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Importance of Reading Comprehension for Virtual Education in Times of Pandemic

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lectora para la educación virtual
en tiempos de pandemia

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Importance of Reading Comprehension for Virtual Education in Times of Pandemic

Importancia de la comprensión lectora para la educación virtual en tiempos de pandemia

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RESUMEN

En el contexto de la pandemia del COVID-19 el objeto de este trabajo es comparar la frecuencia atribuida a la importancia de la enseñanza de comprensión lectora y el empleo de las estrategias metodológicas por los profesores en las zonas urbanas y rurales de Manabí, Ecuador. La metodología es exploratoria y descriptiva, con encuesta estructurada de 16 preguntas sobre el empleo de la metodología de enseñanza de la comprensión lectora del español como primera lengua, aplicada a 176 profesores de séptimo grado de Educación General Básica en las zonas de estudio. Al analizar las frecuencias de los datos distribuidos por zonas, se detectaron diferencias estadísticamente significativas informando que los profesores de la zona urbana ofrecen una visión distinta a los de la zona rural en su percepción de la lectura, lo cual conlleva a una profunda reflexión sobre la enseñanza de la comprensión lectora.

PALABRAS CLAVE

INVESTIGACIÓN EDUCATIVA, COMPRENSIÓN LECTORA, EDUCACIÓN GENERAL BÁSICA, ZONA URBANA, ZONA RURAL

ABSTRACT

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the purpose of this paper is to compare the frequency attributed to the importance of teaching reading comprehension and the use of methodological strategies by teachers in urban and rural areas of Manabí, Ecuador. The methodology is exploratory and descriptive, with a structured survey of 16 questions on the use of the methodology for teaching reading comprehension of Spanish as a first language, applied to 176 teachers of the seventh grade of General Basic Education in the study areas. When it comes to analyzing the frequencies of the data distributed by various zones, statistically significant differences were detected informing that the teachers of the urban zone offer a distinct vision from one of the rural zones in their perception of reading. These results lead to a reflection on reading comprehension as one of the most important challenges for educational institutions given the comprehension problems presented by Ecuadorian school graduates.

KEYWORDS

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, READING COMPREHENSION, BASIC GENERAL EDUCATION, URBAN AREA, RURAL AREA

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is essential for learning the General Basic Education by students in urban and rural areas; however, it is necessary in virtual hybrid education modalities which require students to choose the text, use predictions, read aloud or silently underline what they read, and develop linguistic knowledge autonomously. In times of pandemic, the development of reading is more favorable for not applying all methodological strategies.

In Ecuador, due to the pandemic, schools are virtual, and the exercise of the teacher as the guiding entity of reading strategies is uncertain in the face of teaching, since the contact he or she has with the student is limited. It is suspected that in a few years, reading comprehension will be affected and education in all subjects will be in decline. According to the impact study of COVID-19 by MinEduc¹ de Chile carried out by Figueroa et ál., (2020). “If distance education lasts 10 months, they could lose, on average, 88% of their learning in a year” (p. 10).

Not attending school for a long time can have serious consequences on the formation of students, a situation that makes the work of teachers more complex, especially in poorer social environments. In addition, ECLAC-UNESCO (2020) argues that a large number of Latin American and Caribbean countries, including Ecuador, have taken as a security measure the deployment of distance learning modalities, using a variety of formats and platforms (with or without the use of technology). From this indication, in the case of Ecuador, Moreno et ál., (2019) in the MinEduc report indicate: “in education, 76% (3,341,695) belong to the urban area and 24% (1,033,104) to the rural area”. Therefore, the role of the teacher in teaching reading varies, and is even more restricted, since, in the case of the rural area, many of these do not have access to the Internet and therefore their access to the hybrid classes is irregular.

In this way, the teacher’s situation can be identified and how he or she perceives the level of reading comprehension with the students from the virtual hybrid modality, if there are difficulties in the development of the methodological strategies. For example, in the tests of the Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (TERCE) applied in the year 2013, normally between 60% and 72% of Ecuadorian students have a development of reading and writing skills below the average (Flotts, Manzi, Jiménez, Abarzúa, Cayuman, and García, 2015). Another similar case is the SERECUADOR tests, with a maximum score of 800 and an average of 500, applied to 271,042 students in the area of Language and Communication in seventh grade in 23 provinces nationwide. It was determined that students in Manabí are above 467 points (Vallejo et ál., 2008), with an average below average. Therefore, it is assumed that the GBS student, as he or she advances through the school years, needs more attention and involvement in reading strategies.

Based on the indications that this study proposes, it is necessary to know the importance of reading comprehension especially from the point of views of teachers, students, and in particular determining which strategies are useful in the application of reading. Starting from the initial difficulties manifested by the students and relating it to the digital age adopted since the pandemic.

¹ Ministerio de Educación, (2020)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading comprehension is always a challenge as it requires a certain level of interpretation, consideration, and development of any detailed analysis; nevertheless, when the reader understands what they read, they learn to the fullest extent what the reading is informing them about. What this does is that it allows the reader to approach the world of the author's meaning by demonstrating a new perspective and opinion on specific aspects (Peña-Rañileo et al., 2021). Reading is important for a person and the reader can receive information about the world, different cultures and thoughts around them. In the academic context, this skill is important in the dissemination of teaching. Although, it is the preferred medium for educators to spread their idea and the ability to understand texts in a professional training setting (Sánchez-Domínguez and Silva-Zavala, 2021). Bernardo and Yudelsi (2016) say that some teachers do not show real interest in reading, but they force students to read, in addition, not all teachers are didactically trained to deal with reading from their classes, so they do not take advantage of the potential of the subjects to meet this objective. "The situations are diverse, but they influence the school failure of children and adolescents; for example: the great gap that exists between students in both sectors" (Villagómez, 2020, p. 1.). "with the quarantine, thousands of preschool and early school children did not learn to read or write" (Mesquita, 2020, p. 122).

For example, "with quarantine, thousands of initial preschool and school children did not learn to read and write" (Mesquita, 2020, p. 122). In this sense, it is necessary to stimulate the existing previous knowledge about the nature of the text to be read, which stimulates the development of cognitive abilities by putting into practice in reading processes such as explaining, evaluating, comparing, contrasting, appreciating, informing, classifying, inferring, discovering, deducing, etc., about the reading text itself (Vallés, 2005, p. 50).

Likewise, Gallego, Figueroa and Rodríguez (2019) assume that the level of reading comprehension consists of three levels: (i) literal (which includes questions that students are able to understand in a very basic way), (ii) inferential (which includes questions that allow for conjectures and hypotheses about the text), and (iii) critical (referring to the skills to reflect on what is read, establish relationships, and give reasoned opinions about the quality of the text). Therefore, reading is not only the reproduction and repetition of written communication (text) but goes beyond the constructive production of the text, which is achieved under various endogenous and exogenous conditions; that is why knowing how to read is not enough, but it is necessary to handle a good number of words and know how to interweave them syntactically (Gómez, 2011, p. 28). However, it is important to point out that acquiring this competence goes beyond the mechanical process taught during the first years of primary education; it is about learning to understand, that is, understanding, interpreting and elaborating meanings based on a text (Vidal and Manríquez, 2016). In fact, UNESCO (2020b) has developed a "roadmap", which guides the parties involved in education for the application of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) 2030; being one of its objectives the entrepreneurship of the actors as key global citizens and responsible for this new agenda, which becomes an opportunity for the countries of the region, including Ecuador, so that it can face the educational processes needed in times of pandemic.

According to Villagómez (2020, p. 1), “The situations are diverse, but they influence the school failure of children and adolescents; for example, the great gap between students in the urban and rural sectors”. Creamer et ál., (2020) highlight the importance of reading in the development of students' capacities; therefore, the educational programs in all areas will include activities and tasks that revolve around reading as a tool to develop intellectual capacity, explore the world and incorporate new points of view and knowledge of all kinds.

Williamson (2004) cited by Vera et al., (2012) states: “Basic education in the rural context has been defined by its location, the cultural character of the school population it attends and its pedagogical specificities”. (p.298)

However, when reflecting on reading in this space, it is found that many times, due to the cultural environment in which children are immersed, reading is not a priority; Although the school cannot ignore this reality, its duty is to combat the decision and laziness for reading that on many occasions is shown as a repetitive and mechanical activity (Torres and Dávila, 2020). In addition, it is recognized that “in rural areas, people tend to have less access to educational opportunities and lower academic achievement than their peers in urban areas (Ribadeneira, 2020, p. 32).

In accordance with all this, Castillo et ál., (2006, p. 100) claim: “The role of the teacher in promoting student learning, should not necessarily act as a transmitter of knowledge or facilitator of learning, without mediating the encounter of their students with knowledge so that they can orient and guide the constructivist activities of their students”. Therefore, reading is interpretation, and this depends on the success with which the reader can understand meanings from the text. In the reading process, a series of strategies are used to obtain, evaluate and use information and, like any process, it requires an order and structure where the reader can develop skills to deal with the text and build meanings from the interaction with it (Jama and Suárez, 2015).

Figure 1. *Causes in the promotion of reading in classes*

EL ESTUDIANTE	No se les permite leer en las escuelas lo que les motiva.
	No están interesados en los textos que los docentes les orientan.
	Algunos docentes no muestran interés real por la lectura, pero obligan a los estudiantes a leer. En las clases, en contadas ocasiones, los docentes orientan que los estudiantes lean.
	No existe un verdadero sistema de influencias educativas a favor de la lectura desde el nivel de primaria hasta la educación superior.
LOS PROFESORES	Algunos docentes no tienen desarrollado el amor por la lectura, por lo que no son ejemplo de buenos lectores para sus estudiantes y por ende no son capaces de fomentarla.
	No todos los docentes están capacitados didácticamente para fomentar la lectura desde sus clases, por lo que no aprovechan las potencialidades de las asignaturas para cumplir con este objetivo.
	Algunos docentes no muestran interés real por la lectura, pero obligan a los estudiantes a leer. En las clases, en contadas ocasiones, los docentes orientan que los estudiantes lean.
	La lectura continúa atendiéndose como un problema didáctico exclusivo de los docentes que imparten las asignaturas Español y Literatura, y no como una necesidad de todos los docentes, independientemente de la asignatura que impartan.

Note. Bernardo & Yudelsi (2016, pp. 56-57)

The background on reading comprehension between the teacher and the student, could transcend with the new modality, and also subsist in that reading would not be applied as it should be, since, reading implies the interaction, dedication, involvement of new texts based on the knowledge of both.

From this approach, we will compare the frequency attributed to the importance of teaching reading comprehension and the use of methodological strategies by teachers in urban and rural areas of Manabí, Ecuador.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research is to compare the frequency attributed to the importance of teaching reading comprehension and the use of methodological strategies by teachers in urban and rural areas of Manabí, Ecuador.

METHOD

Regarding the study, a survey of 6 questions in part I and 16 in part II was designed. Each item was constructed with closed response options (yes and no) or Likert scale with level of importance from 1 (Very little) to 6 (A lot) and frequency from 1 (Very little) to 4 (A lot). Based on the collected data, a descriptive analysis was carried out on the perception of the importance attributed to the teaching of reading comprehension (i) and the use of the teaching methodology of reading comprehension of Spanish as a first language (ii). In both cases, the Mann-Whitney U test was used for comparisons between the responses provided by teachers from urban and rural areas.

Participants

The teachers surveyed were 172 seventh grade teachers from the districts of Chone, El Carmen, Jipijapa-Puerto López, Manta and Portoviejo. It should be noted that the institutions visited were chosen at random.

RESULTS

The results of Part I (strategies in teaching reading) among seventh grade teachers reached statistical significance ($p < 0,05$) in the non-parametric tests of the U of Mann-Whitney, so, it can be stated that the answers obtained differ according to the teachers' place of origin. When analyzing the scores by zones, the question with the highest score is in the recognition of elements that establish correferential links in the text (substitution by synonyms, phrases or pronouns, nouns, verb tenses, classes of sentence) with the ($\bar{x}: 3.11 \pm 0.8$), while those that are not very applicable correspond to the inference of non-explicit information in the texts about what, who, how, where and when, and the reflection and emission of judgments about the structure of literary and non-literary texts with the ($\bar{x}: 2.7 \pm 0.8$). It should be noted that, the scores are above average, so the hypothesis is rejected.

Table 1

Perception of the importance attributed to the teaching of reading comprehension of Spanish as a first language

Parte I. Estrategias en la enseñanza de la lectura	Séptimo grado	
	Urbana ($\bar{x} \pm DE$)	Rural ($\bar{x} \pm DE$)
1.1. ¿Trabaja en el reconocimiento de información explícita en los textos sobre qué, quién, cómo, dónde y cuándo?	3,3 (0,7)	3,0 (0,7)
2.1. ¿Trabaja en la inferencia de información no explícita en los textos sobre qué, quién, cómo, dónde y cuándo?	3,01 (0,8)	2,7 (0,8)
3.1. ¿Trabaja en la reflexión y emisión de juicios sobre los recursos y características del contenido?	3,2 (0,7)	3,2 (0,8)
4.1. ¿Trabaja en la reflexión y emisión de juicios sobre la estructura de textos literarios y no literarios?	3,1 (0,8)	2,7 (0,8)
5.1. ¿Trabaja en la reflexión y emisión de juicios sobre los reconocimientos de tipos de textos?	3,1 (0,8)	3,2 (0,7)
6.1. ¿Trabaja Ud. en el reconocimiento de elementos que establecen vínculos de correferencia en el texto (sustitución por sinónimos, sintagmas o pronombres, sustantivos, tiempos verbales, clases de oración)?	3,11 (0,8)	2,9 (0,8)

Note. Own elaboration

In the analysis of part II (use of strategies), the zones coincide in the lowest score with question 8.2. (\bar{x} : 2,3 \pm 1,1). While the teachers in the rural area, with the highest score, show a greater importance in question 7.2. (\bar{x} : 3.4 \pm 0.9) (see Table 2).

Table 2

Use of the methodology for teaching reading comprehension of Spanish as a first language

Parte II. Empleo de Estrategias	Séptimo Grado	
	Urbana ($\bar{x} \pm DE$)	Rural ($\bar{x} \pm DE$)
1.2. ¿Habla Ud. de libros y textos en clases?	3,0 (0,9)	2,9 (0,7)
2.2. ¿Permite Ud. que el alumno escoja el texto que va a leer?	2,7 (0,9)	2,7 (0,8)
3.2. ¿Hace Ud. que el alumno realice predicciones?	2,7 (1,1)	2,8 (0,8)
4.2. ¿Determina Ud. el propósito de la lectura?	3,1 (0,9)	2,9 (0,8)
5.2. ¿Propone Ud. ejercicios de lectura silenciosa?	3,1 (0,8)	2,9 (1,0)
6.2. ¿Propone Ud. ejercicios de lectura en voz alta?	3,3 (0,8)	3,2 (0,8)
7.2. ¿Orienta Ud. la fluidez y entonación?	3,3 (0,8)	3,4 (0,9)
8.2. ¿Interrompe Ud. las lecturas para que los estudiantes hagan predicciones?	2,3 (1,1)	2,3 (1,1)
9.2. ¿Hace Ud. que los alumnos establezcan relaciones entre la ficción y la realidad?	2,9 (0,8)	3,0 (0,8)
10.2. ¿Pide Ud. a sus alumnos que subrayen las ideas principales y las palabras nuevas de un texto y utilicen el diccionario?	3,3 (0,8)	3,2 (0,7)
11.2. ¿Crea Ud. espacios para hacer y responder preguntas orales?	3,3 (0,8)	3,2 (0,9)
12.2. ¿Motiva Ud. la escritura a partir de un texto leído?	3,2 (0,8)	2,9 (0,9)
13.2. ¿Explica Ud. sobre el conocimiento lingüístico (léxico, sintáctico, semántico y fonológico) en la decodificación y comprensión de textos?	2,8 (0,9)	2,7 (1,0)
14.2. ¿Cree Ud. que la lectura de imágenes o paratextos es importante?	2,7 (0,9)	2,6 (1,1)
15.2. ¿Emplea Ud. estrategias cognitivas, como la lectura de un paratexto?	2,8 (0,9)	2,9 (0,9)
16.2. ¿Hace Ud. que los alumnos relacionen, a partir de un texto las semejanzas-diferencias, causas-consecuencias?	3,0 (0,9)	2,9 (0,9)

Note. Own elaboration

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The current pandemic by COVID-19 has triggered a series of reflections on the future of education, because its consequences cover a wide spectrum that goes from the economic, social, personal and labor to the educational. It is necessary to highlight that both the frequency attributed and the use of methodological strategies by teachers in teaching reading comprehension show lower values in rural areas than in urban areas. Almost in the totality of the strategies, the urban centers present a greater frequency; however, in those parts where reflection and judgments on the recognition of types of text are worked on, that is, the rural zone, they have a slightly higher level of frequency. This leads us to rethink the scope of social policies (including educational policies) and to consider the problem of inequality, poverty and exclusion.

Also, regarding the use of the strategy of allowing the student to choose the text he or she will read, teachers in the rural zone declare that they do so more frequently than those in the urban zone. It should be noted that the pandemic affecting the population further deepens the gap in access to technological resources in the rural area, and invites teachers to reflect on the importance of training competent readers.

Another result that has stood out in this study is the use of graphic representations or texts, which are more used by teachers in urban centers. This index for rural areas could improve with the new modality, since the teacher as a regulatory entity it is oriented to search for new methodological strategies that involve the introduction of images for a better reading comprehension.

It is important to indicate that, although the methodological strategies are developed in the classroom when reading comprehension is worked on, much remains to be done, especially in rural areas, and this is where an intervention by the authorities in charge of controlling the processes has to take place. pedagogical, possibly with training for teachers to improve results in this area and a real empowerment of teachers in teaching reading comprehension.

The reading comprehension performance of students in the rural sector of Ecuador is lower than that of urban areas, and lower than expected for their educational level, therefore, "schools cannot ignore this reality, their duty is to combat apathy and laziness because of the reading that on many occasions occurs as a repetitive and mechanical activity" (Torres and Dávila, 2020). For this reason, reading comprehension is one of the most important challenges of all the organizations responsible for the educational system, given the comprehension problems presented by beginning readers who graduate from these educational institutions, students who advance to other levels without the necessary skills. enough readers and that lead to school failure.

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