

## Didactic Strategies to Improve the Reading Comprehension Skill in the English Language Teaching-Learning Process

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**Abstract:** *To analyze the didactic strategies to improve reading comprehension skills in the teaching-learning process of the English language, a descriptive qualitative and quantitative research was carried out at the “Nuevo Ecuador” Senior High School, in Esmeraldas, in 2019. The population was made up of 1.089 students and 5 teachers. The sample of this research consisted of 102 students and 5 teachers, the data being intentionally selected, as it was the author's workplace and was immersed in the problems of the research addressed. The methods used were analysis and synthesis and hermeneutics, with survey and test techniques. The results showed that most of students read when the teacher ordered them, reflecting that there was no adequate motivation to read information in English. In addition, there was little evidence of the students' likes to read aloud. Some students showed understanding of reading texts using dictionaries, with scanning as the most frequently used reading strategy. Despite their low motivation, the greater percentage of them felt more comfortable looking at pictures and reading magazines. It was concluded that the students needed to reinforce more strategies to understand texts efficiently.*

**Keywords:** Didactic Strategies, English Language, Reading Comprehension, , Teaching- Learning Process

### Introduction

For decades, English has been important for specific purposes, also in the general life. For that, teachers consider that it is necessary that students learn the language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, throughout different didactic strategies supporting in the macro, meso and micro plans to develop the elements before mentioned, but this process has been confused because teachers and students mainly focus on speaking, listening and writing. It is important to recognize that reading skills help students to increase the English level, not only because is a learning tool but also became an effective process, even more in the stage of adolescence when they are studying in the upper basic level of Education.

At “Nuevo Ecuador” Senior High school, students are taught with the textbook that the Government provides, but students must increase English level considering the whole reading process with the reading texts of different kinds. Besides, it should also be pointed out the fact that there are not applications of some reading comprehension strategies that students need to develop, this is why an important question arises: Which are the didactic strategies that may improve reading comprehension skills in the English language teaching-learning process of students at Nuevo Ecuador High school?

The main objective of the investigation was to analyze the didactic strategies to improve the reading comprehension skill used in the English language teaching learning process of students of 10<sup>th</sup> grade of basic education at Nuevo Ecuador High school in Esmeraldas Province. The specific objectives were: To diagnose the students' reading comprehension level, to identify the strategies that students use for reading comprehension; to determine the different strategies that teachers apply in the classroom to improve the students' reading comprehension skills and finally to define specific actions and procedures to improve the students' reading comprehension skills.

## Generalities about Reading Comprehension

Snow (2010) refers that reading well involves a mental process that all learners of a second language must consider even if they do not like to read in the mother tongue. When the human beings start with the reading process, elementary teachers and parents must encourage them to read books; but when a person becomes an adult this process could gain interest or not by people.

As Amin (2019) states, students should acquire different reading strategies, which depend on the fact that institutions allow learners to solve problems through reading procedures to become critical and analytical students, able to predict, infer, answer questions, summarize and develop other capacities that a good reader should have.

According to Hamra and Syatriana (2010), teachers and students need good learning conditions. It means that the classroom environment must be essential at the moment to read. Before reading the teacher should establish the rules that students have to follow. The teaching-learning process should be clear because students need that the teacher explains clearly how the reading strategy is and how to apply it. So, reading comprehension should be more than a simple process, it should be something that may encourage students to investigate more. Also, teachers must implement reading strategies to teach an interesting class and the evaluation should be periodically.

As Bojovic (2010) states, reading skills consist of a thinking process which a human being uses to have contact with the writing information. This skill consists of several steps that allow students to read and understand information, it means that students should comprehend, recognize, deduce, find answers of the texts, and identify how the text is. It is important that students try to get the main idea of the text, but this process should be possible with the use of the correct strategies of reading.

## Reading Comprehension Strategies

As Kelly (2009) refers, students must struggle to read. Most students think reading is a boring process, because of the lack of understanding and confusion of the books, so a reading strategy is the result of mental processes that a human being does to understand a message. These mental processes include Predicting the meaning of a text, determining a purpose of a text, promoting strategies to improve understanding of the text.

According to Ness (2019), students need instructions directed by the teacher, the main cause is because of the advantages to interact with a comprehension strategy or more than one to provide a practice and constant feedback. The purpose of this is that students become independent, the ideas of “explicit instructions of the text comprehension”.

Other strategies are the graphic representations because they help to have relationships between the English language and their ideas, as well as questions that allow students to solve doubts about the meaning of the reading context. According to Molina (2018) reading strategies are the forms how students and teachers work together in order to develop English as a foreign language learning process, so reading comprehension develops practice and time.

As Richard and Renandya (2002) affirm, teachers should apply principles, so that students get engaged to learn, particularly in reading comprehension. These principles are: Automacity, meaningful learning, anticipation of reward, intrinsic motivation, strategic investment, language ego, self-confidence, risk taking, language culture connection, the native language effect, interlanguage, communicative language competence, as well as diagnosis, treatment and assessment, an important approach of language teaching for communicative and situational needs and to diagnose the curricular treatment for learners.

## Antecedents

Jara and Lino (2009) proposed an application of new strategies to improve reading skills, which allowed establishing the way to teach learners, the adequate way to read and analyze different kinds of texts. Awada (2014) researched about Instructional strategies for enhancing learning disabled students' reading comprehension and comprehension test performance, by means of which they found results that allowed improving reading skills in students. Also, Madariaga and Martínez (2016) with the research about teaching of reading comprehension and meta comprehension strategies allowed that this institution considered implementing more reading strategies in English teachers.

Silva and Cain (2015) state the relations between lower and higher-level comprehension skills and their role in prediction of early reading comprehension is one of the aspects to consider. Besides, Fernandez (2015) checked the reading strategies in each of the phases of the reading process, solving reading comprehension problems, but Hidalgo and Manzano (2014) with their research about understanding processes in a foreign language to evaluate reading strategies, considered important to review the process followed in the elaboration and validation of an evaluation, self- evaluation of reading strategies, also the dynamics which promote as a means of teaching-learning methods.

## Method

This investigation was carried out at “Nuevo Ecuador” Senior High school, located in Las Palmas neighborhood in the city of Esmeraldas. The population was formed by 1.089 students and 5 teachers. The sample of this research was of 102 students and 5 teachers, being selected in an intentional way because they correspond to the groups that the author of the investigation was working with. This investigation was performed with a descriptive quantitative and qualitative methodological design

Analysis and synthesis and Hermeneutics were the methods used. The first one was used to separate the parts of the whole to study them individually, it means that it has investigated how the reading process is and the strategies that students must apply when they need to read, specifying that is analysis: because the rational gathering of elements and it is synthesis due to the composition, fragmentation of the body in its constitutive principles method that goes from compound to simple. Hermeneutics was used because it is directed to understand a text to determine the meaning of the terms to express a thought, it important to support the bibliography and do the theoretical framework.

The variables of this research were: independent and dependent, being independent the didactic strategies and dependent the reading comprehension skill.

The techniques used were a survey and a test. The survey, with the questionnaire as instrument, was directed to students and teachers, also the test was directed to know the reading level in students, to evidence if teachers have taught students some reading strategies. The data collected from this research were tabulated and analyzed through basic operations, percentages, means, and then taken to bar figures with the help of the Microsoft Excel Programme.

## Results

In relation to the frequency of reading English texts as illustrated in Figure 1, most students, represented by the 60%, stated that they read when the teacher order them to read. Also, there some students (24%) who sometimes read text for pleasure and the 16% states that they sometimes always like to read.

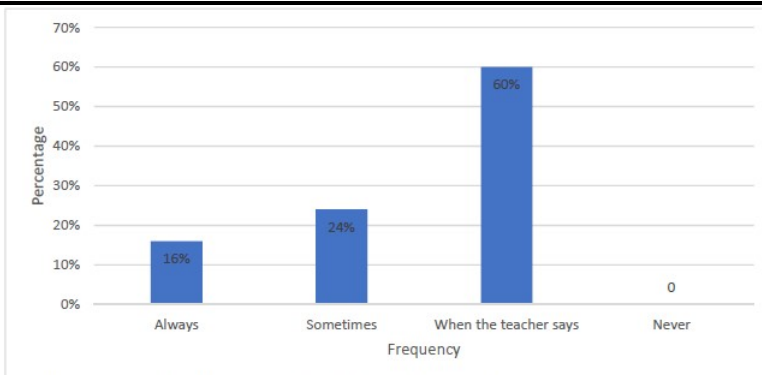


Figure 1: Reading frequency. Source: Survey applied to students

Concerning the reading strategies of scanning or skimming, as shown in figure 2, the 70% revealed that scanning was the strategy mostly used.

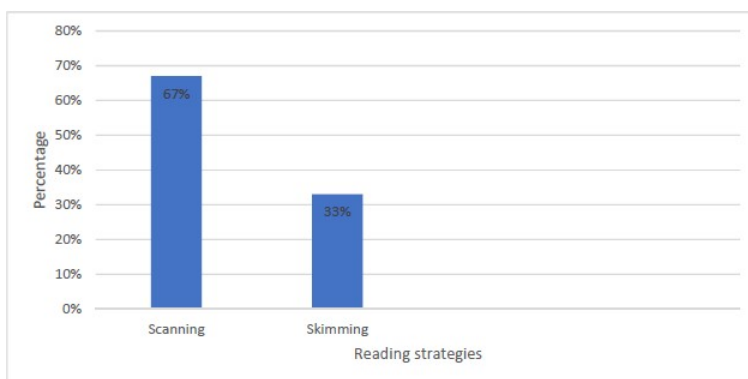


Figure 2: Students' reading strategies. Source: Survey applied to students

Referring to the strategies used in class to understand a text, figure 3, the 70% of teachers stated that students use looking at the pictures.

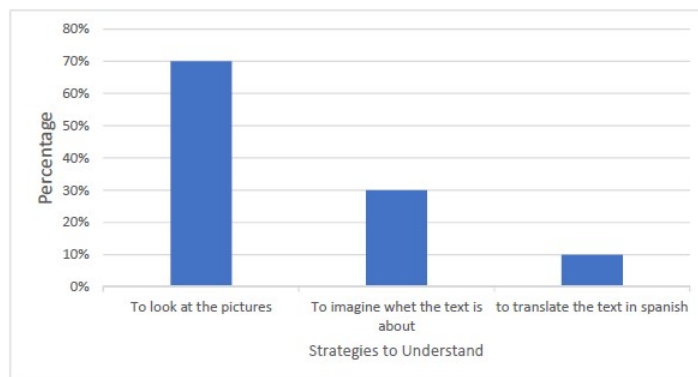


Figure 3: Strategies to understand a text. Source: Survey applied to teachers

About the reading strategies used, figure 4, the 70% of teachers stated that scanning is the strategy mostly used by students.

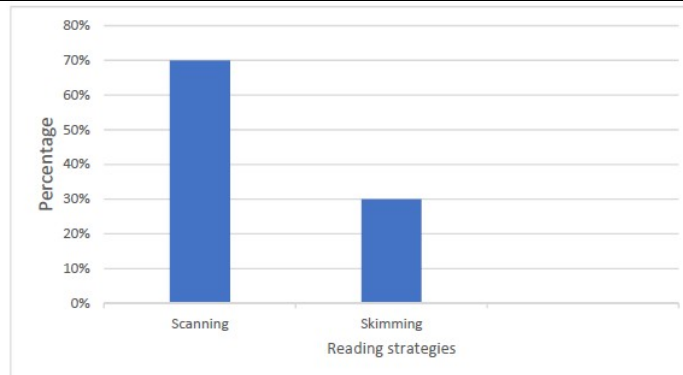


Figure 4: Reading strategies mostly used by students. Source: Survey applied to teachers

In order to diagnose the level of reading comprehension skill of the tenth-grade students, a test was applied that consisted of multiple-choice questions, true or false, and answering for specific details, in an evaluation of 100 points, as illustrated in the following table:

Table 1: Strategies to understand a text

Percentage of students	Score
25%	20
35%	50
40%	75

Source: Test applied to students

Not having students with score 100, it was found that the students had difficulties to understand the text. Noticing this problematic, it was imperative to determine specific actions and procedures to overcome the described situation, which helped the author design an integrated didactic strategy to improve the students' reading comprehension skills at "Nuevo Ecuador" Senior High School in Esmeraldas. This strategy is called Reading Contest. It is integrated because it is aimed at engaging all the educational community in the English Language reading skills teaching-learning process: the students, the teachers, the school authorities, and the family.

### Integrated Didactic Strategy: Reading Contest

**Objective:** To improve the students' English language reading comprehension skills with the engagement of all the educational community.

**Pre-reading Stage, Preparation for the contest and Engaging the educational community:** The teacher must get the school authorities and family engaged in the reading activities. Some posters must be exhibited announcing the reading contest that will be carried out in school in each period. Parents are informed about this activity, and some of them may help in the organization of the event. In class, the teacher may develop some pre-reading activities to get the students prepared for reading. The teacher may use pictures, videos, brainstorming ideas, questions, to pre-teach the content of the reading texts and some vocabulary. This may benefit the students' comprehension. The teacher will facilitate the students' participation. He/she will give opportunities for brief discussions about the theme the students are going to read about.

**While-reading Stage and Reading practice:** The teacher must provide exercises to get the students use either scanning or skimming for reading. The class must be arranged in pairs for the students to interact while doing the exercises. The teacher must monitor the activity, moving around to help the students if they have any doubt or do not understand any word. In this stage the students' parents may be asked to help the students be prepared at home. They must verify if the students devote time for reading at home.



**After -reading Stage and Reading contest:** At this stage, the reading contest must take place. The teacher must get the students do something with what they have read. They may do role plays, simulations, dissertations, discussions, etc. Some ludic activities can be used, such as singing a song in relation to the reading topic, dramatizing, reciting a poem, etc.

The students' parents, who must be participating in the contest, will be more conscious of the importance to encourage their sons or daughters to read. The school authorities will place an important role as well. This will be a great event in the school, with the participation of all students and teachers from different levels. The students who demonstrate reading comprehension will be given a certificate. This strategy for reading comprehension can be developed every two months. It can be applied not only with the students from "Nuevo Ecuador" High School, but with other schools in the province.

## Discussion

Through this research, it has been possible to analyze the didactic strategies to improve the reading comprehension skill used in the English language teaching learning process of students of 10<sup>th</sup> grade of basic education of Nuevo Ecuador High school in Esmeraldas Province. The specific objectives were fulfilled, dealing with a diagnosis of the students' motivation and interest towards reading English texts; the identification of the strategies that learners use for reading comprehension, as well as the different strategies that teachers apply in the classroom, and finally to define specific actions and procedures to improve the students' reading comprehension skills.

The results of this study coincided with Jara and Lino (2009) about the need to use new strategies to improve reading, considering important to analyze a text, even though it is necessary to emphasize what the reading comprehension skill is.

Besides, Awada (2014) investigated instructional strategies for enhancing learning disabled students' reading comprehension and comprehension test performance, so they found results that allowed improving reading skills in students. Moreover, Madariaga and Martínez (2016) with their research about teaching of reading comprehension and meta comprehension strategies, promoted the implementation of more reading strategies in teachers of English.

This investigation considered important to carry out a diagnosis of the students' reading skills, which coincided with Silva, Macarena, Cain, Kate (2015) because a diagnosis made helped to predict the necessity to intervene in the teaching of reading strategies. This necessity to improve the students and teachers' reading strategies coincided with Fernandez (2015) with his investigation about reading comprehension strategies in the framework of a cognitive methodology for the teaching of English as a foreign language. This research proposes three mediators: the school, the library and the family to improve the students' reading comprehension skills. It is supported by the theory of the Zone of Proximal Development and the Socio-Cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) which has been dealt with in the theoretical perspective of this study.

## Conclusions

The development of this research has permitted to analyze the didactic strategies to improve the reading comprehension skill used in the English language teaching learning process, to diagnose the students' reading comprehension level, to identify the strategies that students use for reading comprehension, to determine the different strategies that teachers apply in the classroom, to improve the students' reading comprehension skills and define specific actions and procedures to improve the students' reading comprehension skills.

Students and teachers considered that reading is important, but the lack of practice is one of the negative aspects that does not allow the students to read well, therefore it is relevant to specify that reading

comprehension is a summary of all aspects in order to achieve meaningful learning in students. The diagnosis made allowed to reveal that students have difficulties in the reading comprehension skill. Therefore, they need reading strategies.

The reading strategies that students usually used in class were scanning, skimming, reading aloud, and looking up in the dictionary the unknown words, looking at the pictures to have a general idea of the text.

Teachers' lack of reading strategies caused demotivation in the teaching-learning process regarding the reading comprehension skills. They should apply scanning and skimming more in class, to intensify the students' capability to understand a text and to get information.

A didactic integrated strategy which engages all the educational community in the reading process was designed. It is entitled "Reading Contest", and consists of three important stages: Pre-reading stage, while-reading stage, and after-reading stage. With this strategy teachers should establish reading activities directed to facilitate the reading comprehension in the students.

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