Universidad Veracruzana

Directorate General of the Department of Graduate Studies
Academic Area of Human Sciences
Languages Faculty – Xalapa

Report of the Project of Innovative Application of Knowledge

Improvement of Students’ Reading Comprehension in the EFL Classroom at University

Research area:
English Teaching-Learning Processes in Public Universities in Mexico

MA Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Action Research Project
Irán Mendoza Cárdenas
ABSTRACT

This study was carried out with a group of students on the BA in English language at a public university. The major concern of this research was to identify the type of learning difficulties that students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) were facing. This research, conceived under the optic of Action research began by means of class observations and analysis of students’ work in class. Also, a questionnaire was administered and some students were interviewed in order to identify an area of practice in need of improvement, in this case, EFL reading comprehension. Consequently, an action plan was implemented to try to discover the nature of students’ EFL reading difficulties, and to increase their EFL reading proficiency by means of formal instruction in reading strategies. The findings show that students become more engaged and motivated towards EFL reading when they are aware of the use of reading strategies and how to use them in the classroom.

KEY WORDS
4.2.6 Students can overcome vocabulary difficulties while reading ........................................... 49
4.2.7 L1 interference started to diminish while employing skimming and scanning........... 50

CHAPTER FIVE: FINAL REFLECTIONS................................................................................................. 51
5.2 Research constraints and possible modifications ................................................................. 54
5.3 Conclusions .............................................................................................................................. 54
5.4. Possible second Action Research cycle ................................................................................. 55

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................................. 57
APPENDIXES .................................................................................................................................. 61
### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Action Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>First language, Mother language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure/Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Ferrance’s Action Research Cycle (Ferrance, 2000, p. 9)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Students’ perceptions and rate of vocabulary problems in EFL reading</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Students’ responses in a reading comprehension activity in class</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Students’ initial reading efficiency rate</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Summary of activities</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Students’ final reading efficiency rate.</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td><strong>Comparative between initial and final reading activities.</strong></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Proficiency Level 1, Proficiency Level 2, and Proficiency Level 3 from K.S. Goodman, (Ed.), (1968). The Psycholinguistic Nature of the Reading Process, (pp. 17-19, op. cit. in Barnett, 1989, p. 21)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

When learning a foreign language, reading occupies an important place and represents an essential source of exposure to significant meaning that leads to language acquisition (Krashen, 1982; Barnett, 1989; Aebersold, 1997; Germain, 1999). This is especially the case given that reading represents one of the key sources of real language (Krashen, 1982). In an EFL context, reading becomes even more important since the language is not spoken in society and the exposure to real language is limited (Varona, 2012). However, the benefits that can be gained from L2 reading are considerably reduced if the reader does not have any strategies to deal with written language. Owning sound reading skills is necessary to obtain the maximum benefit from reading. Developing L2 reading skills is therefore indispensable so that EFL learners may achieve a high level of proficiency in L2 reading and language (Krashen, 1982).

Some authors (Lemus et al., 2008) acknowledge that Mexican institutions offering EFL courses are struggling to help learners develop communicative skills in the English language in a wide variety of contexts. Nonetheless, some accounts (Lemus et al., 2008; Davies, 2009) suggest that despite the linguistic and educational policies in Mexico (see National English Programme in Basic Education, 2011), this goal is not being achieved as expected. The lack of teachers’ professionalization, the mandatory nature of courses and the incipient research on EFL in Mexico (Davies, 2009; Ramirez, 2009) have been identified as some possible causes for these adversities. Bearing in mind these aspects, and the fact that university students face different learning difficulties (Lemus et al, 2008), it became necessary to carry out this Action Research aimed at identifying university students’ learning difficulties, on a BA in English Language. This included exploring the nature of these difficulties, in order to implement an appropriate action plan to help students overcome these obstacles in their learning.
1. Rationale
A large number of scholars have discussed English language teaching and the contexts in which it takes place, thus differentiating ESL (English as a Second Language) from EFL (English as a Foreign Language) (Varona, 2012). Unlike ESL contexts, in EFL settings “the non-native speaker learns English in their own native culture” (Varona, 2012, para. 6). Similarly, Brown (2007) claims that EFL learners have “few immediate opportunities to use the language in that culture” (p. 205). In addition to this scarce exposure to language, its use “is limited to the classroom with no natural production outside this environment” (Varona, 2012, par. 4). These characteristics, as Brown (2005) suggests, make the “EFL context ... a greater challenge for students and teachers” (p. 117).

Similarly, several researchers agree that the increasing need to learn English owing to its global importance is one of “the potential effects of globalisation” (Moore, 2012: p. 4). Likewise, some authors claim that the predominance of English on the international scene has made it the *lingua franca* for international communication (Graddol, 2006), a bridge to access and gain knowledge (Aebersold, 1997; Grabe & Stroller, 2002; Crystal, 2003), and a priority in local educational systems (Lemus et al., 2008; Davies, 2009; Reyes et al., 2011). Owing to these reasons, reading constitutes, by and large, one of the most necessary skills that English learners need to develop (Grabe & Stroller, 2002).

After some years of teaching English to young learners and adults, I have realised that many EFL students face difficulties when reading in English. By means of reflecting on my own teaching experience, I have identified four general characteristics concerning reading in the EFL classroom:

a. Difficulties are common regardless of students’ English level despite being literate in L1;
b. Students generally demonstrate little interest in reading;
c. Reading is mainly used to improve speaking (i.e. pronunciation, fluency, intonation);
d. Formal instruction on reading strategies is almost inexistent.
Bearing in mind these aspects, research on EFL reading becomes important and interesting. In addition to this, the development of sound L1 and L2 reading comprehension skills is currently one of the objectives of educational policies in Mexico (National English Programme for Basic Education, 2011). L1 reading, as it is well known, constitutes the essence of literacy.

Literacy (reading) is a basic skill that people must master in order to access social services and interaction (Grabe, 2012). Literacy constitutes a benchmark to measure the educational development of a nation, as some UNESCO accounts suggest. For this organisation, all member countries must contribute to the eradication of illiteracy (UNESCO, 2007. op. cit. in Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Hence, “a major goal for many educational institutions around the world is to promote greater literacy” (Grabe & Stoller, 2002, p. 1).

It is known that an average of “80 percent of the world’s population is reported to be able to read” (id.). The promotion and importance of literacy should neither be taken for granted, nor limited to L1. Conversely, its scope should include L2 contexts, especially for its pragmatic relevance in academic and social contexts. It is, thus, possible to acknowledge that:

The role of reading in society is actually quite complex, so a few comments are needed to situate the role of reading and student learning [...]. The extent of basic literacy around the world [80 percent of world’s population] should not be surprising because literacy is seen as necessary (but not sufficient) for improving earning potential and quality of life.

(id.)

If on the one hand, as these authors suggest, “reading [...] provides no special entry to a better standard of living” (id.); on the other hand, it is impossible to deny that our current technology-based societies require people to own “stronger literacy [and] reading abilities” (id.), and that those who do not fulfil such requirements will encounter greater difficulties to achieve social and professional success. These difficulties are significantly greater in the case of learners of a foreign language. In their case,
..reading is an even more complicated process because they usually do not have enough language background and knowledge that they can bring to the task of acquiring literacy as first language learners do. 

(Lai et al., n.d.: p. 154)

Some studies (e.g. Mohd, 2009; Luo, 2013) have found a strong relationship between L1 reading habits and L2 reading proficiency (which was also identified in this study). The more a student reads in L1, the better her/his results are in L2 reading. In the EFL context, reading is a matter of academic achievement and success (Barnett, 1989; Davies, 2009). Moreover, Crystal (2003) points out that English is the language for academic and scientific research. Therefore, it appears that proficient L2 reading will determine, to some extent, students’ access to information and, thus, academic and professional growth. As Grabe and Stoller (2002) point out:

L2 reading ability, particularly with English as the L2, is already in great demand as English continues to spread, not only as a global language, but also as the language of science, technology and advanced research. Many people in multilingual settings need to read in an L2 at reasonably high levels of proficiency to achieve personal, occupational and professional goals.

(p. 2)

Considering the implications of the latest educational reform in Mexico, and that most EFL students may become EFL teachers at different levels, this high degree of proficiency in L2 reading acquires even more relevance. At present, EFL teachers must hold the National Certificate of Language Level (CENNI) in order to teach in public schools. To do so, they must certify their English knowledge by means of international examinations (e.g. Certificate of Advanced English, Test of English as a Foreign Language). Moreover, there is an increasing social demand of qualified teachers as globalisation and linguistic competence in foreign languages continues to spread (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006).

In Mexico, EFL is mainly taught through the communicative approach (Reyes et al., 2008; Chepetla, 2008 in Varona, 2012.), in which reading occupies an important place in language acquisition and language learning (Germain, 1999). However, Chepetla (2008) suggests that the lack of positive results of the communicative
approach has provoked a change in language programmes in 2005, thus placing “an emphasis on reading and writing” (Varona, 2012, par. 9). Regardless of the method used in TEFL, reading remains as the main source of interaction with real language (Krashen, 1982). Hence, the pertinence of this study acquires more relevance in the context studied.

2. Research context
For the sake of objectivity, in this study I was co-teaching with a university professor. The study was carried out with a group of sixteen second-semester (Elemental English) students on the BA in English language at a public university. The main aim of this university is to provide a solid academic education in order to train professionals and help them acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities inherent to their areas of specialisation.

The group in which this study was carried out has a morning English language course, two hours a day, four days a week. The language is taught by using the communicative approach since the programme aims at fostering students’ communicative abilities so that they are capable of interacting in a wide variety of social situations in the English language. The fostering of these abilities increases gradually from one semester to another.

The BA Languages Department shares its facilities with a Foreign Languages Department (which offers English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Portuguese courses), as well as other BA programmes (Sociology, Anthropology, Philosophy, Hispanic Literature, French Language, and History). Regarding the BA in English Language, most students enrol on this programme for professional or personal purposes; whereas some desire to become translators or teachers, some others want to travel abroad.

On this BA, English language is given great importance. English is the language learnt and, at the same time, the language of instruction. According to the university, the aim of this BA programme is to train professionals

...with an integral profile, competent in communicative abilities in the
mother tongue and the English language, mainly in the fields of didactics and translation. Also, it will foster autonomous and permanent learning with human quality. The programme will seek to train socially responsible professionals capable of attending specific problems such as the imminent need to communicate in the English language, the backwardness in the fields of science and technology, and the lack of appreciation of the mother culture as well as others, with a strong emphasis in communication in both languages.

(Universidad Veracruzana, n.d.: para. 2)

This BA, as is observed in the quotation above, sets a strong emphasis on the development of communicative abilities and skills in the English language. Considering that in an EFL context, as Krashen (1982) suggests, reading constitutes the main source of significant input, reading acquires, therefore, a greater relevance in the context studied.

Some courses, such as English literature and culture, are also taught in English, which requires students to have a considerably high level of proficiency. To contribute to the accomplishment of this linguistic goal, there is a well equipped practice area called the Self-Access Centre, in which students can review their lessons, and put into practice the four language skills by using computer and software programmes, worksheets, and tape recorders, amongst others. Also, the university has a Resource Centre (a library specialised in language books) and a virtual library, through which students can access a great amount of information related to foreign language learning. In contrast classrooms are characterised by a lack of equipment (i.e. slide-projector, laptop, tape-recorder) and so, if needed, it has to be carried there by the teachers and installed, at times, with the help of students, who are mostly collaborative.

3. Research participants
The study was carried out with a group of second semester students between eighteen and twenty-three years of age. This level was selected due to two main reasons: on the one hand, according to the teacher I was co-working with, in the first semester there is a mixture of true and false beginners, which explains having students with different levels of English in the same classroom. Conversely, in the second semester, as the teacher suggested, students’ level of English is more
homogeneous. Such homogeneity, according to the teacher’s counsel, would allow me to have a more objective view of the real needs of students, and their learning difficulties. On the other hand, it was considered important to implement an action plan to improve students’ learning at an early stage of their professional education because it would signify greater benefits for them throughout their university studies.

Before enrolling on the BA, students had already had academic experience in EFL learning at public secondary schools and high schools. All these students like the English language, which was one of their main motivations for having chosen the BA in English. Most of them had a general idea of the profession they would pursue after university, and how English relates to that profession. A female student, for example, affirmed: “What I want to do with English language is to translate and interpret.” Similarly, when asked about the professional activity to practice after university, another female student answered:

I would like to translate or teach at high school. I did not have very good teachers of English. I have always thought, if I ever become a teacher, that I want to be what my teachers were not.

In addition, students were in contact with English through music, movies, and the internet. Although all sixteen were observed in the classroom, only seven of them participated in the interviews. This selection was based on the students’ level of English, their participation in class, and their attendance. Two students were selected because they were very good at English, participated at all times and were always in class; three were selected because they were identified as average students in terms of language proficiency, class participation and attendance. Finally, two students who were interviewed had a lower profile in all three aspects. This selection aimed at discovering a broad panorama of the reading difficulties EFL students were experiencing, regardless of their differences. It was considered that focusing on only one classification of students would have resulted in a research that would have neglected other types of students. As a result, this selection criterion revealed in the initial inquiry that EFL students experience similar learning difficulties despite their particular differences.
4. Description of the problem
The students who participated in this study were observed in the same environment and under similar conditions. A general and revealing aspect observed in the class consisted in the fact that all the activities that took place in the classroom demanded from students to read most of the time. However, such reading was incidental or consequential, no attention was given to the reading process. Students were required to read when solving vocabulary, grammar and listening activities (e.g. instructions, conversations, questions and answering options). However, students seemed to experience a certain degree of difficulty when performing reading comprehension activities during their English language learning process.

Even though students demonstrated an accurate level of English when speaking or solving grammar and vocabulary-related activities, when it came to performing reading comprehension exercises, their outcomes were somewhat erroneous. At times, students were required to answer orally the reading comprehension activities. During these activities, it was possible to perceive that students had this difficulty, even though it was not possible to identify the cause or causes. Before solving the questions proposed by the book, the teacher asked students to underline and read aloud the words they did not know. While doing this, students frequently said they knew all the vocabulary contained in the texts. Despite this, their answers were not correct, which led me to wonder about other possible causes for this problem that would be interesting to identify and solve.

5. Aim / Purpose
In English language teaching, different aspects can affect students’ language learning and proficiency. Overcoming these difficulties depends, to a great extent, on identifying them and on taking action according to their nature. In the context where this study was carried out, it was observed that students had reading comprehension problems. Reading implies more than simply putting one’s eyes on a written passage (Barnett, 1989); it constitutes an important element of students’ performance in all language areas when it comes to doing language exercises for practice and sitting
examinations. Regarding this situation, in order to modify my teaching practice so as to help students improve their reading skills, this research aimed at:

- Discovering students’ perceptions of reading in EFL.
- Identifying the nature of students’ reading comprehension problems.
- Designing, implementing and evaluating an action plan to help students improve their reading comprehension in EFL.

6. Research questions

- What is the nature of students’ reading comprehension problems?
- How may I help students’ improve their reading comprehension proficiency in EFL?

7. Map of research report

This research report is divided into five chapters: *Introduction*, *L2 reading strategies instruction in the EFL classroom*, *Methodology*, *Findings and Discussion and Reflections*. In *Chapter One: Introduction*, general aspects including the pertinence, purpose, and context of this study are presented. *Chapter Two: L2 reading strategies instruction in the EFL classroom*, comprises a brief discussion on some authors' viewpoints and theories related to the implications of L2 reading strategies instruction. *Chapter Three* is a description of the methodology and the instruments that were used in this study to obtain and analyse the data collected in the context. It also includes the initial research that was carried out, and the design of the action plan that was implemented in response to the findings. *Chapter Four: Findings*, reports the outcomes of the action plan implemented. *Chapter Five, Discussion and Reflections*, consists of a brief reflexion on the research process, and the possible focus of a second research cycle on the topic of this research.
CHAPTER TWO: READING STRATEGIES IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

In order to understand the students’ reading comprehension problems and design an action plan in an attempt to ameliorate their difficulties, it was necessary to review the literature related to EFL reading and reading strategies. This chapter presents the pragmatic and theoretical aspects regarding both these aspects. Firstly, the importance of reading for EFL learners is presented. Secondly, different experts’ statements related to L2 reading strategies are discussed, with a considerable focus on Barnett’s (1989), Aebersold’s (1997) and Grabe’s (2002) ideas on the topic. Thirdly, theory regarding the usefulness of formal instruction on skimming and scanning and its pertinence in this study is discussed. Throughout this chapter, the findings of other empirical studies on EFL reading are included, and commented on, when necessary.

2.1 Importance of reading in the EFL classroom

As previously mentioned (Chapter One), unlike ESL teaching, in EFL contexts students’ exposure to, and use of, language for real communication is extremely limited (Brown, 2007, in Varona, 2012.). In this context, and considering that reading constitutes a meaningful source of real language and significant input that leads to language acquisition (Krashen, 1982), the importance of reading in the EFL classroom cannot be neglected.

In our daily lives, as Grabe (2002) affirms, we are constantly in contact with written language. We read text messages, advertisements, posters, publicity, and newspapers:

...when we look at products while shopping [...] posters, billboards and displays when we travel on public transportation. We read forms in order to fill them out [...] when we receive and send e-mails and text messages.

(Grabe, 2002, p. 5)

These sorts of readings evidently require the reader to be literate in L1. Moreover, some scholars (e.g. Barnett, 1989; Aebersold, 1997; Grabe & Stoller, 2002) acknowledge that L1 reading habits and literacy strongly influence and determine
learners’ L2 reading proficiency. Although some accounts (e.g. Luo, 2011) have confirmed these theories, some others (e.g. Shen & Huang, 2007; Mohd, 2009; Luo, 2011) have demonstrated that L1 literacy does not necessary translate into L2 literacy or L2 reading proficiency, as it is commonly believed. It is possible that this misconception of the development of L2 reading and literacy derives from the way L2 learning has been conceived within the communicative approach.

When the natural approaches (e.g. communicative approach, direct method) in EFL teaching started to proliferate, “the acquisition of a second language was treated as a phenomenon analogous to first language acquisition” (Coady, 1995, p. 4). In other words, according to these approaches, “ESL/EFL teaching should replicate L1 learning conditions and let students acquire language skills naturally” (Krashen, 1982, op. cit. id.). However, some scholars (cf. Carrell et al., 1988; Dubin et al., 1986, op. cit in Coady, 1995, p. 4-5) consider that “for students with academic goals [...] natural learning will not provide the literacy skills necessary for coping with academic demands” (Coady, 1995, p. 4). Conversely, those authors consider that formal instruction and training constitute the best form to develop L2 learners’ academic literacy skills (id.).

The development of L2 reading and literacy by means of formal instruction must be reinforced, mainly since the development of L2 reading does not occur as in L1 contexts. When reading in L1, unlike L2 readers, the reader is already capable of accurately mastering huge amounts of vocabulary and grammar structures (Yule, 2011), which significantly facilitates the development of the reading skill. Conversely, L2 readers’ grammar and vocabulary are limited, which prevents reading comprehension (cf. Coady, 1995; Luo, 2011).

These characteristics of reading, to a certain extent, do not seem to be taken into account in current EFL teaching. Although at present EFL is taught by means of the communicative approach, it is a common behaviour to use reading as in the audio-lingual method (Silberstein, 1987, op. cit. in Coady, 1995, p. 6); that is, reading aloud in class by putting a special emphasis on pronunciation and intonation, or as a means to explore and teach linguistic aspects (e.g. vocabulary, grammar) (Nutall, 1982).
Nutall (1982) also states that “reading aloud […] is often used (mistakenly, most experts agree) as one form of pronunciation teaching” (p. 19). In either case, the importance of reading itself is neglected. In this context, most EFL students share the idea that their reading comprehension strongly depends, in addition to correct pronunciation, on their vocabulary proficiency (see Chapter 3). However, effective L2 reading comprehension depends on a wide variety of factors, such as cultural inheritance, reading habits, educational experience, purposes for reading, types of texts, amongst many others (Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

Regardless of these factors, the difficulties that students experience when learning a language are different, and they depend on the individual skills and aptitudes of each student (British Council, N/A. 2011). Regarding this, Germain (1999) agrees that “The diversity of learners’ needs makes us question ourselves about the place of the text in languages teaching” (Germain, 1999, p. 8). A similar point of view is offered by Barnett (1989), who affirmsthat

...the purposes and approaches to written texts [...] depend[...] on many factors, including text types, readers’ language abilities, cognitive development, [and] interests.

(p. 1)

Reading is frequently conceived as a receptive skill in which the reader’s role is perceived as passive. Nevertheless, research on reading (e.g. Barnett, 1989, Aebersold, 1997; Grabe & Stoller, 2002) clearly suggests that rather than receptive or passive, reading is a dynamic process in which the reader plays an active role in order to gain meaning from the text (Grabe, 2012), given that

The text provides information that the author wants the reader to understand in certain ways. The reader also brings a wide range of background knowledge to reading, and she or he actively constructs the meaning of the text by comprehending what the writer intends and by interpreting it in terms of the background knowledge activated by the reader.

(Grabe, 2012, p. 15)

This background knowledge activation is better known in the literature as “schemata [...] recognition devices which carry out a process of evaluation of their goodness of fit
to the data being processed” (Rumelhart, 1980, op. cit in Coady, 1995, p. 10). Hence, reading implies a communicative act in which the reader’s involvement and active participation is indispensable (Habermas, 1981., op. cit. in Bolton, 2005). As Germain (1999) affirms, “the act of reading is implied in a communicative process during which the reader rebuilds a message based upon his/her communicative objectives” (p. 8).

In view of these ideas, it is possible to summarise that reading implies more than simply reading written language aloud (Coady, 1995). Conversely, it implies gaining meaning from the text (Grabe, 2012), which constitutes the essence of the communicative purpose of reading (Habermas, 1981, op. cit. in Bolton, 2005). Finally, it is important to highlight that readers who mainly focus on words are “usually considered less efficient” readers (Barnett, 1989, p. 10). Also, it is necessary to acknowledge that “interactive reading strategies” (Barnett, 1989, p. 13) are considered to be the best way to foster and achieve the communicative nature of reading, and they are the most frequently used by outstanding, effective readers (Barnett, 1989).

2.2 Theory on L2 reading strategies
In the literature on reading, several aspects that characterise effective readers have been pointed out. An effective reader is conceived as an active interlocutor (Nuttall, 1982; Barnett, 1989, Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Grabe, 2012) who brings “a certain amount of knowledge to the task of reading” (Aebersold, 1997, p. 1) in order to contribute to the construction of “comprehension from within” (Showalter, 1985, p. 261., op. cit. in id.). However, some other characteristics point at the active intellectual participation of the reader within the reading process (Barnett, 1989).

From classroom practice it is possible to get the idea that the effective reader is the one that answers all the reading comprehension questions effectively. However, this perception is somewhat limited, for it neglects the importance of the reading process by simply focusing on the reading outcomes. To contribute to the completion of this effective reader conceptualisation in class, it is possible to suggest that effective readers are also frequently conscious of the purpose for reading (Barnett, 1989). To a
great extent, this influences the way they approach the text. In addition to their linguistic proficiency, effective readers make a conscious or an automatic use of different approaches (strategies) in order to gain knowledge from the text (Nuttall, 1982; Barnett, 1989; Grabe & Stoller, 2002). As Booth and Swartz (2004) state,

Proficient readers are aware of the strategies involved in making the most possible meaning with print; they make predications, make inferences, see images in their minds, draw conclusions, and revise hypotheses about the text.

(Booth & Swartz, 2004: 22. op. cit. in Lai et al., n.d.: 153-154)

This type of readers, as Rumelhart (1977) affirms, are aware of the fact that “reading is at once a ‘perceptual’ and a ‘cognitive’ process (p. 573., op. cit. in Barnett, 1989, p. 23). Effective readers make use of an interactive approach to reading, unlike less efficient readers who frequently approach texts by means of “text-driven models of comprehension” (Barnet, 1989, p. 13), such as ‘bottom-up’ (e.g. Gough, 1972; LaBerge-Samuels, 1974; Carver, 1977-78; ops. cit in id.), and ‘top-down’ approaches (e.g. Goodman & Smith, cit. in id.). However, it appears that both approaches are needed simultaneously.

The interactive approach argues that the proficient reader utilizes both bottom-up and top-down processing, and that successful comprehension is the result of an interaction between both types of processing.

(Coady, 1995, p. 6)

Effective reading also requires the activation of the reader’s schemata (Barnett, 1989), which leads to an effective predicting (Goodman, 1967, op. cit. in Barnett, 1989, p. 22) and anticipatory (Smith, 1971, 1982, op. cit. in id.) reader, a “mold into which to place the intelligent and cognitively skilled adult second or foreign language reader” (id.). Therefore, these ideas regarding the implications of reading comprehension appear to confirm Coady’s (1995) assumption that the development of L2 literacy requires a formal instruction in reading strategies. In particular, a review of the literature on reading strategies identifies skimming and scanning as a feasible way to accomplish the goal of comprehensive reading in academic contexts.
2.3 Skimming and scanning
Skimming and scanning are both interactive reading strategies that may help to
arouse the reader’s awareness of the reading comprehension process (Barnett,
1989). Skimming, is described as a quick reading “to get the gist of a text or part of a
text” (id., p. 121., cf. Aebersold, 1997, p. 74). Skimming is normally used during the
pre-reading stage in order to “discover the structure, pinpoint main characters, define
the setting or period, determine the author’s tone or point of view, predict future
directions” (Barnett, 1989, p. 120) amongst other purposes. Skimming is feasible
inside the EFL classroom and is frequently fostered by some general questions
formulated by the teacher directed at eliciting from students general information
related to the text (Aebersold, 1997). In order to implement skimming, the reader is
expected to

1) Look at the main features of the text (e.g. structure, number of
paragraphs, graphic elements...);
2) Quickly read the title, and headings and subheadings (if
present);
3) Read the first and last paragraphs;
4) Read the first sentence of each paragraph.

Similar to skimming, scanning operates during the pre-reading stage in order to “build
knowledge” (Aebersold, 1997, p. 76). The main difference between them is that
scanning aims at finding specific information (id). Scanning is briefly described as
“looking quickly through the text for a specific piece of information” (id.). This author
identifies four main steps to scan effectively:

1. Determine what key words to look for.
2. Look quickly through the text for those words.
3. When you find each word, read the sentences around it to see if they
provide the information being sought.
4. If they do, do not read any further. If they do not, continue scanning.
(p.76)

In addition, Aebersold (1997) suggests that scanning can be useful in order to “check
predictions that students make about the contents of the text to be read (Jensen,
1986, *op. cit.* in id.). The use of these two strategies, as scholars suggest, have a positive effect on readers’ effectiveness. It allows the teacher to foster students’ “metacognitive awareness” (id. p. 76). That is, “Students [...] become aware of how they are reading and what they could do to improve comprehension” (id. p. 96)

In conclusion, several scholars claim that, in general terms, reading is a complex activity in which the reader plays an active role (Barnett, 1989; Aebersold, 1997, Grabe & Stoller, 2002). In the reading process, several aspects such as reading purpose; reader’s cultural, social, familiar, and academic prior experiences and inheritance; type of text; reader’s knowledge of the language, amongst many others, need to be taken into account (Aebersold, 1997). Nevertheless, some research has demonstrated that despite these factors, it is possible to form proficient L2 readers (more specifically EFL readers) by means of formal instruction of reading strategies (*cfr.* Shen & Huang, 2007; Mohd, 2009; Luo, 2011; Lai, 2008). In particular, by means of training in skimming and scanning techniques, students may become more competent in reading comprehension.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes information about the design of the Action research carried out in my teaching context. Also, this section includes the opinions formulated by different authors regarding the different techniques to collect data employed, as well as the varied ways to verify and analyse the outcomes of an initial research cycle. This chapter then reports the outcomes of the initial inquiry of this study that influenced the design of the action plan that was implemented. Finally, the action plan, its rationale, as well as the implementation process are described.

3.1. Research design

The nature of this study constituted, to a great extent, a determinant factor that influenced the research design. When research focuses on identifying a specific area that represents some difficulty for students’ learning, as well as simultaneously improving teaching practice in order to help them overcome such difficulties, Action Research (AR) is the most suitable type of research (Ferrance, 2000; Koshy, 2005; Burns, 2010).

AR has recently been privileged in education owing to its positive effects on the educational context. This sort of inquiry is a specific form of reflective academic research used by teachers in order to improve their teaching. Several authors offer different ideas and concepts that help understand AR and its usefulness. Baumann and Duffy-Hester (2000), for example, state that AR

...is pragmatic and action oriented; that is, it involves reflecting on one’s teaching and practice, inquiring about it, exploring it, and then taking action to improve or alter it... We know from our own teacher research that engaging in classroom inquiry can transform an educator’s views on teaching and learning.

(pp. 78-80, op. cit. in. Grabe & Stoller, 2002, p. 3)

In this type of research, the teacher is no longer a passive observer of the educational reality, but an actor involved in the understanding of the learning process.
and the improvement of her/his own teaching. In reference to this, Burns (2009) points out that

AR involves taking a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to explore your own teaching context [...] One of the main aims of AR is to identify a ‘problematic’ situation or issue [...] The central idea of the action part of AR is to intervene in a deliberate way in the problematic situation [...] to bring about changes and [...] improvements in practice.

(Burns, 2009, p. 2)

Carr and Kemmis (1986, op. cit. in Koshy, 2005), Ferrance (2000), and Koshy (2005) share this view on AR. Furthermore, Ferrance (2000) suggests that AR “refers to a disciplined inquiry [...] with the intent that the research will inform and change [...] practices in the future” (Ferrance, 2000, p. 1)

The benefits reported concerning the AR approach are varied. Koshy (2005), for example, suggests that it can simultaneously influence the teacher’s teaching practice and professional development. One of its major characteristics is that it can comprise both quantitative and qualitative inquiry. Regarding the latter, Richards (2003) claims that qualitative inquiry

...stud[ies] human actors in natural settings, in the context of their ordinary, everyday world; seek[s] to understand the meanings and significance of these actions from the perspective of those involved; [...] focus[es] on a small number of (possibly just one) individuals, groups or settings; employ[s] a range of methods in order to establish different perspectives on the relevant issues; base[s] its analysis on a wide range of features.

(Richards, 2003, p. 10)

In reference to its objectives and participants, this action research can be labelled as “means oriented” (Edge, 2001, p. 5., op. cit. in Burns, 2009, p. 6), and as “individual teacher research” (Ferrance, 2000, p. 3). Whereas the former type of research aims at improving the teaching of a specific skill (Edge, 2001, op. cit. in Burns, 2009, p. 6), the latter “focuses on a single issue in the classroom [...] problems of classroom management or student learning” (Ferrance, 2000, p. 3). In this study, Ferrance’s (2000) model for AR which is based upon Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1988)
model, was used. Even though some slight modifications were included, the essence of the model was maintained.

![Diagram of Ferrance’s Action Research Cycle](image)

**Fig. 1: Ferrance’s Action Research Cycle (Ferrance, 2000, p. 9)**

According to this cycle, the researcher first *identifies the problem* within her/his teaching context. Second, s/he selects the most suitable means to *gather data* to confirm the existence of the problem and understand its nature. Thirdly, the data is *interpreted* (*analysed*) by means of triangulation. In the fourth place, the *literature* related to the research topic is reviewed, and an *action plan* to accomplish the research purposes is designed and implemented. The results of this implementation are then *evaluated* to facilitate decision-making about possible changes for a second action research cycle (Ferrance, 2000; Burns, 2009).

### 3.2. Understanding and Identifying the Research Topic

Some experts recommend using different sources of data simultaneously in order to understand the problem, as well as reduce bias and reinforce the validity of the research outcomes (Ferrance, 2000; Richards, 2003; Koshy, 2005; Burns, 2009). Guion (2011) affirms that “using different sources of information [...] increase[s] the validity of a study” (p. 1). Hence, in this section, the different sources of data used to identify the problem are briefly described. Also, an explanation of the verification of data is included. Finally, the findings of the initial research stage are discussed.
3.2.1 Data collection techniques
A major aspect of action research consists in collecting data. Ferrance (2000) points out that “The collection of data is an important step in deciding what action needs to be taken” (p. 11). In the initial research phase, four data collection techniques were used so as to identify the problem and its implications: class observations, documental evidence, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview.

3.2.1.1 Class observations
Class observations (Appendix 1) were the first method used to gather data. After explaining to the group the purpose of this research, I started observing classes. For this research, I worked with another teacher in order to increase the objectivity of the whole research (Koshy, 2005). Although at the beginning the teacher and students seemed intimidated, my regular presence made me less noticeable within the classroom, which had a positive impact. The events that occurred while performing reading activities in class were registered in a checklist during six weeks of class observations.

Observations generally allow the researcher to gain a wide panorama of “the participants’ behaviour and actions within a particular context” (Mackey et al., 2005, p. 176). Mason (1996) defines observations as

...methods of generating data which involve the researcher immersing [him or herself] in a research setting, and systematically observing dimensions of that setting, interactions, relationships, actions, events, and so on, within it.

(p. 60, as cit. in Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 175)

According to the observer’s role, observations can be participant or non-participant (Hannan, 2006). Considering the design, they are defined as structured or semi-structured. For the purposes of this study, non-participant, structured observations were used owing to their reported benefits. The former are defined as “less subjective” [...] [they] involve [...] observing actions and interactions, perhaps sitting in a corner [...], silent but attentive” (Koshy, 2005, p. 98). Concerning the latter, the same author suggests that
Through structured observations, we can gather both qualitative and quantitative data [...] we can record behaviour patterns and the number of actions and interactions.

(id., p. 99)

3.2.1.2 Documentary evidence (students’ class work)
Documentary evidence is a useful data collection technique that in this case, consisted in collecting and analysing students’ class work. Idealistically, this source of data allows the researcher to have a clear idea of students’ learning difficulties (Koshy, 2005). Scholars agree that in EFL action research, documentary evidence can provide significant benefits when contrasted with research participants’ claims regarding their learning problems. As Koshy (2005) suggests, documentary evidence can often provide a useful background and context for the project and also can be very illuminating, especially when you are comparing what is claimed and what has happened in practice.

(p. 96)

With the help of the teacher, students performed two reading activities in class. They consisted in two brief informative texts (Appendix 2), taken from their textbook. For the first reading (which lasted 5 minutes), students were asked to only underline the words, expressions or sentences they did not know or understand. In the second reading (for which students were given 15 minutes), in addition to the prior activity, they were asked to answer the corresponding questions accordingly.

Documentary evidence, in this study, proved to be highly useful, as it made it possible to identify the particular characteristics and probable causes of students’ learning problem (reading comprehension). By triangulating this data with the students’ responses to questionnaires and interviews, it was possible to design and implement an action pliento resolve this problem.

3.2.1.3. Questionnaires
The third source of data used in this research was a questionnaire. Questionnaires are briefly described as “a series of questions or statements to which [respondents]
either [...] [write] their answers or [select] them among existing answers” (Brown, 2001, p 6, op. cit. in Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 92). Koshy (2005) highlights the importance and utility of questionnaires in action research. The author claims that

...questionnaires [...] can often be very useful because it helps you to collect a range of information with relative ease, which can then be followed up as necessary. [...] They provide baseline data on student attitudes before the intervention begins.

(p. 87)

Questionnaires can be divided into open-ended and close-ended questions. Whereas open-ended questions “may result in more [...] insightful data [and] allow respondents to guide hypothesis formation” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 83); close-ended questions, conversely, “typically involve a greater uniformity of measurement and therefore greater reliability” (id.). Hence, a sixteen-item questionnaire containing a mixture of open-ended and close-ended questions (Appendix 3) was administered to eleven students. Although there were sixteen students in the group, some of them were often absent which made it impossible to administer the questionnaire to all students at the same time. Therefore, for the sake of reliability, it was decided not to administer the questionnaire to those students who were often absent.

The questionnaire aimed at identifying students’ purposes for reading, as well as the types of texts they read inside and outside the classroom which, according to various experts and research studies (Barnett, 1989; Grabe, 2002; Mohd, 2009; Luo, 2013) may have a potential influence on L2 reading proficiency. The questionnaire also aimed at identifying the importance of reading in students’ daily lives, as well as the aspects that, in their opinion, made L2 reading difficult. The questionnaire was piloted by means of administering it to a group of students. In this way, it was possible to modify and improve what aimed at confusion. Having piloted the questionnaire, it was administered in the first week of May.

3.2.1.4 Interviews

Interviews represent a source of information from which the researcher can explore different aspects related to the main research topic. In qualitative inquiry, an interview
is described as a “conversation with a purpose” (Burgess, 1984b, p. 102, cit in Richards, 2003, p. 50). Interviews can be categorised as structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Mackey & Gass, 2005). In this research, semi-structured interviews were employed (Appendix 4). In essence, they are “written lists of questions [...] [researchers can use with a certain freedom] to digress and probe for more information” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 173).

In this study, seven students were interviewed by taking into account their language proficiency, class participation and attendance (owing to the reasons previously explained in the Introduction). Students were interviewed individually after previously arranging an appointment. Similar questions were asked to all students in order to explore similar aspects. However, since the interviews were semi-structured, it was also possible to analyse some individual particularities by asking additional questions as the need arose. The interviews were recorded and, owing to students’ English level, carried out in Spanish, which significantly reduced their anxiety. The aims of these interviews were to analyse students’ relationship with L1 and L2 reading, to explore their perception of reading in English inside and outside the classroom, and to identify the reading difficulties that, in their opinion, affected their reading in English. In addition, these interviews helped to identify the type of strategies students made use of when reading in English. After collecting the data by means of these methods, I proceeded to analyse and verify the data.

3.2.2 Data analysis
For the data analysis, some elements of grounded theory were used. In essence, “a constant comparative method” (Westbrook, 1994, p. 247), was used which allows “substantive theory of social phenomena” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, in Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 559) to emerge. By employing some aspects of grounded theory in qualitative inquiry, the researcher may discover common patterns that emerge from the collected data (id.). If on the one hand, through the use of grounded theory it is possible to formulate or suggest some theory that emerges from social phenomena, on the other hand, according to Connolly (1998), the same purpose can be accomplished within the context of qualitative research. As the author suggests:
Regardless of the research design [...] qualitative research can inform theory and model development if it is conducted in a way that leads to insights into particular psychological, social, and/or cultural processes and practices that exist within a specific setting, location, time, context, event, incident, activity, and/or experience. (Connolly, 1998., op. cit. in Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 559)

After completing the data analysis by means of grounded theory, it was possible to identify some common aspects related to students’ reading habits and difficulties, as well as their perception of reading. Whereas some aspects were recurrent in all data sources, some others were either contradictory or complementary. These outcomes were finally organised into main categories (findings) which helped to define and design the implemented action plan.

3.2.3 Verification of data
Verification of data aims at “ensuring that a [...] study possesses [...] credibility, transferability, and dependability” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 178). It is a process inherent to qualitative research which consists of analysing the different sources of data in order to confirm or discard the research topic. Data verification can be carried out by comparing the sources of data, also known as triangulation. However, Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2004) explain that

...constant comparison analysis [...] of qualitative data sometimes will lead to interpretations that are not consistent with the underlying data—thereby affecting legitimation.

(p. 562)

Similarly, Guion (2005), based on Patton (2002), suggests that

...it is a common misconception that the goal of triangulation is to arrive at consistency across data sources and approaches [...] these inconsistencies should not be seen as weakening evidence, but [...] as an opportunity to uncover deeper meaning in the data.

(p.1)

Bearing in mind these viewpoints, the verification of data was carried out by using data triangulation and member-checking. The former is described as a verification process that “enhances the validity and reliability (accuracy) of the information”
(Johnson, 1992, p. 146, *cit.* in Mackey and Gass, 2005, p. 181). Also, it is “a method [...] to check and establish the validity [...] by analysing a research question from different perspectives” (Guion, 2011, p. 1). Moreover, it involves “using different sources of information in order to increase the validity of a study.” (id.)

The latter, allows the researcher to confirm the initial findings of the research. Kawulich (2004) based upon Lincoln and Guba (1985) describes *member-checking* as a validation practice that “involves testing the analytic categories, themes, interpretations, and conclusions with the participants of the study to establish credibility” (p. 103). In other words, member-checking helps to confirm the researcher’s assumptions and conclusions that s/he elaborated, based upon her/his first impressions (Turner & Coen, 2007). Hence, after completion of the analysis, the initial findings of research were presented and commented on with the participants of this study in order to confirm and/or modify them.

### 3.2.4 Outcomes of Initial Research

Throughout the data verification process, it was possible to realise that at times there was little evidence—or no evidence at all—of students’ perceptions of their difficulties and relationship with EFL reading. This fact was interesting since it allowed confirming what experts say about data triangulation and its importance and pertinence when conducting a qualitative inquiry. In essence, this fact made it possible to confirm that indeed, data triangulation allows the researcher to compare what is assumed with what really occurs in practice. In the following lines, the main findings from this triangulation of data are presented and described.

#### 3.2.4.1 Reading in English inside and outside the classroom is limited

From the different sources of data, it was possible to identify that time and materials for reading were limited both inside and outside the classroom. In general terms, during the class, students were listening to the teacher’s instructions, answering questions orally, and following the activities in the book by reading. However (as has been previously commented), this reading was not accompanied by any sort of reflexion on the reading process. In addition to this, reading comprehension materials
in class were limited to textbook activities. Regarding the dynamics of reading comprehension activities, the testing of students' reading comprehension was limited to accurately answering questions orally.

Similarly, outside the class, students did not consult texts in English for either academic or recreational purposes, except for the texts they were asked to read for homework. However, they acknowledged a lack of motivation when they were obliged to read such texts. In addition, a common trend identified amongst students was that they perceived that an informal environment promoted the effectiveness of their readings. They manifested a strong preference for informal settings in order to read. A student claimed that he reads “generally at night, outdoors [...] I also see it [reading] as a sort of meditation”. Similarly, another student manifested

I like reading at home, in my bed, before going to sleep, because I feel that I concentrate more and it helps me sleep. I think it's the best moment to do it.

This aspect is quite important since students prefer informal environments for reading, which are the opposite of what occurs within the classroom.

3.2.4.2. Reading in the EFL classroom is perceived as a speaking activity

Even though generalisation is not the aim of these findings, it is not possible to neglect a very common and shared perception that students have about EFL reading in class. For these particular students, reading was commonly perceived as a means to improve speaking (i.e. pronunciation, intonation, and fluency), not reading comprehension. Observations confirmed this idea. Throughout the class, the teacher and students concentrated on advancing through the lessons of the book. They alternatively read and answered the activities aloud, and pronunciation was emphasised. The same dynamic occurred when performing reading comprehension activities. Pronunciation and intonation were corrected by the teacher or by peer correction as the reading progressed. Also, students were asked to answer the questions orally, and then write their answers down. This reading procedure seemed
to be an aspect that affected students’ reading comprehension given that there was little emphasis on understanding meaning.

3.2.4.3 Students experience difficulty with academic reading

Students claimed to experience difficulty with academic reading, which was also observable in class. In this research, academic reading is understood as the reading of academic materials (e.g. articles, essays, books) inside or outside the classroom. During the class observations it was noticed that students were sometimes distracted or lacked interest while doing reading activities, which may explain the outcomes of the reading exercises they performed in class. These findings were confirmed by the students’ responses in the interviews. The student that was considered to be the best in the class affirmed: “It’s really hard for me because I need a silent environment to read... I get easily distracted... in the classroom I get upset from hearing the voices.” Similarly, another student with a lower level of language proficiency (according to the main teacher), declared

...in some courses it is all about reading and there are things that make you feel bored [...] also, there are things we are asked to read and you are obliged to [...] There are also things that sometimes you don’t understand, then you go, look them up, and go back to the same text.

3.2.4.4 Students lack reading strategies

Some experts claim that knowledge of vocabulary is fundamental for effective reading comprehension, which is virtually impossible unless a considerable number of words are mastered by the reader (Grabe & Stoller, 1993 in Hucking et al, 1995, p. 24). The students focused on in this inquiry, by and large, agreed that their reading comprehension difficulties derived mostly from vocabulary issues. A student who was almost always absent declared: “I don’t have the knowledge about all the words and I must consult a dictionary.” Similarly, another student who was considered to be the best in the class, and who never missed classes, affirmed in relation to reading in any language (she was raised in a trilingual environment –her mother speaks Spanish, her father German and she lived in the United States): “It depends on the type of
writing because when they [the texts] are too scientific and contain terms difficult to understand [...] I look them up in the dictionary or I ask my mother.” Similarly, two ‘average’ students openly acknowledged “If I don’t understand a word, I won’t understand the whole text.” The other student stated that “I try to read but... well... that word is there. So I don’t know what it means [...] I get completely lost”. These statements suggest that students’ use only word identification or a bottom-up approach during reading comprehension activities.

In contrast to these students’ perceptions, documentary evidence (students’ work) highlighted the fact that students’ reading difficulties were incipiently related to the lack of vocabulary. From a 300 word text, students highlighted only 3 words as unknown (1% rate of unknown vocabulary) (see Fig. 2).

![Fig.2: Students’ perceptions and rate of vocabulary problems in EFL reading](image)

Moreover, while doing a second reading activity, students’ responses were inaccurate even though no word was marked as unknown. (see Tables 1 and 2):
The businessman’s suit in Beijing is like the businessman’s suit in Berlin. And jeans and T-shirts are almost a type of uniform these days.

3. What does the writer think about fashion across the world?
(Ss’ response)= It’s different.

‘Yes, I think that’s true in the big international cities’, Gillian says. ‘But I’m visiting regions in the world with their own fashions. That’s especially true in this part of Africa.’

4. Does Gillian agree with this opinion?
(Ss’ response)= No, she doesn’t.

Table 1: Students’ responses in a reading comprehension activity in class

In this activity, students solved a 6–item reading comprehension activity. Out of sixteen students, seven of them had two or more incorrect answers. The proficiency average was of 81%.

![Figure 3. Students’ initial reading efficiency rate](image)

The comparison between students’ responses in interviews and reading comprehension activities highlighted the real importance of data triangulation; as previously mentioned, it allowed the researcher to detect inconsistencies in the data,
which according to Guion (2005) lead to identifying “deeper meaning” (p. 1) Hence, it was possible to identify that not only do students lack vocabulary, but more importantly they lack reading strategies. Students’ practice of using (though unconsciously) a strategy similar to a bottom-up approach was not enough to ensure comprehension of the texts.

The importance of, and correlation amongst these findings were capital in identifying their theoretical and pragmatic implications in EFL instruction. Similarly, they were determinant in defining the action plan to be implemented and the aspects to be taken into account.

3.3 Action implemented
The action implemented based on the outcomes of the initial inquiry, aimed at helping students overcome the difficulties they faced during reading comprehension activities in the classroom. In essence, the action plan consisted in using two main reading strategies: skimming and scanning. By analysing the exercises and the types of questions that students are normally exposed to (those contained within the English book, see Appendix 2), it was possible to identify which exercises required mainly skimming and scanning.

3.3.1 Rationale
According to Crystal (2003), most EFL students around the world learn English language for academic purposes. This fact makes it possible to agree then, to a certain extent, that “The main reason people around the world study English as a foreign language is to read” (Carrell, 1988., op. cit. in Barnett, 1989, p. 2). Bearing this in mind, as well as the previously mentioned theories on effective L2 reading, formal instruction on reading strategies is indispensable for developing students’ academic literacy and reading comprehension skills in L2 (Coady, 1995), although as Gambrell (2011) suggests (and as is later commented), motivation to read also plays a capital role in effective reading.

A key element that allowed choosing skimming and scanning as the reading strategies to be used in class was students’ purpose for reading. Anderson (2000)
points out that “Reading ability can be improved by teaching how to read for particular purposes (p. 397, op. cit. in Grabe, 2012, p. 7). Similarly, Grabe (id.) states that one of the academic purposes for reading is “to seek for specific information” (p. 8). Aebersold (1997) and Grabe (2012) agree that “When we want to locate some specific information, we engage in search processes that usually include scanning and skimming” (id.). Similarly, the former claims that using scanning makes sense when the reader has “to look for specific […] information” (Aebersol, 1997, p. 67) and that skimming is appropriate when “sampling the text […] to know what the text is about in general” (id.) These two reading purposes characterize the type of readings students are exposed to in the classroom.

3.3.2 Implementation
The action plan was implemented within the students’ normal English course. The purpose for this was to prevent students from feeling reluctant towards the reading activities, considering that they feel discouraged when they are obliged to read. Such discouragement would have definitely affected the impact of the implementation and students’ engagement in reading (cf. International Reading Association, 2000; op. cit. in Gambrell, 2011, p. 172). Secondly, it was assumed that if students worked within their normal English class with materials similar to those they normally deal with in the classroom, they would find the implementation more useful and significant according to their needs, thus enhancing their reading engagement. As Gambrell (id.) points out...

...engaged readers are intrinsically motivated to read for a variety of personal goals, strategic in their reading behaviours, knowledgeable in their construction of new understandings from the text, and socially interactive about the reading of text.

(PP. 172-73)

The implementation was divided into three main phases constituted by up to five stages each. It lasted nine sessions of the normal English course. Each session was thirty minutes long. The exercises that students are commonly provided in class were analysed in order to design the materials (see Appendix 5) to be used in each session. The purpose for this was to help students satisfy their immediate academic needs. The activities were selected and designed by gradually increasing
theirdifficulty levealso to observe students’ improvement in reading comprehension. Five reading activities were prepared and implemented. Four of them were used in two sessions each: first to train skimming, and then scanning. The fifth activity, conversely, was done individually by students by using both skimming and scanning. At the end of this activity, students were asked to reflect on the reading process. The activities were used as in Figure 3 (p.37).

The stages for this implementation focused on skimming and scanning were organised in a sequential way so that students could identify these processes more easily. From the activation of schemata or “background knowledge” (Aebersold, 1997, p. 67) to the final reflection, all the activities aimed at inductively presenting students a structured process so that they could put it into practice independently. As previously described, four out of five documents were used twice during the implementation. The four documents were first used in order to practice skimming. After completion of this phase in four sessions, the texts were used again to train scanning. The stages described below comprise the phases of the implementation.

3.3.2.1 Activation of background knowledge (schemata)
Also defined as “background knowledge” (Aebersold, 1997, p. 67), schemata, according to experts (see Barnett, 1989; Aebersold, 1997; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Grabe, 2012) consists, at a first level, of “a reader’s existing concepts about the world [...] (content schemata)” (Barnett, 1989, pp. 42-43). The preparation for schemata benefits students in three forms:

First, an introduction helps students to recall any information that they may already know about the topic (content schemata) [...] Second [...], they increase their opportunities to make sense of the information [...] in the text [...] [it] increase[s] their interest in the topic [...] Third, if the introduction activity is conducted in the L2/FL, it will also review or introduce the relevant vocabulary for that topic.

(Aebersold, 1997, p. 67)
A second level of schemata relates “to text structure or rhetorical organisation” (Barnett, 1989, p. 43), which is called “formal schemata” (id.) Barnett (1989) states that formal schemata (knowledge of how texts are organised) ...are equally important because they define reader expectations about how pieces of textual information will relate to each other and in what order details will appear. (id.)
Training on skimming (Phase 1)

ACTIVITIES:

1. Activation of Schemata:
   Brief Discussion to elicit students’ prior knowledge on the topic proposed by the text.

2. Presentation:
   Presentation of the reading materials administered to students.

3. Preparation information for skimming:
   Presentation of questions to seek for general about the texts.

4. Reading:
   Students skim the text and answer the proposed questions.

5. Review:
   Students’ answers were reviewed and they reflected collectively on what they did to skim the texts and summarized the process.

6. Personal reflection:
   Students write down their impressions about the activity done in class and its usefulness.

Training on scanning (Phase 2)

ACTIVITIES:

1. Activation of Schemata:
   Brief Discussion to elicit students’ prior knowledge on the topic proposed by the text.

2. Presentation:
   Presentation of the reading materials administered to students.

3. Preparation for scanning:
   Presentation of questions demanding specific information from the texts.

4. Reading:
   Students scan the text and answer the proposed questions.

5. Summary:
   Students’ answers were reviewed and they reflected collectively on what they did to scan the texts and summarized the process.

6. Personal reflection:
   Students write down their impressions about the activity done in each class and its usefulness.

Individual practice and final reflection (Phase 3)

ACTIVITIES:

1. Presentation:
   Presentation of the reading practice to be administered to students and brief collective oral review of the reading processes previously seen in class.

2. Reading:
   Students solve the reading activity by themselves.

3. Verification:
   Verification of students’ results and comment.

4. Reading Process Review:
   Brief revision of the reading processes (skimming and scanning).

5. Summary:
   Short oral interview with the group to review the whole process: its impact on students in terms of emotions, academic pertinence and usefulness, and perception of EFL reading.

Figure 4. Summary of activities.
The activation of schemata consisted in some general questions that the teacher formulated regarding the form and contents of the texts studied in class before presenting them to students. This stage lasted three minutes.

3.3.2.2 Presentation

The second stage of the implementation consisted in allowing students to have a brief glance at the type of documents they had to read. The purpose for this presentation aimed at activating *formal schemata* as described by Barnett (1989) so that they could observe and identify clearly the graphic characteristics and particularities of the documents they would later skim and scan. Two minutes were given for this stage.

3.3.2.3 Preparation for skimming and scanning

In the third stage, students were presented the questions that they would answer while performing the reading practice. During this stage, students were capable of identifying and differentiating the sort of information that the questions aimed at finding information within the texts, whether general or specific information. In the case of *skimming*, students could realise that the questions required general information about the text (e.g. type of document, purpose of the document, hypothetical audience, place of publishing, amongst others). In the case of *scanning*, students realised that the questions were more specific and that they would need to detect key information in the questions in order to look it up in the text and offer an answer to each question. During this stage, which lasted two minutes, students were not given any instruction or guidance about what they had to do in order to find the answers.

3.3.2.4 Reading

The reading stage consisted in showing the texts to students while consulting the questions. They were asked, before starting this stage, to pay attention to what they did in order to find the answers, as well as the graphic or lexical elements they paid more attention to throughout the different activities. Students alternatively looked at the questions and the texts in order to find the answers to the questions they were
given. Throughout this stage, students were asked to read silently and to work individually in order to increase objectivity regarding the revision of their outcomes for each activity and their personal reflections. For this stage, students were given thirteen minutes.

3.3.2.5 Review
The review was a brief stage that lasted five minutes and consisted in revising the answers that students proposed for each question. In this stage, the revision of the answers was carried out collectively and voluntarily. The purpose for this was to identify how motivation was affected — or not — by organising reading instruction in the classroom as proposed in this implementation. For each question, an answer was proposed by a student, who was later asked to justify her/his answer based upon the text. The rest of the group were then asked for any other possible responses. If other responses were given, they were then given the opportunity to give their answers and to justify them. Conversely, when there was no other response proposed, then a collective discussion on what each student did in order to find the answers for either skimming or scanning the text, was guided by the teacher. By these means, students started to become aware of the way to use either reading strategy.

3.3.2.6. Personal reflection
For this stage, students were given five minutes. They were also asked to write down their ideas and feelings about the activities. The teacher suggested orally a series of ideas so that students knew what to write about. However, emphasis was placed on the fact that they could write about what they considered the most relevant, important, interesting, or revealing. The questions proposed by the teacher aimed at discussing, by and large, some of the following aspects:

a. Aesthetics of reading materials.
b. Emotional impact of reading materials (e.g. boring, interesting, curious, funny, creative...)
c. Feelings experienced throughout the reading process (e.g. frustration, encouragement, relief)
d. Perception about the usefulness of the activity.
3.3.2.7 Individual practice and final reflection.

After completion of the first two phases of the implementation, students were given a practice exercise in which they would have to use both skimming and scanning. This practice consisted in briefly presenting to students the document including both the text and the proposed questions. A brief oral review of the reading processes was performed collectively in order to raise students' awareness of skimming and scanning. They were later given the practice document and asked to answer the questions. For this stage students were given fourteen minutes. After completion of the exercise, students' answers were reviewed and commented on for five minutes in order to have them realise by themselves to what extent their answers were accurate or not. Later, a review of the reading process was carried out orally for five minutes by proposing to the students a series of sentences they had to put in order according to the natural processes of skimming and scanning. Finally, the summary of the whole process (from the first day of the implementation to the final activity) was presented orally by means of a focus group interview.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this chapter, the reader can find a description of the evaluation of the implementation as well as the data collection techniques that were used in this study. Later, this chapter includes a description of the process to verify the data obtained from the different instruments that were used, and the main results found. Finally, the findings are analysed and discussed.

4.1 Evaluation of action

The evaluation of the action plan implemented in this study aimed at measuring both quantitatively, but mostly qualitatively, the effect of the implementation on students’ EFL reading proficiency and their perceptions of EFL reading. In order to evaluate the implementation, both formative and summative evaluations were used.

Formative evaluation is a type of evaluation that normally takes place during the improvement of a program (Scriven, 1967). According to this author, it consists of a “systematic evaluation in the process of [...] teaching and learning for the purposes of improving” (Scriven, 1967, p. 117). The main aspect of formative evaluation is that it allows the researcher to identify students’ needs in order to design a sort of instruction that will better satisfy those needs (William, 2006). In this study, formative evaluation took place by means of students’ journals, which “can be informal or more structured... [and] keep learners involved” (Aebersold, 1997, p. 168) in their learning.

Summative evaluation, conversely, takes place after the implementation of an improvement action. Bloom suggests that summative evaluation aims, more frequently, at establishing a “certification, evaluation of progress, or research effectiveness (Bloom et al., 1971, p. 117). Summative evaluation in this study was in the form of a structured, documentary evidence (students’ final practice), class observation (realised throughout the last session), and a semi-structured focus group interview. All the data collection techniques are described briefly in the following section.
4.1.1 Data collection techniques and verification

The data collection techniques used in this study were students’ journals, class observation, documentary evidence and a semi-structured focus group interview.

4.1.1.1 Students’ journals

According to Aebersold (1997), different types of evaluation and assessment can be used in a context of reading instruction. Amongst the techniques listed by the author, students’ journals are effective for obtaining qualitative information regarding the impact of reading instruction. The author describes students’ journals as

...a superb way to keep learners involved in the processes of monitoring comprehension, making comprehension visible, fitting in new knowledge, applying knowledge, and gaining language proficiency. The journal can be informal or a more structured assignment [...] The instructions might be to respond to a simple question like “What do you think about reading?” [...] Journals are flexible and adaptable.

(Aebersold, 1997, p. 169)

In this study, students were asked to write a brief reflection (up to 10 lines) about their perceptions and experience about the reading activities. As previously commented, this was written after the completion of the reading task, and also served as a means to consolidate what had been studied in the classroom.

4.1.1.2 Documentary evidence

Documentary evidence has been previously described in Chapter Three. Nevertheless, it is important to recall its main characteristics. Koshy (2005) suggests that documentary evidence enables the students’ learning difficulties to be identified in a clear and concise way. However, at this point of the study, documentary evidence can have a different purpose as in this research: it was contrasted with students’ initial performance at the beginning of the research so that the researcher could identify the effect (either positive or negative) that her/his implementation had had on students’ EFL proficiency.
4.1.1.3 Class observation

Class observations are briefly described as a technique that allows the researcher to gain a clear perspective of the behaviour, actions or performance of a group “within a particular context” (Mackey et al., 2005, p. 176). Similarly, as Mason (1996) suggests, they allow the researcher to “systematically observing dimensions of that setting, interactions, relationships, actions, events, and so on, within it” (p. 60, as cit. in Mackey et al., 2005, p. 175). For the sake of objectivity, these observations were realised by the teacher I was co-teaching with, while the action was being implemented.

Observations were realised in all the sessions except for the ninth. It was decided not to observe the last session because considering the classroom conditions, there was a main difference: the last session was the administration of a practice exercise (quiz). It is well-known that while administering any evaluation-like activity, students’ anxiety and nervousness increase considerably since they realise that they are being evaluated. The observations were structured, which are defined as instruments that enable the researcher to “gather both qualitative and quantitative data [...] record behaviour patterns and the number of actions and interactions (Koshy, 2005, p. 99).

4.1.1.4 Focus group interview

In this study, a focus group interview was organised at the end of the implementation. Unlike individual interviews employed at the beginning of this study, focus-group interviews “usually involve several participants in a group discussion, often with a facilitator whose goal is to keep the group discussion targeted on specific topics” (id.)

This type of interview was employed for two main reasons. The first relates to feasibility: individual interviews are time consuming, whereas a focus-group interview is more practical and requires less time for analysis. The second relates to focus on the topic: through the focus-group interview, students focused more on the discussion which dealt mainly with two aspects: students’ perceptions of reading in the EFL classroom, and, the academic importance and usefulness of reading strategies in EFL reading.
4.2. Findings and analysis

The data collected in this study during and after the implementation was verified by means of triangulation in order to ensure the study’s “credibility, transferability, and dependability” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 178). In order to identify the main aspects of the effects of the action plan implemented, a process comprising “a constant comparative method” (Westbrook, 1994, p. 247) amongst the different sources of data was implemented. This process, which derives from grounded theory (id.) allowed me to identify some categories that give place to a formal discussion on the findings of the action plan implementation. After triangulating the data collected from the different sources, it was possible to identify some general axes that represent, by and large, the effect of the action plan implemented both quantitatively and qualitatively.

4.2.1 Students’ outcomes improved significantly

This finding made possible to realise that the main purpose of the AR was satisfactorily accomplished. From the final reading comprehension activity, it was possible to observe that students’ EFL reading proficiency had improved significantly. An important aspect of this was that even though students continued to have a minimum rate of vocabulary problems, their responses in the reading comprehension activity were mostly accurate. In the final activity, three out of sixteen students had only two wrong answers out of fourteen items.

![Graph showing students' final reading efficiency rate](image)

*Figure 5. Students’ final reading efficiency rate. 16 students solved a 14-item activity. Only 3 students had 2 wrong answers. The average efficiency rate was 13.62 correct answers per student.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Initial reading</th>
<th>Final reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of words</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of questions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of incorrect</td>
<td>17 (from an</td>
<td>6 (from an accumulated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>answers</td>
<td>accumulated total of 96 questions – each student solved 6 questions).</td>
<td>total of 224 questions – each student solved 16 questions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency rate</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>97.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2. Comparative between initial and final reading activities.*

**4.2.2 Students’ perception of EFL reading was transformed**

From the focus group interview and students’ journals, it was possible to identify that students’ perceptions had changed in a considerably important way. Before the implementation, they mainly perceived EFL reading as a way to practice and improve speaking (i.e. pronunciation, intonation, and fluency). After the implementation, they began to perceive EFL reading in a different way. One student affirmed: “I noticed a difficulty to seize the question rapidly, but I put scanning into practice, what we saw in the last session, and we put it into practice. I’ve been feeling fine because I’m learning reading comprehension.”

**4.2.3 Students’ became aware of the skimming and scanning processes and their pertinence in the EFL classroom**

One important aspect that was elicited from the data analysis was students’ growing awareness of the importance and pertinence of skimming and scanning in the EFL classroom. They realised that they could do their activities in shorter periods of time and with better results. Even though they were not aware or conscious of the mental process they were undergoing (see Figure 4), they were aware of how they had improved their reading skills. Regarding this, a male student stated:
I consider that we used skimming and scanning strategies appropriately because we could observe and understand the texts more easily. We can use the strategies to understand more easily.

Similarly, a female student affirmed:

In these sessions I learnt that it is important to identify the visual elements within a text: the headings, sub-headings, unknown words, and relate key words within the questions with the text.

4.2.4 Students’ awareness of the reading comprehension process became more significant for academic purposes

One aspect that caught my attention in a very particular way was the fact that students started acknowledging that skimming and scanning can be implemented for other courses and for other subjects. This caught my attention since this aspect was not considered at all at the beginning of this study. One student stated:

I think that we were already using these strategies to a certain extent, but we didn’t know their names. Now we know that and we also know exactly how they work. Also, we can use them for other courses.

In the same sense, another student recognised in the interview that:

I think that these processes of skimming and scanning are very useful not only for reading comprehension in the English class, but also for some others in which we read lots of theoretical materials. I think these strategies will help me understand better.

Moreover, another student considered that skimming and scanning were two reading strategies that could be useful even for evaluation purposes. She stated:

I think several times while doing exams we don’t understand clearly what we read. So I think that with these strategies we can better understand the instructions, the questions and answer more accurately.

4.2.5 Students’ engagement and motivation in EFL reading increased

An important aspect of EFL reading proficiency has to do with students’ motivation (Aebersold, 1997; Gambrell, 2011). In comparison with students’ initial perceptions of
reading; they acknowledged having felt more motivated to read, at least in the EFL classroom after the implementation. Moreover, from the class observations, it was possible to identify that students’ engagement in reading activities increased significantly. From all the observations, it was possible to realise that students were attentive all the time, in all the sessions. The reason for this attentiveness was obtained from the interview. A female student declared: “I got bored at the beginning, but later I wasn’t bored anymore. I was interested in what the classes were about and I also wanted to participate in the activities.” Regarding the activities, another student said that “The activities were like a class, but more interactive. That’s what I liked the most.” Owing to a more intellectual or academic reason, another student affirmed that:

The text is analysed, and that’s what I liked the most. We were no longer concentrating on pronunciation. Before, comprehension was limited to answering and checking the answers, but there was no explanation or reflection to justify the answers.

From these findings, it is possible to assume that engaging students in reading activities and having them participate in the class to discuss meanings motivates them to improve their reading comprehension skills.

4.2.6 Students can overcome vocabulary difficulties while reading

From the interviews conducted during the initial inquiry, it was possible to identify in students a major worry about knowing all the words within a text. As previously discussed, some of them even affirmed that not knowing some words prevented them from understanding the whole text. Conversely, after the implementation their perception of the importance of vocabulary for reading comprehension changed. One student affirmed: “I realised that I could answer all the questions that we had to answer even though I didn’t know some words.” Another female student similarly acknowledged:

I had always believed that I had to know all the words in order to understand a text, and I always concentrated mostly in understanding
word by word. But now I know that I can understand even if I ignore the meaning of some words.

4.2.7 L1 interference started to diminish while employing skimming and scanning

Another aspect that had not been considered at the beginning of this study was the role of the L1 during the EFL reading process. At the beginning it was assumed that students simply lacked knowledge about reading strategies and their use in the EFL classroom. However, from the focus-group interview it was possible to detect that they also experienced a sort of interference of the L1 (Yule, 2011) before the implementation. This L1 interference decreased to some extent. One of the female students affirmed:

I feel that I don’t have to translate anymore. Before I always concentrated in the correct pronunciation of the words and was always translating word by word. Now with these strategies I realised that I was not translating as I normally did. I can’t explain, but I think it is good.

Similarly, another student acknowledged that “Sometimes it is difficult to understand a text because we try to translate literally and we don’t understand”

From these findings it is possible to acknowledge that although the aim of this study was achieved to a certain extent, it is possible to recognise that there are more elements that play an important role when reading in EFL and these elements must be taken into account when carrying out further research on reading.
The completion of this AR has definitely been an enriching process that has raised the researcher’s awareness concerning the real importance and pertinence of conducting scientific research in the field of EFL teaching and learning. In a context similar to the one in which this study was conducted, this sort of research acquires even more relevance, considering the current national goals and international needs for English speaking professionals.

The main objective of this study was to improve BA students reading comprehension skills by means of formal instruction in EFL reading strategies. However, the strategies studied in class acquired more relevance than expected for students, since they started to realise their usefulness if employed when reading other texts, in other languages, for other courses. This fact increased significantly their engagement and motivation in reading in general.

From the beginning of this study, special attention was paid to the reading process from a cognitive and academic perspective, thus accidentally neglecting some other aspects that ended up playing an important role in EFL reading, such as students' motivation and L1 interference. In Chapter One, identifying an area of practice in need for improvement was somehow difficult to identify. The fact of conducting this study with second semester students made this task more difficult. Since they are basic level learners, they experience several difficulties in different areas. However, it was possible to realise that even for simple tasks they experienced more difficulties in reading that in any other area.

The review of literature in Chapter Two, along with the theoretical considerations regarding the importance of reading proficiency in our current societies and the professional expectations for English professionals in our country (included in Chapter One), made it possible to determine the relevance of conducting this study on reading. The definition of the methodology, as described in Chapter Three, allowed me to identify the most useful methods that were implemented in this study.
and that helped accomplish the objectives of this research. These methods, in turn facilitated the confirmation and the discovery of the characteristics of the problem that had initially been observed.

Regarding the implementation, the formal instruction on skimming and scanning that was proposed turned out to have a positive impact on students' motivation. In addition to the findings that emerged from the triangulation of the data after the implementation, during the implementation it was possible to realise that some students who had been frequently absent started to attend classes more frequently. Similarly, more students participated in the activities from one class to another. Also, a satisfying aspect of the implementation consisted in the fact that the form in which it was organised allowed students to identify the different stages implicit in skimming and scanning. Similarly, they became aware of the fact that they were reading more easily and more effectively. Even though they did not demonstrate any awareness of the cognitive process implicit in reading, they became more effective readers under Goodman's optic (see Figure 4).
As can be perceived in the previous figure, less proficient readers undergo a longer and more complex mental process to decode a text and to gain some meaning or knowledge from it. They start by recognising letters to form words, words to form sentences, and sentences that are later translated to the oral language in order to finally seize the meaning of the text. Conversely, more proficient readers can skip all those stages and go directly from the graphic input to the meaning. It is possible to assume, from their claims and their documentary evidence, that these students became more effective readers according to Goodman’s classification.
However, it was not possible to determine concisely in what specific level they could be classified.

### 5.2 Research constraints and possible modifications

One key aspect that must definitely be modified for a sequential AR on reading by using skimming and scanning is time. Time was the major constraint in this study. Some aspects that were informally discussed with both the teacher and the students (and that were kept off the record for the purposes of this research) relate to the duration of the classes (two hours a day), the number of classes per week (ten hours a week) and the length of the semester (an average of thirteen weeks). The time for this course becomes shorter considering the numerous curricular contents that have to be covered in class for the purpose of standardised evaluations. Regarding this, it is necessary to design a more extended action plan with more varied materials that would combine both materials taken from students’ book and other materials adapted to their level.

A second aspect that could be modified is the students’ relationship with the topics of the texts as a means to increase their motivation and engagement. In this study, most texts were taken from their English book. However, a previous inquiry about the topics they are interested in would be useful in order to design reading materials related to their personal likes and interests. This is owing to the fact that an individual is always more willing to participate in activities that s/he is interested in.

### 5.3 Conclusions

It appears that students benefited from the formal instruction on skimming and scanning in the expected way. Their perception of reading in the EFL classroom was modified. At the beginning, it was perceived as an indirect way to exercise speaking. The frequent exercises of reading aloud, correction of pronunciation and getting the meaning of words seemed somehow boring and were definitely not very productive in terms of improving reading comprehension. After the implementation, they started to perceive reading differently, somehow more interesting and more helpful for the reading comprehension activities in class, when reading for other courses and even...
for reading while undergoing an examination. Similarly, students’ motivation and interest while doing reading activities increased.

An important aspect that allowed the researcher to identify other aspects to be considered for future research on reading is the fact that students claimed a decrease in their need to translate. The role of the L1 within the reading activity had not been considered while designing this study. However, students’ perceptions of the role of L1 in L2/FL reading obliges the researcher to consider them in future AR cycles.

The major goal of this study was to improve students’ EFL reading proficiency. Considering the outcomes in the final reading activity, it is possible to confirm some experts’ affirmations regarding the importance and pertinence of formal instruction in reading strategies in the EFL classroom. Moreover, students became aware of the process implicit when reading, even though they could not define how it operates from a cognitive standpoint.

In sum, these findings suggest that the main objective of this research was achieved, even though at a different level in each particular case. Although it is frequently believed that learners must master all the vocabulary contained within a text in order to fully understand it, it was possible to realise that, to a certain extent, these barriers can be overcome by using skimming and scanning. However, it remains clear that the implementation of both strategies was limited to the academic purposes of the English course (the reading activities proposed by the text book and included in standardised evaluations).

5.4. Possible second Action Research cycle
Considering the constraints identified in this study, a future research cycle on reading strategies might need to extend the implementation period. The instruction sessions could be carried out twice a week during the whole academic period by implementing a mixture of text book activities and activities related to students’ interests. In terms of reading comprehension, skimming and scanning constitute the pre-reading stage (cfr. Barnett, 1989; Nuttall, 1988; Aebersold, 1997; Grabe, 2012). Even though students acknowledged an increment in their reading comprehension, it is necessary to
recognise that these strategies do not lead to a deep understanding of a text in order to identify the theses, hypotheses or points of view expressed by the author. In order to seize such meaning from the text, other strategies such as the extensive reading approach would be more suitable.

With this same group of students, it could be possible to take advantage of the motivation towards reading that students manifested after formal instruction on skimming and scanning. Then, a bridge could be established by the researcher between skimming and scanning and the extensive reading approach so as to keep students’ motivation and engagement towards EFL reading and its usefulness for their academic needs and professional goals.
REFERENCES


RAMÍREZ Romero, José Luis (2009). Estado del conocimiento de las investigaciones sobre los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje de las lenguas extranjeras en México. México, D.F.


## APPENDIX 1: CLASS OBSERVATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students concentrate on the reading activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students participate in the reading activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students seem to be motivated during the activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are distracted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s answers to the reading are correct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students seem to have a general understanding of the reading process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students seem to read more effectively than before the didactic implementation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students seem to read in the same way as before the didactic implementation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students seem to read not as well as before the didactic implementation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large number of students participate in the activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some students do not seem to understand clearly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2: READING ACTIVITIES IN CLASS

Student A

Voyager 1’s journey
Voyager 1 arrived at Jupiter, the largest planet in the solar system. At a distance of 349,000 kilometres from Earth, scientists received the best photographs of the planet from Voyager 1 and they discovered a lot about the planet’s weather from them. They studied the clouds, lightning and strong winds of three hundred kilometres per hour. Jupiter also has a moon with volcanoes. Voyager 1’s next stop was Saturn. Saturn is smaller than Jupiter and it’s most famous for its rings. From Voyager 1’s photographs, scientists discovered the rings are mostly water and ice.

Voyager 2’s journey
Voyager 2 also visited Jupiter and Saturn after Voyager 1, but then it continued to Uranus. Uranus is the coldest planet in the solar system. There is a lot of ice on the surface. During its journey round Uranus, there were mechanical problems with Voyager 2’s camera. Eventually, scientists fixed it and Voyager 2 travelled to Neptune. Neptune is the furthest planet from the sun (4.5 billion kilometres) and it was the last planet on Voyager 2’s journey.

The journey continues
The two Voyagers finished their official journeys in 1989, but they continued travelling. Now they are at the end of our solar system and scientists think the two spacecrafts can travel until 2025. So Voyager 1 and 2 are on their most amazing journey: into space outside our solar system.
8b Global fashion

Reading

1 How often do you buy new clothes?
   Which of these is most important for you: the price, the size, the colour or the brand?

2 Read an article about photographer Gillian Turner-Niles. Answer the questions.
   1 What type of photographer is she?
   2 Where does she normally work?
   3 Where is she at the moment?

3 Read the article again. Choose the correct answer (a or b) for these questions.

   1 Where can you see her photographs?
     a in shops
     b in magazines
   2 Who does she work for?
     a a clothing company
     b different companies
   3 What does the writer think about fashion across the world?
     a It's the same.
     b It's different.
   4 Does Gillian agree with this opinion?
     a Yes, in some places.
     b No, she doesn't.

Gillian Turner-Niles is a fashion photographer. She lives in New York and works in the fashion capitals of the world. You can see her photographs on the pages of fashion magazines across the world. Her clients include Gucci, Dior, Ferragamo, even the sports clothing company Nike. But today she's talking to me by phone from the middle of Sudan. So, what is she doing there?

'I'm taking photographs, of course!' she explains. 'I'm not taking photographs for *Vogue* or anyone else. It's like a holiday. In my business, it's easy to forget there's another world out there. And I like looking at clothes in a different way when I travel.' But in this world of global fashion, people all over the world wear the same clothes. The businessman's suit in Beijing is like the businessman's suit in Berlin. And jeans and T-shirts are almost a type of uniform these days.

'Yes, I think that's true in the big international cities,' Gillian says. 'But I'm visiting regions in the world with their own traditional clothes and their own fashions. That's especially true in this part of Africa.'

suit (n) /sʌt/ clothes (jacket and trousers/skirt) made from the same material, often for work.

uniform (n) /juːnɪfɔːm/ the same clothes for a group of people (e.g. in the army or in school)
Student B

The Longest Journey in Space

On 20th August and 5th September in 1977, two spacecrafts took off from Florida, USA. Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 started a long and difficult journey to the end of the solar system. They flew past new places in our solar system and sent photos of planets and moons to NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration).

Voyager 1’s journey
Voyager 1 arrived at Jupiter, the largest planet in the solar system. At a distance of 349,000 kilometres from Earth, scientists received the best photographs of the planet from Voyager 1 and they discovered a lot about the planet’s weather from them. They studied the clouds, lightning and strong winds of three hundred kilometres per hour. Jupiter also has a moon with volcanoes. Voyager 1’s next stop was Saturn. Saturn is smaller than Jupiter and it’s most famous for its rings. From Voyager 1’s photographs, scientists discovered the rings are mostly water and ice.

Voyager 2’s journey
Voyager 2 also visited Jupiter and Saturn after Voyager 1, but then it continued to Uranus. Uranus is the coldest planet in the solar system. There is a lot of ice on the surface. During its journey round Uranus, there were mechanical problems with Voyager 2’s camera. Eventually, scientists fixed it and Voyager 2 travelled to Neptune. Neptune is the furthest planet from the sun (4.5 billion kilometres) and it was the last planet on Voyager 2’s journey.

The journey continues
The two Voyagers finished their official journeys in 1989, but they continued travelling. Now they are at the end of our solar system and scientists think the two spacecrafts can travel until 2025. So Voyager 1 and 2 are on their most amazing journey - into space outside our solar system.
Gillian Turner-Niles is a fashion photographer. She lives in New York and works in the fashion capitals of the world. You can see her photographs on the pages of fashion magazines across the world. Her clients include Gucci, Dior, Ferragamo, even the sports clothing company Nike.

But today she’s talking to me by phone from the middle of Sudan. So, what is she doing there?

“I’m taking photographs, of course!” she explains. “I’m not taking photographs for Vogue or anyone else. It’s like a holiday. In my business, it’s easy to forget there’s another world out there. And I like looking at clothes in a different way when I travel.”

But in this world of global fashion, people all over the world wear the same clothes. The businessman’s suit in Beijing is like the businessman’s suit in Berlin. And jeans and T-shirts are almost a type of uniform these days.

“Yes, I think that’s true in the big international cities,” Gillian says. “But I’m visiting regions in the world with their own traditional clothes and their own fashions. That’s especially true in this part of Africa.”
**APPENDIX 3: QUESTIONNAIRE (SAMPLE)**

1. How old are you?
2. What professional activity do you want to do in the future? (remember the first class in which you were asked about this)
3. Do you consider that studying English at an academy, instead of at university, would fulfil your language needs so that you can do the professional activity you’re interested in?
4. Do you consider that undergoing training in English at a university level corresponds to your personal and/or professional goals?
5. Does anybody in your family speak English?
6. Do your parents promote reading in your family?
7. Does anybody in your family read? (what readings and how frequently?)
8. Do you listen to music or watch movies or videos in English?
9. What kind of activities do you enjoy the most for learning English?
10. How frequently do you practice these types of readings? (times per week)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E-mails:</th>
<th>Social Networks (facebook, twitter)</th>
<th>Fiction (poetry, short stories, etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opinions in electronic sites (facebook, twitter, blogs, news, etc).</td>
<td>Formal opinion texts (articles, essays, etc.)</td>
<td>Personal letters:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Why do you read? (rank the options from the most frequent to the less frequent: 1 – 6)

| Rank | 1. For entertainment. | 2. To seek for information for homework | 3. For personal interests | 4. Because teachers ask me to do so | 5. Distraction | 6. For gossiping (social networks) |
## APPENDIX 4: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Why are they studying the BA in the English Language? | ¿En qué basaste tu decisión de estudiar la licenciatura en inglés?  
¿Cuáles eran tus expectativas?  
¿En algún momento has considerado estudiar alguna otra licenciatura? |
| What do students do in their free time? | ¿Qué actividades haces cuando no estás en clase, trabajando o haciendo tareas?  
¿Cuál de esas actividades es tu favorita?  
¿Por qué? |
| What is the nature of their reading habits? | ¿Cada cuánto tiempo lees y por cuánto tiempo dura tu lectura?  
¿En dónde lees?  
¿Qué opinas de discutir lo que lees con otras personas?  
¿En qué lugares te cuesta más trabajo concentrarte en tu lectura? ¿Por qué?  
¿Cómo es tu experiencia cuando tienes que leer en algún lugar de la escuela? (la biblioteca, los pasillos, el salón, etc.) |
| What are the students’ perceptions about reading? | ¿Te gusta leer?  
¿Qué cosas te gusta leer?  
A tu criterio, ¿qué importancia tiene la lectura en tu vida cotidiana?  
¿Cómo te sientes cuando alguien tienes que leer algo por obligación? |
| What kind of problems do they encounter when reading? | ¿Qué tipo de textos te son más difíciles de entender?  
Cuando lees en inglés ¿se te hace más difícil que en español?  
¿Qué dificultades experimentas o de qué forma se te hace más difícil? |
APPENDIX 5: READING ACTIVITIES 1-5.

SESSIONS 1 AND 5

ACTION
SUSPENSE
SCI-FI
ANIMATED
Questions
Image 1.
1. What can you study out of your country?
2. Where can you study?
3. What is the name of the organisation that offers education services?

**Image 2.**
4. What's the Cougar's colour?
5. Does the car need any repair?

**Image 3.**
6. Does Andyman offer services to repair roofs and ceilings?
7. In what country is Andyman established?

**Image 4.**
8. Bennett Medical Services provides paediatric equipment only. True or false?
9. Bennett Medical Services exists since 30 years ago. True or false?

---

**Reading Comprehension. Second Session. September 24th 2014. Activity Two.**
1. What band is giving a concert?
2. Where is the band playing music?
3. This spectacle takes plays in December.
4. How much does the ticket cost to enter the theatre play?

**Answer true or false:**
5. Once upon a time in America is a music concert.
6. The exhibition of modern art is installed at Tottenham Gallery.
7. The exhibition of modern art is closed on Saturdays.
8. Led Zeppelin's concert lasts three hours.
SESSIONS 3 AND 7

- Needed: Full time secretary position available.
- 2 years experience minimum.
- Typing speed: 60 words a minute.
- No computer skills required.
- Apply in person at United Business Ltd., 17, Browning Street.
- Starting Salary: £ 13 per hour.

- Teacher Needed: Tommy’s Kindergarten needs 2 English teacher/trainers to help with classes from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Applicants should have appropriate licenses.
- For more information visit Tommy’s Kindergarten in 16th District. Rue Voltaire, No. 56.
- Salary: € 17 per hour.

- Part time work available: We are looking for retired adults who would like to work part time at the weekend.
- Responsibilities include answering the telephone and giving customer’s information.
- For more information contact us by calling 1-800 WE-HIRE.
- Hourly Salary: CAN $ 12

- University positions open: The University of Cumberland is looking for 4 teaching assistants to help with homework correction.
- Required disciplines: Political Science, Religion, Economics or History.
- Please contact the University of Cumberland for more information.

- What type of documents are they?
- Where are they published?
- What is the documents’ purpose?
- Who writes these documents?
- What is these documents’ audience?
- Are the documents long?
What is the best job position for these people?

- **Jane Madison.** Jane recently retired and is looking for a part-time position. She would like to work with people and enjoys public relation work.

- **Jack Anderson.** Jack graduated from the University of Trent with a degree in Economics two years ago. He would like an academic position.

- **Alice Fingelham.** Alice was trained as a secretary and has six years of experience. She is an excellent typist but does not know how to use a computer. She is looking for a full time position.

- **Vincent san George.** Vincent loves working with children and has an education license from the city of Birmingham. He would like to work with young children.

---

Answer True or False to these questions:

- **1.** A secretary works from 9am to 1pm.
- **2.** A secretary needs to write very fast.
- **3.** The secretary position is offered in Australia.
- **4.** The teaching position is offered inside the European Union.
- **5.** Applicants for teaching position need teaching certifications.
- **6.** The job for retired adults is offered in the USA.
- **7.** Retired adults have to work from Monday to Friday.
- **8.** Secretary is the occupation that gets more money.
Escribe en tu hoja de reporte.

- Compara esta actividad con las del día 2. Relata brevemente:
- 1. ¿Qué actividad te pareció más compleja?
- 2. ¿Hubo muchas palabras que no conocieras?
- 3. ¿El desconocimiento de esas palabras te impidió comprender los textos?
- 4. ¿Qué te pareció la actividad?
- 5. ¿Sientes que tu comprensión lectora está mejorando?
  Sí, no. ¿En qué forma?
- 6. Al realizar una lectura de comprensión, ¿cómo te sientes en este momento en comparación con los días anteriores a iniciar estas actividades?
The Apache people were from the south and west of North America. Geronimo was the grandson of an important Apache leader. He was born on 16 June 1829. When Geronimo was a young man, there was a war between Mexico and the USA, and the Native Americans. At that time, his family's land was part of Mexico. Now, it’s part of the United States.
Geronimo was an Apache war hero. From 1886 until 1909 he was a prisoner of war in the United States. But he was also a famous celebrity. He was with President Theodore Roosevelt on 4 March 1905 – his first day as president.
Answer the following questions

- The Inca Empire was in North America.
  - A. True   b. False

- The Maya people were from Central America.
  - A. True   b. False

- The Aztecs were from Peru.
  - A. True   b. False

- The Sioux people were from South America.
  - A. True   b. False

Answer these questions.

1. Who was Tupac Amaru?
   _______________________________________

2. Who was Moctezuma?
   _______________________________________

3. Where were the Apache people from?
   _______________________________________

4. When was Geronimo Born?
   _______________________________________

5. Why was Geronimo famous?
   _______________________________________
Remember the reading process and organise these sentences in the most logical order

- ___ Read the first and last paragraph of the text.
- ___ Read the first sentence of each paragraph.
- ___ Observe all the graphic elements in the texts or images.
- ___ Read the title, headings and sub-headings in the text.

This process is called:

a. Scanning
b. Skimming

Remember the reading process and organise these sentences in the most logical order

- ___ Read around the key word in the text.
- ___ Try to remember the main ideas in each paragraph or image.
- ___ Identify the key words in the question.
- ___ Find the key words in the text.

This process is called:

a. Scanning
b. Skimming
APPENDIX 6: STUDENTS’ JOURNALS

Student A.

Vimos unos anuncios e hicimos preguntas sobre ello, aprendimos a relacionar imágenes, palabras clave y aprendí que muchas veces no comprendo los textos porque desconozco las palabras que están allí.

Student B.

Nota: una dificultad en captar rápidamente la pregunta, pero pose en práctica el skimming, lo que vimos en la sección pasada y lo pusimos en práctica. Me ha sentado bien porque estoy aprendiendo de la comprensión lectora.

En esta actividad que se tuvo un poco más difícil por que ya era de poner en práctica lo antes visto, además que era mucho más veloz o fue más rápido al hacerlo. Y creo que si es una gran ayuda porque nos facilito más la comprensión de una lectura.
Martes 24 de Septiembre

Yo no sabía acerca del scanning y scanning, pero me di cuenta en la clase que aplicándolas es más fácil el poder leer y entender las cosas.

Comienzo: 25 de septiembre.

Han sido días muy interesantes las dos estrategias que hemos estado poniendo en práctica. ¡Ahora he estado avanzando mucho en la manera de recorrido en documentos sin la necesidad de leerlos por completo.

Jueves 26 de Septiembre

La clase de hoy fue muy interesante para mí porque hay cosas a las que no te entendía y ya ahora sé logro comprender mejor.
Student D.

"The first Americans"

Respondimos de acuerdo, al texto identificamos los elementos visuales, relacionamos palabras claves para responder.

En estas secciones aprendí que es importante identificar los elementos visuales de un texto, los subtítulos, los títulos, las palabras desconocidas. Relacionar palabras claves con preguntas.

Student E.

Me sentí bien con las actividades del día de hoy, honestamente entendí muy bien porque había estudiado algunas cosas en el CANF, y las puse en práctica. Además aprendí algo nuevo como el significado.

Student F.

Considero que ocupamos bien las estrategias de Skimming y Scanning porque pudimos observar más fácilmente y rápido las imágenes. Podemos ocupar las estrategias para más rápido y comprender fácilmente el o los temas vistas.

Buscamos palabras claves y nos damos una idea general del tema para poder contestar mejor.
## APPENDIX 7: CLASS OBSERVATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students concentrate on the reading activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students participate in the reading activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students seem to be motivated during the activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are distracted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s answers to the reading are correct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students seem to have a general understanding of the reading process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students seem to read more effectively that before the didactic implementation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students seem to read in the same way as before the didactic implementation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students seem to read not as well as before the didactic implementation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large number of students participate in the activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some students do not seem to understand clearly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 8: DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Student A

1. Engineer, Medicine, IT, etc.
2. UK, Malaysia, Canada, Turkey, and Cyprus.
5. Needs front end repair.
6. No, he doesn't.
7. Canada.
8. False
9. False
10. Led Zeppelin
11. False
12. Baltimore
13. Once upon a time in America
14. What you can pay for it
15. False
16. False
17. False
Student B

APPENDIX 9: FOCUS-GROUP SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Semi-structured focus group interview

1. ¿Cómo se sintieron con las actividades de comprensión lectora en clase?
2. Comparen cómo se trabaja la lectura en clase generalmente y cómo la trabajamos durante estas sesiones. ¿Qué diferencias encuentran?
3. Si comparan su lectura de comprensión antes y después de estas sesiones, ¿qué diferencias existen? ¿Mejoró algo? ¿Empeoró algo?
4. Después de esta forma de trabajar la lectura de comprensión en inglés, ¿qué tan importante es para ustedes conocer al 100% todas las palabras de un texto para entenderlo?
5. La traducción al leer en inglés. Antes y después de estas sesiones. ¿Traducían? ¿Siguen traduciendo? ¿El traducir les parece una ayuda o un obstáculo?
6. Después de estas sesiones, ¿Qué aspectos consideran más importantes para entender un texto?
7. ¿Qué les parecieron las actividades?
8. ¿Conocían esta forma de trabajar la lectura en clase de inglés?
9. ¿Creen que estas estrategias de lectura les serán útiles? ¿Cómo? ¿En qué clases? ¿Para qué?