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Maridueña-Macancela, Irlanda; Astudillo-Quíñonez, Miguel; Ledesma-Acosta, Brigita
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English methodological strategies and their influences on Reading and Writing skills

Irlanda, Maridueña-Macancela¹; Miguel, Astudillo-Quíñonez²; Brigita, Ledesma-Acosta³

Resumen

To promote learning strategies for reading and writing in the English language and the skills that are included in the development of this process during the modules that are taught at the State University of Milagro, a descriptive research work directly focused on students of Engineering Systems was conducted. Through this, it was identified the aspects that affect negatively the learning process as well as the difficulty that students have in their study surroundings. It was found that students demand motivation from teachers as well as the use of appropriate techniques and strategies to transfer their knowledge to students. It is recommended that teachers use motivational teaching techniques, so that students can feel stimulated when learning this language since it is necessary to develop skills in oral and written communication with a permanent sense of exchange and cooperation which will provide greater security to students when reading and writing English. A descriptive method and surveys were used. The surveys were applied to 103 students. The results showed that 71% of students' level is low, 45% of them said they have a lack of understanding in reading and 67% do not present affinity for reading. This research proposes the incorporation of active methodological strategies that foster the development of understanding and analysis skills, which are based on grammar and text patterns that allow the proper use of reading and writing in English when using vocabulary and grammatical structures in a correct way. Therefore, students will drop the fear and the difficulty they have in learning English. They will also generate confidence in their cognitive part to build and develop written texts according to their level of knowledge and this way, they will be able to reach meaningful learning.

Palabras Clave: teaching techniques; motivation; student achievement.

Estrategias metodológicas en inglés y sus influencias en las destrezas de Escritura y Lectura

Abstract

Con la finalidad de impulsar estrategias de aprendizaje de la lectura y escritura del idioma inglés, así como las habilidades que se desarrollan para dicho fin, dentro del proceso de los Módulos de Inglés que se dictan en la Universidad Estatal de Milagro-Ecuador, se realizó este trabajo enfocado en los estudiantes de la Carrera de Ingeniería en Sistemas Computacionales. Ellos tienen dificultades en torno al aprendizaje de esta lengua, demandan motivación del docente, revisión de las técnicas y estrategias que utiliza durante el proceso de enseñanza, además de la necesidad de desarrollar habilidades de comunicación oral y escrita. Se utilizó el método descriptivo y la técnica de la encuesta. Ésta se aplicó a 103 estudiantes. Los resultados demostraron que en el 71% el nivel de los estudiantes es bajo, 45% de los estudiantes evidenció falta de comprensión en la lectura, 67% en cambio no presentó afinidad por la lectura. Se propone la incorporación de estrategias metodológicas activas que impulsen el desarrollo de habilidades basadas en el procesamiento gramatical y de estructuras, que permitan un buen desarrollo de la lectura y escritura, empleando acertadamente el vocabulario y estructuras gramaticales, logro de competencias y habilidades de comprensión del idioma inglés que conllevarían a una mejor calidad educativa.

Keywords: técnicas de enseñanza; motivación; y progreso estudiantil.

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¹ Docente de la Universidad Estatal de Milagro, UNEMI, Ecuador. Magister en Administración de Empresas por la Universidad Tecnológica Empresarial de Guayaquil. Teléfono: 0992092419, jmariduenam@unemi.edu.ec - <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9117-2013>

² Docente de la Universidad Estatal de Milagro, UNEMI, Ecuador. Magister en Docencia y Gerencia en Educación Superior. Teléfono: 0997566824, mastudilloq@unemi.edu.ec - <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0655-9871>

³ Docente de la Universidad Estatal de Milagro, UNEMI, Ecuador. Magister en Administración de Empresas por la Universidad Tecnológica Empresarial de Guayaquil. Teléfono: 0985314979, bledesmaa@unemi.edu.ec - <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5982-9273>

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of reading and writing skills in the English language plays an important role in the teaching process of this language and must rely on the use of methodological tools that allow the students' progress by associating their knowledge with the existing technological resources nowadays.

To reach the improvement of this process it is necessary that teachers apply the approaches that lead to the success of English learning by motivating students to participate in it.

Long ago, the fact that a person did not know a foreign language such as English was not an obstacle to make their dreams come true, because they could perform any role in any field without having studied this language.

However, since science is progressing every day in all the fields, this fact pushes individuals to prepare themselves as part of their moral obligation with their societies to be ready to face challenges. Therefore, to know English is an important factor that will be required and at the same time decisive to get a job. (Burt, Miriam, Kreeft Peyton, Joy and Schaetze Kirsten, Department of Education, 2008)

There are a lot of teaching strategies to be applied in the classroom that result in hours of fun for learners such as crosswords, songs, and all types of didactic games. These activities provide students with knowledge in context in addition to the sense of recreation.

It is important to mention that appropriate approaches to teach English efficiently have always existed throughout the time, but many teachers do not always apply them, causing lack of interest and demotivation for learning which definitely affect the teaching-learning process.

The methodological strategies to develop the students' skills of reading and writing are basic to obtain a continuous improvement of learning. This fact will allow students to become critical, analytical, and develop a systemic thinking to boost the quality of education according to the demands of the Education Act. (Estrategias metodológicas: La comprensión en la clase de Inglés, 2011)

For there to be quality and warmth in education, it is essential not only to count on teachers with a good knowledge of English, but also that have methodological and andragogic training to enable

them to offer a good service educational. A great number of professionals think that the most important thing to be successful as English teachers is to have a good level of knowledge, but they are wrong because the lack of useful methodology influences their good development as teaching professionals. Moreover, teachers must consider their permanent training about methodological issues that help them prepare lessons in a different and motivational way to change the traditional and conventional types of classes that nowadays are useless and do not give the results that are expected.

II. DEVELOPMENT

1. Methodology

This research proposes the implementation of active methodological strategies to obtain positive outcomes from students of the different English modules that are taught at the State University of Milagro which will provide confidence in the development of reading and writing when incorporating useful and relevant vocabulary and grammar structures in context.

The students' limited ability to perform reading and writing tasks at the State University of Milagro impedes their efficient performance in these areas. Therefore, students feel frustrated because of their poor production, due to the scarce lexical and grammar structures that they have which definitely affects negatively their creativity and quality of their writings of paragraphs, stories and articles.

This limitation turns evident at the moment that students have to take assessments and they are not able to understand the real context of readings. In addition to this, there is a lack of students' interest for learning English and a great number of them quit the modules after a short time of having started, other ones stay until the end, but do not show a relevant progress in mastering these skills, so what they do is to keep attending classes with the hope that their teachers do something extra to change their reality and be able to pass the modules.

It is important to assume that teaching, as in all of the professional fields has changed through the times and what it was effective before; it is not necessarily as effective and useful now, so it is time to break paradigms and renew the teaching methods of English language in order to guarantee quality in

education.(Richards, Jack C & Rodgers, Theodore S, 2014)

In some countries, including Ecuador, the development of reading and writing in their mother tongue has not been efficient and shown a poor production which demonstrates that people have little interest on the development of these skills.

It is regrettable to read in the newspapers that only 10% of the population has the ability to write an article or text and in the classrooms just a few students prove to be competitive when reading and much fewer the ones who can perform as a good speaker in some speech or event.

Since the ability to read and write is limited in Spanish, it is logical to think that something similar likely happens in English because for some reasons the students do not like to work on reading nor writing tasks such as e-mails, formal or informal letters, summaries, short stories and articles.

Furthermore, a lot of students do not feel confident enough to participate in activities related to reading because they think they are exposed to the teasing from peers when they hear their pronunciation and notice their insecurity at the moment they are not able to answer questions.

It is important to mention that not all of them had opportunity to receive regularly English classes in high schools or the teachers who taught this subject were not specialized in this area. As a result of this, students do not have the same level or at least a basic one that lets them perform successfully in this subject when they start their studies at the university.

This is one of the main reasons that cause students to quit their English classes or fail their study modules. To change this situation, teachers must use effective strategies that involve motivation and interest for learning from students to help them develop reading and writing skills in the English language.

Expert Stephen Bailey (1986) in his text entitled *Academic Writing*, "indicates the importance that students develop a good level of writing, so that they can prepare written pieces of work with no difficulty, focusing on vocabulary definitions and grammar structures that are consistent with the language level". Therefore, teachers should encourage the continuous practice of writing in the classroom by using strategic tools that motivate students to improve their understanding and cognitive area.

(Bailey, 1986)

"It is useful that teachers alternate activities, for example, at the end of a story, teachers can consider checking the students' personal opinions about it, proposing to mention details that leads a step by step summary or any oral activity that includes a discussion or a forum that remarks their points of view to make the class more attractive and help learners improve their critical and analytical thinking"(Bailey, 1986)

(Doyle, 2010), in his book *Helping Students Learn in a Learner-Centered Environment*, "states that students are not motivated to read since they consider that they are not good at it, therefore the teacher is the one who must help their students get benefit when reading".

This research work focus on the idea that teachers must prepare their teaching portfolio with didactic material based on suitable strategies that enable students to an active participation in the classroom that generates a real sense of cognitive learning and critical thinking in this language.

Therefore reading and writing skills are the bases that define the guidelines to be able to coordinate ideas and interact efficiently in this language. Students at the State University of Milagro show a series of problems when trying to use the English language because they do not handle a proper lexical so they cannot organize their ideas that allow them do good writings or work successfully on reading comprehension tasks, so their production is limited due to the scarce practice in the English laboratories and in the assignments that are sent to them to reinforce the learning process. This is shown during the teaching process of the modules and turns evident in the results of the midterm and final evaluations.

Since the technological resources offer a very high potential to learn foreign languages in a different and more effective way, it is worthy that teachers encourage their students to use this material that is free and available nowadays on the web and that definitely support the development of the language skills during their learning process.(Nikitina, 2012)

The Academic System Regulations approved by the Higher Education, in its Article 30 about Learning a foreign language states:

"The higher Education Institutions will

guarantee the level of proficiency of the language to fulfil the graduation requirement for programs of the technical studies, high technicians or its equivalent or the ones of third degree. They must organize or homologate the corresponding subjects since the start of them. The sufficiency of the foreign language must be evaluated once the students have taken and passed 60% of the subjects; such proof enables them to the continuation of their studies" (Superior, 2008).

In addition to the regular teachers in their staff, higher education institutions will hire expert teachers to offer students language courses in order to satisfy the demand of learning a foreign language. The sufficiency of a foreign language must be considered as one of the options among the admission requirements.

On the other hand, the use of portfolios that contain all the material that is going to be used during the English modules becomes a very useful educational resource for teachers due to the role they play by motivating interest to learn in students.

It is intended through a good choice of learning activities to develop a constructivist perspective that teachers may be able to acquire with the aim of presenting a model of teaching English that helps students to be confident enough when reading and writing in this language. The results of this study show with no doubt that the activity of students are relatively limited since they are associated with a lack of confidence when they read because of a sense of insecurity they feel due to pronounce words incorrectly or by the limited critical thinking skills they have to understand pieces of information or texts, which can be improved if teachers plan in detail each of the steps to follow the teaching process of English in a productive way to make it effective.

Teachers' training must be assumed as a key part in their profession in this globalized world where all professionals have to be well-qualified to be competitive no matter what the professional fields are. This attitude should be internalized in each educator to generate and transmit their knowledge to students inside and outside the classroom. (Freeman, 2007)

The fact that teachers keep themselves active and updated ought to become a habit that allows them find new techniques and teaching methodology by

using technology as useful tools for this purpose. This requires a lot of inner motivation to offer different quality in education.

Since the challenge of new educational approaches cannot be absent from these requirements, it is important to incorporate new tools of information, interactive resources, technologies and communication in the learning platform that is presented to students and try to use it as much as possible to get better results in this educational process.

Learning English as a foreign language requires having a lot of concentration and development of basic skills, as it is a language that has its own structures and rules that demands to maintain a discipline of study to acquire this knowledge.

Teachers need to work harder with reading and writing activities that include general and specific information which may require students to develop their cognitive side and critical thinking through the applying of useful techniques and strategies that help students to get autonomy and perform naturally (González, 2007). In addition, there is another opinion given by Ana Lucía Delmaestro who said "that is necessary to incorporate technological tools that the new theories of learning demand" (Delmaestro, 2005).

On the Internet there is a wide variety of material that turns greatly useful for learners of foreign languages so English is not the exception, as a matter of fact, most of the material that is on the web can be used to reinforce and develop all the English skills and contribute with the teachers roles. Specific activities are found in some websites which are being presented at the Annexes section of this paper.

2. Results

To support this research a survey with a pre-established format that contains 10 questions was applied to 103 students of the English modules of System Engineering at the State University of Milagro. From a total of 260 students, it was obtained a sample that represents 39.61%.

This work has a descriptive, qualitative and quantitative research modality and the results let the verification of the data collected through the survey, so it was possible to obtain valid conclusions of this research.

In this research, the Independent Variable is Methodological strategies and the Dependent Variable is Reading and writing skills.

For this a simple random sample was used with 103 students of the first English module who study System Engineering that were attending regular classes in the first semester 2014 during the morning, afternoon, and evening was selected to serve as a source of information for this study.

Analysis and discussion results

The information that was obtained through 103 students, who took the surveys, was analysed in detail to identify the bases that support this research. These results made possible recommendations about all the factors that affect the students' development of reading and writing skills.

Table 1. Level students consider reading and understanding English texts

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
High	36	35%
Intermediate	40	39%
Low	27	26%
Total	103	100%

In this question, 74% of the students agreed that they need to have a high or intermediate level to be able to read English texts. It means that the development they reach at the end of this module is low, that is why it is necessary to apply a lot of reading activities with different methodological strategies to overcome this reality.

Table 2. Promoting of Reading by teachers

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	75	73%
No	28	27%
Total	103	100%

In this question, 73% of respondents indicated that their teacher did not use active strategies to offer more confidence when developing reading activities in the classroom.

This data shows the importance to work on these activities more frequently to reach the development of this skill.

Table 3. Students' English level related to the use of English skills

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
High	21	20%
Intermediate	30	29%
Low	52	51%
Total	103	100%

About this question, 51% of students reported having a low English level related to the handling of language skills, which is very worrying and there is a serious problem with the development of English skills which limits students' learning.

Table 4. Negative factors that affect the Reading process

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of understanding	46	45%
Wrong Pronunciation	34	33%
Fear of shame	23	22%
Total	103	100%

The result of this question shows a tendency of 78% of students who are affected with the lack of understanding and wrong pronunciation which are factors that influence negatively on their reading process. This students' reality suggests the need to add methodological strategies in the teaching process.

Table 5. Students' opinions on confidence to do Reading activities efficiently

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	69	67%
No	34	33%
Total	103	100%

One of the main factors that become a barrier for the development of English skills in general, is the confidence that students must have in order to perform any activity in class or at home. In the case of reading, teachers should give students this confidence so that they can overcome this barrier by providing tools to succeed such as vocabulary and instructions that lead them step by step to a correct reading process.

Table 6. Offering information of websites to strengthen Reading and Writing

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	41	40%
No	62	60%
Total	103	100%

In this question, only 40% of students reported that their teacher offered information about useful websites to be checked as supporting material with different activities for developing reading and writing. This action will let students count on interactive tools that enable them to improve reading and writing skills and at the same time accomplish their output profile related to the use of IT tools.

Table 7. Students' preference to work on writing

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	34	33%
No	69	67%
Total	103	100%

In this question, 33% of respondents expressed their affinity for writing in English because they like this language. This suggests that teachers should change their teaching process by using methodological strategies to help learners improve their level of writing in English language.

Table 8. Students' wishes about reading and writing in English Efficiently

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	76	74%
No	27	26%
Total	103	100%

In this question, 74% of students stated their wish to have skills that lead them to improve reading and writing level. These answers prove that with collaborative support from teachers learners can develop these skills much more easily and efficiently.

To get this aim it is necessary to change the focus on the educational system by implementing useful strategies that help improve the teaching process.

Table 9. Students' opinions about how useful for academic profiles Reading and Writing skills are

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	32	31%
No	71	69%
Total	103	100%

In this question, 69% of students claimed that they must develop the right skills to be able to read and write in English, since the correct use and application of this language depends on these ones. The central idea is to apply methodological strategies to get a better teaching-learning process with successful results.

Table 10. Students' willingness to attend academic events to improve reading and writing skills

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	87	84%
No	16	16%
Total	103	100%

This question shows that 84% of respondents expressed their wish to attend academic events in order to improve their skills of reading and writing as an important fact to complement their student profile.

III. CONCLUSIONS

This research work highlights the need of using methodological strategies to help get students more confidence when learning English. Students proved that they have a serious problem related to the development of reading and writing skills, which becomes a barrier to develop the other skills and areas of this language and this way, affecting the learning process.

This problem causes disinterest of students to participate and work on exercises where critical thinking and cognitive development are required to produce assignments efficiently.

Students usually try to solve their problem by themselves by using technological tools, but sometimes they fail on this because they do not count on enough information about useful and at the same time safe websites that offer them the opportunity to

learn English through wide types of exercises in an interactive way. On the other hand, it is a common fact that a lot of teachers do not offer the adequate support that students need for doing successful autonomous work.

Teachers must be aware of the updated technological tools and therefore use a variety of teaching methods about reading, writing and also the other skills and areas by considering English language as a whole that needs to be taught by integrating all its skills and components.

Considering the application of these methodological strategies results in the benefit for students who are going to be able to learn in a much more productive, motivational and efficient way. This fact will definitely contribute to improve the quality of education according to the trends of a globalized and demanding world.

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Annex 1. Proposals for reading

TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR READING Activities

1. Using Context Clues and Word Parts Clues

A suitable management of vocabulary plays a very important role to let students have a better understanding of the readings, so it is a good idea to select the clue words of the readings and write them down with the objective of emphasizing on their meanings, spelling and stress as useful complement of the reading comprehension in the English language. (Hanson, Susan & Padua, Jennifer F.M., 2010)

2. Provide definitions of the words to use them in context

A good option to gain time when working with new words is to provide their definitions, but to make it more challenging the students have to identify and match them to the correct words. Once the learners know the new lexical, they can apply it to sentences in different situations. (Readingrockets.org, 2014)

3. Use graphic organizers as visual support

One of the useful strategies to carry out understanding of readings is the use of graphic organizers. Students have the opportunity to develop this skill by analyzing these graphs that contain important information about characters in the story as well as the plot and the different stages. (Education, 1990)

4. Develop comprehension questions

Comprehension questions are basic for checking understanding of readings and lead students to the development of the cognitive memory. It is really useful to prepare questions that use other words different from the ones that are presented in the readings, so that students can have the opportunity to practice reading comprehension and associate it to information questions that are not literal with the contents of the readings. In this way students can also increase their vocabulary with synonyms and words or expressions with similar meanings. (Readingrockets.org, 2014)

5. Express personal opinion in an oral or written way

After the reading activities a good choice to check understanding of the information previously read and with the aim to complement the development of this skill, students can express their personal opinions about the topic by saying different pieces of information such as: pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages, positive and negative side effects, and what they would do in a hypothetical case they face a situation like that.(International House)

Annex 2. Proposal for writing

TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR WRITING Activities

1. Develop word banks

A good idea to increase and keep vocabulary ready to be used in any kind of writing task is to create word banks with words previously classified by topics and or by functions. This tool makes that students can be constantly checking meanings of words and they are able to recycle lexical they already know.(Supereasystorytelling)

2. Constant use of dictionaries

Dictionaries are a kind of basic didactic resource for learners of other languages. In the case of English, it is a very useful tool that students must always take with them and use constantly. (Cambridge)

3. Use graphic organizers as writing support

Writing tasks become much easier to accomplish when learners have this support that guides their writing step by step since the beginning until the last stage of their work. To make its use more useful, it is necessary that learners previously design and complete an appropriate model of graphic organizer that fits with the type of writing they are working on. (Scholastic)

4. Design writing outlines

In a good process of writing it is important to consider the design and use of outlines at the beginning of it as a starting point because they offer a previous perception of the different stages that have to be developed in a good work of writing. (Kane, 2007)

5. Describe characters

Knowing and describe characters of a story and their features help students a lot in a writing process because they are usually linked with specific details that are clue in the story. It is a good strategy to ask students to describe situations and what they would do in those cases. (Magdalena, 2010)

6. Change endings of stories

This is an excellent activity to activate students' creativity by applying all of the elements considered useful in a writing process in stories. In this way learners are able to use: specific vocabulary, verbs in different tenses, grammar structures or patterns, spelling of words, punctuation marks, and styles of writing. (Bitesize, 2007)

7. Write moral of stories

Through this activity students identify and reinforce moral values and this becomes a very enriching kind of writing. (Stories)