Teaching Sequential Text Writing at Primary School by Using the Read-to-Write Strategy

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Abstract

The number of informative books and their content variety is increasing. Today, students are exposed to informative texts more than ever before. Some learning outcomes in the Turkish Language Curriculum encourage students to discover the differences between text types and to write informative texts. This curriculum also recommends the inclusion of various types of informative text in the coursebooks. Yet, the number of studies on the development of informative text writing skills in Turkey is quite limited, and the need for research to help support students' ability to write informative texts is clear. As such, the present study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the "read-to-write" strategy, which is an informative text writing strategy, in teaching primary school students to write sequential informative texts. Applying the quasi-experimental method with pre-test post-test control group, the study was carried out in a village primary school in Afyonkarahisar. 33 primary school third grade students, 17 in the experimental group and 16 in the control group, participated in the study. The implementation of the research continued for 5 weeks and took 15 course hours. Before and after the intervention, the students were instructed to write sequential texts. A rubric prepared by Clark and Neal (2018) was used to collect the data. The six-item scoring key revealed the quality of the written texts. The collected data were analyzed with the help of a data analysis program using dependent samples t-test and independent samples t-test. The results clearly show that the read-to-write strategy is effective in writing sequential text type texts. After the intervention, the average of the scores of the students in the experimental group in which the read-to-write strategy was used increased significantly compared to the pre-intervention whereas no significant difference could be identified in the mean scores of the informative texts written by the students in the control group before and after the intervention. Finally, based on the research findings, various implications and suggestions are presented for educators and researchers.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading and writing are among the key fundamental skills that should be acquired by primary school students, as these skills form the basis of others. A student's success in reading and writing is a predictor of his/her success at school as well (Kızgın & Baştuğ, 2020; Yılmaz, 2011), and therefore, a student who is successful in reading and writing can be expected to be successful in other subjects as well.

The Turkish Language Curriculum (2019a) is structured in such a way that it includes knowledge, skills and values to help students acquire the habit of reading and writing, by instilling love of the Turkish language in them. Thus, a great deal of effort and time is spent in primary school to help students acquire reading and writing skills. In the 30-hour primary school weekly curriculum, Turkish lessons are planned for 10 hours a week in the 1st and 2nd grades, and 8 hours in each of the 3rd and 4th grades (MEB, 2021). However, recent research findings indicate that the intended outcome levels in primary school reading and writing are not achieved (Erbasan, 2022; Ergen & Batmaz, 2019). According to the 2018 PISA results, Turkey fell behind the average of OECD countries with 466 points in reading comprehension (MEB, 2019b). However, to date, no national study aiming to determine the literacy status of students has been conducted.

Writing is a complex skill to develop (Graham, 2006), as it requires a large number of cognitive processes (Graham, Berninger, & Abbott, 2012). It is a difficult skill for students to practice as it includes many other skills such as reading, thinking and expressing (Ungan, 2007). Being able to write effectively can be difficult for many children (Graham, Harris, & Mason, 2005), and thus, writing practices should not be limited to the first literacy teaching and should be developed from an early age. Since it is critical for academic and professional success, writing education should be given due importance from an early age.

What should primary school students write?

Text types are generally classified into 3 main groups as narrative, informative, and poetry. According to the Turkish Language Curriculum (2019a), primary school students are expected to write texts in all these three types, with the acquisition of "writing a poem" appearing in the 2nd grade for the first time, "writing a narrative text" in the 3rd grade for the first time, and "writing an informative text" in the 4th grade for the first time. This official curriculum states that one hour a week should be devoted to writing practice in the Turkish course under the heading "Writing exercises at the 3rd and 4th grade levels" (MEB, 2019a: 14). Although very little time is allocated for writing study in the program, inlusion of learning outcomes in all text types is helpful. However, whether enough work is done to improve the writing skills of students in all text types at the primary school level is a question that begs an answer.

Although no national study could be found that reveals how much time is devoted to writing practice at primary school level or which text type is highlighted as important, research shows that narrative, rather than informative texts are paid attention in primary schools (Erbasan, 2022). Duke's (2000) research revealed that very little attention is given to informative texts at early ages. After the publication of this study, the number of studies demonstrating the importance of teaching informative texts at an early age has increased (Jeong, Gaffney, & Choi, 2010; Moss & Newton, 2002; Ness, 2011). Duke (2000) revealed that first graders spend only 3.6 minutes a day on informative texts, which falls below 2 minutes in schools with low socio-economic level. Further, Yopp (2006) found that until the third grade, reading activities in primary school are mostly carried out with narrative texts.

Students should be exposed to informative texts at an early age to gain familiarity with informative texts that are more prominent in upper grades (Moss, 2005). The idea that students do not prefer informative texts at an early age is not supported by research. On the contrary, Smolkin and Donovan (2003) found that especially boys are interested in informative books at an early age. Many

studies have revealed that students prefer informative texts at an early age (Duke & Kays, 1998; Duke & Tower, 2004; Filipenko, 2004; Smolkin & Donovan, 2003; Yopp & Yopp, 2006).

Informative texts are generally classified into five groups (description, chronological order, comparing and contrasting, cause-effect relationship, and problem solving) (Akyol, 2020), whose structures have some variation. For example, there are certain sets of words that can be associated with each text structure. For the chronological order type informative texts, words such as "firstly", "later", "later" and "finally" can be given as examples of sequence words. Research indicates that informative text structures and sequencing words should be taught to students from an early age (Clark, Jones, & Reutzel, 2013; Reutzel, Jones, & Clark, 2016; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Williams, Hall & Lauer, 2004; Williams et al. , 2007).

The number of studies on instructional text teaching in Turkey is rather low. Kana and Şener (2021) conducted an action research in which they taught secondary school students the structural features of informative texts. Beydoğan (2011) found out that mental preparation supported by mind map increases the quality of informative texts of university students. Another study concluded that the cooperative learning method improved the informative text writing skills of secondary school students (Ercan, 2019). However, no study aimed at teaching chronological order type informative texts could be detected. The structure of informative texts in the comparing-contrasting, cause-effect relationship and problem-solving type is more challenging than the chronological order type. In the teaching of informative texts, the ordering type texts are easier due to their structure for the primary school period. For this reason, employing the read-to-write strategy, this study aimed to develop primary school students' ability to write chronological order type informative texts.

Read-to-write strategy

The read-to-write strategy is used to teach primary school students to write an ordering-type informative text (Clark & Neal, 2018). As can be seen in Figure 1, the strategy is structured in two stages as reading and writing. The reading phase can be considered as the phase of recognizing the structural features of informative texts. At this stage, students read the titles of the texts and try to determine the subject of the text, and what type of text it is. The contents of the book and the titles in the text, if any, are examined. While reading the book, the structure of the text is visualized with the help of a graphic organizer. Since the text to be read is in the ordering (sequencing) type, the sequence words in the text are identified. If available, the images and graphics in the text are examined as well. Finally, the information collected while reading the book is shared with other students.
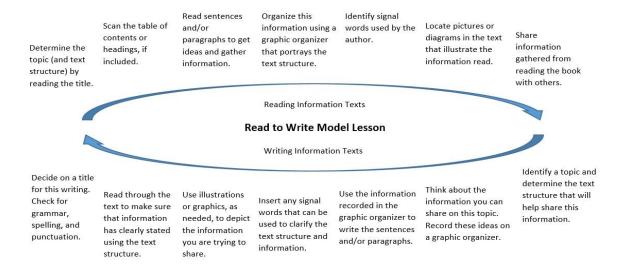

Figure 1. The Read-To-Write Circular Strategy (Clark & Neal, 2018).

The implementation steps of the writing phase, which is the second phase of the strategy, are designed as the opposite of those of the reading phase. Before students write their texts, they determine the subject and text structure they will write. They save the information about the subject they have determined in a graphic organizer. They convert the information recorded in the graphic organizer into sentences and paragraphs. They use sequence words to order their sentences and paragraphs. They use graphics or images to clarify information. To ensure that the information about the subject discussed in the text is clearly presented, they read the text from beginning to end and make the necessary corrections. They decide on a suitable title for their text. Finally, they check the text for grammar, spelling, spelling and punctuation.

METHOD

Research design

This study, conducted to determine the effectiveness of the read to write strategy in teaching primary school students to write ordering-type informative texts, was carried out with a quasi-experimental design with pre-test post-test control group.

Study Group

The research was carried out with 33 third grade students studying in a village primary school in the city of Afyonkarahisar. One of the two equivalent classes in the school was determined by drawing lots, and assigning one as the experimental group and the other as the control group. Information about the study group is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of the study group

Group	Boy	Girl	Total
Experimental	8	9	17
Control	8	8	16

There were 17 students in the experimental group and 16 students in the control group. Participation in the research was voluntary.

Intervention process

The intervention process of the research had 3 steps: pre-intervention, strategy implementation, and post-intervention.

Before the intervention, the students in the experimental and control groups were asked to write ordering-type informative texts with their current knowledge. For this, students were presented with two options, and they were asked to choose one of these options and write their texts within 20 minutes. The options offered were as follows:

1. Write about how you get ready for school.

2. Write about how a game you like is played.

While the students were writing their texts, no support was given by the teacher and they were asked to do their best with their current knowledge.

The implementation of the read to write strategy took 5 weeks, 3 hours a week, and a total of 15 course hours. It was carried out according to the read-to-write circular strategy shown in Figure 1.

After the intervention, the pre-intervention procedure was repeated. At the end, the students were asked to write a text about the other subject they did not write about before the intervention. The students were not supported by the teacher during writing.

Data Collection Tools

A rubric prepared by Clark and Neal (2018) was used to collect data.

Table 2. Informative text rubric

Item	Criterion	Score
Sequence Words Indicating Text Structure: The student uses sequence words to indicate the order in the text. For example first, second, next, then and last.	Five or more sequence words were used.	5
	Four sequence words were used.	4
	Three sequence words were used.	3
	Two sequence words were used.	2
	One sequence word were used.	1
	No sequence word was used.	0
		X.30
Number of words: The student uses this number of words in his/her text.	51 or more words were written.	5
	40-49 words were written.	4
	30-39 words were written.	3
	20-29 words were written.	2
	10-19 words were written.	1
	0-9 words were written.	0
		X.20
Uses capital letters at the beginning of a sentence.	Yes	5
	No	0
		X.10
Uses punctuation at the end of the sentence.	Yes	5
	No	0
		X.10
Uses an introductory sentence.	Yes	5
	No	0
		X.15
Uses a concluding sentence.	Yes	5
	No	0
		X.15

As can be seen in Table 1, there are six items in the rubric. The use of sequence word item in the rubric is important in showing how ordering-type informative texts are organized. Although the number of words used does not exactly show the quality of the text, it is still an important predictor. The weights of the items are as follows: the use of sequence words (30%), the number of words (20%), the use of capital letters at the beginning of the sentences (10%), the use of punctuation at the end of the sentence (10%), the use of introductory sentences (15%), and the use of concluding sentences (15%).

Data Analysis

The SPSS data analysis program was used in the analysis of the scores. The normality of the distribution of the data was determined by looking at the Shapiro-Wilk values since the number of observations was below 30. The normality was interpreted by looking at the skewness and kurtosis values of the distribution of the data, and the distribution of the pretest, posttest and posttest-pretest scores of the groups was determined to be normal. The skewness and kurtosis coefficients of the data in the study are between +1 and -1. Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner, and Barret (2004: 49) state that values between +1 and -1 for the skewness coefficient can be accepted as a measure of normal distribution.

Since the distribution of the data was normal, the independent samples t-test was used to compare the pre-test and post-test scores, and the dependent samples t-test (paired) was used to

determine whether there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the same group.

RESULTS

In the current research conducted to determine the effectiveness of the read-to-write strategy in teaching ordering-type informative text writing, the informative text writing skills of the experimental and control groups were measured with a rubric before the intervention. In Table 3, the pre-intervention scores of the experimental and control groups are presented.

Table 3. Pre-intervention average scores

Group	Student	Sequence words indicating text structure	No. of words	Capitalization of sentences	Punctuation	Introductory sentence	Concluding sentence	Total
Experimental	1	0,3	0,4	0	0,5	0	0	1,2
	2	0,9	0,4	0,5	0,5	0	0	2,3
	3	0,6	0,4	0	0	0,75	0,75	2,5
	4	0	0,2	0	0	0	0	0,2
	5	0,6	0,4	0,5	0,5	0	0,75	2,75
	6	1,2	0,6	0,5	0	0,75	0,75	3,8
	7	0,3	0,4	0,5	0	0	0	1,2
	8	0,9	0,6	0	0,5	0	0	2
	9	0,6	0,2	0	0	0	0	0,8
	10	0,9	0,6	0,5	0	0,75	0,75	3,5
	11	0,6	0,6	0	0	0	0	1,2
	12	1,2	0,8	0,5	0,5	0,75	0,75	4,5
	13	0,9	0,6	0	0,5	0	0,75	2,75
	14	0,3	0,4	0	0,5	0	0	1,2
	15	0	0	0,5	0	0	0	0,5
	16	0,6	0,4	0	0,5	0,75	0	2,25
	17	0	0,2	0,5	0	0	0	0,7
	Mean	0,58	0,42	0,23	0,23	0,22	0,26	1,96
Control	1	0,6	0,4	0,5	0	0,75	0	2,25
	2	0,3	0,2	0	0	0	0	0,5
	3	0,9	0,4	0,5	0,5	0,75	0,75	3,8
	4	0,6	0,4	0	0,5	0	0	1,5
	5	0,3	0,2	0,5	0	0,75	0	1,75
	6	0,9	0,4	0,5	0	0,75	0	2,55
	7	0,6	0,2	0	0	0	0,75	1,55
	8	0	0	0,5	0,5	0,75	0	1,75
	9	0,6	0,4	0,5	0	0	0	1,5
	10	1,2	0,8	0,5	0,5	0,75	0,75	4,5
	11	0,6	0	0	0	0	0	0,6
	12	0,3	0,2	0,5	0	0,75	0	1,75
	13	0,9	0,2	0,5	0	0	0	1,6
	14	0,9	0,4	0,5	0,5	0,75	0	3,05
	15	0,6	0	0	0	0	0	0,6
	16	0,3	0,2	0,5	0	0,75	0	1,75
	Mean	0,6	0,27	0,34	0,15	0,42	0,14	1,93

As shown in Table 3, the mean score of the experimental group was 1.96 and the mean score of the control group was 1.93 before the intervention. Considering that the scoring is done out of 5, it can be said that the students' ability to write informative texts was not sufficient. Examining the criteria, it is observed that the students do not use the sequence words in their texts enough, they write short texts, there are problems in starting the sentence with a capital letter and using punctuation marks at the end of the sentence, and the introductory sentence and the conclusion sentence are not used often enough in the texts. The results of the independent sample t-test performed to determine any significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Pre-intervention independent sample t-test results

	Group	N	Mean	S	sd	t	p
Pretest	Exp.	17	1,96	1,23	31	,059	,953
	Control	16	1,93	1,10			

As can be seen in Table 4, the t-test revealed no significant difference between the mean scores of the informative texts of the groups before the intervention (p>0,05). Therefore, the groups were equivalent to each other before the intervention.

During the intervention, the informative text writing activities were carried out by applying the read-to-write strategy with the experimental groupi while this strategy was not used in the control group. When the intervention was completed, informative texts were written by both groups and their levels were measured by using a rubric. In Table 5, the average scores of both groups after the intervention are presented.

Table 5. Post-intervention average scores

Group	Student	Sequence words indicating text structure	No. of words	Capitalization of sentence	Punctuation	Introductory sentence	Concluding sentence	Total
Experimental	1	0,9	0,8	0,5	0,5	0,75	0,75	4,2
	2	0,9	0,6	0,5	0,5	0,75	0	3,25
	3	0,9	0,8	0,5	0,5	0,75	0,75	4,2
	4	0,6	0,4	0	0	0	0,75	1,75
	5	1,2	0,6	0,5	0,5	0,75	0,75	4,3
	6	1,5	1	0,5	0,5	0,75	0,75	5
	7	0,9	0,6	0,5	0,5	0,75	0	3,25
	8	1,5	0,8	0,5	0,5	0,75	0,75	4,8
	9	0,9	0,6	0,5	0	0	0	2
	10	1,2	0,8	0,5	0,5	0,75	0,75	4,5
	11	1,2	0,8	0,5	0,5	0,75	0,75	4,5
	12	1,5	1	0,5	0,5	0,75	0,75	5
	13	1,2	0,8	0,5	0	0,75	0,75	4
	14	0,9	0,6	0,5	0,5	0	0,75	3,25
	15	0,6	0,6	0,5	0	0,75	0	2,45
	16	0,9	0,6	0,5	0,5	0	0,75	3,25
	17	0,6	0,6	0	0,5	0,75	0,75	3,2
	Mean	1,02	0,70	0,44	0,38	0,57	0,57	3,7
Control	1	0,6	0,6	0,5	0,5	0,75	0	2,95
	2	0,3	0,2	0	0	0	0	0,5
	3	0,9	0,6	0,5	0,5	0,75	0,75	4
	4	0,6	0,4	0	0,5	0	0	1,5
	5	0,3	0,2	0,5	0,5	0,75	0	2,25
	6	0,6	0,4	0,5	0	0	0	1,5
	7	0,6	0,2	0	0	0	0,75	1,55
	8	0	0	0,5	0,5	0,75	0	1,75
	9	0,3	0,2	0	0	0	0	0,5
	10	1,2	0,8	0,5	0,5	0,75	0,75	4,5
	11	0,6	0,2	0	0	0	0	0,8
	12	0,6	0,2	0	0	0,75	0	1,55
	13	0,9	0,4	0,5	0	0,75	0	2,55
	14	0,9	0,4	0,5	0,5	0,75	0,75	3,8
	15	0,6	0,2	0	0	0	0	0,8
	16	0	0,2	0,5	0	0,75	0	1,45
	Mean	0,5625	0,325	0,28125	0,21875	0,421875	0,1875	1,99

As can be seen in Table 5, the average score of the experimental group after the intervention was 3.7, and the mean score of the control group was 1.99. In addition, the students in the

experimental group are observed to show improvement in all criteria compared to the pre-intervention. While the number of sequence words increased in the post-intervention texts of the experimental group students, the number of words they used in their texts also increased. In addition, there is improvement in using sentence-initial capital letters, using end-of-sentence punctuation marks, and using introductory and concluding sentences. The results of the independent sample t-test performed to determine whether there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Post-intervention independent sample t-test results

	Group	N	Mean	S	sd	t	p
Post test	Experimental	17	3,70	1,00	31	4,329	,000
	Control	16	1,99	1,24			

As can be seen in Table 6, the t-test performed shows a significant difference in favor of the experimental group regarding the informative text writing scores after the intervention (p<0,05). The results of the dependent samples t-test regarding the difference between the mean scores of the groups before and after the intervention are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Comparison of intra-group mean scores

Group	Post test – Pre test	N	X	S	sd	t	p
Experimental	Pre test	17	1,96	1,23	16	9,015	,000
	Post test	17	3,70	1,00			
Control	Pre test	16	1,93	1,10	15	,434	,671
	Post test	16	1,99	1,24			

As can be seen in Table 7, there is a significant difference between the score averages of the students in the experimental group before and after the intervention in favor of the post-intervention (p<0,05). No significant difference could be found between the mean scores for the informative texts written by the students in the control group before and after the intervention (p>0,05).

Considering these results holistically, it was concluded that the read-to-write strategy was effective in teaching ordering-type informative text writing.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the read-to-write strategy in teaching primary school students to write ordering-type informative texts. Based on the results obtained by the research, it was concluded that the strategy was effective in teaching informative text writing. In the informative texts of the students in the experimental group, improvements were observed in the number of sequence words, the total number of words, the number of capital letters used at the beginning of sentences, the number of introductory and concluding sentences, and the use of punctuation marks. This is significant in terms of showing that students can write better texts when sample texts are shown to them, and the characteristics of the type of writing expected from them are clearly presented. Relevant research also points at the necessity of modeling and using strategies, especially when students write in unusual genres (Clark & Neal, 2018; De La Paz, Owen, Harris, & Graham, 2000; Helsel & Greenberg, 2007).

Several factors can be said to influence children's ability to produce high-quality texts. Particularly when working with younger age groups, one of the most crucial factors among these is serving as a model to them. The finest model for good writing is, in fact, a well-crafted text. Students find it easier to understand what is expected of them through texts. Through excellent texts, students can grasp what constitutes a good text, the elements that make these texts proficient, the preferred sequencing words, how punctuation marks are utilized, and how introductory and concluding

sentences are written (Clark & Neal, 2018). Students encounter informative texts less frequently compared to stories (Raby, 2006). Consequently, they require more exposure to exemplary texts in order to write well. It can be argued that the read-to-write strategy is effective in this regard. Jam and Shahin (2012) state that this strategy brings forth prior knowledge, establishes a background, and focus attention. Indeed, prior knowledge about the topic to be written and familiarity with keywords related to a text often lead to more successful writing.

Reviewing the research literature on the read-to-write strategy, it is clear that most research supports our findings. Clark and Neal (2018) also found that this strategy improves the quality of the texts written by learners. Rosmawan (2016) used the reading strategy for writing, and also concluded that the strategy improves the composition writing skills of 8th grade students.

Our findings also indicate that when adequate guidance is provided and effective strategies are used, children can write high-quality informative texts even at the primary school level. In the past, while the thought that students could not write informative texts at an early age was common (Wollman-Bonilla, 2000), research conducted in the 2000s revealed that this was not true. Smolkin and Donovan (2003) state that especially boys are interested in informative books at an early age. In their study with primary school students, Kletzien and Szabo (1998) found that contrary to what teachers think, children prefer informative books to read when given the chance to choose, as much as stories. Many other studies have also revealed that students can write informative texts at an early age when they are guided (Donovan, 2001; Erbasan, 2022; Duke, 2000; Pappas, Varelas, Gill, Ortiz & Keblawe-Shamah, 2009).

Research efforts to help develop informative text writing skills at an early age still remain quite few and far between in Turkey. While our research demonstrates the effectiveness of a strategy to improve students' ability to write informative texts at an early age, it is clear that more research is needed in this domain. Scientific inquiries examining whether the read-to-write strategy can be used as an effective tool in teaching how to write other types of informative text would also be enlightening.

Conflicts of Interest: No potential conflict of interest was declared by the author.

Funding Details: No funding or grant was received from any institution or organization for this research.

CRediT Author Statement: Author 1: Conceptualization and methodology, writing-original draft preparation, visualization, investigation, formal analysis, writing-review & editing, supervision.

Ethical Statement: Ethics committee approval within the scope of the research has been obtained from the Afyon Kocatepe University ethics committee of scientific research with the decision numbered 2022/299 on 26.10.2022.

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