



**ENHANCING COMPREHENSION AND MOTIVATION
IN LOWER LEVEL ECUADOR EFL STUDENTS: AN ACTION
RESEARCH STUDY OF THREE READING STRATEGIES AT UNAE**

**Sevy-Biloon, Juliaⁱ,
Cajamarca Alvear, Tania,
Avila Mendez, Andrea**

Universidad Nacional de Educación,
Ecuador

Abstract:

It has been observed that EFL students at the National University of Education (UNAE) struggle with acquiring basic vocabulary, reading comprehension skills, and intrinsic motivation to promote reading in English. To address this issue, a qualitative exploratory action research was conducted aimed at improving these areas through the use of three reading strategies—extensive reading, language experience approach (LEA), and literacy circles—on the reading and motivation of 89 lower-level EFL students in UNAE within three different courses which were conducted over a six-month period. Qualitative and quantitative tools such as diagnostic and summative exams, questionnaires, observations, and reflective journals were used to understand and identify students' improvement and progress throughout the exploratory, intervention, and reflection phases of the study. Throughout this period the teachers regularly observed the strategies being utilized in the classes and reflected on their experiences. The findings from these tools suggest that the implementation of the different reading strategies together had a positive impact on students' reading abilities, writing abilities, vocabulary, comprehension, engagement, and motivation. Additionally, students were more motivated to read not only in class but also for pleasure, which promoted increased reading in English. The study provides insights into the potential benefits of using these strategies to facilitate autonomous reading, improve overall language competencies and may support EFL teachers in the development of reading programs that foster autonomous learning, increase motivation, and promote language development among EFL learners.

Keywords: extensive reading; learning experience approach; reading circles; reading comprehension; motivation in EFL

ⁱCorrespondence: email julia.sevy@unae.edu.ec, tania.cajamarca@unae.edu.ec, andrea.avila@unae.edu.ec

1. Introduction

Just as Ecuador's educational system and population have a poor history of advancing literacy and reading throughout the country at an educational level in their native language, reading in English is no different. The findings of Criollo (2017) at the country level are that very few people read for pleasure in the country and only 1 to 1.5 books are read yearly. In contrast, [pennbookcenter.com](https://www.pennbookcenter.com) (2022) discovered that the typical adult in the United States reads about 12 books per year, highlighting a major discrepancy in reading cultures between nations. Within the educational context at UNAE, the challenges of fostering a reading culture are evident. UNAE teachers found a low interest in reading with the participants of this study. According to the researchers in UNAE, in different lower-level English as a foreign language (EFL) courses at UNAE, many students did not read, were not motivated to read, and struggled with vocabulary acquisition and comprehension. In an initial diagnostic exam, teachers determined that most students were unable to read at basic levels in English because of a lack of basic reading comprehension and vocabulary in their native language. An exploratory questionnaire found that almost none of them read or were motivated to read outside or inside the classroom. Alber-Morgan, Ramp, Anderson, and Martin (2007) also support the idea that students' ability to have the can to or drive to read well comes from students' academic backgrounds. Ecuador has almost no reading culture and engagement with reading, according to Criollo (2017) and Castillo (2021).

Through years of experience teaching, the researchers found this to be true when they observed many university students who did not read at UNAE. They found through informal conversations and open-ended questionnaires that many of their students had never read a book in their first language (L1) or second language (L2) before entering university. Since these studies as well as English First (2023) show there is little or no reading culture in the country the researchers decided to figure out how to promote reading, and reading comprehension, improve engagement, and progress literacy competencies in EFL through the use of strategy-based instruction utilizing the three reading strategies; extensive reading, language experience approach (LEA) and reading circles. Reading or the promotion of reading was not a large part of their previous academic instruction, which is why the teachers chose to intervene. This is critical to understand because according to English First (2023) Ecuador continues to have a very low English level, especially in reading. Without improving students' innate ability to engage in reading and have an intrinsic motivation to read autonomously, the teachers of the courses realized it would be even more of a challenge to improve general English language competencies in their classroom when students do not actually read books or long texts, and few read anything in English.

This study adopted qualitative-based exploratory action research. Therefore, it followed an exploratory action research protocol with a sample population of 89 beginner EFL students from three different lower-level EFL courses. The participants practiced reading through the use of mentioned three reading strategies that were implemented

through qualitative exploratory classroom-based action research to promote and improve reading competencies for EFL courses at the beginner level over a semester or six-month period. The exploratory action research procedure was demonstrated by Smith and Rebolledo (2018), who described the various stages necessary to complete this type of research in the classroom from exploration, intervention, and reflection, demonstrating the study progress and outcomes by using qualitative and quantitative research gathering tools. During the exploratory stage, this study identified the problem, selected an intervention based on similar issues found by all three teachers, and completed the intervention with multiple classroom observations, reflective journal entries, and a final summative test. The teachers intervened through extensive reading, language experience approach (LEA), and reading circle strategies to ultimately engage and improve students in general reading competencies, writing ability, vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension and motivate students to read not only in class but for pleasure by motivating autonomous and self-paced reading. These types of strategies were chosen based on the researchers' experiences and many successful previous classroom-based studies using these different strategies. Some of those researchers include Masruddin (2016), Daniels, H. (2002), DaLie, S. O. (2001) Rendaya *et al.* (2019), and Lestari (2021). All these experts found that individual reading strategies improved EFL learners' language acquisition, reading comprehension, and motivation in different ways. The professors decided to utilize all of these strategies to increase the students' chances of improving not only in reading but in English in general. The main goals of this study are to determine whether extensive reading, LEA, and reading circles are effective in enhancing EFL learners' reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and reading competencies, as well as to find out how these reading strategies affect students' motivation to read independently and at their own pace.

2. Literature review

2.1 Literacy skills and language achievement

According to Isaqjon (2022), advancing reading should be a focus of language teachers. This is because, without a solid base in this skill, students cannot improve reading literacy in a second language. Reading allows students to improve in many aspects of language learning therefore without a strong base in this skill it can be difficult to progress in EFL in general. A greater fluency and language ability could be achieved through acquiring reading skills, according to Par (2020). This study described how students improved in problem-solving, critical thinking, language comprehension, and overall understanding in EFL through reading competency over time. The use of reading strategies and a focus on reading skills throughout the course greatly enhanced students' learning process. The students highlighted the importance of students' understanding and use of reading strategies.

2.2 Extensive reading

This study used extensive reading. In 2002, experts in the field Day and Bamford (2002) listed 10 guidelines English language teachers and learners can follow to improve English through reading. These guidelines are still followed today by educators utilizing this strategy. The 10 basic principles of extensive reading are:

- 1) The reading material is easy to understand.
- 2) A variety of reading materials on a wide range of topics are available.
- 3) Learners choose what to read.
- 4) Learners read as much as possible.
- 5) Reading is for pleasure, information, and understanding.
- 6) Reading is the reward itself.
- 7) Learners generally read quickly and not slowly.
- 8) Reading is silent and individual.
- 9) Teachers guide and guide students.
- 10) The teacher models reading.

These principles have allowed teachers around the world to use extensive reading in the classroom to improve reading, vocabulary acquisition, and general English skills. Some of those educators promoting extensive reading today are Assiri and Siddiqui (2021), Sevy (2022), and Ng and Renandya (2019).

Reading can take many forms in the classroom. Lestari (2021) found the most effective way to do this with lower-level students is through graded readers. This author explains how these types of texts can give students the ability to choose what they want to read at their level. This is critical for all language learners. This way they do not become frustrated and lose motivation. This study explained how graded readers were medium to boost EFL in general as it gave students opportunities to interact with authentic English in a non-English speaking country. Assiri and Siddiqui (2021) further agree that extensive reading can strengthen and support students' reading, grammar, and general EFL skills. Azmuddin *et al.* (2019) evaluated an extensive reading program on graded readers and found that student performance did not improve when the study was not organized and adhered to these guidelines. However, when students were motivated, they would improve their reading comprehension when participating in the extensive reading strategy. However, other researchers such as Ng and Renandya (2019) found that most studies from the last decade have shown that Extensive Reading has had a positive effect on EFL students and should be promoted more frequently to advance and develop students' general English skills.

2.3 Language experience approach

Another significant strategy used was LEA. Nessel and Dixon (2008) say LEA is used to generate reading texts based on the student's own vocabulary, language patterns, and background of experiences. In 2013, Huang argued that an experience is anything in which everyone has taken part. This includes field excursions, hands-on activities, movies, cross-cultural encounters, role plays, games, or exchanging photos or tales. Past

knowledge, experiences, and the cultural background of pupils are all used by teachers to create texts. To make writing more individualized, students share their experiences with their teachers to create a text. Relating to their own experiences, texts can hold a lot of significance for them. Masruddin (2016) says in a LEA lesson, speaking, writing, listening, and reading are all practiced. Students can cross the gap between reading and writing independently when they see their own experiences translated into written form. They can also get a deeper grasp of writing and reading processes according to Taylor, 1992 in CAELLA. Taylor (1992) says LEA is characterized by students creating their own reading materials. The reading material produced by the students provides comprehensible input (Krashen and Terrel, 1983), which is crucial for the acquisition of a second language. According to the Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1983), pupils must comprehend the language and be able to comprehend slightly above their current level. One method to provide this comprehensible input is through literature, as reading is the primary source of input in the second language, according to Manson and Krashen (2019). The four components of communication (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are interconnected, the LEA facilitates the development of writing skills in addition to reading. According to Krashen (1993), reading is the source of writing style, not writing or instruction. Therefore, LEA can contribute to the development of students' writing skills. Additionally, he asserts that we learn to write by reading. In one of his studies, Krashen and Manson (1997) discovered that students made significant writing progress when they engaged in reading since reading provides writers with an understanding of the grammar, vocabulary, and discourse style used by writers. This is substantiated by research conducted by Habibi *et al.*, 2015. They discovered a close relationship between reading and the development of writing.

2.4 Reading circles

According to Dogan *et al.* (2020), reading circles are a successful method for fostering a cooperative learning environment that improves oral communication, reading, and writing abilities. Due to its dynamic and interactive nature, this method has an important effect and provides the most all-encompassing support for student involvement. Daniel (2002) states that numerous educators have used literature circles in their lessons, and many more have used similar activities under different names. Tens of thousands of instructors use literature circles in their classes. He gave teachers a set of guidelines they needed to follow in order to effectively implement reading circles in the classroom. Some of Daniel (2002)'s principles are:

- Participants choose their reading materials.
- Small groups are formed based on selected texts.
- Students' discussion based on assigned roles.
- Use of written or visual aids to discuss the text.
- Discussion sections were chosen by participants.
- Teacher's role is a facilitator.
- Assessment is done through teacher observation and student self-evaluation.

Additionally, El-Esery (2022) explains how it gives students specific roles and motivates them to take control of their education by actively participating in the process. The use of roles ensures fair participation and equitable chances for all people to share their ideas, interpret texts, and respond to other group members' thoughts, resulting in balanced participation (Kassem 2022). As a result, according to Hinds (2019), students may make imaginative predictions, express themselves through writing, posing thought-provoking queries, or drawing links to the text that are specific to them.

In a study by Chou (2022), literary circles surpassed the control group in reading comprehension and strategy execution, especially in the monitoring strategy. Hinds (2019) also conducted action research with third-grade students, and the results revealed that reading circles significantly improved reading comprehension. Like this, Rahman (2022) conducted research to determine how literature circles could enhance students' reading comprehension abilities. He discovered that, when compared to the directed reading activity method, using a literature circle strategy improved students' reading comprehension.

2.5 Motivation through various reading strategies

According to Pustika and Wiedarti (2019), when learning an unfamiliar language, receptive abilities like reading and listening are essential. Reading is a fundamental requirement for anyone studying a foreign language since it gives them the input, they need to start acquiring the language. This is supported by Pysarchyk and Yamshynska (2015), who explains that reading aids in the growth of other skills and enables the acquisition of new knowledge in the target language. Learning to read is a crucial educational objective because it is one of the fundamental abilities to advance in other areas of knowledge. For those learning a foreign language, reading offers several advantages. Reading proficiency enables students to gain expanded vocabulary, acquire new skills, and expand their experiences. However, Masruddin (2016) explained that without student's intrinsic motivation to improve in EFL many of these reading strategies may not give the results educators are looking for.

The material teachers select for their students is also important in the context of increasing motivation. "*Recreational reading or reading for enjoyment is the primary source of our reading proficiency, vocabulary, and capacity to manage complicated grammatical structures*" (Krashen, 2004, pg.1). Krashen also asserts that suitable conditions must exist to encourage pupils to read. Learners should enjoy what they are reading without being forced to report everything they read, which is why Ng and Renandya (2019) point out the importance of allowing students to choose their own materials when improving reading competencies is an objective.

2.6 Students' perceptions of L2 reading

Buterbaugh (2021) stated how reading success is impacted by attitude towards reading. According to Deregozu (2021), the way one feels about reading has a big influence on how well one learns to read in a foreign language. Therefore, the presence of anxiety

during reading can amplify the student's perception that comprehending the material is difficult. The learner's self-assurance in their reading proficiency can be linked to the difficulties encountered in grasping the content (Rahmat, 2019)

In addition, Garcia, Ramayan, *et al.* (2014) state that individuals who read English as a second language face another challenge. These difficulties can arise from the author, the text, or the readers themselves. They may include issues with reading comprehension, lack of concentration, disinterest in reading, insufficient reading aids, monotony in reading, and struggles with unfamiliar vocabulary.

A study conducted by researchers Rahmat, Syed Abdul Rahman, and Hassan (2018), found that when readers could not understand the text's content, they stopped reading. In addition, to identify students having reading difficulties, a survey was given to EFL teachers and secondary students in Saudi Arabia. This was part of research by Keezhatta and Omar (2019). Their reading performance may be affected by several variables, including difficulties with focus, general comprehension, reading fluency, motivation, and retention.

3. Methodology

The research method followed was qualitative classroom exploratory action research. This study was completed by three beginner-level EFL teachers in UNAE with a total of 89 participants over a six-month period. All of the students from each of the teachers' classes chose to participate in the study. These participants were A2 lower-level students consistent with the Common European Framework (CEFR). These students were in their first and second semesters of university studying EFL in three different courses where the reading strategies were implemented and observed by all three teachers. The research methodology followed was qualitative but used a combination of qualitative and quantitative tools to follow an exploratory action research design according to Smith and Rebolledo (2018). The protocol first contained an exploratory phase, an intervention phase, and finally a reflection phase. The exploratory phase was used to identify the problem and plan the intervention. The intervention utilized the different reading strategies in the EFL classrooms to identify, analyze and classify effective practices in teaching and learning. After the intervention the teachers reviewed their reflection journals and gave student reflection activities about the strategies, they participated in to find out how they perceived their interaction and participation.

The implementation included three different strategies to identify practices that were successful in not only advancing reading competencies and general English language skills but also promoting autonomous reading and increasing motivation in English language learners (ELLs) to read in their free time and utilize in class-controlled activities to ultimately improve English language competencies.

During this phase in the initial questionnaire, students were asked to give consent to participate in the intervention and classroom research. The first question in the questionnaire inquired if these students were willing to aid in this project and all agreed

to participate. In addition, a survey was conducted at the end of the intervention to find out student perceptions. Classroom observations and diagnostic and summative examinations were also conducted. These were then compared in terms of percentages to view the progress of the students from the beginning of the intervention until it finished. The questionnaire included open-ended questions, while the survey included open-ended and Likert-type questions. These tools were validated through a pilot test with a small number of experts who were also EFL teachers in UNAE, though not participating in the study. These teachers gave feedback on the questions and the researchers made the necessary changes. This test allowed researchers to refine the question items and determine their reliability and validity. The data collected from these tools were analyzed through MaxQDA software and through narrative analysis. MaxQDA allowed for the findings of specific codes about the students' experiences and teachers' reflections based on their experiences during the research process. Below is a narrative of the research process, findings, and results.

3.1 Exploratory phase

This protocol began with a teacher meeting to plan what area would be researched and how the problem would be identified. One educator noted that the texts were difficult for students to comprehend and decode. The vocabulary and grammatical knowledge they possessed were insufficient to comprehend the text's meaning. When pupils had to study various types of texts in reading and writing classes, the teacher found that they lacked motivation. The instructor began to explore strategies to encourage reading among her students and give reading deeper significance to them. Another educator realized that their students did not comprehend the whole content of the different texts assigned to them. They cannot grasp the main idea of the text in a foreign language as they were too long. The teacher observed that students became stressed or unmotivated because the texts were not at their level. To explore this issue, teachers gave a diagnostic exam to identify students with low scores in reading. Then, the teachers created questions for a pre-questionnaire based on an extensive literature review, which confirmed and supported the problem in all three EFL classes. The teachers met again at the end of the month to reflect on the findings, identified similar problems in each group, and planned to change and intervene.

3.2 Intervention phase

The teachers then implemented the three reading strategies for a semester or 5-month period in each of their classrooms. They observed each other's groups and constantly reflected on the implementation of the strategies in each of their classrooms while individually completing various activities connected to the intervention. Those strategies included extensive reading, LEA, and reading circles. After the implementation phase, teachers administered a summative exam in the same format as the diagnostic test. This was to find student progress in reading competency in EFL. The results of each test were then compared in percentages to review the students' progress from the beginning of the

intervention and how they improved after the intervention. Below is a description of how each strategy was implemented in the classroom to increase vocabulary in reading, increase student motivation and improve reading comprehension. At the end of the intervention, the same survey was completed to find out if the students' opinions and perceptions about reading changed.

3.3 Extensive reading

During the implementation of extensive reading, the teacher first allowed students to choose a leveled reader that they found interesting and was at their level. Students were given two weeks to decide if the book was too difficult or if they could comprehend it on their own. The students made this decision based on a review of their reading speed and several introductory vocabulary words on each page. Once the students chose the graded reader they would read, the teacher assigned a specific number of pages students had to read each week outside of class. During this time the teacher also reflected on students' choices. Beginning with the third week of class the teacher began guided activities in class every two weeks for 4 months with the students. This was to help students improve their reading skills, comprehension, and advancement. The controlled activities focused on improving reading speed, reading comprehension, and internalizing new vocabulary. After each controlled activity the teacher reflected on how the activity was conducted, how the students responded to the activity, and how much the activity aided student improvement and motivation. At the end of the intervention, the students completed a final project and presentation to display what they learned and how they progressed in general in EFL. The teacher wrote down the observed experiences throughout the process in a reflection journal.

3.4 Language Experience Approach

After realizing that the lack of interest in reading and writing was the issue, the instructor planned an intervention strategy using LEA. The pupils were given a variety of themes to write about since these would become the texts they read in class during the intervention. After that, the students focused on the subject and came up with text ideas based on their personal experiences. They followed specific structures given to them by the teacher. The teacher recorded their experiences on the board. The texts were written in collaboration between the instructor and the students based on their experiences. Students read the material and self-edit based on checklists. Once the texts were complete and proofread, the students read them and used them in various reading activities created by the instructor. The teacher reflected during these activities that students were more involved in the reading and writing sessions throughout the intervention time. This was because they were allowed to examine their own texts previously written, which gave them multiple chances to read their writings without the stress of finding words that they would not understand. Through informal open-ended interviews with students, the instructor could gain insight into how they felt about the method. Based on what was

seen during the intervention, the instructor reflected on LEA. Those reflections were written down in a journal throughout the process.

3.5 Reading circles

The teacher offered the students a choice between reading materials from their English books or short stories about different topics students knew about, while participating in reading circles. The students chose this option because the stories were interesting, captivating, condensed, and simple to understand. The teacher stressed the importance of reading each story individually beforehand. The teacher explained the concept of a reading circle, its various aspects, and the procedures involved. The students then engaged in the reading circle process, with the teacher dividing them into groups of four or five. In each group, the students selected a role of their preference, with each member taking on a different role in each reading circle. The available roles were connector, vocabulary enricher, illustrator, summarizer, and discussion director. Through these roles, students could analyze the text, becoming more engaged in the learning process. This improved their reading comprehension skills. Second, the teacher provided the students with a checklist that outlined the tasks each student had to perform depending on their role. During class, the students had between twenty and thirty minutes to complete their assigned roles in their respective groups. The teacher observed the students' creativity as they worked in their groups and presented their final products. The students utilized colored pencils, markers, mind maps, drawings, pictures, and other materials to explain the text to their classmates. Each group member paid close attention during the presentation and could seek clarification or ask questions at the end of the presentation. This teacher also wrote in a reflection journal throughout the process.

3.6 Reflection phase

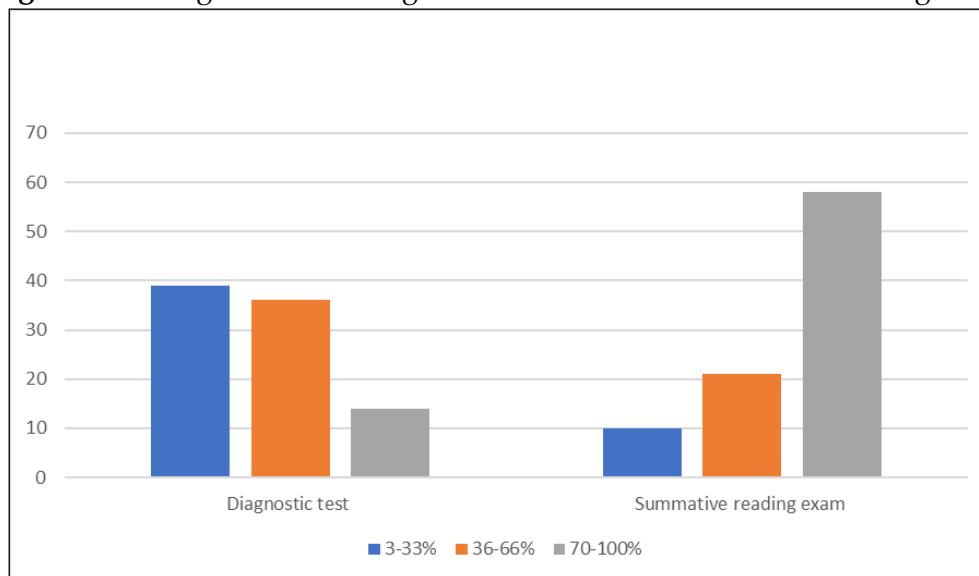
After the intervention, the educators conducted a post-intervention survey to find out if the students' perceptions about reading in general changed about the strategies applied and general reading. The teachers analyzed the students' answers to find out how their intervention was received. Finally, teachers met to reflect on their experiences during the five-month period. At the end of the semester and after the intervention, teachers met again to discuss the overall strategies, review their reflection journals and the progress of the students. Each teacher-reviewed their reflections on the intervention. They compared how the interventions promote positive teaching and learning practices, improved reading comprehension, writing, and vocabulary learning and ultimately motivated students to read independently. They also reflected on how each strategy could be improved and ways they could implement it differently in coming semesters to aid in student learning. Through these reflections, they examined the elements of the technique that were effective in the class. They noted the areas to improve for this approach's future interventions and implementations.

4. Results

Through initial meetings with three EFL teachers and previous teaching experience, the teachers realized most students did not read literature or longer texts than social media posts and this may be one of the reasons students were struggling to advance in EFL and were not motivated to read assigned texts independently outside of the classroom. After initial meetings, the teachers decided to implement a classroom-based action research protocol to not only improve students' L2 abilities in reading skills but also motivate them to want to read autonomously to improve their general English skills and ultimately enjoy reading books and longer texts overall. After the preliminary teacher meeting, they created a short pre-questionnaire to find out initial students' thoughts about reading, then implemented targeted classroom activities based on three specific strategies the researchers incorporated into the classroom over the five-month semester.

Throughout this semester teachers regularly observed each other's classes while implementing the strategies, conducted informal interviews, kept a reflection log, and continuously observed students' interactions with the implemented strategies. The teachers found that all three strategies improved and aided in the students' learning process in different ways. After the intervention was completed, the teachers conducted a post-questionnaire to further understand students' perceptions and opinions about the intervention they participated in. The figure below illustrates the preliminary diagnostic exam and final summative exam at the end of the intervention.

Figure 1: Exam grades from diagnostic test and summative final reading exam



The diagnostic exam was given at the beginning of the semester. The exam showed the levels of beginner students and the need for teachers to intervene in their reading skills. At the beginning of the semester, thirty-nine students got less than thirty-three percent on the reading exam, thirty-four students got less than sixty-six percent and only sixteen got over seventy percent on the diagnostic exam. To have a passing grade a

student must achieve 70% or higher to express sufficient knowledge. This was not completed by most of the students' pre-intervention. However, after a five-month semester and the teacher's intervention fifty-eight students got over seventy percent, twenty-one students received a score of thirty-four to sixty-six percent and only ten students got less than thirty-three percent. Through these findings, most students improved in reading.

The table below contains important information about students' reading habits and perceptions of pre-intervention.

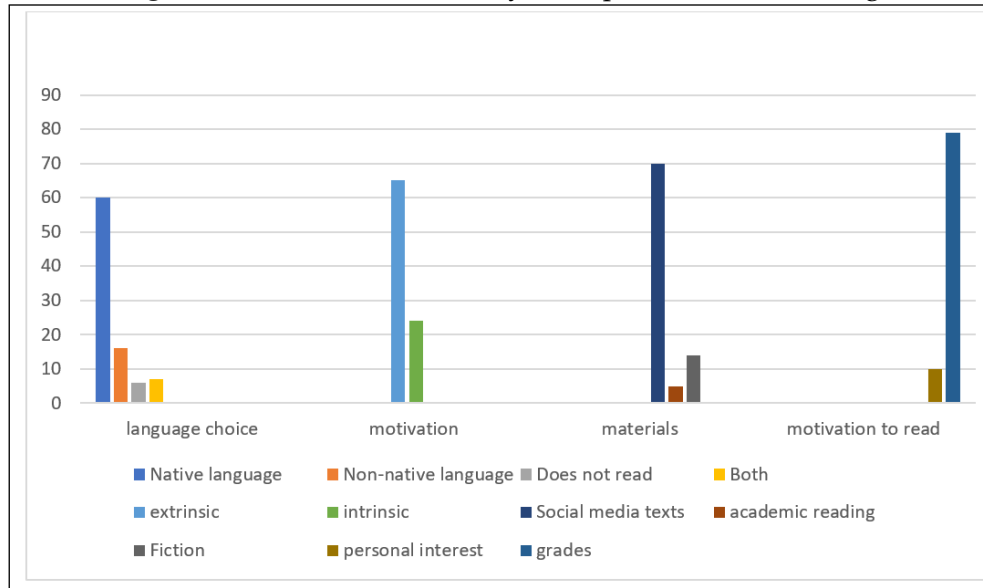
Table 1: Pre-questionnaire about reading habits and perceptions

Category	Code	Definition	Example
Language Preferences	Native Language Only	Only reading in one's native language.	<i>"I prefer to read most texts in my native language because it's easier to understand."</i>
Language Preferences	English Language	Reading in English to improve language skills.	<i>"I like reading English social media posts to practice my English."</i>
Reading Materials	Academic Reading	Reading materials assigned for class.	<i>"I usually only read for class, so most of what I read are textbooks and short texts"</i>
Reading Materials	Fiction	Reading novels, short stories, and other fictional works.	<i>"I rarely read fiction or any other longer texts"</i>
Reading Materials	Social Media posts	Reading different types of short texts on social media sites.	<i>"I read social media posts on Instagram, tic toc and Facebook every day in Spanish and English. This is what I consider reading "</i>
Motivation for Reading	Grades	Reading in order to get good grades in class.	<i>"I only read because I need to get a good grade in this class."</i>
Motivation for Reading	Personal Interest	Reading based on personal interests and hobbies.	<i>"I sometimes enjoy reading to learn new things and practice."</i>
Motivation	Intrinsic	Being motivated to read based on personal enjoyment or fulfilment.	<i>"I almost never read long texts for myself or entertainment."</i>
Motivation	Extrinsic	Being motivated to read based on external factors, such as grades or rewards.	<i>"I only read when I have to for class, but I'm motivated by the idea of getting a good grade."</i>

The findings above clearly describe students' preliminary perceptions, lack of engagement in reading longer texts, and reading habits prior to the intervention. The shared information was derived from the categories and codes the researchers obtained from analyzing the data in MaxQDA. This includes the language students preferred to read in, the types of materials they would consider reading, and why they read outside of the classroom. The next figure will explain how many of the participants answered the preliminary questions in the questionnaire, which makes the information relevant.

The below figure explains how many of the students answered each question to aid in justifying the teachers' interventions in the EFL classrooms.

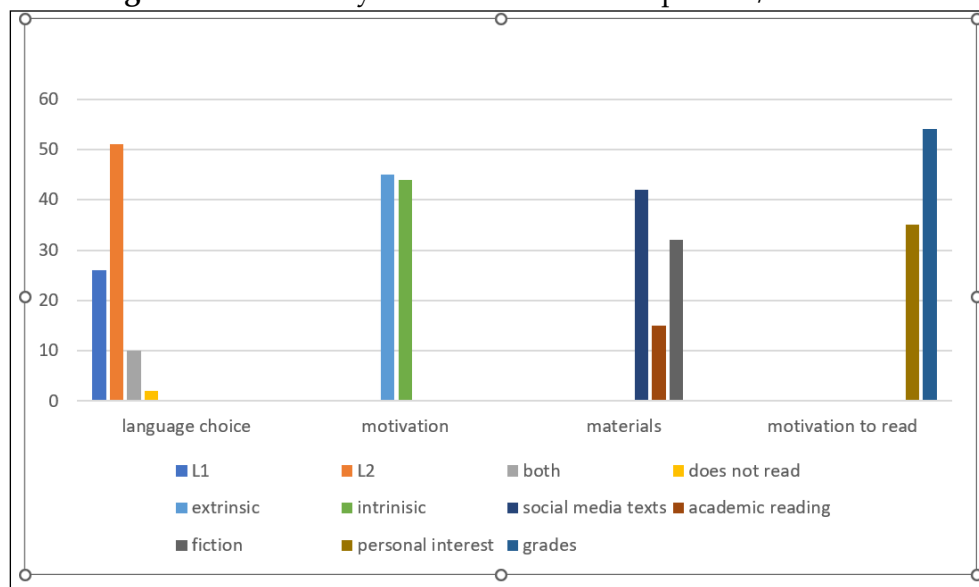
Figure 2: Students' Preliminary Perceptions about Reading



The figure presented above displays the distribution of students' reading habits based on their language preferences. Out of the 89 participants, 60 indicated a preference for reading only in their L1, 16 reported reading in their L2, 6 students indicated not reading at all, and 7 reported reading in both languages. Furthermore, the chart shows that most of the students (70) reported reading primarily for extrinsic motivational reasons, while only a minority (24) reported reading for intrinsic motivational reasons. Specifically, 70 participants reported reading to check social media posts, while only 5 read for school and 12 read for enjoyment or to engage with fictional works. Most participants stated that they read to improve their grades, while a few reported reading for personal interest. These findings suggest a need for strategies to improve students' reading skills both in and outside of class and to foster intrinsic motivation for reading. The results underscore the importance of motivating students to read for personal interest and enjoyment, beyond simply improving their grades.

The figure shown below expresses the changes in students' perceptions after participating in the intervention. The categories were the same, as were the codes. The number of the students' perceptions changed.

Figure 3: Post survey results for students' opinions/reflections

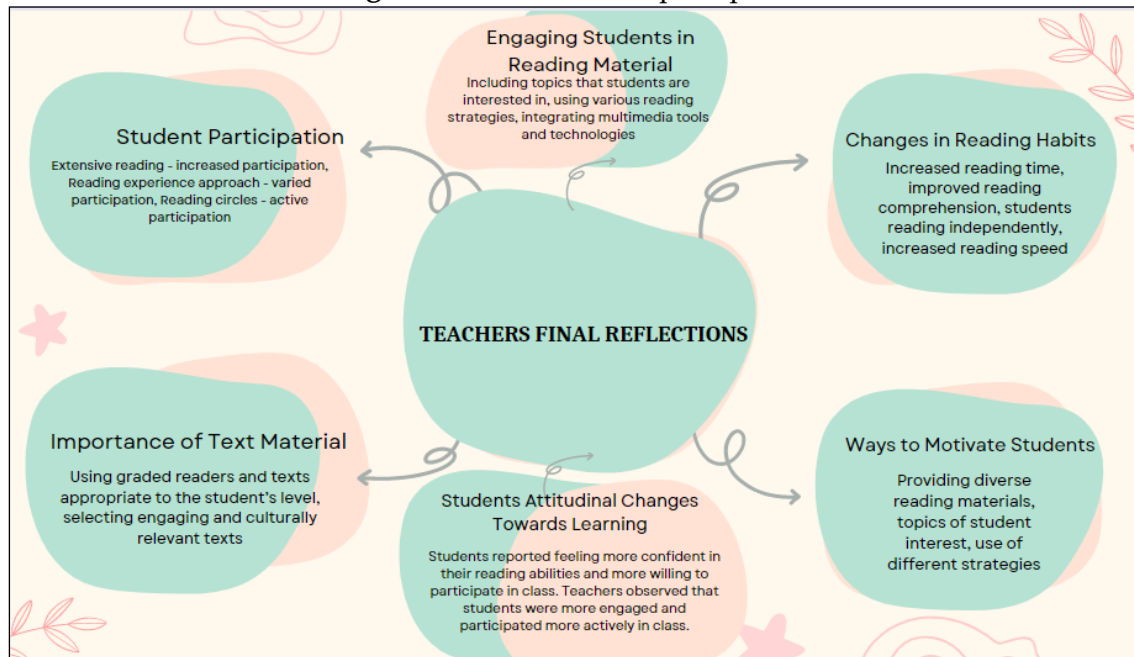


Following the implementation of the reading strategies over the course of the semester, the professors administered a post-questionnaire and conducted post-interviews to elicit students' perceptions about the activities they participated in for the purpose of improving their reading skills and autonomous motivation. The results indicated that a significant number of students benefited from the strategies in different ways, reporting improvements in their English language skills, an increased propensity to read outside of class, improved reading comprehension, increased vocabulary, and heightened motivation to read. Specifically, after the intervention, 51 students reported reading regularly in their L2 language, while 10 reported reading in both languages. However, 44 students did not report any increase in intrinsic motivation for reading. While many students still primarily read social media posts, 32 reported reading fiction, and 15 were reading academic texts outside of class. Moreover, 35 students expressed a personal interest in reading. These findings suggest that the reading strategies were effective in promoting reading habits and motivation among EFL students, but also highlight the need for continued efforts to enhance intrinsic motivation for reading.

4.1 Teacher reflection about interventions for reading improvement and EFL progress

The teachers reflected in various meetings throughout the semester and through journaling. These teachers would meet monthly to discuss the activities that aid student advancement and activities that did not seem to work well. They would also discuss how they could be improved if repeated. Teachers would support each other in their teaching process while advising on ways students' learning could improve. The teachers also kept a journal about how they felt during the process and during invention throughout the semester. The below figure gives codes for these reflections.

Figure 3: Teachers' final perceptions



During the beginning of the implementation, teachers expressed that they were concerned about implementing the strategies with lower-level students, because they were unsure how well students could comprehend texts and books. Though as the implementation of the strategies occurred, they found that students could participate and thrive when the texts and books were at the correct level.

Teachers also found that students were reluctant to do so outside of class. They felt overwhelmed and stressed about reading in English. Many seemed hesitant to read a book or text in English, because they felt they did not have a high enough level to do so. The teachers observed a shift in students' confidence after choosing a book, following the strategies protocol, and beginning to read. The more fluently the more they participated in the activities. Through the controlled activities their reading comprehension and writing also improved. The teacher was not surprised that at the end of the semester, the students wanted to read more and showed improved engagement in reading.

The teachers reflected on how students were motivated by a personal effort to read in L2. Teachers also realized that when the strategy was clearly explained, and the tasks were laid out, students participated more actively and therefore had a deeper understanding of the texts as well.

The teacher found that the few students who did not improve were the ones who really did not work outside of class. They expressed that they did not really want to learn English. Another challenge for teachers was that students required constant monitoring when doing autonomous work. They needed to be pushed to read and complete the various tasks the different strategies asked for. This meant that teachers needed to dedicate a lot of extra time to individual students to aid in their learning process for them to succeed.

Even though the teachers found there were some challenges, the overall implementation was a success for most of the students. Finally, the teachers reflected on how they would improve these strategies the next time they were implemented.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to improve reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition while promoting and encouraging students to read in English through the use of three different reading strategies -extensive reading, language experience approach (LEA), and reading circles. The results indicate that these strategies aided in many students' improvement in reading, general English skills, and their personal motivation to improve in EFL and their interest in reading through the intervention of introducing and utilizing three reading strategies. This section will explain how the results are supported and can be contrasted with previous studies about the use of these different strategies through strategy-based instruction.

The positive aspects of utilizing reading strategies such as extensive reading, LEA, and reading circles tend to be discussed individually by different professionals in the field such as Assiri and Siddiqui (2021), Ng and Renandya (2019, Nessel and Dixon (2008) and Doggen et al (2020). However, the results of this paper describe how using the three strategies together can have more positive aspects than when used separately. Together the results of these strategies show how they not only improve reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition but also promote and encourage autonomous reading and reading interest in many of the participants. Strategy-based instruction allowed the teachers to teach to the students' needs and address the different problems the teachers found through the diagnostic exam and initial student questionnaire.

An A2 lower-level EFL diagnostic and summative reading exam was chosen to check students' reading ability, skill, and level in reading comprehension given before the intervention and at the end of the intervention. This test focused on students' abilities to understand the content, find meaning through context and recognize A2-level vocabulary. It was clear through the results of the exam that most students were not at the necessary level and struggled with A2 vocabulary and comprehension of the reading materials that were supposed to be their level. According to Alber-Morgan, Ramp, Anderson, and Martin (2007), this may be from the fact that they lacked these skills from previous academic instruction.

The results of the pre-questionnaire showed that at the outset of the course, students expressed a lack of enthusiasm towards reading both inside and outside of the classroom, as revealed by the initial questionnaire administered to them. Many of them shared their opinions and thoughts regarding reading, which shed light on their reading habits and preferences. Through these exploratory tools, the researchers were able to plan the intervention of strategy-based instruction for the three reading strategies. During this time the teachers supported each other through classroom observations of the strategies and gave each other feedback through reflection for improvement. The results of the

reflections from the teachers and the students identified how each strategy aided in students' progress and fortified the students' motivation to improve, their changed attitudes towards reading, and their want to read in English more.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study provides evidence of the effectiveness of implementing reading strategies such as extensive reading, language experience approach (LEA), and reading circles to promote and improve reading competencies among beginner-level EFL students at UNAE in Ecuador. The research suggests that these strategies positively impacted students' literacy competencies, writing ability, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Additionally, students were motivated to read not only in class but also for pleasure, which promoted increased reading. This study highlights the importance of supporting autonomous learning and improving language development among EFL learners.

In summary, the teachers reflected on how the three reading strategies affected the students' learning, attitudes toward literature, and reading abilities. The teachers initially observed that students had low reading comprehension, lacked motivation, and had difficulties learning English. Through observation and discussion, the teachers noted that when given the option to select reading material that was interesting and engaging their participation, reading speed, comprehension, and general ELL abilities improved. Students generally felt more confident, while some still struggled to stay engaged during reading activities. Overall, the teachers reflected that it was a successful intervention for student improvement.

The results of this study may have implications for EFL teachers designing effective reading programs that foster autonomous learning and student engagement. This may encourage language development among EFL learners. Furthermore, the study contributes to the existing literature on reading strategies' effectiveness in EFL contexts. It provides insights into the potential benefits of using these strategies to encourage autonomous reading and improve language competencies. This research highlights the importance of promoting a reading culture in EFL contexts. It also highlights how reading strategies can promote learning and improve language development among EFL learners. Finally, this study provides a framework for future research exploring other reading strategies and their impact on language development among EFL learners.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Julia Sevy-Biloon is a tenured professor at the National University of Education in Ecuador. She has a master's degree from Nova Southeastern University in Florida

specializing in Education. She currently specializes in EFL and action research in the classroom and has been an EFL teacher for over ten years.

Tania Cajamarca has a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Kansas State University. She has 16 years of experience in teaching from kindergarten to university and currently works the National University of Education in Ecuador. She has written book chapters and trained secondary and university teachers in classroom management and information technology.

Andrea Tatiana Avila Mendez is an English teacher at UNAE. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in education, and earned a Master's degree in Language and Applied Linguistics. She is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Education Sciences and has contributed to a book chapter on effective teaching strategies.

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