



Reading Strategies in EFL Students from a Private Ecuadorian University

Daniel Isaac Zambrano Zambrano

Guide: Ms. María Rossana Ramírez Ávila

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Proyectos de Investigación

Certifico que Lilian Estefanía Calle Méndez y Daniel Isaac Zambrano Zambrano 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 READING STRATEGIES IN EFL STUDENTS 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.

María Rossana Ramírez Avila

Coordinadora de Titulación

Abstract

This study describes the perspectives of 50 students in a private University in Ecuador on the importance of reading in English. The purpose of this study was to determine how much students read, their application of reading strategies, and their point of view towards learning vocabulary and developing their skills in reading in English. This descriptive study was supported by a quantitative and qualitative instrument. Data obtained from questionnaires applied through google forms was used to answer the research questions. Results demonstrated that 72% read in English. Furthermore, it was evidenced that there was a lack of application of strategies while reading. Also, the participants considered that the acquisition and learning of vocabulary is complex due to the lack of dedication, the large amount of new vocabulary, similar spelling and pronunciation of some words, among others. Finally, 42% of the participants mentioned that they feel anxious when reading in English because of the difficulties of the passages. Implications of this study involve recommendations to EFL teachers who seek to improve their student's perspectives towards learning vocabulary and acquiring reading skills through the application of strategies.

Keywords: reading in EFL, reading strategies, vocabulary, perspectives

Resumen

Este estudio describe las perspectivas de 50 estudiantes de una universidad privada en Ecuador sobre la importancia de la lectura en inglés. El propósito de este estudio fue determinar cuánto leen los estudiantes, la aplicación de estrategias de lectura y sus puntos de vistas sobre el aprendizaje de vocabulario y desarrollo de las destrezas de lectura en inglés. Este estudio descriptivo se sustentó en un instrumento cuantitativo y cualitativo. Para responder a las preguntas de investigación se utilizaron datos obtenidos de cuestionarios aplicados a través de formularios de Google. Los resultados demostraron que el 72% leía en inglés. Además, se evidenció que hubo falta de aplicación de estrategias durante la lectura. Asimismo, los participantes consideraron que la adquisición y el aprendizaje de vocabulario es complejo debido a la falta de dedicación, la gran cantidad de vocabulario nuevo, similar ortografía y pronunciación de algunas palabras, entre otras. Finalmente, el 42% de los participantes mencionó que se sienten ansiosos al leer en inglés debido a las dificultades de los pasajes. Las implicaciones de este estudio incluyen recomendaciones a los maestros de inglés como lengua extranjera que buscan mejorar las perspectivas de sus estudiantes hacia el aprendizaje de vocabulario y la adquisición de habilidades de lectura mediante la aplicación de estrategias.

Palabras clave: lectura en EFL, estrategias de lectura, vocabulario, perspectivas

Reading Strategies in EFL Students from a Private Ecuadorian University

It has been demonstrated that reading is substantially important for people in general. “The ability to read is highly valued and imperative for social and economic advancement” (Qarqez & Rashid, 2017, p. 422). In the educational domain, it “provides the basis for a significant amount of learning” and academic progress would be restricted if learners do not become skilled at reading comprehensively (Guthrie, et al., 2004, p. 403).

Additionally, Harmer (2007, p. 99) sustained that “Reading texts also provide good models for English writing”. Consciously and unconsciously, students can learn the way sentences, paragraphs, and complete texts are formed. This can even become more productive if educators encourage learners to focus on “vocabulary, grammar or punctuation while they read” (Hammer, 2007, p. 99).

Due to the importance of reading, it becomes crucial that learners know and apply strategies to improve their reading comprehension. At first, applying these reading strategies could take more time than just reading the passage. Nonetheless, with practice, learners become skilled and able to “understand and remember much more from the text in less time” (McNamara, 2007, p. 23).

Despite the importance of strategies while reading (Lopera, 2012), the truth is that not many learners apply them as part of their reading habits. This situation leads EFL students to confront different difficulties and challenges when they attempt to read effectively. In a study carried out in a foreign country to non-native English students, Samad et al. (2017) mentioned some of those difficulties: Students find especially difficult to interpret both implied and stated information, as well as their capacity to use context and spot the main idea of a text. Another study carried out by Sultana (2016, as

cited in Suchona & Urmey, 2019) reported that some students also face difficulty in comprehending and figuring out the main points of a passage.

Lack of lexis is likewise a difficulty experienced by learners when trying to comprehend a text. According to Jayanti (2016, p. 299), “vocabulary is considered to be the most significant source of students’ difficulties”. This problem leads to another one, which is the dependence students have on dictionaries when they “find new or difficult words in a text.” This limits their capacity to understand the meaning of the words in context.

Alternatively, Chandran and Shah (2019, p. 3381) exposed another inconvenience EFL learners encounter: they basically “do not know the proper reading process of comprehending the content of the texts”. This is supported by Davoudi and Yousefi (2015) who alleged reading problems to be related to a lack of good meaning-in-text decoding techniques during the reading process. Finally, León (2020, p. 1) corroborated this in a study focused on “summarization as a strategy to enhance reading comprehension of narrative stories.” The lack of knowledge about reading strategies prevent reader from having a good understanding of a given text.

Corroborating the above, in Ecuador, students from higher education do not possess the reading skill correctly developed. Even though people who begin university studies are required to have a B1 English Proficiency, the reality is that most of them “barely have an A1 level”. In an article, Contreras (2019, p. 6) reported having taken diagnostic tests in her higher education institution, and the scores mostly “showed students having no more than A1 proficiency level.” Additionally, Peñafiel (2014, p. 219) stated that “While college students are reading advanced academic material, it does not mean that they always comprehend the information.”

In countries other than Ecuador, some authors have carried out descriptive studies about the use of reading strategies and reading comprehension proficiency among learners (Alrabah & Wu, 2019; Ardi, 2016; Kurnia, 2011; Paige, et al., 2013; Zare & Othman, 2013). Ardi (2016), for example, conducted a descriptive study on reading proficiency in a tenth-grade group of students with the objective of identifying their mastery of reading comprehension. A 20-item test was used, for the data collection in 45 participants out of a population of 219 students. The findings showed that 84.45% of the randomly selected group were between good and very good readers and only a minor group of the population were fair and poor readers.

In another study, Paige et al. (2013) also explored reading comprehension skills in a group of 193 elementary and middle school students ranging grades 3-9. The study aimed to measure the proficiency of students' reading in the following categories: phonology, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary knowledge. Different tests were applied for each one of the indicators. Some important findings were obtained. First, even though the teachers in the institution were not native English speakers, they had led their students to acquire high fluency skills when reading. This proposes that students are capable of acquiring high level of fluent “decoding and reading” skills in English even though they live where “no English is spoken at home”. The results also showed that there was a “statistically significant relationship between vocabulary and comprehension” (Paige et al. 2013). This suggests that if learners do not possess an acceptable amount of vocabulary, it might be difficult for them to understand a text.

Comprehension ability by using authentic materials from internet has also been studied (Kurnia, 2011). For the main data, Kurnia (2011) utilized a reading comprehension test consisting of 30 items; while interview, observation and

documentation were used to collect supporting data. The participants were 43 students from a school in which reading classes have been imparted, using only authentic materials from internet since 2007. The test was divided in 4 indicators: word comprehension, sentence comprehension, paragraph comprehension and text comprehension. The results obtained stipulated that in general, 80.21 percent of the students possessed a good level of reading comprehension ability, while 19.61 percent did not have good reading skills. In general, it can be said that the use of authentic material in reading classes can help text comprehension skills. Among the four indicators, the highest achievement was on text comprehension. In contrast, the lowest scores were obtained in paragraph comprehension.

The previous researches had as objective to know the reading proficiency of the participants. Nevertheless, Zare and Othman (2013) went beyond and analyzed the usage of strategies when students read English texts. The aim of the study was to identify the “rate of recurrence of reading strategies among learners” who were also separated between males and females. A “reading strategy inventory and a reading comprehension test” were used to collect data of 95 students from Malaysia: 50 males and 45 females. In first instance, participants were given an instrument listing 15 reading strategies. They had to choose how often they used the strategies marked as: never, rarely, occasionally, frequently, always. Additionally, they also took a reading comprehension test “from a retired version of IELTS”. There were two important findings in the research. First, the results showed that participants were high strategy users. This can be explained with the fact that English is highly used in Malaysia, so the exposure to this language is also frequent. This generates interest for learning and opportunities for practice as well. Second, the study demonstrates that “there is a strong positive correlation ($r = .89$) between reading strategy use and reading comprehension

achievement (The correlation is significant at the level of 0.01)” (Zare & Othman, 2013, p. 190). This stipulates that the more well implemented strategies learners use, the better they will do in reading comprehension.

Most of the descriptive studies analyzed in this research were executed in high schools; however, at college level, Alrabah and Wu (2019) conducted a study to identify the awareness and use of *metacognitive reading strategies* in a group of EFL students at a medical college. Data collection was based on the administration of the survey *MARSI* (Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory) developed by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002, as cited in Alrabah & Wu, 2019) using google forms and the mobile phones of the students. The survey was conducted in a group of 83 students from two different degree programs; (1) Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), (2) Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN).

Metacognitive strategies are procedures used to help students understand, be aware of, and think about the way they learn. *Metacognitive reading strategies* were classified by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002, as cited in Alrabah & Wu, 2019) into *Global strategies*, which “include planning, monitoring, and evaluating what one has read”; *problem-solving strategies*, which are aimed “at solving problems when the text becomes difficult to read”; and *support reading strategies* which stands for “the use of outside reference materials such as looking up unknown words in dictionaries.” (Alrabah & Wu, 2019, p. 25).

The findings of the research indicated that participants were active users of problem solving and global strategies, and medium users of support strategies. Since students review content related to their specific major during all their English classes, a good learning environment could have been created, which allowed students to enhance their reading skills in texts related to their major.

Although the relationship of applying reading strategies and the improvement of reading skill have been studied in Asian Countries such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Kuwait (Ardi, 2016; Alrabah & Wu, 2019; Kurnia, 2011; Paige, et al., 2013; Zare & Othman, 2013), there is no evidence of this been studied in Ecuador at university level. That is the basis for the present descriptive study, which was carried out in a private Ecuadorian university. In this institution, students have to present a B1 English proficiency certification before they finish any degree program. Consequently, most students take a 6-level course in the language center to obtain the certification. Some others who speak English fluently decide to present an international proficiency certification such as TOEFL, FCE or IELTS. students' proficiency in English varies drastically even among students of the same course level. To conclude, the present study was done with the objective to find the answer for the following research questions which were addressed in accordance to the participants' necessities.

- Do participants read in English?
- Do they use reading strategies?
- What are their perspectives towards vocabulary?
- What are their perspectives towards reading in English?

Literature Review

Reading

A person who reads will have many opportunities in life. According to Singer and Alexander (2016), reading is one of the most important skills for economic, political, civic and social improvement. In their study they mentioned that a person who reads has more opportunities in a globalized world.

Stanovich's belief (1986, as cited in Malatesha, 2005) supported that students who read copiously tend to have a large vocabulary and wide knowledge about the environment that surrounds them, in contrast to those who read just a few.

Emphasizing the significance of literacy, Kassam (1994) affirmed,

“[...] Literacy enables people to read their own world and to write their own history. Literacy makes people aware of their basic human rights and enables them to fight for and protect their rights. Literacy enables people to have a greater degree of control over their own lives. Literacy helps people to become self-reliant and resist exploitation and oppression. Literacy provides access to written knowledge - and knowledge is power” (p. 3)

Learning English as a foreign language involves the development of four basic skills. Reading skill is one of those language skills. This skill is considered by Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), as one of the most significant skills that students should master. Those authors said if students can read, they will perform many academic activities. Nowadays, English is considered a mandatory subject. Consequently, most of the teachers focus on reading skills to develop students' proficiency in the language while increasing knowledge regarding any topic. Even though some students might consider reading as a complex skill, through practice they learn to decode, analyze, and express their ideas from what they read (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

According to Graves et al. (1998, as cited in Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016), reading is a skill in which readers make meaning from what they read. Readers have to recognize and interpret symbols to understand what is written (Dennis, 2008, as cited in Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Also, some important skills such as word recognition, fluency, and lexical knowledge, are connected to reading. By integrating these skills, the

reader has more opportunities to learn and master the language (Pressley & Birsch, 2006, as cited in Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Falk-Ross (2014) stated that reading is a process in which the reader interacts with the text. Readers apply their knowledge regarding word recognition and vocabulary to build meaning from the text. In other words, reading is a process in which people interpret a written message based on their expertise. Furthermore, it is the construction of meaning in which the reader connects information from the written message with previous knowledge to develop an understanding (Day & Bamford, 1998, p. 13).

Tavakoli (2014, as cited in Wu, 2016) mentioned reading as the key to many academic opportunities for all the students. For that reason, teachers are focused on helping students to develop this skill and to construct meaning from the text through different strategies. Another reason for teachers' interest in reading skills, according to River (1981, as cited in Wu, 2016), is because of the lack of oral interaction in countries where English is not a native language. Notwithstanding the absence of verbal communication, students find various literary, scientific, and technical written resources (Wu, 2016).

Reading Components

There are several types of components in reading that help to know what are the strengths and weaknesses that each student has. Based on them, teachers can apply new strategies to develop reading skills and improve comprehension (MacArthur et al., 2010).

Vocabulary.

It is a component in fluent reading and in the acquisition of a second language. Vocabulary plays an important role firstly for phonological recoding, which is to use previous knowledge of how groups of letters or words are spelled and pronounced; and

secondly, for reading comprehension (Suggate et al., 2018). Furthermore, vocabulary along with grammar are considered to allow learners to improve their reading skills (Ibrahim et al., 2016). Laufer and Sim (1985, as cited in Ibrahim et al., 2016) mentioned that vocabulary performs a fundamental role in the acquisition of a foreign language. Unfortunately, a lack of vocabulary can affect the understanding of a text and progress in acquiring new knowledge.

Grammar.

Grammar is a part of acquiring a second language. It also has a role that helps to recognize rules of structures to master the language. In other words, grammar is a guide that helps to know the morphology, clauses, sentences, and complete texts. However, the traditional way of teaching grammar has caused learners to feel unmotivated and find this area of the language very tedious (Lin et al., 2020).

Reading Strategies

Izquierdo and Jiménez (2014), mentioned that reading strategies are useful in order to engage students in the reading process and promote the understanding ability. To achieve these goals, they suggested putting into practice the following strategies:

- a. Scanning refers to seek for specific information without reading the whole text. It is considered a quick reading for “specific reading goals” (p. 70). Marliasari (2017) mentioned the following example regarding Scanning. A reader might scan a biography of a famous person looking for specific information concerning their studies. The reader will leave out information that does not include descriptions of studies, stopping only when he/she sees something related to the topic that is interesting.
- b. Skimming is to look briefly at the text and find the main ideas focusing just on “main lines and headings” (Izquierdo & Jiménez, 2014, p. 70). In other words, it

can be said that it is the action of looking quickly at the text to get a general idea of it. The reader wants to understand the essence of the text, but he or she does not give much importance to the details (Marliasari, 2017).

- c. Summarizing is a strategy that allows the reader to synthesize the ideas of a text. Moreover, it increases retention and understanding because students analyze the main thoughts and relevant details of the reading. Readers report their understanding in their own words (Pourhosein & Sabouri, 2016).
- a. Decoding is a process of analyzing and understanding each word or sentence of a text. Readers apply their previous knowledge into practice to interpret the smaller linguistic units such as phonemes and graphemes. Consequently, they understand what the reading aspires to communicate (Pourhosein & Sabouri, 2016).
- b. Encoding is a strategy that allows the construction of words from sounds. It is very useful because it increases phonological awareness to avoid difficulties when reading (Russell & Shiffler, 2019).
- c. Reading out loud is a strategy that allows controlling the rhythm of visual attention, fluency, and reading comprehension. Also, it enables readers to be corrected and guided by their teacher. In this way, readers make corrections and improve their reading. This strategy can be individual, in pairs, or groups. The reader may be interrupted by the monitor to ask questions and check the understanding of both the reader and the audience (Topping, 2014).

All the mentioned strategies will help readers in both reading comprehension and in the acquisition of vocabulary. Furthermore, readers will be able to recognize main ideas, important details and new lexical elements within the text (Jaramillo et al., 2019).

Prior Knowledge when Reading

Echeverri and McNulty (2010) mentioned in their research that activating students' previous knowledge is helpful to engage students in the reading activity. The students develop their imagination and bring out more ideas and curiosity. Also, the students concentrate and understand the text easily while linking it with their previous knowledge (Echeverri & McNulty, 2010). Having prior knowledge is of great importance to readers. Readers associate their prior knowledge with the text. In addition, prior knowledge regarding the topic of the text facilitates comprehension and readers can generate inferences during reading (Hwang, 2019).

It is important to take into consideration that students might be lacking previous knowledge regarding the topic of the text. In other words, students may not be able to infer the meaning or relate some previous experiences with the topic of the text, if they lack previous knowledge (Echeverri & McNulty, 2010).

Purpose for Reading

There are a variety of purposes to read: reading to get knowledge, reading to write, reading to learn a language, reading to evaluate critically, reading for entertainment (Grabe, 2002; Sheeba, 2018). Due to this, the cognitive process of reading varies depending on its purpose. A person reading for an exam may have stricter standards than another one who reads a magazine for pleasure. This may as well determine the time invested and strategies to be employed (Linderholm, 2016).

Organization of Texts

According to Dickson (1995), the organization of a text is very important for the reader to understand the ideas and purpose of the text. Also, a well-organized text facilitates understanding, relates main ideas to supporting ideas, and avoids irrelevant

information. Dickson (1995) mentioned two important elements in the structure of a text. The first is physical presentation, which is the visual part of the text. In a well-organized text, readers will find the titles, subtitles, main ideas and conclusions. On the other hand, there are text structures, which are less visual than the previous one, but its organization is important to make the purpose of the text known.

Methodology

The methodology for this research was descriptive with analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The objective of a descriptive research is to “describe a phenomenon and its characteristics.” (Nassaji, 2015). This type of research is mainly focused on “*what* rather than *how* or *why* something has happened.” That is why observational and data collection tools such as surveys are used (Gall et al., 2007).

Participants

Fifty students from a private university in Ecuador participated in the study, all of them belonged to the fourth semester of the Dentistry major. There were thirty-five females and fifteen males. The age of the participants ranged from 19 – 32 and most of them were twenty years old. All of the participants were Ecuadorian and the great majority affirmed to be “Mestizo”. As for their religion, most of them were Catholic and three participants assumed to be agnostics. Regarding their socio-economic class, most of them belonged to the middle class; however, 10 percent are low-income students, according to their own perspective. All of them had access to technological supplies such as desktop, laptops, and smartphones as well as internet and the majority of them had a basic to intermediate knowledge about technology.

Participant’s mother tongue is Spanish. However, one of them spoke fluent Italian. As for English, their background varied significantly. Even though most of them said to have been studying English since they were kids, one of them considered to have

an advanced level of English, while the great majority consider to be basic speakers. Most of them had difficulties at speaking and some confirmed to have problems with reading. This could be so due to the importance their teacher had given to reading activities during the semester the survey was carried out.

Finally, student's participation in the study was voluntary. They were invited to take part in it by their teacher, who was also the researcher. Additionally, they were informed that their responses in the survey would remain confidential and would not affect their grades in the course.

Instruments

An online survey was applied to carry out this study. The survey was divided in two parts. The first part provided demographic information of the participants such as age, gender, ethnic group, social status, and religion. The second part of the survey allowed to answer the research questions of this study. This part asked students about their reading habits and strategies as well as their perspective towards reading. Google Forms was used to carry out the survey so students answered it online. Furthermore, the survey was written in English and Spanish for a better comprehension of each item.

Data Analysis

A Google Spreadsheet was generated from the Google Forms survey. Some students involuntarily sent their answers twice, so duplicated surveys were deleted. Google Forms computed the percentages of the demographic information and a formula was used to get the means. For some questions in which students had to type an answer instead of selecting one, selective coding was applied to obtain the most relevant comments. Finally, the survey was taken by 50 students, however some of them did not answer all the survey items.

Ethical Considerations

A formal permission was retrieved from the language center director to carry out the research. All the participants were adults so they do not need a consent letter from their parents. However, they were informed that it was not mandatory to participate in the research and that the information provided in the survey would remain confidential.

Results

This section provides the results obtained in the survey and is organized in accordance to the research questions of the study. Research question one was: *Do participants read in English?* Two items from the survey allowed to give an answer to this research question. They were: (a) *I read in English*, and (b) *why?* Answers show that most of the students (72%) read in English. The principal reason why they read in English is because they can learn new things. Also, some students alleged they found useful to read because it was interesting for them and could learn new vocabulary. On the other side, 12% said they did not read. The principal reason was that they cannot understand what they read and they only do it because it is a class requirement. They also declared that they lack of vocabulary and strategies to read appropriately, so that restrains them from doing it. The results of this question are presented in Table 1

Table 1

I read in English

Option to Answer	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	36	72%
No	12	24%
A little	02	02%
Almost never	01	02%
Total	50	100%

Research question two was: *Do participants use reading strategies?* There was a total of 14 Likert items that were used to answer this research question. For each one of them, there was a scale ranging 1-5: 5 meant, *to a great extent*; 4, *most of it*; 3, *some*; 2, *a little bit*; 1, *none*. Additionally, one open question that required them to describe the process of skimming and scanning also provided qualitative information about how participants used these strategies. The Likert items and the open question were aimed to determine how much they were able to understand complete texts or parts of them and how well they could apply reading strategies such as skimming and scanning.

Results showed that what students found most difficult is to understand *a long text with the first reading* (M=2.86). This goes in hand with the fact that the second lowest item was *to know the organization of a text* (M=2.96). This implies that the fact of not knowing how a paragraph or a whole text is structured restrains them from understanding or locating the most important information in the first reading. One student mentioned that they had to read slowly a couple of times before they could understand a complete text. Another student said that he read as many times as necessary in order to understand the passage, whether they are three, four or five times.

As for skimming and scanning, the items *I can skim* (M=3.12) and *I can scan* (M=3.25) obtained an average result. This can be corroborated with the results in the open question: 34% said they could skim and 28% said they could scan. This question also required them to explain the process of skimming and scanning, and even though about 30% of the participants alleged to be able to apply these two reading strategies, only a few of them were able to explain their process appropriately.

Furthermore, *observation of punctuation pauses* (M=3.65) obtained the second highest mean. As far as some students indicated, *observing punctuation when they read helped them understand a text* (M=3.65). Finally, the item with the highest mean was to

understand single phrases at a time (3.76). One student said that understanding phrase by phrase is the way they can identify what the text is about. The results of this question are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2

Likert scale in the survey to measure students' use of strategies in reading

Item	Mean
I understand a long text with the first reading.	2.86
I know the organization of the text.	2.96
I identify the type of texts I read.	3.02
When I read, I translate all the words?	3.08
I can skim.	3.12
I can understand a long complex text	3.20
I use my prior knowledge when I read.	3.24
I can scan.	3.25
I can classify words of a reading according to their function in context of the reading: noun, verb, adverb, adjective, among others.	3.33
I understand a long text by rereading it.	3.42
I know the elements of a summary.	3.57
When I read, the punctuation helps me understand the text.	3.58
When I read, I observe punctuation pauses.	3.65
I understand single phrases at a time.	3.76

Table 3

I can skim and scan

Option to Answer	Frequency	Valid Percent
I can skim	17	34%
I can scan	14	28%
More or less	11	22%
I cannot	8	16%
Total	50	100%

Research question three was: *What are students’ perspectives toward vocabulary?*

Two items answered this question: (a) *I feel my knowledge of vocabulary in English is,* and (b) *I think learning vocabulary is complex due to.* To report this research question, Tables 4 and 5 shows the students’ opinions about their knowledge of vocabulary and why they think learning new vocabulary is complex. On one hand, a few of them considered they possessed a high knowledge of vocabulary, and they thought that learning new vocabulary was not complex at all. On the other hand, around half of the participants 44% stated they had an intermediate knowledge of vocabulary. One of the things they found most difficult was the way words are pronounced and spelled and how it varied from their mother tongue. However, they also recognized that having a wide range of vocabulary was a great resource to better comprehend and learn a passage. Finally, around 30% of the participants considered that learning new vocabulary was complex due to their own lack of interest and dedication. One student said: “It is not difficult. It is just a matter of studying and practicing the new vocabulary.” They also mentioned that they only practiced when they were in English classes and did not try to use the new vocabulary outside of the classroom.

Table 4

I feel my knowledge of vocabulary is

Option to Answer	Frequency	Valid Percent
High	7	14%
intermediate	22	44%
basic	21	42%
Total	50	100%

Table 5*I Think learning vocabulary is complex due to*

Option to Answer	Frequency	Valid Percent
Pronunciation	10	20%
Spelling	03	06%
Amount of vocabulary	12	24%
Lack of dedication	13	26%
Lack of interest	03	06%
Teacher's methodology	02	04%
Not complex	07	14%
Total	50	100%

Last research question inquired to know student's perspective toward reading in English. When they were asked how they felt when reading in English, almost half of them, 42%, confirmed to get anxious because passages sometimes get too difficult to understand. One student alleged to have anxiety depending on the topic he was reading. So, when he was reading about a topic that was very familiar to him, he felt curiosity about what he could learn from the text. Conversely, another student claimed that as soon as he found excerpt of a passage that was difficult to understand for him, he did not want to read anymore. Other students also held that the use of a dictionary or translator was a must for them when reading; For some of them, that was a tortuous task. Finally, 20% expressed that they did not feel anxious about reading. Instead, reading caused them a lot of interest. One participant even said that he liked to test his abilities in English and focus in trying to understand as much as he could. Table 6 presents the results for this question.

Table 6*I see an English passage and I feel*

Option to Answer	Frequency	Valid Percent
Anxious	21	42%
Bored	10	20%
I do not read	9	18%
I do not feel Anxious	10	20%
Total	50	100%

Discussion

This study sought to answer four research questions. The first question inquired whether students read in English. A great majority of students 70% said they read and one of the main reasons was that they can learn new things. This can be explained since the researcher, who was also the teacher, would often take some minutes during classes to read some passages from Readtheory.org. This is a free website that allows students to practice reading comprehension through a great variety of texts from different subjects, such as history, biology, and physics, among others. Finally, this is confirmed by Guthrie et al. (2004) who stated that reading “provides the basis for a significant amount of learning” (p. 403).

A total of 12% indicated they do not read because they could not understand the passages. Sultana (2016, as cited in Suchona & Urmey, 2019) reported that some students face difficulty in comprehending and figuring out the main points of a passage. Moreover, Jayanti exposed that students may face comprehension difficulties due to their lack of vocabulary (2016, p. 299). Some students’ answers corroborated this when they said that one of the reasons why they do not understand the passages is the little amount of vocabulary they know. However, this can be contrasted to what Stanovich

(1986, as cited in Malatesha, 2005) who declared that in order to expand their knowledge of vocabulary, students must read copiously. This way, learners can get a wide range of vocabulary and knowledge about the environment that surrounds them, in contrast to those who read just a few.

Research question two was about the use of strategies when reading. Results showed students possessed an average knowledge about organization and types of texts, classification of words, elements of a summary, and punctuation. Means of all the 14 items slightly varied between 2.86 = a little bit and 3.76 = some; there was around 1 mean point of difference between the item with the lowest score and the one with the highest score. The lowest mean was in the item that inquired if students could understand long texts with the first reading $M=2.86$. This contrasts with the results Kurnia (2011) obtained in his research to a group of students that had been using authentic reading materials in class for several years. Among the indicators, the highest achievement was on whole text comprehension. The same can be said about the study carried out by Ardi (2016) in which around 80% of the participants were labeled as good or very good readers.

Furthermore, around 30% of students said they knew skimming and scanning. However, the open question in the survey that inquired them to describe the process of skimming and scanning showed that very few students knew the strategies and consequently could not apply them when reading. Since strategies are useful to get engaged in the reading comprehension process, students fail at understanding long texts (Izquierdo & Jiménez, 2014).

Research question three sought to identify students' perspectives toward learning vocabulary. It was noticeable that opinions were divided about the knowledge of vocabulary they possessed. 42% said their knowledge was intermediate and 42% said it

was basic. No doubt that, for those students whose vocabulary knowledges is low, understanding a text is difficult since vocabulary plays an important role, firstly for phonological recoding, and secondly for reading comprehension (Suggate et al., 2018). This also explains the fact that one of the most critical reasons to think learning vocabulary is complex is the pronunciation of words, due to the different phonological system there is between their native language, which is Spanish, and English.

Lastly, the fourth research question examined students' perspective towards reading in English. Students demonstrated that they felt anxious when reading. Therefore, it seems to be that the sole knowledge of vocabulary does not lead to reading comprehension. Instead, there should be a combination of reading strategies and lexical knowledge. McNamara (2017), in his study, mentioned the importance of applying strategies to improve reading skills. Since most learners were not able to apply strategies while reading other than translating or trying to understand every single word, they did not acquire the skills to use context and spot the main idea of the texts (Samad et al., 2017). Finally, Paige et al. (2013) supported this in his study in which results showed a statistically significant relationship between vocabulary and comprehension.

Conclusion

Reading has proved to be of importance in people's professional and educational domains. Some people with good reading skills can easily comprehend passages and this allows them to learn new things by self-education. However, there are also people who lack these skills and, therefore, their communication both written and spoken do not develop. The objective of this research was to analyze the use of reading strategies in a group of college students in a private university in Ecuador.

It can be concluded that students do read in English. Although some of them only read because it is a requirement in their class, some others do it because they want to

learn new things. Teachers should seek to know students interests better and provide them with reading topics that are up to their appeals. Also, it can be said that those that see reading as an obligation do not possess a good level of vocabulary. As a result. They feel frustrated and anxious when passages are not comprehensible for them. Educators should develop strategies to little by little improve student's vocabulary in an engaging way, and find passages that are in accordance to their English level.

It was also concluded that there is little knowledge about reading strategies in participants. Even though answers in the Likert scale indicated that they possess an average knowledge of reading strategies, their explanation of the process of skimming and scanning in the open question provided hints to conclude that they do not have good reading strategies. This lack of strategies also has an impact on student's engagement when they read. Since these strategies are not difficult to learn or apply, teachers should take some minutes during classes or before doing a reading activity to help students learn these strategies. This way, they will be able to easily find the main points and specific details of long and complex passages. As a result, learner's invested time in any reading activity will be reduced and their engagement will increase.

Limitations

This section includes difficulties that can be taken into consideration for future research. First, this questionnaire was taken at the beginning of the pandemic. Students were not used to Google forms, so some of them experienced certain difficulties when doing it. This caused that some of them sent the questionnaire two or three times. While analyzing the data, it was noticeable that many answers were exactly the same, so deletion of those answers had to be done as well as the re-start of the data analysis.

Another limitation was that the survey was taken right before an exam. This might have influenced in the concentration they should have put on the survey. Many of the

answers in the open questions were short answers that did not provide enough feedback of student's perspective or point of view about the topic addressed. It was also noticeable in a few students that there were some contradictions between what they stated in one item and what they mentioned in another one.

Recommendations

Some recommendation that can be given for future research are: Divide participants in two groups. One group of students with a high English proficiency and another group of students with a low proficiency. That way the researcher can analyze and compare results from the different groups as for the use of strategies and reading habits. Additionally, all the participants in this research were majoring Dentistry. This research can also be replicated with a group of participants from other majors such as Law or Architecture.

Another recommendation is to conduct the survey in a moment in which students do not feel the pressure or anxiety of an exam or any other activity. Also, to be very explicit at indicating participants that they must read the questions carefully and give answers in accordance to what is asked. Results will be that student can fully concentrate on the answers and their comments in the survey will be more useful for the realization of it.

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Appendix A

Consent letter.

Available upon request.