Perspectives of EFL Teachers towards Reading Strategies: A Descriptive Study

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Proyectos de Investigación

Certifico que Carla Isabel Lozano Alvarado, Oswaldo Jonathan Sánchez Macías y Tito Yovanny

Indacochea Rodríguez han cumplido satisfactoriamente su investigación descriptiva como pre-

requisito de graduación de Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con

Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés. Su investigación es parte del proyecto PERSPECTIVES OF

EFL STUDENTS TOWARDS READING STRATEGIES cuyo objetivo general es determinar

las dificultades que tienen los estudiantes al leer en inglés como lengua extranjera.

En este proyecto, cada participante reporta los resultados de una encuesta tomada en un contexto

educativo diferente. Las secciones de introducción, literatura y metodología (instrumentos y

análisis de datos) son las mismas.

Particular que comunico para los fines consiguientes.

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Abstract

This study describes perceptions of fifty teachers of different subjects from a private and public school in Guayas province - Ecuador. The purpose of this study was to analyze participants' perspectives towards vocabulary and reading in English. This descriptive study includes the collection of quantitative data obtained from questionnaires applied through google forms to measure the participant' responses. The results showed that half of the participants read in English. Additionally, it proved that the strategies were not applied while reading. Also, the participants indicated that the understanding of vocabulary from the text is complex because of the absence of practice, including similar spelling, intonation, and pronunciation of some words among the new vocabulary presented in the text. Finally, the participants explained that they feel confused when reading in English since they do not understand the context. Thus, they reread it several times to understand the text. Consequently, this study will be helpful for EFL teachers. The acquisition and the enhancement of reading skills must be considered by the teachers to assist their students.

Keywords: reading strategies, vocabulary, EFL, perspectives.

Resumen

Este estudio describe las percepciones de cincuenta profesores de diferentes materias de una escuela pública y privada en la provincia de Guayas - Ecuador. El propósito de este estudio fue analizar las perspectivas de los participantes hacia el vocabulario y la lectura en inglés. Este estudio descriptivo incluye la recopilación de datos cuantitativos obtenidos de cuestionarios aplicados a través de formularios de Google para medir las respuestas de los participantes. Los resultados mostraron que la mitad de los participantes leían en inglés. Además, demostró que las estrategias no se aplicaron durante la lectura. Además, los participantes indicaron que la comprensión del vocabulario del texto es compleja debido a la ausencia de práctica que incluya ortografía, entonación y pronunciación similares de algunas palabras entre el nuevo vocabulario presentado en el texto. Finalmente, los participantes explicaron que se sienten confusos al leer en inglés ya que no entienden el contexto. Así, lo releyeron varias veces para entender el texto. En consecuencia, este estudio será útil para los profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera. Los maestros deben considerar la adquisición y mejora de las habilidades de lectura para ayudar a sus estudiantes.

Palabras clave: estrategias de lectura, vocabulario, inglés como lengua extranjera, perspectivas

Perspectives of Reading Strategies in EFL: A Descriptive Study

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Literature Review

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

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

Vocabulary and Grammar in Reading Comprehension

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

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

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

Reading Skills

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

Skimming.

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

Scanning.

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

Decoding and encoding.

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

Reading out loud.

One of the advantages of reading aloud is improving the interpretation of words and scenarios, especially to children since they associate words with situations and context with meaning (Kieras & Just, 1984). Reading aloud only enhances reading comprehension but also listening skills in large or small classes (Djiwandono, 2018). Through reading aloud students build connections between spoken and written words.

Prior Knowledge when Reading

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

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

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

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

Organization of Texts

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

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

Methodology

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

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

Research questions

1.   Do participants read in English?

2.   Do they use reading strategies?

3.   What are their perspectives towards vocabulary?

4.   What are their perspectives toward reading in English?

Participants Description

Fifty teachers from a private and a public school which are situated in Guayas province in Ecuador were the participants for this study. There were 6 males and 44 females whose ages range between 24 to 50 years old. The participants were not just English teachers but also teachers from other subjects. Their English proficiency level varied from A1 to B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

All the participants were Ecuadorian so that, their mother tongue was Spanish. Everyone chose mestizo as their ethnicity. Just one participant mentioned being Afro. Additionally, 64 percent of the participants were Catholic, 26 percent were evangelic, and 10 percent atheist. Regarding participant's socio-economic class the 38 percent belonged to the middle class. Most of them had access to laptops, smartphones as well as internet at home. Also, they commented that they had from basic to intermediate knowledge in technology. Finally, the teachers' participation in this study was voluntary. They were informed that their answers would remain confidential.

Instruments

The survey was applied through google forms which was a questionnaire of twenty-two multiple choice and open questions. The first part consisted of the participants' demographic information such as type of institutions, age, gender, nationality, English level, ethnicity, socio-economic class, and religion. The second part was addressed to participants' background knowledge about English, technology, and the perspective towards reading according to the research questions of this study. Moreover, the survey was written in English and Spanish to facilitate participants' comprehension in each question.

Data Analysis

The data of this study was collected on a google spreadsheet survey from google forms which was computed the percentages of the demographic information and analyzed on a Microsoft Excel document where the right formula was applied to get the means. To obtain the results for open questions, the most relevant comments were selected since some of them were not responded by the participants. Finally, there were 50 teachers who participated in this descriptive study.

Ethical Considerations

Teachers were informed about the research study and the importance of their participation in this process through WhatsApp as the first step. The research instrument from Google Forms was sent as a link to each contact number. Teachers' participation was voluntary.

Results

Descriptive statistics for answering the first question of this research, RQ: *Do you read in English?* is presented in table 1. Table 1 demonstrates that there is a similarity between the group that reads and that does not read in English. Most of the teachers read a little bit because of time and resources and whereas others read in English due to getting prior knowledge from the English course. Some do it to increase their vocabulary since they are English teachers. Also, participants who selected yes explained that English is one of the best foreign languages that exist. Just one teacher reads about global news. Furthermore, participants demonstrated through their responses that reading in English could enhance their skill since it the best way to interpret texts and extend their vocabulary by spending adequate time in its practice.

On the other hand, many participants do not read in English because of the lack of knowledge and vocabulary for understanding. Others commented that reading in English is difficult because they do not know its pronunciation and most of the time, they deduce the

context due to cognate words to Spanish. Some wrote that they do not do it because they do not

like reading in English. Finally, two participants considered that English is not a requirement for

a job.

Table 1

Do you read in English?

Yes (N=25)	Increase knowledge (4)
	Reading about global news (1)
	Get prior knowledge from English course (6)
	Hobby (2)
	No explanation (4)
	Does not understand the question (1)
	A little bit because of time and practice (7)
No (N=25)	Lack of practice (2)
	Lack of knowledge and vocabulary for understanding (10)
	Reading aloud difficulties (3)
	Does not know (3)
	Does not like (3)
	Is not a requirement for a job (2)
	No explanation (2)

Regarding the next question *RQ: Do the participants use reading strategies?* The results

of this question are in table 2. In this part, the participants selected the strategies that they were

able to apply in reading. The answers were classified in a range of 5 to 1, *to a great*

extent corresponded to 5, *most of it* 4, some to 3, *a little bit* to 2, and *none* to 1. According to the

results, the highest mean was from 3 to 3.34. It evidenced that the participants managed to

develop some strategies such as: understanding a long text by rereading it, and observing

punctuation pauses. The punctuation helps understand the text and understand single phrases at a

time, whereas the other strategies can be performed a little bit.

Table 2

Reading Strategies

Item	Mean
I can understand a long, complex text.	2.68
I understand single phrases at a time.	3.34
I understand a long text with the first reading.	2.80
I understand a long text by rereading it.	3.14
I can skim.	2.72
I can scan.	2.78
I know the elements of a summary.	2.90
When I read I translate all the words.	2.94
I identify the type of texts I read.	2.92
I know the organization of the text.	2.74
I use my prior knowledge when I read.	2.90
I can classify words of a reading according to their function in context of the reading: noun, verb, adverb, adjective, among others.	2.88
When I read, I observe punctuation pauses.	3.16
When I read, the punctuation helps me understand the text.	3.20

Results to the third question *RQ: What are the perspectives towards vocabulary?* from the statement *I feel my knowledge of vocabulary in English is…,* The 4 % stated that they had advanced vocabulary. The 26% of the participants commented that they have an intermediate level, 50 % mentioned that their level is basic, 14% agreed that they are beginners, 8% did not answer the question.

According to the statement, *I think learning vocabulary is complex.* The 48 % of the participants commented that learning vocabulary is not complex, is lacks practice because of the time. Also, one participant stated that the more vocabulary you know, the better you can understand. Moreover, 12 % responded they did not study due to financial status. The other 8 % mentioned learning vocabulary is difficult for them as there are unknown words, so they get on fused. Also, 14 % of them considered that there are some words with difficult pronunciation for them due to their conjugation and spelling. So, they tend to change their intonation incorrectly according to the tense on a context, which happens because they do not have previous knowledge to make the variation of the word form. Finally, 8 % indicated that they did not pay attention in English classes. Lack of motivation can be the reason. And the other, 10 % did not write any explanation to complete the statement.

The last question *RQ: What are their perspectives towards reading in English?* The participants had to complete the statement, *I see an English passage and I feel. The* 24 % of the participants explained they felt excited and motivated in reading, that is because they are interested in increasing vocabulary, and feel more confident to understand an English passage. The 52 % of the participants commented they felt anxious, stressed, and confused due to see long texts so that they do not understand some words. Besides, 8 % commented they felt relaxing in reading due to the high level of reading skill. The 6 % stated they felt mindful by seeing a

passage while searching on the net for new words since they need to improve their reading skill. The 2% do not read English textbooks. Finally, 8% did not complete this statement.

Discussion

Four research questions revealed participants' experience through the collection of data from a questionnaire oriented toward the perspective in reading strategies. A group of teachers participated as volunteers for this descriptive study.

In the first question: Do participants read in English? Fifty participants gave several explanations. The half affirmed to read, and the other half did not. As presented in table 1, the majority considered that reading is important to acquire knowledge and vocabulary through practice in their free time. Al-Damiree et al. (2016) stated that the more time students spend reading, the more likely they get familiarized with new words and expressions. Some participants mentioned that they got prior knowledge from the English course to acquire familiarity with vocabulary in English passages. According to Jun and Bin (2008), Favorable reading comprehension mostly depends on the connection students make between their previous knowledge. The first question demonstrated that the participants are interested in increasing their vocabulary by reading texts.

According to the second question: Do they use reading strategies? The results evidenced that the participants apply reading strategies a little bit. Nevertheless, they mentioned four strategies that they use most of the time. This result indicated that the reader does not need to know the meaning of all the words in a text (Ngot, 2015) to understand it. So that, the result indicated that the participants need to skim a text to comprehend it.

Regarding the second and third statements, when they read, the punctuation and observe punctuation pauses help them to understand the text. Mahdavy (2011) noted that attention to

orthography, pronunciation, grammatical category, the meaning of words as well as the relationships between them improves retention. Although the participants do not recognize all the words in the text, they might comprehend by identifying grammar structure.

On the other hand, the fourth statement where they understand a long text by rereading it. Nagy (1988) stated that learners are not able to understand most of the words in a passage if they are not familiarized with them. For that reason, they consider reading several times to understand

For the third question: What are their perspectives towards vocabulary? the study demonstrated that half of the participants mentioned they had a basic level in vocabulary. A quarter of them considered they had an intermediate level in vocabulary. Both mentioned that learning vocabulary is not difficult. It is just a matter of practice. Also, one participant stated that "more vocabulary you know, the better you can understand". The reflection of these participants coincides with Jun and Bin (2008), who stated that favorable reading comprehension mostly depends on the connection students make between their previous knowledge and what they read in the passage. Whereas the participants who had low level mentioned that learning vocabulary is difficult due to its variation in a grammar context.

Finally, the last research question: What are their perspectives towards reading in English? Even though the majority of participants expressed they felt anxious by seeing a long text which was difficult to understand, they were aware that reading is the best way to acquire knowledge from a long text since searching and learning new words may increase their vocabulary significantly. According to Lipson (1982), new information can be acquired through textual materials considering three prior knowledge conditions such as correct, wrong, or unknown. Therefore, readers will be able to comprehend what they have read in a text.

Conclusion

This study described that half of the participants read in English. Additionally, they expressed that reading is not a complex skill if they take enough time to practice and understand it more. The survey helped the researcher discover through specific questions the perspective that participants have regarding reading strategies in EFL. Nevertheless, the responses and explanations demonstrated that the participants do it to enhance vocabulary and grammar since that facilitates them for the acquisition of knowledge to apply it in reading skills. Finally, this is an important role because the participants agreed that it increases their interest in reading.

On the other hand, regarding their perspective towards reading in English, the participants commented that they feel confused by not understanding a long text. Besides, they tend to look for other methods such as the digital dictionary to find the meaning of complex vocabulary. However, they reread until understanding it. Consequently, this demonstrated the lack of application of reading strategies in their previous knowledge. Fortunately, they considered in this descriptive study that reading is essential to acquire a new language.

Limitations

Because of the pandemic occasioned by Covid-19, the survey was applied through google forms by the researcher. This online platform allowed us to get the results of the questionnaires from the instrument rapidly. Nonetheless, the researcher would have obtained more significant data if the participants had been personally directed in each item since some questions were not completed or understood. That indicated the result did not meet the researcher's expectations due to some participants did not write more detail on the open questions in reading skills.

Recommendations

Based on the information above, prospective researchers should ensure that participants are well acquainted with the research instrument to provide complete data. Additionally, they

should review each query for unclear statements and improve them so that participants can respond correctly to their perspective on EFL reading strategies without complexity before applying them. Also, in this descriptive study, fifty of the participants' responses have been analyzed to determine their perspective toward vocabulary and reading in EFL. Unfortunately, some questions were not answered by the participants due to the absence of a prior personalized guide. Therefore, prospective researchers must get responses of over fifty participants to have more valid data and results.

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