension. Furthermore, the studies have indicated that there is mostly a positive relationship between teachers' perceptions and their classroom practices (Chou, 2008; Grade, 1996; Nazari & Bagheri, 2014; Protacio & Jang, 2016; Richardson et al., 1991). Teachers' behavior in the classroom is highly influenced by their beliefs. Hence, exploring the thinking processes of teachers is substantial in terms of explaining foreign language teaching and learning and improving pre-service education of teachers.

1.5.5. Reasons for Differences in Reading Comprehension Success

Reading comprehension occurs as a result of various cognitive processes. Goodman (1982) argues that these processes or "optical, perceptual, syntactic, and semantic cycles" and the strategies that are used to make sense of the texts are universal and they are similar in all languages (p. 74). Grabe (2009b) also posits that cognitive processing skills are employed universally in reading. According to this argument, being literate in their L1, adult learners must have the advantage of transferring knowledge and skills when they read in L2/FL since reading processes in all languages are universal. However, "Language Threshold Hypothesis" argues that L1 reading skills can only be transferred if an adequate amount of linguistic knowledge in L2/FL is acquired (Alderson, 1984; Grabe, 2009b; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Koda, 2005). According to these two hypotheses, the reasons for learners to have differences in reading comprehension success and the problems that are encountered while reading in L2/FL might be either due to the lack of L1 reading skills and their transfer or due to the lack of appropriate linguistic proficiency in L2/FL. In addition to linguistic knowledge and transfer of L1 reading skills, cultural knowledge, readers' self-image, how they perceive reading in L2/FL, and some

environmental factors such as the availability of resources might affect the success in L2/FL reading (Wurr, 2003). In order to understand these and other reasons, it is important to know how L2/FL reading is different from L1 reading and what affects reading success in L2/FL. This study aims to gather information about the components of L2/FL reading and the factors affecting reading success in a second or foreign language. Therefore, a brief analysis of the possible reasons behind successful reading comprehension will be useful.

One of the prominent factors for being successful readers is undoubtedly language proficiency. However, there are different views on the extent to which language knowledge affects reading comprehension. Several researchers have questioned whether reading in L2/FL is a language problem or a reading problem (Alderson, 1984; Carrel, 1991; Wurr, 2003). That is to say, they researched whether it is enough to have language proficiency to be good at reading or whether it requires more than linguistic knowledge. Clarke's (1980) study on L1 and L2 reading skills of Spanish-speaking students revealed that the participants used similar skills to obtain meaning in both languages and good L1 readers can transfer reading skills while reading a text in English to some extent. However, the study also emphasizes the importance of language proficiency because the participants in the study could not transfer skills or perform well when they encountered difficult texts or unfamiliar topics. This indicates that in order to transfer L1 reading skills to L2/FL, a certain level of linguistic proficiency in that language must be achieved. Carrel's (1991) study, which examines the effects of both first language reading ability and proficiency in the second language on L2 reading success, suggests that while both language proficiency and reading ability in L1 seem to affect reading comprehension success in L2/FL, proficiency in L2 is a more decisive factor for those learners with lower L2 proficiency. Reading ability in L1, on the other hand, has a greater effect on the reading success of the learners with a higher L2 proficiency level. Moreover, studies suggest that learners perceive L1 and L2/FL reading differently and therefore they apply different reading strategies (Chin, 1996; Wurr, 2003). This prevents the transfer of L1 reading skills to L2/FL reading.

Many researchers emphasize the importance of transferring strategies used in L1 reading because meta-cognitive awareness and strategy use facilitate reading

substantially and learners with sufficient education in meta-cognitive awareness in their first language can transfer this knowledge when they learn a second or foreign language. Using strategies such as contextual guessing, critical reading and using background knowledge benefits readers by helping them manage their reading processes purposely and efficiently. Thus, the readers who try to improve, appraise and organize their comprehension through these strategies are likely to be successful readers (Aebersold & Field, 1997; Baker, 1989; Carrell, 1989; Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

There are also some non-linguistic factors that affect reading. First, cultural proficiency influences success in L2/FL reading because topic familiarity and using background knowledge have a positive effect on comprehension. Several studies have displayed that culturally familiar texts are easier to understand for learners (Alptekin & Erçetin, 2011; Leeser, 2007). Another non-linguistic factor is readers' perceptions of reading and their self-images as readers. To explain, if readers think that L2/FL reading is different from reading in L1, they are likely to apply different strategies and therefore do not transfer some of the useful strategies that they use in their first language. For example, while some readers tolerate ambiguity and focus more on contextual clues in their first language, they focus too much on the language and the unknown vocabulary in second or foreign language reading (Wurr, 2003). In addition, readers with a positive attitude and self-image regarding reading tend to be more successful readers according to the research (Chiu et. al., 2012; Sparks, 2019). Researchers also note some other non-linguistic factors that play a role in reading success such as the learning environment, available resources and schooling (Carrel, 1991; Durgunoğlu & Öney, 2000; Sparks; 2019; Wurr, 2003). For instance, being exposed to L2/FL outside the classroom can have a positive effect on reading skills by exposing learners to different contexts in that language (Sparks, 2019). Wurr (2003) emphasizes the importance of the learning environment and resources and notes that:

> L2 reading curricula for adults should facilitate the readers' awareness and use of all the resources available to them in the reading process by integrating theory, methods, materials, and evaluation into a language-rich environment that celebrates and builds on what learners know-their language, culture, interests and common experiences. (pp. 165)

To conclude, although adult second or foreign language learners have some experience and education in reading in their first language, their performances in second or foreign language reading vary. The reasons for the variances in reading in L2/FL might be due to several factors. Some researchers posit that the differences in reading success in L2/FL are related to L1 reading skills and their transfer as reading processes and strategies are universal (Aebersold & Field, 1997; Goodman, 1982; Koda, 2005). As a result, if learners are good L1 readers, they are more likely to be good L2/FL readers. Some researchers argue that the language threshold plays an important role in learning to read in L2/FL as well since it is not possible to transfer L1 reading skills without a certain level of linguistic proficiency in L2/FL (Alderson, 1984; Grabe, 2009b; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Koda, 2005). Thus, learners must have adequate linguistic knowledge to become successful readers. Many researchers also emphasize the importance of strategy use, cultural knowledge and topic familiarity for reading comprehension (Alptekin & Erçetin, 2011; Leeser, 2007). Moreover, there are motivational factors such as readers' perceptions of reading and their self-images as readers (Chiu et. al., 2012; Sparks, 2019). Finally, environmental factors such as the country, schools and resources may have an effect on learners' success in L2/FL reading (Carrel, 1991; Durgunoğlu & Öney, 2000; Sparks; 2019; Wurr, 2003).

CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Questions

A review of the literature has revealed that more research into teachers' perceptions on the subject of reading is needed. A few of the previous studies that were about the causes of being successful or unsuccessful in foreign language reading focused on teachers' perceptions. Therefore, this study aims to investigate what teachers think about the factors that affect improving reading comprehension skills in a foreign language and how reading skills can be improved. As the aim of this study is to collect information about the perceptions of ELT instructors regarding the reasons that affect improving foreign language reading comprehension, the following research questions will be brought to a focus:

1. What are the perceptions of ELT instructors regarding the factors that affect improving foreign language reading skills?
2. What are the factors that affect foreign language reading comprehension?
3. What do ELT instructors suggest to improve reading comprehension skills?

2.2 Data Collection Instruments

In this study, a qualitative research method was conducted in order to obtain the perspectives of teachers regarding foreign language reading comprehension. Qualitative research is inductive research that aims to understand a specific phenomenon, thoughts and events in order to develop new hypotheses and theories. Qualitative research employs inductive logic, emphasizes meaning and understanding and aims to explore rich depictions. In order to gather information about concepts, opinions and experiences, data from texts and images are used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Educational researchers who follow the qualitative research method can use observations, interviews, focus groups, surveys or existing data to obtain empirical research data from their

participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). In this study, qualitative research methods such as open-ended interviewing, systematic data collection and data analysis procedures were utilized.

One of the most common data collection methods in qualitative research is interviews (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). In this method, the researcher or the interviewer collects data by asking questions to the participants or the interviewees. According to King (2004), the purpose of an interview is "to see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee and to understand how and why they come to have this particular perspective" (p. 11). Johnson & Christensen (2008) state that interviews grant comprehensive data on what a person thinks and feels about a subject. In fact, they reveal the interviewee's inner world. An interview is a useful instrument to gather information about teachers' perspectives, as well. It not only allows the interviewer to discover teachers' ideas and experiences but also helps to collect a large amount of this kind of information.

There are different types of interviews that the researcher can employ. In an informal conversational interview, there are no predetermined questions, so the interview flows in a conversational tone and questions emerge naturally. This is the least systematic and organized and most flexible type of interview. In the interview guide approach, only the topics to be discussed are predetermined, but there are no fixed questions. This approach is also situational and conversational; however, it provides an outline which makes it more systematic than the conversational interview. A standardized open-ended interview, on the other hand, provides certain questions which are determined and phrased in advance. Although these questions are open-ended, all interviewees answer the same questions which enables comparability of the answers. It also diminishes the effects of the interviewer and provides more organized and easy to analyze data. However, it is not very flexible which restrains spontaneity and flexibility. The final type of interview is a closed quantitative interview in which both questions and the answers are fixed. The interviewees answer the questions by choosing from the predetermined responses. It is a quantitative approach that facilitates data analysis, comparison and organization, but at the same time, it is impersonal and doesn't provide a rich depiction of experiences.

In this study, interviews with instructors were primarily used to gather data about the perceptions of English instructors on improving foreign language reading skills. Informed by the literature review, 8 interview questions were formulated by the researcher in order to discover the opinions of the interviewees on the subject of what affects the development of foreign language reading skills. The interview questions were designed after reviewing related literature, drawing from the researcher's own experience and consulting with colleagues about the possible factors influencing the reading comprehension skills. The questions were aimed at exploring the participants' opinions on the factors that influence reading comprehension in a foreign language, some of which are linguistic knowledge, L1 reading, using reading strategies, cultural background, topic familiarity, motivation and the learning environment. Standardized open-ended interviews were decided to be used for this study in order to collect as much information as possible in a regulated way.

Through the review of the literature, the main aspects of reading were determined as linguistic knowledge, L1 reading skills and their transfer, using reading strategies, cultural background, topic familiarity, motivational and environmental factors. In order to gather data about teachers' perceptions on these factors, 8 open-ended questions were formed by the researcher (Appendix 1). The first interview question was "What are the factors that affect improving foreign language reading skills?" This open-ended question was asked to determine the factors affecting foreign language reading success based on teachers' thoughts and their teaching experience. The following questions were related to the individual elements in foreign language reading such as linguistic knowledge and use of reading strategies.

These questions were formed by the researcher after reviewing the literature and determining the important aspects of foreign language reading and a pilot study was conducted to detect any ambiguity in the questions. A pilot study is recommended to facilitate the refinement of the data collection instruments prior to the actual data collection process (Yin, 2009). Therefore, the researcher interviewed a colleague before interviewing the actual participants. This pilot study revealed that the questions were clear and there was no need for a rewording.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

After careful review of the literature and forming the interview questions, the participants were purposefully chosen from the instructors of universities as the focus of this study is adult education. 23 teachers who met the criteria were contacted through email or phone and only 20 of them agreed to be part of the study. All the participants in this study are certified instructors with at least 7 years of English teaching experience and they all work at English preparatory schools of universities. They work at 3 different universities, all of which are private foundation universities. 19 participants were interviewed in Turkish and 1 participant, who is Iranian, was interviewed in English. Each interview were conducted on Zoom and lasted about 15 to 25 minutes. At the beginning of each interview, the participants were shown the interview protocol (Appendix 1) and the informed consent form. They were asked to approve the informed consent form at the beginning of the interview. They were informed that their answers would be used to acquire a better understanding of the perceptions of teachers regarding the factors that may influence improving foreign language reading. The interviews were audio-recorded via Zoom with the participants' consent. Information about the participants' gender, years of teaching experience and graduate degree were also collected (Appendix 2). It was conveyed to the teachers that the data collected would be kept confidential and their personal information would not be shared with any third parties without their consent. Thus, data shared in this study would be anonymous. All the participants were asked the same questions, however; in some interviews follow-up questions were needed for clarification or elaboration of their answers. Field notes were taken during each interview by the researcher in order to write down the keywords and quotations that would be useful when analyzing the data and detecting the themes.

2.4 Data Analysis Procedure

To diligently analyze qualitative data, first, the data must be transcribed. It is the process of typing what was said in the audio recordings of the interviews. Through this process, the data becomes ready to be analyzed. The analysis consists of several stages which are segmenting, coding and developing category systems. Segmenting is separating the data into meaningful units. A meaningful unit is what the researcher considers

valuable for the research and can be a word, a sentence or a paragraph. The next process is called coding. In this process, segments from the transcript are labeled using codes or categories. A list of all the codes and categories, called a master list, should be prepared in order to keep track of these codes and categories. Codes or category names can be both inductive and priori codes. Inductive codes refer to the ones derived from the transcript during the analysis process. Priori codes, however, are prepared by the researchers in advance after considering the research questions. The researcher can use both inductive and priori codes based on the needs. After the coding process, the codes must be organized in a hierarchic order by specifying the higher-level categories and subcategories. The next step is called enumeration, in which the researcher finds out how often the words or codes surface in the transcript and notes down the numbers in order to see the frequency (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

All the data which was audio-recorded during the interviews was transcribed via Sonix, a website that offers automated transcription in Turkish. The researcher reviewed and edited all the transcription texts as the website did not provide completely correct results. After the transcription of all the audio recordings, the researcher translated the data from Turkish to English. Only one of the interview transcriptions did not need to be translated as the interview was in English. The transcripts and field notes were read and examined by the researcher several times to determine segments and categories. Key words that are meaningful for this research are decided and the categories are generated considering these key words. A master list of the categories was prepared (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

It is significant to assess the reliability of the codes and categories in order to generate accurate interpretations. The categorization process must be dependable in terms of consistency. Consistency can be assessed by intra-rater and inter-rater reliability. Intra-rater reliability or stability is reached if the coder gets the same codes after coding the data again and again. Inter-rater reliability or reproducibility is achieved when different coders reach the same results (Stemler, 2000). Thus, the researcher read and coded the transcripts several times to reach consistent results. After transcription, coding and reliability assessment processes, the frequency that each category has is discussed in relation to the theories and previous studies on the subject as the final stage.

CHAPTER 3. RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to investigate the research question "What are the perceptions of ELT instructors regarding the factors that affect improving foreign language reading skills?" 20 English instructors from 3 universities were interviewed and information was collected to gain insight to their perceptions regarding foreign language reading skills and how to improve them. 20 instructors who participated in the study shared their ideas, knowledge and experience both as learners and instructors. Their answers provide valuable information on the subject of reading in a foreign language as all the participants are experienced professionals. After analyzing the interview transcripts, 6 main factors that influence improving foreign language reading skills emerged, which are learner related factors, L2/FL, L1 related factors, using reading strategies, text related factors and learning environment related factors. In this chapter, these factors are addressed with quotations from the interviews in relation to the research questions.

3.1 Category 1: Learner Related Factors

Although linguistic knowledge both in L1 and L2/FL is a strong indicator of successful foreign language reading skills, learners' individual differences might also be considered in understanding both reading and overall language learning process. These can be psychological factors such as motivation and self-image, or some aspects such as background and reading habits (Durgunoğlu & Öney, 2000; Sparks, 2019). That is to say, learners' background, readiness to learn and their perspective of reading might affect learners' reading skills in a foreign language. Having a habit of reading and motivation were referred to as two of the most influential factors in the interviews, as well. Therefore, they must be considered as noteworthy components of the reading process and understood in depth.

3.1.1. Habit of Reading

Most people gain a habit of reading through observing their family at home or during their formal education. Having a reading habit refers to a positive attitude towards

reading, reading novels, short stories or articles in L1 or L2/FL and having a previous reading experience in general. It might be related to the learner's background, as it is influenced by the learner's family. However, it might also be acquired at school or university, even during adulthood. Moreover, while some learners can have a reading habit in their native language, those who have not acquired it in L1 might obtain it in a foreign language. Either obtained at home or at the school environment, in L1 or in L2/FL, reading habit is undoubtedly a great influence in learners' development in foreign language reading.

In this study, the habit of reading emerged as a main theme that was repeated by 10 participants as well. Some of them believed that it is the most important factor in foreign language reading. Participant 12 said:

> It is very important because if they have no reading habit in their native language, they do not usually have a reading habit in English. That's why they can't improve, they generally do not like to read. They prefer to read shorter paragraphs. When there is a long paragraph, there is such tension and fear in the students about how to read such a long thing. So if they have a reading skill and habit in their native language, then they can do it more easily in English, as well.

Another teacher also associated having a reading habit with dealing with long texts and said "It is a skill to be able to read a 500-word article in native language or English, regardless of language. They do not have these habits. They do not have the ability to sit down and read 500 words. First of all, they do not have that patience or attention".

11 participants also emphasized the importance of reading activities outside the classroom such as reading books, newspapers and articles. Participant 1 suggested reading best sellers or simplified novels while participant 15 emphasized readers as useful reading materials. Participant 9 said "If a student has very good scores in reading and answers all the questions correctly, that student also reads Turkish books. They have a habit of reading. They have gained a habit of reading books". Participant 1 shared a similar idea and said "Of course, the reading texts that we read in the lessons definitely affect the development, but I think that extra sources should also be used. Otherwise, I think it is not very possible to develop reading skills on the basis of the lesson alone".

Some instructors associated having a reading habit with the learner's background, the country and family that the learner grew up in. Participant 17 said:

> The family the student has is already a huge factor. Does a reading habit exist in this family? Is there a reading habit in the country they live in? We all see it. Everyone reads a book abroad, on the subway or on the bus. Of course there is a decline in reading. The new generations do not read as much as we do, both in our country and abroad. But in that sense, Turkey is not an environment that has the habit of reading.

Similarly, participant 5 talked about the country's role in developing a reading habit and said "When we look at developed countries, people are proud of reading there. However, in our country people think that they do not miss out on anything if they do not study or read. There are so many students who say 'I haven't read anything' and brag about it".

As a result, these participants believe in the usefulness of having a habit of reading. Whether or not learners can develop this habit might depend on their family, country and even the age they live in. Nevertheless, it can be a great advantage in gaining reading skills in another language.

3.1.2. Motivation

Motivation is a highly influential factor in language learning because learners cannot begin learning or persevere in their learning without it. Motivation is of utmost importance for reading, in particular, since it can be a difficult skill that requires a lot of patience and perseverance. Not only does it help learners start reading long texts in another language, but it also encourages them to continue even when they are faced with challenging reading tasks. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the role of motivation in reading context.

All the participants in this study agreed that motivation influences the improvement of foreign language reading skills. Participant 8 said "Motivation is important in everything; I think this contributes to second language learning in every field. It is also effective in reading. If the student is not inclined to read, they seem not to enjoy it, but to resist because they do not enjoy it". Participant 11 said "It is to have the motivation that I can do it, whatever the text is in front of me, or if it is very familiar or

if it is unfamiliar. And that motivation is basically the fuel of comprehension". They also talked about internal and external motivation and how to increase it in learners. For example, participant 9 said:

> Motivation can take two forms. Getting a good grade from the exam is also a motivation. Students can develop such a motivation, or being really good in a subject that interests them, wanting to learn more about that subject can cause motivation. This can also make students improve reading skills in that language. Some instructors said that internal motivation in reading is hard to achieve. Therefore, external motivation that comes from exam scores is necessary.

Participant 13 said "Is a student highly motivated to improve their reading skills? I do not think so. The scoring of the reading parts in the exams is very high. Maybe it leads to external motivation and external factors rather than internal factors".

On the subject of how to increase learner motivation, the participants mentioned the role of teacher as an important factor. Participant 6 said "It is the duty of every instructor to increase learners' motivation by creating something interesting and making that reading activity more attractive for them". Participant 10 said "The teacher should be thoughtful at first for the learner to have an encouraging environment and develop a learning curiosity".

Participant 12 also emphasized instructors' role on motivation and said:

> Its effect is very high in language as well as in everything else. But how to increase this motivation is a huge challenge for instructors. The teacher's job becomes much easier if the student has their own motivation to learn. While what we have to do is teach them how to study, give the texts they need to read or guide them, we try to increase the motivation of a student without motivation. You can only come to the language teaching part after increasing the motivation. Because when the student lacks interest and motivation, they do not want to do anything.

Instructors' roles in motivating students was mentioned by participant 11 as well who said:

> In my opinion, all the thoughts and the insight talks that learners have in their minds have an effect. And it is one of the major responsibilities of a teacher to tackle those kinds of inner discussions and let the learners know that they are there for them and they can rely on them and they are in this together. And I mean that is what worked for me as a teacher and I could rely on my students when I have a good rapport and when they are psychologically at peace as well.

In addition to the teacher's role, some participants suggested ways to increase motivation in learners which are related to the level of the text and text topics. For example, participant 7, said:

> They see that they get motivated when they succeed, and they can read more when they are motivated. But I think the feeling that they can understand what they read, being able to answer the questions and being successful motivate them. When the student starts reading with a text that they do not understand and which is above their level, they do not want to read again.

Similarly, participant 12 stated that "You cannot give a high level text to a very low level student. Then, no matter how eager they are, of course, their motivation will be lost".

Curiosity emerges as another motivational factor that 7 participants mentioned. For instance, participant 16 said "If there is a reading habit coming from the family, if there is a curiosity to learn, the students tend to read in foreign languages and broaden their horizons" Participant 10 also made a connection between curiosity and the learning environment and said "Having a family that encourages learning has a positive effect. Having a family that encourages learning curiosity". Curiosity and being interested in reading was also associated with text topics. For example, participant 2 said:

> If the learner is familiar with a subject or if they are more or less interested, they understand better when they come across a text that gives more detailed information on that subject. Besides, sometimes there is an effort from the student to show that they know about the subject in the classroom, or an effort to gain appreciation and so on.

Participant 14 also said "If the student has an opinion on the topic and it is something they like, then the reading lesson becomes very good and productive. If it is a topic the student is interested in, then reading becomes efficient".

According to the instructors, another problem with increasing motivation is related to the generation and the time learners live in. For example, participant 17 said:

> Especially in the new generation, I generally see low motivation to read in any language. The reason for this is because the concentration spans are very low. Because when you read something written, you have to keep the concentration high for a long time, you have to get into it. I see a problem here. Since there is less interest in reading in general and there are much different, more easily

> consumable stimuli on the screens, there is no motivation to read written texts as much as before. That's why reading skills cannot improve much.

Another participant, participant 7, shared a similar opinion and said "Unfortunately, it is also about this generation being very visual. I think this generation perceives things better visually. I think it is getting more difficult to teach reading". Participant 20 stated:

> This generation Z already does not have this motivation but I do not think it is their fault. It is the media available to them. In our youth, the main media was TV and reading. These were the sources of entertainment. Now, sources of entertainment are so diverse, reading comes last in line. I cannot directly blame generation Z for not reading, but I expect them to reach the capacity to perceive the importance of reading after a while. I ask them "Why aren't you curious about reading?"

To sum up, all the participants in this study agree that learners need motivation to improve reading skills, as well as any other skills. Their motivation might come from inside or outside. When they do not have intrinsic motivation, teachers can help develop it. Some participants mentioned that it might be more difficult to cultivate motivation nowadays due to the distractions of this age. Nevertheless, motivation is a must for language learners and developing it relies on both learners themselves and some other external factors such as teachers and the environment.

3.2 Category 2: L2/FL Related Factors

Although learners' L1 proficiency and reading abilities provide a strong foundation for reading skills in another language, they will not be enough unless they are supported by L2/FL. According to Language Threshold Hypothesis, a certain level of linguistic competence in the target language must be gained in order to benefit from language skills in L1. Therefore, L2/FL proficiency is the first step towards learning and improving reading skills in a foreign language (Alderson, 1984; Grabe, 2009b; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Koda, 2005). In the interviews, being competent in L2/FL is mentioned as another important factor by the instructors as well.

18 out of 20 instructors agreed that linguistic competence in L2/FL is effective in improving foreign language reading skills. Participant 7 associated linguistic competence in L2/FL with motivation and said:

> It has a lot of impact. The student with poor linguistic knowledge does not approach reading and gives up quickly. They do not even bother to try those strategies because they get lost in the text. They stop reading because there are words they do not know. It affects the motivation of the student, causing them to quit.

When their answers regarding linguistic knowledge were examined, it was revealed that the positive effect of vocabulary was mentioned 38 times but the positive effects of grammar was only mentioned 17 times in the transcripts. 15 out of 20 instructors emphasized the importance of vocabulary and stated that it is highly effective to improve reading skills. Participant 8 said:

> Grammar is secondary in reading skill. I think the vocabulary is more effective. Of course, grammar knowledge is important, but I think vocabulary is important in the first place. Apart from that, even if there is a grammatical structure that students do not know, they can make sense in some way.

Participant 17 also shared a similar opinion and said:

> Of course, the two are related as you cannot understand what is meant without linguistic knowledge. But I still think it is more important to know more or less what the words mean rather than grammar. Because when you can understand the words then you can infer a meaning. Even if you do not know or cannot fully understand that grammatical structure, you can make an inference and you can understand and infer what is meant according to the course of the story. Therefore, it is more important for me to know the words, to understand the words.

Participant 9, on the other hand, expressed that grammar knowledge is more important than vocabulary by saying "Obviously, grammar can be more important because students can guess the meaning of the words. A student can guess unfamiliar words from the context in some way, but if there is a critical grammatical structure, that sentence may be more difficult to understand".

According to 5 participants, the appropriacy of text levels has a positive impact on improving reading comprehension as well. Participant 2 said "If the level of the text is a little above the learner's level, grammatically or in terms of linguistic knowledge, they do not understand what they are reading, and when they do not understand, they lose

enthusiasm or become lazy and stop reading". Moreover, participant 13 gave an example from the reading lessons at the university she works at and said:

> The student's level of grammar and vocabulary has an effect because our texts are actually above their level and challenging somehow. Although the main course lesson is not that much, somehow our reading lessons are above their level. Therefore, it is already very challenging for students who do not have enough vocabulary and grammar.

3 participants stated that just as L2/FL linguistic knowledge has an effect on foreign language reading skills, reading in a foreign language influences L2/FL linguistic knowledge and they have a reciprocal relationship. Participant 1 said "It actually depends on each other. It is like a chicken and an egg situation. The more you read, the more vocabulary you have. The more vocabulary you have, the more comprehension increases". Participant 10 shared a similar opinion and stated that:

> The student might have a low language level, but if they read a lot, they can still improve their reading skills. Even if the student hasn't received an advanced language education, when they intensely work on reading activities, read articles, books, the newspaper, etc. or try to read written texts around them, then their reading skills improve and become better than others.

Participant 20, who also thinks linguistic knowledge can be acquired through reading, said "You can improve your linguistic skills on the way. For example, when the student starts to read a beginner-level text, they do not know every grammar structure or every word in it. I think the motivation to want to learn is the most important issue".

To sum up, the participants assume that L2/FL linguistic skills, especially vocabulary, can have various effects on reading comprehension skills. It may affect the level of comprehension as well as the motivation of learners. In addition, learners must read as much as possible to enhance their vocabulary and grammar knowledge in a foreign language.

3.3 Category 3: L1 Related Factors

Literature review has revealed that one of the essential elements in reading is the learner's first language, as adult learners initially acquire reading skills in their native language. L1-L2 distance and whether learners have gained reading skills in their L1

affect foreign language reading skills because linguistic proficiency and transfer of reading skills depend on them. That is to say, similarities between L1 and L2/FL might facilitate reading in L2/FL. Moreover, having developed reading skills in L1 assists in transferring these skills to foreign language reading. (Aebersold & Field, 1997; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Koda, 2005). When asked about the effects of L1 reading skills on foreign language reading skills, the instructors in this study held similar opinions.

13 out of 20 instructors mentioned the importance of reading ability and competency in L1. They all stated that having a reading habit in L1 that either started in childhood or in school is a crucial factor to become good readers in a foreign language. Participant 2 explained why the reading habit in L1 is important for foreign language reading skills and said that "If there is a reading skill or habit from childhood, then that habit becomes a part of their life. Therefore, when the learner switches to a different language, reading in that language is not so difficult for them". Participant 5, shared a similar opinion and said "If a learner does not speak or read in his native language, it is very difficult for them to read in a foreign language or to understand what he is reading". Participant 18 said "Unfortunately everything starts with the native language. If some skills develop in the native language, they are used in the foreign language as well. Because it is very difficult to teach an 18-year-old person from scratch".

Some instructors also explained how reading skills in L1 can contribute through the transfer between the two languages. Participant 17 stated "If you read something in any language, have the habit of reading, infer meaning from the text you read, imagine something, if you can do these in another language, it is much easier to transfer and use these skills in the foreign language you learn".

In addition, 4 participants suggested L1 competency, which means having a good command of the native language, is related to improving foreign language reading skills. Participant 13 said "The more vocabulary learners have in their L1, the more vocabulary they learn in a foreign language. That's why I really attach great importance to it. I think whether or not having grammar and vocabulary knowledge in Turkish has a great impact". Participant 20 pointed out the low exam scores that Turkish students receive from Turkish exams and said:

> According to recent research, our scores are very low compared to the world. So, it is not realistic to expect the students who cannot comprehend what they read and answer questions in their native language to be successful at these skills in a foreign language. It is very clear that languages nourish and influence each other.

As a result, more than half of the participants explained that L1 competency and reading skills are highly influential in improving reading comprehension in a foreign language in terms of forming a reading habit, acquiring reading skills and transferring these skills. Only 4 of them think that having L1 linguistic knowledge is also effective in enhancing reading skills in a foreign language.

3.4 Category 4: Using Reading Strategies

Many researchers agree that reading skills can be improved through the use of strategies (Aebersold & Field, 1997; Baker, 1989; Carrell, 1989; Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Strategies such as guessing the meaning from the context, reading critically and benefiting from one's background knowledge are immensely useful in terms of efficient reading comprehension. Those who use reading strategies are more likely to be better readers. Therefore, the participants in this study, who are experienced English instructors, were asked about the role of using strategies in foreign language reading.

15 participants in this study accept that using reading strategies is helpful to some extent. Some instructors believe that using reading strategies is important because learners should read for a purpose. Some of them think that reading strategies are useful in exams. For example, when asked about the factors that affect improving foreign language reading skills, participant 5 said "Third, being a slightly active reader, to question what you read. Not reading idly". Similarly, participant 9 suggested that giving a purpose is one of the prominent factors and said "We can talk about reading for a specific purpose. For example, students read the paragraph to find the main idea in our reading texts. Perhaps giving a specific purpose to the student can be effective". Participant 14 also emphasized the importance of giving learners a purpose to read and said:

> If there is a purpose, if there is a purpose related to the text the student is reading, the motivation comes with that purpose anyway. So it is better if the student is motivated that way. So if the teacher tells the students just to read a text without

> giving them a purpose, there is not much improvement in general. The student must have a purpose.

Participant 7 referred to using strategies as one of the most influential elements in developing foreign language reading and said:

> The ability to use strategies, to know strategies, that is, to know how to deal with the text. In fact, because they do not know how to deal with the text, they feel they have to understand every word, every sentence, so they do not focus on the task but only on the text. But if they know how to use strategies, if they know what to do in reading, their skills improve better.

When asked about the effects of using strategies, the instructors in this study said that they are usually useful in the exams or when answering comprehension questions in the classroom. Participant 11 said:

> The main thing about, especially academic reading, is most of the time, because the topics are so diverse and it is humanly impossible for students, for the learners to be familiar with all topics. So the steps to get through the comprehension question or to comprehend the text are from pre-teaching vocabulary, from the warm-up, from the scaffolding. The most important thing, in my opinion, is this scaffolding, which means to have a general idea about what they have and those reading techniques would help to achieve those things.

Other instructors also agreed that whether or not to use strategies depends on the type of the text. For example, participant 8 said:

> Now, if we are talking about reading skills for an exam, then of course these strategies are important. Apart from that, this is a broader subject. For example, a novel reading skill. The skills and methods you need to read novels are slightly different. But if you need to develop a reading strategy for the exam, of course it is important in this sense. Familiarity with these question types is essential to save time and at the same time better understand the text.

Likewise, participant 17 stated:

> It depends on what you read. If you're reading a storybook, a novel, or a short story for pleasure, then I think these reading strategies do not matter much. But of course, these strategies work if you are in an environment where you are studying for an exam that will measure your reading comprehension skills.

Participants 12 and 13 referred to the benefits of using strategies in terms of facilitating the comprehension for learners at lower levels. Participant 12 said:

> Students who are not at a very high level can get the information they need from the text when they understand what the text means in general, even though they do not know all the words with this kind of skimming activity. Besides, grammar structures that they do not know or word structures that they do not know may not be too difficult for them, because they know how to look at the text. In this way, they can at least read very long texts more effectively and in a short time.

Participant 13 stated a similar opinion and said:

> I think it is more helpful especially for students who have difficulties due to their level. Because if the level of the student is appropriate, they understand what they are reading without errors. Therefore, they do not fall into the question traps because he understands it correctly. I try to give things like test tactics to get them interested, too, with the advantage of having multiple choice questions. I give tactics about the use of synonyms in questions, and warn them about these traps. I think it affects positively. It also encourages the student. They think that even if they do not understand the passage entirely or their level of foreign language is not enough they can actually make these connections.

Some instructors also emphasized the fact that reading strategies can be developed through practice. For example, participant 4 said “It is useful, of course. But it is a skill that can be developed by the teacher, under the guidance of that teacher. It is of course useful after meeting the basic conditions. But maybe he uses it unconsciously. It can be improved with teacher guidance”. Participant 9 said “The more they work on this subject or attaches importance to reading strategies, the better the student's reading skills will become in their studies inside or outside of the classroom. I think they will improve”.

To summarize, reading strategies which can be very effective tools in academic reading and exams are considered a necessary part of reading instruction by the majority of the participants in this study. Learning and developing these strategies can help learners not only become better readers but also do well in exams. Therefore, they must be a part of reading instruction.

3.5 Category 5: Text Related Factors

Texts are another significant factor in foreign language reading as they are the main instruments in reading. The level and topic of the text might affect reading comprehension. To illustrate, being familiar with the text topic has a positive effect on reading comprehension since it enables recalling pre-existing information (Leeser, 2007;

Alptekin & Erçetin, 2011). Moreover, appropriacy of the text levels might facilitate comprehension, according to the Language Threshold Hypothesis (Alderson, 1984; Grabe, 2009b; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Koda, 2005). As a result, the effects of texts is one of the concernments of this study.

19 out of 20 participants agree that topic familiarity has an effect on reading comprehension. Participant 3 said "The more familiar a student is with the subject, the more they know the terminology of the subject, if it is an academic thing. If they know the humorous side of it in a social sense, the more easily they will understand what he is reading. Participant 9 explained its benefits by saying:

> For example, if a student is interested in space or, I do not know, aliens. In one lesson, there was the topic of aliens building the pyramids of Egypt. The topic attracts the attention of students who are interested in the topic and students who have previously read about it because they have a background. These students perform better on those tasks. So it is also important to be familiar with the topic.

Likewise, participant 6 said:

> In fact, one of the biggest responsibilities of the instructors is to provide familiarity with the subject by creating a context. At the same time, we must try to familiarize them with the things in the text by having them watch a video if necessary, give them a little information, and play a small game. Because there can be many different topics.

Another issue about topic familiarity in the texts is that it helps learners at the beginning levels. For example, when asked about the effect of topic familiarity on improving foreign language reading skills participant 17 said:

> I think it might be preferable at the beginning especially. For example, when you read a story that you previously read in your L1 and you know very well, it is much easier to understand what the story means and where it goes in a foreign language. It has this effect. I think it is something that can be useful especially at the lower levels.

Participant 10 had a similar opinion:

> Being familiar with the topic is important in terms of allowing the learner to make comparisons. The fact that the topics of the texts that the learner read in his native language and in a foreign language are similar is helpful at the beginning, but later it becomes meaningless and boring. Topic familiarity can become boring after a

certain level because when you learn a new language, you should be learning new things as well, instead of reading about the same topics.

Participant 13 emphasized the importance of interesting topics and said:

> Being familiar with the subject may be a relief for students who are struggling. Perhaps it is more important at lower levels. So, of course at lower levels, topic familiarity may be useful, but it is better that the subject is more interesting as the level progresses. Then the lessons flow more easily.

On whether or not to provide learners only with familiar topics, participant 2 said "I think it (topic familiarity) is important, but in this case, should only the texts they are familiar with be given to them? No, maybe they will come across a topic they do not know and it will be very interesting". Participant 4, who believe that being familiar with the topic is not that vital for reading comprehension, also said:

> Frankly, I do not think it is very effective. A subject that the student does not know at all is sometimes more interesting for them. Sometimes something like "ignorance is bliss" happens. But of course, I believe that all this is directly related to the attitude of the teacher. I think it is very important how you introduce that subject, whether you do warm-up or not, if you do, how you do it. Familiarity with the topic can be gained by students.

In addition, 8 instructors point out the effect of text levels. They agree that when the level of the text and level of learners are in accordance, comprehension becomes easier and motivation to read increases. For example, on how text level affects learners, participant 1 said: "When they come across many different foreign words, they get bored and quit. Perhaps they need to start with something suitable for their level in order to continue." Participant 7 also emphasized the role of text level in motivating learners and said:

> They are actually all very connected, being familiar with the topic, the appropriate level of the text. They see that they get motivated when they succeed, and they can read more when they are motivated. But I think the feeling that they can understand what they read, being able to answer the questions and being successful motivate them. When the student starts reading with a text that they do not understand and which is above their level, they do not want to read again.

Thus, the instructors in the study believe that texts are considerable components of reading. While the majority think topic familiarity has an impact on comprehension, some instructors also assume that reading about interesting topics can stimulate learners.

Also, it is necessary to provide texts with an appropriate level which can benefit learners in terms of both comprehension and motivation.

3.6 Category 6: Learning Environment Related Factors

The learning environment refers to the environment where learning takes place, such as home, school or the country. Since families, schools, teachers and the countries learners live in affect overall learning experience, they influence the development of reading skills, as well (Chiu & McBride, 2006; Durgunoğlu & Öney, 2000; Sparks 2019). Therefore, the participants in the study were asked about their opinions about the effect of the learning environment.

12 out of 20 participants said that the teacher's influence is indisputable when the learning environment is considered. They mostly mentioned the motivating role of the teacher in the classroom, especially for the learners who do not have intrinsic motivation. Participant 9 said "I think there is an interaction with the teacher and their friends. I think it is important to have an encouraging environment. In other words, students who have not developed their intrinsic motivation need such a push in our classes as well". Participant 2 talked about the importance of rapport between instructors and learners as well and she said:

> I think it has a lot to do with the teacher. If so, I was such a student myself. If I liked the teacher, I would get more interested in the lesson or I would try to show my interest. But as a student, if I didn't like the teacher or thought it was a boring lesson, I might prefer to stay behind. Frankly, I also see this in students.

Participant 11, who considers the psychological elements such as the learner's attitude and confidence as the most important factors in learning, said:

> In my opinion, the relation between the instructor and the learner and the environment that they are in, the physical environment that they are in, is one of the most intimate kind of relations that I can say. You need to trust the moment that you are in. You need to trust the person that is telling you, giving you information. Otherwise, the psychological block that no matter how hard the learner would try, they cannot lift it. And it is happening subconsciously. It is not something active on their mind. But if there is that block, if there is that, if there is not that required environment, physical or mental, both of them, it would be that unseen block that would basically interrupt the learning.

Participant 9 also mentioned the role of the teacher in overcoming such psychological blocks and said “It is one of the major responsibilities of a teacher to tackle those kinds of inner discussions and let the learners know that they are there for them and they can rely on them and they are in this together”. Similarly, participant 19, who thinks that the relationship between the teacher and the learner matters more than other environmental elements, said:

> I think the space created by the teacher is more important. It does not matter whether it is the school or somewhere else. If it is an environment where the student feels comfortable. Because it is the teacher who creates that environment. So I think the teacher is more important than the environment.

Another aspect of the learning environment is the country where learners live and learn a foreign language. 9 out of 20 participants believe that the country affects foreign language learning, whether in terms of forming reading habits, motivation or practicing the foreign language. Considering the cultural aspect, participant 10 said “Reading has been considered a burden in Turkish society. Sometimes the student is forced to choose between reading or doing homework”. Participant 5 also mentioned the cultural perspective on reading in general and said:

> As Turkey, we are not a nation that reads much. For example, I do not let my child sleep every day without reading. I always have a book next to me and my children grow up like that. But how many families do this for their children? I do not think so. That's why we have an allergy to reading.

About the learning atmosphere in Turkey, participant 20 said “There is something about the general atmosphere of the country. It is an atmosphere where only a small minority has the necessary motivation to learn”.

Other participants like participant 4 emphasized the effect of being in a country where the foreign language is spoken and said:

> So if we take it on a country basis, of course, being in an English-speaking country abroad has a much greater impact in terms of exposure to foreign languages. Even if they do not read a newspaper or magazine in L2, at least it strikes their eye. It creates a familiarity.

Likewise, participant 8 said:

> First of all, vocabulary is the primary element for me in reading. Grammar knowledge is of course important, but I think vocabulary is more important. In that sense, when a language is spoken in the environment, vocabulary inevitably improves. So it develops very quickly. That's why I said it also contributes to the reading skill, and at the same time, if the school environment is the environment in which the language is spoken, the familiarity with the grammar increases.

Finally, 2 participants talked about the effect of the economy and how it affects the motivation to learn. About the demotivating effect of the country's economy, participant 2 said:

> I think it has a huge impact. I see many things related to the environment of the country in the student. Sometimes we even talk. So when I say who wants to live abroad after graduating, the minimum half of the class raises their hands. When I ask why, they say "What are we going to do if we stay?" You know, it is not just a job issue, but some of them think that they can't find a job. But in the other part, in general, there is insecurity about the state of the country, economic policies and so on. There is a lack of motivation, but they cannot turn it into motivation.

Similarly, participant 6 said "It is important because where economic freedom and prosperity are higher, more people can be carefree and more relaxed to spend time on things like reading".

On the other hand, there are 7 instructors that believe in the necessity of physically being in a classroom environment. One of these instructors, participant 18, said:

> The learning environment is, of course, important. When students are in a classroom environment, they bring each other up, as the students see each other, they make an effort. Even the facial expression of the teacher benefits students. The teacher shakes their head or approves while students are speaking, and their friends look at them with interest… These are very important and therefore there is nothing motivating in this online environment.

In addition to the teacher's influence in the classroom, participant 12 talked about the effect of peers and said "We cannot create a class spirit because we are not in the classroom, and students cannot be very motivated without establishing that relationship with each other. I noticed this. There is actually an energy of being a class in the classroom. They help each other, motivate each other. Participant 2 also mentioned the importance of being in a classroom with peers and said:

> In other words, when students are in the classroom, their interaction with each other increases. In online teaching, they are playing on the phone or doing

> something on their computer instead of concentrating on the lesson, but you can prevent this only to a certain extent. Another thing is that with the development of friendships, sometimes they can motivate each other more.

To summarize, 19 participants in this study agree that the learning environment is effective in learning reading skills. In terms of the effects of the learning environment, the instructors emphasized the importance of the role of the teacher, being in a classroom environment and the motivating impact of the country. Therefore, enhancing these aspects of the learning environment can help learners become more successful in reading.

So, in this study, 20 participants who are experienced instructors of English at universities were asked their opinions about the factors affecting the development of the reading skills in a foreign language. They were asked 8 questions that aim to uncover their ideas on these factors and the effects of linguistic knowledge, L1 reading skills, using strategies, cultural background, topic familiarity, motivation and the learning environment. As a result of the analysis of interview data, 6 categories have arisen, which are learner related factors, L2/FL related factors, L1 related factors, using reading strategies, text related factors and learning environment related factors. The results have demonstrated that 13 participants agree on the indisputable effect of L1 reading skills on improving foreign language reading skills. They believe that having developed reading skills in L1 will benefit the advancement of these skills in another language. 18 participants agree that linguistic knowledge in L2/FL is influential in one way or another. While the majority agree that vocabulary is the most important linguistic factor, some value grammar knowledge more in the progress of foreign language reading skills. Moreover, learners' attitude about reading, whether or not they are interested in reading and learner motivation appear to be a part of learner related factors. All the participants agree on the positive effect of motivation on enhancing reading skills. Furthermore, using reading strategies are considered as a useful way to read texts in a more efficient way, especially in academic settings, by 15 participants. The participants also mentioned the usefulness of reading strategies for lower level students. On the subject of the effect of the texts, 19 participants agree that being familiar with the text topic has a positive effect on reading comprehension, especially for lower level learners. Appealing text topics are also considered to have a positive impact on reading comprehension. In addition, 19 participants agree on the influence of the learning environment, but they approach the

subject from different perspectives such as the role of the teacher, being in a classroom environment and the country's influence. Most frequently repeated factor is the teacher, as his/her motivating attitude and the encouraging atmosphere he/she creates are considered highly influential. Some of them believe in the supportive effect of being in a classroom, while others think that the country might have an effect in motivating learners.

CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Conclusion

Studies on the factors that affect improving reading skills in L2/FL have demonstrated that several determinants can be influential in L2/FL reading skills development. The aim of this study is to investigate these determinants by collecting the perceptions of experienced university instructors through interviews and to find out how reading skills can be improved. The analysis of the interviews have revealed that, according to the participants, the main factors that affect reading comprehension in a foreign language are reading habits and motivation, L2/FL knowledge, L1 reading skills, using reading strategies, texts and the learning environment.

The participants think that reading comprehension skills depend not only on cognitive factors but also on the psychological factors such as motivation and self-image as readers. All the participants in this study agree that cultivating motivation is crucial in improving reading, as it helps learners to persevere developing reading skills. Therefore, motivation to read inside or outside the school should be increased. Another psychological factor is having a reading habit which refers to reading in L1 and having a positive attitude about reading in general. In this study, reading practice is considered as one of the most important elements of reading skills development by the participants. Having a habit of reading was repeatedly mentioned as a way to learn how to deal with a text by the instructors in this study. As the participants mentioned, developing foreign language reading skills can be much more effortless when learners have a previous reading practice and have an affirmative approach towards reading. As a result, increasing the motivation to read both inside and outside the classroom and creating a habit of reading in learners will facilitate the improvement of foreign language reading skills.

Secondly, the interviewees have identified linguistic competence in L2/FL as one of the factors in improving foreign language reading. 18 participants believe that knowledge of L2/FL grammar and vocabulary makes comprehension possible by making the text accessible for the reader. In addition, a certain level of linguistic competence is needed for the transfer of L1 reading skills. Therefore, it is one of the most influential

factors in L2/FL reading. Moreover, vocabulary might be a more persuasive determinant of reading comprehension in L2/FL. 15 of the participants in the study agreed that vocabulary is more important than grammar knowledge in terms of reading comprehension. Consequently, learners need linguistic competency, especially in terms of vocabulary, in order to advance their reading skills in a foreign language.

According to the interviewee's answers, L1 reading skills are considered as a principal element in reading skills development in a foreign language. 13 participants agree that having acquired reading skills in L1 may have several benefits. Firstly, it allows the transfer of reading skills to another language. Those who have gained reading skills in their native language will be familiar with several aspects of reading such as text organization, the ability to read long texts and dealing with ambiguity. Learning these skills and other strategies that make the text more available benefit readers immensely and when they read texts in another language, they can transfer these skills. Thus, L1 reading skills will facilitate the process of developing reading skills in a foreign language.

In addition, according to the participants, meta-cognition and the use of reading strategies such as critical reading and using background knowledge arise as the most effective components in L2/FL reading. In accordance with the literature, 15 participants in this study also stated that using reading strategies provide better and more efficient reading comprehension. They stated that strategy use can be useful for learners both in answering comprehension questions and learning how to deal with the text. Using reading strategies facilitates comprehension, especially for those who have a lower level of L2/FL knowledge. So, even if learners do not possess a high level of linguistic competence, reading strategies benefit them immensely in dealing with the text, particularly in academic environments.

The interviewees agree that texts are another factor which are influential on the development of foreign language reading skills in several ways. First, familiar text topics are beneficial in facilitating comprehension. The participants in this study consider text topics as a noteworthy part of reading as 19 participants agreed that familiarity with text topics can provide advantages in reading comprehension by making the text more appealing and accessible for learners. While 19 participants agree that reading about familiar topics benefit learners in comprehending the text, 3 participants believe that it is

more important to have interesting topics rather than common ones. As a result, the majority of the participants think that text topics must be considered when choosing which texts to read in the lessons, in order to create more success and motivation. The second effect of the texts is related to their levels. The participants in this study valued level-appropriate texts as they said that when the level of the text is above the learner's level, he/she loses motivation and gives up on reading. Accordingly, when the level of the text is not in accordance with the level of learners, it causes lack of motivation and affects the development of reading skills negatively. Consequently, the texts that are read in lessons should have familiar and interesting topics and their level ought to be in accordance with learners' level in order to motivate them and facilitate comprehension.

Finally, in addition to cognitive, meta-cognitive and psychological elements and texts, the participants consider the learning environment as another important component in L2/FL reading. Environmental factors can be family attitudes towards reading, the number of books in the house, socioeconomic status of the family and GDP of the country. In this study, the instructors considered the environment as an influential factor as well, since 19 participants mentioned the importance of the learning environment. Some noted that the learning environment can be the environment created by the teacher, while others talked about the effects of the country and the culture. Some instructors also emphasized the importance of being in a physical classroom environment. So, teachers should create supportive environments for learners by providing activities that motivate them to read and a physical classroom environment is needed to create such an encouraging atmosphere. Being in a family or country that encourages reading is also a tremendous advantage.

To conclude, as the literature and the results of this study indicate, reading in a foreign language involves many internal and external processes and is affected by many factors. Both the literature and the results of this study point out some main components that have a substantial effect on reading comprehension in L2/FL, namely L1 reading skills, L2/FL linguistic knowledge, psychological factors, using reading strategies, texts and the learning environment. First, L1 reading skills emerge as a main factor both in the literature and in this study because reading skills can be transferred when reading in a foreign language and the learners who acquired reading skills in their native language

will have an advantage in foreign language reading. Another factor is related to L2/FL. Both in the literature and in this study, L2/FL knowledge arises as an important component since it affects not only the transfer of L1 reading skills but also the motivation of learners. That is to say, in order for learners to use their previous knowledge and to persevere in the reading task, they need to have a certain level of L2/FL competence. Motivation of learners is also a theme that appears in the literature and in this study. Learners need to have internal or external motivation in order to keep on developing their reading skills. So, their motivation should absolutely be increased. Learners can also attain a better comprehension in reading tasks if they use reading strategies, which benefit them in handling the text, using textual clues, and monitoring their comprehension. Accordingly, the participants in this study also admitted the benefits of reading strategies especially in the academic context. Texts are also one of the significant factors in reading as they are the main instrument. According to previous studies and this study, text topics and levels should be considered when choosing texts since they affect comprehension and motivation on a great scale. Finally, the environment in which learning takes place has been deemed as an important element in the development of reading skills. The environment whether it is the family, school, or in a broader context, the country and the culture is influential in developing reading skills as it affects the reading habits and motivation of learners. All in all, having L1 reading skills, being competent in L2/FL, motivation, using reading strategies, familiar text topics, appropriate text levels and encouraging learning environments tremendously contribute to acquiring reading comprehension skills in a foreign language and should be considered in preparing reading lessons.

4.2 Implications for ELT

Understanding reading comprehension in a foreign language and how to improve it has been a subject of many studies. Although previous research has mostly dealt with the components of reading, there have not been plenty of studies investigating the opinions of teachers. This research approached the topic through the perceptions of educators since they have a great amount of insight derived from their experiences as learners and teachers.

The results of this study have shown that all the components of reading which have been revealed in the previous research have an effect on the development of reading skills. However, the participants in this study specifically pointed out L1 reading skills, L2/FL knowledge, having a reading habit, motivation, reading strategies, texts and the learning environment as the main components that influence learners the most. Consequently, these components may be focused on more heavily in ELT reading lessons in order to help learners become better readers.

The first factor the participants emphasized is L1 reading skills. Learners should be encouraged to read in their native language, starting from an early age because when learners have previously acquired reading skills, it becomes much easier to improve them in a foreign language. Secondly, without grammar and vocabulary knowledge in L2/FL, learners not only lack the ability to transfer L1 reading skills but also get overwhelmed with the language of the text and refrain from reading it. Therefore, a proper and sufficient language education is needed. In addition, the participants in this study and in previous studies have indicated that constant reading practice or having a habit of reading is required to enhance reading skills. Therefore, learners must be provided with more opportunities to read inside and outside the classroom. They must be encouraged to read literary works as well as non-fiction texts in order for them to gain a reading habit. The motivation to read appears as another important factor in this research. As a result, how to boost motivation to read in learners must be a concern in ELT. Next, as reading skills are mostly useful in academic settings, using reading strategies is considered as a need. This study has revealed that reading strategies benefit learners in several ways such as dealing with the text, overcoming difficult language and answering exam questions more efficiently. Therefore, teaching these strategies must definitely be one of the aims in ELT reading lessons. In this study, the participants also pointed out the importance of texts. So, when choosing which texts to read in ELT reading lessons, their topics and levels must be scrutinized. Text topics should not only be familiar but also appealing and text levels should not be highly above learners' level, as these two factors considerably affect learner motivation. Finally, the learning environment has been considered as an influential factor by the participants in this study regarding the role of the teacher and the country in creating an encouraging environment. Accordingly, ELT teachers and instructors should be made aware of the importance of the atmosphere they create in the

classroom and instructed about how to achieve such an atmosphere. Moreover, ELT teachers should be able to adapt to changing teaching methods. They must readjust reading materials or use digital materials in online lessons in order to have more effective reading lessons. Increasing the reading habits and motivation of students should also be the primary focus of the country's foreign language education policies.

In conclusion, this study indicates that teachers believe that there are certain factors that can affect learners' progress in foreign language reading, namely L1 reading skills, L2/FL knowledge, having a reading habit, motivation, use of reading strategies, text topics and levels and the learning environment. It has investigated these factors through the lens of instructors' perspectives and reached significant conclusions. Focusing on these components of reading and promoting them can contribute to the improvement of ELT and eventually to the improvement of English language learners.

4.3 Recommendations for Further Research

A recommendation for further research can be to investigate the perspective of instructors on the factors in foreign language reading in a broader manner by interviewing a higher number of instructors. Students' perceptions on the factors that affect foreign language reading development can be explored in addition to the instructors'. Moreover, the opinions of instructors on each component in foreign language reading can be investigated in detail. For example, instructors' perceptions on how having sufficient L1 reading skills affects improving foreign language reading skills can be investigated separately. Thus, the effect of each reading comprehension component may be scrutinized and understood more thoroughly. Finally, a case study in which instructors who teach foreign language reading lessons are interviewed can reveal specific instructional needs and help to improve the reading lessons in a specific institution.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of this study. The goal of this study is to gather information about the elements that affect foreign language reading comprehension and help to improve students' foreign language reading skills. I believe your input will be highly beneficial to this research because of your experience as an English language instructor at university preparatory schools.

Your responses will be kept confidential. Any interview content, or direct quotations from the interview will be written under a pseudonym so that you cannot be identified.

Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Can you read and approve the informed consent form?

Demographic information:

Major:

Degree:

Years of experience:

Interview Questions

1. What are the factors that affect foreign language reading comprehension skills?
2. What are your opinions on how improving foreign language reading comprehension skills is related to linguistic knowledge?
3. What are your opinions on how improving foreign language reading comprehension skills is related to L1 reading skills?
4. What are your opinions on how improving foreign language reading comprehension skills is related to reading strategies?
5. What are your opinions on how improving reading comprehension skills is related to cultural background?
6. What are your opinions on how improving foreign language reading comprehension skills is related to topic familiarity?
7. What are your opinions on how improving foreign language reading comprehension skills is related to motivation?
8. What are your opinions on how improving foreign language reading comprehension skills is related to the learning environment?

Appendix 2: Demographics of Participants

Participants	Degree	Major/Certificate	Years of Experience
Participant 1	BA	ELT	37
Participant 2	BA/MA/PHD	American Culture and Literature	9
Participant 3	BA	English Language and Literature	8
Participant 4	BA	English Language and Literature	25
Participant 5	BA/MA	Translation and Interpreting	21
Participant 6	BA	American Culture and Literature	9
Participant 7	BA/MA	English Language and Literature	11
Participant 8	BA	English Language and Literature	16
Participant 9	BA	English Language and Literature	13

Participant 10	BA/MA	English Language and Literature	39
Participant 11	BA	CELTA, TA certificate	10
Participant 12	BA	English Language and Literature	7
Participant 13	BA	English Language and Literature	13
Participant 14	BA/MA	English Language and Literature	23
Participant 15	BA/MA	American Culture and Literature	9
Participant 16	BA	English Language and Literature	30
Participant 17	BA/MA	English Language and Literature	15
Participant 18	BA	ELT Certificate	21
Participant 19	BA/MA	English Language and Literature	15
Participant 20	BA/MA	English Language and Literature	15

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