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Título

**SHORT STORIES AS A STRATEGY OF SELF-STUDY
TO IMPROVE READING COMPREHENSION SKILL
IN FIRST-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.**

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1. Introduction.

Having an excellent understanding of a text is important for professional development. In this sense, developing reading in the first years of university may help students to get essential abilities for improving their competences in English language. This research project was carried out at Facultad Regional Multidisciplinaria FAREM-Estelí/ UNAN-Managua, with first-year university students of English. The aim of the mentioned paper was to determine the reading comprehension difficulties that the students face during their language acquisition process and how they can use short stories as a self-study strategy to improve by themselves. In this paper, we describe a set of methods to teach university students how to develop reading comprehension skills while reading different short stories as a self-study activity.

To get reliable information, an experiment was implemented by using short stories in the classroom. It consisted of reading a text and looking for specific details, such as unknown vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical tenses and others. The idea was to help students to get a better comprehension of the reading. The effectiveness of these kinds of activities was reported and shown, because of their multiple benefits for students who are studying English major in the university, given that they can develop their skills on their own.

Problem statement.

Every year thousands of students finish their secondary school and decide to study English as a degree. Notwithstanding, they are not ready to tackle the new challenges that university life implies. For students majoring in English, one of these challenges is the time allotted to each class which is very because the learners do not have enough time to practice reading in the classroom, even more when they are studying only on Saturday.

Learning English is a complex task and the little time that students devote to study it is a serious problem, given that students will not gain enough competences in this foreign

language. That is why this important question emerges: How can short-stories as a self-study strategy contribute to first-year students for developing their reading comprehension?

To answer this question, we use some literature to underpin our proposal.

2. Literature review.

This section contains a definition for those important terms that establish a strong theoretical background for this article.

2.1. Input Theory.

One of the most important theories about learning a new language is the theory of input. Suggested by Stephen Krashen defines the learning of a new language as its acquisition only by means of comprehending messages in that language. Ricardo E (2019) in his analysis cites Stephen Krashen's words to explain the following:

The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production.

2.2. Extensive Reading Approach.

The term extensive reading, according to Carrillo (2013) is attributed to Harold Palmer, who used it in his book *The Scientific Study of Language*, in 1917 to signify the rapid reading of one book after another. Extensive reading is defined as the reading of large amounts of material or long texts, for global or general understanding with the intention of obtaining

pleasure from the texts. Extensive reading is an efficient approach to improve the reading comprehension skill, since extensive reading promotes the development of skills such as writing, oral ability, and others.

2.3. Intensive Reading Approach

The idea of blending extensive reading approach and intensive reading approach arises from the fact that we can use the first-one to look for an overall meaning from the text in a as students have fun, and the second-one to find a specific piece of information in the text. For the British Council (2010), Extensive Reading involves learners reading texts for enjoyment and to develop general reading skills, while Intensive Reading involves learners reading with specific learning aims and tasks.

2.4. Self-Study

Extensive Reading approach can be used as self-study technique to improve the reading comprehension, taking into account that self-study is an efficient way to take advantage of free time. Grade Power Learning (2018), states that "Self-study is a learning method where students direct their own studying—outside the classroom and without direct supervision". As students practice extensive reading through the use of short-stories and take it to the level of self-study, they will gradually increase their interest in reading, which will allow them to develop their reading comprehension skills. Therefore, this method is essential to make the reading process pleasant; in such a way, that the students get interested and organize a specific time for reading.

3. Materials and methods.

This section describes the actions taken into account to investigate the research problem and the procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyze information applied to understanding the problem.

3.1. Population and Study Sample.

We selected the population and study sample through intentional and convenient sampling, since through this method more detailed information of the phenomenon under study is

obtained. According to Creswell (2007), " the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p.125). Therefore, the information is elicited from first-year students at FAREM Estelí, who are studying on the Saturday shift; in this group there are 38 students, which are the population that was studied; from this group of students, 5 students were chosen to obtain information from them.

3.2. Instruments and experiments.

A set of instruments was selected for eliciting information from the participants involves in this research; these instruments were: group experiment, qualitative interview and observation. Those give the opportunity to be closer to the students for investigating the problem they have in reading and for knowing their viewpoints and their opinions about the topic.

First, a group experiment was applied; this consisted on reading a motivational short story name "The blind girl", which students had to manage, they read it individually, but then some students were chosen for reading aloud and checking the pronunciation of the words; then they looked for specific details in the reading such as main characters, grammatical tenses, prepositions, conjunctions, main problem of the reading, the moral part of the reading and others.

While students were working on the reading, we observed their reaction when they were using short stories; after that five students were selected for the interview, and establishing a comparison between the observation and experiment with the students` own opinions.

4. Analysis and discussion.

As was said before, reading is one of the most important skills for English learners. It may help students to get a lot of vocabulary, how to pronounce words correctly, and at the same time use those words in a specific context.

During the data collection was clearly observed, the student's motivation for reading, but it comes to discussion, how prepared the students are to comprehend a text or a simple paragraph. To clear this doubt, the experiment, the observation and the interviews were effective tools.

At the beginning it was difficult to determine how students can develop reading comprehension in their first year, given that they were taken oral communication, instead of something related to reading. For this reason, we decided to find a way to use a short story in activities outside of the university as self-study. Bearing in mind this, the English teacher of first year was asked for permission to apply an experiment and observe the students' reactions when they are reading short stories. During data collection through the observation instrument, it was observed that students easily managed to understand the short story. Then they mentioned that they can enhance step by step and learn a lot of things using them for studying.

When students were asked about their reading habits, they mentioned that they like to read, but sometimes they do not know what kind of literature is adequate for them, besides most of the time the vocabulary of extensive books is too heavy for beginners, also they do not have enough time for practicing inside the classroom.

The interrelationship between these two approaches is very interesting. It has functioned as the basis of our research and have opened the path for new experiences that promote not only pedagogical innovation but also provide efficient alternatives through which the students can improve their English language skills in an efficient and independent way, in the same way, while the teacher uses the intensive reading approach at school, the students can use the extensive reading at home, as well.

As a conclusion, this research could be a great source for those who want to optimize their free time and learning not only inside the classroom. Nowadays there are a lot of methods for learning English, but reading is most complete for those students who are studying only on Saturday, they have to realize the importance of being responsible for their own knowledge.

5. Final words.

As English learners it has been a great experience to work with this thematic, for growing as professionals and to develop our own skills by using reading as a strategy, it will be useful to help others who are facing different problems with English language acquisition, for showing them some ways to enhance.

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