THE CHALLENGE OF READING COMPREHENSION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

El desafío de la comprensión lectora en la educación primaria

O desafio da compreensão da leitura no ensino primário

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ABSTRACT

This research demonstrates the importance of didactic strategies aimed at reading comprehension for Mexican students in the sixth grade of primary education. Connections between reading moments, strategies and modalities stand out in the results obtained. This is a quantitative and field-based study, characterised by being cross-sectional and synchronous. Its representative sample consists of 100 subjects. The main findings evince the importance of having a clear objective and how anticipating reading aids students to infer, summarise, interpret and synthesize information. In addition, the demonstration and explanation of the associated didactic practices allow each teacher to realize the importance of its application in the classroom in order to consolidate students' taste for reading, reading comprehension and text writing as a

RESUMEN

En esta investigación se observa la importancia de las estrategias didácticas en la comprensión de la lectura en los alumnos mexicanos que cursan el sexto grado de educación primaria; destacan las relaciones entre los momentos, estrategias y modalidades de lectura en los resultados obtenidos. Se caracteriza por ser cuantitativa y de campo, de corte trasversal y sincrónica, con una muestra representativa de 100 sujetos. Entre los principales hallazgos se muestra la importancia de tener un objetivo claro, y se evidencia que hacer anticipaciones sobre la lectura ayuda a los alumnos a inferir, resumir, interpretar y sintetizar la información. Además, la demostración y explicación de las prácticas didácticas asociadas entre sí, permiten dar cuenta a cada docente sobre la importancia de su aplicación en el aula para consolidar el gusto por leer, la

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa mostra a importância das estratégias didáticas na compreensão da leitura em estudantes mexicanos do sexto ano do ensino fundamental; destacam-se as relações entre os momentos, estratégias e modalidades de leitura nos resultados obtidos. Caracteriza-se por ser quantitativa e de campo, transversal e síncrona. Com uma amostra representativa de 100 indivíduos. Entre os principais achados, a importância de ter um objetivo claro e antecipar a leitura ajuda os alunos a inferir, resumir, interpretar e sintetizar informações. Além disso, a demonstração e explicação das práticas didáticas associadas uns com os outros, permitem que cada professor para explicar a importância da sua aplicação na sala de aula para consolidar o gosto pela leitura, compreensão de leitura e escrita de textos nos alunos, isto como uma base sólida para o

solid basis for the development of learning. It determines that teachers are the main models and promoters of reading, the leads that consolidate reading and writing skills in the classroom within students. The originality of the research lies in the design of the instrument to operate the variables involved in the reading strategies proposed in the didactic methodology of the current Primary Education program in Mexico (p.47 Study Plan 2011. Teacher's Guide. SEP), and in applying it in public institution students as a sample of what happens in classrooms (according to students' opinion).

comprensión de la lectura y la redacción de textos en los alumnos, esto como base sólida para el desarrollo del aprendizaje. Se demuestra que el docente es el principal modelo y promotor de la lectura, el guía y orientación que consolida las habilidades de lectura y escritura en el aula en sus alumnos. La originalidad de la investigación radica en el diseño del instrumento para operar las variables implicadas en las estrategias de lectura propuestas en la metodología didáctica del programa vigente de educación primaria en México (Plan de Estudios, 2011. Guía para el maestro. SEP, p.47), y aplicarlo en alumnos de una institución pública, como muestra de lo que ocurre en las aulas, según la opinión de los estudiantes.de Educación Superior con 37 programas en todos los niveles educativos.

desenvolvimento a aprendizagem. É demonstrado que o professor é o principal modelo e promotor de leitura, orientação e orientação que consolida as habilidades de leitura e escrita em sala de aula em seus alunos. A originalidade da esquisa reside na concepção do instrumento para operar as variáveis envolvidas nas estratégias de leitura propostas na metodología didática do atual programa de Educação Primária no México (p.47 Plano de Estudo 2011. Guia do Professor. SEP) e aplicá-lo em estudantes de uma instituição pública como uma amostra do que acontece nas salas de aula, de acordo com a opinião dos alunos.

Panorama |

Volumen 13 |

Número 24 |

Enero-Junio |

2019 |

ISSN impreso |

1909-7433 |

ISSN en línea |

2145-308X |

INTRODUCTION

This research emphasizes the importance of socialization in the reading comprehension process, in meaningful learning and in the consolidation of reading competences in primary education students (Lerner, 2001; Gomez, 1995). It also evinces that pertinent and efficient orientation by teachers regarding design and management of reading didactic strategies fosters critical reflection in students during, before and after reading (Rodriguez, 2011). These results lead to an analysis and reflection of current reading methodologies that are applied in the classroom to attain skill development in students (Sole, 2007) and that constitute a latent challenge for primary education.

METHODOLOGY

This research is relational and empirical; it looks into the phenomenon in the place of occurrence without intervening in the surveyed students' answers. It is an applied research since it is focused on solving problems of the educational reality. The study is cross-sectional and synchronous, and the sample is made up of 100 randomly selected students. Qualifying variables are limited with nominal, interval or ratio scales that define a person who takes part in the instrument's solution with a scale of 0 to 10 (Hernandez, 2006).

Firstly, a pilot test was applied to a sample of 15 students in order to verify the clarity, pertinence and objectivity of the questions. After correcting inconsistencies, the definitive test was applied to a sample of 100 students. The instrument's reliability was measured with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.961802.

The research's objectives were based on characterizing the students in the sixth grade of primary education, comparing applied reading strategies and developed reading skills, relating reading moments, strategies and modalities, and obtaining the main factor of reading comprehension achievement. The core proposed thesis is as follows: the association of ideas through the teacher's thoughtful questioning and the students' exchange of ideas is the main factor to develop and understand reading in the classroom in primary education.

RESULTS

The 100 primary sixth graders that participated in the survey ranged between 10 and 11 years of age; 59% were boys and 41% were girls. 35% corresponded to sixth grade section A, 54% to section B and 46% to section C, as per the distribution of the groups in their schools.

These students' stated that they enjoy reading quietly more, listening to the teacher read and practice reading in pairs; they enjoy reading out loud less, as well as shared or guided reading and commenting on what they have read. Also, they do not enjoy reading in episodes. It can be inferred that the sixth graders fail to enjoy all of the reading modalities due to a lack of constant practice or lack

of knowledge on its purpose. A monotonous classroom reading routine is manifested (Table 1).

The most frequent didactic strategies in the classroom prior to reading a text are title predictions, revealing the purpose of the text, visualising its content, discussing prior knowledge of the text, and having a clear motivation and objective to fulfil. The least practiced is anticipation regarding the topic, as well as identifying unknown vocabulary. This leads to infer that students fail to identify the purpose of each strategy before reading a text to contextualize, analyse and make sense of it as a foundation for continuous learning (Table 2).

The strategies that are more frequently applied in the classroom during reading are identifying main ideas, relating prior knowledge, anticipating sentences or words and speed-reading. The least they do is inference and using the dictionary. It is likely that this occurs as a result of lack of orientation, ignorance, or of only recovering literal information from the text (Table 3).

Students claim that experiencing an emotion is the most frequent event after reading; yet, content socialization, relation with personal experiences, expressing their opinions, memorising information and having different versions of the text are almost always left out. The least they do is explain text content in detail. This information leads to deduce that it is necessary for teachers to take advantage of the students' emotional response after reading to promote critical analysis and reflection about the text, developing creativity along the way (Table 4).

The most developed reading skills in the sixth grade are information systematisation based on schemes, identification of information in descriptions and summarising information in a text. To a lesser degree, explanation of information in demonstrative texts, arguing the text, deducing the organization of an interview and analysing graphical elements of demonstrative texts are developed. Interpretation of the sense of a metaphor and inference in poetical meaning is very seldom practiced. It is likely that a lack of reading practice and analysis in the three moments results in an incomplete development of the reading skills evaluated in this grade (Table 5).

Preferred texts include literary drama and literary narrative, and demonstrative or scientific, informative and literary lyrical texts to a smaller degree. It can be said that students are more attracted by reading that is considered more meaningful and functional for their communicative and social needs (Table 6).

Sixth graders prefer to read at home, in the classroom and in the computer, while the library is not completely to their liking. It is deduced that any space for reading may be agreeable as long as reading takes place frequently and in a way that is motivational (Table 7).

In comparison with girls, sixth grade boys practice anticipation as a strategy during reading possibly because more boys participated in the survey or because it is easier to engage in it. And in comparison, girls prefer literary narrative texts such as novels and stories, most likely because of the emotional characteristics they experience in preadolescence; girls like to read at home more than boys probably because it is a hobby they can practice at home.

Students in section B enjoy reading out loud, practice shared reading and reading in episodes; it is also more frequent that they set a clear objective while reading and identify the vocabulary used in the text. This section also experiences emotions with more frequency after reading. It is likely that the teacher masters these didactic strategies better and applies them in the classroom, providing more sense to the act of reading.

Subsequently, associations between 2 or more complex variables took place in order to find connections that might provide elements to support the research. A correlational coefficient of 0.31 within a value of p=.001 is used.

When students are motivated before reading, they read better out loud and comment what the text might be about. When presented with a clear objective about the reading, they enjoy listening to the content, comment and participate by reading in episodes. After they have been presented with a purpose, they enjoy shared reading. When predictions are made, their interest to read out loud increases; and when identifying the text's distinctive vocabulary, they want to share and comment the text. It is likely that if the purpose is exposed before reading, students would want to participate by reading using any modality (Table 8).

When they read out loud, they rescue main ideas more easily; when they read in pairs, they anticipate what the text is about and read faster; when they comment the content with the group, they also identify relevant information. This could mean that reading is a process of interaction and integration of the text content with the group's members as classroom learning environment (Table 9).

If students feel emotions after reading the text, they will engage by commenting the content; when they have guided readings, they will draft different versions at the end. This allows inferring that when the teacher leads the development of reading strategies and modalities, he/she promotes a simultaneous interest in reading and writing (Table 10). When reading is commented and done in episodes, it makes it easier to explain and summarise information of demonstrative texts. Thus, increasing the likelihood to express and understand the content of the reading (Table 11).

Students that enjoy reading out loud, shared reading and reading in pairs comment what they have read in the classroom. This means that reading activities in the classroom that allow communication seem to be more attractive (Table

12). It is observed that when reading is commented or in episodes, it is easier to explain the information in a demonstrative text, to summarise the information and to deduce the organization of an interview. It can be deduced that the exchange of ideas and group discussions enable reading comprehension and content systematisation. (Table 13).

When students find motivation to read, they develop skills to explain demonstrative texts and to summarise information; when they are familiar with the purpose, they have skills to summarise, argue and infer the meaning of poetry; discussing prior knowledge develops argumentation. By identifying information when making predictions, they can argue and infer; and when they visualise the content of a demonstrative text, they are able to explain information.

The aforementioned is used to deduce that student motivation is fundamental to identify information and is the key to achieve inferences and reflections when reading a text. It can also be said that the use of prediction as a reading strategy works just as inference does, and reading argumentation aided by the use of the dictionary are complementary to improve students' writing skills.

Practicing anticipation as a strategy while reading develops skills such as identification of details, summarising, interpreting and synthesising information. When the main idea is identified, the information can be summarised and reading can be

Panorama |

Volumen 13 |

Número 24 |

Enero-Junio |

2019 |

ISSN impreso |

1909-7433 |

ISSN en línea |

2145-308X |

argued. Inference develops the explanation of demonstrative texts, argumentation, deduction of interviews and the skill to synthesise.

Using the dictionary helps explain demonstrative texts. When students connect to their prior knowledge, they can distinguish information in descriptions, summarise, interpret and argue diverse texts. Consequently, practicing reading strategies drives students' reception of information and integration of logical thinking in order to organise and express the content of a text (Table 15).

Students who socialise the content of a reading manage to explain with ease the content of demonstrative texts by relating what they have read with their experiences. Explaining the content in detail leads to summarising and analysing the charts presented in a text.

If students are able to express their opinion regarding what they read, they will be capable of summarising and arguing the text, similarly to what happens when they memorise it or experiment emotions after reading. When students draft summaries or syntheses of the text, they manage to outline information. By identifying information in descriptions and arguing it, students can produce different written versions on the same topic. Therefore, it can be said that when students express their feelings while reading, they develop writing skills and are able to synthesise information (Table 16).

Reading informative texts in magazines develops students' skills to describe, explain, infer and analyse graphic elements. When students read novels, they can provide explanations; hymns help them analyse graphic elements; and dramatic texts aid in the development of inference with ease. This means that each type of text serves a purpose to develop reading and writing skills according to the characteristics of the content and the way in which it is presented (Table 17). At this age (10-11 years of age), students prefer reading narrative texts (novels and stories) and lyric texts (hymns and songs) using the computer. It can be deduced that visual or interactive texts are more appealing to students, and that virtual spaces are their favourite.

Centroid method is the statistical treatment chosen to provide further explanation on the research's factor analysis; this method shows 10 factors have 55.77% of explanation. Clear reading objectives and previous anticipation in the classroom helps students infer, summarise, interpret and synthesise information. Thus, it is critical for children to be familiar with the reading objective in order to achieve overall and logical comprehension of a given text. To understand what has been read, students need to develop logical thinking.

Factor 1, Fluency: reading out loud in pairs and sharing the content helps increase reading speed in students. This implies that peer competition acts as an incentive to improve reading fluency.

Factor 2: no significant relation with lyrical and literary texts was found.

Factor 3, Analysis: reading demonstrative or scientific texts (dissemination or didactic texts), as well as informative texts (magazines and newspapers), develops the skill to identify information in descriptions, interpret the sense of a metaphor and synthesise based on schemes. By reading demonstrative and informative texts, students develop information analysis and synthesis skills.

Factor 4, Synthesis: reading anticipation and production of summaries develop the skill of recognising main ideas in a text and of synthesising based on schemes (classification charts). Therefore, anticipation used as reading strategy develops the skills of connection, integration and synthesising the content of a text.

Factor 5, Argumentation: when the purpose of literary texts is explained and the title or images are subject to predictions, prior knowledge is discussed and the vocabulary is identified before reading, students are capable of expressing an opinion regarding content, thus developing the skill of argumentation. Reading prediction and confirmation are steppingstones to develop argumentation in students.

Factor 6, Security: home is an adequate reading environment for literary and narrative texts (stories and novels), it benefits the skills of explanation and

presentation of content. It can be said that the reading habit at home strengthens security and argumentation in students.

Factor 7, Deduction: inference as reading strategy supports deduction and analysis of continuous (interviews) and discontinuous (graphic) texts. This leads to the conclusion that deduction is the main strategy to tackle the content of any kind of text.

Factor 8, Motivation: when there is motivation in the classroom and a clear explanation of the reading objective, and when reading is addressed with strategies of anticipation, identification of main ideas, inference, speed, use of the dictionary, connection with prior knowledge, alongside a final personal experience account, it is possible to develop the skill of summarising and interpreting information. Which is to say that motivation, teaching guidance, prior knowledge and connection to personal experiences are the main indicators to cultivate reading comprehension a classroom.

Factor 9, Reading Modalities: when children listen to a person reading, they have a clear example and objective to follow. Thus, model reading is indispensable for students to acquire the taste for reading.

Factor 10, Orientation: guided reading and interrogation of the content in a classroom leads to students elaborating on their personal comments. This helps deduce that the teacher is the main agent of reading comprehension by fostering interaction with the content of the text.

DISCUSSION

The lack of constant practice or unawareness of the purpose results in sixth graders failing to enjoy all of the reading modalities; classes can be monotonous in terms of reading. They also fail to recognise the purpose of each didactic strategy before reading a text, which provides context and meaning to the reading exercise as the basis of learning. While reading, the only strategy applied is recovery of literal information. Teachers must guide and take students' emotions into account before reading in order to promote critical analysis and reflection with a broader sense of comprehension, not just focusing on information. Reading practice, analysis and integration in the three moments can result in total reading skill development in the students.

In this final stage of primary education, students are attracted by texts that are more meaningful and functional (such as novels) for their communicative and social needs. The space to read is nice as long as it is done often and in a way that is motivating, regardless of the place in which they do it. It is important to add that girls enjoy reading at home more than boys. Reading during childhood and adolescence supports better expression of emotions and funnels said emotions towards educational purposes.

Teachers who have the skill and mastery of reading strategies and modalities are the main promoters and models for others; if they illustrate the purpose of each type of text before reading, students will want to engage. This means that reading is a process of interaction and integration between the text and its readers (Larrosa, 2014).

When the teacher leads the development of reading strategies and modalities, he/she is promoting a simultaneous interest in reading and writing. If the reading is commented and in episodes, it makes it easier to explain and summarise the information included in demonstrative texts, thus increasing the possibility to express and comprehend its content; an exchange of ideas drives communication and allows reading comprehension in students (Niño, 2001).

Student motivation is critical to identify information and is the key to achieve inferences and reflections of a text. It can also be said that the strategy of prediction develops inference and arguing what has been read plus the use of the dictionary act as complement to improve writing. Inference helps explain demonstrative texts, argumentation and deduction, as well as the skill to synthesise information.

The practice of strategies while reading results in information reception and integration of the student's logical thinking in order to organise and express the content of the text, which in turn develops writing and information synthesis skills.

Each type of text has the purpose of developing reading skills depending on its analysis and characteristics of content and form (Zaid, 2016).

Children who participated in the study prefer to read narrative texts (novels and stories) and lyrical texts (hymns and songs) using the computer, meaning that visual or interactive texts are more interesting and virtual spaces are more appealing, yet, it is necessary to reveal the reading objective to them in order to achieve overall content comprehension, especially in printed texts. Moreover, it is observed that peer competition is an incentive to enhance reading fluency.

By reading demonstrative and informative texts, students develop analysis and information synthesis skills; using anticipation as a reading strategy develops their ability to connect, integrate and synthesise the content of the reading. Reading prediction and confirmation are the foundation to develop argumentation while working in the classroom. The habit of reading at home strengthens security and argumentation in students (Cohen, 2008).

The main strategy to address the content of any type of text is inference; likewise, teaching orientation, prior knowledge and connection with personal experiences are the main indicators to engage in reading comprehension in the classroom. Model reading is indispensable for students to acquire the taste for reading; the teacher acts as the main promoter of reading comprehension

orchestrating an interaction of students with the content of different types of texts, which can be worked in or outside the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

Authors such as Delia Lerner (2001) and David Perkins (2000) affirm that reading consists in making children efficiently manage different types of texts through strategies that integrate said texts in the classroom's daily life. On the other hand, there is a reference to teachers' work based on fragile, naïve and inert dynamics that are neither meaningful nor productive in terms of reading comprehension. The results obtained in this research reflect such ideas.

Another postulate addressed in the theoretical reference is the importance of socialization and dialog among students, teacher and text as critical points for comprehension; this includes questions asked by the teacher before, while and after reading carefully and connecting them with the applied reading strategies (Cervantes, 2011). Results show that indeed there is a connection between them; although it is also observed that a conscious practice of the strategies is not the only thing to consider while reading with the group, it is also important to associate each strategy to the text's purpose in order to understand it and to produce personal versions per student.

Learning to read and write is a simultaneous process in any school grade, the only thing that

changes is vocabulary complexity (Cerrillo, 2010). The habit and the taste for learning are key learning factors which cannot be taught by a teacher to a group lacking the habit or taste for reading, moreover, the teacher cannot execute and redesign the practice of strategies to accomplish the purpose of comprehension and social application of language.

The teacher's challenge is considering reading comprehension development as a strategy of idea systematisation in which all of its interaction elements act as main pieces. The content, ideas expressed by the author, student's perception, the teacher as mediator and the application of reading strategies and modalities associated in each intervention, as well as the questions and inquiries socialized in the classroom, make reading the driver of permanent learning.

In this systematisation of strategies, the main topics are motivation, orientation and the use of reading modalities by the teacher to provide security and fluency to students; as well as the development of skills such as text analysis, synthesis and deduction; and the skill of argumentation as the foundation for reading comprehension in each moment of reading and writing.

Aside from the academic training, it is important to highlight that reading is a mental process that transforms the individual in a comprehensive way (Larrosa, 2014), it is the main axis of the educational system. This is the real teachers' challenge: getting each student (as a member of

society) to appreciate the importance of reading to transcend in every way, leaving rejection and apathy behind; it is about transforming the act of reading into a reading skill.

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Panorama |

Volumen 13 |

Número 24 |

Enero-Junio |

2019 |

ISSN impreso |

1909-7433 |

ISSN en línea |

2145-308X |

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Panorama |

Volumen 13 |

Número 24 |

Enero-Junio |

2019 |

ISSN impreso |

1909-7433 |

ISSN en línea |

2145-308X |