

Level of Reading Comprehension of Dominican EFL College Students.

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## *Abstract*

Universidad Tecnológica de Santiago (UTESA) is a university considered as one of the highest ranking universities in the Dominican Republic, it is one of the few to be recognized by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology as an autonomous university for its constant research and updating. This university offers to college students some interesting and important fields as Architecture and Engineering, Health Sciences, Economic and Social Sciences, Science and humanities, Graduates School.

Reading in a foreign language: A reading problem or a language problem? Alderson (1984) ascribes poor reading in L2 to four possible causes: (a) poor reading ability in the first language; (b) inadequate knowledge of the foreign language; (c) incorrect strategies for reading in the foreign language; (d) reading strategies in the first language not being employed in the foreign language, due to inadequate knowledge of the foreign language.

This research work will study the Modern Languages Career which belong to the Science and Humanities field. The career will be examined in the level of reading comprehension in English as a second language for the contribution of the development of itself.

Learning a second language or a foreign language implies having some linguistic skills so that the process of its development is more effective. The ability to read, write, speak and comprehend a foreign language are key points for its domain. The lack of such skills represents some problems that can be detected in the learning process of the language in question. The level of reading comprehension in the study of a foreign language is essential for the absorption of knowledge and better acquire of the language.

Key words:

Foreign language, reading comprehension, learning, English language, L2 (second language).

## *Introduction*

For years, several authors have studied the ways in which reading could be taught effectively. At the beginning, the conception of reading was merely that of a decoding process (Carrell, 1998). In contrast, authors such as Dechant (1991) affirmed that reading is about meaning and comprehension of meaning. As she said "comprehension is the goal and purpose of reading. Without it there is no reading" (p. 9).

Many researchers argue that reading in a foreign language is similar to reading in the first language. Goodman (1982) pointed out that the reading process is universal for all the languages since making meaning from written texts happens in all of them.

According to Zúñiga (2001), reading in a first language and a foreign language are processes that share many things. The author states, with Goodman (1982), that both are meaning making processes from printed texts. Moreover, both are transactions between the reader, the text and the context. Both depend on prior knowledge, knowledge of systems, and use of cognitive and affective strategies; and both are vehicles for getting or changing knowledge (p. 105).

The focus of this research work is dedicated to study the Modern languages college students of UTESA and their level of reading comprehension in English as second language.

Chapter I is dedicated to describe the bases which are found the topic showing, its objectives and guiding the research to some important aspects covering the focus field of the research.

Chapter II is focused on the contribution that made the schema theory adding important information concerning to the topic which is based in how students use prior knowledge to comprehend.

Chapter III exposes the bottom up and bottom down model for helping students to use distinctive reading mythologies.

Chapter IV examines the methodological design which is conform for the tools and the population that will show the results and the conclusion of the topic.

## Chapter I: Theoretical Framework

### *Statement of the problem*

Many years ago reading in English as a foreign language was perceived as a passive process. It was conceived as a decoding process of reconstructing the author's intended meaning by means of recognizing the printed letters and words, and building up a meaning for a text from the smallest textual units at the bottom which are letters and words to larger units at the top like phrases, sentences, clauses (Carrell, 1998).

During the reading process it is the reader who has the role of giving meaning to the words and sentences he reads in order to build knowledge. The construction of meaning involves the reader connecting information from the written text with previous knowledge to arrive at meaning or understanding

For the reasons of why to develop a good reading comprehension in English as a second language is an indispensable require for a better acquiring of a L2, this work is to place emphasis on to examine and to determine possible causes of a poor level of reading comprehension in English as a second language for the Modern Languages students of UTESA.

### *Importance of the problem*

According to Paul Shoebottom, "Good readers can understand the individual sentences and the organizational structure of a piece of writing. They can comprehend ideas, follow arguments, and detect implications." Shoe bottom goes on to say that the best way to acquire a large vocabulary is to read extensively. The students have the opportunity to recognize words and expressions that they already know or have learned in class, and to learn new vocabulary by taking note of unfamiliar words and using a dictionary to find their meaning. Books and other authentic texts are rich in idiomatic language that so much of the English language is based on.

This research work will help and contribute to college student of UTESA to identify factors that affect the student's process of reading comprehension in English as second language and will deduct possible solutions or strategies for improving this important field for modern Languages students.

### *Hypothesis*

“If the factors affecting English reading comprehension are discovered, the suggested remedies or strategies that can improve the reading comprehension of the students.”

### *General objective:*

To analyze and determine potentials causes of why colleges students that study English as a second language in Modern Languages career at UTESA do not develop a good level of reading comprehension during their studies.

### *Specific objectives:*

- 1- To examine possible causes of not having a good level of reading comprehension development in English as a second language.
- 2- To reach a deeper understanding of the importance of having the appropriate level of reading comprehension in English as second language as college students.
- 3- To determine the most common level of reading comprehension in English as a L2 that college students have before finishing the Modern Languages carrier at UTESA.

### *Research question*

- 1- What is reading comprehension in English all about?
- 2- Which level of reading comprehension in English as a second language a college student of Modern Languages can develop at UTESA?
- 3- In which semester the student of Modern Language acquire the appropriate level of reading comprehension as a second language?
- 4- What are the key factors that affect English reading comprehension as a second language?
- 5- How much lexis is necessary for developing an adequate level of reading comprehension as a second language?

### *Definition of terms*

#### *Reading comprehension as a second language*

Goodman (1998) defines reading as a receptive language process. He states that it is a psycholinguistic process which starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning constructed by the reader. Based on this author's statement, it can be said that in this process there is an essential interaction between language and thought. He argues that "the writer encodes thoughts as language and the reader decodes language to thought" (Goodman, 1998, p. 12).

In other words, reading comprehension is the act of understanding what you are reading. While the definition can be simply stated the act is not simple to teach, learn or practice. Reading comprehension is an intentional, active, interactive process that occurs before, during and after a person reads a particular piece of writing.

Reading comprehension is one of the pillars of the act of reading. When a person reads a text, that person engages in a complex array of cognitive processes. He is simultaneously using his awareness and understanding of phonemes (individual sound "pieces" in language), phonics (connection between letters and sounds and the relationship between sounds, letters and words) and ability to comprehend or construct meaning from the text. This last component of the act of reading is reading comprehension. It cannot occur independent of the other two elements of the process. At the same time, it is the most difficult and most important of the three.

There are two elements that make up the process of reading comprehension: vocabulary knowledge and text comprehension. In order to understand a text the reader must be able to comprehend the vocabulary used in the piece of writing. If the individual words don't make sense then the overall story will not either. Children can draw on their prior knowledge of vocabulary, but they also need to continually be taught new words. The best vocabulary instruction occurs at the point of need. Parents and teachers should pre-teach new words that a child will encounter in a text or aid her in understanding unfamiliar words as they come upon them in the writing. In addition to being able to understand each distinct word in a text, the child also has to be able to put them together to develop an overall conception of what it is trying to say. This is text comprehension. Text comprehension is much more complex and varied than vocabulary knowledge. Readers use many different text comprehension strategies to develop reading

comprehension. These include monitoring for understanding, answering and generating questions, summarizing and being aware of and using a text's structure to aid comprehension.

### *Foreign language vs Second language*

A second language is a language that is not your native but you have learned it to get by in your daily life. The typical vocabulary of a second-language speaker will be about household items, groceries, various routine needs such as going to the doctor, to the hairdresser, calling a plumber, being familiar with local holidays. Its purpose is to help you survive. One could say that immigrants or ethnic minorities in a certain country will be learning this language as their second language.

A foreign language is a language you learn because you are interested in it for whatever reason. The typical vocabulary of a foreign language speaker will include amazingly varied topics such as politics, philosophy, science, literature - not necessarily useful in real life but picked randomly anyway from textbooks and other media used for the enhancement of language learning. A foreign language may be the one you will never have an opportunity to use in your day-to-day tasks.

### *Types of comprehension*

As noted previously, the six types of comprehension that are proposed and discussed are based on the experiences in teaching, reading and developing materials. It intend this taxonomy to cover all possible interpretations of comprehension; we have found the six types to be useful in helping the students to become interactive readers. The taxonomy has been influenced in particular by the work of Pearson and Johnson (1972) and Nuttall (1996).<sup>1</sup>

### *Literal comprehension*

*Literal comprehension* refers to an understanding of the straightforward meaning of the text, such as facts, vocabulary, dates, times, and locations. Questions of literal comprehension can be answered directly and explicitly from the text. The teachers often

check on literal comprehension first to make sure that their students have understood the basic or surface meaning of the text.

An example of a literal comprehension question about this article is: *How many types of comprehension do the authors discuss?*

### *Reorganization*

The next type of comprehension is *reorganization*. Reorganization is based on a literal understanding of the text; students must use information from various parts of the text and combine them for additional understanding. For example, we might read at the beginning of a text that a woman named Maria Kim was born in 1945 and then later at the end of the text that she died in 1990. In order to answer this question, *How old was Maria Kim when she died?* The student has to put together two pieces of information that are from different parts of the text.

Questions that address this type of comprehension are important because they teach students to examine the text in its entirety, helping them move from a sentence-by-sentence consideration of the text to a more global view. The students generally find reorganization questions somewhat more difficult than straightforward literal comprehension questions.

### *Inference*

Making *inferences* involves more than a literal understanding. Students may initially have a difficult time answering inference questions because the answers are based on material that is in the text but not explicitly stated. An inference involves students combining their literal understanding of the text with their own knowledge and intuitions.

An example of a question that requires the reader to make an inference is: *Are the authors of this article experienced language teachers?* Readers are required to use their knowledge of the field, teaching foreign language reading, with what they have gained from reading the article, in particular that sentence, to construct an appropriate answer. That is, readers might understand that newcomers to the profession generally do not develop materials or write articles, so the authors are probably experienced language teachers.

### *Prediction*

The fourth comprehension type, *prediction*, involves students using both their understanding of the passage and their own knowledge of the topic and related matters in a systematic fashion to determine what might happen next or after a story ends.

We use two varieties of prediction, while-reading and post- (after) reading. While-reading prediction questions differ from post-reading prediction questions in that students can immediately learn the accuracy of their predictions by continuing to read the passage. For example, students could read the first two paragraphs of a passage and then be asked a question about what might happen next. They can determine the answer by reading the remainder of the text.

In contrast, post-reading prediction questions generally have no right answers in that students cannot continue to read to confirm their predictions. However, predictions must be supported by information from the text. Generally, scholarly articles do not allow for post-reading prediction questions. Other types of writing, such as fiction, are fertile ground for such questions. To illustrate, consider a romance in which the woman and man are married as the novel comes to a close. A post-reading prediction question might be: *Do you think they will stay married? Why or why not?* Depending on a variety of factors including evidence in the text and personal experiences of the reader, either a *yes* or a *no* answer could be justified.

Having students make predictions *before* they read the text is a pre-reading activity. We do not see this type of prediction as a type of comprehension. Rather, it is an activity that allows students to realize how much they know about the topic of the text.

### *Evaluation*

The fifth type of comprehension, *evaluation*, requires the learner to give a global or comprehensive judgment about some aspect of the text. For example, a comprehension question that requires the reader to give an evaluation of this article is: *How will the information in this article be useful to you?* In order to answer this type of question, students must use both a literal understanding of the text and their knowledge of the text's topic and related issues. Some students, because of cultural factors, may be reluctant to be critical or to disagree with the printed word. In such circumstances, the

teacher might want to model possible answers to evaluation questions, making sure to include both positive and negative aspects.

### *Personal response*

The sixth type of comprehension, *personal response*, requires readers to respond with their feelings for the text and the subject. The answers are not found in the text; they come strictly from the readers. While no personal responses are incorrect, they cannot be unfounded; they must relate to the content of the text and reflect a literal understanding of the material.

An example of a comprehension question that requires a personal response is: *What do you like or dislike about this article?* Like an evaluation question, students have to use both their literal understanding and their own knowledge to respond.

Also, like evaluation questions, cultural factors may make some students hesitate to be critical or to disagree with the printed word. Teacher modeling of various responses is helpful in these situations.

### *Summary of comprehension types*

If it is believed that reading is an interactive process in which the reader constructs meaning with the text, then it's necessary to help the students learn to do this. This means moving beyond a literal understanding of a text, and allowing the students to use their own knowledge while reading. It may be challenging, however, for beginning and intermediate students to create their own understanding, if they are accustomed to reading word-for-word and focusing on meaning at the word- and sentence-levels.

When questions move beyond a literal understanding, students' answers have to be motivated by information in the text. Inference questions can have clearly correct and incorrect responses. In contrast, prediction, evaluation, and personal response answers are correct as long as they depend primarily on students' reactions to what they read. Evaluative and personal response answers not only depend primarily on students' reactions to what they have read, but they need to reflect a global understanding of the text.

Finally, researches has shown that effective teachers and teachers in more effective schools are more frequently observed asking higher level questions, questions that go beyond a literal understanding of a text, than less effective teachers and teachers in less effective schools (Knapp, 1995; Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, and Rodriguez, 2002). This provides a solid reason for teachers to engage their students in all six types of comprehension.

There is another reason for using a variety of questions that involve different types of comprehension. Guszak (1967, cited in Pearson and Johnson, 1972: 154) found that students performed best when answering questions of factual recall, which was the type of question that their teachers asked most often. This means that students do best at what they have learned and practiced. Thus, if you would like the students to be able to go beyond a literal understanding of a text, then it is necessary to teach them how to do this and to give them opportunities to work with different types of comprehension.

This taxonomy of comprehension types is not an inventory of reading skills and strategies. It is, rather, an overview of types of understanding that foreign language learners need to have if they are to read a text with more than a literal understanding. How these types of comprehension can be approached through a variety of question forms is the focus of the next section.

#### *Geographical & historical background*

Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic. It is situated on the Yaque Del Norte River, in the heart of the Cibao Valley, and it is known as the capital of the Cibao region. Santiago de los Caballeros is the country's second largest city and is more traditional than the national capital, Santo Domingo. Whether founded in 1494 by Christopher Columbus (as some historians claim) or in 1495 by his brother Bartholomew, Santiago was among the first European settlements in the Americas. In 1504, 30 caballeros (gentlemen) of the Order of St. James (Santiago) moved from nearby La Isabela to Santiago, henceforth known as Santiago de los Caballeros. After being destroyed by an earthquake in 1562, the city was rebuilt a few miles away, where Nibaje Stream meets the Yaque; ruins of the old city are still visible in the city's San Francisco de Jacagua district. Santiago survived numerous earthquakes and fires to serve repeatedly as the republic's capital.

The city's economy long depended mainly on the production of cigarettes, rum, furniture, pharmaceuticals, soaps, leather articles, and processed foods, including cacao, milled rice, and dairy produce. Services, including tourism, have become increasingly important, however. Santiago is on the main highway linking Santo Domingo (85 miles [137 km] southeast) with Monte Cristi in the extreme northwest. A regional international airport opened there in 2002. Pop. (2002) urban area, 507,418; (2010) urban area, 550,753.

Notable landmarks include the San Luis Fort (now a museum), the Monument to the Heroes of the Restoration, various palaces, and the Cathedral of Santiago el Mayor situated opposite to the city park (Parque Duarte). Institutions of higher learning include the Pontificia Católica Madre y Maestra University, established in 1962, and a technological university founded in 1974. [www.britannica.com/place/Santiago-de-los-Caballeros](http://www.britannica.com/place/Santiago-de-los-Caballeros). The Technological University of Santiago (UTESA), arises as a result of the interpretation of a group of professionals who visualized the need for a new educational order at a time when the country required a qualified personnel in the technical and professional areas. As a response to these needs, supported by the Founding Board and its Academic Regulations, on November 12, 1974, this educational institution began its formal work, acquiring its legal status on April 19, 1976, by decree of Executive Power No. 1944 . The technological nature with which it was conceived guided the creation of careers of technical level, linked to the Economic and Social Sciences. Open, from its beginnings, to a population that was already inserted in the different productive sectors of the region, it was the first private university of the Dominican Republic to offer a night schedule. On June 17, 1978, by means of decree 3432 of the Executive Power, it receives the authorization to issue academic degrees with the same force and validity as those of other official or autonomous institutions of the same category. In the year 1979, responding to the new demands, its curricular offer is extended; for the development of the Career in Health Sciences, with the advice of the North American Universities of Ohio, South Carolina and Grenada.

*Philosophy*

The Technological University of Santiago was founded to promote the democratic ideals of our community, offering ample opportunities for Higher Education to all people, regardless of their religious, racial, political, economic or social status.

Especially, UTESA, is open to those people with aspirations for personal and professional improvement who, due to their economic and family situation, would have difficulties to achieve a professional degree in a traditional university. UTESA encourages its students to aspire to everything their abilities allow them, emphasizing quality, the development of their personality and their social responsibility.

### *Mission*

The Corporate System Universidad Tecnológica de Santiago, UTESA, as a mission, develops comprehensively, under a national and international perspective, teaching, research, information, communication and extension functions aimed at the training of creative and enterprising people with a humanist vision in a mean of generating knowledge based on Science, Technology, Research, via university-company, which stimulates the permanent search through quality and academic excellence of solutions to the country's problems. UTESA, forms, develops and specializes human resources, conducts and promotes scientific research, as well as produces goods and services with a sense of social projection and equal opportunities for all people, without distinction of race, gender, religious creed and / or political .

### *View*

UTESA will continue to be the most important corporate university in the country, both qualitatively and quantitatively. For the impact of its graduates, for the production, transfer and dissemination of knowledge and communication and information, for the harmonious integration between its university-company actors, for the relevance of the services offered to the national community and for its projection at the international level.

### *Values*

UTESA, assumes its role as a training institution, based on the ethical principles of ensuring respect for the rights and dignity of people. His work in the educational field of research and service to the community has as its axis, equity, democracy, objectivity and the responsibility to educate from a humanist and guiding perspective.

The search for a promising future that enriches society, where truth prevails, participation and teamwork contribute to UTESA expressing the basic values: truth, justice and honesty as part of the institutional culture.

(utesamisionvision.blogspot.com).

## Chapter II: *Literary review*

Schema theory is an explanation of how readers use prior knowledge to comprehend and learn from text (Rumelhart, 1980). The fundamental principle of the schema theory assumes that written text does not carry meaning by itself. Rather, a text only provides directions for readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own previously acquired knowledge (An, 2013).

According to schema theory, comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text. Efficient comprehension requires the ability to relate the textual material to one's own knowledge. As Anderson (1977, p.369) pointed out, "every act of comprehension involves one's knowledge of the world as well". Reading comprehension operates in two directions, from bottom up to the top and from the top down to the bottom of the hierarchy. Bottom-up processing is activated by specific data from the text, while top-down processing starts with general to confirm these predictions. These two kinds of processing are occurring simultaneously and interactively, which adds to the concept of interaction or comprehension between bottom-up and top-down processes (Carrel and Eiserhold, 1983. Cited in An, 2013).

Reading comprehension is the ability to process information that we have read and to understand its meaning. The three levels of comprehension are the literal level, inferential level and the critical/evaluative level.

**The Literal Level:** It is simply what the text says and what actually happens in the story. This is a very important level of understanding because it provides the foundation for more advanced comprehension. It focuses on reading the passages, hearing the words or viewing the images. It involves identifying the important and essential information. With guidance, students can distinguish between the important and less important ideas.

**The Inferential Level:** It involves determining what the text means. Determining inferential meaning requires you to think about the text and draw a conclusion. , the focus shifts to reading between the lines, looking at what is implied by the material under study. It requires students to combine pieces of information in order

to make inferences about the author's intent and message. Guiding students to recognize these perceived relationships promotes understanding and decreases the risk of being overwhelmed by the complexities of the text being view, heard or read.

The Critical Level: This level is about analyzing or synthesizing information and applying it to other information. Understandings at the literal and interpretive levels are combined, reorganized and restructured at the critical level to express opinions, draw new insights and develop fresh ideas. Guiding students through the applied level shows them how to synthesize information, to read between the lines and to develop a deeper understanding of the concepts, principles, and implications presented in the text.

In the article What makes a 'good reader'? In essence, a 'good reader' is simply a reader who is able to fully comprehend and make meaning from the text they are reading.

Evidently, not all students are 'good readers', however, all students have the potential to become 'good readers' with the right teaching and learning.

According to Duke and Pearson (2002), good readers make predictions, read actively and selectively, draw on prior knowledge, and questions and evaluate the text and author. Furthermore, Konza (2011) noted that good readers understand the purpose of the text they are reading, monitor their own comprehension and are able to adjust their own reading strategies. They also search for both literal and inferential meaning in the texts they read.

In terms of the skills that they use, good readers have excellent word recognition skills and are able to accurately and speedily recognize most words as they see them without having to sound them out.

All in all, a good reader will be someone who can confidently employ the skills and strategies that are discussed. Integrating the information on skills and strategies into every day, literacy teaching could help struggling students to become 'good readers'.

One way that the teacher can make students aware of what a 'good reader' is and what they need to do to become a 'good reader' is by displaying these good ways of reading around the classroom.

### Chapter III: *Methodological procedures*

#### *Bottom-Up Model*

In bottom-up theories, meaning resides in the text. This point of view shows this process as an essentially passive process, where the reader decodes the intended message of the writer by moving from the lowest level, such as letters and words, towards the higher levels of clauses, sentences, and paragraphs (Carrell, 1998). This implies that the meaning comes from deciphering the letter, then the word, the sentence and finally the text. In other words, the process is conceived of as something unilateral in which the reader only has the role of extracting written information and constructs meaning from the particular text segment that is being processed without taking into account the surrounding environment.

One bottom-up model, described by Urquhart and Weir (1998) taking into account Gough's model mentions that a number of processing components are used in order to process text. His description shows the reading process from the perception of the letters which make up the text, through an oral realization of it. The reader begins with letters, which are detected by the scanner, and then the strings of letters are converted into phonemes by the decoder. The output of the decoder then arrives to the recognition of a word. The reader then continues by fixating on the next word in the text until every word in the sentence has been analyzed.

The bottom-up or decoding model of reading was criticized by Eskey (1998) for its failure to account for the contribution of the reader and his expectations about the text, which are informed by his knowledge of language, and are employed as part of the reading process. The perceived importance of the reader's expectations in the processing of text led to the development of the top-down model of reading.

#### *Top-Down Model*

Goodman (1982) is closely related to top-down approaches of reading. He argues that readers bring a great deal of knowledge, expectations, assumptions and questions to the

text and, given a basic understanding of the vocabulary, they continue reading as long as the text confirms their expectations. The top-down school of reading theory claims that readers fit the text into (cultural, syntactic, linguistic, and historical) knowledge they already possess and then check back when new or unexpected information appears.

As a complement, some other authors mention that the top-down model comprehends reading not as the bottom-up processing of words, and that the meaning is not entirely residing in the text. The knowledge, experience and concepts that the reader brings to the text, in other words, his/her schemata, are a very important part in the process (Dechant, 1991, p. 25).

In Urquhart and Weir's words (1998), the reader brings expectations to the text and continues making predictions as he/she samples the text, while he/she omits parts of the text which is considered to be unimportant. If the predictions made seem to be incorrect, the reader will return to read the text more carefully in order to create further predictions. Urquhart and Weir point out, "Goodman views reading as a process of hypothesis verification, whereby the readers use selected data from the text to confirm their guesses" (1998, p. 42).

Besides, Goodman (1998) offers a revised model of the reading process. He perceives reading as a cycle, in which the reader samples the text continuously in order to construct meaning. In his model there are five processes used during the reading. These are recognition-initiation, prediction, confirmation, correction and termination.

The first process, recognition-initiation process is where the "brain must recognize a graphic display in the visual field as language and initiate reading" (Goodman, 1998, p. 16). The prediction, confirmation and correction processes are strongly connected.

The brain makes predictions which are either confirmed or found to be incorrect at the confirmation level, depending on the input received. If a prediction is determined to be incorrect, the brain will reprocess and formulate a new prediction based on the previous input. The termination process is where reading stops, at the end of the reading task.

Nevertheless, the bottom-up theorists disagree with the last point of view, especially with Goodman's perception. Rayner and Pollatsek (1989) argue that visual processing of a text occurs very fast and that the extent to which readers engage in hypothesis testing or guessing behaviors seems to play a minimal part in the process of reading.

The most relevant characteristic of the top-down theory is that reading is perceived as a subset of problem solving rather than as a simply automatic matching of linguistic responses to linguistic stimulus. The belief that both top-down and bottom-up processing are important characteristics of the behavior of a skilled reader led to the development of interactive theories of reading.

### *Interactive Model of Reading*

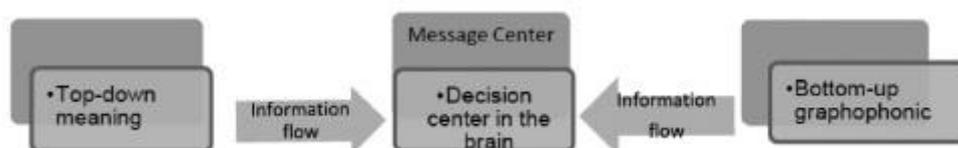
The interactive model assumes that all bottom-up and top-down processes interact. In fact, the term interactive can be interpreted in two ways as said by Hedge (2000). The first one describes the relationship created between the reader and the text while the reader tries to make sense of it. In this process of meaning building the reader is totally involved in an active process where he combines information from the text and his/her previous knowledge and experiences. In Hedge's (2000) words "reading can be seen as a kind of dialogue between the reader and the text, or even between the reader and the author" (p. 188).

The second interpretation of the term interactive refers to the interplay among the different types of knowledge a reader uses to make sense of a text. There are at least six types of knowledge mentioned by Hedge (2000): syntactic knowledge, morphological knowledge, general world knowledge, sociocultural knowledge, topic knowledge, and genre knowledge. Two of these, syntactic and morphological, are to do with the language itself and help the reader decode the language of a text; they are both linguistic and are called systemic knowledge. In the same way, the other kinds of knowledge help the reader work with the language of the text in order to give meaning to it. They are called *schematic knowledge*.

In particular, the model proposed by Rumelhart (1980) explains the previous concepts. It is called interactive-activation model. Rumelhart's theory suggests that each level of

information, from grapheme to word, is separately represented in the memory and that information passes from one level to the next in both directions, which is what he calls interaction. The diagram in figure 1 shows his proposal.

Figure 1. Rumelhart's Interactive Model. (Cited in Dechart, 1991, p. 29)



This model is explained in depth by Samuels and Kamil (1998). According to the diagram, the knowledge sources such as semantic, syntactic, lexical, orthographic, general world, genre, etc. (systemic and schematic knowledge) provide input simultaneously and the message center holds the information and redirects it as needed. The message center has different functions: as each of the knowledge sources feeds in information about the text being processed, the center holds the information in a temporary store. Each of the sources may use the information provided by one or more of the other sources. The message center permits the knowledge sources to communicate and interact with others in order to create meaning while reading.

Turning to the interactive model pertinent for this research study, it was the one proposed by Stanovich (1980). He refers to his model as interactive compensatory. The interactive-compensatory model of reading was developed primarily to explain developmental and individual differences in the use of context to facilitate word recognition during reading. Samuels and Kamil (1998) explain this model as an interactive model of reading that allows compensating weaknesses in any of the processing levels by processes at other levels.

For example, if a reader has a weakness at the level of word recognition, he/she can compensate this by the use of knowledge about the topic of the text. Therefore, top-down processing could compensate weaknesses in bottom-up processes. In contrast, a reader who has little knowledge about the topic of a text can compensate this deficiency if he/she is skilled at word recognition by relying more on bottom-up processes. The

Stanovich model is interactive in the sense that any stage, regardless of its position in the system, may communicate with any other stage, and it is compensatory in the sense that any reader may rely on better developed knowledge sources when particular, and usually more commonly used, knowledge sources are temporarily weak (Samuels & Kamil, 1998). This interactive-compensatory model implies the interaction between the two processes to achieve comprehension, aspects which were worth taking into account when proposing the activities for sixth grade students.

It is known that interactive theories of reading have been embraced by many writers interested in the teaching of second language reading. Nuttall (2000) writes that top-down and bottom-up processing are "complementary ways of processing a text. They are both used whenever we read, sometimes one predominates, and sometimes the other, but both are needed" (p. 16). She also adds that "in practice a reader continually shifts from one focus to another, now adopting a top-down approach to predict the probable meaning, then moving to a bottom-up approach to check whether that is really what the writer says" (p. 17). In any case the interaction is presented.

Another view of reading based on the interaction presented between the reader and the text includes according to Birch (2007) three principal aspects: The different processing strategies, both top and bottom, along with the knowledge base, interact with each other in order to accomplish the reading. The second aspect mentions that the reader's mind interacts with the written text so that the reader can understand the message. And finally, the reader interacts indirectly with the writer of the text, trying to give meaning to the message the writer wants to communicate.

Works by the different authors mentioned before led to reading being regarded as an interactive rather than a passive process. According to this view, the reading process involves the activation of knowledge in the mind of the reader. This knowledge is then used by the reader and may be extended or refined according to the new information provided by the text (Grabe, 1998). In this sense, meaning is not seen as something provided by the text, as it was proposed in the bottom-up theory, but it is created as a result of the interaction between the reader and the reading.

This conception of reading as interaction is related to the interactive-compensatory model. As was noted earlier, the model presented by Stanovich (1980) and explained by Samuels and Kamil (1998) allowed for the reader's background knowledge to compensate for deficiencies in bottom-up processes. It is very important to highlight that in the classroom it is necessary to pay attention to both processes and help students activate the needed knowledge to create meaning.

The role of background knowledge in reading comprehension has been formalized as schema theory. The schema theory is focused on the way the schematic knowledge may be activated to help the learner in the reading process. According to this theory, the comprehension of a text is an interactive process between the readers' background knowledge and the text. It is concerned with the abstract knowledge structures the reader possesses based on her/his prior experiences, and which may be activated in the mind of the reader and utilized as she or he tries to interpret the text (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1998).

Schema theory confirms that background knowledge is important within a psycholinguistic model of reading. This theory comes under the influence of Goodman (1982) in his psycholinguistic theory. Inside the classroom teachers need to recognize the importance of building background knowledge and helping students activate the schemata by implementing different strategies such as pre-reading, communicative pre-reading, vocabulary instruction, visual cues, questioning methods, comprehension instruction, and appreciating their culture, as Navarro (2008) proposed in her study.

### *Strategies for Students*

The following strategies are meant to assist ESL students in improving their reading skills on their own.

- Review each paragraph after reading it. If you are confused, find the topic sentence, again.
- Look for transitional words, phrases and paragraphs, which change the topic.
- Read the first and last paragraph of your text or the first sentence in each section.

- Monitor if you have missed an idea, backup and reread.
- Pay attention to vocabulary. Collect new words in a notebook especially for that purpose. Look up the new word in a dictionary and study its meaning. Try to fit the right synonym into context of the sentence. It is a good idea to learn the antonym of the word at the same time. Reading for vocabulary is very important in improving your reading comprehension.
- When you are building your vocabulary, concentrate on roots, prefixes and endings. This will help you tremendously to recognize new words you will come across.
- Ask yourself questions about each paragraph. Write the answers down in a notebook.
- Move ahead on your own, reading as much as possible in the new language. Broaden your background knowledge by reading as many magazines, newspapers and books that you possibly can.
- Get together with classmates and discuss reading material. This is a great way to improve comprehension.

#### Chapter IV: *Methodology Design*

This research is descriptive in nature. The qualitative and quantitative research will be carried out for this study.

##### Population

The study will be realized to 40 students from the Modern Language career at UTESA, Santiago. The chosen group have students that are at least in level five in the career.

##### *Tools*

###### *Interviews*

An Interview for the students will explore the problems that are faced by the students during reading comprehension and suggestions will be asked from them to overcome this problem.

Also a short questionnaire will be applied to the students in order to determine factors that not allow them to develop a good reading comprehension in English as a second language.

## Chapter V: Discussion

### *Overview*

Findings from this study revealed that students of level five of English as a foreign Language (EFL) in this private college faced serious problems when addressing themselves to a deeper level of reading. In the opinion of many professors consulted on this matter and from the analysis of another studies conducted before (Gomez & Mercedes, 2016) it seems to be that the levels of comprehensions reached by college students are affected by a poor reading practice during their pre-college studies, something which is not an exclusive phenomenon of this university in particular, but that it is rooted in the *spirit* of our high school graduates due to a lack of quality in our educational system.

Discussion Question 1: What is reading comprehension in English all about?

-For many of the cases of the students interviewed (68%) comprehension in EFL in the reading classes or for reading assignments have to do with the ability of developing a critical reading ability. For most of them, reading at a higher level has to do with becoming a critical reader, that is to say the inner capacity of interpreting what the author is thinking when writing and thus to differ from the author if necessary.

Discussion Question 2: Which level of reading comprehension in English as a second language a college student of Modern Languages can develop at UTESA?

-Almost (100%) of the students interviewed responded that that is an individual capacity or ability because for most of the cases, students with a higher linguistics attitude score better regardless of their level.

Discussion Question 3: In which semester the student of Modern Language acquire the appropriate level of reading comprehension as a second language?

-Although they responded the highest the better, most of them agree that regardless their level of English or even the quality of their campus, it is an inner ability that enable the students to make a great deal of progress in their level of

comprehension and their level of reading skill, moreover, if they are poor readers in their native language, how can they expect to perform well in the other language?

Discussion Question 4: What are the key factors that affect English reading comprehension as a second language?

-Some of the keys factors that affect EFL student ( 54%)in reading-comprehension is the interfering of the native language of the students (Spanish in this case) and the uses of English/Spanish dictionaries when dealing with a stock of new vocabulary.

Discussion Question 5: How much lexis is necessary for developing an adequate level of reading comprehension as a second language?

-The response was undoubtedly, countless, since it takes the whole life in the opinion of the most experienced students to become an avid reader, which is the basis of becoming a good writer in such a way they firmly believe that students encounter a *double degree of difficulty* when they lack that skill in their own language.

### *Conclusions*

From the analysis of the above discussed questions, one of the most logical conclusion to be reached it is, that since reading is clearly one of the four skills to be developed from the very beginning of the teaching-learning process, it is not difficult to imagine that it contains a great individual component, that is to say, it has mainly to do with those inner characteristics amply known as Multiple Intelligences (Gardner) it should be noted to that respect what describes as follows “MI theory may also have implications for reading comprehension and vocabulary learning. As to reading comprehension, Gaines and Lehmann (2002) showed that the use of MI theory improved learners' reading comprehension and enhanced their academic performance. In another study, Owolabi and Okebukola (2009) showed that reading comprehension in MI classrooms enhances learners' interaction with the print and ideas presented. Furthermore, according to Abdulkader, Gundogdu and Eissa (2009), the implementation of MI theory coupled with increased parental involvement can lead to substantial gains in the learners'

reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge.

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UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA DE SANTO DOMINGO  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
THE SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES  
THE REGIONAL CENTER OF UASD BONAO

*SURVEY OF LEVEL OF READING COMPREHENSION OF MODERN LANGUAGES  
COLLEGE STUDENTS*

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Name (optional) or assigned number.

Sex

3. \_\_\_\_\_

University or college where you study.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ 5. \_\_\_\_\_

Country/ State/ Republic

city

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you like to read books in English?

a) Yes I do.

b) No I don't.

c) Sometimes.

d) \_\_\_\_\_ another answer.

2. How many books in English do you read during the year?

a) 1-5

b) 5-10

c) None

d) \_\_\_\_\_ other amount.in English, as:

a) Good

b) Poor

c) Regular

d) Excellent

5. When you explain of what you had comprehend about a book, a paragraph or a story in English you used to:

- a) Paraphrases the story.
- b) Relate what you comprehend with a similar context.
- c) Say the main idea with your own words.
- d) another answer.

6. How good is your English vocabulary?

- a) Good
- b) Very good
- c) Bad
- d) Very bad

7. How good is your logical thinking?

- a) Good
- b) Very good
- c) Very bad
- d) Bad

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THANKS FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!!