



**Perspectives of EFL Students about Reading**

Cristian Bolivar Paredes Pico

Guide: Rossana Ramirez

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### **Proyectos de Investigación**

Certifico que Cristian Bolívar Paredes Pico ha 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 COMPREHENSION 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**

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### Abstract

This descriptive study was carried out to obtain information on the reading level, the use of reading strategies and the vocabulary level of students from a public school in the city of Guayaquil. 66 students, 35 men and 31 women, participated in the study. A virtual survey was carried out in which quantitative and qualitative information was collected on the reading level, vocabulary and reading strategies, the main difficulties and problems they had when reading in English. The results showed the low level of reading, vocabulary and use of reading strategies. In addition, it identifies the strategies that are more or less used, the main causes of low vocabulary level and the main problems when reading. It is concluded that the implementation of reading strategies will help to increase the students' reading level and the learning of the language. It is recommended to inquire in future studies on students' preferences in reading, their likes and dislikes to suggest texts they feel comfortable with to increase interest in this skill.

*Keywords:* reading, reading strategies, vocabulary, EFL

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### Resumen

Este estudio descriptivo se realizó para obtener información sobre el nivel de lectura, el uso de estrategias de lectura y el nivel del vocabulario de estudiantes de un colegio público de la ciudad de Guayaquil. En el estudio participaron 66 estudiantes, 35 hombres y 31 mujeres. Se realizó una encuesta virtual en la que se recolectó información cuantitativa y cualitativa sobre el nivel de lectura, vocabulario y estrategias de lectura, las principales dificultades y problemas que tenían al realizar una lectura en inglés. Los resultados mostraron el bajo nivel de lectura, de vocabulario y de uso de estrategias de lectura. Además, permitieron identificar las estrategias más y menos usadas, las principales causas del bajo nivel de vocabulario y los principales problemas al momento de leer. Se concluye que la implementación de estrategias de lectura ayudará a incrementar el nivel de lectura de los estudiantes y el aprendizaje del idioma. Se recomienda indagar en futuros estudios sobre las preferencias de lectura de los estudiantes, sus gustos y disgustos para sugerir textos con los que se sientan cómodos para aumentar el interés en esta habilidad.

*Palabras clave:* lectura, estrategias lectoras, vocabulario, EFL.

### **Perspectives of EFL Students about Reading**

The English language is widely identified as one of the most important in the world (Nunan, 2003). Its use as the primary language in tourist, academic, and business contexts, among others, has positioned it as one of the most used worldwide (Smith, 2015). Learning the English language requires mastering four main skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Reading is considered the most important for mastering the language (Chandran & Shah, 2019).

There are two main ways to learn a second language: consciously learning a language and unconsciously acquiring it (Krashen, 2013). To master English, you need to develop four basic skills: reading, speaking, listening, and writing. Nuttal (1996) mentions that reading is one of the best ways to learn a second language.

Being a good reader is one of the foundations of success in life (Inderjit, 2014). Bojovic (2014) mentioned that having a good reading level is important for language learning and development. Similarly, developing good literary skills is necessary to develop good reading skills (Krashen, 2013). Reading is essential for acquiring new vocabulary and improving understanding of information (Sullivan, 2014).

Previous research shows that good readers in their native language can better achieve a good reading level when learning a second language (Tomlinson, 2013). Geva (2006) mentioned that reading in the native language will define the level of skills at a cognitive and linguistic level when learning another language.

Ecuadorian students have difficulties learning English (Obiajulu, 2018), and the main difficulty a student has when learning a new language is reading (Fuchs et al., 2019). The lack of vocabulary is one of the main problems when reading (Ford, 2012). Huges (2013) stated that One of main reasons is that at home, reading is not given importance and that some teachers are not trained to teach reading in a foreign

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language. Krashen (2013) said that one factor for young people to read less is the lack of access to books.

Cabrera et al. (2019) mentioned in their study that students at an early age have a predisposition and interest in reading. The students' reading interest decreases with age over time by seeing difficult tasks and having tough time processing. Ochoa (2021) concluded that reading in English is a difficult task for Ecuadorian students due to their lack of vocabulary and difficulties when pronouncing.

Huisha (2021) realized a descriptive study on reading perspective among 68 students in a higher technological institute in Santo Domingo de los Tsachilas, the study showed that students felt anxious when they could not recognize vocabulary words within the text, therefore the students tried to translate the text as a strategy for reading comprehension.

Calle (2021) did a descriptive study in a private university located in the coast region from Ecuador, there were 54 participants. The study concluded that 50% of the students read in English. These students considered reading as an important and complex skill. The more interesting the text were, the more interesting students were.

This descriptive study seeks to explore and describe the ability of the participants to read in English, their reading strategies, their level of vocabulary, and their opinions regarding reading in English.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review provides prior knowledge about the components of reading and the use of reading strategies.

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### **Reading**

Falk-Ross (2014) stated that reading is the interaction between a text and the reader; in this process, the reader uses her previous vocabulary to interpret the meaning of the text. Reading helps students improve their academic performance and acquire new knowledge (Bano, Jabeen, & Quitoshi, 2018),

Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) mentioned that reading is a complex skill for some students and that with practice, they learn to analyze and express their ideas. Motivation and having a good attitude are important for reading; an unmotivated reader may not be a good reader (Gunobgunob-Mirasol, 2019).

### **Reading Components**

#### **Vocabulary.**

It is the set of words that a student can understand and use to communicate. Alqahtani (2015) stated that it is a metric of the abilities one has to transmit a message and that acquiring a good vocabulary is very important to learn a language. It is a fundamental component of reading comprehension (Suggate et al., 2018).

Vocabulary provides students with the words they need to communicate, and reading helps to incorporate new words and expressions into the vocabulary (Al-Damiree et al., 2016). Zhang and Zhang (2020) pointed out that vocabulary is fundamental for comprehending reading in a second language. Also, it improves the ability to communicate, and the absence of it is a significant obstacle in learning a foreign language (Alqahtani, 2015). Moeller, Ketsman and Masmaliyeva (2009) established the differences in how students learn vocabulary in their mother tongue, interacting with the environment; and in a second language, understanding each word according to the context in which it is used.

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### **Grammar.**

It studies the joint functioning of words. Grammar's mastery is essential when learning a foreign language and helps students improve their written production (Debata, 2013). Grammar helps to understand a language better (Rahuma, 2016), and its use in reading plays a fundamental role when learning a new language (Al-Damiree & Bataineh, 2016).

Zhang (2012) related the knowledge of grammar with the level of reading comprehension and establishes the low grammatical level as one of the causes of failure in reading. He also mentioned two types of grammatical structures, those similar to the rules of his native language (implicit) and the linguistic rules (explicit).

Grammar can help a student interpret the meaning of an unknown word by analyzing the grammatical structure of the context in which it is used. Studies show the correlation between grammatical knowledge and the level of reading comprehension (Akbari, 2014).

### **Reading Skills**

They are the set needed to perform a reading and help students reinforce their level of comprehension (Cartwright, 2002). Sesma et al. (2009) stated that reading skills improve the reading comprehension process.

### **Skimming.**

It is one of the skills most used by the reader, quickly going through the text to develop a general understanding of it. Ngoc (2015) mentioned that the reader does not need to know the meaning of all the words when skimming. It is a recommended technique when the reader wants to understand the text's central idea, regardless of the details (Marliasari, 2017). According to Izquierdo and Jiménez (2014), skimming focuses on the main lines of the text and its headings.



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It is recommended that the reader use this technique when it is necessary to read long texts in a short time (Mambua, 2020). Yusuf et al. (2017) said that skimming is related to speed and recommended reading each paragraph's beginning and end. Blitry (2016) mentioned three types of skimming: previous reading, reading to interpret and, review reading.

### **Scanning.**

It is a speed reading technique (Mambua, 2020), in which the reader focuses on searching for keywords within a text (Lucantoni, 2017) and allows finding specific information in a short period (Berregui & Boulaachab, 2017). Alderson et al. (2016) mentioned that it is a strategy that facilitates efficient and fast reading. It helps increase students' speed in reading and comprehension (Touriz, 2020).

Scanning is used to perform a quick reading looking for specific objectives (Marliasari, 2017), and it is very effective without reading the full text (Brown, 2001). Deveci (2018) pointed out the advantage that the reader does not need to master all the text's vocabulary. Yusuf et. al (2017) indicated the three steps to perform scanning: identify keywords, quickly search for those words and read around the words.

### **Summarizing.**

It is a reading strategy in which the main ideas of a text are identified (Ness, 2016). It allows students to understand the text profoundly and indicates the level of comprehension of a text (Pečjak & Pirc, 2018). It provides greater retention and understanding because readers use their own vocabulary (Pourhosein & Sabouri, 2016).

Summarizing emphasizes main ideas and discards irrelevant information (Ozdemir, 2018). Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) recommend the use of synonyms and the use of topic sentences. There are three stages of summarizing: selection, note-taking, and miniaturization (Bazerman, 2010).

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### **Decoding and Encoding.**

It is a process of analyzing the phonemes and graphemes of each word (Pourhosein & Sabouri, 2016). With this recognition of spelling information, students make sense of the analyzed text (Johns et al., 2018) and increase reading and spelling skills (Tauber, 1993). It allows students to identify new words from previous analyses of similar words (Linde & Clayton 2016).

Coding is a strategy that focuses on sounds to build words. According to Russell and Shiffler (2019), it avoids problems at reading because it increases the reader's phonological awareness. Mastering encoding allows you to form new words using your phonemes (Weiser & Mathes, 2019). Oakhill et al. (2015) pointed out that many students who do not master encoding and decoding cannot understand words they do not know, and this causes problems when reading.

### **Reading out loud.**

It is a reading strategy that consists of reading a text so that others can listen to it; it allows to develop reading comprehension (Djiwandono, 2018). It helps fluency, and improves the reader's interpretation (Hasler-Brooks, 2016).

Reading aloud improves the interpretation of words and scenarios and helps students to relate written words with pronunciation (Kieras & Just, 1984). Ledger and Merga (2018) pointed out that reading aloud positively affects performance and increases student motivation. Implementing it in classes can generate positive dynamics allowing questions and answers that verify the students' level of understanding (Topping, 2014).

### **Prior Knowledge**

It is everything a reader knows about the subject of reading. It helps to develop reading comprehension, using previous information to acquire new data from a text

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(Cervetti & Hiebert, 2015). According to Sanacore (1983), the teacher can help students to compare their previous knowledge with the new information from reading.

The more prior knowledge the reader has, the easier it is to acquire new information from a text (Almutairi, 2018). According to Lipson (1982), there are three conditions of prior knowledge: correct, incorrect, or unknown. Brantmeier (2006) indicated it helps with the degree of familiarity of the reader with a text. Tools such as brainstorming that activate knowledge before a reading can help develop the ability to infer.

### **Organization of Texts**

Teachers must adequately choose the texts to work in the classroom according to the different levels and student needs (Fisher & Frey, 2015). It allows the student to learn from texts that they find interesting, connecting with their cultural environment. Kganetso (2017) mentioned that the use of colloquial words, contractions, and other informal texts increases students' interest in reading.

It is essential to ensure that the texts are correctly organized. The order helps the reader to understand the ideas and the main objective, which will improve understanding (Dickson, 1995). In addition, he mentioned the importance of the physical and visual presentation of the text.

The reviewed literature helped to know the relationship between reading strategies and reading level and the main problems when learning English, and the importance, use, and difficulties of each strategy.

### **Methodology**

According to Nassaji (2015) a descriptive study is used to study the different characteristics of a problem and is known for describing the variables that describe a problem, without any input or what may cause the problem. The different descriptive

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research tools that can be used, variate from surveys to observations and case studies (McCombes, 2020).

Descriptive research can be quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research focuses on data that can be represented as a number, such as quantity, frequency, size, among others (Davidson, 2019)). A qualitative research studies the quality of variables that proportionate clear information in a micro level of the research (Lahore University of Management Sciences, 2016).

This is a descriptive study with analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The goal is to share information of the participants about his reading strategies.

### **Research questions:**

Do participants read in English?

Do they use reading strategies?

What are their perspectives towards vocabulary?

What are their perspectives towards reading in English?

### **Participants**

This study was conducted in a public high school in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The participants were 66 students, 35 males and 31 females, whose ages ranged between 16 to 18 years old. Their ethnic group was mestizo, and their social-economic class was low and middle class. They have 4 hours of English classes a week.

### **Instruments**

To answer the research questions, the following instruments were applied:

**Reading survey.**

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The participants were asked to answer a reading survey in Google Forms. The survey was translated to Spanish. The survey had 29 questions divided into two parts. The first part of 15 questions was a demographic survey (Appendix A) with open questions to describe the participants' general situation, age, gender, grade, language, and ethnic group. It also contains closed questions about the level of English, access to technology, and technological knowledge.

The second part of the survey (Appendix B) contains questions about the student's reading level and their use of reading strategies. It includes 14 questions that use the Likert scale to know the level of the students in reading level, use of reading strategy, vocabulary, and grammar.

### **Data Analysis**

The given data in the survey was organized and processed, assigning numerical value to the options shown in the likert scale, being number one the lowest and number five the highest. Descriptive statistics was used and as a statistical indicator the mean.

To process the qualitative data, general and common criteria were used to group the students' open responses. The results allow identifying the most common student's answers.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Before the implementation of the research, the Principal signed a consent letter to carry out the investigation. Students were also informed that their answers and names would be confidential within their study. Finally, the students were reminded that this was purely voluntary, and the survey's participation did not affect their grades.

### **Results**

To answer the first question: do participants read in english? The mean was used in the six questions from the survey (valued from 1 to 5). The highest result was in the

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comprehension of a simple phrase with a mean of 3.36, which means that the majority of students can understand simple sentences. Another high result is the comprehension of long texts when rereading, with a mean of 3.16 and the lowest result is the understanding of long texts at a first time reading with a mean of 2.41.

Table 1.

*Survey results about reading level.*

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS	
Questions	Mean
I can understand a long, complex text	2.61
I understand single phrases at a time	3.36
I understand a long text with the first reading	2.41
I understand a long text by rereading it	3.16
When I read I translate all the words	2.84
I identify the type of texts I read	2.87
<b>MEAN</b>	<b>2.87</b>

To answer the second question: do they use reading strategies? The arithmetical mean was used on the five questions from the survey. The highest result was on the summarizing skill with a 2.99, which means that the majority of students can summarize a text. The strategies with the lowest result were skimming and scanning with a median of 2.68 and 2.61, each one respectively.

Table 2.

*Survey results about reading strategies.*

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DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS	
Questions	Mean
I can skim	2.68
I can scan	2.61
I know the elements of a summary	2.99
I know the organization of the text	2.83
I use my prior knowledge when I read	2.96
<b>MEAN</b>	<b>2.81</b>

In order to answer the third question: what are their perspectives towards vocabulary? 67% of students mentioned that they had a basic level of vocabulary and 29% had an intermediate level, being the two highest responses. Just 5% answered that they had a good or excellent level in their vocabulary.

Table 3.

*Survey results about vocabulary level.*

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS		
Questions	N	%
Basic	44	67%
Intermediate	19	29%
Good	2	3%
Excellent	1	2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100%</b>

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The answers were grouped into general answers, five different answers were identified. Regarding to the reasons for low vocabulary, the answers obtained vary from: "lack of attention", "the lack of implements and explanation", "the multiple meaning of the words" or "the pronunciation is complicated".

On the analysis, the data obtained that 36% of the students mentioned having great difficulty learning vocabulary, 13% cited the lack of motivation learning the vocabulary, and 14% had problems with the spelling of the words and pronunciation. 15% of the students said, not having the essential resources to learn, and 8% considered that vocabulary was not as hard to understand.

Table 4.

*Survey results about perspectives towards vocabulary.*

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS		
Questions	N	Mean
Difficult at the moment of learning	24	36%
Lack of personal motivation	13	20%
Lack of resources or learning skills	10	15%
Problems with the writing of the words	14	21%
Does not believe vocabulary is hard	5	8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100%</b>

To answer the fourth question: What are their perspectives towards reading in English? 65% of students were aware to have a basic level towards reading and 29%



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said to have an intermediate level. Just 7% answered to have a good or excellent level in their English reading overall.

Table 5.

*Survey results about perspectives reading level.*

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS		
Questions	N	%
Basico	43	65%
Intermedio	19	29%
Bueno	3	5%
Muy bueno	1	2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100%</b>

A group of answers were tabulated into general answers, six different most frequent answers were identified. Analyzing the reasons for the low reading level, the answers differ from: "la verdad se hace difícil por la falta de práctica", "a que no tengo concentración", "su pronunciación y escritura", "no he tomado un curso para aprenderlo bien".

Analyzing the data, the following results showed that 35% of students mentioned having great difficulty at reading, 12% mentioned that they could not read because of lack of formation, and 11% had pronunciation problems. 24% of students stated having interest in reading and 14% said to have a good level of reading.

Table 4.

*Survey results about perspectives about reading in English.*

## DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

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Questions	N	Mean
Lack of information	8	12%
Interested on reading	16	24%
Difficult at reading	23	35%
By the academic curriculum	3	5%
Pronunciation problems	7	11%
Have a high level in reading	9	14%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Discussion

The results of this descriptive study revealed student's perspectives towards reading in English.

The first question: do participants read in English? The students mentioned that it is difficult to understand long and complete texts on a first read. The majority said they need to read a second time to understand long and complex texts fully. However, a significant percentage said that they could understand the simple text on a first read.

The average data shows that students do not have a good level in reading. This first diagnosis can limit the learning of the language, considering that reading is one of the most important skills to learn a second language (Chandran & Shah, 2019).

The second question: do they use reading strategies? The results showed that the majority of the students do not use strategies in reading. On average, the results show a level below intermediate on all strategies covered in the survey.

The low results obtained on the levels of knowing the reading strategies on texts affects directly the level of reading comprehensively on the students (Cartwright, 2002)

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and do not show improvement (Sesma et al., 2009). According to Mambua (2020), the low results obtained from the skimming and scanning strategies are related to reading comprehensively long texts.

The third question: what is their perspective towards vocabulary? The results demonstrate the reasons why there is such a low level of the students' vocabulary. The main reason why students can not improve their vocabulary is the difficulty of the experience. While complex words are used, the students struggle to recognize the spelling of the words.

It also points out the lack of student's motivation at the moment of learning new words; this statement reinforces the presented ideas by Cabrera et al. (2019) and by Ochoa (2021), the students have difficulty going through long, complex texts which the students don't find interesting. Finally, it is worth mentioning that 15% of the students said not to have the essential resources (materials, teachers, time, house environment, etc.) to learn the vocabulary they need.

The fourth question: what are their perspectives towards reading in english? The results indicate a negative perspective towards reading, 93% mentioned to have a low reading level. The main reason is the difficulty identifying words in complex texts, the decreased interest for reading and the lack of access to information that the student needs to learn.

These results align with the descriptive study made by Calle (2021); students do believe that reading is a critical skill, a skill which people lose interest in when growing up by facing complicated text to understand. A consideration is that the more the student is related to the topic, the better it is to improve their performance towards the reading skill.

## **Conclusions**

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The descriptive study takes place in a high school from Guayaquil, Ecuador. It was established, in the literature review, the importance of reading skill in order to learn a foreign language. The survey presented to the students served to help obtain the reading level of the participants. Unfortunately, the average reading level is less than the intermediate, highlighting the difficulty of reading complex texts.

The results showed similar results in using reading strategies, a level below the intermediate on the previously mentioned strategies. In addition, it identified the most frequent strategy used by the students. The data compared to other previous studies showed the relation between reading strategies and the level of reading reach by the students. The high school teachers that participate in this study should utilize these results to strengthen the learning of reading strategies in their students to improve their reading skills.

The research takes the students' perspectives towards vocabulary, indicating that most of the students mentioned having a low level of vocabulary. Furthermore, the data reveals the main motives of insufficient knowledge in vocabulary: how hard it is to learn new words, the lack of personal motivation, and the lack of access to primary resources, indicating the reasons obtained in previous studies.

Finally, in this descriptive study, the results indicated a low level of reading skills and identified the reasons for these results. The main reasons pointed by participants were the difficulty of the language, the low motivation towards reading texts that there is no interest from the students, and the lack of access to resources to learn a language. These results concur with the previous statements mentioned in the literature review section.

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### **Recommendations**

The study was performed during the pandemic, and there was no face-to-face class. The survey used was made through a virtual link. The recommendation is to do the survey when the students start going to class to get better results.

For further studies, it is recommendable to include questions about the students' interests and consider what types of reading they like. This information is vital so the professors can include lectures with students' interests in their respective subjects.

Finally, it is also recommended to include questions regarding information about academic resources that students have access to, the number of classes the students have and the teachers they had in the years of studying.

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PERSPECTIVE OF READING IN EFL

**Appendix A**

**Demographics Survey**

Available upon request.

**Appendix B**

**Survey about Reading strategies.**

Available upon request.

**Appendix C**

**Consent Letter Institution.**

Available upon request.

**Appendix D**

**Consent Letter from parents.**

Available upon request.