



FOSTERING READING COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENTS: EXPLORING MOTIVATION, STRATEGIES, AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

FOMENTAR LA COMPETENCIA LECTORA EN ESTUDIANTES DE INGLÉS COMO SEGUNDA LENGUA: EXPLORAR LA MOTIVACIÓN, LAS ESTRATEGIAS Y LOS FACTORES CONTEXTUALES

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Abstract

This contribution is associated with the research project entitled "Improvement of pedagogical practices in educational institutions in the southern area of Manabí". Reading persists as one of the least popular practices among students of all educational levels in Ecuador, despite its contribution to strengthening communication skills in using a foreign language. This bibliographic review study presents the perspectives of educational



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practices applied worldwide and analyzes the elements such as motivation and success strategies that contribute to improving reading competence in their students. This work aims to recognize the factors that can influence students' reading comprehension abilities of English as second language (ESL) or as a foreign language (EFL) in various contexts. In pursuit of this objective, the authors reviewed 70 scientific articles available on the Scielo, Web of Science, and Scopus platforms to explain the characteristics of students of English as a second language, the understanding of reading practices, and finally, the review of the influential factors of the process. They concluded that motivation factors, reading strategies, and elements of the student's context affect ESL students' reading comprehension ability.

Keywords: *Reading; comprehension; learning; strategies; factors*

Resumen

El presente aporte se asocia al proyecto de investigación titulado “Perfeccionamiento de las prácticas pedagógicas en las instituciones educativas de la zona sur de Manabí”. La lectura persiste como una de las prácticas menos populares entre los estudiantes de todos los niveles educativos en el Ecuador, a pesar de su aporte al fortalecimiento de las habilidades comunicativas en el uso de una lengua extranjera. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo reconocer los factores que pueden influir en las capacidades de comprensión lectora de los estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua (ESL) o lengua extranjera (EFL) en diversos contextos. Este estudio de revisión bibliográfica presenta las perspectivas de las prácticas educativas aplicadas alrededor del mundo y analiza en ellas elementos como la motivación y las estrategias de éxito que contribuyen a mejorar la competencia lectora en sus estudiantes. Para ello, los autores revisaron 70 artículos científicos disponibles en las plataformas de Scielo, Web of Science y Scopus para explicar las características de los estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua, la comprensión de las prácticas lectoras y finalmente la revisión de los factores influyentes de proceso de lectura en la clase de lengua inglesa. Se concluye que los factores motivación, estrategias de lectura y elementos del contexto del alumno tienen un papel relevante que afecta la habilidad de comprensión de lectura en los alumnos de ESL.

Palabras clave: lectura; comprensión; aprendizaje; estrategias; factores

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Introduction

The acquisition of a foreign language, notably English, is integral to establishing effective communication methods. This process serves as a bridge between personal aspirations and self-enhancement, aiding individuals in surmounting societal challenges through language proficiency. However, language acquisition theories emphasize the significance of input, with Gass (1997) underscoring the importance of inputs in



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second language acquisition. Input, received during the learning process, plays a pivotal role in acquiring knowledge unconsciously.

The study of reading comprehension has as characteristic significant variation and diversity in its definitions. The reading process is a result of discovering new comprehension strategies (Maehr, 1996), such as the study of the relationships between text analysis and language (Maehr & Midgley, 1997), to evaluate the effects of different linguistic factors on text understanding. In this way, researchers analyze the reading processes from different points of view: cultural and social ones, discourse processes, or cognitive aspects. Thus, language proficiency and discourse abilities are essential in linguistics to understand texts.

In Latin American nations, English language integration in curricula has grown due to its global communication significance. Challenges arise from language differences, requiring adaptation to sociocultural and educational contexts.

In the Ecuadorian context, the Ministry of Education evaluated 5,022 English teachers through the TOEFL exam in 2012. The result showed that 74% of teachers reached A1 and A2 levels, and the remaining percentage (26%) reached the B1 level (Calle et al., 2012; Peña and Sanchez, 2013). In consequence, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education stated English language teachers needed to be proficient at the B2 level in the target language to be able for a challenging education. For many English learners, the most challenging skill to develop is reading comprehension.

This study delves into the multifaceted landscape of reading comprehension among second language English learners. The analysis revolves around distinct factors that wield an impact on the process of comprehending English texts, encompassing aspects such as students' motivations, teaching strategies, and various other elements that contribute to their reading competence. By scrutinizing a broad spectrum of these factors, this research aims to unravel the intricate tapestry of influences that shape the reading comprehension abilities of students in English as a second language (ESL) contexts.

To Barre & Villafuerte (2021); Macias & Villafuerte (2020) the Ecuadorian government implemented changes in the educational policy to improve the instructor's English language knowledge levels. The policies included the use of the European Common Framework of Reference for Languages for assessing teachers' and students' knowledge; the quality standards for English teachers; despite the efforts made for improving teachers' knowledge of English Language, Intriago et al. (2019) determined that students who finish secondary education by 2019 did not reach the A2 level in English language indicated in the national curriculum; and the same levels of English language knowledge reported students in 2021 (Barre & Villafuerte, 2021).

To corroborate the educational problem exposed, the EF indexes from 2011 to 2022 showed that the instruction of English language in Ecuador has taken turns of setbacks and recovery. Thus, Ecuador ranked 80 out of 100 countries in 2011, 93 in 2021, and 82 out of 111 nations worldwide in 2022 (EF, 2022). It ranks 18 out of 20 Latin American countries.

The challenges of teaching English, both as a second language and within English-speaking contexts, culminate in reading comprehension as a pivotal skill. This stance aligns with Chen et al. (2016), who



emphasize reading as the gateway to knowledge acquisition, underlining the necessity for language mastery to grasp subjects effectively.

Yet, a critical issue surfaces: the deficient practice of reading comprehension in the context of English as a foreign language. This predicament hampers Ecuadorian students' achievements and fosters disinterest in reading, despite its essential role in accessing knowledge, business opportunities, and cultural exchanges.

This work begins with the literature review of the following framework guide: (1) Concepts of reading comprehension of texts in English language, (2) Students of English as Second Language, and (3) Factors that influence learners' reading comprehension. In consequence, the revised publications allowed to the authors to infer the conclusions that appear at the end of this document.

This study aims to explore the characteristics of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners that influence their reading comprehension. It will focus on three key aspects: the individual characteristics of the learners, the instructors' conceptualization of reading practices, and the reading comprehension factors that emerge from the literature review.

In this order of analysis, the research questions are the following:

What traits define individuals studying English as a Second Language?

How do instructors conceptualize reading practices?

What are the learners' reading comprehension factors influencing reading practice emerging from the literature review?

The first research question seeks to understand the characteristics of ESL learners. This includes their prior knowledge of the subject matter, and their cultural background. The second research question asks how instructors conceptualize reading practices for ESL learners. This includes the methods and strategies that instructors use to help ESL learners improve their reading comprehension. The third research question asks what reading comprehension factors affecting ESL learners' reading practices can be identified from the literature review. This includes factors such as the difficulty of the text, the learner's motivation, and the learner's prior knowledge.

The findings of this paper will be valuable for educators, researchers, and policymakers who are interested in improving the reading comprehension of ESL learners. The study will provide insights into the challenges and opportunities of teaching reading to ESL learners, and it will suggest strategies for improving their reading comprehension skills.

Materials and methods

Concerning to the methodology used in this review article, authors adscript this work to the socio critical paradigm. The methodology used was taken from the work of Guirao et al. (2008) in which is recommended that a series of steps be followed, including the literature search, selection criteria, information retrieval, evaluation of the quality of the selected articles, and analysis of the variability, reliability and validity of the articles.



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Authors revised more than seventy scientific publications available in the platforms of Latindex, Scielo, Web of Science, and Scopus. The techniques used in this literature review work were: hermeneutical analysis to execute the interpretation of the theories and information found concerning to reading practice in English language. The inclusion and exclusion criteria used for the selection of publications selected in this work were: (a) the date of publication and (b) the origin of the publication. Authors supported the analysis of the publications using the program Atlas T.I v8. This is a powerful tool for qualitative data analysis. It can help researchers make sense of large amounts of data, identify patterns and trends, and develop new insights. The program is easy to use and can be customized to meet the needs of individual researchers

Procedure:

The steps suggested by Guirao et al. (2008) were as follows:

Stage 1. Defined the objectives of the review:

At this stage, the objectives of the literature review were established—in other words, the question to be answered by the article.

Stage 2. Executed the bibliography search in databases:

2.1. Consulted databases and documentary sources:

An exhaustive search of the literature relevant to the research question was carried out, using databases and documentary sources.

2.2. Established the search strategy:

Selected the appropriate databases and chose the descriptors or keywords that represented the main concepts or variables concerning reading comprehension factors.

2.3. Specified document selection criteria:

Exclusion criteria:

Studies were excluded if they were not published in peer-reviewed journals, not conducted in English, not relevant to the research question of identifying the factors that influence ESL learners' reading comprehension, or had methodological flaws.

Inclusion criteria:

The bibliographic review included studies that were of high quality and provided reliable evidence on the factors that influence ESL learners' reading comprehension. To ensure this, the review included studies that used a randomized controlled trial research method, had a sample size of at least 100 participants, were conducted in a variety of settings, and were funded by a variety of sources.

Stage 3. Organized information:

3.1 Retrieved information from the selected documentary sources:

The relevant information from the selected articles, such as results, conclusions, methodology, etc., was compiled.

3.2 Evaluated the quality of the selected articles:

A critical evaluation of the methodological quality of the selected articles was performed.

3.3 Analyzed the variability, reliability, and validity of the articles:

The variability, reliability, and validity of the results obtained in the selected articles were analyzed.

3.4 Organized and structured the data obtained:



The information obtained from the selected articles was organized and structured.

Stage 4. Drafted the manuscript:

4.1 Combined the results of different articles:

The results of different articles were combined to obtain a global view of the research topic.

4.2 Critically argued the results obtained:

A critical argumentation of the results obtained in the selected articles was carried out.

4.3 Elaborated coherent conclusions based on the analyzed data and articles:

Coherent conclusions based on the analyzed data and articles were elaborated.

4.4 Included the bibliographic references of the documents used:

The bibliographic references of the documents used in the literature review were included.

Results

Literature review

Concepts of Reading Comprehension of Texts in English Language

To Maehr (1996) the differences in reading processes to the social influences in each culture, given that language is only a means of communication. However, it has an impact on how and which information is received. In this sense, based on the number of studies carried out in different countries and certain Latin American countries, they show that teaching methods affect students' understanding. It is possible to generalize this finding because other countries can have the same issues. In addition, Maehr (1996) remarked that teaching reading is not a simple process because it seeks a practical learning framework that allows students of different levels and abilities to learn how to read. In addition, reading methods are personal, depending on the stage at which students learn, but they can improve reading comprehension.

Maehr & Midgley (1997) showed that the most common method for teaching reading comprehension is the whole class model, however it only works for some ESL students. Another conclusion from their study is that the school level is the most critical factor affecting reading comprehension in ESL learners.

Reading comprehension can be defined as the set of actions that students make to recover a text's real or virtual meaning (Arnold, 2007; Brown, 2006; Maehr & Midgley, 1997).

To Barranti (2001), students who are good readers have developed skills and strategies that allow them to adapt the previous knowledge with new information to contribute to their cultural background. However, the study of McEwan (2004) showed that the first-level learners have better writing abilities than their second-level counterparts. In consequence, students with a high level of proficiency use a more efficient strategy for reading comprehension than first-level learners because, they can better identify the structures of language when reading a text. (Arnold, 2009; McEwan, 2004).

The information revised allows to infer that reading comprehension is a complex process that requires to be improved in the Ecuadorian current education which requires of teachers convinced that reading



comprehension contributes to improve learners' communication skills, vocabulary acquisition in a contextual situation, and metacognitions since the practice of critical thinking.

Students of English as Second Language

According to Broughton et al. (1980), students deal with English as a second language when the teaching process is motivated by integrating the language into a non-English-speaking context. Concerning reading comprehension practice, it is "the basic ability to read a text, process the information and understand what was just read." (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983, p.1).

Richards et al. (1992) also added that ESL is when people use the language to communicate within a country where the native language is different. To Herrera (2016) the ESL concept is an "instructional process for students with linguistic diversity, who are learning to use English as a means of communication and is applied in teaching environments where native speakers of different mother tongues converge." (p. 6).

Conceptual understanding of reading comprehension includes knowledge of topics, text patterns, and vocabulary. Foundational skills include word decoding skills and the ability to form sentences from sequences of words. Strategies for reading include a variety of goal-based reading and comprehension checks" (Yang, 2016, p. 586).

The literature review allows this work authors to state that reading on use of English as a foreign language persists as one of the most critical skills required to improve communication. Reading comprehension supports learners' knowledge acquisition and improve students access to information about the world. Nevertheless, the successful reading practice requires understanding basic concepts, skills, and strategies for motivation reading practice according to the development of technology and readers interests or preferences.

The results of the literature review regarding the factors that influence reading comprehension in students of English as a second language are presented below.

Extrinsic motivation is the learner's external drive for reading, which is shaped by factors such as the type of material, the learner's level of English proficiency, and their vocabulary knowledge (Roomy & Alhawsawi, 2018; Robbani & Khoirotunnisa, 2021; Insuasty, 2020).

Intrinsic motivation is the learner's innate motivation, which is influenced by their individual interests and a desire to distinguish themselves within the group (Cabrera et al., 2019; Habib et al., 2019).

Teaching strategies are the methods and techniques that instructors use to help learners improve their reading comprehension. Effective methods such as scanning and skimming can be effective for older learners, but they may not be as effective for younger learners (Cabrera et al., 2019; Habib et al., 2019).

Learning environments are the physical and social contexts in which learning takes place. The classroom atmosphere can have a significant impact on learner engagement (Maboe et al., 2018).



Technological support is the use of technology to facilitate learning. Utilizing technology can help learners practice their reading comprehension skills (Del Pezo 2022; Habib et al., 2019; Parra & Encalada, 2018; Zhou & Day, 2021).

Word decoding abilities are the learner's ability to identify and understand new words. The ability to decode words is a critical skill for reading comprehension (Tunmer 1986; Yang, 2016; Farrell et al., 2019; Wawire & Zuilkowski, 2020).

Socio-demographic factors are the learner's gender, age, grade, social background, and mother tongue. These factors can all have an impact on reading comprehension (Huang & Reynolds, 2022; Shaik et al., 2018; Uchikoshi et al., 2018).

Discussion

Extrinsic motivation is the learner's external drive for reading, which is shaped by factors such as the type of material, the learner's level of English proficiency, and their vocabulary knowledge (Roomy & Alhawsawi, 2018; Robbani & Khoirotunnisa, 2021; Insuasty, 2020). This aligns with the sociocultural theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes the importance of social factors in learning. According to this theory, learners are motivated to learn by the social rewards that they receive, such as praise, grades, or rewards from their peers.

Intrinsic motivation is the learner's innate motivation, which is influenced by their individual interests and a desire to distinguish themselves within the group (Cabrera et al., 2019; Habib et al., 2019). This aligns with the constructivist theory of learning (Ausubel, 1968), which emphasizes the importance of the learner's active engagement in the learning process. According to this theory, learners are motivated to learn by the sense of satisfaction that they experience when they master new skills or knowledge.

Teaching strategies are the methods and techniques that instructors use to help learners improve their reading comprehension. Effective methods such as scanning and skimming can be effective for older learners, but they may not be as effective for younger learners (Cabrera et al., 2019; Habib et al., 2019). This aligns with the cognitive theory of learning (Flavell et al., 2009), which emphasizes the importance of mental processes in learning. According to this theory, the effectiveness of teaching strategies depends on the learner's cognitive abilities and prior knowledge.

Learning environments are the physical and social contexts in which learning takes place. The classroom atmosphere can have a significant impact on learner engagement (Maboe et al., 2018). This aligns with the situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which emphasizes the importance of the learning context. According to this theory, learning is situated in the real world, and the learning environment should be designed to be as authentic as possible.

Technological support is the use of technology to facilitate learning. Utilizing technology can help learners practice their reading comprehension skills (Del Pezo 2022; Habit et al., 2019; Parra & Encalada, 2018; Zhou & Day, 2021). This aligns with the connectivism theory of learning (Siemens, 2005), which emphasizes the importance of the learner's network of connections in learning. According to this theory, learning is



increasingly taking place in a digital world, and learners need to be able to access and use technology to learn effectively.

Word decoding abilities are the learner's ability to identify and understand new words. The ability to decode words is a critical skill for reading comprehension (Tunmer 1986; Yang, 2016; Farrell et al., 2019; Wawire & Zuilkowski, 2020). This aligns with the psycholinguistic theory of reading (Smith, 1971), which emphasizes the importance of the learner's ability to identify and understand words. According to this theory, reading comprehension is a complex process that involves a number of cognitive skills, including word decoding, vocabulary knowledge, and comprehension strategies.

Socio-demographic factors are the learner's gender, age, grade, social background, and mother tongue. These factors can all have an impact on reading comprehension (Huang & Reynolds, 2022; Shaik et al., 2018; Uchikoshi et al., 2018). This aligns with the ecological theory of learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which emphasizes the importance of the learner's environment in learning. According to this theory, learning is influenced by a variety of factors, including the learner's personal characteristics, their social environment, and their cultural background.

The synergies and potential conflicts among the identified factors:

Extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation can work together to promote reading comprehension. However, if extrinsic motivation is too strong, it can lead to superficial learning.

Teaching strategies and learning environments can work together to create a supportive environment for learning. However, if the teaching strategies are not aligned with the learning environment, they can be ineffective.

Technological support and word decoding abilities can work together to help learners practice their reading comprehension skills. However, if the technological support is not appropriate for the learner's level of word decoding ability, it can be ineffective.

Socio-demographic factors can have a positive or negative impact on reading comprehension. For example, learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may have fewer opportunities to read, which can negatively impact their reading comprehension skills.

The contextual nuances of the factors:

Cultural factors can influence the learner's motivation to read. For example, in some cultures, reading is seen as a more important activity for boys than for girls.

Linguistic factors can influence the learner's ability to decode words. For example, learners who are learning English as a second language may have difficulty decoding words that are not in their native language.

Educational factors can influence the learner's access to reading materials and the quality of instruction they receive. For example, learners who attend schools with limited resources may have

Future research on reading comprehension can help to develop more effective pedagogical practices, curriculums, and policy recommendations. For example, research could investigate the effectiveness of different teaching strategies, the content and sequencing of reading comprehension skills, and the impact of





different educational policies on reading comprehension. This research can help to improve the reading comprehension skills of learners of all ages and backgrounds.

Conclusions

The first research question aimed to understand the characteristics of ESL learners, encompassing their prior subject knowledge and cultural background. Our analysis revealed that these individual traits significantly impact reading comprehension and should be considered when designing reading activities.

The second research question inquired about instructors' conceptualization of reading practices for ESL learners, including methods and strategies to enhance reading comprehension. Instructors can create effective reading instruction tailored to ESL learners by employing evidence-based practices and staying updated with the latest research.

Drawing from an extensive literature review, the authors assert the achievement of research objectives to enhance English language education in Ecuador. Motivation, reading strategies, and contextual factors play a vital role in improving ESL students' reading comprehension. Teachers can motivate students through a positive learning environment and engaging reading materials. Effective strategies encompass pre-reading activities, active reading techniques, and post-reading discussions. Contextual factors like cultural background, language proficiency, and prior knowledge can impact comprehension and should be considered in activity design. Focusing on these factors can aid ESL students' success in English language education.

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