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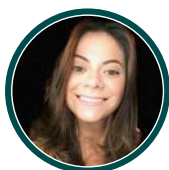


## Reading in English: A Case Study Developed During the COVID-19 Pandemic

## La lectura en inglés: estudio de caso desarrollado durante la pandemia del COVID-19



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## Reading in English: A Case Study Developed During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

In 2021, Costa Rica was still dealing with the sanitary conditions caused by the COVID-19 virus, which eminently impacted the educational system. Therefore, at Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica (UNA), the pedagogical praxis had to be mostly developed through the remote learning modality; this research explains the mediation process carried out in two English I courses, which specifically addressed the reading skill through four main principles and seven determined strategies. The results of this study show that students highly benefited and improved in the reading ability, which in turn, helped them in the listening, speaking, and writing macro-skills as well as in the grammar, phonetics, and vocabulary micro-abilities.

**Keywords:** Reading, principles, strategies, pedagogy, mediation

### Resumen

En el año 2021, Costa Rica aún estaba enfrentando las condiciones sanitarias generadas por el virus COVID-19, las cuales eminentemente impactaron el sistema educativo en gran medida. Por lo tanto, en la Universidad Nacional (UNA), la praxis pedagógica tuvo que ser mayoritariamente desarrollada a través de la presencialidad remota; esta investigación explica el proceso de mediación llevado a cabo en dos cursos de inglés I, los cuales enfatizaron la habilidad de lectura mediante cuatro principios y siete estrategias específicas. Los resultados de este estudio muestran que el estudiantado se benefició y mejoró en la destreza de lectura, lo que a su vez, les ayudó en las macro-habilidades auditiva, oral, y escrita como también en las micro-habilidades de gramática, fonética, y vocabulario.

**Palabras clave:** Lectura, principios, estrategias, pedagogía, mediación

## 1. Introduction

In 2021, the school year was drastically modified due to the sanitary conditions in Costa Rica. By this time, this country was still facing a high number of SarsCov2 cases and deaths; since 2020, educational settings struggled with similar sanitary conditions. As a result, over 2021, classes also had to be taught through the remote learning modality, in which learners worked by means of synchronous as well as asynchronous sessions in digital platforms. In the case of Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica (UNA), students, who were registered in English courses for majors other than English, took their lessons in this modality given that authorities tried to protect their population from getting infected by the COVID-19 virus, so face-to-face contact was always prevented. Therefore, the courses of this research were taught by using the Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) platform, which provided professors as well as learners with distinct didactic and learning resources since it was used under a license. The courses of this study were English I, which are offered by the School of Literature and Languages to all majors taught in the Omar Dengo Campus, Heredia. Students from all majors taught at this university must take one or two courses in English as part of their study plan; in this regard, learners from different careers as well as language levels enroll in the courses, and they are expected to reach an A1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in the first level or English course, thus students are able to communicate ideas and messages related to daily situations in varied contexts, for example, personal life, daily activities, hobbies, work interviews, etc.

Given the Costa Rican sanitary situation in 2021, learners took their lessons from their residencies by joining online classes or meetings in which they received two-hour or two-hour and thirty minutes (maximum time), twice a week. The English I course aimed students to achieve a basic level in their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills because most of them showed shallow background knowledge in terms of the target language and for most of them, these lessons were their first experience having classes totally taught in English. Most of these learners came from the public high school system, and they stated they knew some basic topics in English and words; however, more than half of them were not able to produce in the target language. For this reason, lessons were tailored according to the population's language level, and the initial classes were a review of basic contents and grammatical structures such as describing their daily routine (simple present tense), communicating ideas about past experiences (simple past tense), expressing information about ongoing events and situations (present continuous and/or progressive tense), among others. The main objective was to go over particular elemental contents at the time varied activities and exercises were implemented by addressing the four linguistic macro-abilities and some micro-skills such as grammar, phonetics, and vocabulary, mainly.

In addition, throughout the progression of the English I courses, readings with a wide variety of topics were implemented in each lesson as a way of having learners see the purpose and importance of the passages utilized over classes. In fact, Clarke and Silberstein (1977) (as cited in Brown, 2015) asserted that:

Research has shown that reading is only incidentally visual. More information is contributed by the reader than by the print on the page. That is, readers understand what they read because they can take the

stimulus beyond its graphic representation and assign it membership to an appropriate group of concepts already stored in their memories... Skill in reading depends on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world. (pp.136-137)

From this standpoint, the importance of reading comprehension lies in the fact that it fosters other linguistic macro and micro-abilities. For example, it can be seen as a source of input to improve the learners' oral production since it provides a wide range of vocabulary and more complex structures, in which language instructors can work on to make the most out of the texts. From the pedagogical mediation perspective, reading helps students get familiar with varied topics and its target vocabulary, insights, which later can be used in oral form. Once learners go through pre, during, and post reading activities, they may probably feel more confident to work on further oral activities such as debates, pair conversations, role-plays, small talks, among others. As a matter of fact, over the English I course, students worked on pre, during, and post reading activities that aimed to strengthen this receptive skill and to promote other language abilities. Throughout the development of these stages, four specific principles were followed to address the reading process: a) meaning-focused input, b) meaning-focused output, c) language-focused learning, and d) fluency development as well as seven strategies for reading a) reading as frequently as possible, b) previewing and predicting, c) brainstorming, d) highlighting new vocabulary, e) reading out loud, f) using contextual clues, and g) and asking questions, which are presented and discussed in the following section.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Types of Reading in Foreign Language Learning (FLL)

In Costa Rica, when learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), students usually believe that reading is just about knowing vocabulary isolatedly; if words are understood one by one, then, this skill should not represent an issue while learning the language. However, what is true about reading is that it goes beyond understanding all words in a passage; it is about getting the gist of it, relating the main ideas to the secondary ones, gaining insights about the reading, among others. In fact, Grabe and Stoller (2013) affirmed that "the overall goal is not to remember most of the specific details but to have a good grasp of the main ideas and supporting ideas, and to relate those main ideas to background knowledge as appropriate" (p. 6). From this viewpoint, educators should make sure their pedagogical mediation encourages their target population to enjoy reading in the foreign and/or second language, so they worry much less about knowing the meaning of each word they see and instead, they care more about getting insights from it.

In this regard, intensive from extensive reading must be differentiated. In the first case, readings are used as the means for having students gain knowledge in terms of particular linguistic features; that is texts are tailored according to the learners' language level and these readings are usually part of specific language programs. Thus,



comprehension is mostly focused on language characteristics the educator draws the students' attention to. Intensive reading contributes to the preparation in terms of grammatical aspects, verbal tenses, vocabulary, specific contents or themes, etc. On the other hand, extensive reading is a source of enjoyment while learning. It can be the learners' own goal to select a book and read it because they like to; in this scenario, students may probably learn new and more advanced grammar as well as develop larger vocabulary as they gain insights about the world. As individuals read for pleasure, the reading skill is fostered since the focus is on meanings rather than on specific linguistic characteristics; thus, enjoyment of the target language may increase and in turn, aid learners to continue discovering passages. Nation and Waring (2013) stated that "the major aim of extensive reading is to get learners doing large quantities of enjoyable reading" (p. 6); both authors affirmed that this kind of reading provides plenty of opportunities for working on comprehension, critical thinking, and fluency in this ability.

In the case of this study, the participants were exposed to intensive reading throughout the whole course since they were beginners whose mastery of grammar and vocabulary was overly basic at that time. Besides that, both language educators needed to draw the students' attention towards specific structures and lexicon; in such manner, they were leveled up and kept moving towards other language components. Intensive reading, of course, involves careful planning of the didactic materials and resources selected and presented in class; they must match the learners' level, but, at the same time, pose a challenge for them. In this way, students are implicitly pushed to pay attention to comprehension and to linguistic characteristics' of the text. For this English course, educators had a specific textbook, which was used for addressing the reading skill; however, this didactic resource was complemented with other materials and additional pre, during, and post-activities based on this ability.

## 2.2. Principles for Reading

This study was based on promoting the reading skill in the selected groups of research participants. In fact, for this purpose, Nation (2009) proposed four principles for working on the reading skill, which were the foundation for the current work. These principles intend to guide educational leaders by explaining how it is possible to achieve a meaningful reading process while teaching a foreign language; in this case, English; they are as follows: a) meaning-focused input, b) meaning-focused output, c) language-focused learning, and d) fluency development.

Nation (2009) stated that the meaning-focused input highlights that reading should be done with certain purposes, for example, "reading to search for information, reading to learn, reading for fun, reading to integrate information, reading to critique texts, and reading to write" (p. 6). Additionally, reading should be done according to the students' proficiency level and as a way for enhancing language competence; Nation (2009) mentioned that "learners should read with 98 percent coverage of vocabulary in the text so they can learn the remaining 2 percent through guessing from context" (p. 6). Both professors of the English I course visualized the reading skill as a source of input for the improvement of the learners' proficiency level and for having them gain insights about vocabulary and structures, which, afterwards, were used to work on the productive skills, speaking and writing.

The second principle, meaning-focused output, states that reading should be linked to other abilities such as listening, speaking or writing. This principle looks for an integral learning process since reading is a source that complements other abilities, as it was mentioned previously. In fact, this process was carried out in two different directions simultaneously to work on macro as well as on micro-skills, such as, pronunciation; for instance, students read out loud varied texts and later, they produced their own output by speaking or writing. Pronunciation was reinforced while learners read aloud. The educators of both courses made sure varied activities were implemented based on each reading; as a result, learners were prompted to produce in oral and/or written form in the target language.

The third principle, language-focused learning, acknowledges the relevance of support during the reading process. Likewise, it states that sub-abilities for reading should complement the process, such as vocabulary practice, phonetics, or grammatical explanations. Reading strategies like previewing, setting a purpose, predicting, posing questions, connecting background knowledge, guessing words from context, among others, should be always considered; these strategies would help individuals get familiar with any new text which may be in the format of newspapers, reports, stories, etc. In this regard, Grabe and Stoller (2013) claimed that “discourse-structure awareness of these types is often associated with reading strategies (e.g. identifying main ideas, inferring connections across parts of a text, recognizing organizational patterns in texts)” (p.230).

The last principle, fluency development, remarks the importance of promoting fluency within the reading process; this means that the material used in class should be familiar to students to a certain extent and vocabulary should be mostly known; consequently, comprehension of the text is high. For this purpose, readings must be engaging, interesting, and level-appropriate. This selection of material leads to a second key element which is the enjoyment and motivation towards the reading process. According to Brown (2015), “by stimulating reading for enjoyment or reading where all concepts, names, dates, and other details need not be retained, students gain an appreciation for the affective and cognitive window or reading: an entrée into new worlds” (p. 409). In this case, the language instructor’s role is crucial since this will highly depend on the pedagogical activities applied. For instance, the professors of the English I courses made sure that before going over a text, learners were engaged by eliciting questions, paying attention to the title and guessing about the content of the reading, showing pictures or videos, emphasizing on unknown words, highlighting the most important vocabulary, understanding graphs or simply approaching the students to a familiar context by relating the material to the learners' previous knowledge; all this preparation process aimed students to feel confident with the text and in turn motivated and ready to enjoy it.

Finally, it is a fact that reading a lot will certainly help learners gain insights about varied topics and micro-skills of the target language, implicitly, like grammar, sentence structure, verbal tenses, vocabulary, etc. Thus, promoting extensive reading in the language class will lead learners to focus on meanings rather than on form; in this way, they will feel more confident, engaged, and ready to use this knowledge in other contexts and by using other linguistic abilities.



### 2.3. Strategies for Addressing Reading in the EFL Class

Addressing reading is an essential component for learning a foreign language successfully; its implementation requires an appropriate mediation so that educational leaders can take advantage of all the benefits this macro-skill provides. Brown (2015) asserted that “for most second language learners who are already literate in a previous language, reading comprehension is primarily a matter of developing appropriate, efficient comprehension strategies. Some strategies are related to bottom-up procedures, and others enhance the top-down processes” (pp. 401-402). Additionally, this author proposes ten different strategies which are closely related to the ones implemented for this research. For this study, seven specific strategies were applied for addressing the reading skill in English. In the first place, raising awareness about the importance of this ability was essential. As a result, students were told that in every lesson, a text was going to be addressed; this process was part of each class’s mediation activities. Learners were encouraged to read as frequently as possible; hence, it became a habit over the class period. Second, previewing and predicting were always implemented; students were asked to read the title of the text and to observe its images with the purpose of guessing what the text was going to be about and why they thought so. For this purpose, professors made sure all passages included images, so learners were able to relate print to pictures in case they were unsure about the vocabulary included in the title and/or subtitle. Thirdly, brainstorming was promoted; thus, visual support to rely on as students were previewing and predicting what the text was about was always implemented. Language educators would use the corresponding whiteboard in Microsoft Teams; in this way, students could see the words they were saying. This vocabulary was discussed in oral form to generate input and output.

Additionally, participants were taught the importance of highlighting new words as they read and to think about them within the context of the sentence in which they were placed. After reading, they were encouraged to say out loud the words they highlighted and the rest of the class would provide definitions in oral form about them; consequently, new vocabulary was explained in the target language. Once this process was completed and all new words were addressed and reviewed, professors would play the recording of the text and would ask learners to read as they listened to it. After that, students were highly encouraged to participate by reading aloud, and they were taught the importance of using contextual clues to get the meaning of a given sentence rather than focusing on words they did not know or understand; in the same way, learners were prompted to ask questions about the text in case there was any unclear or unknown information.

## 3. Method of the research

### 3.1. Type of Study

This was qualitative research, which consisted of gathering data based on the students' experience in terms of the reading skill. In this regard, Tracy 2013 affirmed that “researchers using an inductive emic approach (a) begin with observing specific interactions; (b) conceptualize general patterns from these observations; (c) make tentative claims (that are then re-examined in the field); and d) draw conclusions that build theory” (p. 38). As it was

the case of this research, professors were part of the educational setting and aimed to collect data from the learners' natural context, the class, as they had contact with their educators, their classmates, and the target language. In addition, this study fits what Dornyei (2007) denominated the "insider meaning", which deals with the "subjective opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals and thus the explicit goal of research is to explore the participants' views of the situation being studied" (p. 38).

Moreover, this was a case study carried out at Universidad Nacional, precisely, at Omar Dengo Campus, Heredia, Costa Rica. It was anchored in real life; it was focused on a single unit or group of research participants, and it was based on providing holistic descriptions of the context and issue researched. In fact, according to Ary, Cheser, Sorensen, and Razavieh (2010):

Case studies can answer descriptive questions (what happened) or attempt to explain why something happened by looking at a process. They are particularistic (focused on a particular phenomenon, situation, or event), descriptive (providing as an end result a thick rich description), and heuristic (focused on providing new insights). The researcher believes that something can be learned in this specific case. (p. 454)

This research aimed to describe deeply the types of reading, its principles, and seven specific strategies for promoting this skill in the language class through the pedagogical mediation developed (what happened); this case describes the particularities of the context, participants, and process carried out in the next sections.

### **3.2. Context and Participants**

This case study was conducted in two different courses of English I, which took place over the first school cycle, at Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica, in 2021. These courses had a length of time of sixteen weeks, and the main purpose was the enhancement of basic skills, so students were able to express information related to personal life themes and daily situations in varied contexts. Besides that, this program aimed students to learn distinct grammatical structures, verbal tenses, and vocabulary related to the topics studied. In addition, the four linguistic macro-skills had to be equally integrated and/or balanced; thus, learners had the possibility to develop these abilities integrally. Given the national situation and sanitary conditions in Costa Rica, by 2021, which were caused by the Covid-19 virus, classes were carried out through the remote learning modality, which means that students took their lessons from home and by using a technological platform, in this case, Microsoft Teams. Universidad Nacional provided its academic community with a license for using this platform with no time limit and by including all the

different apps and resources it offers. The research participants took lessons twice a week for over two and half hours (maximum); this was done through synchronous sessions. After that, varied dynamic activities were assigned and students continued working in an asynchronous modality. For example, professors would assign listening exercises, individual or team oral-production activities, and reading and writing tasks. The participants of the course worked on the corresponding task(s) and posted them on the platform for the professors to provide them with feedback. In addition, the research participants' age range was between 18 to 56 years old; most of them were in their first and second year of their major, and the rest were taking their third and fourth year. In fact, there were 69 research participants; 30 men and 39 women, and all of them were from different parts of the country and were studying distinct majors such as Business Administration, Economy, Forest Science, International Commerce and Business, Geography, Librarianship, Math Teaching, Music Teaching, Pedagogy, Sociology, Topography, and Visual Arts.

### 3.3 Categories of Analysis

For this study, four specific categories of analysis were examined, which match each of the principles developed over the course of English I; a) meaning-focused input, b) meaning-focused output, c) language-focused learning, and d) fluency development. The first one aimed students to identify the purpose of reading a given text; the second one was based on having learners work on varied comprehension activities integrally, which was done by addressing the remaining linguistic macro-skills: a) listening, b) speaking, and c) writing and some linguistic micro-abilities such as a) grammar, b) pronunciation, and c) vocabulary through different activities. Additionally, language-focused learning referred to the practice and training that should be given in integrating strategies (reading as frequently as possible, previewing and predicting, brainstorming, highlighting new vocabulary, reading out loud, using contextual clues, and asking questions) for developing reading. Lastly, the fluency development category entailed the participants' involvement in activities related to the materials they read and their process of decoding and comprehending information.

### 3.4. Implementation of the Principles and Strategies for Reading

During the pedagogical praxis of the courses English I, varied passages and comprehension activities were implemented over each lesson. Every reading principle was addressed multiple times; for instance, the meaning-focused input was implemented by having students look at the text and its corresponding illustrations and guessing the purpose of reading it. Hence, they would search for specific information, observe the image and/or picture and relate it to the title and/or subtitle of the text, etc. In terms of the second principle, meaning-focused output, other skills were linked to the work of each text. Students were asked to work on listening exercises based on the reading, to discuss orally key elements of the text, either in pairs or in small groups, and to write short compositions; this could be in the format of reflections, changing the ending to the text, among others. For this specific principle, the main purpose was to integrate as many linguistic skills as possible. The third principle, language-focused learning

aimed to support the learners' process by complementing the previous one with short practices based on the linguistic micro-skills: grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. The participants' attention was drawn towards particular micro-skills as the reading was developed. Most of the time, learners were encouraged to read the text out loud; professors and classmates would listen to them and provide feedback in terms of grammar and phonetics mainly. Lastly, the fourth principle, fluency development, was addressed by having students read passages which were tailored to their language level and to the contents of the course; this means that the material used in class was familiar to a certain level and vocabulary was mostly known, so understanding of the text was high for learners. For this purpose, professors made sure texts were as engaging, interesting, and level-appropriate as possible. This selection of material led to a second key element which was related to the process of enjoyment while reading and to motivation. Over the implementation of each principle, data was gathered in the format of journals, so track was kept in terms of the learners' performance in the language.

### 3.5 Instrumentation

The instrument designed for gathering information was a questionnaire, which main purpose was to collect data about the students' perceptions in terms of their learning process in the reading skill. For the construction of the instrument, Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2023)'s tips for building up research instruments were taken into account, as they refer to the importance of making sure the categories of analysis or variables to be addressed match the research's objectives, the format in terms of the type of item, length, and language use, the revision and validity of the items included by colleagues, and the incorporation of feedback into the final version of the instrumentation. This questionnaire consisted of a Google Form, which included fifteen open as well as closed-ended questions. The research participants were asked about their progress, performance, and experience regarding the reading skill and how they believe their process could be improved and/or further enhanced in the next English course. This instrument was sent to each student's email address, and they were asked to complete it within a period of eight days. Also, to gather reliable data, the questionnaire was sent in the learners' native language, Spanish, so they were able to fully express and develop their ideas regarding the reading principles, strategies, and mediation process carried out over the sixteen-week academic cycle. Before implementing the questionnaire to the research participants, it was validated by two educators whose expertise is English teaching as a foreign language, at university level, too; their insights were considered for creating the final version of the instrument. It is paramount to mention that questionnaires were anonymous, so data regarding the students' personal information was not gathered; besides that, learners agreed to be part of the research through an informed consent, and they also had the opportunity to withdraw from the study whenever they felt like, with no consequence whatsoever. For analyzing the data, participants were coded by numbers, and the triangulation process was not done through any software; on the other hand, the process was done by the researchers.



## 4. Results and Discussion

Reading was addressed throughout the entire cycle by carrying out short activities and one more complex project; each exercise was designed by following the principles and strategies previously explained. At the end of the academic cycle, an instrument with fifteen closed and open-ended questions was sent to the research participants to gather data about their perceptions towards the reading skill. One of the questions revealed that 11.1% of learners think they have a very good ability to understand texts; 53.3% believe their ability is good according to their level; 31.3% perceive their ability is average, while 4.3% of the respondents state that their ability is still deficient. As a matter of fact, students were inquired about the factors that mostly affected their reading skill; most of them, 55.5%, agreed that understanding vocabulary interferes with their comprehension, followed by the fact of reading a text at an adequate speed; while few of them stated that getting the gist of main and secondary ideas turned out difficult for them.

Fortunately, most research participants seemed to have a positive attitude towards reading. Almost all of them, more specifically, 97.8%, pointed out that the texts used in class had a particular purpose within the learning process, and 86.7% stated that the readings selected were appropriate according to their English level. Moreover, 95.6% assured that context was appropriate to comprehend the texts and figure out unknown vocabulary. Lexicon constitutes an essential part of the reading process; knowing a wide range of words may assure an appropriate understanding of the text, a process that is linked to comprehension. Nunan (2015) affirmed that:

Learning and consolidating vocabulary by practicing it in context are crucial for building an effective vocabulary base. When reading, guessing the meaning on an unknown word is also an important strategy and a good antidote for students who want to look up every word in their dictionary. (pp. 110-111)

Most participants, 97.8%, confirmed that the pre and post activities were useful to improve their comprehension. In this regard, Nunan (2015) stated that when individuals read what they do is to “decode unfamiliar words” and then they “predict what is next”, which is done according to the person’s knowledge of the world (p.73). This can be done by giving a glimpse to the full text, eliciting questions, looking at the title and subtitles or interpreting pictures; these strategies may engage learners to the text and give some ideas about the content itself. In the case of the current study, vocabulary was addressed as a pre-activity; before going over each text, students were familiarized with some particular words in oral questions such as surveys, finding someone who activities or even matching exercises. In this regard, Brown (2015) affirmed that:

However, because the meaning of a good many unknown words can be predicted from their context, and because sometimes the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph is nevertheless still clear, learners should refrain from the frequent use of a bilingual dictionary. (p. 400)

Additionally, integrating macro and micro skills within the reading process was one of the main purposes of this study; Brown (2000) claims that integration plays an essential role in language teaching given that:

1. production and reception are quite simple two sides of the same coin; one cannot split the coin in two,
2. interaction means sending *and* receiving messages,
3. written and spoken language often (but not always!) bear a relationship to each other; to ignore that relationship is to ignore the richness of language,
4. for literate learners, the interrelationship of written and spoken language is intrinsically motivating reflection of language and culture and society,
5. by attending primarily to what learners can do with language, and only secondarily to the forms of language, we invite any or all the four skills that are relevant into the classroom arena,
6. often one skill will reinforce another; we learn to speak, for example, in part by modeling what we hear, and we learn to write by examining what we can read,
7. proponents of the whole language approach have shown us that in the real world of language use, most of our natural performance involves not only the integration of one or more skills, but connections between language and the way we think and feel and act. (pp. 234)

Throughout the pre, during, and post-reading activities, professors intended learners to read while practicing and mastering other productive abilities such as speaking and writing. The students (44.4%) perceived that reading truly improved their writing skill, while 31.1% claimed that it enhanced their listening, and 24.5% assured that it fostered their speaking ability. Additionally, 88.9% of learners agreed that the activities aided them in terms of the phonetic, spelling, and vocabulary micro-skills. Most of them stated that learning new vocabulary was one of the aspects which was boosted the most, followed by pronunciation, fluency, and spelling.

As it was stated above, the reading process intended to integrate other skills; for this reason, it was necessary to carry out a great variety of activities before, during, and after reading. Most students, 97.8%, acknowledged that discussions, picture-descriptions, and vocabulary exercises were adequate for them. Most of them (66.7%) claimed that reviewing vocabulary was very useful in class too; 48.9% agreed that looking at some pictures related to the reading was appropriate for them to guess meanings and think of the text's information before reading it, and finally, 46.7% indicated that having discussions about the texts was nurturing for their language performance. Achieving motivation while promoting reading was truly one of the greatest challenges for both educational leaders since only 20% revealed that they were always motivated while reading; 42.2% assured they were almost always motivated; 31.1% said they were sometimes motivated; finally, 6.7% agreed that they were rarely motivated. In this regard, Willis (2008) asserted that:

Motivated students are more likely to take more notice of words whose meanings they do not know, use strategies to understand challenging words, and recognize relationships between words. Interest and curiosity lead to the practices that build the neuronal circuits that bring students brain ownership of the new words. (p. 85)

Finally, one of the tasks of the course was to work on a reading project. Students had to read the Robin Hood book, which was a version specifically designed for beginner learners, so chapters were shorter and the grammar structures and vocabulary appropriate to their language level. Participants were asked to work on a creative chapter presentation, which they had to explain to the rest of the class; for this purpose, the speaking skill and the pronunciation micro-ability were highly addressed. Moreover, the research participants took part in an individual comprehension exercise in which general questions about the book were asked; they answered based on their comprehension of the characters, plot, and setting of the book. This activity was done through a Google Form, and learners showed themselves eager when the time of reviewing what they had learned from the book came. In this case, comprehension was promoted as well as the vocabulary micro-skill. At the end of the project, students worked on a final reflection in which they wrote their ideas and thoughts based on the book they read. For this section of the assignment, these questions were used as guidelines for learners to develop their composition: what insights have you gained as a result of: a) reading the Robin Hood book, b) working as a team on the corresponding oral presentation of one of the book's chapters, c) analyzing and reflecting on the most important characters, events, and settings of the story, and d) how would this new information and experiences be used to improve your English learning process? At the end of the process, 73.3% of the students indicated that working on the project was useful; 17.9% referred to it as entertaining; 4.4% as boring, and finally 4.4% not very useful. Learners provided some recommendations they considered helpful for improving their reading ability besides working on a project; they mentioned that it is necessary to have shorter texts they can read individually, to relate texts to their real-life, to read books more frequently, to have extra practice at home, to include more updated articles and/or passages, and to have audio books.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the results obtained and, on the analysis, carried out, it can be concluded, in general terms, that the participants truly benefited from this process. Reading, as a receptive skill, is sometimes overlooked since learners usually think it is just about knowing vocabulary and their corresponding meanings. However, it may be a source of lots of varied input if it is integrated along with other linguistic macro and micro-skills. Indeed, during the lessons of English I, students were encouraged to listen carefully to the recordings of the texts, to discuss them, to read aloud, to write short compositions based on the readings, etc., so the information from a text was used in multiple ways to provide students with constant and diverse input and feedback. By practicing what Willis (2008) asserted

“successful comprehension is augmented when students have practice with strategies for monitoring their understanding, increasing their intrinsic interest in the text, and creating goals and purpose for reading” (p. 128), reading was understood as a dynamic process from which students could benefit by working on different exercises and by enhancing and fostering other linguistic skills.

In fact, students referred to the project as a useful task for working on reading in and out of the class context given that they truly liked the text provided for this purpose, which was a beginner version of the Robin Hood book. Learners stated that they had previous knowledge of the story since it is very common, and this helped them deal with unknown vocabulary and/or phrases as they read. Indeed, the participants of this research claimed that they truly enjoyed creating a visual didactic resource and an oral presentation based on the assigned chapter of the book; this process allowed them to discuss with their peers the reasons why specific events happened previous, and, on the chapter, they had to present orally. It is crucial to mention that the participants were very creative in terms of the design and presentation of the corresponding chapters and that they looked forward to creating a visual resource that was catchy and engaging for the rest of their classmates. At the end of all the teams' oral presentations, professors led a discussion based on the students' experience while working on the project, and they said they really enjoyed reading the book given that they felt they were truly able to work on it; they felt the book was tailored to their language level, and they were able to deal with the information presented with no major difficulties. Moreover, after the oral presentation of the book, students worked on a comprehension exercise in which they answered a unique selection set of questions about the Robin Hood book; it is relevant to mention that most learners performed highly on this final task of the project. Willis (2008) denominated processes such as the previous one as “independent activities”, which can be “papers, projects, or original graphic organizers” (p. 144); since these:

can give students opportunities to demonstrate their comprehension and their improvement. This is also the time for students to chart their individual comprehension goal progress or write in their literature response logs so they can experience the dopamine-pleasure response to recognizing their growing skills and feel encouraged to persevere. (p. 144)

Building a path towards addressing reading in the language class, certainly, poses a challenge for educators who aim to help their students develop this skill. However, research suggests that implementing varied principles and the modeling of distinct strategies highly assist learners in processing printed stimuli and transform it into output while fostering other macro (listening, speaking, and writing) and micro (grammar, phonetics, and vocabulary) linguistic abilities, as the case of this study. Indeed, the results obtained show how pivotal fostering reading is, as students learn how to use strategies for developing comprehension as well.



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