METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL FOR ENHANCING READING COMPREHENSION FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL FOR ENHANCING ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop a methodological proposal to develop reading comprehension in university students by encourage them to read not just in the classroom but also outside. The literature review showed that a positive attitude toward reading through different text become a motivation for students because the text is based on their interests. When learners create a long-lasting motivation according to the text, the reader will have many kinds of attention getting a tremendous impact on reading development. In addition, offering a varying of opportunities to the students permit they stay active in the reading process. In conclusion, reading comprehension is a vital skill for university students which must be developed during the learning process of English as a foreign language. It also becomes more interesting when the text is related to their interest to call their attention in the classroom.

KEYWORDS: reading comprehension; methodological proposal; foreign language; motivation.

PROPUESTA METODOLÓGICA PARA MEJORAR LA COMPRENSIÓN DE LECTURA PARA APRENDICES DE IDIOMA INGLÉS

RESUMEN

Este estudio tiene como objetivo presentar una propuesta pedagógica para desarrollar la comprensión lectora en estudiantes universitarios alentándolos a leer no solo en el aula sino también fuera de ella. La revisión de la literatura mostró que una actitud positiva hacia la lectura a través de diferentes textos se convierte en una motivación para los estudiantes porque estos se basan en sus intereses. Cuando los alumnos crean una motivación duradera de acuerdo con el texto, el lector tendrá muchos tipos de atención y y, por ende, un mejor desarrollo de la lectura. Además, los procesos de lectura ofrecen una variedad de oportunidades a los estudiantes que les permite mantenerse activos mientras leen. En conclusión, la comprensión lectora es una habilidad vital para los estudiantes universitarios que debe desarrollarse durante el proceso de aprendizaje

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del inglés como lengua extranjera. También, la lectura comprensiva se vuelve más amena cuando las lecturas están relacionadas con los intereses del lector, lo cual permite una mayor motivación para leer.

PALABRAS CLAVE: comprensión lectora; propuesta metodológica; idioma extranjero; motivación.

INTRODUCTION

The need to develop reading comprehension quickly and naturally increased throughout the 20th century, becoming a necessity for education and most professions (Bamford & Day, 2004). In the 21st century, great amazement in globalization is influencing different spheres in society, including the economy, culture, politics, science, technology and education, and any other sphere (Carrell & Carson, 1997). It indicates that people have to have more preparation to insert themselves and be competent in the academic world. Thus, reading comprehension has become an indispensable tool in all areas of knowledge for the contribution that it provides to the development of the professional competences. Furthermore, reading comprehension is a skill developed during the learning of a language.

Reading is one of the four skill developed by learning in the process of language acquisition (Scrivener, 2011). It demands an hour of practising through reading practices to reach the standard proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference Language (CEFRL). Besides, the reading process represents a motivational issue that English Foreign Language Teachers (EFLT) need to apply to encourage their students to practise this skill (Escudero, 2013). Moreover, the practising of reading skill not just must happen in the classroom but also outside. Thus, learners are in contact with a text they want to read according to their interests.

Comprehension is the result of the reader's processing of a text. In essence, it is the process by which the reader constructs meaning by interacting with the text, which is why the way this skill is taught in class is so important to learn the English language (Grellet, 1981). The concept of understanding is, therefore associated with an adequate reading in which the reader can independently and correctly identify the main idea that the writer is trying to convey.

Teachers' classroom experience has shown that many teachers use texts only as a way to expose students to language forms, not to attend to the development of comprehension skills (Nikou, Bonyadi, & Bakhshalinezhad, 2015). Although all language skills bring benefits to the language learning process, for instance, reading tends to stand out for a large number of advantages it generates, while contributing to the assimilation of other skills: listening, writing and producing orally (Nation, 2004). In other words, a person who frequently reads in English assimilates a large number of units of language, improving oral and written production.

On the other hand, the audiovisual information that circulates on the web makes reading take second place in students. It brings with it a disinterest in reading and a mechanical understanding of the text (Infanti, 2012). Added to this is the poor acquisition of vocabulary and the decrease in the ability to understand words in the context of reading. Nation (2004) states that this problem is increasing in countries due to the misuse of technologies. Despite the relevance of the development of reading comprehension, the preparation of teachers to face this process pedagogically is scarce (Fernando-Gómez, 2012). For this reason, teacher training would contribute to the application of strategies that allow students to improve reading levels.

The investigations carried out by Blachowicz and Ogle (2008); Grellet (1981); Jager Adam (2018) suggest that teachers' concepts of what it is to learn to read, as well as the activities carried out in the classrooms, do not include aspects related to reading comprehension. In other words, it indicates that a vision of reading predominates among teachers, in which comprehension is associated with decoding the text and extracting the meaning of the words (Burns & Richards, 2009; Richards & Renandya, 2002). With this, the reader assumes the role of a liability which only receives the information read.

In the late 1970s, interactive and transactional understanding models derived from psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology challenged the theory of reading-comprehension as a set of skills (Blachowicz & Ogle, 2008). However, the effects of this challenge do not seem to have been felt in the classroom. Both Spanish and foreign language teachers seem to retain an approach to teaching reading in which the first level is word knowledge (Stutz, Schaffner, & Schiefele, 2016). The second comprehension and the third the evaluation and assimilation of content, ignoring the advances in the field of understanding that show new models of understanding and approach to the text.

Reading comprehension strategies used by teachers are focused on the analysis of texts for exposing the students to a linguistics structure with taking in consideration the understanding of the message of the text and without the appropriate development of reading skills (Harmer, 2007). It means that new methodological strategies are needed to support EFLT to be updated with the lasted trend about how to develop reading comprehension in their learners. Reading comprehension also brings some benefits for enhancing the learning of a language. One of them is the vocabulary acquisition. Reading provides a wide range of vocabulary expressed in different contexts according to the thematic of the text (Gower, Phillips, & Steve, 2007; Hedge, 2000; Hedgscock & Ferris, 2009). It also represents real vocabulary for learners in real contexts where deeply comprehension is part of the process for understanding the text (Blachowicz & Ogle, 2008). On the other hand, teachers have to active the previous information students could have about the reading. It motivates talking about reading and also critical thinking.

Through reading texts, controversial topics can be generated to encourage discussion among students and, therefore, deepen reading comprehension and connect it with the context of the students (Jager Adam, 2018). These types of activities respond to a reconstructive, participatory and dynamic pedagogical model. Likewise, this process contributes to the development of critical thinking.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to develop a methodological proposal for enhancing reading comprehension motivation in students who are learning English as a foreign language. For the validation process, eight experts in the field of teaching English as foreign language helped wit their observations to give feedback to the methodological proposal by giving their opinions and a quantitative score with a Linkert scale (strongly agree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree).

Pedagogical proposal

The following part represents the steps developed for applying the methodological proposal in university students at Universidad Técnica de Manabí. First, it is essential to highlight that comprehension is the result of the reader's processing of a text. In essence, it is the process by which the reader constructs meaning by interacting with the text, which is why the way this skill is taught in class is so important to learn the English language. The concept of understanding is,

therefore associated with an active reading in which the reader can independently and correctly identify the main idea that the writer is trying to convey.

The trend in recent years is to give greater importance to cognitive activities that are developed through the mastery of linguistic skills, in this case reading (Scrivener, 2011; Ur, 2010). This process includes oral language, the relation of concepts and words, how a particular textual construction is heard when reading aloud, and how ideas are written. This process is based on a constructive theory to strengthen the learning of the language. These recent trends are based on constructivist theories, the acquisition of a foreign language.

Short-term memory is significant in the reading process because it allows us to remember the necessary data while still receiving information and then process it as a whole. With short-term memory, the essential thing is remembered at the moment (Jager Adam, 2018; Wang, Yang, Wei, Chang, & Zhou, 2017). In contrast, in long-term memory, the specific information of the text being understood is stored. The memory is, therefore activated by the reading process.

How a subject approaches the text is also another element that allows determining how much the psychological processes of the individual influence cognitive processes. In this case, the positive and stimulating motivation towards the text and the subject that it develops will have a direct impact on how much knowledge that subject will acquire in the reading process and in the retention in their memory for some time to integrate it into general knowledge that students already own.

Objective: to develop comprehensive reading skills in university students of English language through active techniques.

Characterization

The present methodological proposal is characterized by the benefit of learning the English language as a foreign language. For this, it is necessary to create, maintain, and improve the reading strategies that students have to access the text. Among the benefits that reading comprehension in English brings to the process of learning a foreign language, the following can be highlighted:

- Acquire vocabulary on a wide variety of topics and assimilate the meaning of words in context.
- Activate prior knowledge and use it to understand the text presented to them.
- Adopt fluency in the language concerning reading comprehension.
- Fun, entertainment and motivation to continue learning the language.

Premises or requirements:

To carry it out, it must have premises or conditions, such as:

- Teachers with adequate preparation: the relevance that teachers must have when training is necessary; Aware that the teaching-learning process is continually changing and that they must be updated continuously.
- Students with at least a basic level of English: this premise becomes essential, in that when developing reading comprehension, students must already be familiar with the

foreign language, in this case, English, beforehand avoid that they feel a barrier when discovering their own knowledge.

- Texts with authenticity: this refers to emphasizing so that the texts have meaning in their daily lives, texts from a real-world, from real contexts and that contains an original language.
- Equipped classroom, according to current demands: in this globalized world, it would be unfortunate not to take advantage of the tools available to achieve the motivation and constant interaction of students, in addition to being able to achieve a better approach with communities and teaching-learning processes of English-speaking countries.

Conception:

This methodology has been conceived in 4 stages, under the functional-structural systemic approach proposed by Rivera, Forteza, and Rivera (2006). These authors propose the following steps:

1. Previous recognition of the student's interest in the subject of reading.
2. Activation of the reading process in the pre-reading phase.
3. Application of the reading process during reading.
4. Strengthening of the topics and their storage in memory in the post-reading phase.

In this methodological proposal, which is emphasized in the conditions in which this process occurs. Thus, each can be specified as follows:

Structuring of the stages of the methodological proposal

Stage 1: Previous recognition of the student's interest in the subject of reading.

Objective: to determine the level of motivation and previous interest of the student towards the subject of reading.

This stage can be done as a diagnosis before starting the course by brainstorming ideas that reflect an interest in the topic to be read. It can also be done at the end of each class specifying the student's interest in a specific topic that will be studied in the next class. Another possibility of knowing the student's interest in the subject of reading is to relate it according to the stage of development, that is, determine books for young people and others for adults. Here the sociocultural context played an important role because the teacher would select the reading book that most closely resembles the context of the students. For example, in the first unit, the idea of the beauty of Western culture is expressed and the girl who is observed is white with white clothes and a toy that looks like a Barbie, this situation could be perfectly replaced by a photo of a girl from Portoviejo or from Ecuador that shows the native beauty features with the colours of the region and the culture that characterizes Ecuadorians, including the objects that a boy or girl play with and that also puts them in a position to participate and comment. This process allows teaching-learning to be more representative of both students and teachers.

Besides, at this stage, the teacher can detect the difficulties and potential of the students before starting the class. With this, it is sought that the teacher takes a series of assumed possibilities from recognizing the student's zone of proximal development. For this, a diagnosis can be made through questions that determine the motivation of the student to read. Here are some of them:

- What does the text teach students?
- Is the topic meaningful to students?
- Can it promote the professional and study preparation of students?
- What activities can motivate them to approach the text with their previous knowledge?
- Can the idea be understood by students who have low levels of knowledge acquisition?

This stage is of great importance because through it the level of motivation of the students is diagnosed, for it, three actions are carried out: (1) the elaboration of the instruments for the diagnosis, (2) the application of the instrument and (3) analysis of results.

Stage 2: Activation of the reading process in the pre-reading phase.

Objective: to activate the potential of the students regarding the reading process in the pre-reading phase.

Before reading, the text to be read must be previously motivated to involve all the students in the text analysis process. In this stage, the student will be given the general idea of the content of the material. They will be given the objectives that they want to achieve at the end with the topic covered in the reading. They will be given the different work guides with the essential questions if there is any modification to the student text. They will be shown how to answer them. Finally, global questions that demonstrate whether the student understood how to carry out the reading activity, that is, check to understand, will be analyzed.

Among the techniques that can be used at this stage, we can mention those of corporal expression, relaxation, those of disinhibition by the use of the foreign language and those of cooperation or properly those of understanding some meaning. All of them can be carried out as preparatory activities to motivate students and face reading comprehension pleasantly and enjoyably. For this reason, the following activities are carried out here, among others:

- Exercises for the prior analysis of vocabulary in cases where new words hinder text comprehension.
- Brainstorm from a keyword related to the text.
- Interview between students on representative issues of the text.
- Speculation on the subject of the text, based on the title and a photo or illustration.
- Communicative exchange of anticipation of the text content.

In addition, three actions can be applied to complement the process: (1) adapt motivational dynamics oriented to the activity to be carried out, (2) activate the reading process through motivation with the use of participatory techniques and (3) assess the potentialities to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the students in the process through an in-depth interview.

Stage 3: Application of the reading process during reading.

Objective: to guide teachers regarding the treatment to be given to the use of participatory techniques during the English language teaching-learning process for the development of reading comprehension.

During the reading stage, the student is given a comprehensive understanding of the text so that he can analyze the material as exhaustively as possible. The exercises included in the text will be read and the different techniques for analyzing the information will be explained. At this stage, details will be made for the study of the language (vocabulary, phonetics, grammar, syntax, culture and history) and the degree of interest that the text arouses in the students will be observed, since if it is not enough with the realization homework or notice a decline in interest, as another relaxation exercise will be done. This exercise can be a kind of educational game with the elements of the language that will be addressed during the class. However, it should be done briefly so that the student can once again concentrate on selecting the necessary details for understanding the text. Also, they can be made to read between the lines in pairs and look for the implicit meaning of the text or moral that it offers as an activity that demands more of learning. In this case, this activity would be done to reinforce their motivations shown in the understanding process.

The actions to be carried out in this process are: (1) definition of participatory techniques for the development of reading comprehension in the teaching process of English language learning, (2) exemplification of the application of participatory techniques for the development of understanding reader in the classroom, (3) stress the importance that should be given to the use of participatory techniques, where the student is the object and subject of their learning.

Stage 4: Strengthening the topics and storing them in memory in the post-reading phase.

Objective: to strengthen the themes and store them in memory in the post-reading phase.

When the student has managed to understand the text, they should be encouraged to learn more about the subject or to make what has been learned become part of their knowledge. The most significant retention in students' memory of knowledge occurs when students can use what they have learned in other situations. Therefore, the scale proposed by García (2000, p. 27) must be taken into consideration:

- Students remember 10% of what was read,
- Students remember 20% of what was heard,
- Students remember 30% of what they saw,
- Students remember 50% of what they saw and heard,
- The students remember 70% of what they were able to discuss,
- Students remember 90% of what they practically explained and did.

For all the above, practical activities should prevail in university classrooms, where the intensity of the stimuli received by the student and the value of the sources of exchange of ideas have a primary role during class. That is why, in the teaching-learning process, fundamentally in reading comprehension, the relationship between the natural conditions of man as a fundamentally supernatural and acoustic being, the affective conditions that occur in the classroom have been taken into account. And the development of their memory through cognitive processes.

At this stage, teachers can use techniques to complete sentences, sentences and paragraphs, summarizing the text to exchange between students; word search and crossword puzzles; Comparison of the subject through the exercise of writing or dialogue, exchanging points of view between students and the teacher.

In all the steps, it should be assessed how the participatory techniques work, since sometimes they do not produce the desired effect, in addition to this constant evaluation, you can exercise control over the understanding process to detect inconsistencies or deficiencies, look for solutions in class or out of it. For this, the actions proposed in this phase are (1) to encourage students to know more about the subject, and that what has been learned is part of their knowledge, (2) the use of participatory techniques, students should explain and carry out in practice the knowledge acquired in other situations and (3) assess how participatory techniques work through an unstructured observation sheet.

CONCLUSIONS AND REMARKS

The objective of this proposal was to develop reading comprehension in English in university students through motivation to read texts. The proposal was validated with the contribution of 8 specialists in teaching English as a foreign language.

Among the comments given by the experts, it can be said that 95% of them were totally agree for considering that the theoretical basis for preparing the proposal ca be applied, and 5% of them agree. Regarding the objectives, 90% of the experts were agreed that they were clear and reachable for a research and 10% of them were undecided. In addition, 85% consider being totally agreed that starting the students' interest in topics that are following their expectations could arouse interest in the students, and 15% undecided. Regarding the activation phase in the prereading, 90% rated, the experts expressed to be totally agreed and 10% of them agree. Regarding the application exercises during the reading process, 95% of the specialists considered that they were coherent, and only 5% indicated that they were undecided (strongly agree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree).

Based on the work done, the following conclusions can be established:

In the historical study of methods, approaches and trends on the teaching of English as a foreign language, the analysis of how the teaching-learning process has gone through has been made possible, which has led to several approaches to the treatment of reading motivation, evolving from structural, functional, and finally interactive, which are currently the dominant methods and approaches (Meyer & Ray, 2017).

In the theoretical study, it was confirmed that there are several models designed with the aim of explaining how the understanding process occurs, which has influenced the teaching of reading in Ecuadorian reality, especially in the preparation of textbooks and manuals exercises (Fernández-Agüero & Chancay-Cedeño, 2018; Vélez & Ramos, 2018). Thus, effective teaching must be organized on the basis of the subject's activity, and the assimilation of the reading activity includes a series of stages that the student must go through, the first of which is motivational.

In the diagnostic phase, it was found that the students are not motivated to do the reading, and therefore there is insufficient development of reading comprehension in the English language in university students; evidencing that there are failures in understanding and that the methodological treatment of the English subject is insufficient to favors the student's training process, specifically with regard to reading comprehension.

A methodological proposal was designed, which was validated by experts based on pedagogical principles for the development of reading skills in the teaching-learning process of foreign languages. The methodological proposal consists of four steps aimed at facilitating the development of the cognitive and affective processes of reading comprehension in English with

university students through participatory techniques. Based on the criteria of specialists, it is corroborated that the methodological proposal has the necessary requirements to be introduced into the educational practice of developing reading comprehension of English as a foreign language in university students.

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