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Perspectives of EFL Students towards Reading Strategies

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Proyectos de Investigación

Certifico que Carla Isabel Lozano Alvarado, Oswaldo Jonathan Sánchez Macías y Tito Yovanny Indacochea Rodríguez han cumplido satisfactoriamente su investigación descriptiva 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 PERSPECTIVES OF EFL STUDENTS TOWARDS READING STRATEGIES cuyo objetivo general es determinar las dificultades que tienen los estudiantes al leer en inglés como lengua extranjera.

En este proyecto, cada participante reporta los resultados de una encuesta tomada 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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Coordinadora de Titulación

Abstract

This descriptive study examines the point of view of a group of teachers towards reading and vocabulary practice in EFL. This study included the collection of qualitative and quantitative data. The participants were 56 teachers, 23 males, and 33 females; their ages ranged from 20 to 50 years old. The instrument applied in this research was a survey that was specifically created to gather information on the opinions and feelings of teachers while exposed to different types of texts in EFL practices. According to the collected data, most of the participants read in English and enjoy it. Most of them agreed on how easy it was for them to understand texts in English. Few of them presented problems due to the fact they consider their proficiency level is not enough to understand the meaning of words which can cause them to feel stressed and anxious. Additionally, the participants identified reading as one of the most important skills and mentioned they read to improve their language skills or to investigate. These results should be considered by EFL teachers and students to understand how important reading is in the English learning process.

Keywords: reading, receptive skills, reading skills, reading strategies.

Resumen

Este estudio descriptivo examina el punto de vista de un grupo de profesores hacia la lectura y la práctica del vocabulario en EFL. Este estudio incluyó la recopilación de datos cualitativos y cuantitativos. Los participantes fueron 56 profesores, 23 hombres y 33 mujeres; sus edades oscilaban entre los 20 y los 50 años. El instrumento aplicado en esta investigación fue una encuesta que se creó específicamente para recopilar información sobre las opiniones y sentimientos de los docentes al ser expuestos a diferentes tipos de textos en las prácticas de EFL.

Según los datos recopilados, la mayoría de los participantes leen en inglés y lo disfrutan. La mayoría estuvo de acuerdo en lo fácil que les resultaba entender el texto en inglés. Sin embargo, pocos de ellos presentaron problemas debido a que consideran que su nivel de competencia no es suficiente para comprender el significado de las palabras, lo que puede causarles estrés y ansiedad. Además, los participantes identificaron la lectura como una de las habilidades más importantes y mencionaron que leían para mejorar sus habilidades lingüísticas o para investigar. Los profesores y estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera deben considerar estos resultados para comprender la importancia de la lectura en el proceso de aprendizaje del inglés.

Palabras clave: lectura, habilidades receptoras, habilidades lectoras, estrategias lectoras.

Perspective of Reading Strategies in EFL

According to Karavas (2015), English is a language for communication around the world. One of the ways to acquire more information is by reading. Readers interpret texts and passages according to their specific purpose. However, teachers can face difficulties or obstacles directing their students into the correct material. Chacha (2019) stated that learners find it difficult to comprehend texts due to their lack of motivation and interest.

Teaching English as a second language in Ecuador has gone through different changes since a new curriculum came out in 2016 in order to enhance the students' English level in public and private high schools (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016). Unquestionably, the application of this curriculum facilitates the teaching process for educators in the classrooms around the country.

Shehu (2015) indicated that teachers are able to use different methods to build up all the English skills especially, reading and vocabulary which students struggle the most when trying to comprehend a given text. It was pointed out that some of the factors which influence reading comprehension are the different levels of materials, the readers' responses, background knowledge, experience in selecting reading books, and readers' environments (Noicharoen, 2012, as cited in Dara, 2019). These are common aspects that EFL learners face when reading a text at home or school.

According to Jun and Bin (2008), educators and learners refer to vocabulary as the biggest barrier in reading comprehension. Moreover, vocabulary is often one of the most critical aspects of language acquisition. This is because the complexity of vocabulary for ESL learners present problems in learning English properly (Mohamad Ali & Jabar, 2016).

According to Hindman et al. (2019), students do not gain enough knowledge in everyday conversations and reading helps them to enhance their vocabulary skills. This author agreed that vocabulary and reading play an important role in the communication and proficiency of learners even more when they are not accustomed to using the appropriate material in or out of class.

This descriptive study is an exploratory research that is characterized by how EFL students deal with reading comprehension and vocabulary skills. Thus, learners reported their perspectives about EFL reading and suggestions on how they could enhance their reading and vocabulary skills. Moreover, this research clarified some of the difficulties and challenges frequently encountered when reading.

The participants also described the time they spend reading and what resources are commonly used to enhance their vocabulary and reading skills in the English language. Jerrim (2012) stated in his paper about the performance of reading skills of teenagers in England that the teachers have the task of addressing the difficulties that students face, especially the ones labeled as underachieving or circumspect readers. Additionally, the author mentioned that the way in which the teacher motivates the pupils can directly affect the levels of gratification the students can have at the moment of performing a reading task, and even affect the perception they have about reading for pleasure in their personal lives.

Literature review

In this study, some of the most relevant reading components are indicated in order to clarify the importance of reading comprehension in the English language. They are: reading skills (skimming, scanning, summarizing, decoding, encoding, reading out loud), prior knowledge when reading, the purpose for reading, and organization of texts. All these

characteristics are considered appropriate in order to execute this descriptive study and clarify the importance of reading comprehension.

Vocabulary and Grammar in Reading Comprehension

In agreement with Al-Damiree and Bataineh (2016), the main objective of vocabulary and reading comprehension is to provide students the denotation of as many words as possible in order to make them communicate in an effective way. The use of grammar in reading takes a crucial role as much as learners spend valuable time reading not only in English but also in their native language (Al-Damiree & Bataineh 2016). The more time students spend reading, the more likely they get familiarized with new words and expressions.

Additionally, grammar and vocabulary knowledge is built up when reading involves continual extraction of information. According to Jun and Bin (2008), favorable reading comprehension mostly depends on the connection students make between their previous knowledge and what they read in the passage. Although students do not recognize all the words in a text, they may interpret the meaning of them by identifying the grammar structure. Most studies addressing the role of grammar in L2 reading explored this issue by measuring the correlation between learners' grammatical knowledge and their L2 reading comprehension ability (Akbari, 2014).

Another component of reading comprehension is vocabulary which plays a valuable part in understanding and grammar sentence structure. Nagy (1988) stated that learners are not able to understand most of the words in a passage if they are not familiarized with them. English as a foreign language as any other has a very large number of words, therefore, the lack of sufficient vocabulary knowledge in students is a great impediment to raise their relationship between vocabulary and comprehension.

Reading Skills

Reading comprehension skills are defined as a group of mental tools necessary to fulfill a task, and that facilitates learners to reinforce comprehension approaches (Cartwright, 2002). It has been noticed that readers can use their executive skills in a proficient way and have better results in the reading comprehension process in all its stages (Sesma et al., 2009). Reading comprehension helps learners to reinforce their abilities to comprehend written English efficiently and associate the context with the meaning of words or phrases. According to Jun and Bin (2008), reading comprehension increases a wide range of skills including critical and cognitive capacities to active readers by comparing and contrasting situations.

Skimming.

One of the most common reading skills used in the process of reading comprehension is skimming. It is said that in this technique the gist is the reader's purpose. When this skill is put into practice the reader goes through the text very quickly to identify in a general way what it is about and develops a general understanding of it. In addition, the reader does not need to know the meaning of all the words in the text (Ngoc, 2015).

Scanning.

Another widely used technique implemented by readers is scanning, which can be defined as reading a text searching for specific information. Yusuf et al. (2016) mentioned that this process is formed by three steps; first, it is necessary to identify keywords that readers will be looking for in the reading. Secondly, the reader needs to look quickly through the text for those specific words; and finally, read the text around the words to discover if that information is useful. This strategy is also useful after reading the complete text to remember specific details about it.

Decoding and encoding.

Decode information means to translate the words into information in the learner's mind while encoding is to translate the information into the learner's mind as well to build a link between the meaning internalized and the word itself that is written in the text (Sesma et al., 2009). As described by Tauber (1993), encoding increases the reading and spelling skills of those students at risk for literacy failure, the use of didactic material such as plastic letters and letter tiles might be of great help to teach phonemes and graphemes. Likewise, Weiser and Mathes (2011) conducted a study that students were able to enhance their reading skills with decoding and encoding through the spelling of words and writing.

Reading out loud.

One of the advantages of reading out loud is to improve the interpretation of words and scenarios, especially to children since they associate words with situation and context with meaning (Kieras & Just, 1984). Reading out loud not only enhances reading comprehension but also listening skills in large or small classes (Djiwandono, 2018). Through reading out loud students build connections between spoken and written words.

Prior Knowledge when Reading

In reading comprehension, previous knowledge makes predictions about the information that the subject brings. Additionally, it can be influenced by a way of intellectual capacity, emotions, linguistic and communication skills. According to Lipson (1982), new information can be acquired through textual materials taking into account three prior knowledge conditions such as correct, wrong, or unknown. She argued that prior knowledge refers to all of the experience's readers have had throughout their lives, including information they have learned elsewhere.

This knowledge is used to bring the written word to life and make it more relevant in the reader's mind. Brantmeier (2006) indicated that a quality shaping the contribution of prior

knowledge to L2 reading comprehension is the degree of the reader's familiarity with culturally related information within a text. Furthermore, the prior knowledge activation before beginning a new reading can help the readers practice their inference-making skills and metacognition. When introducing and reviewing new vocabulary, pupils are able to become more familiar and continue building up their skills. Tarchi (2015) noted that prior knowledge and inferences are considered the most important predictors of reading comprehension.

Readers relate the written word to their previous experiences to make reading more personal, helping them to both understand and remember what they have read. Some experts believe that activating prior knowledge is an important aspect of the reading experience. Joh and Plakans (2017) proposed that the contribution of working memory to L2 reading comprehension can be moderated by readers' prior knowledge. Al-Momani et al. (2015) stated that the more time students spend reading, the more knowledge they construct, especially when they present great interest in what they read.

Organization of Texts

Organization of texts refers to how a text is developed. Therefore, readers follow and understand the information presented. Richard (2001, as cited in Andriani, 2019) pointed out that textbooks are a key component of language teaching serving as the basis for much of the language input trainees receive when learning a language. Reading texts provides detailed information through ideas, opinions that do not just determine the structural, lexical forms of new vocabulary, but also the semantic and syntactic elements. Moreover, texts that contain unknown grammatical constructions are more difficult to understand than well-organized text. Andriani (2019) said that readers who can recognize the rhetorical organization of a text have better comprehension than those who do not. Readers who prosecute new rhetorical information

can acquire better retention furthermore they know the meaning and the usage of a specific part of the speech to comprehend what the text is about. Mahdavy (2011) noted that attention to orthography, pronunciation, grammatical category, the meaning of words as well as the relationships between them improves retention. Moreover, readers can expand their prior knowledge of the correct use of the meaning of words.

Methodology

This is a descriptive study with an analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The instrument used in this article was a survey designed to determine the viewpoint of this group of students towards reading and the acquisition of new vocabulary. According to Nassaji (2015), the goal of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics, therefore observation and surveys are commonly used tools in this type of research. On the other hand, quantitative data is defined as the value of collected information to know numbers where each data-set has a numerical value. Watson (2015) claimed that quantitative research involves measurement and assumes that the phenomenon under study can be measured.

In this survey, students reported their attitude about the attainment of reading and vocabulary skills in EFL. When they finished answering all the questions, the responses were saved to interpret the results.

Research questions

1. Do participants read in English?
2. Do they use reading strategies?
3. What are their perspectives towards vocabulary?
4. What are their perspectives toward reading in English?

Participants Description

The survey was applied to English teachers of the city of Guayaquil who work in different institutions such as public, private, or language academies. Their ages vary from 20 to 50 years old. The main goal of this survey was to determine the importance of reading comprehension in teachers, the time they spend reading in their spare time, and how they can enhance their vocabulary and reading skills in the English language. To name another thing this study can enlighten what the limitations are for people with an upper intermediate level of proficiency, how they feel towards engaging in a reading skills activity.

As a mean of collecting enough information, participants needed to answer some open-ended questions in the survey which will help the investigator in the data processing. enhancing the understanding of the reasons that cause the way participants feel about reading tasks and activities and to discover how important they think this type of activities are.

Instruments

Reading survey.

In this study, a survey was implemented. It was divided in five sections and in total it had 23 individual questions.

In the first section of the survey the participants found general questions about their personal information such as age, gender, level of proficiency and nationality, among others. So it was possible for the researcher to understand who the participants were.

In the second section of the survey, participants were required to describe their language learning background in their own words, to label their level of knowledge and use of technology and their access to it.

In the third section of this study, the participants, needed to label their proficiency by selecting the option that fits the most with their reality on a Liker scale; to a great extent, most of

it, some, a little bit, and none were the options that the participants had in order to describe how proficient they were and if they could implement and use specific reading skills. On the other hand, there was a specific question that requires information about how their understand English at the moment of reading and if they translate it to Spanish or not.

Comentado [1]:

To conclude in the fourth and fifth sections of the survey the participants were required to describe in their own words information to answer three open ended questions about their own perception and feelings towards reading itself.

Data Analysis

The information gathered and analyzed in this study was assembled in a Microsoft Excel Document where it was also broken down into small pieces of information. After analyzing the data, the attained results were organized in charts to find out the strengths and weaknesses in the teachers' background to facilitate the analysis of the outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

All the participants of this study were adults, so it was not necessary a written authorization of legal tutors or parents, but their collaboration was required previously in order them actively engage with the study. There was a legend at the beginning of the survey that indicated the participation was free and voluntary. Participants knew the results were used for academic purposes.

Results

Most teachers mentioned that they read because they can, or because they enjoy it, and it can be said that the ones that wrote this reason were the ones that felt they have enough English background and that is the reason why, they started reading for pleasure. As a consequence of the

regular reading activities they perform, they also mentioned that they feel comfortable with their level of proficiency.

A great number of teachers mentioned that English was very helpful for them as a tool for learning, working or finding information. Additionally, it can be said that their opinion about the language was generally positive. It was possible to notice that a very few of them do not feel prepared to practice reading frequently. They can experience certain negative predisposition at the moment of reading because they do not understand some of the words, or the lack of vocabulary can make them feel frazzled at the moment of performing a reading task.

Most of the participants of this study mentioned that they do not translate the words of the text while they are reading, on the other hand other participants specified that the use of the previous general knowledge is important when they are reading a text.

To conclude, a considerable number of teachers agreed that the importance of reading in English with a considerable level of proficiency is crucial to improve their language skills and it is a tool for their careers and education.

Table 1

Do you read in English?

Yes (N= 49)	Why or Why not?	
	Entertainment	9
	For work or educational purposes	5
	To improve the language skills	11

	For investigation or research purposes	9
	It is easy	15
No (N= 7)	Lack of knowledge/ difficulty level	6
	No interest or need	1

Table 1 shows most of the participants mentioned that they do read in English for different reasons. First it can be noticed that most of the participants stated that they read in English because they find it easy. That is a valid reason to perform this type of tasks regularly, most teachers express that the main reason they read was to improve their language skills such as vocabulary and writing. Few participants mentioned their reason to read was to investigate or to understand information that can only be found in English. It can be said that reading in English is a necessity for most of them as they use it in their work, educational tasks, or to acquire information. To contrast this information only a group of 7 teachers mentioned that they do not read in English. Most of them affirmed that it was due a lack of knowledge or the reading difficulty level. A poor vocabulary is the reason the participants feel they cannot read or understand some texts, especially big ones.

Perspective about EFL Reading and Vocabulary

Table 2 reports the results of the Likert scale table; its purpose is to illustrate the means of the survey. According to the results, most participants can understand a long reading after rereading it two times at least. They can understand its meaning, topic and general idea. Some of them mentioned that they can understand all its characteristics in the first reading.

Additionally, it was demonstrated that most of the participants that filled this survey understand the meaning and use of some reading techniques such as skimming and scanning, many of them mentioned they can implement these techniques while reading.

While one of the lowest scores of the table was in the question that asked if they translate the words while they are reading. Additionally a big amount of them do not do this practice.

Table 2

Perspective about reading

Descriptive Statistics		
	Item	Mean
1	I can understand a long, complex text.	4,41
2	I understand single phrases at a time.	4,64
3	I understand a long text with the first reading.	4.14
4	I understand a long text by rereading it.	4.48
5	I can skim.	4.29
6	I can scan.	4.29
7	I know the elements of a summary.	4.32
8	When I read, I translate all the words	3.14
9	I identify the type of texts I read.	4.38
10	I know the organization of the text.	4.43
11	I use my prior knowledge when I read.	4.46
12	I can classify words of a reading according to their function in context of the reading: noun, verb, and adverb, adjective, among others.	4.38
13	When I read, I observe punctuation pauses.	4.52
14	When I read, the punctuation helps me understand the text.	4.57

The last section of the survey had the open-ended questions. How I feel when I see an English passage, how I feel about my English vocabulary and performance, and what I think about learning vocabulary. Most participants mentioned that when they see a reading passage, they feel confident, interested and encouraged to read, many of them mentioned they enjoy reading and if it is about a topic they find interesting they can be very engaged with it and read it until the end.

From the participants' point of view, they describe their level as good, or upper intermediate which is the reason they feel confident during reading tasks. In contrast to that, four people pointed out that their level of proficiency is "not good enough" or "precarious". Learning vocabulary is a very interesting task for some of the participants that took this survey, who mentioned that "It is not that difficult, especially if you have the habit of practice and acquire new vocabulary every day". Nevertheless, some of them mention that they find the learning of vocabulary process difficult due to several facts such as "Due to the thousands of words that appear every day. Also, because there are collocation and slangs. Another reason is the variety of idioms so you can say phrases in different forms." It was also mentioned as one of the challenges that many of the words in English had different meaning so it is necessary to be very aware of the context of words.

Discussion

This descriptive study reveals that the common feeling of the participants towards reading in English is that they find it interesting, relaxing even entertaining. There is a general positive perception of reading among them, few of them mentioned that they did not feel comfortable with regard to reading tasks. Very few of them stated that they feel stressed or nervous towards the activity. Chacha (2019) stated that learners find it difficult to comprehend

texts due to their lack of motivation and interest. The lack of knowledge or reading a text that does not match the level of proficiency of the student, can lead them feel frustrated.

As reported by Al-Momani et al. (2015), the more time students spend reading, the more knowledge they construct, especially if they find it interesting. The participants of the survey mentioned that they are using their reading skills and practice them frequently due to the fact they want to improve their skills and extend their vocabulary. Mentioning additionally that they read frequently because they find it easy and enjoyable. It can be said that it has a direct relationship with the level of performance of the participants.

The participants were familiarized with the punctuation pauses and structure in the passages they usually read, they reported that they understand the organization of different types of texts which enhances their level of reading comprehension. Andriani (2019) said that readers who can recognize the rhetorical organization of a text have better comprehension than those who do not. Corresponding with the findings that mentioned that they find it relatively easy to comprehend different types of texts and most of them even at the first reading. In addition, Mahdavy (2011) noted that attention to orthography, pronunciation, grammatical category, the meaning of words as well as the relationships between them improves retention. Improving their perception of the text and facilitating the implementation of reading techniques.

The participants were asked if they understand the meaning of skimming and scanning in an open question, most of them mentioned they are familiar with the use of these reading techniques and that it is easy to apply them while reading texts in English in their daily lives facilitating their reading comprehension and understanding of the information read.

To conclude, it can be said that participants with a wider English background or a high level of proficiency were the ones that mentioned that they read because it is entertaining for

them, leading us to the conclusion that the better someone understands a task it becomes more enjoyable.

Conclusion

The descriptive study was designed to find and demonstrate the point of view teachers have towards reading. By collecting and inspecting the answers, it was easy to find out that their opinions were somehow similar among them. After analyzing the information; it was determined that most of the people read frequently in their daily lives and due to several facts, they actually enjoy this activity.

During the analysis of the data, it could be observed that many of the teachers have a very wide English background leading them to correctly appreciate the reading practice, taking it as a way of improving their own skills and enhance their vocabulary acquirement, nevertheless some of the participants who felt really confident about their skills, mentioned that they use their reading mostly to investigate about specific topics that are not available in their L1.

It was noticeable that the few participants that mentioned that they did not feel confident with their proficiency, find stressing or could feel anxious in front of a reading task. It needs to be understood that the reading practice, when it matches the level, interests and age of the students can be a very useful tool to help them improve their language use and vocabulary, it can also be said that continued reading practices can build up the writing skills as well.

Most of the teachers that participate in this study mentioned that they know the meaning of some words and use of skimming and scanning practices. By being familiar to them they mentioned that this enhances their general understanding of the text about the reading, and to find specific information in a short period of time. This type of practice helps them feel more in control of themselves while performing a reading activity no matter if it is for pleasure or work.

It was found that by feeling confident with what they are reading and how they are doing it, the activity becomes more pleasant.

Most of the participants indicated they never translate what they are reading to their L1s, but a very few numbers of the participants which coincidentally mentioned that did not feel confident with their proficiency level tend to translate all the words of the reading. There is a possibility that as they do not understand each one of the words they can experience negative feeling towards the activity. In contrast to that, the ones that feel confident mentioned that they clearly understand the message without the necessity of translating or knowing the meaning of the words because sometimes they can infer what it means.

Limitations

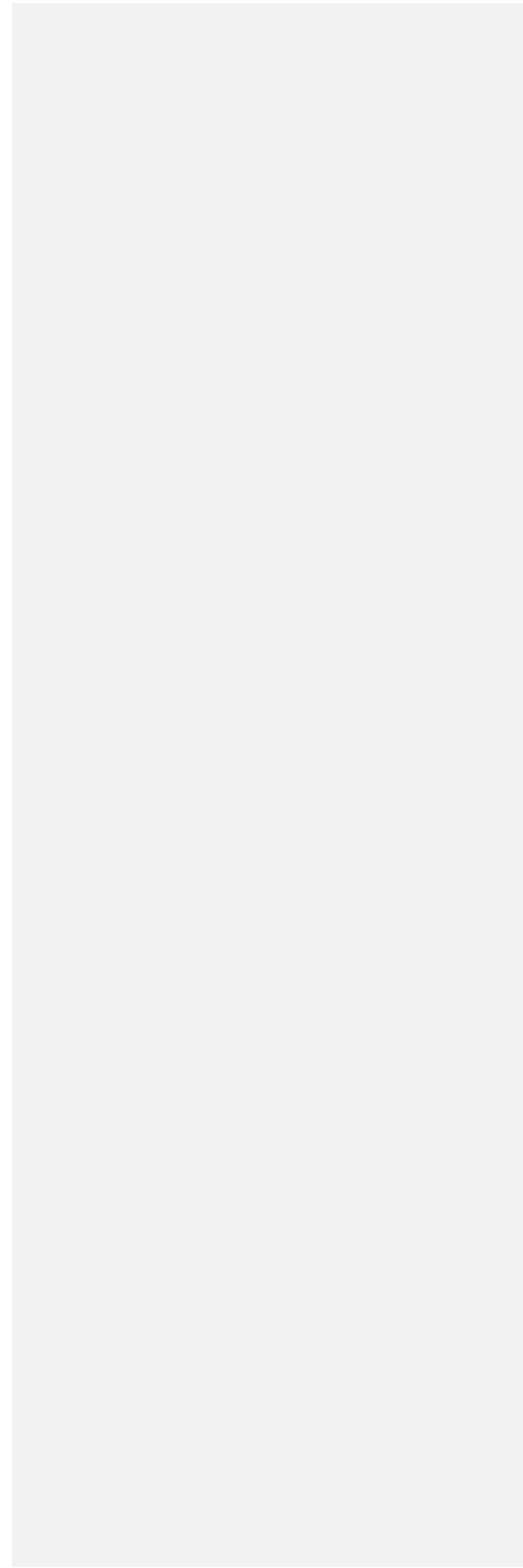
During this process there were very few limitations, some of them were very easy to solve. Some others were not. The participants of this study were adults so it was not necessary to fulfill consent forms. Additionally, the participants were informed that the answers of the survey were going to be used in an analysis and that they needed to be as honest as possible at moment of answering the questions.

Some of the participants did not answer the questions with long and clear answers, which at first was difficult to analyze due to the lack of information of some answers. But there were no major problems during the collection of data nor the analysis.

Recommendations

After the participants answered the survey, and they understood its purpose, some recommendations were made in order to improve the outcomes of the study. the sections religions and Economic income should be omitted due to the fact that this information does not

add relevance to the background of the participant. It could be very useful if the survey had asked their favorite topics for reading, so it could be inferred that their personal interest can influence or not on their reading habits.



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Appendix
Survey

Available upon request.

