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## READING COMPREHENSION IN ENGLISH IN 10<sup>TH</sup> GRADERS AT CAMILO CIENFUEGOS MILITARY SCHOOL

### LA COMPRENSIÓN DE LECTURA EN INGLÉS EN ESTUDIANTES DE 10<sup>MO</sup> GRADO DE LA ESCUELA MILITAR CAMILO CIENFUEGOS

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#### ABSTRACT

Traditionally, the purpose of learning to read in a foreign language has been to have access to the written literature in that language. In language instruction, reading materials have traditionally been chosen from literary texts that represent "higher" forms of culture. A person may read in order to get information or verify existing knowledge, in order to critique a writer's ideas or writing style, for enjoyment, or to enhance knowledge of the language being read. The objective of this research is to develop reading comprehension in English in 10th Graders at "Camilo Cienfuegos" Military School through a proposal of reading texts and activities. This research deals with the learning stages regarding the theoretical aspects of the reading process, the kind of texts, the necessary requirements reading should meet, where pleasant reading of cultural interest were chosen to improve reading comprehension in English, keeping the linguistic and grammatical elements proposed by the syllabus of 10th grade.

#### Keywords:

Reading comprehension, texts, cultural interest

#### RESUMEN

Tradicionalmente el propósito de aprender a leer en un idioma extranjero ha sido tener acceso a la literatura escrita en ese idioma. En la enseñanza de idiomas, los materiales de lectura tradicionalmente han sido seleccionados de los textos literarios que representan elevadas formas de cultura. Una persona puede leer para obtener información o verificar el conocimiento existente, de acuerdo a criticar las ideas del escritor, el estilo de la escritura, para el disfrute o para ampliar el conocimiento del idioma en que se está leyendo. El objetivo de esta investigación es desarrollar la comprensión de lectura en inglés en la escuela militar Camilo Cienfuegos de Cienfuegos a través de una propuesta de textos, ejercicios y actividades lectoras. Esta investigación se trata de las fases de aprendizaje con respecto a los aspectos teóricos del proceso de lectura, el tipo de textos y los requisitos necesarios que debe cumplir la lectura, donde se optó por lecturas amenas de interés cultural para mejorar la comprensión lectora en inglés, manteniendo los elementos lingüísticos y gramaticales propuestos.

#### Palabras clave:

Comprensión de lectura, textos, interés cultural

## INTRODUCTION

Education in Cuba is a vital factor of social development and many resources have been developed to it, although not all the countries give the same priority to education in spite of their awareness of how important it is.

Reading is the key to learning. Learning and knowledge are fundamental to education. The history of reading is associated with the invention of writing. It is common knowledge that no one is born knowing how to read or to write because these two things must be taught. Reading is of great significance in human life; therefore, it is the main factor in the acquisition of expertise and knowledge.

Reading is a translation of written symbols into spoken words and the relationship between the written symbol and meaning. That means, reading is a complex process between the eyes and tongue and mind. From this standpoint, the objective of teaching reading is to train readers to read in order to effectively get the information and understand what has been read.

Nowadays, the teaching of foreign languages has become very essential, and a complex process in Cuba educational context. Because of the world-wide changes, teaching and learning foreign languages in Cuba has witnessed development at the level of many aspects. In fact, learning English needs the mastery of the four fundamental skills; namely listening, speaking, reading and writing, to master the language.

Without comprehension, reading is nothing more than tracking symbols on a page with your eyes and sounding them out. People read for many reasons but understanding is always a part of their purpose. Reading comprehension is important because without it reading doesn't provide the reader with any information Grellet (1981).

Beyond this, reading comprehension is essential to life. Much has been written about the importance of functional literacy. In order to survive in today's world individuals must be able to comprehend basic texts. Reading comprehension is a critical component of functional literacy. Mikulecky (1990). With the ability to comprehend what they read, people are able not only to live safely and productively, but also to continue developing socially, emotionally and intellectually. It increases the enjoyment and effectiveness of reading and helps not only academically, but professionally, and in a person's personal life. What is more, vocabulary is needed for expressing meaning. When the vocabulary is poor and unclear, communication becomes very difficult, because the analysis and understanding of situations will be poor, as well as the possibility of sharing feelings and ideas.

Reading is one of the main skills that the learner should acquire in the process of mastering a language. Through reading the learner enriches his knowledge of the world around him. He increases his knowledge and understanding of the culture of the speakers of the language, their ways of thinking, and their contributions to many fields of artistic and intellectual endeavor. Reading develops learners' psychological processes such as analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization, memory and imagination.

According to Antich de León (1987), reading comprehension in a foreign language presupposes the teaching of reading. Without the dominion of the reading, the handling of the foreign language goes away to a large extent if one lives out of the linguistic midway in that one speaks. In short, what the definitions above about vocabulary have in common is the fact that vocabulary knowledge requires not only word meanings knowledge, but it requires the usage of the words in the appropriate context and in a natural way and also includes the relationship between new words acquired and the ones already acquired. Therefore, teachers should use strategies that teach the meaning of words in context and help students associate the new vocabulary learned and what they already knew and help students memorize the words and their meanings.

Reading comprehension is not a skill someone learns and can then apply in different reading contexts. One individual may have multiple levels of comprehension ability depending upon what they are reading and why they are reading it Catts (2022).

It is also important to say that reading is lead to increase students' knowledge, culture and vocabulary. Also is a mighty weapon to develop in the learners' qualities as patriotism, internationalism, responsibility, honesty, loyalty and love.

The ability to see and understand written or printed language is called reading. People who cannot read are said to be illiterate, or unlettered. The ability to read is one of the foundation skills in all industrialized societies.

Taken together, it is easy to see how any one individual may have multiple levels of comprehension ability depending upon what they are reading and why they are reading it. As a result, comprehension cannot be reduced to a single notion because it is not a single ability. Catts (2022).

Reading is a medium of communication, the power to get information from written language; it is an active, thought-getting and problem-solving process. In this process, the reader must make an active contribution by drawing upon and using concurrently various abilities that he has acquired. Grellet (1981) puts that reading is a constant process of guessing, and what one brings to the text is often more important than what one finds in it. This is why, from the very beginning, the students should be taught to use what they know to understand unknown elements, whether these are ideas or simple words. It is also true that each reader has his own interpretation of a text.

García (2010) establishes that reading is a communication skill aimed at understanding information as efficiently as possible. The reading process is by nature an independent and silent activity. It is also an active process in which there are two participants interacting: the writer and the reader who use a written text as channel of communication. Reading is characterized by being personal due to the fact that each reader has his/ her own interpretation of the written material using his/ her background knowledge giving his/her personal style. It is an essential skill in language learning.

But teachers have to be clear that reading is more than an interaction between a reader and a text. Mikulecky (1990) defines this as “a complex behavior which involves conscious and unconscious use of various strategies, including problem-solving strategies, to build a model of the meaning which the writer is assumed to have intended”.

The author takes into account to develop this research Garcia (2010) and Mikulecky (1990) concept. Findings of applied linguistics have stated that language is primarily oral, and writing is derived from it. Scientific procedures in language learning involve listening first, followed by speaking. Then, come reading and finally the writing of the language. The assumption is that written language is a graphic representation of vocal signals, and therefore to read must come after one has acquired the habits to respond to vocal signals.

The first step to fluent reading is the oral mastery of language, from which the students subsequently learn to recognize in the printed script.

Reading is also a way to improve listening, speaking and writing. The introduction of reading permits to bring in carefully controlled writing exercises. These two reinforce each other and consolidate the aural-oral learning. The oral language is the constant factor in the reading process, and it is the teacher's primary task to ensure mastery of related audio-lingual exercises as a prerequisite to the introduction of reading. This aural-oral mastery will aid students in learning to recognize the written forms. Through the perception of the visual forms via the eye, the student must establish a relationship of meaning based on auditory signals.

For every visual symbol the students see, they should be able to recall the pronunciation of the word for which it stands and to recognize its concept as expressed in the arrangement of the sentence pattern. They need a great deal of organized and intensive oral practice to sharpen their visual perception and discrimination in order to build up the high-speed recognition necessary to develop efficient reading habits.

The foreign language teacher's primary task is to keep his students build up an adequate linguistic background based on their needs, interests and levels of understanding before they attempt any reading.

The bulk of the class time will still be devoted to aural-oral practice. The graphic form will be used as a support for consolidation of oral skills through home learning and private study, for clarification of certain problems, and for some reading and writing practice. The printed script will represent material which has been learned orally and the symbols will be continually associated with the oral version. The students will listen or repeat after a model as they read, so that they will, from the beginning, associate correct pronunciation with the sound-symbol combinations in print, and superimpose elements such as stress, pitch, and intonation which the printed script does not indicate.

Reading is not only an aim in itself; it is also a means of learning a language. When reading a text, the learner reviews sounds and letters, vocabulary and grammar, spelling and meaning. The importance of the teacher's role is emphasized

using seven pillars of effective reading instruction: Teacher Knowledge; Classroom Assessment; Evidence-Based Teaching Strategies; Response to Intervention (or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support); Motivation and Engagement; Technology and New Literacies; and Family and Community Connections. Cooter and Robert (2019)

### *Teaching Reading*

The teaching of reading should involve the content of the text and the reading skills. Thus, reading is taught as a process (skill-getting) and as a result (information). Mikulecky (1990) points out that in English foreign language classes where reading is taught using a content-based approach, students work on selections which include lessons on reading skills (as well as grammar, vocabulary, discussion, and writing exercises), but rarely are reading skills the focus -the lessons are about the language of the passage.

Mikulecky (1990) notes that Alderson and Urquart asserted that such a pedagogical practice -of focusing on the language of a text- may be justified as a language lesson, but it may very well be counter-productive as a reading lesson. He suggests that the teachers should use a methodology that focus on the cognitive processes and language practice which are the basis of literate behavior in English. Cognitive psychologists have shown in their research that students learn new strategies or thinking processes most effectively when they are consciously aware that they are doing so. Once they are conscious of the process, students can monitor their comprehension and apply appropriate strategies as needed for comprehending a text.

After a reading lesson, students can answer questions about what they learned in the reading lessons, really questions of product versus process. This type of questions leads the students to the core objectives and lets them analyze the teaching-learning process from inside. The students enjoy this activity, for they demonstrate independence and self-critical analysis. As learners, they become aware of their reading strength and weaknesses, as well as the strategies to use in a given situation. Choosri Banditvilai (2020)

The process of comprehending should be the explicit object of the lesson. Of course, the ability to read and understand a text through the automatic application of the skills is the objective.

In skill- focused reading comprehension lessons, a decision must be made about the order in which the skills will be taught. For each skill, the teacher must select or design a sequence of exercises which begins with very simple tasks and then gradually increases in complexity.

A reading skill lesson should begin by providing opportunities for students to learn to use analytical language orally. The more the students talk, the more they will learn. Then they can apply these new ways of thinking and talking to their reading.

In order to apply correctly the process of reading comprehension in lessons it is needed to take into account some remarks to determine reading tasks:

- Variety of activities is required mainly if different skills are to be covered
- Reading tasks should never be imposed to a text. The structure and characteristics of the text should be considered as the starting point to design the activities
- Too many activities can spoil the pleasure of reading
- Reading tasks should be graded rather than texts so as to create a balance between the reading activities and the linguistic complexity of the text.

The objective(s) of the tasks, the reading skill(s) they develop, and how the activities are going to be performed should be clearly defined in the lesson plan and, of course, in each task.

### *Methods*

The implementation of this proposal started in the current course 2019-2020 in October; after the diagnosis stage. The proposal followed the chronogram stated at the beginning of the research, keeping an activity per unit and following the derivation of objectives intended for each unit both in the syllabus elaborated for the English subject and the academic units from the basic bibliography stated for this subject in 9th grade. The validation was completed, since this academic year finished the regular course in April to devote to the preparation for final tests, and the last reading test was applied in March. Since that date the students are preparing themselves to the final project work and reading lessons are not present.

It is necessary to state the results obtained during the stage of empirical exploration:

### *Stages of the research*

The research procedure went through three stages:

The diagnosis stage was directed to determine the conditions of the teaching-learning process of reading comprehension in English, with the aim of elaborating a proposal of activities that went through the following stages:

- Empirical exploration to determine the scientific problem of the present research.
- Bibliographical revision related to the development of reading comprehension in English to substantiate the research from the theoretical and the methodological points of view.
- Elaboration of the proposal of Activities to Develop Reading Comprehension in 10th Graders at "Camilo Cienfuegos Military School
- Validation of the proposal. The sample consists of 25 6th graders at "Osiris García Fonseca" Elementary School.

Main objective: to develop English vocabulary by means of didactic games at Elementary School

Specific tasks:

- To determine the research about the difficulties on reading comprehension skills based on the application of some instruments

- To make a deep bibliographical review based on reading comprehension, its particularities and didactic key elements as theoretical foundation of the topic
- To elaborate the proposal of military texts and activities
- To validate the proposal.

### *Results and discussion*

#### *Empirical Exploration of the Teaching Practice*

This stage was fulfilled throughout the academic year 2019-2020, with the application of empirical methods such as revision of documents, the syllabus, the students' book and workbook, (class observation, survey and interview to teachers and to the students) and from the theoretical level I took into account (historical-logical), (analytical-synthetic), (inductive-deductive) and the mathematical method. Among the instruments applied the following could be appreciated: The observation of 10 classes throughout an observation guide, an interview applied to English teachers in order to obtain their opinions in relation to the possible need of changes within the teaching-learning process of English in 11th grade regarding reading comprehension, and also an interview was applied to 14 students to obtain their personal insight of the topic of the research.

The results of the class observations carried out by the Head of the Department showed that there were difficulties in designing the objectives and the activities of the reading lessons, from the 10 lessons observed, just 2 of them (19,8%) showed that the objectives and the activities were right. The motivational level at the time of working with texts is low, because just in 2 texts (19, 8%) this point could also be appreciated, of the 10 lessons the motivation is achieved, and in the rest 8 (80, 1%), the students do feel motivated for reading. Some points to ponder were also taken into consideration.

The results of the survey showed that the teachers consider that the lack of bibliography is a fundamental element, taken into consideration that the proposal of activities will contribute to increase the students' level of motivation so the texts are from the students' preferences.

The results of the interview to teachers showed that 3 (70%) do not know the right methods and procedures to deal with texts and only 2 (30%) of them knew the methods and procedures at the time of facing texts; taking into consideration their opinions, they considered that the texts which appear in the basic bibliography of the subject do not meet the requirements of a senior high school student.

The results of the interview to students showed that 10 (67%) of the students agreed that they do not feel motivated because the vocabulary presented in texts does not take into account their preferences and likes. On the other hand, 4 (33%) considered that the handling of this skill is really important because most of the current bibliography in this field is written in English.

All this information led to determine the regularities presented in the Introduction of this report.

### *An approach to the set of additional texts to enhance*



The proposal consists of 10 texts with their corresponding activities to contribute to the development of reading comprehension in the 10<sup>th</sup> graders at “Camilo Cienfuegos” Military School. Some specialists and students’ opinions were taken into consideration at the moment of selecting the most appropriate texts. The students take knowledge of the texts and put it in function of their lives: assessing, explaining, arguing, and analyzing a given situation; for that reason, they are designed as exercises where the graders are supposed to analyze and comprehend the given topic.

The activities are within the competence of the students, helping to build up their confidence and they were designed regarding the three stages for developing reading comprehension, (before reading, while reading, and after reading). The texts contain around 90 words due to the rules of the military education Ministry and they are organized by stating the main ideas or giving the chronological sequence of events, and they are used in the proposal with vocabulary that allows developing the students’ comprehension level.

Several elements were taken into account for the evaluation of these activities:

- Recognition of the communicative functions
- Recognition of the grammatical functions: (the simple tense of be)
- Understanding the main ideas
- Understanding details.

Two examples of texts and activities taking into account the student’s level and their characteristics are presented below.

### Activity # 1

#### Unit 1 Moving to a new city

Objective: the students should be able to get a global comprehension of the text and to introduce themselves.

Procedures: questions and answers, searching information and filling blank spaces.

Teaching Aids: student’s worksheet, board.

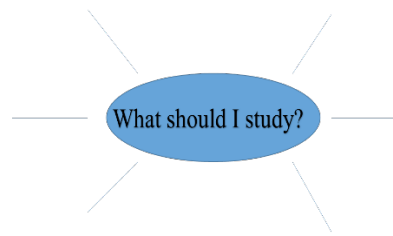
Subskill: understanding general ideas, identifying key words and to recognize the writer propose and attitude.

Text: I love my school

My name is Ernesto. I live in Sandino. I am a student at Camilo Cienfuegos Military School. I study many subjects like Biology, Math, Geography, but English is my favorite. Agustin is the name of my teacher of English. She is 54 years old. He is very exigent, but a friendly person. My squad loves him so much. We feel good when we have English lessons. We listen to conversations, dramatize dialogues, read texts etc. I learn new things every day. There is a laboratory of English where we see video sequences, listen to songs and repeat words all the time. I love my school very much.

#### Before reading activity

Brainstorming: put the ideas around the topic



#### While- reading activity

Take out from the text:

A word expressing object position.

Two words modifying nouns.

Two words expressing forms of the verb to be.

A word meaning pelotón.

Two words expressing actions.

Answer the following questions:

Is Ernesto a young person?

Does Ernesto like English?

Is Agustin a student?

Where do the students practice English?

What's your opinion about the English lessons?

#### After- reading activity

Complete the following paragraph.

Hello! My name \_\_\_\_ Daniel. I \_\_\_\_ from Pinar del Río. I \_\_\_\_ 15 years old. I \_\_\_\_ at Camilo Cienfuegos Military School, it \_\_\_\_ in Pinar del Río. I live with my mother and my sister. They \_\_\_\_ nice persons. My mother \_\_\_\_ an officer and works at 4600 Military Unit. She \_\_\_\_ a major. She \_\_\_\_ an example for me to follow. We \_\_\_\_ a happy family.

### Activity # 2

#### Unit 2 Out of order

Objective: to get a global comprehension of the text about Jose Marti through reading activities to develop reading skills in order to promote patriotism and to increase their cultural background.

Procedures: questions and answers, searching information and filling blank spaces.

Teaching Aids: a sheet of paper, board and pictures

Subskill: understanding general ideas, identifying key words and to recognize the writer propose and attitude.

Text: our Apostle

Martí was born on January 28th, 1853. He was the man who at the age of 16 became a political prisoner. Martí organized the war in Cuba and headed the Cuban Revolutionary Party. He was a politician, diplomat, writer, journalist, translator, speaker, professor and philosopher. He died in his first combat on May 19th, 1895. His ideas came true thanks to

Fidel and the revolutionaries on January 1st, 1959. At that time Cuba needed to graduate officers in military sciences to defend the new revolutionary process. That is why, on February 1st 1967, Fidel founded the José Martí Military Technical Institute. This institute prepares young cadets to face life and to keep our socialist ideas. You will be a well-prepared officer.

Before reading:

Look up the meaning of the following words:

Prisoner                      Headed                      Journalist

Well-prepared officer

While- reading activity

Find in the text.

The English equivalent to Martí nació el 28 de enero de 1853: \_\_\_\_\_

The opposite way to say he lived: \_\_\_\_\_ to face death: \_\_\_\_\_

A word that qualifies combat: \_\_\_\_\_

A word similar to school: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer the following questions.

How old was Martí when he was in prison?

What did Martí do during his life?

Were Martí's ideas satisfied after 1959?

Why was the José Martí Military Technical Institute founded?

Do you want to study a technical career? Base your decision on three (3) reasons.

After- reading activity

4- Complete the following sentence:

Christian and Alexis are friends. They \_\_\_\_\_ for the next control work. Christian is sick at home, Alexis \_\_\_\_\_ him. Christian's mother \_\_\_\_\_ sandwiches form them. Her husband, Alberto, \_\_\_\_\_ the newspaper. They \_\_\_\_\_ a good time.

#### *Assessment during the application of the Proposal. Results and Discussion*

The proposal of activities to develop reading comprehension was applied to 10th graders from "*Camilo Cienfuegos*" Military Senior High School throughout the academic year 2019-2020. The comparative charts that will be offered later shows concrete evidence of effectiveness and efficiency according to this proposal. The analysis of the final instruments showed the following results:

The observation to classes demonstrated that the totality of the professors took advantage of the proposed activities, having appropriated theoretical assumptions ruling this essential skill, which was also confirmed in the survey applied. The survey showed that students appreciate that

their knowledge has risen regarding reading through the proposal.

The results of the levels of cognitive performance taking into account the number of students before the application of the proposal are as follows: from 14 students taken as sample, there are 6 students (55, 15 %) without level, 4 of them (24 %) are in first level, from the whole group 2 (15, 60 %) are in second level, and the other 2 (5, 25 %) are in third level (see appendix 3).

Taking into consideration that the syllabus imparted through textbooks and workbooks do not propitiate the development of basic reading skills, a proposal of activities was designed to develop reading comprehension in 10th graders at Camilo Cienfuegos Military School senior high school because of the real problems those students presented with reading comprehension. Then, a final test was applied to corroborate whether the pupils had advanced in the development of this skill and the results were.

Satisfactorily, the percentage of pupils who passed was higher than that of the initial test (see appendix 4). The results after the application of the proposal taken into consideration levels of assimilation and the same number of students are as follows: There is just 1 (3, 30%) student from this group who is still without level, 2 (10%) of them are in first level, there are 3 (34, 20%) in second level, and 8 (52, 50%) are in third level (see appendix 5)

Through the implementation of this proposal, in the second period the students' skills advanced in the development of reading comprehension they were able of extracting main ideas, predicting and previewing the topic of the reading texts and guessing the meaning of unknown words.

These results proved that the objective of the current research has been fulfilled.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Since the beginning of the current research was evident that students lack enough reading comprehension skills about military terms. They were not able to understand what the writer was trying to communicate or at least to connect what they read to their own experience or prior knowledge.

The development of reading comprehension is a complex and important task to be achieved when teaching a foreign language and the mechanisms, strategies and stages that lead its acquisition cannot be obviated. In short, building reading comprehension skills requires a long-term strategy on which all the reading skills areas will contribute to success.

This proposal can enhance the students' reading abilities and strategies as well as the development of their vocational training. The implementation of this proposal showed that teaching the elements that facilitate the reading process improve the positive students' motivation, attitudes, and reading comprehension skills, as well as their active participation in the teaching and learning process. At the end students were able to go beyond what is written on the page and add meaning and draw conclusions about a text.

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