



Improve Reading Comprehension Through Cooperative Learning

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English is currently the most important language in the world, not only because it is the language spoken by great nations such as the United States or England, but it is a language that is used for business and to communicate among everyone in the world (Nurhadi, 2017).

Students' ability to understand texts is affecting them at all levels. Nunan (2015) believed that reading is a process in which students can integrate information from a text and their previous knowledge (p. 46). AGRA (2019) stated that the most important and unique factor based on Ausubel's theory is previous knowledge (p. 248). Currently, educational contexts have been influenced by a constructivist approach, which has led to changes in the dynamics of instruction administration Wesselink (2017) and in the design of activities carried out in the classroom.

Pozo and Monereo (1999), stated that the current educational experience must adjust to the demands of the growing "cognitive civilization". This motivates an autonomous, responsible student profile, capable of learning to learn. Starting from the idea that human cognition is socially situated and owes its very origin to this process of social construction (Crook, 1998); (Karpov & Haywood, 1998). Then, it is possible to argue that the way people are capable of carrying out such transactions and social interactions is one of the most relevant factors when building learning. Hence the importance that has been given to the consideration of cooperative forms of learning.

There is a great difference between the forms of individual learning. Typical of previous conceptions of teaching and an approach to learning processes and human interaction that are promoted in the dynamics of any strategy learning program, which propose that the processes are centered on the student plus the environment (Cázares, 2007). By identifying the individual work

experience in the classroom, it is possible to identify certain notions that characterize this process: a) the student works in isolation, which, if it happens frequently, can cause a decrease in personal motivation, increase frustration feelings, anxiety feelings and the perception that learning is a totally impersonal experience; and b) limits the resources that the student can use to make good personal effort (Ferreiro, 2019). Therefore, alternative ways of developing the educational process must be thought, taking advantage of the potential knowledge that the cooperative environment can provide.

Cooperative learning can be defined as a "is a crucial method in the educational field not only in the elementary and secondary Schools but also in the universities" (Yassin & Razak, 2018). Within this scheme, it essentially identifies three elements: a) a task structure; b) a reward structure; and, c) an authority structure, referring to the relative control that the student can have over their own activities.

An intervention in reading skill must be carried out in a context in which the normal social interaction between the participants change from its traditional form to a new scheme that allows a different access to knowledge. Students need reading in order to comprehend complex materials in higher education. Besides, students need to master good cooperative learning techniques like jigsaw and numbered head together to acquire new information and understand extensive reading mostly at university.

Evidence in class shows that students cannot identify the main idea, important details and give a brief summary of texts. Several studies in the field of reading comprehension are about this international problem of developing the reading skill in EFL students (Boling & Robinson, 1999; Colbeck et al., 2000; Hmelo et al., 2000; Morgan et al., 2000; Russo & Warren, 1999). All these references emphasize the improvement of reading comprehension through cooperative

learning and about performance in tasks that involve planning, directing, monitoring skills, verification and possibility of evaluation in the course of the cooperative activity or task.

Similarly, previous research focuses on cooperative learning to improve the reading ability with skimming and scanning techniques, to improve the reading competence of high school students. These studies identify three important aspects of cooperative learning: a) the possibility of establishing adequate communication strategies between subjects; b) the feasibility of generating tolerance and fostering negotiation in the face of the demands of the tasks together with individual approaches to address them; c) the consolidation of the cognitive effort to give way to the final solution as cited in Leon (2020) and Yopez (2020). These three aspects, to which referred appropriately to the previous authors, highlighting the social interaction of the participating people in specific situations or tasks and generate the organization of a highly effective cooperative environment that contributes to increasing the degree of knowledge of the students.

In Latin American countries, specifically in Ecuador, there is a low level of reading comprehension in the different educational institutions of the country in L2, however, the Ministry of Education, through the area of English, seeks to implement better comprehension strategies to improve the reading comprehension (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador., 2016).

This same issue, which is investigated at the international level, has been detected at the local level in the city of Guayaquil. In a private institution in the 9th level of EGB where students' age ranges from 13 to 15 years old. These students do not understand the texts, do not identify main and secondary ideas and have not developed the necessary skills to write short summaries. So, improving the ability to read, using the strategy of jigsaw puzzle and numbered head together as parts of cooperative learning, is the goal of this proposal.

Literature Review

This section shows the literature review based on different authors and sources investigated, which offers an accurate description of the different topics studied. It is organized according to the following topic like reading, reading comprehension, cooperative learning, reading and strategies of reading.

Reading

According to Nurhadi (2017) reading is a complex competence that involves the use of various cognitive strategies in a conscious and unconscious way, such as reasoning that helps the construction of text meanings through self-control in the reading processes, detecting errors in understanding and working on them.

Depending on previous experience and knowledge the meaning that the reader finds in the text is born, in which she will encode the paragraphs, phrases, words and main ideas that the author transmits to him (Snow, 2002).

Nurhadi (2017) believed that reading is the construction of meaning from a printed or written message. Beginner's learners will have some difficulties specially whose native language is not English. Students at low level will likely to understand simple texts once they are familiar with the vocabulary, and topics.

The reader brings to the act of reading his or her cognitive capabilities (attention, memory, critical analytic ability, inferencing, visualization); motivation (a purpose of reading, interest in the content, self - efficacy as a reader); knowledge (vocabulary and topic knowledge, linguistic and discourse knowledge, knowledge of comprehension strategies); and experiences (Snow, 2002, p.14).

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension helps develop higher levels of education, necessary for students' academic progress, which demands a broad comprehension of texts, vocabulary, and concentration. According to Guevara cited in (Manzano, 2000) "it is perhaps the most superior and wonderful intellectual capacity of men, because it is to create, to rescue the depths of our thought and our sensitivity"(p.45).

Reading comprehension is the ability to understand what is read, both in reference to the meaning of the words that make up a text, and with respect to the overall understanding of the text. It is a process by which meanings are elaborated and concepts are related to the readers' previous knowledge, in this way the reader interacts with the text. Understanding is a complex process that involves capturing meanings and ideas immersed in a written text, which is why reading comprehension is a process where the reader must identify words and meanings like the main idea, important details, setting, and characters. According to Zanotto (2017), this identification will provide a frame of reference to understand how text interpretation processes are carried out. How they are learned. What difficulties may arise in this process, and what function it has or what the reader grants to the text within a given context.

Cooperative Learning

It refers to carrying out an activity in the classroom, developed in small groups. However, it is not about the students only forming teams, but that these teams, after receiving instructions from the teacher, exchange information and work on a task until all students understand and achieve learning through mutual help in collaboration. (Kagan, 2018) the term «cooperative learning» refers to a broad and diverse set of teaching methods in which students work together,

in groups or in teams, helping each other in generally academic tasks (Fernández & Melero, 1995). This process may promote learning, understanding, and encourage working hard.

Strategies of Reading

There are many strategies to engage students in reading activities. An effective strategy can improve interaction between reading efficiency. And text comprehension (Snow, 2002)

Al-Salkhi (2015) and (Azmin, 2016) confirmed the effectiveness of using the Jigsaw cooperative learning method on improving students' language learning. The results indicated that EFL learners can benefit from the Jigsaw technique. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Jigsaw technique in teaching and learning can produce positive results because these techniques immerse students in learning English.

According to Aronson and Patnoe, (1997) the Jigsaw cooperative learning method that helps to organize activities in the classroom, making students work together cooperating with each other to achieve objectives. The class is divided into mixed groups to work on small problems that the group tries to solve, for example, the task is divided into topics to which numbers are assigned, then the students are divided into groups and each group is assigned a number, corresponding to the numbers that each topic has assigned, then the students meet in groups divided by topic, each member of the group presents the topic group again.

They create a final report and then the original groups meet again and listen to the presentations of each member. The final presentations provide all group members with an understanding of their own material, as well as the findings that have emerged from the group's discussion of specific topics. Just like a puzzle, every piece - every student - is essential for coordination, development, and complete understanding of the final product.

According to Kagan (2009) the jigsaw puzzle technique is very simple to perform by following the steps:

1. Divide the students into groups with 5 or 6 people. The groups must be heterogeneous in terms of gender, ethnicity, race, and ability
2. Appoint a leader. At first this person should be the most responsible student in the group. Later in the development of this technique, it is important to rotate the leadership position
3. Divide the day's lesson into 5-6 segments. For example, the biography of a character in independent segments: (1) Childhood, (2) Family life, (3) First important events, (4) Achievements and (5) Death
4. Assign each student to learn a segment, making sure that students only have direct access to their own segment
5. Assign students a defined time to read about their segment and understand it properly
6. Students from each group assigned to the same segment get together and discuss the main points, then rehearse the presentations they will make to their puzzle group
7. Students go back to their puzzle group
8. Ask the student to present their segment to the group. Encourage others in the group to ask questions
9. The teacher observes the process in each group
10. Finally, a small evaluation of the material is carried out so that the students recognize that these sessions are not fun and games but really count in terms of evaluation and qualification

Similarly, the cooperative learning strategy called Numbered Head Together, invites students to learn cooperatively with each other while having fun. Students are placed in groups and each person is assigned a number (from one to the maximum number in each group), the teacher calls a specific number to respond as a spokesperson for the group. It is an innovative strategy, as the name of its creator Dr. Spencer Kagan:

Given that the teachers and students learned and remembered the strategies, and used them frequently with the academic content, I assigned them some unique and catchy names. "Numbered Heads" is much more descriptive and easier to remember than something similar to "teammates consult before presenting their individual contribution."(Kagan., 2003, p.7)

To apply this cooperative learning strategy, it must be taken into account that the whole group is preparing to respond. But only the student who has the number that the teacher chooses answers, for which the following order must be followed:

1. Team members are numbered.
2. The teacher raises questions to resolve to the group.
3. The groups work together to answer the question so that everyone can answer the question.
4. The teacher chooses a number and asks for an answer.

The students form teams, while the teacher, supported with a tool, such as a projector, teaches a lesson in their subject. The teacher projects a slide with a sentence, and asks a question related to that sentence. Afterwards the teacher gives a signal and a student from each team stands up. The teacher asks the student and if he answers correctly, his team wins a point, in this process the teacher can use various types of non-verbal signals, if one team makes a mistake,

another can challenge him. The class has a lot of fun, students jump out of their seats, answering questions, while learning and earning points.

Fun is important, students like game apps and teamwork, for this reason there are game program software through which students learn by playing. Numbered Heads Together Software, is a game implemented online to improve teamwork in a virtual way. Students simply write their questions or problems on any topic and can play. “The game leads teams through Numbered Heads Together, a longtime favorite cooperative learning review structure designed to promote teamwork and accountability for every student.” (Kagan Publishing & Professional Development, 2009). With this game all students actively participate while learning.

This game demonstrates the importance of virtual interaction since it stimulates interpersonal communication, access to information and learning content, monitoring the progress of the participant at an individual and group level, the management and administration of students, the creation of scenarios for co-evaluation and evaluation. According to Colvin & Mayer (2018) these virtual implementations or technological tools help synchronous communication, asynchronous communication, data transfer, shared applications, meeting call and shared navigation.

There are several additional ways that students can respond when they hear their number, including whiteboards, response cards, thumbs up / down. The structural approach becomes richer and more varied. Based on that the research considered that this specific strategy can be useful in narrative text and in online contexts.

According to (Fonseca et al., 2019) a reading strategy different from the one mentioned above and which is very interesting is the program called LEE comprehensively. This intervention program is based on the work carried out by Cain & Oakhill (2007), who identified

the causal relationships between various types of skills related to reading comprehension and suggested that these skills are capable of being trained. The three skills that they identified as the most relevant and that can be trained were: a) the construction of inferences, b) the monitoring or self-regulation of comprehension and c) the knowledge of the textual structure.

- 1) Construction of inferences. The texts present explicit information and other information that is not in the text and that the reader needs to build from their previous knowledge.
- 2) Self-regulation of understanding or monitoring is the ability to reflect on what is being read and the obstacles that are being encountered. This ability develops during the elementary school years and without it understanding itself will suffer. Monitoring allows the reader to detect when an inference is required, if the content of the text or idea is difficult to understand, if the information read is contradictory, if there are words whose meaning is unknown or an inappropriate meaning is being activated.
- 3) Knowledge of the structure of the text helps the reader to detect the ideas in a text and their internal organization, allowing building a coherent representation. Difficulty understanding the structure of the text is a source of failure in reading comprehension.
- 4) Vocabulary. Expert readers have a deep understanding of words and their meanings and can apply diverse meanings according to context and find synonyms. Knowledge of vocabulary is strongly related to reading comprehension, and it is important for both rapid recognition of individual words, and for text comprehension.

Pre, during and post reading.

Reading comprehension is a process, in which the reader establishes interactive relationships with the content of the reading, links ideas with previous ones, contrasts them, argues them and draws conclusions. These conclusions of significant information, when assimilated and stored, enrich the knowledge. If we understand reading as an active process by which the reader processes the text, based on the interactive relationship that is established between the reader's cognitive schemes and the information that the text provides, it is clear that the construction of meaning is only possible if the reader puts into play all his previous knowledge stored in memory. This means that the meaning to be built is not explicit in the text, it is built thanks to the activation of its appropriate knowledge schemes.

According to Condemarín & Medina (2018), students must:

Pre reading:

- 1) In this stage the students activate their previous knowledge in a reading, so that it is available in the form of diagrams or pictures before reading.
- 2) Activate their previous knowledge about discourse genres, so that they can anticipate the type of organization of information.

During reading:

- 1) in this phase students make predictions regarding the content of the text (not guessing) or regarding its organization. Reading need for the second time which predisposes them to carry out an active reading process of monitoring and confirming their predictions.

Post reading:

- 1) Identify a final idea of the reading after completing the last time of reading using the number head strategy.

Research Question:

- To what extent does cooperative learning help to improve reading comprehension?
- Which strategy is the most helpful cooperative learning for students' reading comprehension?

Innovation

This innovation included practice in jigsaw and numbered heads together. The main purpose of this research is to develop cooperative learning through those strategies to improve reading comprehension.

The innovation is made up as a part of a learning unit taken from the English book used in the institution. It will last 12 hours of teaching or periods divided in 12 classes during a month. The innovation plan proposes using an innovative unit of instruction (Appendix A) in which students will work with bibliographies of important people. The participants will receive regular vocabulary and language as well as tips with reading techniques.

At the beginning, students will take a pre-test on their own based on a provided bibliography by the teacher and at the end of the innovation, and once the students have been trained in reading strategies, jigsaw puzzle and number heads together, they will take a posttest to measure the changes or improvement obtained. It fits with the principal objectives which are to improve students reading comprehension and participation in class.

In the innovation, some ICT tools will be used in class which will facilitate the objective and they will be used only as a resource. Examples of these tools to work with are: Canva, Class tool-Roulette, Kahoot, Word-cloud and Power point slides. Students will be trained for three days in this online apps and at the beginning at the proposal. The teacher should present the

activity as many times as possible to train students. The teacher should include examples and models of good ways to make sure that students will be trained at writing summaries and also motivate students at reading texts using the rubric (Appendix B) as many times as possible during the class. On stage number two, where the students at the end are the ones during the activities, this is key.

Throughout this innovation, two kind of groups will be used: the expert groups, where all the participants have the same information of the text, and the home groups, where all the participants share a part of the big text; there will be some specific readings to work on the strategies mentioned above. The readings will be taken from the English textbooks. Students will have to work in a collaborative way, and master their topic using jigsaw and numbered heads together.

Jigsaw activities will be used in the class as an important cooperative learning task that makes students to communicate with each other. Students need to understand their ideas to get the others' big picture, and they should know all the text for the practice not just their part. This strategy will enable each student to master a specific topic and then they will be able to talk about it and answer some questions from the topic. Every student in their home group has a piece of information that all students need to learn and be responsible to explain.

Numbered heads together is another strategy that each student needs to understand the material. Students are place in expert groups and each student is given a number (from one to the maximum number of the class). The teacher has a question and students have to put their heads together to figure out the answer. The teacher calls a specific student to respond to that question in the group and the other groups write comments on their presenter peers in a template.

This innovation is divided into two scenarios: In the first one, the students will attend a 5-hour workshop before starting the experiment. In this workshop they will learn reading strategies and master the techniques of jigsaw puzzle and number head together. They will learn to differentiate the quality of making a good, medium or low summary level of the material provided.

Additionally, they will be writing in a paperwork sheet the main topic, the most important details, the scenario, and the characters of the texts given through examples modeled by the teacher, until students master these techniques with the help of the teacher who should also include clear examples as many times as necessary during this first part of the workshop.

In the second scenario the teacher explains the content of the unit, monitors students and makes sure that the jigsaw puzzle and number heads together strategies are performed correctly. Taking into account that the students know how to distinguish the main theme, the important details, the characters, and the setting of the different texts.

Methodology

This study is an action research because the author is involved in it. The design will be mixed since it will use qualitative and quantitative instruments in the processes. According Saltos-Rodríguez (2018) the action research helps teachers improve their strategies in class based on their experience. This section will introduce the participants and the instruments that will be used in the innovation. In the paperwork sheet see (Appendix B) that was adapted from (Leon, 2020) to fit with this proposal and it considers descriptors of the main idea, important details, characters and scenarios students can write a small summary of the text given. In the one wish-two star template (see Appendix C) that was adapted from (Leon, 2020) students will write comments on their peer's presentations. A personal innovate rubric only for this proposal will be

used by the teacher as the quantitative instrument (Appendix D). Finally, in the Appendix E there is a students' perspective questionnaire that will be used as a qualitative instrument. After the experiment is conducted all the quantitative data is going to be analyzed and the SPSS statistics program.

Description of Participants

Students are in the 9th level of basic education from a private institution in the city of Guayaquil - Ecuador. The participants study English as a complementary subject in their actual curriculum. They have an A1 level according to the last placement test taken by the English coordination department of the institution. There are 20 students who were taken out from two classes "B" and "C" for the purpose of this study. The aged ranged between 13 and 15 years old. Their economic level is low, most of the students live in the south part of Guayaquil. In this course, there are 70% women while 30% men. Most of the participants have access to internet through their cellphones, because many of them have a smart phone. This experience will help students in their future English courses, they will improve reading skills during this time. The experiment will have a duration of 4 weeks. The class is online, and students have to attend classes from 8am to 11am.

Evidence in class shows that their A1 English level makes them able to understand and identify specific information dealing with people in the community, search for details in text and communicate ideas and information on familiar topics. Sometimes students might need some repetition and help from the teacher to understand the material.

They are going to work on real life activities from the textbook that can be applied in real life. They are very good at listening and speaking. They are also good at collaborative work and they very committed to their studies, but they are low in the reading and writing skills. Most of

them do not understand texts, do not identify main ideas, cannot identify important details in short texts and have not developed the necessary skills to highlight short summaries. This is why the use of the jigsaw puzzle and number heads together strategies are key details on this proposal.

Instruments and Data Collection

In this study, the independent variable is jigsaw puzzle and number heads together strategies, and the dependent variable is reading comprehension, specifically to identify the main idea, important details, characters and scenarios. The tools were developed to collect data and to find the answers to the research questions as follows:

- To what extent does cooperative learning help to improve reading comprehension?

For the first question a reading analysis rubric for the teacher (see Appendix D) will be used to grade the pre- and posttest and this rubric considers descriptors of four components like the main idea, important details, scenario, and characters. This section of the research will be graded by another teacher to reduce bias in the information.

Pre and Posttest

The first and the last summaries in the paperwork sheets will be taken as the pre and posttest. The first summary will take place on week number one. The lesson will be “People I love”. After the reading activity, students will write a summary about an important person in their life. The final summary will take place on week four. The lesson will be “Presidents of the United States”. After the reading, students will summarize the biography of a president of the United States paying special attention to the descriptors like the main idea, important details, scenario, and characters. These two activities will be graded with a reading comprehension analysis rubric only by teacher (see Appendix D).

Rubrics

There is a personal innovative rubric for the teacher to grade the main idea, important details, scenario, and characters called “Reading comprehension analysis” (see Appendix D). This instrument will be used to grade the first and last activities. This rubric ranges from: “Need improvement”, “Good” until “Excellent” and it scores 1 to 3 points respectively. They will provide the highest scores for best performance in each component regarding the main idea, important details, scenario, and characters, and the lowest score to the ones that did not comprehend any of the text at all.

To answer the second research question. 2) Which strategy is the most helpful for cooperative learning with students’ reading comprehension? A questionnaire will be performed in order to know the student's perspectives regarding the relevance of this innovation in class. This question is connected to the point of view of the students using the proposed strategies and its reading comprehension.

Questionnaire

Aligned to the second question the researcher will conduct a questionnaire (see Appendix E) to all the 20 students of the project to know which strategy was the most efficient according to their perspective. This questionnaire will be applied in the week number four with seven open questions. It will be anonymous. It will allow the researcher to discover the relevance of the strategies to improve reading comprehension

The questionnaire is written in Spanish because of student’s English level.

Reliability and Data Analysis

The results of the instruments will be reported and listed in graphs that will make the research questions easy to understand. Participants' general viewpoints against the variables of this initiative will be grouped by variables then the frequencies will be calculated. The questionnaires.

Ethical Considerations

Personal data of the participants will be confidential. The data will be only available for the researcher. In this study, the participants will use pseudonyms. Once implemented, the institution and participants will be notified with the findings of this analysis. Summaries will be used only for research purposes, and after the research is complete, related and personal details will be eliminated.

The institution must provide the consent to implement this future research. All the data and results produced by this proposal will be handled with the confidentiality of the information provided and obtained. Finally, since students are minors, the authorization of their parents will be asked through a sign letter so students can be part of this research.

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Appendix A

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix B

Paperwork sheet

Available upon request.

Appendix C

Template to write comments on their peers' presentations

Available upon request.

Appendix D

Rubric: Reading comprehension analysis.

Available upon request.

Appendix E

Instrument: Questionnaire for students' perspectives.

Available upon request.