



Reading Comprehension through Summarization of Narrative Stories: An Action Research
Study

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Proyectos de Investigación

Certifico que MIGUEL ANDRÉS AVILÈS MONCAYO ha cumplido satisfactoriamente su investigación acción como pre-requisito de graduación de Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés.

Su investigación es parte del proyecto Summarization to Improve Reading Comprehension cuyo objetivo general es mejorar la comprensión lectora a través de la aplicación de resúmenes.

El proyecto se implementa en diez contextos y niveles de eficiencia en inglés diferentes. En este proyecto, cada participante desarrolla la investigación-acción en un contexto educativo diferente. Las secciones de introducción, literatura y metodología (instrumentos y análisis de datos) son las mismas.

Particular que comunico para los fines consiguientes.

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Abstract

This innovation was implemented to improve students' reading comprehension. Confusion was observed when summarizing and getting main ideas. The 12 participants belonged to the Reading and Writing class from a private English language school in Guayaquil with a B1 level of English. In the group, there were 3 women and 9 men, and their occupations were university students and professionals. To help students of the Reading and Writing course to improve these aspects, summaries of narratives texts were implemented. The action research included quantitative instruments: pre and posttests, pre and post surveys of the innovation. The results showed 10 of the participants improved the way they summarize. The participants were very enthusiastic from the beginning until the end of the innovation. This study is aimed at the authorities and teachers of English as a foreign language from other institutions, who wish to improve their reading comprehension results and motivate a skill that students often find boring.

Keywords: reading comprehension, summaries, EFL

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Resumen

Esta innovación se implementó para mejorar la comprensión lectora de los estudiantes. Se observó confusión al resumir y obtener las ideas principales. Los 12 participantes pertenecían a la clase de Lectura y Escritura de una escuela de inglés privada en Guayaquil con un nivel de inglés B1. Dentro del grupo había 3 mujeres y 9 hombres, dentro de sus ocupaciones estaban estudiantes universitarios y profesionales. Para ayudar a los alumnos del curso de Lectura y Escritura a mejorar estos aspectos, se implementaron resúmenes de textos narrativos. La investigación-acción incluyó instrumentos cuantitativos como encuestas y pruebas tomadas al inicio y al final de la implementación. Los resultados mostraron que 10 de los participantes mejoraron la forma en que resumían. Los participantes se mostraron muy entusiasmados desde el principio hasta el final de la innovación. Este estudio está dirigido a las autoridades y profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera de otras instituciones, que deseen mejorar sus resultados en comprensión lectora y motivar esta habilidad que a menudo les resulta aburrida a los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: comprensión lectora, resúmenes, EFL

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Reading Comprehension through Summarization on Narrative Stories: An Action Research Study

Reading practice enriches individuals since it allows them to know and learn.

Besides, it stimulates the multiple cognitive skills in order to facilitate and develop different kinds of understandings, reflection, reasoning and argument capacities, critical thinking skills, personal identity acquisition, and autonomy (Jorge et al., 2006). For young people, according to Sullivan (2014), reading promotes the acquisition of new vocabulary and new ideas, which are extremely beneficial for having a better comprehension and absorption of new information and concepts.

Likewise, reading helps people to show and develop great literacy competences (Krashen, 2016). Krashen also mentioned that learners need to be surrounded by books to become engaged in reading; so that, learners read less due to the lack of access to books. When they are exposed to books around, they read more often, and they read better. In fact, the Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development (Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económicos [OECD], 2011) pointed out those students who enjoy reading, unlike who do not, have a high probability to be effective learners and to perform better at school or university. In Ecuador, according to the local statistics institution (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos [INEC], 2012), 56% of people of six cities do not read because of the lack of interest.

Lack of reading is the most likely reason why students are not good at reading in L1. According to Guo (2018), learners who are active readers in L1 reading activities have more possibilities to transfer general reading strategies to L2 reading. In consequence,

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learners succeed in L2 and positive aspects bring up such as affective cognitive and linguistic benefits (Maley & Prowse, 2013).

In order to achieve effective reading comprehension, this paper was focused on summarization strategy due to different aspects. For instance, after an application of the summarization strategy in Taiwan, this summarization strategy helped fifth grade students develop their comprehension abilities (Al-Alwan, 2012). Oczkus (2018) manifested something similarly by announcing that despite the complexity of summarizing, there are many advantages that summarization skills bring up: recalling important events and details, sequencing, paraphrasing, and synonyms or picking vocabulary.

In conclusion, students in the Reading and Writing class usually encounter reading comprehension problems due to several factors such as lack of reading habits in L1 that could be transferred to L2, lack of interest and the absence of implementation of reading strategies. For that reason, this action research study focused on summarization strategy to improve reading comprehension.

Literature Review

Based on the researcher's goal, the topics developed in this section are reading Comprehension, reading Strategies, summarization strategy and its advantages, elements of summarization on narrative stories and blogs.

Reading Strategies

Duke and Pearson (2009) mentioned that an effective reading comprehension is reflected when readers receive effective instructions and enough time to read, write, and discuss the text. That is, effective reading strategies are reflected on when reading skills are fruitfully developed by readers, particularly when applying intensive reading. Unlike

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extensive reading where learners read for pleasure, intensive reading is the practice of specific “reading skills, language features and close linguistic study of text” which is frequently applied in a class (Erguvan, 2016, p. 137.).

A second-language reading process is acquired by different reading models: the bottom-up model, the top-down model, and the interactive model (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Gamboa (2017) explained in detail more about these three models. Through the bottom-up model, readers had problems deciphering letters and words in order to comprehend clauses, sentences and paragraphs of texts. In turn, the top-down model focuses on assumptions and questions related to the text which means, readers firstly analyze those points before emerging in the reading texts. It enables them to confirm or disconfirm their expectations with the reading. Whereas interactive models are practically the combination of both, bottom-up and top-down processes.

Summarization strategy.

According to Duke and Pearson (2009), the summarization strategy aids in improving students’ written summaries as well as enhancing comprehension when taking reading tests. Similarly, Duke and Pearson mentioned that summarization strategy principally requires readers use main ideas to start writing their summaries, which only demands practice to turn into good readers. As such, readers can write their summaries by using their own words in order to demonstrate what they have read about (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Özdemir (2018) alleged that every reading level should include in their studies summarization strategy. This is because according to his research study done in Turkey with a sample of 35 candidates and 140 summary texts, the results demonstrated that in comparison with the pre-test model, the post-test model increased reading comprehension.

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However, summarizing does not simply mean to say to students to write a summary after reading. On the contrary, it implies to teach students what and how to do it (Özdemir, 2018). In that sense, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) considered summarization can follow some rules as the elimination of useless information, elimination of repeated information, replacing new words with synonyms and the selection or invention of topic sentences. Bazerman (2010) coincided that the key of summarization is to focus on the most relevant sentences and delete the less important sentences of the readings. Bazerman recommended three techniques (selection and deletion, note taking, and miniaturizing). They can aid to produce a short, readable, and precise summary.

Equally, after summarizing and generalizing from content, readers can relate them to the purpose of the text (Blachowicz & Ogle, 2017). Likewise, in order not to be bored when summarizing, Oczkus (2018) claimed there should be creativity at the summarizing stage for students to feel engaged; for instance, dramatization of a text and representation of certain scenes with drawings. In short, summarization helps learners build up an entire understanding of a text, story, chapter, or article (Oczkus, 2018). In other words, through summarization, the reader tries to identify and write the principal or most relevant ideas into a coherent whole (Ness, 2016).

Hutchins (1987) said after reading long texts, general ideas are commonly retained and details are omitted, in consequence, the abstraction would become insufficient. Likewise, Hutchins (1987) expressed summarization can become difficult to do since it demands advanced cognitive and writing skills.

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Elements of summarization on narrative stories.

The absence of relevant information extracted from texts is the maximum problem to design precise summarization (Zopf et al., 2018). However, when the important elements: the action, the subject and object, the time, and the environment are extracted from a text, redundant information is omitted and summarization is automatically generated (Liao et al., 2016). Similarly, Mwinyi et al. (2017) expressed the recognition of elements of texts are helpful for understanding stories. According to Liao et al. (2016), in their experimentation paper, they encountered these elements of summarization (the action, the subject and object, the time, and the environment) are applicable only for narrative stories. These elements allow students not only to analyze what and how their stories should be structured but also to enhance their writing skills (Herrera, 2013). Finally, elements of summarization in narrative stories will help learners visualize and identify the most important aspect in a text.

Blogs

Blogs have been used in different educational purposes as humanities, management, communication, and teacher education with the intention of keeping an active, engaging and rich interaction among learners and instructors (Lee & Bonk, 2016). In an experimental study done by Churchill (2009), multiple activities were done in blogs during a whole semester such as posting reflections and learning tasks, contributing and commenting to peers' tasks. This experimentation had a big acceptance of students since blogs facilitated and contributed to their learning. It made all involved, especially when seeing and commenting peers' tasks (Churchill, 2009).

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In short, in order to help students, overcome the deficiency of reading comprehension in L2, summarization strategy was used to assist those difficulties. Blogs were utilized by students to write and comment their summaries and create an online interaction. Thus, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent does summarization improve reading comprehension?
2. What are students' perspectives when using summarization to evidence reading comprehension?

Innovation

I started with 16 participants but I ended up with 12. Twelve participants accepted to be part of the innovation. I started on day 1 with a demographic survey in order to collect data from them. They showed great interest and encouragement to participate in this study, the following activities were developed:

- The students listened to the activities we were going to carry out in the course in the next three weeks.
- The students were very familiar with the topics to be discuss. Some of them said that summaries were difficult for them, and some said that they could, but they described it as a quick and straightforward process.
- The researcher conducted the pretest and explained about the use of blogs
- The students learned how to create their blog on the internet. However, they stayed with the Blog site since it was quite friendly, and it was a free option for them, and I did not want to focus too much on the use of the blog. I asked them to talk about their favorite book or favorite.

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- The students had to read a story and observe images to predict what the story was about so it can make them begin to activate their prior knowledge. This activity was carried out in pairs. They had to write a summary of these stories, and then at home, they had to make their first draft of their summaries to publish it on their blogs. The next day this was reviewed with each of the couples. The corresponding feedback was done. Then, the students used the “time to reflect” where they wrote their reflection on the experience of summarizing, and have to write them on their blogs.
- The researcher taught students how a summary is made and how it should be done after reading. By pointing out the students with a story and how using connectors and words or sequence words to have a more significant organization in writing, and using graphic organizers.
- The students read another story, but this time they used the graphic organizer's goal to identify the elements of the story. They also had to use the sequence words or connectors to write their second summary. They had to a review to verify their summaries had been posted on their blogs.
- The students began to make their graphic organizers be able to identify elements of a text. This way, they realized if the summaries fulfilled the requirements. Once reviewed among colleagues, they published on blogs.
- Students presented their stories to the class. Then other colleagues wrote a summary of those presentations, and then posted them on their blogs. Finally, each made a brief comment on a colleague's blog. On this stage, they felt a little nervous and afraid to comment on the blogs of their other colleagues. In the end,

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they were able to do it under my guidance and checked that they used appropriate language.

- Students filled out a learning log to assess their progress. This day, we used technology a lot. Through their phones, they had to make stories and upload them to their WhatsApp to be shared with the entire group of classes. This activity was of great interest to them since they could record themselves speaking English for 30 seconds and publish it. However, about three students were fearful of this activity. The researcher encouraged them.
- At the end of the activity, they had to make their respective summaries on the blogs but with a different ending than the story of their peers. Then students filled out the template to reflect.
- They worked in groups and I combined them so that they varied their ideas between them. They were very excited as they had the freedom to put together their stories according to their imagination.

The researcher gave feedback to the 12 participants.

Finally, the students set up an online open house to present their new stories based on ideas from their classmates. This fusion of ideas was very striking for them and there was a lot of empathy between them since certain radical endings were not expected for the previously exposed stories.

Methodology

This action research collected quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative instruments were pre-post survey as well as pre and post reading tests. While the instruments for qualitative methods were “Time to Reflect” template and an interview.

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Before running the implementation of the innovation, students took an English placement test to evidence their English level.

Description of Participants

Sixteen students initially participated in this study. Four quit the class due to personal problems. The participants belonged to the Reading and Writing class at a private language school. When students took the placement test, it determined that the level of the class was a B1 level. Some of them have been learning English from childhood; others had travelled to English speaking countries. They were most of them 18 years old and the eldest was 25, nine of them were male. Eight of them were university students and four professionals. Within the group, there were 3 Afro-descendants and 2 Jehovah's Witnesses. The others were mestizo and Catholic. Most belonged to a middle-income class and two of them to a low-income class. Regarding technology, they all had access to a computer and had internet at home, except for one participant who used the public internet network.

Instruments and Data Analysis

For this innovation pre-test was conducted the first day of the innovation and the post-test at the end of the innovation. Besides, participants filled out a pre-survey and a post-survey. To collect more data, participants completed 3 learning logs in the first week, third week and in the fifth week. To carry out the tests and the interview, the Google forms and the Google Meet platform were used respectively. All this information was saved on the field notes, which were also completed during the innovation and during the application of the instruments.

The demographic survey (Appendix B) reported that most of the students regarded themselves as high intermediate language learners. It coincided with the results of the

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proficiency test, which reported that 10 out of 12 learners were B1. The demographic survey also informed that learners felt capable of using technology.

Table 1.

Demographic information – Self-assessment of English level and Technology

Knowledge

Level of English	Frequency	Technology Knowledge	Frequency
Intermediate	10	Basic	0
High	2	Intermediate	9
Intermediate			
Advanced	0	Advanced	3
Total	12		12

Information of Table 1 showed the results of the demographic survey. It was used to describe the sample. About learners' level of English, it displayed that they knew their limitations regarding the use of the English language. It coincided with the proficiency test. On the other hand, regarding technology, these results matched the students' performance in the laboratory.

Ethical Standards

The prior approval of the academic department was requested to carry out the present study. Therefore, some letters were addressed to them describing the application of the innovation process and its objective. The master program authorities supported these letters.

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This research project did not affect the language school program. Participants were informed and the process was explained orally and by email. The consent and permission of those involved was also requested. It was also explained that they were free to decline participation. As they were all adults and no rejections, the schedule started for which the participants dedicated five weeks in which a total of 20 hours in online classes were used for this research and 5 hours for activities at home.

The researcher guided the students in the innovation process and ensured the confidentiality of the information provided and obtained. For the forms, surveys and rubrics, the participants used a nickname to be able to be identified. All the blogs and resources they used to develop innovation and the Google classroom platform were closed. Finishing the innovation in the course period, the participants proceeded to delete all their accounts and blogs linked to the project. The results and participation in this research study did not affect the student's final grade in the current course.

Results

The present action research was conducted to enhance reading comprehension in narrative stories. Through the application of quantitative and qualitative instruments, the two research questions were answered. Significant findings were discovered from the beginning to the end of the innovation that lasted five weeks with a population of 12 participants.

The students proceeded to take the reading comprehension test and were given 40 minutes. This was a precedent for what was going to come during the innovation to obtain results. At the end of that process, they received the subsequent test, which indicated points

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to be able to work with them. Regarding that test, it was a combination of multiple-choice questions with ordering paragraphs, finding the correct answer

The first results of the pre-test showed that the participants had shortcomings in summarizing and getting main ideas in a reading. The posttests reflected that the participants improved their ability to summarize and speed-read as well as being able to paraphrase and comment on a text.

First research question, *to what extent does summarization improve reading comprehension?* There was a significant difference in the results of reading test between the pretest and posttest as shown in table 1

Table 2.

Pre-post-tests and post-tests results

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Effect size
Pre_Test	12	6.00	8.00	6.91	.63	1.63
Post_Test	12	7.00	10.00	8-2500	.96	
Valid N (listwise)	12					

Note: N= Sample. M= Mean. SD= Standard Deviation. d=effect size

Table 2 points out that throughout the pre and posttest the students improved. A $p=0.000$ means that the results were due to the application of the summaries. When they read, they could identify the elements of the stories (characters, setting, conflict, resolution, and ending) easily to write their summaries.

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Second research question, *what are students' perspectives when using summarization to evidence reading comprehension?* Pre and post surveys were conducted.

Yes answers were considered in the analysis.

Table 3.

Pre survey and Post survey

Question	Pre survey	Post survey
I can understand a long, complex text.	4	9
I understand single phrases at a time.	5	8
I understand a long text with the first reading.	3	8
I understand a long text by rereading it.	3	8
I can skim.	1	9
I can scan.	6	9
I can summarize a passage.	4	8
I know the elements of a summary.	4	10
When I read I translate all the words.	6	7

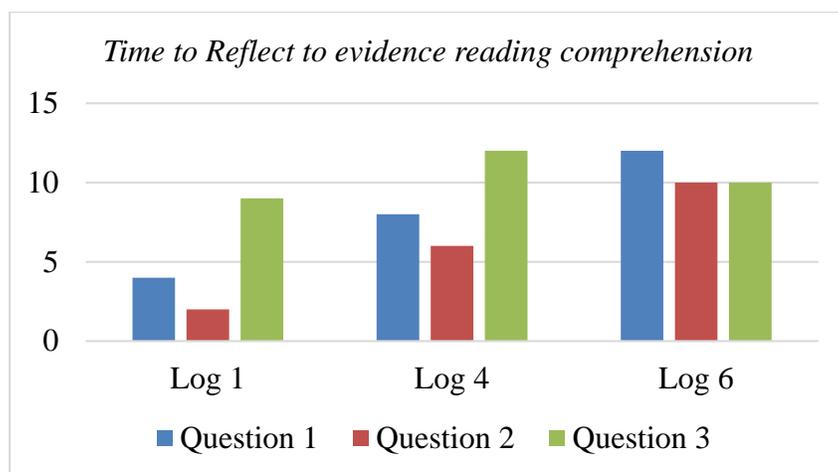
To support these quantitative results, participants demonstrated their perspectives with a pre-survey and post-survey with five questions statements (Appendix C) using google forms. Results showed a positive change in terms of their performance in summarizing after a comprehensive reading.

In addition, three reflective logs were conducted. One in the first week, the second in the third week and the last one in the fifth week. In first week, few participants knew how to apply summaries when reading. Only two considered the summarization process

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easy. Likewise, nine of them considered that this process would help them improve their Reading comprehension. In the middle of the innovation, this number grew by almost half. Eight of the participants underlined when they read, while six already consider the process of making summaries easy, twelve participants consider that this process will help them in their Reading comprehension. In the end, the results were very good, twelve out of twelve underlined the most important idea when reading, and ten of them managed to handle summaries in a practical way. The following questions were included: When you read, do you highlight the most important information? Why? Is summarization easy for you? Why? Do you consider summarization can help you improve reading comprehension? Why?

Figure 1. Time to Reflect to evidence reading comprehension



By using this way of answering anonymously, they felt more confident about expressing their emotions and feelings during this innovation. Many of the responses indicated that they were somewhat confused at first but found it interesting to learn to read well in order to answer the test questions. Some felt that using blogs to post their summaries was better than using paper, and since the classes were entirely online, this was very helpful.

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Discussion

This action research gave insights that summarization could be an innovative strategy to enhance reading comprehension. This is principally because its two research questions results demonstrated participants reached significant results on reading comprehension during the five-week innovation.

With regard to first research question; to what extent does summarization improve reading comprehension? Table 2 affirms, in general terms, the application of summarization to increase reading comprehension was effective and significant since its p-value is less than 0.05 ($p= 0000$). These results coincide with Duke and Pearson (2009) and Özdemir (2018) who stated summarization helps not only enhance writing skills but also increase and demonstrate reading comprehension on post-tests.

Regarding the second research question, what are students' perspectives when using summarization to evidence reading comprehension? Pre-survey compared to Post-survey on the analysis of reflections logs (Time to Reflect) show that participants had a change in their reading skills. Thus, these results infer that summarization can be appealing for many other students to increase reading comprehension.

According to the participants who were asked to fill out a form at the end of the innovation in order to know their feelings, the majority showed confusion and some curiosity at first. Ten of them did not know how to summarize or underline main ideas. This was changing in the midst of innovation, when they were already acquiring strategies for the abstract process. These positive perspectives coincide with Churchill's (2009) findings in his experimentation, which explained that the interaction and involvement among students when commenting on blogs arose significant learnings. Likewise, creativity

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is relevant when summarizing (Oczkus, 2018) so participants were engaged of the idea of publishing their summaries in the blogs.

Therefore, it can be deduced blogs were just the venue as students interacted with the text when they have to write. Probably, this interaction was what worked since they had to read and reread not only the text but also their summaries before publishing it on blogs.

Conclusion

The present action research study was conducted to find how summarization increases students' reading comprehension on narrative stories. Since participants had never used summarization before as a strategy to improve reading comprehension, they showed interest in this innovative management.

The researcher found that the students increased their ability to obtain main ideas, analyze characters and write summaries. The reflections and interviews evidenced that they were interested in learning how to make a better summary and in turn how to understand a reading without major problems.

Some drawback arose; one of them was the lack of use of vocabulary and understanding oral instructions. It was possible to handle this situation through online dictionaries and the use of technology.

The fact that they have learned to write their own blogs and be able to comment on their peers allowed them to improve not only their reading ability but also their attitude towards learning.

Limitations

Despite the fact this strategy was supported by technology and the guidance that was given through the online classes, the process was not all so easy since there was interference in terms of the internet signal and the interest that the students presented as the

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innovation passes. Some students used the dictionary to be able to look up words they did not know, and as it was an online modality, there could not be control in the exam as in the face-to-face class.

Another limitation was that in the midst of the innovation, some participants showed difficulties with listening instructions and had feelings of frustration, as reading online seemed somewhat exhausting, so they wanted to leave the activities but were encouraged to continue. Consequently, this group of participants sometimes lost interest in innovation. As a third limitation, the researcher did not have 100% direct control over the activities since the innovation was completed online. The participants had to read and go through the process until writing the summaries at home.

Recommendations

In the course of improving this research study, it is recommended that future researchers conduct a research study in order to teach techniques to be able to infer the meaning of words without looking in the dictionary as well as reinforce listening comprehension by having students listen to what they are reading and adapt their ears. On the other hand, it is recommended to have narrative texts that are of interest to the participants and include technological resources so as not to lose interest in innovation.

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Appendix A

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

SUMMARIES OF NARRATIVE STORIES

Appendix B

Students' Demographics

Estimados Estudiantes:

La información de la siguiente encuesta se utilizará para el estudio denominado “Summaries to improve reading” (Resúmenes para mejorar la lectura). Los datos obtenidos en este instrumento se tratarán con estricta confidencialidad.

Gracias por su participación libre y voluntaria.

Atentamente,

Available upon request.

SUMMARIES OF NARRATIVE STORIES

Appendix C **Students' Experience with Reading**

Estimados Estudiantes:

La información de la siguiente encuesta se utilizará para el estudio denominado “Evidencing Reading Comprehension through Summarization (Evidenciando Comprensión Lectora a través de Resúmenes)”. Los datos obtenidos en este instrumento se tratarán con estricta confidencialidad.

Gracias por su participación libre y voluntaria.

Atentamente,

Available upon request.

SUMMARIES OF NARRATIVE STORIES

Appendix D

Rubric for Grading Reading Comprehension of narrative texts.

Available upon request.

SUMMARIES OF NARRATIVE STORIES

Appendix E **Learning logs**

Available upon request.

SUMMARIES OF NARRATIVE STORIES

Appendix F

FIELD NOTES (Example)

Research study: Summaries to improve reading comprehension.

Available upon request.

SUMMARIES OF NARRATIVE STORIES

Appendix G

Available upon request.

SUMMARIES OF NARRATIVE STORIES

Appendix H

Available upon request.

SUMMARIES OF NARRATIVE STORIES

Appendix I

Graphic Organizer - Elements of a Summary

Available upon request.

SUMMARIES OF NARRATIVE STORIES

Appendix J

Captures from the innovation

Available upon request.