

Autonomous Learning Strategies in the Reading Comprehension of High School Students

Estrategias de aprendizaje autónomo en la comprensión lectora de estudiantes de secundaria

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Summary

When observing in the high school as well as higher education classrooms, the way adolescents and young people study, the idea of knowing if they have strategies for autonomous learning and if this variable explained to some extent a critical problem in Peru arose: reading comprehension. That is why it was proposed as a purpose of the study, to know if the autonomous learning strategies, its dimensions and indicators have some explanatory power on reading comprehension. Under a causal correlational design of an exploratory nature, the following instruments were applied: Autonomous work strategies questionnaire (CETA) that evaluates the strategies of expansion, collaboration, conceptualization, planning, preparation of exams and participation and PECL 2 test to measure levels of reading comprehension: literal, inferential and evaluative in a group of 144 students from educational institutions from the districts of Majes in Arequipa and Villa Rica in Pasco. Among the most important results was that 79.33% of students reached a level in process regarding the use of autonomous learning strategies and 62.7% reached the same level in reading comprehension. Likewise, it was found that 34.4% of the reading comprehension variable is accounted for the use of autonomous learning strategies. Out of that total, 25.8% for expansion strategies, 14.3% for collaboration strategies, 28.7% for conceptualization strategies, 19.6% for exam preparation strategies and finally, 19.5% for participation strategies.

Keywords: Autonomous Learning Strategies; Reading Comprehension; High School Students.

Resumen

Al observar en las aulas de clase del nivel secundaria, así como del nivel superior la forma como los adolescentes y jóvenes estudian, surgió la idea de conocer si cuentan con estrategias para el aprendizaje independiente y de si esta variable explicaba en alguna medida un problema crítico en el Perú: la comprensión lectora. Es por ello, que se planteó como propósito del estudio, conocer si las estrategias de aprendizaje autónomo, sus dimensiones e indicadores tienen algún poder explicativo sobre la comprensión lectora. Bajo un diseño correlacional causal de carácter exploratorio, se aplicaron los siguientes instrumentos: Cuestionario de estrategias de trabajo autónomo (CETA) que evalúa las estrategias de ampliación, colaboración, conceptualización, planificación, preparación de exámenes y participación y prueba PECL 2 para medir niveles de comprensión de la lectura: literal, inferencial y criterial en un grupo de 144 estudiantes de IE de los distritos de Majes en Arequipa y Villa Rica en Pasco. Entre los resultados más importantes se obtuvo que el 79.33% de estudiantes alcanzaron un nivel en proceso en cuanto al uso de estrategias de aprendizaje autónomo y el 62.7% alcanzó el mismo nivel en la comprensión lectora; así mismo, se halló que el 34.4% de la variable comprensión lectora es explicada por el uso de estrategias de aprendizaje autónomo, de ese total, un 25.8% por las estrategias de ampliación, 14.3% por las estrategias de colaboración, 28.7% por las estrategias de conceptualización, 19.6% por las estrategias de preparación de exámenes y finalmente un 19.5% por las estrategias de participación.

Palabras clave: Estrategias de aprendizaje autónomo; Comprensión lectora; Estudiantes de secundaria.

Introduction

Have regular basic education students developed the minimum skills necessary for self-learning that will enable them to face with the challenges of Peruvian higher education, of the globalization of information, or of the digital transformation of education? Upon completion of regular basic education, do students really understand what they read? All these questions arise because reality reveals that students have a series of deficiencies and needs in comparison with the minimum required standards.

During the colonial period until the twentieth century, education in Peru was provided under the behavioral model in which knowledge was delivered memoristically without further critical and reflective participation of the student. In the twenty-first century, the educational model has been based on a constructivist approach, but there is still no full knowledge of the new teaching-learning processes by educational institutions, teachers, and students. This is why students remain unable to develop many basic competences and study habits since passivity for self-learning persists even when constructivist strategies are applied. This is evident because very few students reviewed the material before attending classes, that is, poor habits for self-learning.

This problem is observed with higher incidence in the provinces of Peru due to their higher levels of poverty and poor infrastructure, where there are still multi-teacher schools without the minimum educational resources and materials to ensure quality teaching, and even less so, in line with the vertiginous changes that are occurring with education 3.0 due to the fact that the current digital gap is huge.

For students to achieve self-learning, especially in higher education, they need to have developed conscious, reflective, critical thinking, to be capable of using strategies to learn independently by themselves. This requires students to be aware of their abilities, skills and attitudes towards learning: initiative to be proactive, to acquire more knowledge than that provided by teachers; responsibility, ability to help teachers and their peers so that they can work in teams with an appropriate level of communication to transmit ideas within a framework of tolerance; ability to solve problems, be prepared beforehand for exams; self-discipline to plan their own learning; and finally, persistence to not drop out.

Therefore, it can be inferred that the average level of self-learning is not the one desired, as a result of the observation made of the students, their performance in the classroom, and the quality of their submitted papers; if they are not properly advised and monitored by teachers. Students have not developed the habit of systematically using learning strategies to achieve better academic results. López (2002) corroborates that experts affirm that there is an urgent need to teach how to learn because the lack of use of learning strategies by students increases dropout. Additionally, there is evidence of student's poor ability to interpret and transfer information, skills that are linked to reading skills.

With respect to reading comprehension (Gaines & Meca 2013 quoted by Ceplan 2014) indicates that the countries leading the rankings of the education sector such as South Korea, Singapore, and Finland, are emphasizing the integrated development of citizens, that is, besides mathematical and reading comprehension skills, they are developing soft skills in participatory, collaborative and tolerance spaces, with mastery of information technologies. The questions asked at the beginning of this research work help to take a look at what is happening in the country

and to make a diagnosis in order to have a baseline to propose a redirection of the teaching-learning process according to the changes that are occurring in the educational sphere worldwide.

In Peru, according to the consensus reached by educational institutions, the fourth objective for quality education is to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (Ceplan, 2017). According to the evaluation of the reading comprehension level of second grade primary school students, it is observed that it has increased from 15.9% in 2007 to 49.8% in 2015. In light of this national reality of such low levels of reading comprehension, the question is if students learn and develop the competences proposed by the Ministry of Education.

In order to answer this question, according to El Comercio (2016), the PISA 2015 test determines that Peru, although it is the Latin American country that has improved the most in general terms, still ranks 62 out of 70 participants below Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay. The results obtained are below the OECD world average; Asian countries such as Singapore, China, and South Korea lead the PISA results.

The causes of the low levels of reading comprehension are diverse: lack of motivation, poor vocabulary, development of cognitive skills involved, scarce previous knowledge, lack of knowledge and/or lack of mastery of comprehension strategies and metacognitive strategies to mention a few (López, 2010). Under the concept that in today's society students need to be able to learn by themselves and understand what they read, the first step is to know which of the above-mentioned variables significantly explains reading comprehension; therefore, the purpose of this study was to know to what extent self-learning strategies impact reading comprehension.

Among the research studies linked to this work are those of Koosha, Abdollahi and Karimi (2016), who conducted a research at the Islamic Azad University on the existing relationship between three variables: self-esteem, autonomy and reading comprehension, in a random sample of 121 foreign language students, finding a high correlation of 0.911 between self-learning and reading comprehension and an R^2 of 0.82 at 95% confidence level. Six years before in the same university, Zarei and Gahremani decided to carry out a research on the relationship between self-learning and reading comprehension in a sample of 68 students from four universities of Iran. The results obtained through the Pearson correlation and one-way ANOVA regression coefficient, confirmed a significant, but low relation $r = 0.264$ at a level of confidence of 95%. On the other hand, the regression analysis results to identify which of the dimensions of the self-learning scale better predicts reading comprehension was not statistically significant. Likewise, Gaeta (2015) presented the results of her research: personal aspects that favor the self-regulated learning in academic text comprehension in university students in Valencia, Spain. She worked with a significant sample of 364 first cycle university students with the purpose of analyzing the proposed variables. The results of the regression analysis confirmed that the goals set by the student favorably influence the use of self-regulated learning strategies in reading comprehension.

Among the national studies is the proposal of Sevillano (2015) who studied the relationship between the variables: learning strategies, motivation and reading comprehension, in 217 fourth grade high school students to whom the multi-factor questionnaire on learning strategies and motivation and the DET reading comprehension test were applied, respectively, confirming the relationship between the variables studied. Guevara (2014) studied the cooperative learning strategies, one of the dimensions of self-learning, with the purpose of demonstrating the existence

of the relationship between the cooperative learning strategies and reading comprehension, in a sample of 85 students from the Faculty of Education of the Amazon National University of Madre de Dios, through the application of two 40-item questionnaires with a high reliability of 0.882 and 0.839, respectively. The results obtained determined that there is no significant relationship neither between the study variables nor between the dimensions studied.

It is within this framework that the objective proposed was to determine the predominant self-learning strategy which influences the reading comprehension of fifth grade high school students of public educational institutions in Pasco and Arequipa, starting from the question Which is the predominant self-learning strategy which influences the reading comprehension of fifth grade high school students of public educational institutions in Pasco and Arequipa?

Self-Learning Strategies

Esteban, Ruiz, and Cerezo (1996) consider that strategies are actions that have been consciously organized, and procedures that emerge from the student's own initiative, organized and planned by the own learner to solve specific learning tasks. These learning strategies are linked to metacognition; strategic behavior includes deliberation and flexibility in the selection of own resources and capabilities, planning and evaluation of actions or procedures.

In the order of the previous ideas, strategies are processes that involve decision-making and procedural knowledge on the most adequate steps that the student will need to choose to deal with a task (Mayor, Suengas and González, 1993; Monereo, 1994). They depend on the context of the student, and the characteristics of the specific learning situation with the objective of achieving learning and thus acquiring competences.

Appropriate use of these strategies will enable the student to develop self-learning. The student will have control and self-regulation of his/her learning process, thus leading to the achievement of competences. To this end, it is essential for the student to acquire a wide set of strategies that will be chosen according to the characteristics of each student. The development and application of self-learning strategies require, at first, teacher's support as a motivator and facilitator (López-Aguado, 2010). The following strategies, proposed by the same author, have been considered for this study:

Expansion strategies, aimed at developing student informational competences expressed in the student's ability to search for information to expand that received by the student in the classroom, refer to consulting other physical or digital bibliographic sources - use of Internet, and to carrying out complementary activities, all this with the purpose of expansion and improving the understanding of some concept.

Collaboration strategies refer to knowing and using all the resources provided by the educational institution, to carrying out collaborative work with classmates by exchanging summaries, materials, information from the Internet to solve assignments, and to clarifying doubts with classmates.

Conceptualization strategies, related to the use of different knowledge organizers such as schemes, mind maps, concept maps, synoptic charts, comparative charts, among others, and to

the use of reading strategies such as underlining, summarization, etc. to make summaries; they are conceptualization strategies that will develop self-learning.

Preparation strategies, self-learning will be developed and achieved as a result of the student being the main actor of his/her learning and this begins by planning his/her academic activities and the amount of time that he/she will allocate for study and academic assignments, and ends with the self-evaluation of his/her learning process.

Participation strategies, the self-learner student knows that he/she needs to actively participate in the learning process from reading all the material provided by the teacher, participate in the organized classroom activities such as presentations and debates, prepare for exams, among other activities.

Planning strategies, related to the student's attitude and actions in the classroom such as actively participating in the classroom, taking notes of the explanations made by the teacher as well as the inputs or opinions of classmates, writing down his/her own doubts and then clarifying them using the expansion strategies. Finally, these strategies seek that the student test the knowledge he/she is acquiring.

Reading Comprehension

According to Solé (2007), reading comprehension is defined as the reader's understanding of the written language, with the following components: the text, the reader and his/her previous knowledge, sufficient cultural background. It is also necessary for the reader to have skills to decode a text, give his/her ideas, objectives as well as previous experiences, and finally be able to verify and reject predictions.

Pinzas's proposal (2006) can be added to the above-mentioned definition, stating that in order for reading comprehension to occur, it is necessary to interpret meanings in a way that makes sense of the text. Therefore, this ability needs to be developed in the early age learner through stimulation from interpreting images to asking questions in order to achieve the goal of understanding. It can be added that this entire process takes place in a socio-cultural context (Solórzano and Montero, 2011).

In order for the student to understand what he/she reads, it is important for the teacher to provide him/her assistance to develop and achieve this competence. As stated by Solé (2004), we need to have clear objectives when reading, to know what is expected from the text, to ask ourselves about the text, and to be aware of whether we are understanding, to make inferences, to image. Likewise, the teacher also needs to teach the student to differentiate the main ideas from the secondary ones, to make summaries, schemes. Therefore, it can be concluded that in order to understand a text it is not enough to read the text but to add additional activities to the reading process to really understand what has been read. Finally, it is concluded that in order to achieve reading comprehension as a competence, the student needs to acquire knowledge, develop cognitive and attitudinal processes, and develop linguistic skills (Cassany, Luna and Sanz, 2005).

Ausubel (1963) quoted by Solé (2004) explains significant learning from a constructivist approach:

Learning something is equivalent to forming a representation, an own model, of that which is presented as a learning object. It means being able to assign meaning to the content in question in a process that leads to a personal, subjective construction of something that exists objectively. This process refers to the possibility of relating in a non-arbitrary and substantive manner what is already known and what is intended to be learned. (p. 38).

From this perspective there is a link between reading, understanding, and learning because we read to learn in a meaningful way. This process takes place when what is being read is really understood. This affirmation is valid when the text informs the reader the new perspectives and knowledge; it approaches the world of pre-existing meanings in the reader. Consequently, a series of strategies is used to ensure learning and achieve meta-comprehension, which are based on the use of reading strategies: before, during and after reading, slow reading, re-reading, self-questioning about the content of the text, use of underlining, summarization, preparation of summaries, use of knowledge organizers, among others.

Vallés (2005) considers that a student capable of understanding what he/she reads will have access to culture and learning in all spheres; a competence that is also basic to search for and find information, and to solve routine and academic problems, and, most importantly, to develop his/her imagination. And at a cognitive level, it will help the student develop his/her information processing abilities and functions in order to value and internalize the information.

With respect to the components or dimensions of the reading comprehension variable, the levels proposed by Solé (1987) were taken into account:

Literal reading comprehension is the most elementary, in which the reader only makes a syntactic and semantic recognition of the text, without any intervention of the cognitive or intellectual structure. At this level, there is only a recognition of the explicit information such as the main and secondary ideas, the sequence of actions, identification of places, actors, facts and the identification of reasons for the occurrence of the events (Gordillo and Flórez, 2009).

Inferential reading comprehension, in which the previous knowledge stored in the student's long-term memory plays an important role because it will allow the student to construct the meanings of the text read (Vega 2012). This construction takes place through three cognitive processes: infer, summarize and elaborate the meaning of the text searching in its network of relationships and associations to explain the text more broadly because it provides to the text more information, previous experiences, formulates hypotheses, adds new ideas and requires a higher level of abstraction.

Evaluative reading comprehension, considered the highest level because in order to achieve it, the reader needs to have developed the ability to make value judgments of the reading, which will enable him/her to accept or reject, with arguments, the proposal after having been evaluated. The judgment criteria the reader may use have the character of accuracy, acceptability or probability (Gordillo and Flórez 2009).

Method

The research was carried out under the quantitative approach and is of substantive type, with a causal-correlational design since the aim was to find cause-effect relations between the self-learning strategies and reading comprehension variables.

The instruments used to collect the information were the Self-Learning Strategies Questionnaire (CETA) of the University of Leon - Spain, with 45 items distributed in six types of strategies: expansion, collaboration, conceptualization, planning, preparation of exams and participation strategies, and a Likert-type design with an ordinal scale of 1 to 5 from never to always. The result of the CETA factor analysis showed a Kaiser - Meyer - Olkin (KMO) index of 0.845 in its original version. Likewise, Bartlett's sphericity test has a significance of .000, suggesting that there are significant interrelations between the variables reporting the adjustment of the data to a factor analysis model.

With respect to reading comprehension, the PECL 2 test was developed to measure reading comprehension levels: literal, inferential and evaluative, creating a rubric to evaluate the performance of the students. The instrument was validated in terms of content by experts in the subject whose final opinion was that the instrument was applicable. Likewise, the reliability exhibited an Alpha of 0.657, considered acceptable for performance tests. Both instruments were applied to all fifth grade high school students of 3 public educational institutions; 51 students of the institution located in Majes, Arequipa, and 93 students of two institutions located in Villa Rica, Pasco.

Results

Table 1.

Strategies for self-learning by fifth grade high school students of public educational institutions in Pasco and Arequipa, expressed in levels

Levels	Self-learning	Expansion strategies	Collaboration strategies	Conceptualization strategies	Planning strategies	Preparation for exams strategies	Participation strategies
Initial	16.0	15.3	23.3	20.7	60.0	6.7	12.0
In progress	79.3	74.0	74.0	79.3	40.0	60.7	74.0
Achieved	4.7	10.7	2.7	0.0	0.0	32.7	14.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Values expressed in percentage

The table shows the level of use of the self-learning strategies, and of the six dimensions corresponding to fifth grade high school students of public educational institutions in Pasco and Arequipa. Seventy nine point three percent of students are in the In Progress level with respect to the use of self-learning strategies, and only 4.7% reached the Achieved level. In terms of

dimensions, the planning strategies had greater difficulties with 60% of students being in the Initial level, while the preparation strategies obtained the best results with 32.7% of students being in the Achieved level.

Table 2.

Reading comprehension level of fifth grade high school students of public educational institutions in Pasco and Arequipa

Levels	Reading comprehension	Literal level	Inferential level	Evaluative level
Initial	26.7	38.7	17.3	68.7
In progress	62.7	59.3	52.0	26.7
Achieved	10.7	2.0	30.7	4.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Values expressed in percentage

The results shown in table 2 confirm the already known national results. Only 10.7% reached the Achieved level, 62.7% the In Progress level, and 26.7% the Initial level. With respect to the reading comprehension dimensions, the evaluative level showed greater difficulties with 68.7% of students being in the Initial level, while the inferential level exhibited that 30.7% of students had reached the Achieved level.

Table 3.

Model Adjustment

	Model	-2 log of verisimilitude	Chi-square	gl	Sig.
	Only intersection	152.973			
Self-learning variable dimensions	Final	102.545	50.428	10	.000
Expansion dimension indicators		75.345	39.166	4	.000
Collaboration dimension indicators		54.870	36.001	4	.001
Conceptualization dimension indicators		72.157			

	31.311	40.845	4	.000
Planning dimension indicators	58.796			
	32.250	26.546	4	.000
Preparation for exams dimension indicators	58.122			
	35.168	22,955	4	.000
Participation dimension indicators	66.926			
	40.536	26.390	4	.000

Link function: Logit

Table 3 shows that in all cases the significance value obtained is lower than the proposed significance level of 0.05. Accordingly, it can be affirmed that the model is not suitable only with the constant and requires the proposed variable with its dimensions and indicators.

Table 4.
Pseudo R-cuadrado

	Self-learning	Expansion strategies	Collaboration strategies	Conceptualization strategies	Planning strategies	Preparation for exams strategies	Participation strategies
Cox and Snell	.286	.214	.118	.238	.162	.142	.161
Nagelkerke	.344	.258	.143	.287	.196	.171	.195
McFadden	.190	.136	.071	.154	.100	.087	.100

Link function: Logit

Table 4 shows the results of the Nagelkerke test, which accounts for the reading comprehension variability accounted for by the model, for both the dimensions and the indicators of each proposed dimension.

It is observed that 34.4% of the reading comprehension variable is accounted for by the use of self-learning strategies. Out of this 34%, 25.8% of the reading comprehension is accounted for by the expansion strategies, 14.3% by the collaboration strategies, 28.7% by the conceptualization strategies, 19.6% by the preparation for exams strategies, and finally 19.5% by the participation strategies.

Table 5
Parameter estimation

		Estima tion	Stan dard error	Wald	gl	Sig.	Confidence interval of 95%	
							Lower limit	Upper limit
S.L.E.	[expansion=1]	- 2.444	.894	7.478	1	.006	-4.195	-.692
Exp. E.	[complementa ry activities=1]	-2.734	.837	10.66 0	1	.001	-4.376	-1.093
Concep. E.	[visual=1]	-2.648	.753	12.38 2	1	.000	-4.124	-1.173
Prep. Ex. E.	[reading=2]	1.426	.454	9.861	1	.002	-2.316	-.536
Part. E.	[doubt=1]	-2.228	.661	11.35 7	1	.001	-3.525	-.932

Table 5 summarizes the indicators and the levels that influence the most the reading comprehension variable. It is observed that not all the indicators in the model are explanatory in nature; only some of the expansion, conceptualization, preparation for exams and participation strategies dimensions. With respect to the predominant indicator of the expansion strategies, the complementary activities are of greater explanatory character. The predominant indicator of the conceptualization strategies dimension is the use of visual schemes. With respect to the preparation for exams strategies is the reading of materials. Finally, the predominant indicator of the participation strategies dimension that influence the reading comprehension is the clarification of doubts.

Discussion

It was found in the study population that self-learning strategies were related to reading comprehension and that each of the dimensions had an explanatory character to a greater or lesser extent. Similar results were obtained by the Iranian Koosha, Abdollahi, and Karimi (2016) who found a high correlation between self-learning (SL) and reading comprehension (RC), and that the relation of SL to RC accounted for 82%. There are also the results obtained by Zarei and Gahremani in 2010 who found a low relationship between SL and RC in university students from the same country; however, no prediction was found in the regression analysis. There are few empirical studies directly related to the objective of this study that can be used as a national reference. One of the few is the study by Sevillano (2015) who found a relationship between learning strategies, motivation, and RC. In this regard, López-Aguado (2010) maintains that by using self-learning strategies, the student will better regulate and control his/her learning. This aspect is of vital importance in the reading process. When there is no teacher's support or a mediator of the reading process, it is the student who needs to use various strategies to ensure

effective reading. Therefore, it is important to know what to do and how to ensure this process called metacomprehension (Ríos 1991), that is, the knowledge and regulation of various cognitive strategies and resources to deal with a text. Thus, the expansion, conceptualization, preparation and participation strategies in which indicators significantly accounting for RC were found, suggest that if a student has strategies to expand information and improve the understanding of some concept, knows and puts into practice how to make visual organizers, plans the use of time, self-evaluates his/her learning, and actively participates in the classroom, he/she will successfully comprehend the text, according to the model found.

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