Chapter XXIV

READING STRATEGIES INSTRUCTION IN A GRADUATE PROGRAM FOR ENGLISH IN-SERVICE TEACHERS

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Abstract: A faculty complained that students were not reading as expected to in order to participate in class and to complete their assignments. Master's candidates argued that there was too much content to read. Participants were in-service teachers of a master program for English teachers at a private university. The intervention included asking the faculty to choose the core topics to be read, analyzed, and discussed in class. This is a descriptive study with analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. This study explored to what extent the faculty included reading strategies in class as well as students' perspectives of in-class-reading for different purposes. Data were obtained from the syllabus, and from surveys given to students. Findings reported an increase in reading strategies in class, students evaluated teachers better, and there was a change in their perspectives towards reading. The implications of this study favour supporting students' understandings of academic concepts and raising their motivations through in-class-reading.

Keywords*: in-service teachers, academic reading, reading strategies, graduate program.*

Introduction

Main international institutions recognize reading as a venue for academic success. UNESCO (2014) is currently investigating how books can be accessed through mobile phones, seeing that mobile phones are common in places where texts are scarce. UNESCO values reading for its positive effects in any field of humanlife. Furthermore, reading has been in the curriculum, and it is mentioned as one of the key 21st century skills. Currently, there is a tendency to include 21st century skills into standards and curriculum to prepare students to outperform when they are immersed in the work force (Alismail, McGuire, 2015). In this regard, Scott (2015) made a review of subjects that must be included to reach 21st century skills, and second in her list is reading.

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Worldwide, there are several studies that find reading highly correlated to academic success (Oriogu, Subair, Oriogu-Ogbuiyi, Ogbuiyi, 2017; Whitten, Labby & Sullivan, 2016; Horbec, 2012). In Latin-America, researchers have discussed the importance of reading as a tool available from the first years of study to build knowledge and learning. They add that teachers consider this skill as an intrinsic component of learning as well as a basic element used in all formal education stages. It can be optimized to promote continuous and indefinite learning (Carlino, 2006; Márquez & Prat, 2006). Locally, official documents like the academic regulation from the higher education council consider reading as an autonomous learning activity (Consejo de Educación Superior 2015).

The weaknesses of critical reading and its application in academic discussions and assignments were detected in a graduate program of a private university in Guayaquil. It was expected from students at this level to read autonomously the references provided by the faculty. However, there was a feeling of explicit refusal from master's candidates not only to autonomous reading but also to the quantity of references. Thus, in order to improve students' quality of participation in the program, teachers were asked to choose one or two references core to the subject and scaffold reading strategies in the classroom to read, analyze, and discuss.

Literature Review

With refard to rReading in higher education, research concludes that students do not read academic articles. There is also a common complaint from professors. They imply that the contact with academic production is reading, and students are not going through these academic papers as they are expected to (Carlino, 2006; Cornejo, Roble, Barrero, Martín, 2012). There are many causes for those difficulties, among them the complexity of the content. Due to this situation, texts have been adapted and simplified to improve students' comprehension. In addition, Horning (2007) implied that there is lack of training and practice of reading strategies. Cartolari and Carlino (2009) added that teachers focus on superficial aspects of reading due to their own limited interaction with texts.

Cornejo et al. (2012) observed that reading activities are limited to close questions made by the teachers and that students have to look for literal answers found in the passages. This practice was also found by Briones and Author (2011) in high school classrooms. It was noted that teachers do not take advantage of the benefits of the passages; most the questions were answered by the best student, or the student that was paying attention; when there was no answer, the teacher provided the correct response.

The authorities of education in Ecuador have adopted international tests that measure knowledge of students in Reading, Science, and Math. Results of these standard examinations indicate that sixth graders are below the mean when compared to regional scores. The institute of statistics and census reported a low rate of reading in the population (27%). Participants' were aged from 16 upwards. Data was gathered in five cities in Ecuador (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos 2012). Most of them reported not being interested as the main cause (56.8%), followed by no time (31,7%). When the participants were asked about the place where they read, 5,4% answered that they read in an educational institution. Another important finding was that the participants do not read for professional development. Thus, it seems that optimal reading habits are far from being achieved in Ecuador. Nowadays, local authorities are investing resources to promote reading. In 2017, a campaign to motivate reading named "Yo Leo" [I read] was launched in elementary and high schools (Ministerio de Educación 2017).

Methodology

This is a descriptive study with analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. This innovation was implemented during two terms of a university Master's program for English teachers. Each term lasted six months. During the first term, teachers planned and delivered the lessons without reading in class. They assumed students would read autonomously. After a meeting with the group of teachers for the first term, there was a general observation from teachers that students were not reading academic references to participate in class or to structure their assignments. Thus, teachers from the second semester were advised to add guided reading activities in class.

This study was carried out to answer the following research questions:

- Will the faculty be receptive to recommendations and make adjustments to the syllabus of their classes?
- Will students' perceptions of assigned reading change?

It is important to mention that teachers were asked to include individual and group work. There was a platform to organize the activities. This platform allowed them to upload files, create tests, and write tags to announce or provide more information about tasks. Syllabi were downloaded from the platform.

Data was gathered from these instruments:

- Demographic information from the faculty. This information was selected and organized from the curricula that were uploaded to the platform for each class. From students, they completed a demographic survey.
- Syllabus. There was analysis of syllabi from the first and second terms in order to compare and contrast the use of reading strategies in class.

- Class observations. These were conducted to compare and contrast the syllabus of each class and to observe how teachers set the reading strategies.
- Surveys. The program asked students to complete surveys in order to receive feedback in terms of teaching methodology, content, and activities developed in class. The surveys include a Likert scale ranging from "To a great extent" to "Not at all". This survey was made up of six questions regarding objectives of the subject, and twelve about the strategies implemented during classes. There were three open questions. From this survey, items that included reading were chosen and analyzed. To achieve reliability of the survey, Cronbach Alpha was run, and the result was 0.962 which means excellent.

Participants

The sample consisted of eight different teachers of the program. Four taught first term subjects, and the rest subjects of the second term. Two of the faculty members hold PhD degrees. There is one PhD candidate. The remaining five hold 3 master's degrees. They have all evaluated or guided a graduate thesis and have collaborated in research studies. One faculty member had published several articles. There is one male professor. This information was taken from the curricula uploaded to the platform for each class. Sixty-two percent of professors were from the United States. From them, only one had not lived in Ecuador.

In this study, there were also 30 in-service-teacher students. They all hold an undergraduate degree. Table 1 summarizes the fields that the participants had studied. Most of them had studied to be English teachers (57%). Their ages range from 27 to 52. Thirty-three percent of the participants were male.

Table 1: Undegraduate degree

University Degree	Percentage
Teaching English	57%
Engineering	23%
BA in Tourism	10%
High school teacher	3%
Other	7%

Results and Discussion.

Research question 1: Will the faculty be receptive to recommendations and make adjustments to the syllabus of their classes? To answer the first research question, the syllabi were analyzed. Table 2 summarizes the reading activities implemented by teachers of the first and second term. It also shows that during the second term, more reading activities were developed in class. In the second term, there were also individual and group activities that involved reading for different tasks. These results indicate that faculty members of the second term were receptive to the recommendations and included guided reading as part of their sessions.

This implies that teachers in the first term assumed reading as an intrinsic component to learning (Carlino 2006; Márquez, Prat 2006). They expected students to read autonomously in the first term. After the term, they complained that students did not contribute in class (either in oral discussions, or in assignments). Students' understanding of academic sources were not reflected (Carlino 2006; Cornejo, Roble, Barrero, Martín 2012). There were many reasons for neglecting reading. One may be the complexity of the content, and the adaptation of academic content to make it more comprehensible to students. Thus, paying attention to teachers' and students' perceptions, the venue was to require a new faculty to guide students through reading strategies to engage participants with the content of the subjects. At this level, the faculty was receptive and could adapt their syllabus to implement reading for different purposes in class.

Table 2: Syllabi analysis of subjects per term

First term	Reading Strategy	Second Term	Reading Strategy
Subject 1. Area: Epistemic knowledge	Autonomous reading for – A test. – Glossary. – Case study Students do not mention the references in their work.	Subject 1: Area: Epistemic knowledge	In class: – Role-playing – Cooperative work – Jigsaw. Autonomous reading for: – Prepare a class in group. – Participate in Forums (students were asked to quote three authors) 4 – Essay (connect teaching practices to theory).
Subject 2. Area: Professional	Readings were used as samples to: – Compare and summarize two readings. – Define concepts individually or in groups. – Paraphrase. – Quote. – Test – Write an abstract.	Subject 2: Area: Professional.	In class: – Discussion groups (5) – Roleplaying (2) – Reading analysis (3) – Debate (2) – Case study (2) – Group project. Autonomous reading: – Forums (6) – Research proposal.
Subject 3: Area: Professional	Autonomous reading for: – Essay. – Class discussion. – A test. – Diary.	Subject 3: CF: Professional.	Guided reading through self assessment and practice questions to contrast with theory. Use of analogies to generate knowledge. Students read individually, highlighted relevant ideas, shared them with classmates. They responded to peers' ideas. This practice was observed in all sessions. Students read to: – Write immediate, shortand long-term learning goals. – Plan a class based on concepts of the subject.
Subject 4: Area: Professional	Autonomous reading for a test and to write an argumentative essay.	Subject 4: Area: Professional.	In class: – Scan. – To write. – To extend the discussion. – Jigsaw Autonomous reading to write: – Logs (4) Group activity: – Infography (1)

In terms of the number of sources assigned in each class, Table 3 indicates that it increased the number of sources students had to refer to.

Table 3: Usage of sources

First term		Second Term	
Books	Articles	Books	Articles
4	4	7	8
3	6	7	7
7	7	4	9
1	3	--	14
Total 15	**20**	**18**	**38**

Results of the survey are presented in table 4. From the second term, an item was added regarding reading in the Likert scale. Comments in the first term indicated that there was too much content to read and not much time. On the other hand, comments in the second term showed that students hadnot only realized the effect of reading in their understandings but this had also impacted their perception of the faculty. The average improved in the second term.

Table 4: Results of survey that evaluated the quality of teaching and reading

First term			Second Term	
Subject	Faculty	Reading	Faculty	Reading
1	4.63	10 comments	4.77	4.87
2	4.35	3 comments	4.84	4.83
3	4.47	4 comments	4.70	4.67
4	4.84	2 comments	4.70	4.78
Media	4.57		4.75	4.79

This survey included open questions. Answers regarding reading were selected. Table 5 includes a review of students' comments, and how they differed from the first and second term. Reading and discussing the texts in class made students not only change their perceptions from negative to positive, but there was a requirement of including more texts. They connected reading to their practice. Their discourse included theoretical frameworks for learning. They felt they understood the contributions of the authors. It is important to mention that the sources increased in the second term. However, this was not perceived by the students; they did not mention reducing the sources.

Table 5: Students' comments towards reading

First term	Second term
Reduce the length and number of readings. Select better sources. Some are interesting but do not support the activities. Select better articles to be analyzed.	Recommend articles to read. More information to read. Readings were fantastic. Connection of readings to practice. Read and follow the format. The theoretical framework helped me learn. The contributions of the authors. Include more theoretical books.

Conclusions

Despite reading being a key element for success, it seems is has been neglected in educational institutions. As reported by the institute of statistics, only 6% of the population mentioned reading in educational institutions (Instituto Ecuatoriano de Estadísticas y Censos 2012). Thus, this perception may reflect the fact that teachers assume autonomous reading that students are not conducting. The same report indicates that only 27% of the population read, but not for professional development.

Teachers assume students can get meaning from texts by themselves. This practice was observed in this graduate program. When following teachers were aware of this situation, they were receptive to the recommendation of including reading activities in class for different purposes, mainly comprehension to later discuss orally or in writing. This study reports that when the faculty is aware of the needs of the participants teachers can adapt their syllabus and design lessons to manage texts in class.

When students read for a purpose, when they comprehend, and when they connect content to practice, they can raise their voices can contribute in class. Even though the sources increased in the second term, students asked for more articles, more information, and more theoretical bases. They graded teachers better. They found readings fantastic. Hence, this study may also deal with the main cause of not reading: "interest" (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos 2012).

All in all, reading in class is effective to promote learning. However, teachers need to know how to handle, manage, and select the texts that will be read, discussed, and used in class to raise students' interest. Students come from different backgrounds, thus, reading can easily address different needs. Reading awareness should not be neglected at any educational level.

Recommendations

Future studies may integrate other instruments. Interviews can be added to gain more insights about students' perspectives of practices. Learning logs can be kept to know and compare the different reading activities. Analysis of students' oral and written participation to determine the level of comprehension and appropriateness should also be conducted.

This study can be replicated in other levels of education (elementary, high school, and undergraduate programs). In this case, the reading practices should be observed. Training sessions for teachers can be implemented if required.

The impact of the reading strategies in students' academic success can also be measured. Grades of students for different subjects and how they improve if they become effective readers should also be considered. Another option is to measure to what extent students become independent readers.

Participants of this intervention belong to the master's program for English teachers. It was observed that their proficiency improved. Implications of reading to improve proficiency in English can be also studied.

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