

The Development of Reading Comprehension through Intensive and Extensive Reading

By

Angela Sofía Ortiz Guerrero

Submitted to the school of human science in partial

Fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of B.A in English and Spanish

Linguistics and Language Department

English and Spanish Program

University of Nariño

February 2016

Las ideas y conceptos expresados en el siguiente Trabajo de Grado son responsabilidad del autor.

Artículo 1ro del Acuerdo No. 324 de octubre 11 de 1966 emanado del Honorable Consejo

Directivo de la Universidad de Nariño

Nota de Aceptación:

FIRMA DE JURADO

FIRMA DE JURADO

FIRMA DE ACEPTACION

San Juan de Pasto, 1 de Marzo de 2016

Acknowledgement

"At times, our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us." Albert

Schweitzer

I want to thank my family, teachers and friends for your constant and unconditional support.

Resumen

Este documento presenta un panorama general de las investigaciones existentes en lectura de una segunda lengua, con el fin de proporcionar una base teórica que apoye la aplicación de la comprensión lectora del inglés en Colombia. Para ello, algunas definiciones de conceptos como Lectura y Comprensión propuestas por distintos investigadores se tomarán en cuenta, así como sus implicaciones para el ejercicio de la enseñanza en el aula de clases. Adicionalmente, los conceptos de Vocabulario, Conocimiento sintáctico, Estrategias de Lectura y Conocimientos Previos son reconocidos como elementos indispensables para la comprensión de lectura y por lo tanto necesitan ser abordados en los salones colombianos. Finalmente, las lecturas Intensiva y Extensiva son propuestas para ser usadas en combinación con el objetivo de asegurar el desarrollo de los componentes esenciales de la comprensión lectora.

Abstract

This paper presents an overview of Second Language Reading research in order to provide a theoretical basis that supports the application of English reading comprehension in Colombia. Several definitions of Reading and Comprehension provided by different researchers are examined, and their implication for instruction are also considered in this paper. In addition, Vocabulary and Syntactic Knowledge, Reading Strategies, and Background Knowledge are recognized as major components of reading comprehension that need to be addressed in classrooms. Finally, intensive and extensive reading are proposed as approaches that can be used in combination in order to assure the development of the essential components of reading comprehension.

Table of Contents

The Development of Reading Comprehension through Intensive and Extensive Reading.....	8
Defining Reading.....	10
Reading Comprehension.....	12
Components of Reading Comprehension.....	13
Vocabulary Knowledge.....	15
Syntactic Knowledge.....	18
Reading Strategies.....	19
Background Knowledge.....	22
Applying Reading Comprehension in Colombian Context.....	23
Intensive Reading.....	25
Extensive Reading.....	28
Conclusion.....	32
References.....	35

THE DEVELOPMENT OF READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH INTENSIVE AND EXTENSIVE READING

Due to the economical and industrial changes that have been taking place in modern societies, countries around the world now share cultural and ideological links that affect all aspects of life. In consequence, the acquisition of a second language has become an important tool in order to be successful on a global level. In the last decades, different ways to teach and learn languages have been proposed; these have focused their attention on the research of the specific issues involved in EFL and ESL instruction. In this respect, a number of researchers (Anderson, 2012, 2013; Bernhardt, 2011; Birch, 2007; Grabe, 2009; Grabe and Stoller, 2011; Nation, 2006, 2015; Koda, 2010; Krashen, 1993) have emphasized the central role of reading in language learning. Researchers agree that reading provides the basis for the accomplishment of second language acquisition and academic learning since it is one of the main ways to access many types of information. With the rise of the Internet, electronic communication, and English as a global language, millions of students are expected to become competent English speakers. The development of effective reading skills can provide them with the opportunity to learn English abilities in order to achieve goals (Grabe, 2009).

One of the benefits of reading to general second language learning is meaningful exposure to vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Reading offers rich contexts, where learners can practice word recognition and notice language patterns through incidental learning. (Krashen, 1993; Grabe, 2009). The improvement of vocabulary and grammar will facilitate learners to develop their speaking performance. Reading is also related to writing because it can be a “springboard into writing by providing students with something meaningful to write about based on what they have read” (Anderson, 2012, p. 219).

Learning to read in a second language is a key matter to achieve professional and economical success. Nowadays, better opportunities are given to those who are capable of reading with higher levels of comprehension. This fact has influenced educational systems of different countries, which are now more concerned about providing students with critical reading skills to “interpret appropriately the content and intention of texts written by persons from other backgrounds; other world views; other linguistic systems” (Bernhardt, 2011, p. ix). In the Colombian educational context, the acquisition of English has been promoted by the government through “The Curricular Guidelines for Foreign Languages” which suggests the implementation of English teaching since primary school level in order to enrich students’ knowledge of other languages and cultures with a critical perspective, enabling them to contribute to the construction of a cohesive society (Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN), 1999). The curricular Guidelines also highlights the importance of using literature, tales, comics, hypertexts, and other types of reading texts to enhance learners’ analytical abilities, and learn to learn. Likewise, “Basic Standards of Competence in Foreign Languages: English” also created by the MEN (2006) contains a set of policies, which aim to develop English reading comprehension in all grades. Some examples of the standards for eighth and ninth grade are:

- Recognize the purpose of descriptions in narrative texts of medium length.
- Value reading as an important activity for all areas of life.
- Understand implicit information in texts of interesting topics.
- Identify cultural elements in simple texts. (p. 24)

In spite of the fact that the creation of these policies is aimed to improve Colombian students’ reading comprehension, the results obtained in standardized tests applied in Colombia such as “Pruebas Saber 11” and “Pruebas Saber Pro”, which evaluate students’ performance

according to “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages”, show that most students do not display proficiency in English. In 2004, the MEN announced the implementation of “National Bilingualism Program” which aims to implement levels B1 and B2 for all high school and university students by 2019. However, Sanchez Jabba (2013) analyzed the outcomes obtained from these tests in 2011 and concluded that only 2 percent of high school students reached level B1 and only 6,5 percent of university students reached B2 or B+ level. In other words, Colombian learners are far away from attaining the goal set by MEN. Considering that the structure of the English section in both tests consists of several questions related to reading comprehension abilities (ICFES, 2010), it can be inferred that reading instruction in Colombian classrooms is not effective.

Therefore, this paper aims to explore the theoretical framework that underpins the reading comprehension process in order to provide teachers with a clear overview of the various components of effective reading instruction so that they can articulate this theory with classroom practices.

To meet this goal, the definitions of reading and reading comprehension will be first presented, as well as a description of the major components of reading comprehension. In addition, intensive and extensive reading instruction are proposed as ways of enhance the acquisition of such components.

Defining Reading

It is very important for teachers to understand the complex nature of L2 reading. Although L2 and L1 reading processes are related, reading in a second language requires the acquisition of particular abilities that learners need to master in order to become fluent readers.

The acknowledgment of such matter can help teachers to make suitable decisions about teaching reading in the classrooms.

There have been many attempts to define reading. Alyousef (2005) describes reading as an “interactive process between the reader and the text that leads to fluency or automaticity.” On the other hand, Cassany (2006) explains that reading is a social construction, which implies that interaction occurs not only between the text and the reader but also that society and culture intervene in such a way that the reading process is constantly adapting according to historical, geographical, and cultural circumstances. For Cassany, reading is a “transitive verb” because reading activity involves both the development of the cognitive process and the acquisition of sociocultural knowledge specific to each genre, discursive practice, and text. In the field of Second Language Acquisition, the issue of how language learners approach a text was first addressed by Kenneth Goodman in 1970. Goodman defined reading as a “psycholinguistic guessing game” in which readers use textual cues and background knowledge to reconstruct the meaning of a text (Birch, 2007, p. 7). This concept influenced second language reading research in the 1970’s and 1980’s. During this time the distinction of “bottom up” and “top down” processes was made. In the “bottom up” process, readers identify linguistic patterns such as words, phrases, syntactical cues, and later they use their “data driven” operations to construct meaning. Meanwhile, in the “top down” process intelligence and prior knowledge are used to make sense of a text (Brown, 2001).

However, throughout the last years of inquiry in second language reading, some researchers have questioned Goodman’s theories. For example, Birch (2007) considers that the notion of “reading as a guessing game” (p. 8) has many limitations. She argues that not all EFL /ESL learners understand the relationship between letters and sounds, and that they cannot

extend this knowledge to new words; that is, they are unable to “guess the game”. Therefore, some learners get stuck at some point and need help to move on. Likewise, Bernhardt (2005) believes that the top down/bottom up principles oversimplify the second language reading process because they reduce it to a “grammar issue or a prior knowledge issue” (p.3) and other significant components are excluded such as phonological aspects. Grabe (2009) is of the opinion that reading is a complex process which cannot be defined as the interpretation of information encoded in print language. For him reading is a combination of ten different processes: “a rapid process, an efficient process, a comprehending process, an interactive process, a strategic process, a flexible process, a purposeful process, an evaluative process, a learning process, and a linguistic process” (p.16). The combination of these processes form fluent reading.

The evolution of the definition of reading and its processes presented above have a number of implications for instruction. First, a clear awareness of the complex nature of reading can provide teachers with insight into the effective ways of teaching reading taking into account students’ needs and the variety of circumstances that impact learning in Colombian classrooms. Moreover, this will also encourage them to take a critical position towards the educational policies that MEN has imposed for language reading instruction. Finally, teachers will be able to evaluate learning materials and activities on EFL reading, so they can make meaningful changes and achieve better outcomes.

Reading Comprehension

Reading and comprehension are not the same; comprehension is not specific only to reading since listening ability also requires an active use of this process. Nevertheless, it has been acknowledged that comprehension is the principal goal of reading (Anderson, 2013; Grabe,

2009). When a person decides to read a newspaper, a book or a letter he or she does so with the intention of understanding the ideas that the author wants to convey. Gomez and Avila (2009) describe reading comprehension as “the understanding of the meaning of written material and involves the conscious strategies that lead to understanding” (p. 55). For other authors such as Bernhardt and James (1987), and Koda (as cited in Grabe, 2009) comprehension involves the integration of incoming information from the text and background knowledge. Bernhardt and James (1987) add that “comprehension is not a process of breaking complex units of language into simpler ones, but rather a process of taking multiple units and building them into representations” (p. 66). Therefore, reading comprehension encompasses the understanding of texts using smaller units, such as strategies and background knowledge, which together create a more complex cognitive process.

From these definitions it is possible to infer that comprehension is the most important outcome that EFL students must achieve in reading language instruction. However, as it will be shown later this is not a simple task that is accomplished with reading activities that commonly are offered in most school textbooks. Teachers must find a way to articulate reading comprehension instruction with the development of other language components so that students can find the value of reading to general English learning and the future achievement of their goals.

Components of Reading Comprehension

When readers approach a text they do it for different reasons. Reading can occur in order to search specific information, to gain new knowledge, or for entertainment. Grabe (2009) recognized six types of academic reading purposes: “reading to search for information, reading for quick understanding, reading to learn, reading to integrate information, reading to evaluate,

critique, and use information, reading for general comprehension” (p.7). It has been argued that one’s motive for reading will influence the ways texts are processed to meet particular goals; reading a newspaper is not the same as reading an academic text. Cassany (2006) states that for each purpose, readers assume specific roles, and they use different linguistic and rhetoric resources. Though the different purposes require that readers set diverse goals, according to Grabe (2009) this does not mean that each one of the purposes involves a unique process of reading. Studies have shown that for every purpose, readers use the same cognitive processes but in different combinations, in other words the difference is only “a matter of emphasis.” Consistent with these studies, it is possible to recognize some principal components that underpin the reading comprehension process no matter the reader’s intentions.

Nowadays, the notions of “top down” and “bottom up” processes are still accepted as important, but they have been rethought. Throughout the decades, researchers have argued about which of them is more effective for reading comprehension instruction. Thus, it has been emphasized a more balanced model where both processes interact jointly during reading. The “bottom up” model is composed of lower-level skills such as recognition of word meanings and syntactic structures. In order to comprehend a text with ease, these skills need to be automatized because once L2 readers are able to identify words and grammar without effort, they will have more cognitive functions available to use, giving them more resources to understand the ideas of a text. These other resources are part of higher level processing or “top down” reading. During this process, readers not only make inferences or hypothesis of the text based on their background knowledge, but also they use strategies to consciously monitor and assess comprehension (Phakiti, 2006).

In this sense, researchers (Birch, 2007; Grabe, 2009; Anderson, 2013; Phakiti, 2006) have agreed that the development of vocabulary, syntactic knowledge (Lower Level Processing), reading strategies, and background knowledge (Higher Level Processing) are critical components in which teachers and learners must focus in order to reach the goal of comprehension. Therefore, in the next section the components mentioned above will be described in more detail as well as its implications for reading comprehension instruction in EFL classrooms.

Vocabulary Knowledge

There is a strong correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension. A reciprocal relationship is shared between the two since a large amount of vocabulary directly contributes to improve L2 reading comprehension, and extensive reading can significantly increase vocabulary knowledge (Stanovich, 2000 as cited in Grabe, 2009). However, in this section it will be considered the role of vocabulary in the ability to understand the main idea of a text.

Frequently, the lack of vocabulary causes frustration to EFL students during reading tasks. According to Scrivener (2005) learners may encounter reading problems when they assume a “word by word approach” that is they stop reading every time they find an unknown word, making reading slower, less pleasurable, and affecting comprehension. This difficulty has provoked discussions about the amount of vocabulary ESL/EFL learners need to acquire in order to make sense of a text with ease. In this regard, Nation (2006) argues that comprehension occurs when readers know at least 98 percent of all the words in a text. That is, only one in fifty words can be unknown to allow learners to decode a reading passage and use context to infer the meaning of the unknown words. Based on this information, Nation developed a list of fourteen thousand word-families using data from the British National Corpus in order to measure how

many word-families are actually needed to “reach a 98% coverage level of a variety of written and spoken texts” (p. 61). The list was arranged from high frequency to low frequency words; therefore, the first thousand word-families are the most common words found in texts and so forth. Nation used different kinds of corpora such as novels, newspapers and graded readers. The results of his study showed that in order to read a novel and a newspaper comprehensibly it was required a vocabulary of 8000 to 9000 words. Meanwhile, in order to understand graded readers the size of vocabulary needed was around 1000 to 3000 word-families.

Nation’s studies allowed to set a goal in terms of vocabulary needed in reading comprehension. However, the next question researchers have made is how to acquire those first 9000 word-families in such a way that this process does not become a headache. Krashen (1989 in Cobb 2007) proposed that the better way to learn large amounts of vocabulary is through free, extensive and voluntary reading. According to him, reading a lot is all what it takes to enrich the lexicon. That means that vocabulary difficulties encountered during reading can be supplied by reading more. However, Cobb (2007) questions Krashen’s assumption by saying that his studies lack of “empirical support.” He argues that in order to learn a word, an average of six to twelve encounters with that same word are required; therefore, reading alone it is not enough to acquire all vocabulary needed since most texts do not provide sufficient input to guarantee such learning. To prove this, Cobb (2007) used a computer program to calculate the occurrence of the first 3000 word-families (based on Nation’s list) in a corpus of 500 texts which encompassed several fiction novels, newspaper articles and academic texts. The results showed that most texts provide only the half of the 3000 word-families, and many of them were not repeated enough to assure learning. As a result, Cobb highlights the need of additional vocabulary instruction during reading. He proposes the used of computational tools designed by himself such as “Lextutor”

(free available in his web page) that allows a learner to “paste the text she is reading into a text box, and the program transforms it into a text with every word click-linked to a concordance from any corpus and from there to an online dictionary” (p.52). In other words, learners would be able to find a word in several texts and compare its uses in different contexts. In Colombia Cobb’s computer program can be a helpful tool to articulate the use of Information and Communication Technology ICT (or TICs in Spanish) with reading instruction since it provides learners with interactive activities which may facilitate vocabulary learning.

In regard to Cobb’s study, Nation (2014) conducted a similar research using a program which calculates the frequency of the word-families of his lists in an investigation of twenty-five novels and several TV shows. The results of this study showed that by reading these twenty-five novels readers could easily encounter all the 9000 word-families with repetitions of 171 of the first 2000 words and twelve at the 9000 level. The twenty-five novels provide a total of 2,956,908 words, Nation therefore concluded that this is the amount of words that a learner needs to read in order to find the 9000 word-families. The difference between Cobb’s and Nation’s studies may be in the kind of corpora used. While Cobb used several newspaper articles, but only six fiction novels and graded readers, Nation used twenty-five novels among which were classic literature books, fiction and non-fiction stories, and others. Moreover, Cobb did not specify the total amount of words found in his investigation.

On the other hand, Nation (2015) claims that although repetition is an essential factor to vocabulary learning, the quality of the attention learners put each encounter with a word is also important. He recognizes four levels of quality of attention “noticing a word, retrieval of knowledge gained from previous meetings, meeting or using the word in ways which are different from the previous meetings or use, and elaborating on knowledge of the word beyond

its contextual uses” (p.136) these levels define word acquisition. Nation argues that extensive reading has all the conditions to offer learners the possibility to encounter words at each one of the former levels. Yet, he agrees with Cobb in that learners need additional instruction for vocabulary learning because the four levels of attention mentioned can be better supported by a variety of aids such as Cobb’s “Lextutor”. Grabe (2009) adds that a 95 percent word knowledge of a text can allow learners to successfully read as long as teachers provide them with instructional support and strategies. For Grabe (2009) it is also important to help learners to increase their awareness of new words and motivate them to use them. He also proposes activities such as glosses, flash cards, vocabulary lists and others that “can create ways to reintroduce large numbers of words in a variety of contexts and uses” (p.278)

Vocabulary knowledge is an essential condition for reading comprehension. Knowing a lot of words can facilitate reading tasks and help students to avoid frustration. Nation’s studies proved that extensive reading is capable of providing enough input to achieve the goal of 9000 word families. However, twenty-five novels with 2,956,908 words seems a considerable amount of reading and many learners especially in the Colombian context find it difficult to undertake this task. Therefore, the application of extensive reading must be supported by some principles and intensive instruction. Such issue will be later addressed in this paper.

Syntactic Knowledge

During reading, the recognition of words permits the extraction of syntactic information (Grabe, 2009). This means that the different ways in which words are grouped enable learners to identify grammar patterns. For instance, the article the usually precedes a noun; therefore, readers will identify “the” as a signal that introduces a noun. Among fluent readers this process goes almost unnoticed; however, L2 readers usually struggle with reading comprehension when

they encounter unknown grammar patterns. Through a review of studies, Jung (2009) found evidence that grammar plays a critical role in second language readers' ability to understand the meaning of a text. She recognizes that "the abilities to identify syntactic roles of words, dissect sentences into meaningful chunks, and recognize the syntactic structure of a sentence" (p.4) seem to contribute to comprehension. Hence, reading comprehension instruction must not ignore the importance of syntactic knowledge. However, as it is a sensitive issue, teachers should attempt to integrate grammar teaching into meaningful contexts which permit learners to notice syntactic patterns without forgetting that the main purpose of language learning is communication.

Reading Strategies

A great deal of current research on reading comprehension seems to focus on the use of reading strategies to improve the learner's capacity to extract the main idea of a text. Anderson (2005, as cited in Anderson, 2013) defines strategies as "conscious actions that learners take to improve language learning" (p. 5). That is, students are able to consciously choose and use strategies at will while building metacognitive awareness.

Although vocabulary and syntactic knowledge are essential, reading comprehension not only depends on decoding words, sentences and paragraphs, but it also requires awareness of the comprehension process. This awareness has been known as metacognition and it engages the ability to control and monitor cognitive processes (Grabe, 2009; Phakiti, 2006). During reading, metacognition happens when learners consciously use a set of reading strategies in order to recognize the main idea of a text, and try to restore comprehension when difficulties arise. Researchers have agreed that strategies are a major concern in reading instruction because they enable learners to monitor comprehension, and seek resources to assure they understand a text on

a deeper level. Therefore, the teacher's task is to assist EFL students in the accurate use of strategies so that they become independent and confident readers. According to Grabe (2009) reading comprehension instruction is best developed when students and teachers "talk about what the text means, what difficulties may arise in interpreting it, how can these difficulties can be resolved, where important information is found, and why the information that has been identified is so important" (p.245). In other words, a reading comprehension course is about interaction, where learners receive teacher's constant feedback on the better ways to use strategies in order to comprehend faster.

In this sense, Grabe (2009) also provides a list of eight strategies which have been tested empirically by different researchers during several decades: summarizing, forming questions, answering questions and elaborative interrogation, activating prior knowledge, monitoring comprehension (which encompasses other strategies such as setting a reading goal, attending difficulties, etc), using text structure awareness (recognize discourse-signaling systems in a text such as subheadings, transition words etc.), using graphic organizers (charts, diagrams, matrices, etc), and inferencing. The former strategies have been widely tested by researchers, who have concluded that their use can bring huge benefits to EFL/ESL classrooms. The evidence showed that these strategies help learners to focus on main ideas, associate prior knowledge with new one, make use of text structure resources, and improve their ability to recall information of a text; therefore, strategies along with vocabulary and syntactic instruction must be developed through pre-, during-, and post-reading activities (Grabe, 2009). Moreover, Grabe also suggests that reading strategies must be applied in combination. That is, learners can benefit from a strategy when they use it along with others. To do this, teachers can employ activities such as KWL (What students know, what they want to know, and what they have learned) which enables

learners to activate prior knowledge, set goals and monitor comprehension. Activities such as Reciprocal Teaching which allows students to ask questions and provide feedback to other peers.

Likewise, other researchers have proposed strategies which are more or less related to Grabe's list. For instance, Schacter (2006 in Anderson 2012) created a teacher book with twenty-six strategies categorized in seven groups, among them it is possible to find charts (KWL, T-charts) and forming questions strategy (thin and thick questions). Scrivener (2005) and Harmer (2007) highlight "Skimming" a fast reading for overall comprehension, and "Scanning" a fast reading for specific information.

Meanwhile, in Colombia some studies on reading strategies instruction have been conducted. Echeverri and McNulty (2010) found that strategies such as activating previous knowledge, making predictions and graphic organizers had a positive effect on the comprehension of the Colombian students tested because these strategies allowed them to express their opinions about the reading topics, promote their curiosity, and help them to organize information. In another study conducted by Gomez and Ávila (2009) tested 50 second semester students of different degree programs at a private university in Colombia, the implementation of strategies such as brainstorming, KWL charts and comparison and contrast charts was analyzed. Researchers report that these strategies allowed learners to focus on the important information and established connections between the topic and prior knowledge. At the end of the study it was concluded that there was a positive correlation between reading comprehension and the implementation of strategies; twenty participants out of thirty-eight improved their reading performance.

The appropriate use of strategies can lessen the effort required to read a text. Colombian teachers therefore must be actively involved offering support and guidance in order to ensure their students can benefit from their application.

Background Knowledge

Another important component of reading comprehension is the role of background knowledge. During the process of extracting the main idea of a text, readers not only use their vocabulary and syntactic knowledge but they also bring a large amount of values, “experiences, and preconceptions about the uses of spoken and written language” (Mikulecky, 2008 p.1). This means that background knowledge gives readers different possibilities to build meaning from a text. According to researchers prior information is structured in the mind through schemata. Each schema has some “slots” where the knowledge of certain topic is categorized. When readers try to understand a text, the slots which are related to the information are activated, and understanding occurs depending on the compatibility of the new input and the existent schema (Jung, 2009). According to this theory if the reader lacks of sufficient background knowledge of the topic, problems may arise throughout the comprehension process. This complication is usually found in L2 reading once EFL learners are confronted with reading passages which are far away from their experiences, and cultural practices. Such issue needs to be addressed in the classroom. Scrivener (2005) proposed a model of reading lesson that “moves form big to small”. During pre- reading activities, teachers should elicit learners’ interest on the topic and “make an explicit link between the topic of the text and students’ own lives and experience” (p.187) so that when reading begins, they will have familiar schemata to build comprehension.

In the next section, some challenges of developing the four components of reading comprehension in Colombian classrooms will be analyzed, then intensive and extensive reading instruction will be considered.

Applying Reading Comprehension to a Colombian Context

As mentioned above, successful reading comprehension requires that learners have a vocabulary of at least 8000 to 9000 word families, recognize elements such as collocations, idioms and phrasal verbs, and understand syntactic patterns. They also need to learn to apply strategies in order to understand the meaning of a text, and use them with autonomy in academic or non-academic situations to achieve (with time and dedication) fluency and accuracy in reading. This should be the goal in most reading comprehension programs; however, many of the practices that need to be involved in effective reading instruction represent a number of challenges in Colombian context. First, the lack of reading habits in Colombia. According to a study conducted by the “Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas” (DANE) in 2014, 23.4 percent of the respondents said they read one to two books in a year, but only 7.7 percent of them read 6 to 9 books in a year. Although the number of books read by Colombians increased compared to results from other years (see Cultural Consumption Survey, DANE 2008), these numbers are still low. Second, reading instruction requires the access to varied reading materials. Nevertheless, in many schools students do not have access to English books. It must also be considered that Colombia is an EFL context which is an obstacle for L2 reading development. According to Brown (2001) EFL contexts are challenging since there is no natural production outside the classroom. While in ESL contexts, students are exposed to large amounts of written input on their daily routine, learners in Colombia have L2 reading opportunities only during classroom time which is preventing the development of reading skills.

Some studies therefore have focused on extensive reading as an activity which can enrich reading comprehension teaching and bring several benefits to English learning. As it was mentioned before, there is evidence that extensive reading contributes with vocabulary growth because it assures word repetition in a variety of contexts. It also has an impact in conceptual and cultural knowledge growth, and it helps to improve reasoning skills and reinforce schema building (Grabe,2009). Thus, the implementation of extensive reading in Colombian classrooms may be an alternative to increase students' motivation towards reading comprehension courses since it provides learners the opportunity to choose the books and texts they want to read. In a study done by Echeverri and McNulty (2010) with Colombian high school students, it was found that learners were more engage with reading activities when they perceived that the topics of the texts were interesting and relevant for their lives.

On the other hand, although extensive reading is an essential element, it does not cover all the instruction needed to develop the components of reading comprehension (vocabulary, syntactic knowledge, reading strategies and background knowledge) by itself. As it was already stated, a significant increase in vocabulary size is only possible after a great amount of reading. This can be a challenge in our context; due to poor reading habits, it is very difficult for Colombian students to read the two million words suggested by Nation, and if there is a lack of vocabulary it is really difficult to maintain a good reading rate. Even if materials are at an appropriate level, students would need explicit strategy instruction to learn to restore comprehension and connect background knowledge with new information.

On account of this, intensive reading can be a way to reinforce extensive reading because it provides students opportunities to learn comprehension strategies and apply them through peer interaction, practice grammar, and use tools to support vocabulary learning. Intensive reading

teaching can be seen as a preparation to achieve the goal of the two million words with less complications, while simultaneously internalizing and automatizing all the knowledge acquired in the classroom.

For these reasons, this paper suggests that reading comprehension teaching may be better applied in Colombian classrooms through a combination of intensive reading and extensive reading. In the following sections both are going to be explained in more detail as well as their implications for instruction in Colombian classrooms.

Intensive Reading

Nation (2004) defined intensive reading as the “detailed reading of texts with the two goals of understanding the text and learning language features with a deliberate focus on these items” (p.20). In other words, intensive reading lessons are aimed to guide comprehension of reading passages, and focus learners’ attention in the acquisition of language items.

Some researchers have argued that intensive reading is not beneficial because it focuses on the analysis of grammar and the use of translation. However, in the last decades some principles have been proposed in order to avoid practices that could prevent effective comprehension teaching. Grabe (2009) believes that intensive reading lessons must be learner-centered, they must be planned around students’ needs and desires, the teaching objectives need to be clear, materials must be interesting and there must be a degree of students’ choice in their selection. Furthermore, he emphasizes that strategy training should be developed with the intention of providing students with the opportunity to become independent readers. Likewise, Harmer (2007) claims that intensive reading requires that the teacher adopts the role of organizer (to clarify the reading purpose and explain the activities), observer (to check progress), feedback organizer, and prompter (to respond to questions). In addition, Harmer believes that “students are

far more likely to be engaged in a text if they bring their own feelings and knowledge to the task, rather than only responding to someone else's ideas of what they should find out" (p.287). This is a really important thing to apply in Pasto, where learners sometimes are indifferent to the topics which are typically proposed in English text books, but if teachers include student's thoughts and feelings, it is possible to reduce boredom and apathy towards reading. Harmer suggests that the use of KWL charts can help to include students actively during lessons. There are some other activities which can be used by teachers in Pasto to increase interaction. For example, "Collaborative Strategic Reading" is an approach which combines the use of different strategies such as activating prior knowledge, making predictions and clarifying information. It promotes reading tasks through group work following the principles of cooperative learning (Grabe, 2009).

Regarding to vocabulary learning, Nation (2004) suggests that during intensive reading teachers should explain to their students all the knowledge that is involved in understanding a word. That is, they need to know the pronunciation of a word, how it sounds, how it is written, their meanings according to different contexts, and the different patterns in which the word can be used, for example collocations. In order to teach these things, Nation proposes activities such as *Preteaching* which consists in explain problematic vocabulary before learners meet these words in texts, adding a *Glossary* with high frequency words to help learners focus on important vocabulary, *guessing from Context* which is a valuable vocabulary strategy that needs to be practiced a lot. Teachers can provide students support when there are difficult words, but this strategy must be developed independently through practice. In this respect, Harmer (2007) argues that although teachers encourage students to guess the meaning of unknown words from the context, many times they are "desperate to know what each individual word means" (p.286).

This also happens in Colombian classrooms because teachers usually put too much emphasis on dictionary use or because students are used to extract the main idea of a text only after they have translated it into Spanish. In that case, Harmer recommends that teachers permit students to search the meaning of a small amount of words. Teachers give learners only five minutes to look up words or make questions about them. Another activity is to look up words with other peer, students can make groups to write a list of five unknown words, the groups can join into larger groups and share the lists, then each group have to decide which words are more important for comprehension and make a new list, again with only five words. Finally, the words in the last list can be looked up using dictionaries or other sources.

In addition, intensive reading can be better addressed in the classroom through Pre- During- and Post- reading activities. These three stages need to be organized around the development of the four reading skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) where reading is the core around which the others are built (Grabe,2009; Harmer,2007; Anderson, 2012). In this sense, Pre-reading focuses on introducing the reading topic using prior knowledge to enhance reading comprehension. Moreover, Pre-reading activities are used to increase learners' motivation and facilitate the During- reading stage. Ajideh (2003) points out that pre- reading occurs when the teacher initiates a discussion around a video, image or word. This practice gives learners the opportunity to “accept, reject or alter their own initial associations and to integrate them into more accurate pictures of the target concept”. (p.7). During-reading stage learners read long texts, short stories, passages, etc., with constant guidance so that they are able to apply reading strategies, learn to guess meanings from context, and make clear other difficulties they may have. Post-reading is used to verify learner's comprehension, examine grammar and

vocabulary doubts that could not be clarified during reading, and consolidate knowledge acquired (Deyan and Yufen, 2006).

Finally, it is the teacher's duty to organize lesson plans around the principles provided above. His or her role is to guide learners to take advantage of intensive reading tasks so that they can use them outside the classroom.

Extensive Reading

Extensive reading is fluent reading of larger texts for pleasure and general understanding (Scrivener, 2005). Different researchers have defended it because of its several benefits, but as it was said before, whether or not students improve their reading ability with extensive reading depends on the quality of the guidance teachers provide throughout the whole process. In this sense some principles have been suggested to its application. One of the most important characteristics of effective extensive reading is freedom of choice. Students should be able to choose among a variety of materials (books, magazines, etc.) and topics in order to assure that they read for pleasure and genuine desire of learning. Also, the materials selected should be at an adequate level of difficulty, learners should learn to set their own learning goals, and they should be able to select their texts according to length and linguistic level. (Day and Bamford as cited in Ruiz and Arias, 2009). Once students choose their own books, it is teacher's role to give learners tools to persevere in reading. In Colombia, due to the large size of most classrooms, it is difficult for teachers to keep track of students' reading. In this respect, Lyutaya (2011) recommends the creation of "a community of readers"; students create reading groups where they are able to share their reading experiences with their partners, they also complete reading tasks, exchange books and advice. Lyutaya also proposes the use of Reading Logs to connect extensive reading with writing skill. Reading Logs give learners the opportunity to write their opinion about the

books they are reading. Every time students write something in their logs they build comprehension, because they are associating all the things they see in their daily lives with the new perspectives stories offer. Lyutaya considers that “a Reading Log is a place to take risks, speculate, ask questions, express opinions, and build knowledge, giving students the ability to grow as strategic readers and independent learners” (P.29). Teachers need to create classroom moments where learners can share their logs, and enrich comprehension. To do this Lyutaya argues that Reading Logs must be composed of comprehension and vocabulary strategies. This means that although students are free to fill their logs with their own ideas, teachers should guide learners during writing with some strategies which are aimed to facilitate comprehension. Some of the strategies proposed by Lyutaya (2011) which can be easily applied in Colombian classrooms are listed below.

- Comment on a passage or sentence from the text: A student can write down some interesting, strange or puzzling sentence and then give his or her own interpretations on it.
- Learners can make a poster using pictures or drawings with a fragment of the story or some special character.
- Students can write a letter to an editor or a columnist giving their impressions of the story. “If some student in class is reading the same story, they can write a reply”(p.31)
- Teachers can ask learners to give their opinions about the story and provide an alternative ending.
- Learners can compare cultural aspects of the story with their own culture.

- On Vocabulary, students should first try to guess the meaning from the context; otherwise they can write unknown vocabulary in their logs, provide the English meaning and write sentences, phrases or questions using the words.

The former strategies can be used by learners every time they make an entry in their log. In Colombia, Reading Logs may be a good alternative to encourage learners to read more and comprehend better because it does not require complex and expensive materials (a notebook, pencils), it does not demand a lot of time, and it can help learners to become more creative and autonomous.

Though many researchers have argued that learners should try to guess unknown words from context, as it was said before if students are not able to understand at least 95 to 98 percent of a text, guessing the meaning of a word gets more complex and the reading process can become frustrating rather than pleasurable. Consequently, reading materials should be understandable, texts provided need to be simplified to learner's different levels. Modified texts are called "Graded Readers". "Readers" are often simplified versions of established literary books, written based on specific vocabulary and grammar lists, L2 students are therefore able to read them with ease (Harmer, 2007). Along with the use of "Readers", Harmer (2007) indicates that extensive reading also requires the constant presence of the teacher to organize reading programs and help students to choose what to read.

Although the instruction of reading comprehension in Colombian classrooms is crucial, one of the major complaints that teachers have is that learners do not have any interest in reading activities. In this sense, the use of "Graded Readers" at the appropriate level can promote learners' motivation to read books for pleasure and learning. Teachers must select stories that catch teenagers' and children's attention, elicit their imagination, and their desire to continue

reading. Extensive reading is considered one of the most important sources of incidental learning, but due to student's poor reading habits, reading large amounts of materials in a second language may be difficult. Hence, it is the teacher's duty to guide students to learn vocabulary and grammar patterns from reading contexts. In the same way, they must help learners to understand the main idea of a text, and build meaningful connections between new and prior knowledge through activities such as Reading Logs which combine the application of different strategies and allow learners to express their feelings while they develop writing skills as well.

It is true that in our educational context reading can be difficult to promote due to the lack of materials. However, given that the most frequent deficiencies among Colombian learners are related to the lack of reading comprehension abilities, it is imperative that teachers find a way to provide schools and students with appropriate books and materials. For example, in Pasto in the public library "Banco de la Republica" there are a variety of "Readers" and general English books which teachers and learners can borrow and make copies. Finally, extensive reading can bring positive changes in the Colombian educational system. Teachers, administrators, parents, and others must therefore be involved in the process of providing learners with the opportunities to take advantages of the benefits that books offer.

To conclude, reading comprehension can be better achieved with the integration of extensive reading in classroom practices. To do this, teachers must provide students with materials which are suited to their proficiency levels. Although extensive reading is an excellent tool to improve learner's reading performance by itself, it is necessary that teachers support and guide this process with the implementation of reading strategies instruction, vocabulary and the construction of prior schemata, they are the components that learners need to acquire to become competent readers.

Conclusion

Reading comprehension has become a primary need for EFL students. Nowadays, written English is frequently found in academic and non-academic environments, and people who have the tools to deal with English texts are more prepared to face challenges. However, in Colombia standardized exams such as “Pruebas Saber 11” have shown that students have difficulties when they try to understand the main idea of English texts. Therefore, poor results in such exams demands changes in the reading comprehension instruction of Colombian classrooms.

With this in mind, this paper suggests the development of four components of reading comprehension: Vocabulary, Syntactic knowledge, Reading Strategies and Background Knowledge. These components represent the core elements that teachers should consider in order to give learners what it takes to become fluent and independent readers.

Some limitations in the development of such components can be identified. First, students are not motivated to read. This paper reviews some studies which show that learners continue to read for a longer time when they feel that topics are interesting and relevant for their lives. Lack of motivation may therefore happen because teachers do not include students’ interests and needs in the selection of reading materials, and students read only because it is obligatory, but they do not make the extra effort to improve their comprehension abilities. Second, students do not know how to deal with unknown words. Many times comprehension is interrupted because they stop reading every time they find an unknown word. In this sense, teachers should encourage learners to use context to guess the meaning of words and when this is not enough they may use additional vocabulary activities. Third, students are not exposed to the amount of input required because an EFL environment does not offer the possibility of a natural exposure.

In this regard, intensive and extensive reading are proposed as alternatives which can give teachers tools to reorient reading comprehension classes. Extensive reading is reading large amounts of materials for pleasure, which be an option to increase learners' motivation towards reading. In the Colombian context however extensive reading would not be easy to apply mostly because it requires that learners have access to a variety of materials. Researchers suggest that it is necessary to set up a library in the classroom which would require a lot of effort. Moreover, reading could be a difficult task to undertake if students do not have consolidated reading habits, and if they do not know how to use vocabulary, syntactic and reading strategies. Nevertheless, extensive reading offers a number of benefits to help Colombian students to improve their reading comprehension performance and achieve better outcomes in standardized tests. For that reason, an extensive reading program should be implemented in Colombian schools. In spite of challenges, "Graded Readers" can be a good choice to give students the possibility to start reading. "Readers" are simplified books which help students to avoid frustration with too many unknown words. In addition, teachers can facilitate extensive reading including activities such as Reading Logs which allow learners to become more creative through writing.

On the other hand, intensive reading would be easier to apply in Colombia because it does not require a lot of reading materials, but teachers need to choose texts according to what students want to read. Moreover, intensive reading lessons should be carefully planned in Pre- During- and Post- reading tasks, and teachers must be there to check students' progress and provide guidance when there are difficulties.

Finally, considering that importance of reading comprehension, it is recommended that teachers take into account the proposals presented in this paper since most of the practices

suggested are supported by strong theoretical bases and can be easily articulated in EFL classrooms.

References

- Alyousef, H. S. (2005). Teaching reading comprehension to ESL/EFL learners. *The Reading Matrix*, 5 (2). 143-153. Retrieved from <http://www.readingmatrix.com/articles/alyousef/article.pdf>
- Ajideh, P. (2003). Schema Theory-Based Pre-Reading Tasks: A Neglected Essential in the ESL Reading Class. *The Reading Matrix*, 3(1). 1-14 Retrieved from <http://www.readingmatrix.com/articles/ajideh/article.pdf>
- Anderson, N. J. (2012). Reading Instruction. In A. Burns and C.J Richards (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to pedagogy and practice in second language teaching* (pp. 218-224). NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Anderson, N. J. (2013). A curricular model for reading: The inclusion of extensive reading. *TESL Reporter*, 46, 1-9. Retrieved from <https://ojs.lib.byu.edu/spc/index.php/TESL/article/view/35748/33478>
- Bernhardt, E. B., & James, C. J. (1987). The teaching and testing of comprehension in foreign language learning. In D.W. Birckbichler (Ed.), *Foreign Languages: Proficiency, policy and professionalism*, 65-81. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED285420.pdf>
- Bernhardt, E.B. (2005). Progress and procrastination in second-language reading. In Mary McGroarty (Ed). *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*,133-150. Cambridge: CUP. Retrieved from <https://web.stanford.edu/dept/lc/language/about/conferencepapers/AAALBernhardt01.pdf>

- Bernhardt, E. B. (2011). Preface. In *Understanding Advanced Second-Language Reading* (pp. vi-xix).
- Birch, B. M. (2007). The expert decision maker. In *English L2 reading: Getting to the bottom* (Chapter 1). Retrieved from http://samples.sainsburysebooks.co.uk/9781135217723_sample_572808.pdf
- Brown, H.D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (2nd Ed.) Longman.
- Cassany, D. (2006). Tras las líneas. Sobre la lectura contemporánea. *Anagrama, Barcelona, pp. 21 -43*. Retrieved from <http://upvv.clavijero.edu.mx/cursos/ContenidosBasicosLenguaLiteratura/vector2/actividad7/documentos/TRASLASLINEAS.pdf>
- Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas DANE. (2014) *Encuesta de Consumo Cultural en Colombia*.
- Deyuan, B. & Yufen, G (2006). Reading in the Three Stages. *CELEA Journal*, 29 (4), 124-126. Retrieved from <http://www.celea.org.cn/teic/68/68-124.pdf>
- Echeverri, L.M & M. McNulty (2010). Reading Strategies to Develop Higher Thinking Skills for Reading Comprehension. *PROFILE*, 12 (1), 107-123
- Gomez, N. & Ávila, J.J. (2009). Improving reading comprehension skills through reading strategies used by a group of foreign language learners. *HOW, A Colombian Journal for Teachers of English*, 16, 55-70.e

- Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. (2011). *Teaching and Researching: Reading* (2nd ed.). NY: Routledge.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching* (4th Ed.). Edinburg: Pearson Longman.
- Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior, ICFES (2010). *Examen de Estado de la educación media – ICFES SABER 11°: Qué se evalúa cómo se interpretan los resultados individuales*. Bogotá: ICFES. Retrieved from <http://www.ietfelixtiberioguzman.edu.co/ICFES.pdf>
- Jung, J. (2009) Second Language Reading and the Role of Grammar. *Teachers College, Columbia University Working Papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics*, 9 (2) 29-48
Retrieved from <http://tesolal.columbia.edu/article/second-language-reading/>
- Koda, K. (2010). The role of reading in fostering transcultural competence. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 22, 5-10. Retrieved from <http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/rfl/January2010/articles/koda.pdf>
- Krashen, S. (1993). The research. In *The power of reading* (1st Ed.) (pp. 1-32). Englewood, colo: Libraries Unlimited.
- Lytaya, T. (2011) Reading logs: Integrating extensive reading with writing tasks. *English Teaching Forum*, 49 (1) 26-34

Mikulecky, B. (2008). Teaching Reading in a Second Language. *ELT Journal*, 65(1), 99-101.

Retrieved from <http://www.longmanhomeusa.com/content/FINAL-LO%20RES-Mikulecky-Reading%20Monograph%20.pdf>

Ministerio de Educación Nacional, MEN (1999). *Serie lineamientos curriculares: Idiomas Extranjeros*. Colombia: MEN. Retrieved from

http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1621/articles-89869_archivo_pdf4.pdf

Ministerio de Educación Nacional, MEN (2004). *Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo*. Colombia:

MEN. Retrieved from. http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1621/articles-132560_recurso_pdf_programa_nacional_bilinguismo.pdf

Ministerio de Educación Nacional, MEN (2006). *Estándares básicos de competencias en lenguas extranjeras: Inglés (Guías N°22)*. Colombia: MEN. Retrieved from

http://www.colombiaaprende.edu.co/html/mediateca/1607/articles-115375_archivo.pdf

Nation, I.S.P. (2006). How large a vocabulary is needed for reading and listening?. *The*

Canadian Modern Language Review / La revue canadienne des langues vivantes, 63 (1),

59-82. Retrieved from [http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/about/staff/publications/paul-](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/about/staff/publications/paul-nation/2006-How-large-a-vocab.pdf)

[nation/2006-How-large-a-vocab.pdf](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/about/staff/publications/paul-nation/2006-How-large-a-vocab.pdf)

Nation, I.S.P. (2015). Principles guiding vocabulary learning through extensive reading. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 27(1), 136-145. Retrieved from

<http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/rfl/April2015/discussion/nation.pdf>

Phakiti, A. (2006) Theoretical and Pedagogical Issues in ESL/EFL Teaching of Strategic Reading. *University Of Sydney Papers In TESOL*, 1, 19-50. Retrieved from

http://faculty.edfac.usyd.edu.au/projects/usp_in_tesol/pdf/volume01/article02.pdf

Ruiz, Y. N & Arias, G. L. (2009). Reading beyond the classroom: The effects of extensive Reading at USTA, Tunja. *HOW, A Colombian Journal for Teachers of English*, 16, 71-91.

Sanchez Jabba, A. (2013). Bilingüismo en Colombia. *Documentos de Trabajo Sobre Economía Regional*, 191. Cartagena, Colombia: Banco de la República. Retrieved from http://www.banrep.gov.co/docum/Lectura_finanzas/pdf/dtser_191.pdf

Scrivener, J. (2005) *Learning Teaching* (2nd Ed). Macmillan books for teachers.