



Andragogical Focus to enhance Reading skills in University students

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ABSTRACT

Reading can definitely be affected by some personal factors such as formal educational background, frequency of reading, types of texts used, attitude of the reader, among others. However, it still has to be integrated to daily classes, especially when learning a new language. This research work aimed to enhance reading comprehension in intermediate level students of English as a foreign language in the 18-40 age group, at the Languages Center - Universidad Técnica De Ambato.

Teaching reading strategies with a focus on andragogy to university students is valuable because while being appreciated as adults, they can participate and co-exist in work groups where their learning will evolve through sharing experiences with their peers and their teacher.

Two groups were observed: one experimental and one controlled. The instruments used in this research allowed us to measure the effect and importance of using class-time with the use of tools and reading strategies with the above mentioned focus. Finally, this type of analysis allowed us to conclude that after intervention, the experimental group obtained better results in reading comprehension tests, applying the andragogical approach; therefore it can be stated that this was found to be effective, therefore applicable in the future.

Key Words: Reading comprehension, Andragogy, Reading strategies, reading skills



RESUMEN

Enfoque andragógico para potenciar la destreza de lectura en estudiantes de Inglés como lengua extranjera.

La comprensión lectora puede estar afectada por factores personales como estudios anteriores, frecuencia de lectura, tipos de textos leídos, actitud frente a dicha actividad, y otros; sin embargo debe ser un acto integrado diariamente en las clases, especialmente cuando se aprende un lenguaje nuevo. El objetivo de este trabajo fue mejorar la comprensión lectora en los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera del nivel intermedio del centro de Idiomas de la Universidad Técnica de Ambato, donde encontramos estudiantes que oscilan entre los 18 y 40 años de edad.

El enseñar estrategias de lectura con un enfoque andragógico a estudiantes universitarios es algo muy valioso ya que al ser apreciados como adultos, ellos podrán participar y coexistir en grupos de trabajo donde evolucione su aprendizaje a través de experiencias compartidas con sus compañeros de aula y su profesor.

Se observaron dos grupos: uno experimental y otro controlado. Los instrumentos utilizados en esta investigación permitieron medir el efecto e importancia de usar tiempo de la clase con el uso de herramientas y estrategias de lectura con el enfoque antes señalado.

Finalmente, este tipo de análisis permitió concluir que luego de la intervención, los sujetos del grupo experimental obtuvieron mejores resultados en pruebas de comprensión lectora, aplicando el enfoque andragógico; es decir fue muy efectivo y por lo tanto, aplicable en el futuro.

Palabras Clave: Comprensión lectora; Andragogía; estrategias de lectura; destrezas lectoras



1. INTRODUCTION

Andragogy is a theory that differentiates teaching young learners from teaching adults. Some authors have speculated about this theory of learning being weak and empirical (St. Clair, 2002); nevertheless andragogy has also inspired numerous adult educators.

It needs to be remembered that in the past, learning was not even considered possible during adulthood; however, according to Piaget and his theory of cognitive development (Piaget, 1958), young adults of 20-40 years continue in the formal operational stage of cognitive development, which allows them to expand their knowledge. Although there is not physical growth, there is mental development during this stage, consequently there is learning.

In 1833, the German educator Alexander Kapp, was the first person to use the word Andragogy. Kapp did not explain the term and did not develop a theory either, but he stated that Andragogy is a practical necessity of teaching adults. Since then, the topic has been addressed by many authors in several publications mainly because there are some undeniable considerations to be taken while teaching adults (Ozuah, 2016).

As analyzed by Smith (Smith, 2004), Eduard Lindeman was an early explorer on adult education that envisioned learning as a life long process rather than simply a means to an end. His first work on the topic: *The meaning of Adult Education* was written in 1926 and since then, Lindeman extensively continued to write about andragogy, (Cited in Ozuah, 2016).

While describing his theory of adult learning, Lindeman stated that the approach to adult learning will be via the root of problem solving, not subjects. His work influenced whom will be later known as the father of Andragogy: Malcolm Knowles.

Knowles claimed that the learning process for adults cannot be based on how children learn. He began to talk about emerging theories of adult education that would result in different teaching practices for both groups. (Knowles M. , 1973). He set out 4 key assumptions (Knowles M. , 1984), (Knowles M. , 1980), (Blondy, 2007):

1. Self-Concept: adults are self-directed human beings
2. Experience: Adults accumulates experiences which become a source for learning
3. Readiness to learn: Adults are ready to learn accordingly to their social roles and duties.
4. Orientation to learn: adults' orientation to learn focuses on how to solve problems



5. Internal motivation to learn: for example a better job, earn more money, among others.

Those assumptions demonstrate how this theory of learning has a humanistic point of view.

Félix Adam, one of the most prestigious pioneers in adult education in Venezuela, agrees with Knowles's andragogical point of view that focuses on the learner rather than on the teacher. For this reason, the author suggests that the andragogical practice should be adopted and used bi-directionally (learner and teacher), in an environment of trust and mutual respect (Adam, 1977).

It must also be mentioned that some authors have critiqued Knowles' theory. A few have said it is only a concept born into a specific historic context. For example when he mentioned that adults are self-directed, this probably described the American type of life; which can be very different in other parts of the world. Others, such as Merriam, have pointed out that there is no one theory or model, but combination of theories, principles and explanations that are the foundation to new approaches to adult teaching (Merriam, 2001).

Despite the issues found with Andragogy, Knowles's work has undoubtedly been of great value during the last 40 years on account of having been preserved and used as core material on adult education (Knowles, M. S, Holton III, & Swanson, 2014). For instance, numerous differences between andragogy and classic grounded theories have been considered highly valuable to current educational research (Chamensky, 2016). It is also important to remark that research and studies on the topic of andragogy and how to teach adults are currently being done (Phillips , Baltzer, Filoon, & Whitley, 2017). The conclusions are showing that adult students seem to prefer instructors with knowledge and respect for adult learners, who can understand their issues and needs when learning something new at an older age. Also, the use of Andragogy is being validated in specific contexts, countries and settings, which findings show that the features of adult learning could be predictors to enhance learning satisfaction in adults (Park, Sunyoung, Robinson, Petra, & Bates, Reid , 2016). Furthermore, Andragogy is being examined in a way in which it can be applied to the design of specific fields of education, such as online learning environments for adults (Cercone, 2008).



Experts on Education like Theodore Clymer, challenged many myths in other fields of education, for example, the way reading was taught changed and also more research on this topic was encouraged (Clymer, 1968).

(Carney, 1992) points out how reading has evolved from being considered as a skill which only verbalized what was found in written (approximately in the 20's), into a much more complex process that is not only repeating the ideas of the author or decoding words to understand their meaning.

It seemed teaching reading finally started to adopt a new path, as it was explained with Barret's taxonomy for reading comprehension (Teacher Pages, 2016), also cited by (Glaser, 1973). Barret proposed this taxonomy related to reading comprehension in four main categories: (a) literal recognition (b) inferences, (c) evaluation, and (d) appreciation. Such taxonomy was designed originally to assist teachers in developing comprehension questions for reading; however, teachers and researchers noticed that making questions about a reading helped comprehension; but it was not actually teaching anything new.

During the 80's, reading comprehension started to be seen as an emotional reaction to a stimulus (Dubois, 1989). Similarly to what Dubois asserted, Solé referred to the reader as to an active subject in the reading process. For this author, the reader will only try to find meanings in specific case and will not only read isolated sentences. In those cases, the person will try to understand the text by inferring, predicting and selecting important information (Sole, 1996) (Sole, 1992).

Reading must be understood as a complex cognitive process and it also must be acknowledged that there is a transfer from reading in our mother tongue, when reading in a foreign language. Catherine Walter proposed that there is a transfer of mental structure-building skills which is associated with the level of success in reading comprehension in a foreign language. In her study, it was shown that skilled readers in their mother tongue were also good readers in the foreign language they used (Walter, 2004).

According to the INEC (National institute of statistics and census), and its survey on reading habits in Ecuador -2012, 16 years and older Ecuadorians show low poor reading habits, and lack of interests (INEC, 2012). It can clearly be seen that generally speaking, people do not read enough.

When we identify poor reading habits and skills in our students in their own mother tongue, it can be assumed that reading in English will not be easier for them. If we have an adult learners classroom where readers are trying to understand not only a text, but a new language, it can become a source of frustration and demotivation. For this reason, it



is of great importance to offer these adult students some reading strategies based on the analysis of their characteristics and determine to what extent the use of andragogical principles impacts the development of their reading skills.

2. METHODS

This is a longitudinal study carried out at the Languages Center - Universidad Técnica de Ambato, about the reading skills intermediate level students of English as a foreign language during the year 2015.

Numerous seminal research papers and authors with important work on the topics of reading skills in students of English as a foreign language, as well as on Andragogy were analyzed. The subjects of this study were learners who were 18 years and over. They were surveyed on their frequency of reading and type of text preferred by them, as well on the strategies they used to understand a text in English. During this work, reading strategies were taught and adapted in order to be applicable for adult learners. Finally, after teaching students the reading strategies with an andragogical focus, results on reading comprehension tests were measured to see if reading comprehension had been enhanced.

3. RESULTS

The results were observed in two reading tests designed and adapted in order that both would have similar content and complexity. One of the tests was applied before the application of reading strategies with a focus on andragogy in the class, and the other test was applied at the end of the academic term in which reading strategies were taught. These tests had five extracts, each one of them measuring different reading skills.

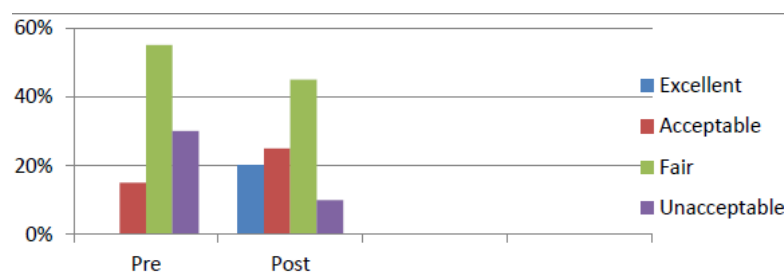


Figure 1. Extract N. 1: Measured the skills of skimming, scanning, and inferring. Reading comprehension improved in the skills of skimming, scanning, and inferring. It can be seen that fair and unacceptable results decreased after students used the strategies, even showing 20% of excellent results.

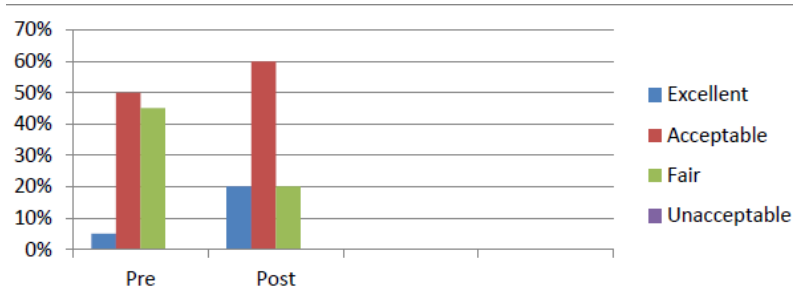


Figure N. 2. Extract N. 2: Measured the skills of skimming, scanning, and inferring. The same type of skills were measured in this extract, As it is shown, 20% of students got excellent results when using the strategies taught. Also the percentage of fair results was reduced in the post-test from 45% (pre-test) to 20% (post-test).

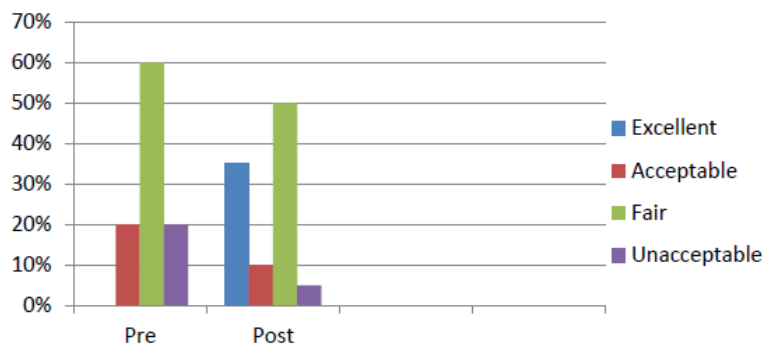


Figure 3. Extract N. 3: Measured the skills of inferring, making connections and summarizing. The results of the reading extract represented here measured the skills of inferring and making connections. It can be seen in the bars that fair and unacceptable results decreased after using the strategies with an andragogical focus, while the excellent results appeared in 35% of the students.

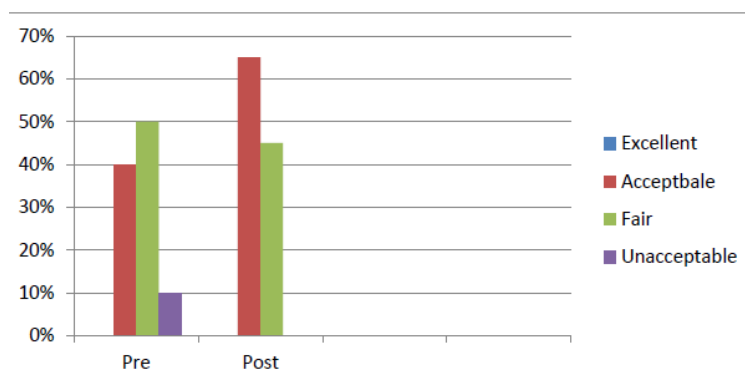


Figure 4. Extract N. 4: Measured the skills of summarizing and making connections.



The results of the reading extract represented in these bars measured the skills of summarizing and making connections. It can be seen in the scale that fair and unacceptable results decreased after using the strategies taught, while the acceptable results increased to a 65%.

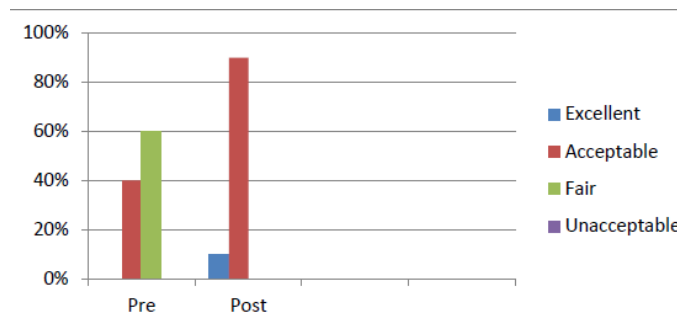


Figure 5. Extract N. 5 Measured the skill of guessing the meaning of word in context

The results of the reading extract represented in these bars measured the skill of guessing the meaning of word in context. It can be seen that fair results decreased, and unacceptable results disappeared after students used the strategies taught, while the acceptable results increased to 90%, and some students also obtained excellent results in the reading comprehension test.

The andragogical approach used when teaching reading strategies to university students was found to be effective, therefore applicable in the future.

4. CONCLUSIONS

It is necessary to teach Reading comprehension strategies to our adult students in order to encourage their autonomous reading. Adults need to understand why they are learning something; therefore they should be explicitly guided at first, so that they can be aware of the different strategies they could use. Eventually, they will be able to independently choose the proper one when reading different types of texts.

Text analysis and thinking skills are completely necessary for students to comprehend texts in their mother tongue or in a foreign language. Once readers understand a text, there are more possibilities for them to get engaged in the reading task. Students should be encouraged to avoid their desire to translate a text word by word; instead they should focus on prefixes and suffixes, as well as context clues. These strategies showed to have helped students to read more effectively and in less time the same type of text that would have been read without using the strategies. For this reason, reading strategies should not only be taught but also practiced in daily basis, to get students familiarized with them.



The use of reading strategies along with group-work and pair-work also benefits students to gain confidence, because they can learn from their peers in an less threatening environment.

Although there are important implications for further studies, modifying some aspects of our methodology and strategies in the EFL classroom can bridge a gap between standardized teaching language and teaching language to adult students.

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