

## **Assessment of intensive reading as a bridge in comprehension and learning of English as a foreign language**

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**Abstract:** In the educational scenario, reading is the first cognitive tool that allows the teacher to research, develop and adapt teaching techniques and strategies for the attention of groups of students at a certain moment. It is currently recognized the importance of intensive reading as a vertical axis in the new curricular designs in the teaching of the English language, and it constitutes a construct that must be deepened in the light of the most recent progress in the field of Didactics. This research aims to assess the relationship of intensive reading between the comprehension and learning of English as a foreign language. The results are expected to contribute to the coherence of the teacher's actions and to the development of educational practices that contribute to the shaping of a renewed thinking and strengthen the development of intensive reading as a strategy of English language learning in the class.

**Keywords:** intensive reading, learning, reading, teaching English, English as a foreign language.

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### **1. Introduction**

The essential role of reading as a development manager in all of the professional and working areas and any disciplinary knowledge is widely recognized. It is not limited only as an academic resource to know, implement and build new knowledge because it represents a source of enjoyment for those who does it in their free time.

The Affective, psychic and biological independence is favored by this figure, in turn fostering the thinking and assimilation processes of information undertaken by the human being and raising emotional intelligence (Mórquez, 2018).

Paz (2014) asserts that reading represents a fundamental part in the construction of knowledge, in any stage of it. Therefore, it is considered an essential element in the process of integral formation of human beings. There is no doubt the importance of the development of the reading capacity of learners and their social development, where the process must be enhanced through education as a fundamental axis.

Reading is one of the most effective canals that allow learners to be in contact with the constant flow of information that is generated in the information age. Hereafter, success in studies and professional activity is closely related to its development. It is through this practice that the necessary cognitive tools are purified so that a person consolidates his or her critical, rational and constructive thinking. (Hernández, 2007; Paz, 2014; Arellano, Calvo, Collado and Valeria, 2015)

The current changes in global economy and the geopolitical landscape, pose unprecedented challenges in educational field turns reading comprehension as a forefront of policy formulation and curriculum planning, in this context English has positioned as a lingua franca in international relations developing different fields such as: economic, scientific-technological development, education and culture, and others.(Díaz, 2015; López, 2016; Sevilla, 2017).

The establishment of English as an international language has been increased by the effect of global communication and the latest technologies applied to it. It is produced by two causes: the need for a common language and the ease of its diffusion. The English teaching process is considered an important tool in which globalization is imposed, due to the high level of scientific-technological development and international collaboration among the populace.

The fact that universities and schools from countries where the English language is not the mother tongue, the ability to read and understand texts written in English is developed. Several researchers who are immersed in the academic and scientific community agreed that reading in the target language represents also an essential way to access technical information, as a result, it is increased the expertise, knowledge, and ability to read the target language in their related fields. (Zapata, 2011; Siboney, 2014; Paz, 2014)

It follows that authors such as Zapata, (2011), Siboney, (2014), Poblete (2016) and Sevilla (2017), acknowledges that never before, in the history of language education, the world's society has been more obliged to assume and respond to the fact that reading comprehension skills in English are not luxury thing, nevertheless it seems like a strong need. The increasing dissemination of English-language research, the formal study of engineering and computer science disciplines, the demand for access to tutorials or online seminars with specific content, as well as trivial activities such as games or the understanding of instructions in a travel guide are few among of diverse examples that show the usefulness of English as a foreign language.

Under these circumstances, innumerable language teaching programs have included the real goal where reading comprehension is at the forefront of its curricula. Thus, reading comprehension is considered to be one of the most important skills in the professional and academic areas.

Furthermore, teaching English must be built based on contextualization and the socialization of knowledge. This didactic should support the characteristics of the students, their needs, potentials, creativity, feelings and the context of the applicability of knowledge, among others (Poblete, 2016; Gamboa, 2017, Parra, 2017).

Reading as an indispensable tool in the conception of knowledge requires the development of English language skills since a large flow of information, especially related to the scientific field, circulates in the target language. Hence the need to enhance the reading skills of future professionals in foreign languages, especially in the English language. Considering that education is a fundamental factor in the development of societies, it is necessary to promote quality education at all levels. An education that does not include reasoning processes represents an insufficient context because it does not promote the production of new knowledge.

In this sense, education at the Latin American level has suffered stagnation processes through the adequate levels of verbal and logical reasoning have not been evidenced. One of the steps for the generation of this much needed logical reasoning is, without a doubt, critical and comprehensive reading (Ruiz, 2011; Poblete, 2016; Mórquez et al., 2018). This type of reading explores to raise the level of cognition and understanding of the phenomena in students, due to the lack of knowledge on how to make an adequate comprehensive reading because it has limited the development of science at the regional level. In this context, the value in the relationship of intensive reading in the relation with understanding and learning English as a foreign language contributes to strengthening the positions of improving teaching and learning English methods, in which reading represents the first way to provide a diversity of thoughts and possibilities.

## **2. Developing**

The reading process represents a process only capable of being carried out by human beings, in which biological, affective and psychological processes influence the understanding of a given text involved. These processes are directly elaborated in the comprehension of written texts because the capabilities of extraction, analysis, and synthesis depend on the affinity for the text, and the strategies for cognition and metacognition, which gives meaning to the text through the reader's previous experience. It is the so-called reading comprehension. In this way, students reach a process of cognitive maturation, which allows them to learn the knowledge of several disciplines or curricular components (Ruiz, 2011; Parra, 2017; Mórquez, 2018)

At present, the importance that universities and schools, in general, consider that reading comprehension has been growing through the pass of the time. This is evidenced in the promotion of the habit of reading and the execution of diverse campaigns for its improvement. Certainly, reading helps to develop learner's ability to read a diverse number of texts with different purposes and prepares them to have their discernments and judgments value. Additionally, the selection of the relevant contents and meaning, without being confused with the superficial material. (Mórquez, 2018). According to Martínez and Mata (2018), thanks to this research process, learners become autonomous by self-regulating their learning process, managing own criteria when selecting texts, and making judgments are taken by them. In this order of ideas, Zapata (2011), exhorts that the objective of reading responds to academic purposes and learners control their learning because intends to examine words, phrases, sentences, and clauses to give answers to certain unknowns raised by themselves, a guide, exercise book, teachers and classmates.

Reading has become a fundamental tool in the academic field, in the same context is considered as an elemental mechanism that increases our globalized and technological society. As a practice, it constitutes one of the essential skills, besides, it provides information and culture to the reader, it intervenes in the formation of personality, it becomes a link for learning and intellectual development and represents a source of recreation. As it is mentioned above, without a doubt the poor practice of reading skill or inadequate mastery of such an important ability restricts any type of learning and prevents real progress in another area (Silva and Araujo, 2016; Sevilla, 2017).

Morquez et al. (2018) express that the educational environment serves as a substrate for the role of reading as the fundamental cognitive tool, where teacher's hands lead to research, develop, adapt teaching techniques and strategies for the attention of groups of learners. Likewise, this is one of the first options in a student's body that allows the linguistic process which displays the production of an appropriate academic text, or simply, to learn certain structures in understanding, abstraction, and reflection of knowledge. Silva and Araujo (2016) mention that this practice constitutes a basic and transcendental process for the structure of knowledge in any field, being essential in today's society, given that its intellectual and rational nature, when development is based on all information transmitted in everyday communication.

Reading leads the assumption of content and makes the improvement of cognitive abilities and development of written text comprehension; in a few words, the reading process makes the reader apply metacognitive strategies for the best use of information. The specific purpose decodes implicit meanings in the text also interprets what has been read and finally, the production of text, creation of ideas and thoughts from what is understood and read thoroughly.

Zapata (2011), reveals that reading constitutes one of the mechanisms where information is obtained through instruction. The author assumes the idea that reading is not a simple activity-based only on the decoding of signs and spellings, also gives priority to the understanding of what is read and describes when task involves the development of a number of cognitive and metacognitive strategies that allow the reader to process the information acquired from the text, and contrast it with the knowledge obtained from the world, where the new knowledge is produced. Learners analyze the speech process in a search of foundations that open comprehension and guide the understanding of the original meaning through syntactic, semantic and morphological criteria.

The vision of Zapata (2011) and Willis (2014), explains that the meaning of the understanding process in the original text leads us to consider that the reader interprets both what he/she is reading, and the intentions of the author. The quality of this interpretation depends on the culture of the person who reads. The characteristics of the text and those of the context and their linguistic knowledge. It is necessary to put into practice reading skills that enhance reading comprehension where step by step determines their maturity. (Zapata, 2011) Learners must be able to perform such an arduous task effectively, by virtue of which reading implies understanding a text, which two parameters become indispensable, namely: one, of a psycholinguistic type, related to readers, when there is specify intention of the author and the different discursive strategies that are used to deliver the message, as well as the expectation they have regarding about the satisfaction of intellectual needs in the light of their knowledge about the subject and language resource management. The second parameter, of linguistic type, refers to the external characteristics of the text; that is, the structure or pattern of information organization, the type of text and context, among others

According to cognitive schema theory, reading comprehension implies an interaction between the knowledge that the reader already has and the text itself while the activity of reading takes place. Its cognitive constructivists in their assessment behavior of understanding and learning in general work (McLaughlin and Overturf, 2013) have also analyzed this approach

## **2.1 Reading and comprehension Reading**

Reading is linked to understanding as a simultaneous process of global reconstruction of the text, therefore, every reader must put into play cognitive processes using any particular type of tools, in this case, is called cognitive strategies (Delmastro and Balada, 2012; Parra, 2017; Sánchez, 2017).

Starting from the fact that reading is a fundamental tool within the educational sector to obtain information, reading comprehension skills are indispensable for academic learning. The previous statements described above do not apply only in local educational environments, however in multilingual and international environments, these criteria can be applied, not only in learning of a mother tongue, in fact, it can be in learning any foreign language.

When readers face specialized reading, they interact with macro and micro-processes that allow their elaboration of a coherent representation of text in their cognitive system. At the macro level, the reader summarizes the structure of the writing, through the synthesis and organization of individual units meaning, in a summary of interrelated general ideas. At the micro-level, the reader seeks to make sense of ideas by grouping words to form sentences, or what is the same, the initial fragmentation and selective memorization of the most important units of meaning occur in each sentence. During the process of both levels, readers must use metacognition to relate the information read with their previous knowledge, making inferences and sense in the production of information. Integrative processes are recognized among micro and macro processes, such as the connection of individual ideas in a coherent whole interpreting linguistic clue. The closure is made up of metacognitive processes that are analyzed from their selection, evaluation or regulation strategies to control understanding in long-term memory. Consequently, metacognition plays a relevant role in the production of

reading skills, considering that reader knowledge improvement through the growth of cognitive resources available to face in reading the task and with the self-regulation of strategies over planning, supervision, and evaluation. (Albarello, 2015; Arellano, Calvo, Collado, Gracciano, 2015).

Sevilla (2015), Poblete (2016) and Sánchez (2017) assert that historically reading comprehension has been a central skill in most language programs. In times of grammatical translation, for example, reading skills were followed as a way to study the classics of literature in their original language.

Reading-comprehension is considered as the field within the teaching of a foreign language, where teaching represents the ability to read through the analysis of the micro and macro structures of the text and training in reading strategies.

Reading English texts in comprehension context is a mandatory step to achieve full academic literacy. To be qualified professionals in an environmental work that we must perform, today, the management of English is imposed, at least concerning written expression and reading comprehension. (Zapata, 2011; Paz, 2014; López, 2016; Gamboa, 2017)

It is essential growing an institutional curriculum that articulates content and strategies to make explicit and effective teaching of reading strategies in the foreign language.

## **2.2 Intensive reading in the English language**

On one hand, language problems can be overcome when it is associated with a variety of languages, the phenomenon of a third language as a communication bridge, acquired by interlocutors who do not share the same language and has always been present. Learners are considered as social beings who need to communicate through the language. On the other hand, since the second half of the twentieth century, English has been progressively implanted as the universal language. Although it has been demonstrated the importance of English in today's society and the need to reinsert this area of training within the curriculum for the study of careers at different levels of education, it is no less true the need to reformulate their teaching, so that allows to articulate the development of this activity with the integral development of the students who are professionally trained in the field of any area of knowledge or discipline (Paz, 2014; Arellano et al., 2015; Silva and Araújo, 2016).

According to Ruiz (2011) and Mórquez (2018), intensive reading has been a common practice in foreign language classrooms and one of the most recurrent in textbooks published for teaching / learning English as a foreign language. Normally text is oriented towards the study of linguistic aspects, including grammatical, lexical, cohesive or pragmatic aspects, conducive to the total understanding of the textual content, or, towards the fulfillment of a careful practice closely related in the teaching process. The main objective of this academic resource is to ensure that the student understands the material read in detail. It also searches for the analysis of linguistic aspects that allows the achievement an accuracy in the understanding of what someone has read (Efron and Ravid, 2013; Willis, 2014, Silva and Araujo, 2016). This type of reading, due to its precise characteristic, is known as intensive because it requires metacognition and the student's thinking skills to understand and assimilate the contents of a discipline (Hernández, 2007; Ruiz, 2011).

Intensive reading is detailed or, in the case of a second or foreign language, a translation of texts of a certain complexity. Under this circumstance, the translation of a text, learners must discover linguistic forms in the passage; These linguistic forms will be revealed through the transfer of cognitive experiences and metacognitive strategies from their mother tongue to the foreign language. In this way, intensive reading stands out, because it is done with the teacher guidance and intervention. In other words, the teacher works as a promoter and organizer of the reading phases for the improvement of learning and understanding. Teacher encourages learners the correct functioning of the thought processes, such as, presuppose, infer and imply anticipations of the text, extraction of precise information or the main idea of the paragraph, and define possible idiomatic phrases, or unknown words (Krashen, 2007; Ebrahimi and Rahimi, 2013; Coon, Ferrell and Klott, 2014; Willis, 2014; Siboney, 2014; Díaz, 2015).

Following this order of ideas, Silva and Araujo (2016), express that intensive reading is associated with teaching reading in terms of its components, because texts are approached with the aim of exercising reading comprehension, and during this process, the achievement of procedural objectives prevails such as anticipation, location of specific information (scanning) or general idea (skimming). Also inferences and induction of the meaning of unknown words, extraction of main idea and secondary ideas, of connectors, among others. These intensive reading activities are carried out with the mediation of the teacher. It can be said, then, this type of reading the reader makes a thorough and detailed study of the text. The practice includes strategies to identify specific information, discriminate relevant information from the complementary, make inferences based on explicit data, among other skills.

As an academic resource, intensive reading is carried out more frequently when teaching a second language at any level: it is about reading relatively short texts with the central objective of learning certain vocabulary and grammatical aspects depending on the understanding of meaning. Its practice is more enriching

if it is carried out in class. When selecting a text to develop this type of reading, the teacher, in general, takes into account the criteria of extension and lexicon. It can be concluded then, stating that this type of reading seeks to understand, point by point, the different grammatical and textual aspects, present in the printed material. (Hernández, 2007) Nevertheless, the application and habit of reading as an essential process in the professional training of students during class sessions becomes appreciable and necessary. In particular, this reading applied in academic or school work makes the autonomy unfold in the student and develops in him the mental schemes necessary to make connections between what it has been previously learned and what it is new to know. (Mórquez, 2018)

Contemporary pedagogical trends converge in the importance attached to cognitive, metacognitive and strategic processes in the teaching-learning process of a foreign language, justified the conception of knowledge as construction and not as transmission. In this sense, learning a foreign language (FE) is considered a process of construction of the new linguistic system: learners start from their previous experiences, cognitively elaborate and process the new experiences from the input or exposure to the target language, thus generating changes in their cognitive-conceptual, procedural and attitudinal schemes. In this process the interaction with peers and the scaffolding or mediating activity provided by the teacher who plays a significant role (Delmastro and Balada, 2012; Bull and Ma, 2001).

Because of the growth of the English language, application is considered that this phenomenon is currently modifying in many countries all over the world, the educational policies open space in teaching the target language beginning since the first levels of education. Likewise, the comprehension of English written texts represents a great importance competence within the process of training learners. Reading is one of the most complex skills developed by pupils and undoubtedly enriches them both professionally and spiritually. The development of reading ability in English is a much more relevant factor in training professionals who must be constantly acquiring and updating information, from specialized bibliography that is written in a foreign language. Because of these considerations, it is significant that academia adjusts its educational process to the demands of the new realities that society presents. (Paz, 2014; Gamboa, 2017)

The teaching process of FL is characterized today by its interest in learners needs and cognitive styles, the combination of cognition and social cognitive components, additionally the development of effective strategies that allow students to take control of their education (empowerment) and continue learning for themselves (learn to learn). Day by day English continues to conquer land and is more used in different areas of knowledge and human development. Consequently, this language has become the global language of communication, which is why its domain becomes so necessary. (Paz, 2014; Gamboa, 2017)

Furthermore, there is a low interest and a little attention in the interpretation of the text in the language classroom. Normally, reading has been focused on carrying out less comprehension and structural activities, reducing the whole process to short activities. Starting from motivation as a backbone, the contents should focus on a more student-centered perspective, into an active subject who transforms the text into a field of interaction between what learners already know and the experiences stored in their intertext, highlighting the new information contained. Thus, as the protagonist of a good conception of reading faces critically the interpretation of the text. This interpretation can be considered as the peak moment of the reading process, it means the way where text and reader are transformed and complement, critically differ and dialogue slowly; until the subject's cognitive structures conclude in an individual meaning that has been energized by experiences, a priori.

### **3. Conclusions**

In a few words, the expansion of English worldwide as an international language and its projection and use in the labor, social, cultural, economic, political, technological, educational, sports and entertainment fields have increased the training needs in management and use of this language as a vehicle for interaction, information and updating. Hence, teaching, reading strategies are implemented that optimize the learning process.

Education, like many other areas of knowledge within the humanist sciences, has been relegated from the scientific level. Particularly, socially legitimized groups have not properly valued teaching the English language as a source of scientific knowledge production. However, under the new scheme that is being proposed today, education has been gaining ground in terms of its legitimacy and need as part of individual and collective development.

The reading process is understood as a linguistic-cognitive activity aimed at communicative action. It represents an interactive process between the reader, the text and the author, which facilitates the subject to position themselves in the world and as a knowledge approach that transforms their experiences. Reading practice would imply a transactional process where readers put into play all their baggage of knowledge, beliefs, interpretations of the world, experiences, etc. to interpret, integrate and recreate a new text.

The exposure of the students in English classes, the reading of disciplinary texts and the deep and conscious work in class with comprehension strategies will allow teachers to guide students focusing on the formal characteristics of written texts. At the end of each text, teachers should guide and promote students the implementation of various reading comprehension strategies in English through different activities as well as written production strategies in their mother tongue aimed at deepening the study of different aspects of language and reinforce the area of reading comprehension.

It is very important that foreign language learners would be able to identify and use the most appropriate reading strategies to develop reading comprehension, according to the types of texts and reading purposes. In this sense, the promotion of adequate role as readers, learners will be able to familiarize themselves with content, cognition, and culture from the text and open the possibility of obtaining valuable information that can be applied in learner's benefit.

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