


## **Development of skills in reading comprehension at fourth level of English from Language School (Original)**

### **Desarrollo de habilidades en la comprensión textual para el cuarto nivel de inglés en la escuela de idiomas (Original)**

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#### **Resumen**

La investigación se desarrolló con estudiantes del cuarto nivel de la escuela de Idiomas: “José Machado Rodríguez” de Manzanillo. Mediante un test pedagógico inicial se detectaron dificultades en la comprensión textual. Se elaboró un sistema de ejercicios que permitieron dar solución a esta problemática según los textos que se tratan en la sección *On Your Own* durante las clases de inglés, para evaluar como contribuyeron los ejercicios propuestos a desarrollar la habilidad de comprensión de textos y la información que estos brindan a los estudiantes. Se utilizaron herramientas como: la observación en el aula y realización de encuestas a los estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:** idioma inglés; cuarto nivel; comprensión textual; diagnóstico

#### **Abstract**

The research was developed with fourth level students of the Language School, “José Machado Rodríguez” from Manzanillo. By means of an initial pedagogical test were detected difficulties in reading comprehension. A system of exercises was elaborated. These ones permitted giving solution to this theme according to the texts that are dealt in the section on your own during the

English lessons, to evaluate how the designed exercises contributed developing the skill of reading comprehension and the information that they offer to the students. Some tools were used like the observation in the classroom and fulfillment of surveys to the students.

**Keywords:** english language; fourth level; reading comprehension; diagnosis

### **Introduction**

The English Language is the native language of more than 300 million people. But many more speak it as an international means of communication. Science, sports, trade, and international relations of various kinds have given the English Language the status of one of the world's most important languages. In many countries of the world, English is not considered as the official language however it is taught to the relations among countries. The interaction in the social networks, the use of new technologies as information and communication are aspects to be taken into account. These ones contribute to the development of a country (Abbott et al. 1989).

The Language Schools have a heterogeneous composition in their students in relation with: age, cultural background, professions among others. For this reason, it is necessary to establish instruments for evaluating the development of skills in reading, comprehension and communication.

Cuban professionals participate in relations of internationalism with other countries and some of them are English-speaking countries. Besides, there are many bibliographies in English that professionals use in their investigations to acquire more knowledge about their specialties. That is the reason why it is so important that Cuban students learn to encode the foreign language in its written and spoken ways.

The English language must not only contribute to a functional linguistic efficiency, but also to build new knowledge; that is, to develop student's knowledge, habits and basic skills to

allow them communicate in the foreign language. The students should be able to comprehend oral and written information, as well as to express orally about topics of their daily life and to write simple and brief messages.

The National System of Education plays a very outstanding part in promoting the teaching of English at the different levels of education. Within this system, language schools are developing a great role in this attempt; and in it, the teaching of the reading skills is very important for people who specialize in various fields in which they use English to improve the knowledge of their subject matters by consulting a vast amount of bibliographic sources published in this language in many parts of the world in print, and others that appear on the Internet.

Reading is an exercise that shows and sustains the culture of a given nation. Although it looks like an inanimate or lonely experience, it demands participation and analysis. For those reasons, it is necessary to enhance the teaching of reading skills as a way to better up the education of the present generations.

Because it is so important, many authors, both Cuban and foreigners have been concerned with the treatment of the topic under analysis, such as: Antich (1986); who dealt with some methodological aspects related to this topic as well as Álvarez et al. (2005). There are also some diploma papers related to reading Comprehension but they were applied in Junior High School.

In spite of those attempts to give solution to the reading problems of the students, they still remain. Nowadays, the students are facing some difficulties at the time of comprehending texts and they have problems at the time of answering exercises related to some texts. Most of the students do not reach the third level of assimilation regarding the extrapolation.

Throughout his teaching experience at José Machado Rodríguez Language School, the researcher has observed in the English lessons that it is difficult for the students to succeed in all the levels of improvement of the reading comprehension; almost all of them can only say what the text is about and they do some exercises from the text, they face difficulties in answering some specific questions from what they have read and the most difficult aspect for them is to get involved in extrapolating information. This point has been confirmed through the students' daily evaluations to the reading activity. Taking into account the difficulties mentioned before, the author states the following scientific problem: how to improve the reading skills through the English lessons in fourth level students at José Machado Rodríguez Language School?

The object of this research was the teaching-learning process of the English lessons. The objective of the investigation was to develop the skills in reading comprehension at fourth level of English from "Language School". And as scope of research: The improvement of the fourth level students' reading skills.

### **Population and sample**

For the development of the research took a population of 30 students from fourth level and one English teacher belonging to the Language School from Manzanillo municipality. As sample, was taken 30 students, what represented 100% from total.

### **Materials and Methods**

The research began with a study from analytical-synthetical method to characterize the teaching learning process of the reading comprehension in fourth level. The bibliographical revision, the analysis of content, the observation of lessons, surveys and result of the pedagogical test were used to corroborate scientifically the problematical mentioned and the application of the system of texts and exercises in the English lessons.

In the research was used the following scientific questions:

1. What are the pedagogical, psychological, didactic and linguistic grounds of the teaching-learning process of the reading skills?
2. What is the current state of the reading skills in the fourth level students from José Machado Rodríguez Language School?
3. What set of exercises should be designed to improve the reading skills in fourth level students at José Machado Rodríguez Language School?
4. How to evaluate the degree of effectiveness of the proposal?

For the fulfillment of this research were taken into account different kinds of exercises which are directed to get their specific objectives for the reading comprehension. The exercises can be found in sections. Before-reading, the students predict information about the text. While-reading, they get an overall view of it. After-reading, pupils extrapolate information from the text.

To develop the research was carried out these stages:

1. Pedagogical, psychological, didactic and linguistic grounds of the teaching-learning process of the reading skills.
2. Diagnosis of the current state of the reading skills in the fourth level students from José Machado Rodríguez Language School.
3. Design of the set of exercises to improve fourth level students' reading skills through English lessons at José Machado Rodríguez School.
4. Evaluation of the degree of effectiveness of the proposal.

The diagnosis of the current state of the problem was based on:

- Initial pedagogical test.

- Observation of lectures in classroom.
- Surveys to the students.

### **Analysis of the Results**

#### The reading skills and their relation to the fourth level syllabus from the language schools

According to the syllabus, the objective of this section is the development of the main linguistic skills that allow to form an efficient reader, that is why the activities that are designed must be guided to obtain this goal and to fulfill the methodological requisites that characterize reading as a process of communicative interaction among the reader and the text, as well as the ones that are carried out during and after the reading González (2009). The syllabus states that the students comprehend what they have read when they read brief and simple written materials about topics related to the prior subjects and they take out the main idea and some other details to answer to some questions mainly in the target language, taking into account the whole and correct information that has been asked.

According to Rogova (1983), reading is one of the main skills that a student must develop in a process of mastering a foreign language in school. The syllabus lists this linguistic ability as one of the leading activities to be developed.

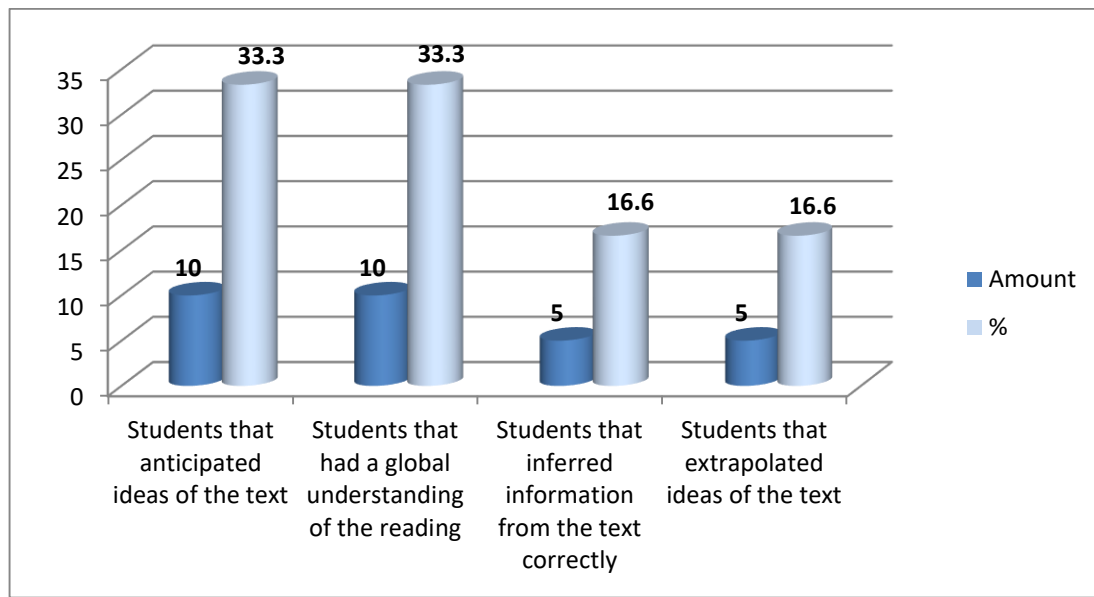
The results of diagnosis will be detailed below:

#### Initial pedagogical test

Reading is of great educational importance, as it is a means of communication, with which people get information they need from books, journals, magazines and newspapers (Wardhaugh, 1969). Through it, in a foreign language, the students enrich their knowledge of the world around them. They get acquainted with the countries where the target language is spoken (Padrón, 2001). With the objective of evaluating the understanding and use of the acquired

knowledge from a reading, a pedagogical test was applied. For this means, it was possible to evaluate the students' knowledge, as a way of diagnosis, about the readings they studied within the *On Your Own* section, obtaining the following results:

**Figure 1. Results of the initial pedagogical test**



According to the results, 10 students (33.3%) anticipated the ideas of the text, 10 students (33.3%) had a global understanding of the reading, 5 students (16.6%) inferred information from the text correctly, and finally, 5 students (16.6%) could extrapolate the ideas of the text.

As can be observed in the previous paragraph, the students have difficulties in the development of their reading skills, especially when interpreting the texts correctly, and in extrapolating the ideas of the texts.

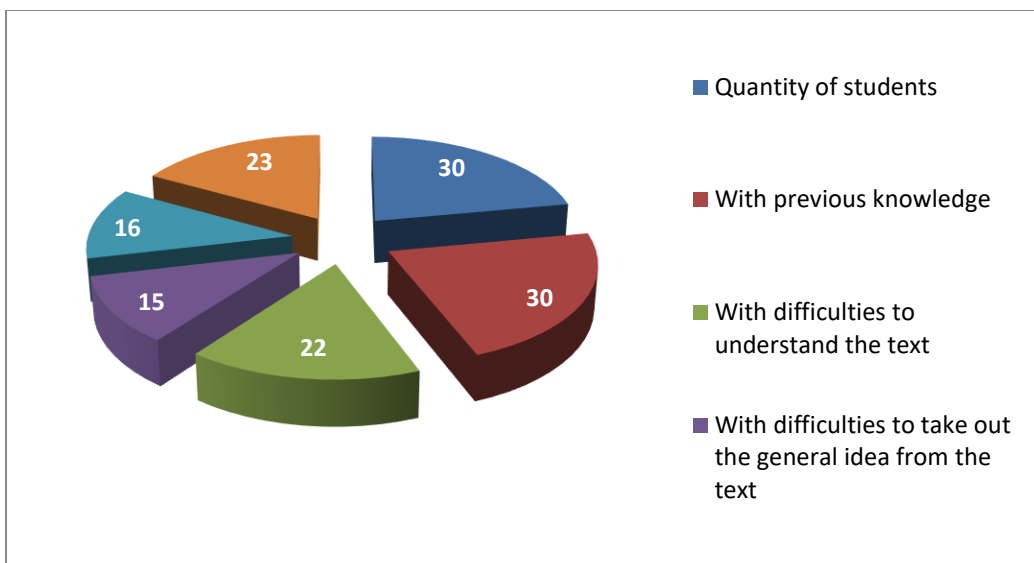
The four linguistic skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) are taught in the language school levels, making emphasis in the two last ones that were mentioned above. Nevertheless, there is undoubtedly a relation among them, which is the reason why it is necessary to teach the students to express orally and in a written way, as well as to understand what they listen and read.

Observation of lectures in classroom

The application of the different exercises to deal with reading will be fitted to the characteristics of the teachers and the students of the school.

Eight lessons were observed in order to evaluate the development of the fourth level students' reading skills. In Figure 2 the obtained results are showed.

**Figure 2. Results of the observation of English lessons**



It was observed that in general the students had a previous knowledge about the topic of the readings that were dealt with in the English lessons. However, 22 students (73.3%) faced serious difficulties in understanding the content of the texts from the On Your Own section, 15 students (50 %) had problems when obtaining the general idea about the texts, 16 students (53.3 %) had problems in getting information about concrete points, and finally 23 students (76.6 %) presented some difficulties in extrapolating information concerning the texts.

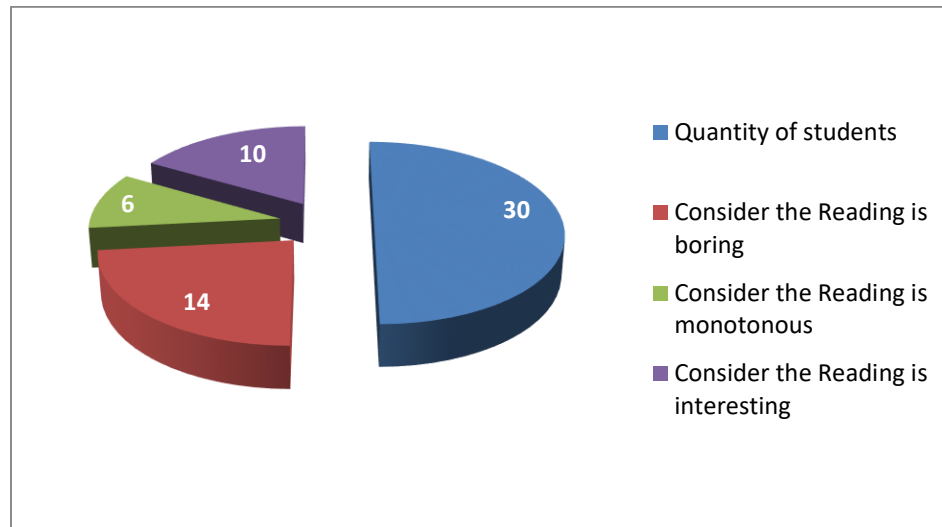
According to Zhang (1997), it is beyond any doubt that the ultimate objective of reading is to obtain information from what is being read. Therefore, these obtained results indicate that the students of the fourth level had problems to acquire information of the read text.

Surveys to the students.



The application of a survey to the sample of thirty (30) students allowed to inquire about their level of satisfaction with the subject English, as well as their opinion about the texts treated in their lessons within the On Your Own section (Pérez, 1996).

**Figure 3. Results of the student's survey**



The survey to the students let the researcher to obtain the following results:

1. 14 students (46.6 %) said that the reading lessons are boring, 6 (20%) said they are monotonous and 10 (33.3%) said they are interesting.
2. 15 students (50 %) said that the exercises were not varied.

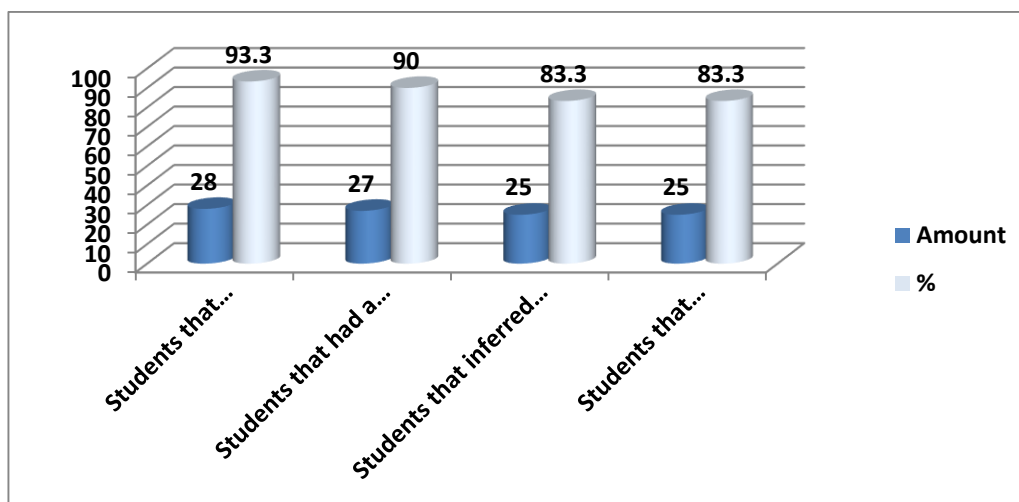
The analysis of the survey applied to the students demonstrates that lonely 33.3% of them found interesting the reading.

In accordance with the previous responses, the exercises and activities cannot be imposed to the text and not all the units must have the same kinds of exercises, but those that are related to the main linguistic skills. The texts must contribute to develop the vocabulary and to reinforce the grammatical structures that are worked in other sections. Besides, they must allow the integration of reading to the other components of verbal activity (Roméu, 2007).

### Final evaluation of the proposal

After the application of the proposal, the author applied the final pedagogical test to evaluate the students' knowledge about the readings they studied within the On Your Own section to evaluate the degree of effectiveness of the set of exercises proposed. Once the set of exercises was applied, this test provided the following results:

**Figure 4. Results of final evaluation of the proposal**



As can be observed in the previous figure, most of the students were able to anticipate the ideas of the text provided, to have a global understanding of the reading, and to extrapolate the ideas of those texts. This is the most significant report derived from the application of the final pedagogical test in regard to the readings taken from the On Your Own section.

### **Conclusions**

1. The results of the initial diagnosis proved that there were serious difficulties in the fourth level students' reading skills.
2. The comparison previously carried out led the author of this investigation to assume that there was a significant advance in the reading skills of the fourth level students sampled,

considering the amount of students that obtained a higher degree of improvement in this respect.

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