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Maestría en Lingüística Aplicada a la Enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera

Academic reading applied to Medical Technology students at the University of Cuenca to enhance reading performance and positive attitude towards English learning

Trabajo de titulación previo a la obtención del título de Magister en Lingüística Aplicada a la Enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera

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Resumen:

El aprendizaje del idioma inglés en la Universidad de Cuenca ha sido generalmente visto como una asignatura simple, sin importancia, irrelevante pero obligatoria que es parte del currículo. Los estudiantes tienen la obligación de aprobar 3 cursos de crédito en inglés para cumplir con los requisitos académicos de graduación. Las metodologías de enseñanza de inglés generalmente están centradas en el profesor; en éstas el énfasis se centra principalmente en desarrollar habilidades gramaticales como se estipula en el sílabo 2016-2017 para el sistema de créditos del Instituto Universitario de lenguas. Sin embargo, las lecturas académicas relacionadas con el interés de los estudiantes se pueden utilizar como una herramienta pedagógica alternativa para enseñar y aprender inglés. El propósito de este estudio fue determinar los efectos de la lectura académica en el rendimiento de lectura de los estudiantes y las actitudes de los estudiantes hacia la lectura y aprendizaje del idioma inglés. A lo largo de este proyecto de investigación se aplicaron siete lecturas académicas a un grupo de estudiantes de nivel intermedio bajo de inglés entre las edades de 19 y 22 años en la Facultad de Ciencias Médicas de la Carrera de Tecnología Médica. Para el análisis de datos se usaron medidas de tendencias centrales, prueba ANOVA y pruebas no paramétricas de Wilcoxon. Se observaron diferencias significativas en el rendimiento de lectura de los estudiantes, y actitudes positivas hacia el aprendizaje académico en inglés. No hubo un cambio significativo en las actitudes hacia la lectura del inglés general. Se recomiendan investigaciones adicionales para probar la hipótesis de que incluir la lectura académica en los diferentes cursos de crédito en inglés puede mejorar la enseñanza del inglés en la Universidad de Cuenca.

Palabras claves: Lectura académica. Actitudes. Herramienta pedagógica. Enseñanza de EFL

Abstract:

English Language Learning in the University of Cuenca has been generally viewed as a simple, unimportant, irrelevant, but mandatory subject that is part of the curriculum. Students have the obligation to pass 3 English credit courses in order to comply with academic requirements for graduation. English teaching methodologies are teacher-centered mostly; in these, the emphasis is mainly on developing grammar skills as stipulated in the syllabus for the second level of credit modality of the University Language Institute in 2016-2017. However, academic readings related to students´ interest can be used as an alternative pedagogical tool for teaching and learning English. The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of academic reading on students´ reading performance and students´ attitudes towards reading in English and English learning. Throughout this research project seven academic readings were applied to a group of students at low-intermediate level of English between the ages of 19 and 26 in the Medical Technology School at the Faculty of Medical Sciences. For data analysis measures of central tendencies, ANOVA test, and non-parametrical Wilcoxon Tests were used. Significant differences on students´ reading performance, positive attitudes towards academic and English learning were observed. There was not a significant change in attitudes towards reading general English. Further research is recommended to demonstrate the hypothesis that including academic reading in the different English credit courses can improve English teaching at the Universidad de Cuenca.

Keywords: Academic reading. Attitudes. Pedagogical tool. EFL teaching.

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and continue to mean my reason for being.

Introduction

Effective English teaching approaches[1] are commonly explored by teachers of English who are constantly seeking how to lead students to be critic, autonomous and reflective. In this commitment, reading should be greatly considered to allow individuals effectively process written language (Nunan, 1999). Despite the importance English language has gained as a common language in science and technology, it is noteworthy the apathy students have towards learning English (Burden, 2002). In this concern Clerici, Monteverde, and Fernández (2015) state that most students who enter the university have serious difficulties in understanding texts and display absence of reading strategies which result in reading comprehension deficiencies. Conventionally, reading has been taken separately from other language skills by second language (ESL) as well as foreign language (EFL) teachers (Tsai, 2006). Although there are students with difficulties in reading comprehension, it is also true that methodologies such as the repetition of grammar structures, vocabulary, isolated and artificial language contents have caused demotivation, boredom and even rejection to learning English. These negative attitudes towards learning English have led most students from the University of Cuenca (UC) to take English classes only for complying with a compulsory requirement for graduation (Bernal, 2017).

Consequently, in response to students' lack of interest in learning English, English texts related to students' fields of knowledge have been introduced in this research considering students' needs and interests to consensually decide on suitable reading material to be read. Contrary to currently reading courses that mainly focus on activities that aim at developing comprehension and skill-building exercises as stated by Shih (1992), this study introduces pre, while, and post-reading tasks which enable students to activate prior and build background knowledge, identify main ideas and their supporting details, guess unfamiliar words through context and increase linguistic ability through word and sentence analysis.

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[1] Throughout this document, in accordance to Richards, J.C.; Rodgers, T.S. (2001), the term "approaches" refers to the general perspective used to apply a particular methodology, which in turn denotes a set of specific steps.

The goal of the present study is to observe if academic reading enhances reading performance and positive attitude towards English learning in EFL students of the A2 level of the English credit model at the Medical Technology School in the University of Cuenca. Seven chapters present the information on The Scope of the Study, Theoretical Framework, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Analysis, and Conclusions.

In chapter one, the scope of the study, a brief introduction of the topic, background information and justification and the purpose of the research is provided with the statement of the problem. Additionally, this chapter concludes with the general and specific objectives of this research.

Chapter two contains the theoretical framework. This chapter provides definitions and importance of reading, cooperative and task-based learning, and attitudes as determinants in L2 learning.

Chapter three provides the literature review. This chapter analyses and discusses the main studies on the role of reading and attitudes as key determinant in relation with language learning.

Chapter four refers to the methodology applied to university students of EFL A2 English level. It describes in detail the participants' characteristics, intervention, instruments and procedures during the intervention as well as the analysis of data.

Chapter five shows the results obtained after the pre and posttests on academic reading, attitudes, and preferences of topics for reading.

Chapter six presents the analysis of academic reading, attitudes towards academic reading, and preferences between academic and general English.

Chapter seven discusses the relationships between the results and the research questions raised in this study. Additionally, conclusions and recommendations are provided in this chapter.

To conclude, a reference list and the appendices section with reading samples and material used in this research such as: the authorities and students' consent form, and students' surveys are added.

Chapter I

The Scope of the Study

1.1 Introduction: Background, Rationale, Research purpose

The University of Cuenca (UC) within its 2017-2021 strategic plan has embraced the challenge of becoming a research university. In this context, English teaching might play an important and decisive role because both teaching and research at university level in general depend to a certain extent upon the ability to read and understand academic and scientific literature published in English, the dominant language of science (Meneghini and Parker 2007). In this regard Harmer (2009) states that "A great deal of academic discourse around the world takes place in English. It is often the lingua franca of conferences, for example, and many journal articles in fields as diverse of astrophysics and zoology have English as a default language" (p. 15). However, as stated in the UC strategic plan, there is a lack of English reading skills among university students and professors that hampers the easy access to updated academic and scientific English literature (p.39). Furthermore, according to the Consejo de Educación Superior (CES 2016, p.21), in order for students to be able to complete their undergraduate university study programs, they must possess a B2 level of the Common European Framework of proficiency for Languages (CEFRL).

Postgraduate degree programs, which include a significant component of academic reading in English, require a demanding English language proficiency, especially in reading comprehension, well-known as an essential skill to adopt new ways of thinking and being. (Vidal and Manriquez, 2016). Academic success in university level courses is also mainly attributed to the ability to comprehend texts with a considerable proficiency rate (Oller, 1972).

Moreover, most standardized English tests such as the TOEFL ®, PET, KET, CEFRL, and so on have a high component of reading comprehension and analysis exercises, and students should be trained to take this type of tests. By training students to take standardized tests and by teaching them how to properly read in English, we are preparing them for success. In this regard, Hermida (2009) states

that giving an existing relationship between academic success and students' educational aptitudes, it is paramount to estimate the importance of teaching challenging cognitive learning methodologies such as reading through synthesis, analysis, outlining and presenting texts.

Additionally, important plans at the UC such as internationalization, student and faculty mobilization, demand the improvement of teaching and learning English at UC.

According to the 2017-2021 strategic plan, university students and faculty show a deficiency in English language proficiency affecting their academic development. It states that this deficiency hinders their access to up-to-date academic information to maintain UC's national and international credibility.

Due to challenging objectives aimed at the improvement of English learning in the UC, the introduction of reading related to the students' majors, as a learning approach, would serve as an alternative to comply with these demanding objectives. In this commitment, teachers require to explicitly teach reading skills mistakenly understood as acquired by students in early education. Reading strategies employed in secondary education significantly differ from university strategies to read academic texts, which require a demanding approach to reading (Hermida, 2009).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Contrary to high English learning expectations of UC administrators, instructors, and hardworking students, Meyer (2014), who carried out an evaluation of the former Language Department now called University Language Institute, at the University of Cuenca, states that the dubious and illogical teaching and learning objectives based on commercial textbook series of the English Language Program offered in the University Institute of Languages does neither offer nor allow students to reach B1 competencies of the Common European Reference for Languages (CEFR).

According to Meyer (2014), 71% of a sample of 2,367 students thinks that at least 50% of the English content should be related to their majors. Such a change might improve students' attitudes

towards learning English at UC. In addition, Meyer suggests that including academic and general English reading material would increase the possibility of reaching the desired learning outcomes, B2 level of the CEFR.

Therefore, the UC English instructors should start rethinking of implementing innovative and interesting teaching and learning approaches for students to achieve the

B2 sufficiency level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages indicated in Article 31 of the Consejo de Educación Superior del Ecuador (CES) New Regulations for foreign language as a requirement to obtain a professional degree (Consejo de Educación Superior, 2016).

Students' willingness to read is mainly based on their attitude towards particular topics related to their needs. As Smith (2004) points out, "the emotional response to reading … is the primary reason most readers read, and probably the primary reason most nonreaders do not read." (p. 1). Once students are motivated to read, their reading performance improves. Wixson and Lipson (1991) note that "students' attitude towards reading is a central factor affecting reading performance" (p. 1). In order to enhance students' positive attitude towards English language learning, it is my belief that reading might be the answer to the demand and to the future national educational requirements for foreign languages for Ecuadorian university undergraduates.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to use academic reading on 26 students of Early Stimulation at the Medical Technology School in the Faculty of Medical Sciences of the University of Cuenca as part of their study content to enhance reading performance and positive attitudes towards English learning.

In other words, this study focused on guiding students to develop reading skills through the application of pre, while, and post academic reading, reading strategies, and cooperative learning activities that led them to develop a positive attitude towards learning English.

To achieve this goal, the texts were selected by the students from the internet, taking into account their needs and interests. Since the selected texts were related to students' prior knowledge on Early Stimulation, it was the key determinant in the development of a student-centered method in which the students were the central axis of the learning process.

This proposed teaching approach differs greatly from the traditional teacher-centered teaching approach that has been used for many years in English teaching courses in the UC. The main objective of this practice is to offer students the possibilities to own and empower their learning by selecting the reading material to be read during their English courses by themselves. By doing so, students would feel more enthusiastic and motivated to learning a new language since they will undoubtedly make use of their prior knowledge in their fields of study and transferring of lexical skills.

In this research, even though students' prior knowledge was in Spanish, understanding of academic language was, to a certain extent, satisfactory. At this stage in the research, it is scarcely considered that nearly 70% of the academic word list is Spanish-English cognates as stated by Lubliner and Hiebert (2011).

On the other hand, transferring lexical skills from Spanish to English is a matter of showing students and having them to pay close attention to the formation of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and complete pieces of readings in which students can easily identify the different components of the texts. They can easily identify how sentences are structured in English, and that they have similarities with Spanish sentences. By applying transferring lexical skills, Spanish students are in advantage to comprehend English reading texts.

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 General:

- To determine the effects of academic reading on students' reading performance and students' attitudes towards English learning and reading in English.

1.4.2 Specific.

- To integrate academic reading related to Early Stimulation in the English courses offered at the Medical Technology School through the design of lesson plans to develop reading based on the task-based approach.

- To identify the students' attitudes towards learning English and reading in English before and after the course.

- To identify the students' preferences towards academic reading and general English reading material.

Once the general and specific objectives have been presented, the theoretical framework of the study is introduced in the next chapter.

Chapter II

Theoretical Framework

In this section, scientific evidence regarding reading and attitudes towards reading are developed to support this thesis. Firstly, some definitions of reading, the reading approach, types of readings, reasons for readings, reading comprehension, and reading strategies are presented. Likewise, cooperative learning and task based learning are briefly defined since these were the main methodologies used during this study. I will also describe how this language skill represents one of the most important abilities in second and foreign language learning. Lastly, attitude as one of the key determinants in L2 learning is addressed.

When teaching English as a second or Foreign Language at postsecondary level, academic reading should be taken as the foundation for teaching the other language skills. Reading can enhance the acquisition of foreign languages as stated by Yukselir (2014) who asserts that "Many have stated that in the past fifteen years that reading is the important academic language skill for second language learners" (p. 1).

Additionally, Krashen (1993) stated that "Reading is the only way, the only way we become good readers, develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, advanced grammar, and the only way we become good spellers" (p.23). In this concern, Sadiku (2015) emphasized that reading provides learners with countless opportunities to improve language which allow them to listen, write and speak better. The author also affirmed that it is important to enhance the habit of reading by gradually exposing learners to written texts.

2.1 Academic reading

Academic texts can be broadly defined; however, there are certain characteristics within which science is produced and transmitted. Quiroga Carrillo (2010) refers to academic texts as written reports, articles, books and anything an expert in the field has written. Its incidence in educational

settings mainly aims at the spread of knowledge generated from research. This characteristic places academic texts as authentic material defined for Tomlinson (2012), (p. 162). as "… one which is produced in order to communicate rather than to teach…" He also states that "The text does not have to be produced by a native speaker and it might be a version of an original which has been simplified to facilitate communication" In this regard, Shih (1992), differentiates between reading for learning and reading for enjoyment where the former requires an active involvement of readers which leads them to develop reading strategies to question and associate previous knowledge to what is being read. In other words, rather than simply reading for information related to daily life topics of general interest found in news, advertisements, books, magazines and newspapers, academic reading encourages the reader to set a purpose which determines the interpretation and use of the information through inquiring and connecting the new information with prior knowledge.

2.2 Definitions of reading

Many authors have tried to give a precise definition of reading. For Frank (2004), reading is defined as "extracting information from print", (p. 192). In this process readers at lower levels attempt to identify or decode letters while readers at high levels are suggested to draw conclusions through the use of background knowledge which allows the interaction between readers and the text (Nassaji, as cited in Yukselir 2014).

The ability to read can be considered the most important skill to develop when learning a foreign language. In this regard, Carrell, Devine and Eskey (1988) state that at any level of English language sufficiency, it is utmost for learners to develop reading abilities. Consequently, research on reading has been conducted since 1967 with Goodman (1967), who refutes the misconception of reading as a precise process where printed word identification is paramount. He states that "Reading is a selective process. It involves partial use of available minimal language cues selected from perceptual input on the basis of the reader's expectation. As this partial information is processed, tentative decisions are made to be confirmed, rejected or refined as reading progresses" (pag. 126-127).

Goodman (1967), himself simplifies the definition of reading as a "psycholinguistic guessing game" (pag. 127) which involves interaction between thought and language. This means that mind processing such as understanding and reflecting on texts occurs when readers hypothesize about the text and the relationship between their assumptions are confirmed or rejected in sentences, paragraphs or passages. According to Goodman (1967), this occurs when readers do not need to decode every single word in a text because the reader's previous knowledge, generally known as schema, supports the assumptions made before, during, and after reading. Consequently, reading comprehension depends on how much knowledge the reader brings to the text and how much he wishes to extract from it. In other words, a written text mediates an interaction between the author and the reader which is called the top-down view of reading.

Contrary to this view, Paran (1996) considers observable information and bottom up processing remarkable during reading. In this bottom-up a approach students are taught to focus on vocabulary and the structure of a passage during reading. Even though bottom-up techniques have been considered as the most appropriate learning methodology by authors such as Aebersold and Field (1997), Xia (2011) proposes top-down methodologies as an effective reading approach since this considers the prior knowledge students bring into the interaction with a written text. However, authors such as Kintsch (2005), Eskey and Grabe (1988), and Grabe and Stoller (2001) suggest the use of a combined approach where the reader decides which one is more beneficial. In other words, if there is a lack of previous knowledge of what is being read, a bottom up approach would be more appropriate. On the other hand, if the reader possesses prior knowledge of what is being read, a top down methodology would be more helpful.

The importance of prior knowledge to comprehend printed material has been mentioned since 1781 by Immanuel Kant, as cited in Carrell (1984). He stated that new information, concepts, definitions and so on have meaning when readers have previous knowledge of what is being read. Based on this belief, students at the Technology School in the UC have been exposed to reading

material related to what has been previously studied in early university educational years. Consequently, the top down methodology has been emphasized in this work.

2.3 The reading approach

Opportunities of being exposed to English language in our context through reading practices make reading an important source of language input, especially for those whose specific goal is to improve their academic development. According to Matute (2005), vocabulary expansion is considered more beneficial than pronunciation, conversation, or grammar skills when dealing with comprehension of written texts. On the other hand, Ibáñez (2007), considers reading approach as a worthy activity where students are required to be actively involved in reading activities which lead them not only to understand the written texts but also to know more about language structures and uses. Therefore, the introduction of reading approach might help students identify the meaning, understand the text in shorter periods of time and participate actively in reading tasks.

2.4 Intensive and extensive reading

The interactive features of reading need to be highlighted to help students get actively involved while reading, which in turn will encourage them to use different strategies. The use of strategies to develop reading skills is determinant. In this regard, extensive and intensive readings play a decisive role in planning appropriate teaching of reading strategies. On one hand, extensive reading, defined as reading large amounts of texts focusing on general understanding without performing any tasks after reading (Loh, 2009) is considered useful when developing language proficiency. On the other hand, intensive reading refers to reading under the guidance of instructors focusing on understanding of structure and vocabulary (Richards and Schmidt, 2002).

Even though extensive reading has been considered as an alternative strategy to develop reading skills, it is necessary to take into account that "the most important thing about choosing materials for extensive reading is that they are at least 98% comprehensible to the students. There should be little new vocabulary and very little new grammar. If the students can already understand that much of

the text, new words can often be learned entirely through context" (Robb and Susser, 1989, p. 5). Therefore, since participants of this study are not familiar with L2 reading, intensive reading concerning their major with features of extensive reading such as students' free chosen reading material has been emphasized.

Different authors highlight the importance of reading as a pedagogical tool to boost students reading performance and adjust their attitudes towards learning English. Richard and Schmidt (2002) argue that intensive reading is needed to develop reading habits, encourage knowledge of grammar structures and vocabulary, and cultivate the love for reading.

2.5 Narrow reading

Schmitt and Carter, (2000) define narrow reading as "reading on the same topic over the course of a number of texts" that may allow readers acquire background knowledge, vocabulary, grammar, collocations and even alternative meaning to facilitate comprehension in further texts.

According to Krashen (2004), foreign and second language learners' exposure to a variety of reading topics is not beneficial since it hinders the opportunity to acquire new structures and words in a specific context which narrow reading may offer. This assumption is based on integral review encountered in expressions and specific writer´s styles. Additionally, this author states that "the more one reads in one area, the more one learns about the area, and the easier one finds subsequent reading in the area (and the more one acquires of the language)" (p, 1).

2.6 Reasons for reading

On a daily basis people read for a variety of reasons. If we recall what we have recently read, we would realize we read for some reasons. In this regard, David Cross (1992), in his book, A Practical Handbook of Language Teaching, states that "we read for pleasure (a novel), information (a railway schedule, a newspaper), knowledge (a scholarly journal or book), curiosity (a guide book), to satisfy a need (instructions for a new machine), and so on" (255-256). Consequently, we always read novels,

magazines to entertain ourselves. We might read the bus time schedule to plan a trip. Or, we might read the directions to use an electronic device. Likewise, if we are interested in knowing the upcoming cultural events in our city, we might read the cultural section of newspapers or look for information on the internet.

Without any purpose, much of what we read will not be possible to recall. In this regard, Katims (1997) suggests that reading without comprehension is worthless. Understanding of written texts lays on active involvement of readers whose prior knowledge needs to be activated through reading strategies which help them deal with scientific articles, journals, and chapters of textbooks. According to Grabe (2009), readers with deficient prior knowledge tend to focus on constructing a text model of comprehension based on understanding of main ideas and supporting details. On the other hand, readers with solid prior knowledge build a situation model of interpretation which entails attitudes, interest, and individual interpretation; factors that directly influence understanding. L2 learners are likely to adopt a situation model rather than a text model due to lack of vocabulary knowledge. However, the construction of either text or situation model of understanding is determined by the reader´s purpose of reading.

2.7 Reading comprehension

Since this study is oriented to enhance reading performance, it is of outmost importance to define what reading comprehension is in order to determine the accomplishment of this objective. Parodi, Peronard and Ibanez (2010) sustain that linguistic and contextual knowledge related to the text has to be activated. This knowledge which is standardized and conventional would allow readers identify the type of discourse and what strategy must be taken to succeed in comprehending a written text. Reading comprehension might be generally defined as a process where factors such as prior knowledge, content of the text, and reader's predisposition interact to construct meaning (Pardo, 2004). Reading comprehension is not limited to the text but to the interaction between the reader, the text, and the activity in which the reader is involved (Snow, 2002). In other words, if a reader's

previous knowledge or personal experiences is in accordance with the text, the reader will be able to assimilate the new information; otherwise, the reader either will adjust or reject the new information (Kucer, 2001). Regarding the text, its broad range of options includes printed or electronic texts. Concerning the activity, it involves objectives, procedures, and results related to the act of reading (Snow, 2002).

2.8 Reading strategies

The importance of establishing a purpose for reading is determinant to build what is already known by activating previous knowledge and differentiating between relevant and irrelevant information through skimming and scanning strategies. This can be done by selecting motivational reading material proposed by students and effective strategies to fulfill tasks which encourage them to become engaged in the learning process.

Predominantly, strategic readers succeed by using strategies such as previewing a text, scanning, skimming, summarizing, generating questions about the text, etc. (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). Besides, strategies such as summarizing, questioning, predicting and clarifying have also been introduced by Palincsar and Brown (1984). Nevertheless, answering the questions and summarizing have been considering as the most useful ones (Brown, 2000; Ur, 1996). Additionally, Alderson (2005) asserts that when students generate the questions, comprehension of text improves.

Being reading a strategic activity, English language instructors ought to work on developing pre, while and post-reading strategies amongst university students to achieve a decent level of comprehension when reading English materials in our EFL courses. Likewise, it is paramount to identify the reasons for reading as previously mentioned; when reasons for reading are established, these clearly tell what strategy should be chosen to effectively deal with any written text. In other words, when reading for pleasure, every single word is read in a novel in order to follow the plot. On the contrary, when looking for specific information regarding any particular subject matter, we do

not read every word, we skip details or scan the text to find the information needed. This does not necessarily mean it is incorrect, but rather appropriate.

For the purpose of this study, pre-reading exercises such as activation of background knowledge, scanning, skimming, vocabulary review; while-reading exercises such as generating questions, mining, and post-reading exercises such as oral or written summaries have been considered to improve reading performance and positive attitude towards learning English.

2.8.1 Background knowledge

Even though the terms background knowledge and prior knowledge have been utilized interchangeably as stated by Strangman, Hall and Meyer (2010), it is necessary to differentiate these two terms. Throughout our lives we accumulate information either by reading or experiencing daily life events. This fact determines our understanding of new concepts or text structures which, according to Brody (2001), is known as prior knowledge. On the other hand, Brody (2001) states that accurate and inaccurate concepts, information, and text structures related to what is being read are known as background knowledge. In a learning context, this previous body knowledge allows students to confirm or reject information depending on how relevant this previous knowledge is. Therefore, activating background knowledge would greater benefit students' comprehension since direct instruction on a text under study would be more effective.

2.8.2 Generating questions

Conventionally, who generate the questions are the teachers and students are asked to provide the answers. However, it has been proved that if students generate their own questions, they will have the opportunity to engage in reading comprehension and ensure they have read the text carefully (Hervey, 2006). This will help them to be aware of what they read and think and reflect about their own learning.

Studies carried out by Hardy, Bates and Casey, Galloway, K. W., Galloway, K. R., Kay, Kirsop and McQueen (2014) have proved that students-generated questions lead to better learning. Questioning could be applied either in elementary levels by providing students with some guidelines Nuttall, (1996) to generate wh-questions or with more challenging questions in advanced levels which require higher thinking skills such as synthesis or evaluation.

The success of these strategies would be possible if there is a favorable classroom environment during the learning process. Learning is not a technique; it is a relationship, as stated by Gutiérrez (2017). Therefore, it is teacher's

commitment to identify and encourage students' positive attitudes in order to offer them a motivating atmosphere to succeed in learning the language.

The following paragraphs briefly describe pre, while, and post-reading exercises suggested by Barnett (1988), who considers the development of manageable reading tasks as generators of students language production.

Pre-reading

In order to arise students' interest, pre-reading activities such as introducing vocabulary, guessing from pictures or titles help students prepare for reading, and allow them to effectively approach the text through the establishment of a purpose for reading. They also provide background knowledge and activate their prior knowledge.

While-reading

While-reading exercises such as deducing word meaning from context, identifying cognates, noting grammatical functions of words, generating questions or reading for specific pieces of information may help students develop reading strategies which improve their second language management and understanding of difficult text passages. Despite the complexity to encourage

students to employ while-reading strategies due to individual needs, most useful and effective approaches should be offered by the teacher.

Post-reading

Post-reading exercises such as oral and written summaries, group discussions, scanning or predicting oncoming information may help students not only comprehend the text but also identify authors' purposes.

2.8 Cooperative Learning

Li and Lam (2013) define cooperative learning as "a student-centered, instructor-facilitated instructional strategy in which a small group of students is responsible for its own learning and the learning of all group members" (p. 1) that may lead to solving their own learning problems.

More than 900 research studies have been done comparing cooperative, competitive, and individualistic efforts for learning where results suggest that cooperative learning increases productivity, generates favorable interpersonal relationships, and enhances intrapersonal qualities (Slavin, 1985). To promote a supportive environment where students have the opportunity to develop their individual needs, strengths, and weaknesses, cooperative learning as a student-centered strategy offers an alternative to enhance such classroom atmospheres. In this regard, Tsiplakides and Keramida (2010) emphasize teacher-students relationships, general classroom atmosphere, authentic teaching materials and activities, as influencing factors on students' attitudes towards foreign languages. Also, Li and Lam (2013) consider classroom environment as a cornerstone to boost students' learning attempts.

2.9 Task-Based Teaching

Task-based language teaching has been introduced in response to the traditional bottom-up methodology which emphasizes linguistic aspects such as lexical and grammatical recognition.

Contrary to this teacher-centered approach, Nunan (2006) states that tasks offer students and teachers the opportunity to use the target language in a meaningful way. This author defines task as …

> … a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle and an end. (p. 7)

According to Van Den Braden (2006), tasks are the main components of task-based language teaching that activates the learning process and promotes L2 learning. It also facilitates meaningful interaction between learners and instructors leading them to engage in problem-solving activities as well as allowing them to assess their performances.

According to Brophy (1986), providing students with challenging tasks gives them the opportunity to learn to process thoughtful information and build strategies while spending reasonable amounts of effort. This, in turn, increases students' responsibility for their learning. Additionally, challenging tasks offer students the opportunity to use prior knowledge and construct an understanding of a topic which, as Miller (2003) states, engages students in any activity.

Challenging tasks as main components of Task-Based Language Teaching provide a context that activates learning processes and promotes L2 learning. Van Den Branden (2006) states, "Tasks invite learner to act primarily as a language user and not as language learners. Tasks are supposed to elicit the kinds of communicative behavior that naturally arises from performing real-life language tasks because these are believed to foster language acquisition" (p. 9). Besides, according to Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), "tasks have a clear outcome so that the teacher and students know whether or not the communication has been successful" (p. 149).

Considering reading in a foreign language as a complex process which involves two important acquisition areas: understanding information and enhancing language proficiency, the design of specific tasks as suggested by Mounts and Smirnova (2011) might be essential for facilitating comprehension. The paragraph-by-paragraph reading technique recommended by these two authors view a paragraph as a complete text with its own semantic and structural

organization. Consequently, tasks may aim at obtaining and understanding information, as well as evaluating and reflecting on it.

2.10 Attitudes

Language learning is not only determined by students' aptitudes, but also by their cognitive, behavioral and affective attitudes. These three interrelated components of attitudes were addressed by Wenden (1991) to offer a clearer definition of attitude. Cognitive attitude refers to the individuals' beliefs, thoughts or viewpoints. Behavioral denotes the inclination to assume a particular behavior, and the affective component consists of individuals' likes and dislikes, feelings and emotions.

In this concern, McGuire (as cited in Oscamp, 1997) points out the possibility of an interrelation between these three components, "that theorists who insist on distinguishing them should bear the burden of providing that the distinction is worthwhile" (p. 10). This made Van Els, Bongaerts, Extra, Van Os, Van Dieten (1984) suggest that "it does not really matter whether all or only if the three components are measured; the relationship between the components is so close that sufficient information on an attitude can be obtained by measuring only one component, no matter which" (p. 116).

Fakeye (2010) states that learners' attitudes are recognized as determinants in learning a language. The success in learning a language is determined by the learners' attitudes towards L2, its users and the context (Candlin and Mercer, 2001). Hence, attitudes may play a fundamental role in language learning due to their likely influence on student's success and failure in their learning.

The importance of attitudes in language learning has also been addressed by authors like Gardner (1985) who considers attitudes as components of motivation in language learning. According to this author, "motivation ... refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language" (p. 10). Gardner (2006) also suggests that "students with higher levels of motivation will do better than students with lower levels" (p. 241). Gardner (2006) further adds that "if one is motivated, he/she has reasons (motives) for engaging in the relevant activities, expends effort, persists in the activities, attends to the tasks, shows desire to achieve the goal, enjoys the activities, etc." (p. 243).

The concept of attitude related to didactic field is also addressed by Karlsson (2004) who defines attitude as positive or negative feelings individuals associate with things, situations, or people. This author mentions knowledge as information gathered through reading or living during life, feelings as sensations associated with concepts and attitudes which control our behavior. Karlsson (2004) also states that in order to modify an attitude, it is necessary to change one of these components.

Concerning reading attitude, Alexander and Filler (1975) define it as "a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation" (p. 1). Likewise, Smith (1990) considers reading attitude as "a state of mind, accompanied by feelings and emotions that makes a reading task more or less probable" (p. 215).

Chapter III

Literature Review

3.1 Attitudes

Different emotional and cognitive factors influence learning a second language and it is paramount for teachers to recognize their importance. One of the emotional factors affecting learning is attitude and motivation which has been increasingly studied in the last 30 years with overall results showing that success in learning is due to positive attitudes and motivation (Ahmed, 2015).

Regarding the role of attitudes and motivations in foreign language learning, Sandoval-Pineda (2011) carried out a study in Mexico aimed at examining the relationships between attitudes, motivations, and English language learning. This study also aimed at generating data to determine if English language programs affect attitudes. The results of this study showed positive attitudes and motivation towards English learning in general. However, these attitudes and motivation were lower when students received classes in the research site due to the way the English language program was structured. Also, this study revealed that once the assessment process was understood by the participants, their scores improved. Higher scores were also noticed in students with previous knowledge of English comparing with those who had not contact with the target language. Interviews and class observations were proved to be effective instruments in the research which allowed a continuous evaluation of the English program to benefit students, teachers and administrators.

A study done by Yang and Wu (2012) on 20 students at the University of Malaya, aimed at identifying what makes it possible for some students acquire and learn better than others, revealed that providing the same amount of time, learning and environmental opportunities, students greatly involved in the learning process showed positive and high level of motivation in developing language proficiency.

Alkaabi (2016) led an investigation with 181 Saudi Arabian students who participated in a scholarship program in the United States to comply with the English language admission needed to be admitted in universities and colleges in the U.S. The aim of the study was to examine and investigate students' motivation for learning, attitudes towards English language and their willingness to invest effort and money in learning English. Results revealed that most of the students showed high motivation and positive attitude towards English learning regardless of gender, length of stay, and academic level.

Another study done by Yamashita (2004) was carried out due to the need to understand L2 Japanese university students' attitudes towards reading and the impact of such affective reactions on the performance of extensive reading. This extensive reading is understood as quantity of reading in order to generate good habits of reading which increase understanding of vocabulary and structure (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). This study addressed the influence of L1 reading as one of the main factors influencing L2 reading attitude (Day & Bamford,1998), and the agreement among contemporary researchers in defining reading attitude through three components: cognitive (personal, evaluative beliefs), affective (feelings and emotions), and conative (action readiness and behavioral intentions). This particular study did not include the conative aspect arguing that even though English books are found in Japanese context, they are limited, and also because the conative component is not operational. Results from this study showed that a positive affective condition assists performance in extensive reading and suggests teachers to attempt to understand students' reading attitudes in L1 as well in L2.

3.2 Reading

The main learning activity carried out by children in their first years of school is learning to read (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995), and the main concern of education at this time is to develop children's literacy skills. However, a statistical study carried out by INEC (Instituto National de Estadística y Censos) in 2013 showed that 83% of Ecuadorian young people between the ages of 16 to 24 read no

more than an hour a week. This deficiency in reading competence development would be directly attributed to the weak culture for reading in our country. Additionally, the unidirectional approach to teach reading, which refers to the cognitive performance as stated by Gettys and Fowler (1996), in which reading is understood as simple decoding syllables, words or sentences without a deep semantic interpretation of these symbols might as well contribute to such low results.

Concerning reading as a pedagogical tool, Pluck (2013), in a study done at the University of "San Francisco de Quito" in Quito-Ecuador, pointed out that the introduction of academic and scientific articles in English teaching offered not only additional challenges for students, but also significant overall benefits. In this regard, Yan (2017) highlighted the importance of reading as paramount to unfold information. This author emphasized the use of close reading where purpose for reading and text-related questions would trigger readers' response and lead to a deeper understanding of texts and language acquisition.

A study done by Tran (2017) explored reading strategy instruction, attitudes and practices of public university teachers. The results of the study showed that teachers emphasized the importance of teaching only some reading strategies by explaining, modelling, and letting students practice. Regarding attitudes, teachers showed positive attitudes towards metacognitive strategy instruction and neutral attitudes towards cognitive reading strategy instruction. Referring teachers' practices, teachers focused only on the three first steps of Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) model, preparation, presentation and practice. Possibly, as stated in the study, nor evaluation or expansion were considered of great importance by teachers, neither there was sufficient time to cover these steps.

In a private Colombian university, Arias (2014) conducted a study aimed at students of fifth level of university who were exposed to reading for specific purposes which increased students' vocabulary and knowledge about their major. In this study the author emphasized students' needs and goals to properly select the reading material. The author highlighted that students appreciate

reading material due to its broad content and academic characteristic based on research and empirical experiences. She also remarked that real communication as well as improvement of background knowledge could be promoted by using authentic material.

Likewise, Moncada and Siboney (2013) promoted understanding of English scientific articles about engineering in the National University of Táchira through application of some reading strategies. 48 participants had the opportunity to read written texts related to their major and performed guided activities which motivated the participants. The authors suggested teaching reading strategies to improve understanding of written texts in English because it allowed learners to have access to updated bibliography and to become competent professionals.

More locally, a study in the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Cuenca done by Bernal (2017) recommended the use of reading as a pedagogical tool for improving teaching and learning English. In this study, four tests of comprehension and analysis of texts related to Psychology and General English, and a questionnaire about students' confidence level in reading comprehension were given to 23 students. Results showed improvement in understanding and analyzing texts, language learning and confidence levels for reading in English.

Additionally, in order to offer an alternative to generate interest in learning English in the University of Cuenca, Bernal and Feyen (2017) conducted a study at the Faculty of Psychology geared at modifying the EFL instruction of the three levels of English followed in the University Language Institute. Teaching reading strategies upon major related texts were implemented to enhance students' rehearsal of the four language skills through the use of website and video hosting sites. Results showed enthusiasm and appreciation towards this novel approach and suggested that grammar instruction should not be neglected.

Concerning building interest in learning English, Vekemans (2016), in her article, highlighted the importance of using medical related literature with students in their fifth year at the University of

Leuven in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. The purpose of this strategy was to develop English communicative abilities needed in healthcare settings and to expand their English for medical purposes. Students' needs were well identified since they have to work in English-speaking environments. During a two semester course, students had the opportunity to use authentic English in health care settings. Results showed that implementing course related material to teach English is completely practical.

Consequently, it might be of great value to consider these research works as reference to carry out a replication study in the Medical Technology School of the UC. These studies were used as reference to apply in the Medical Technology School at the Faculty of Medical Sciences where research on this field had not been carried out yet. The use of academic readings might increase students' interest in learning English; therefore, this present study proposes to answer the following three questions:

- To what extent does academic reading improve students reading performance?
- To what extent does academic reading enhance students' positive attitudes towards reading in English and learning English in general?
- To what extent do students prefer academic reading rather than general reading?

Chapter IV

Methodology

As it was mentioned in the Literature Review, this research is partially based on the study of Bernal (2017) and adapted to the level of the group. For example, despite the four skill the length of the writing component was reduced. In addition, this quantitative study not only assessed academic reading and its impact on reading performance but also gauged positive attitude towards English learning of Medical Technology students. For gathering data, a reading pre-test and a post-test were conducted, as well as surveys aimed at determining the students' attitude. It is worth mentioning that through reading, the other skills were also rehearsed.

4.1 Context

Informed consents were signed by participants and authorities of the Institute of Languages of the UC (Appendices 1 and 2) after an explanation of the objectives, procedures and possible risks and benefits of the study highlighting the anonymity of the participants by using numbers instead of names to avoid revealing identifying information as suggested by Mackey and Gass (2005). This quasi-experimental and transversal study was carried out during the September 2016-February 2017 semester in the faculty of Medical Sciences at the Medical Technology School, where subjects such as Neurology, Psychology and Psychomotor Skills are studied.

It is considered a quasi-experimental study because the participants were not randomly chosen, and it is transversal because of the short period of the intervention.

Out of the weekly 4 hours of class that are mandatory at the faculty, a 2-hour session was held on Tuesdays from 1pm to 3pm, while the other 2-hour session was on Thursdays from 4pm to 6pm. It is important to highlight the fact that, due to the students´ schedule, they are required to do 2 hours of autonomous work in the virtual platform.

4.2 Participants:

The participants were not randomly chosen but were part of a convenience sample. Twenty-six (26) students of second level of English credit mode at the Medical technology school in the UC participated in this study. There were 21 females and 5 males, twelve (12) students' ages ranged from 18 to 20, 11 students from 21 to 23 and 3 students from 24 to 26. In terms of majors, 18 students belonged to Early Stimulation, 2 to Odontology, 1 to Graphic Design, 1 to Civil Engineering, 2 to Administration, and 2 to Law School. Their first language (L1) was Spanish, and they were studying English level II as part of their requirements to obtain their undergraduate degree.
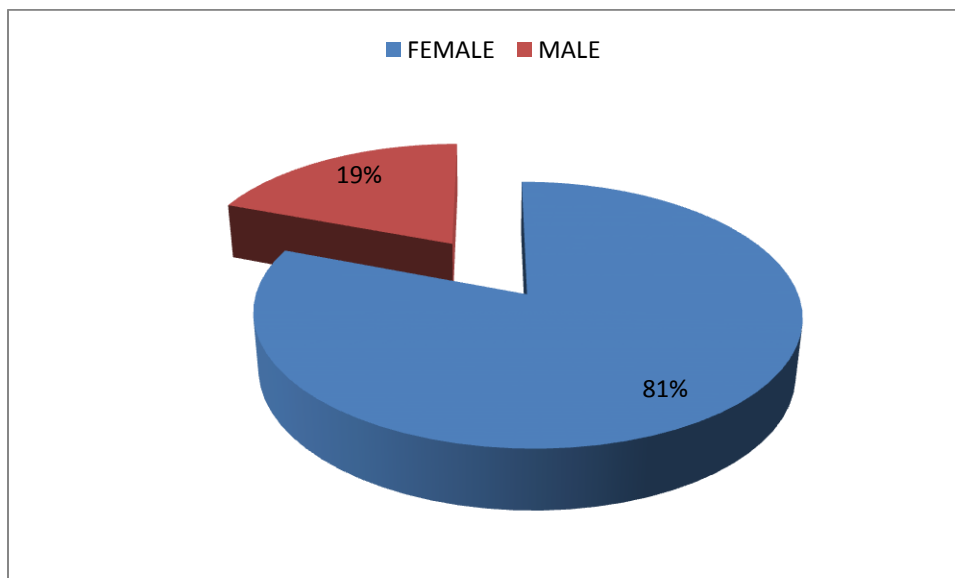
Figure 1 Participants by Gender
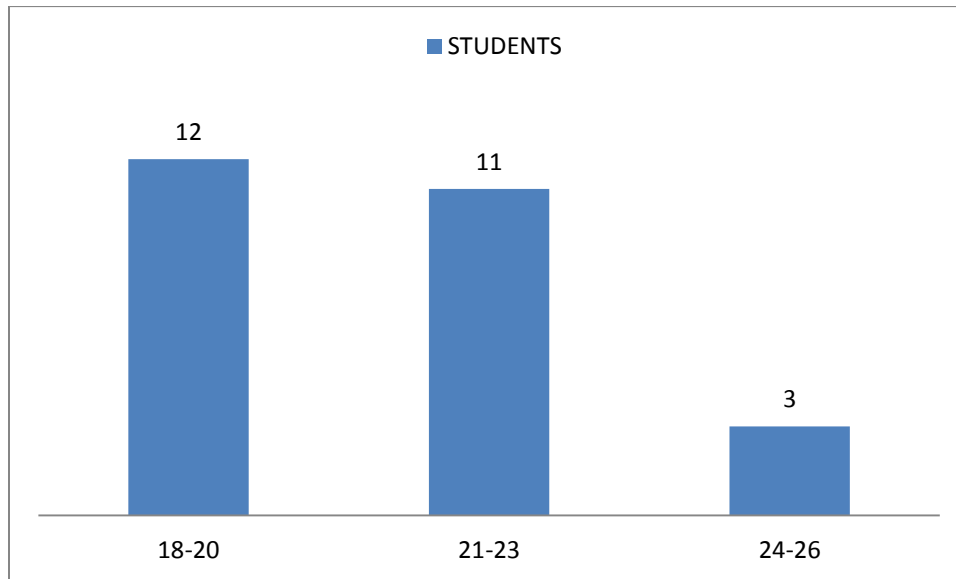
Figure 2 Participants by Age
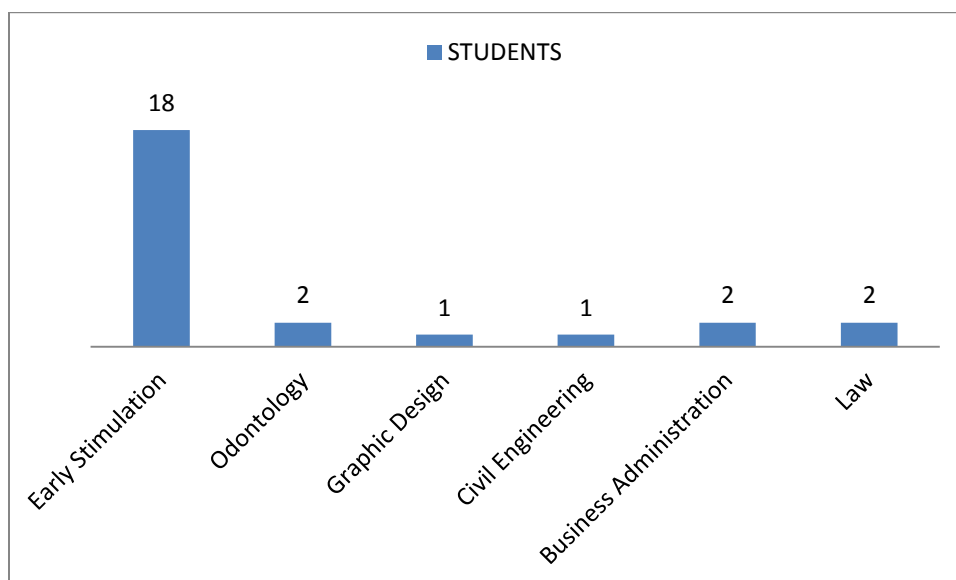
Figure 3 Participants by Majors

Considering that English language learning is compulsory for all secondary schools, all the participants had taken English classes at least for 4 school years. Typically, five to six classes of 40 to 45 minutes are taken during the secondary years. However, it is remarkable to mention that some students had studied English since they were in elementary school. Taking this heterogeneity into

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consideration, their strengths and weaknesses of the target language where identified through a

diagnostic test.[2].

4.3 Design

The intervention included a pre-test and a post-test; however, there was one group pre-posttest. Indeed, the same group acted as the control group. Therefore, the design of this research was quasi-experimental (White and Sabarwal, 2014).

Due to the fact that, the same participants answered the surveys and completed the reading comprehension exercises at different dates, this is a study with a Panel Design where quantitative and descriptive techniques were performed to identify the levels of reading performance and positive attitudes towards reading and learning English, before and after the intervention (Rasinger, 2013).

4.4 Procedure

The aim of this study was to expose participants to academic reading to improve reading comprehension and enhance positive attitudes towards reading and English learning. Therefore, the participants were given the opportunity to work with both academic and general reading exercises. Students also performed two self-evaluated tests at the beginning and at the end of the semester. During the intervention, the next procedures were followed in order to accomplish the objective.

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[2] This classification was done based on the Diagnostic Test prepared by the Language Institute (Appendix 3)

Pre-test (Reading)
- 1st. class
- Reading: academic and general
- Informed Consent

↓

Pre-test (Attitude)
- 2nd. class
- Attitude

↓

Modeling of exercises
- 3rd. class
- Gathering of readings

↓

Group Assignment
- 4th. class

↓

Reading Activities
- 5th. - 30th. class

↓

Post-test
- 31st. class
- Reading: Academic and general

↓

Post-test
- 32nd. class
- Attitude
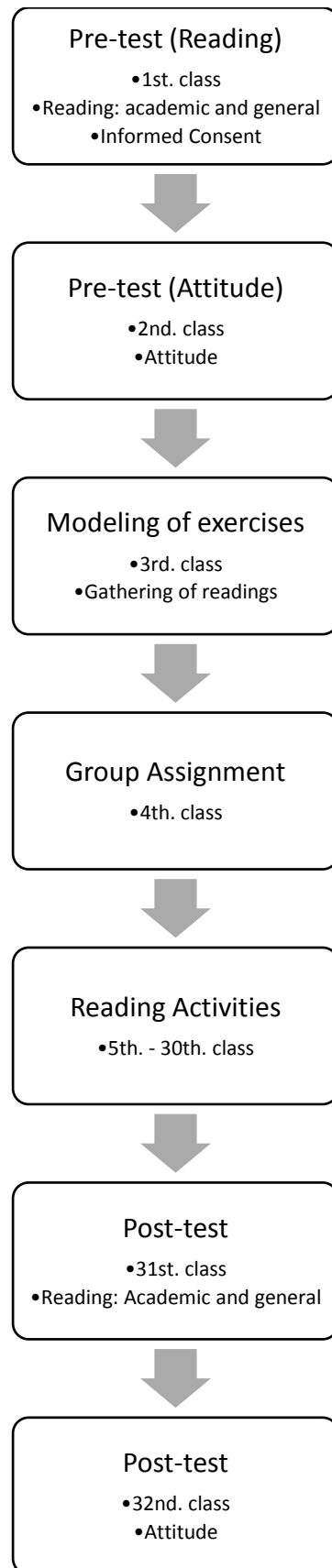
As Figure 1 shows, the first day of class the teacher explained the details of the research and requested the participants to sign a consent form. After all the participants agreed on taking part of the research, a general and an academic reading exercises were administered as the pre-test. The purpose of the general reading was only to expose them to both types of reading, so they could later analyze their preference between general and academic reading. The pretest included: a reading passage followed by four sections, true-false questions, multiple choice questions, a synonym match, and a word identification exercise. The questions required the performance of reading skills such as skimming, scanning, inferring, deducing meaning from context, and identifying reference words. Students had 60 minutes to take the pre-test; however, 7 students took between 15 to 25 more minutes. During this pre-test, the students asked about the instructions and the teacher gave clarifications when it was necessary.

In the second day of class, students were given three attitude tests: a questionnaire on attitudes towards reading academic material, a questionnaire on attitudes towards learning English, and a questionnaire about their preferences on academic and general English.

In the third day of class, the teacher modeled a reading exercise which included pre-reading, while and post-reading tasks. In the pre-reading task, the teacher introduced the topic by showing a picture and asking students some questions related to early stimulation. The purpose of this task was to activate background knowledge which, as stated by Miller (2003), engages students in an activity. In the while-reading tasks, the teacher introduced the use of skimming and scanning to guide the students to answer the multiple-choice questions, synonym match, and word identification, which also required inferring, deducing meaning from context, and identifying reference words. At the end of the class, students were organized in groups of maximum 4 people. Such groups had to choose an article related to their major, and either send it by email to the teacher or bring it for the next class.

In the fourth session, participants were asked to choose articles from 800 to 1,200 words related to their majors. Additionally, the students had to choose texts they could understand at least 50% of

their content. After a consensus regarding the chronological order of presentations, the first article entitled "Jaundice in Healthy Newborns" by Gupta (2015) was assigned to be read by the whole group. The students in charge of this article had eight days to prepare the exercises previously modeled by the teacher. During the time allotted to prepare tasks for the selected readings, students practiced different reading strategies such as paragraph-by-paragraph reading, addressed by Mounts and Smirnova (2011) as an essential tool for facilitating comprehension. Additionally, generation of five multiple-choice and five open-ended questions, ten true-false statements and ten synonym match exercises was also emphasized during the weekly 4 hours of class, and the 2 hours of autonomous work were assigned to individual reading and grammar review.

In the day of the oral presentation, each group reproduced the pre-reading, while-reading and after-reading tasks. The time of a 2-hour session was evenly distributed across those three sets of activities; nevertheless, there were instances when presentations were carried over to the next session. It is worth mentioning that, to the extent that the teacher supported each presentation, he was part of it as well. The teacher's intervention included, but was not limited to, explanation of grammar, spelling, and pronunciation, in the first two sets of activities. At the same time, the teacher's involvement was carefully integrated to avoid interference in the students´ activities. Students were also encouraged to make comments or ask questions about the topic. The final task was to produce a written summary, which also served as a way to evaluate comprehension. This part of the procedure took place between the fifth and thirtieth class.

The post-test was administered in the last two sessions before the final exam. The second to last day was dedicated to the general and academic reading test, and the last day to the attitude tests. The versions used in the post-test were the same that were used in the pre-test. The reason for having the same version was to simplify the comparison and to minimize the influence of other factors inherent to a different version. In other words, any difference in the scores should not be the result of a change in length, vocabulary, grammar structure, etc. Since it is difficult to account for all

those factors by formulating a different version, the option of having the same one was preferred Schalich (2015).

4.5 Instruments

There were two types of instruments according to what was being assessed, academic reading and attitudes towards the target language.

4.5.1 Test for Academic Reading

Due to the heterogeneous academic background of the participants, the pre-test for the academic reading part was different. In fact, six different versions were created in order to include all six majors present in the class (i.e. Early Stimulation, Odontology, Law, Civil Engineering, Administration and Graphic Design).

The items of the pre-tests produced by the author and adapted from breaking news in English were based on the criteria proposed by Yang and Chang (2008) for English learning websites. In addition, tests were conducted with comparable groups. As a result, changes were made to the format rather than to the content of the tests. For example, numbering and labeling of the questions.

The final version of the pre-tests (Appendix 4) consisted of a two-page reading, followed by 5 true/false questions, 5 completion questions, 10 matching questions, and 5 unscramble questions. The maximum total score possible was 20 points. The same test was used as the posttest.

4.6 Tests for Attitude

Except for the last questionnaire, direct translated versions from English to Spanish of attitude tests towards academic reading and English learning were presented since the English level of students was not high enough to understand it in English. As stated by Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg (1998), translation facilitates the need to understand the language the questionnaires were originally designed.

4.6.1 Test for Attitude towards learning English

To determine the students' attitudes towards learning English language, a translated questionnaire taken from Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi and Alzwari (2012) was completed by the students after the pre and posttest. Such questionnaire was validated by both a psychologist and an expert on TEFL (op cit) (Appendix 5).

For each of the 45 questions, the student had to choose one of the five options of the Lickert scale. The scale ranged from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). Therefore, the minimum score possible was 45 and the maximum, 225. Table 1 details how results should be interpreted.

Table 1 Guideline for the Interpretation of Attitudes towards English

SCORE	ATTITUDE
136-225	Positive
135	Indifferent
45-134	Negative

4.6.2 Test for Attitude towards academic reading in English

To analyze the students' attitudes towards academic reading, a questionnaire on attitudes towards reading, previously utilized in a study carried out in the Faculty of Psychology (Bernal, 2017), was administered after the pre and posttests (Appendix 6). It consisted of 10 questions using the same Lickert scale from the previous test, but now the possible scores ranged from 10 to 50. Table 2 details how results should be interpreted.

Table 2 Guideline for the Interpretation of Attitudes towards Academic Reading in English

SCORE	ATTITUDE
31-50	Positive
30	Indifferent
10-29	Negative

4.6.3 Test for students' preference between academic and general English reading

Similarly, a questionnaire taken from Bernal (2017) was applied at the beginning and at the end of the course to compare the students' preference between academic and general English (Appendix 7). The format included 4 questions that used the Lickert scale from the other two tests, and 1 open-ended question about what students prefer to read. The minimum possible score was 4 and the maximum 20. Table 3 shows in detail how the results should be interpreted.

Table 3 Guideline for the Interpretation of Preference for Reading

SCORE	ATTITUDE
13-20	Prefers academic reading
12	Indifferent
4-11	Prefers general reading

4.7 Analysis

The use of the research instruments mentioned in the this chapter allowed the researcher to gather data and let me know if academic reading enhanced reading performance and positive attitude towards learning English.

For statistical analysis, the data were processed with a combination of three software packages, Excel, EZAnalyze and SPSS. In this quantitative and descriptive study, measures of central tendencies, and percentages were used to determine if there was a significant difference between the pre and posttest results.

First, there was an analysis of the results of the scores achieved by the students in general and academic reading. To determine if students showed an evolution in their performance throughout the semester, the ANOVA test for repeated measures was applied to the data. For this purpose, null and alternative hypotheses are proposed.

Ho: there are no statistically significant differences between the pre and posttest results (the intervention had no effect).

Ha: there are statistically significant differences between the pre and posttest results (the intervention had an effect).

The result has to be compared to the statistical value of 0.01. If the result is lower, the null hypothesis has to be rejected and it means there is a difference in the reading performance of the group.

The WILCOXON non parametrical test for related samples was used to compare the results of the attitude tests. The rationale is the same as the one for the ANOVA test; the same hypotheses, null and alternative were tested. The value obtained in this test had to be compared against the error value, i.e. 0.05 because the confidence level was set as 95%. If the obtained value is greater, then the null hypothesis is accepted. In other words, there is no significant difference in the pre and posttest results.

Finally, the answers for the open-ended question in the questionnaire about the preference between general and academic readings were tabulated and categorized in Excel.

Chapter V

Results

In this chapter, results are summarized. Following the structure of procedure, the results for the academic reading are presented first. Then, results for the three attitude questionnaires are shown. The figures are complemented with the information regarding specific topics that students want to read about.

5.1 Academic Reading Results

In terms of reading performance, the average score of students increased from 13.52 in the pre-test to 15.04 in the posttest. Moreover, the minimum as well as the maximum score also went up by at least 1 point.
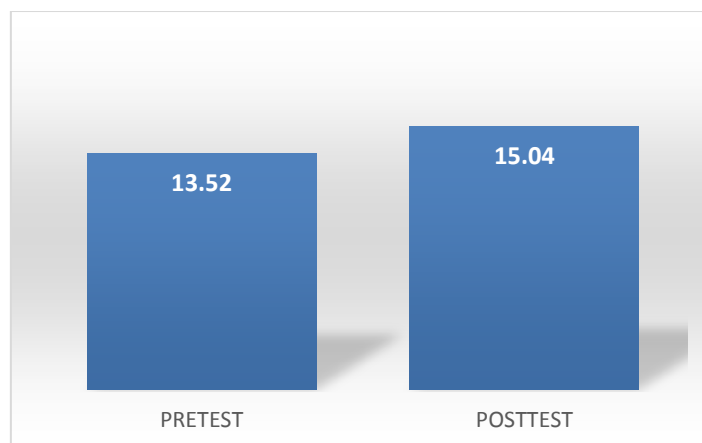
Figure 4 Mean Scores of Academic Reading (Pre and Posttest)

Table 4 Statistical Results for Academic Reading

EZAnalyze Results Report - PRE TOTAL with POST TOTAL

	PRE TOTAL	POST TOTAL
Mean:	13.52	15.04
Std. Dev.:	2.417	2.423
Min.:	8	10
Max.:	19	20

Contrast statistics[a]

	VAR00003 - VAR00002
Z	-.205[b]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.002

a. Wilcoxon signed ranked test

b. Based on negative ranks.

5.2 Attitude Questionnaire Results

According to the following tables and figures, there was an increase in the mean score and its standard deviation for attitude towards academic reading in English and the preference between academic and general reading. On the other hand, the average score and its standard deviation for attitude towards English language decreased. The WILCOXON values are also provided in the statistical results tables for each questionnaire.
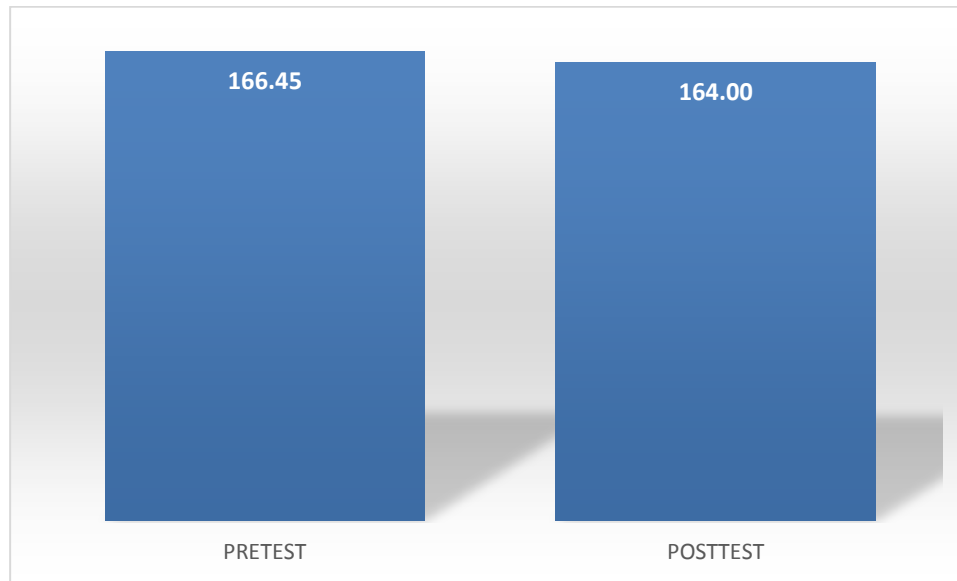
Figure 5 Mean Scores of Attitudes towards English learning (Pre and Posttest)

Table 5 Statistical Results for Attitude towards English learning

EZAnalyze Results Report - PRE TOTAL with POST TOTAL

	PRE TOTAL	POST TOTAL	Contrast statistics[a]	
				VAR00003 - VAR00002
Mean:	166.450	164.000		
Std. Dev.:	12.211	12.191	Z	-.205[b]
Min.:	139	137	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.837
Max.:	202	200		

a. Wilcoxon signed ranked test

b. Based on negative ranks.
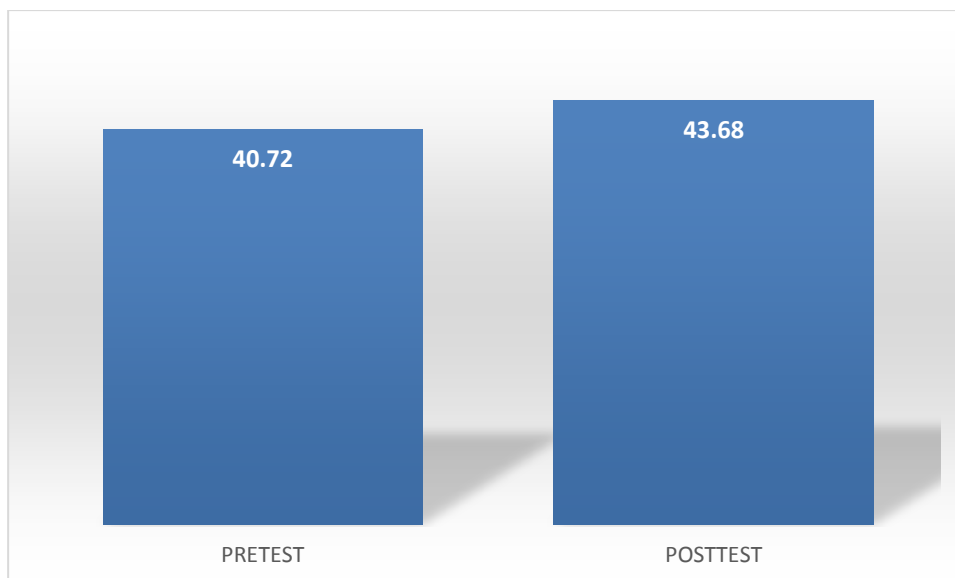
Figure 6 Mean Scores of Attitudes towards Academic Reading in English (Pre and Posttest)

Table 6 Statistical Results for Attitude towards Academic Reading in English

EZAnalyze Results Report - PRE TOTAL with POST TOTAL

	PRE TOTAL	POST TOTAL	Contrast statistics[a]	
Mean:	40.720	43.680		VAR00003 - VAR00002
Std. Dev.:	4.316	4.616	Z	-2.149[b]
Min.:	33	35	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.032
Max.:	49	50		

a. Wilcoxon signed ranked test

b. Based on negative ranks.
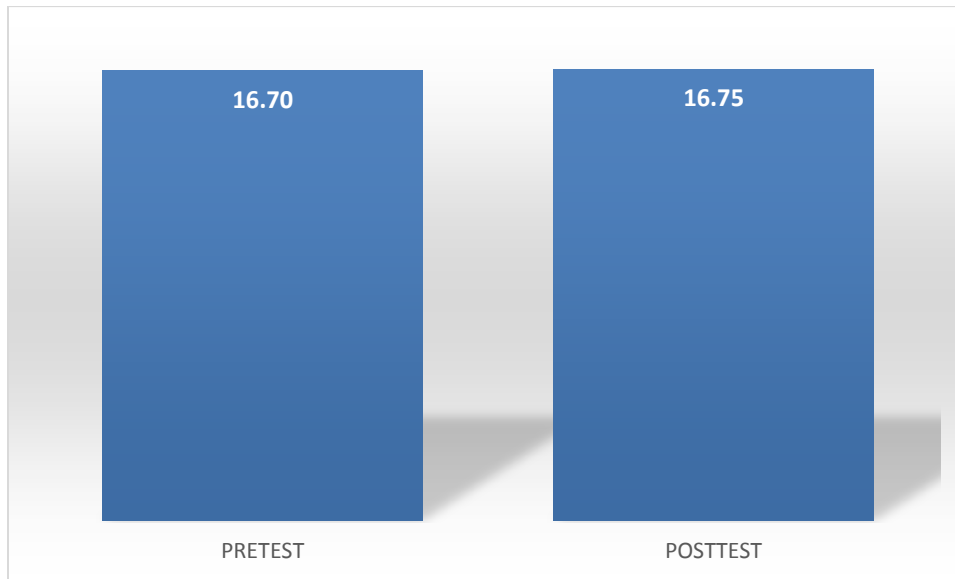
Figure 7 Mean Scores of Preferences between Academic and General Reading (Pre and Posttest)

Table 7 Statistical Results for Preference between Academic and General Reading

EZAnalyze Results Report - PRE TOTAL with POST TOTAL

	PRE TOTAL	POST TOTAL	Contrast statistics[a]	
				VAR00003 - VAR00002
Mean:	16.700	16.750		
Std. Dev.:	1.720	1.943	Z	-.305[b]
Min.:	13	13	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.760
Max.:	20	20		

a. Wilcoxon signed ranked test

b. Based on negative ranks.

5.3 Preference of Topics for Reading

As shown in figure 6, 63% of the students in the pre-test mention their preference for academic reading. The group of students that indicate their indifference in preference between academic and general reading amounts 29%. The survey also reveals that 8% of the students strongly agree on reading other topics such as novels, news and animals. Results in figure 7 show that 71% of the

students in the posttest are convinced about their preference for academic reading which might be attributed to the positive influence of the intervention carried out in this study. Preference for neither academic or general reading is shown by 21% whereas 8% of the students would like reading other topics not related to their majors.
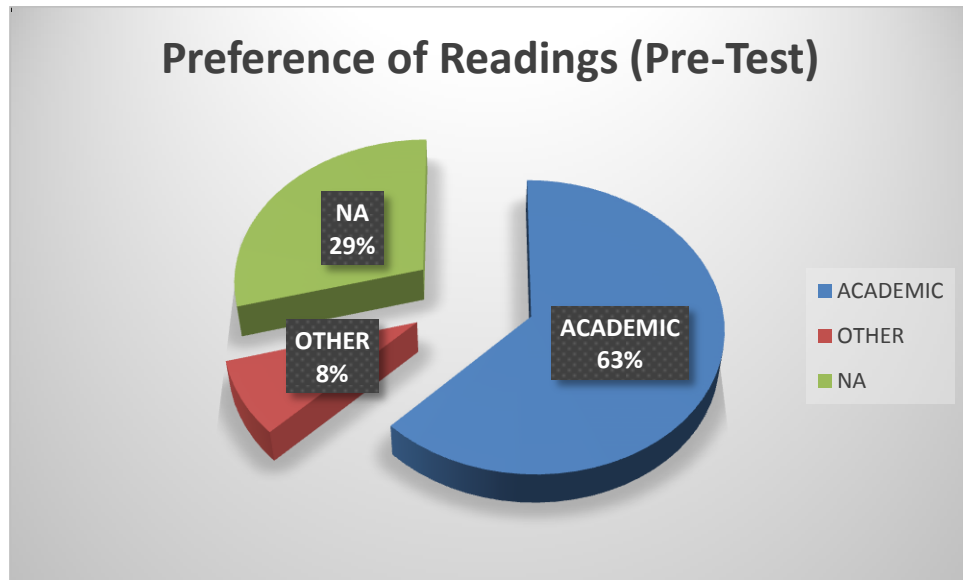
Figure 8 Preference of Readings (Pre-Test)
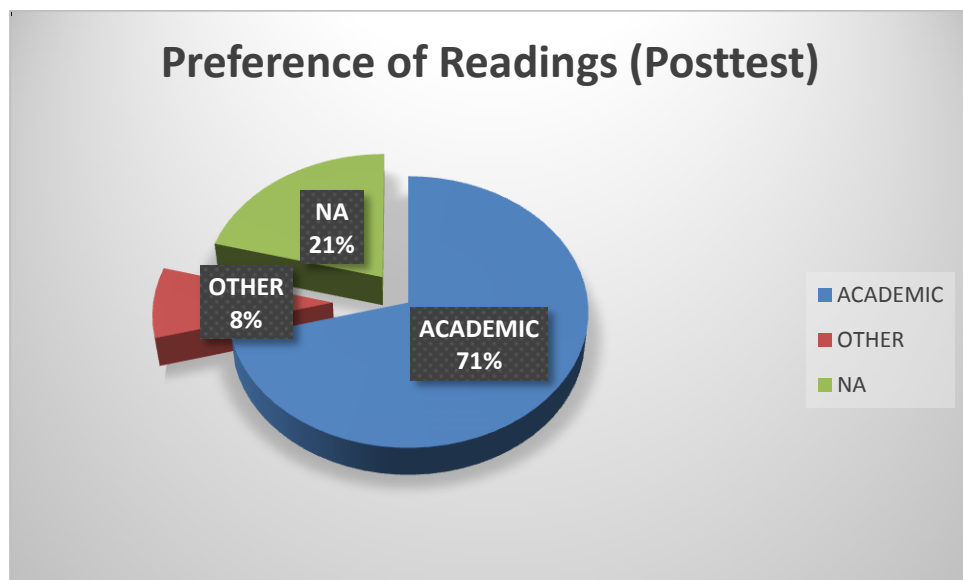
Figure 9 Preference of Readings (Posttest)

Chapter VI

Analysis

This chapter reviews in more detail the results and their implications. It follows the same structure as in the previous chapter.

6.1 Analysis of Academic Reading Results

There are significant differences between the scores of the pre and posttest. In fact, the p value is 0.002, which is less than 0.01. Therefore, the 1,52 point difference from 13.52 to 15.04, can be attributed to the intervention. This is in alignment to what was suggested by Pluck (2013), i.e. academic and scientific articles are beneficial for students. Nevertheless, Figure 8 shows a more detailed account of the progress made by the participants. It can be seen that the score went up from reading 2 to reading 5. The sudden decrease in reading 6 can be related to the fact that students were being evaluated in other subjects. Moreover, the posttest was administered one week before the final exams, so it is not clear how that situation affected the results.
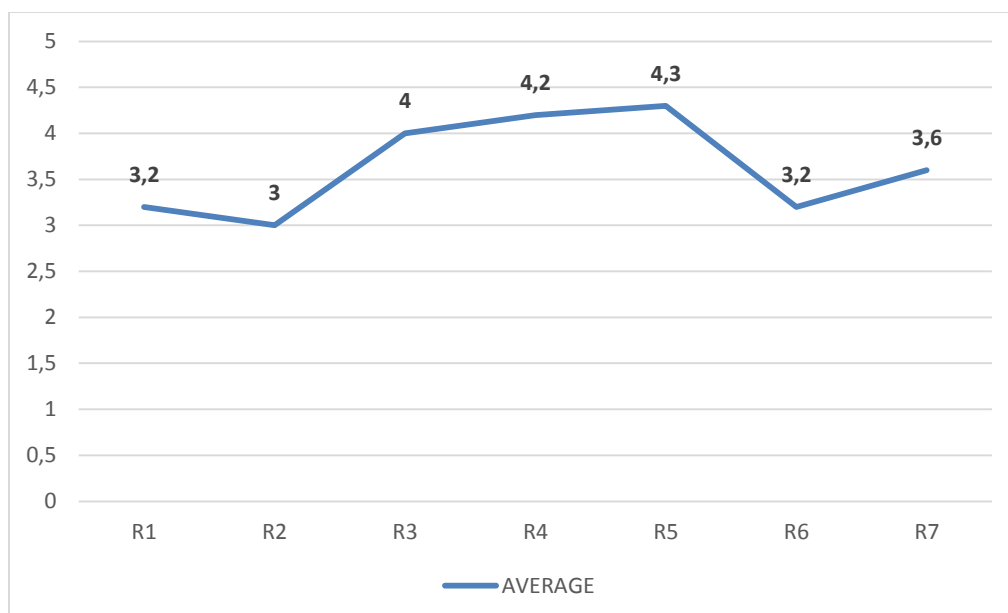
Figure 10 Partial Average Scores of Reading during the Intervention

6.2 Analysis of Attitudes Results

Table 8 summarizes the results of the three attitude questionnaires answered by the participants.

The correspondent interpretation is shown in Table 9.

Table 8 Results for Attitude Questionnaires

CATEGORIES	SIGNIFICANCE		
	PRETEST AVERAGE	POSTTEST AVERAGE	WILCOXON
ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE	166.45	164.00	0.837 > 0.05
ATTITUDE TOWARDS ACADEMIC READING IN ENGLISH	40.72	43.68	0,032 < 0.05
PREFERENCE BETWEEN ACADEMIC AND GENERAL READING	16.70	16.75	0.760 > 0.05

Table 9 Interpretation of Results for Attitudes Questionnaires

CATEGORIES	SIGNIFICANCE		
	PRETEST AVERAGE	POSTTEST AVERAGE	WILCOXON
ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE	Positive	Positive	Accept null hypothesis
ATTITUDE TOWARDS ACADEMIC READING IN ENGLISH	Positive	Positive	Reject null hypothesis
PREFERENCE BETWEEN ACADEMIC AND GENERAL READING	Prefers academic reading	Prefers academic reading	Accept null hypothesis

6.3 Analysis of Attitudes towards English Language

Although the information displayed in Table 9 shows that students retained a positive attitude

towards the target language, the results in Table 8 indicate that, numerically, this positive attitude

diminished by the end of the study. Moreover, the Wilcoxon test suggests that this decrease was not

a result of the intervention. Possible drawbacks encountered during the intervention include the number and complexity of reading activities, which due to the level, could have been considered as challenging.

6.4 Analysis of Attitude towards Academic Reading in English

The initial attitude of students towards academic reading in English was positive and this did not change throughout the study. Furthermore, the score itself increased, as shown in Table 8. The Wilcoxon test concluded that the null hypothesis should be rejected. Therefore, the increase in the positive attitude was due to the intervention.

A possible cause that triggered that rise in positive attitude could have been the fact that they felt more identified with the topics they read, as they related to their fields. This outcome is in alignment with the notion of activating prior knowledge, even if this one was not originally acquired in the target language. Moreover, prior knowledge might have had a positive effect in confidence and indirectly influence the willingness to interact in English. As a result, students might have had a better predisposition to read, knowing that it would allow them to express something they already knew, but now in a different language.

6.5 Analysis of Preference between Academic and General Reading

Students' preference for academic reading slightly increased after the study. This increase is in accordance with the answers to the open-ended question. Indeed, a higher percentage of students mentioned specific academic topics that they would prefer to read about. Nevertheless, the Wilcoxon test determined that the null hypothesis should be accepted. This suggests that the difference in scores was unintentional and not a result of the intervention.

Chapter VII

Discussion

Results show significant improvement in students' understanding of major related written texts and students' positive attitudes towards academic reading. This indicates that including reading as a boosted educational tool in current regular courses would improve English teaching and learning. This alternative methodological tool aims at motivating students to improve their writing, vocabulary, and oral skills through reading, which in turn would expand their academic knowledge. According to Pluck (2013), including reading texts related to university students' majors can be more challenging. Yet, it is remarkable and likely to accomplish. Therefore, it is imperative to reconsider teaching methodologies that challenge students and language instructors as well. English curricula mostly based on objectives and sequence of English commercial textbooks, mentioned by Bernal (2017), bores, frustrates, and even causes rejection on students to learn English. Sandoval and Pineda (2011) mention the importance of considering student's understanding of the English language program and its relationship with motivation and attitudes to boost English language learning. In this regard, Yang and Wu (2012) revealed that high levels of motivation can be seen in students if equal learning and environmental opportunities plus sufficient among of time are assigned to the learning process.

Results are also in alignment to a certain extent with Yamashita's (2004); Richards & Schmidt's (2002); Day & Bamford's (1998) studies since they indicate that exposing students to reading material related to their interest or to what they are studying, improve understanding of English material together with students' favorable predisposition to read. Furthermore, these results show and overall increase in cognitive, affective ad conative components.

Reading and writing practice through intensive and extensive reading are recommended by Bernal and Feyen (2017), Vanegas, in Meyer´s report (2014), and Krashen (2004). The sustaining feature of reading mentioned by Richard and Smith (2002) allows the development of the other language skills. These authors claim that by developing the reading habits, it enhances the knowledge of grammar structures and vocabulary. Generation of questions, summaries, oral presentations, discussions and text analysis led students to develop the four language skills. It is worth to mention that, the listening component was rehearsed through listening the instructor, peers, video presentations and so on.

However, the length of texts and complexity of vocabulary have been addressed by participants as limitation to fully accomplish this challenging and demanding approach that requires students' capabilities and linguistic transfer skills, which by no means would not be underestimated by language instructors considering that students today enter the university more prepared in the area of language.

Reading academic material related to students' majors should be integrated in regular English courses at university level with satisfactory results as shown by Arias (2014) in a study conducted in a private Colombian university where students appreciated the introduction of reading material based on research and empirical sources. By the same token, Moncada and Siboney (2013) and Vekemans (2016) highlighted the importance of using engineering and medical related literature respectably with students to motivate students who appreciated the introduction of updated bibliography to become competent professionals. Even though homogenous groups of students studying the same major are necessary to carry out this program, students from other majors would easily fit into the group with satisfactory language learning results.

This study provides some general information about the use of academic reading to enhance reading performance and positive attitude on participants who by no means represent all students from the Universidad de Cuenca. This can be the most considerable limitation of the present study.

According to the diagnostic test applied at the beginning of the study, participants' English language weaknesses and strengths were identified suggesting that the demanding and challenging language skills plus an unfavorable class schedule, which went along with overloaded academic responsibilities caused boredom, demotivation and even rejection on participants to English learning. In addition, the weak culture for reading of Ecuadorian youth stated by INEC in 2012 should be considered as paramount factor affecting reading performance. These limitations would have influenced in the attitudes test, which in spite of the sustained positive score along the intervention declined in the posttest.

On the contrary, participants showed a great deal of enthusiasm when the readings chosen by them were analyzed through paragraph by paragraph technique recommended by Mounts and Smirnova (2011) as an effective approach to develop the four language skills.

Conclusions

Globalization and the fact that most scientific literature is published in English have made English language proficiency at university levels become indispensable. To some extent, outdated teaching-centered approaches, aimed at mastering grammar rules and building vocabulary based on unrealistic contexts, would be one of the reasons of students' low proficiency level of English when graduating. This study applied academic reading as an alternative teaching approach in order to enhance reading performance and positive attitude towards English learning.

Concerning the first research question, to what extent does academic reading improve students reading performance?, results show that after a gradual progress, students' improvement was statistically significant. In addition, inferential statistics confirmed that the higher scores were due to the introduction of academic reading. These results are in accordance with those obtained by Moncada and Siboney (2013) and Bernal (2017), and with the benefits remarked by Pluck (2013).

The second research question, to what extent academic reading enhances students' positive attitudes towards reading in English and learning English in general entails two parts. Regarding the attitudes towards reading in English, the numerical value increased, which was significant and consequently could be related to the intervention. Hence, its interpretation remained as being "positive". On the other hand, although the score of attitudes towards English language went down, the positive attitude towards English in general persisted. The sustained interest of students in learning English would confirm the results of Vekemans (2016); however, the results in the present study could not be linked to the intervention.

For the third question, to what extent students prefer academic reading rather than general reading, results show that participants slightly increased their preference of academic reading, as opposed to general reading. Nevertheless, this result was not statistically significant and could not be associated with the intervention.

Even though the results are not statistically favorable due to numerous limitations encountered throughout this study, such as lack of reading culture, time constrains, inappropriate class schedules, and so on, reading, the most significant language skill evaluated to either enter international universities or take standardized tests, should be considered as an alternative pedagogical tool to fulfill such demanding objectives. Therefore, being reading of such importance, it is necessary to shift from a traditional teacher-centered to a student-centered approach that leads to reconsider students' needs and interests and value their potential aptitudes to offer them more challenging language learning approaches. Hence, academic reading as well as general English would enhance their reading performance and motivation to learning the target language. To conclude, it is paramount for English instructors to employ more reading material on their daily teaching practices based upon their students´ needs and interests, and promote further studies on either extensive or intensive reading since they would boost exposure to a variety of contexts and the use of reading strategies respectively.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Informed Consent

Estimado estudiante

De mi consideración

Soy maestrante en el programa de MAESTRÍA EN LINGÜÍSTICA APLICADA A LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA y estoy llevando a cabo un estudio sobre la lectura académica aplicada a estudiantes de tecnología médica en la Universidad de Cuenca para motivar las actitudes positivas hacia la producción de lectura. El objetivo del estudio es determinar los efectos de la lectura académica en las actitudes de los estudiantes hacia la producción lectora.

El estudio consiste en realizar ejercicios de lectura general y académica y llenar un cuestionario acerca de actitudes hacia la lectura académica en inglés. El proceso será estrictamente confidencial y su nombre no será utilizado. La participación en el estudio no afectará la nota del estudiante.

La participación es voluntaria. Usted tiene el derecho de retirar el consentimiento para la participación en cualquier momento. El estudio no conlleva ningún riesgo ni recibe ningún beneficio. No recibirá ninguna compensación por participar.

Yo _____

Estoy de acuerdo en participar del estudio titulado *Academic reading applied to Medical Technology students at the University of Cuenca to enhance positive attitudes towards English reading performance*. El propósito y naturaleza del estudio me ha sido descrito por el investigador principal Lic. Paul Bernal. Yo comprendo lo que se me solicita y también sé que puedo hacer las consultas que estime pertinentes. Sé que puedo contactarme con el investigador principal y también con el comité de Ética por cualquier motivo. También comprendo que puedo suspender mi participación en cualquier momento.

Nombre del participante: _____

Firma del participante: _____

Fecha: _____ / _____ / _____

Appendix 2: Informed Consent

Cuenca, 31 de mayo de 2018

Magister
Paúl Bernal Arellano.
DOCENTE DEL INSTITUTO UNIVERSITARIO DE LENGUAS

De mi consideración.

Con un cordial saludo y por medio del presente me permito comunicar a Usted la resolución emitida por el Consejo Académico del IUL, en su sesión de 30 de mayo de 2018, que textualmente señala:

7.3.- Se conoce la comunicación enviada por el Lcdo. Paúl Bernal Arellano por medio del cual solicita se ratifique la resolución emitida a su petición realizada el 19 de septiembre de 2016, para efectuar la intervención de mi tesis titulada "Academic Reading Applied To Medical Technology Students At The University Of Cuenca To Enhance Reading Performance And Positive Attitudes Towards English Learning".

Al respecto los miembros del Consejo Académico resuelven ratificar la resolución tomada anteriormente por parte de este organismo y autorizar la intervención de la tesis titulada "Academic Reading Applied To Medical Technology Students At The University Of Cuenca To Enhance Reading Performance And Positive Attitudes Towards English Learning" dentro del segundo nivel de inglés por créditos en la Escuela de Tecnología Médica de la Universidad de Cuenca.

Particular que comunico para los fines legales pertinentes.

Atentamente,

Dra. Tania Iglesias Vázquez
**SECRETARIA-ABOGADA DEL
INSTITUTO UNIVERSITARIO DE LENGUAS.**

c.c. Archivo

Appendix 3: Diagnostic Test

UNIVERSITY II

DIAGNOSTIC ENGLISH EXAM

NAME: ....**LEVEL:** (English II, Credits) **DATE:** ....

A. LISTENING
Listen and write the missing information. (1/5)

Monday: work in the (1) _____

Tuesday: (2) _____ after work

Wednesday: go to the (3) _____.

Thursday: (4) _____friends for coffee.

Friday: go (5) _____

AUDIOSCRIPT: OPENMIND 1, UNIT 4, CD 1, TRACK 24

A. GRAMMAR
Choose the best option (/20)

1. Are there _____ apples in the kitchen?

a) much   b) any   c) some

2.That is _____ interesting book.

a) the   b) a   c) an

3. I went _____ church last Sunday.

a) at   b) in   c) to

4. What _____ he like? - He is very friendly.

a) does   b) did   c) is

5. I _____ a new car last month.

a) bought   b) have bought   c) buyed

6. I _____ TV when the telephone rang.

a) watched   b) waswatching   c) are watching

7.I'm afraid I'm not hungry. I've _____ eaten lunch.

a) yet   b) still   c) already

8. My mother let me _____ late when I was a child.

a) to stay out   b) stayed out   c) stay out

9. Would you like _____ chicken?

a) any   b) a   c) some

10. He has _____ friends in Chicago.

a) a lot   b) few   c) few of

11. She _____ lunch by the time we arrived.

a) had finished   b) finished   c) have finished

12. What shall we do tonight? How about _____ a film?

a) to see   b) see   c) seeing

13. _____ you ever _____ to Hollywood?

a) did ... go   b) have .... go   c) have ... gone

14. Have you finished your homework _____?

a) yet   b) already   c) still

15. Jack is really _____ history, especially Japanese history.

a) interested at   b) interestingon   c) interested in

Paúl Leoncio Bernal Arellano

16. If she _____ about his financial situation, she would have helped him out.
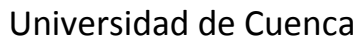
  a) knew   b) had been knowing   c) had known

17. I'll _____ their cat while they are away on holiday.

  a) be looking into   b) be looking   c) be looking after

                                                        at

18. He made his children _____ their homework every afternoon.

  a) do   b) to do   c) studied

19. The test was _____ difficult she had problems finishing it on time.

  a) so   b) a   c) as

20. By the time she arrives, we _____ our homework.

  a) finish   b) will have finished   c) will finish

C. READING (Points   /18)

Passage 1

My father is a construction worker. He builds houses. He builds schools.

He builds houses and schools. He uses a hammer and a saw.

My brother is an engineer. He designs buildings. He designs bridges. He designs buildings and bridges. He uses a pencil and a calculator.

My son is an athlete. He plays soccer. He plays tennis. He plays soccer and tennis. He uses a racket and a ball.

My daughter is an artist. She draws pictures of animals. She draws pictures of people. She draws pictures of animals and people. She uses a pencil and a piece of paper.

Questions

Who is a construction worker?

	A. my father	B. my daughter	C. my son

What does my brother do?

	A. He is a construction worker.	B. He is an engineer.	C. He is an artist.

Who uses a saw?

	A. my father	B. my brother	C. my son

Who uses a racket?

	A. my daughter	B. my brother	C. my son

Who uses a pencil?

I. my brother	A. I only	B. I and Ionly	C. I, II, and III

II. my daughter

III. my father

Who probably uses an eraser?

	A. my daughter	B. my brother	C. my son

Passage 2

Seagulls live on the beach. They eat small fish, bread, and seaweed.

Seagulls run quickly on the sand and fly quickly in the sky. Seagulls will run or fly away if you try to catch them. There are many seagulls on the beach.

Crabs also live on the beach. They eat shrimp, ocean plants, and small fish. Crabs crawl quickly on the sand and in the ocean. Crabs will crawl away if you try to catch them. There are many crabs on the beach, but it is not always easy to see them.

Starfish live on the beach, too. They eat clams, oysters, and small fish.

Starfish move slowly on the sand and in the ocean. Starfish will not move away if you try to catch them. There are few starfish on the beach.

Questions

Seagulls are _____.

| | A. birds | B. fish | C. mammals |

Seagulls, crabs, and starfish all eat

| | A. clams | B. bread | C.fish |

Which animal does not move quickly?

| | A. starfish | B. seagulls | C. crabs |

Based on information in the passage, which sentence is false?

| | A. Starfish are hard to catch. | B. Crabs eat shrimp and ocean plants. | C. Seagulls move quickly on the sand and in the air. |

Passage 3

Today, David and his sister are going to the library. David wants to find a book to read. His sister wants to use a computer there.

When they get to the library, David finds a book about detectives. He also finds a book with chapters about a friendly ghost. Finally, he finds a book about a man who lives in the woods without food or water. He puts the books on the front desk and waits for his sister.

David´s sister sits at one of the computers in the library. She checks her email and looks at pictures of flowers on the internet. Then she reads a news article on a website. David's sister leaves the computer and walks over to David. "I got a movie for us to watch tonight," she says. "Are you ready to leave?"

"Sure," David says. He puts his books and the movie on the front desk to check out. "How long can we keep them?" he asks.

"Two weeks," says the librarian.

"Cool," says David.

Suddenly, David is surprised. His mother is checking out something else that is too big to put on the desk. It's a picture of the ocean.

"What is that for?" David asks.

"To put on our wall at home," says David's sister.

"You can do that?" David asks.

David's sister smiles at the librarian. "Yes," she says,
"but we have to return it in three months."

Questions

Based on the books David finds, we can tell that he is interested in…

A. science   B.nature   C. mysteries

What does Mike's sister do at the library?

I. She uses a computer.   A. Ionly   B. I and IIonly   C. I, II, anIII

II. She looks at pictures.

III. She reads an article.

For how long can Daviduse the books before he must return them to the library?

A. one week   B. two weeks   C.Twoweeks

What does Mike's sister want to do with the picture of the ocean?

A. She wants to buy it.   B. She wants to put it in her house.   C. She wants to give it to her friend as a gift.

Based on information in the passage, it can be understood that you can check out all of the following at the library, EXCEPT:

A. computers   B. movies   C. pictures

As used in the passage, what does "check out" mean?

A. see   B. rent   C.find

Which of the following would be the best title for this passage?

A. Mike's sister   B. A Picture of the Ocean   C. A Day at the Library

---

Using the passage as a guide, it can be understood that you can check out which of the following things from the library?

I. pictures   A. Ionly   B. I and IIonly   C. I, II, anIII

II. furniture

III. food

D. VOCABULARY (Points   /20)

1. Tourism is _____ travelling for fun.

                a.with   b. about   c. of

2. The tour of the museum _____ very boring.

                a.were   b. was   c. did

3. The world is _____ of exciting places to visit.

                a.from   b. full   c. with

4. _____ tourist wants to see new things.

                a. Every   b. Many   c. Few

5. Do you think people _____ carry passports in the future?

                a. did   b. will   c. would

6. Travel agents _____ questions about flights and destinations.

                a. answer   b. tell   c. talk about

7. Tourism is growing _____ people enjoy seeing new places.

                a. but   b. when   c. because

8. Many University students in Cuenca still live _____ home with their parents.

        a. in   b. on   c. at

9. Tourism has been a career since ancient times.

        a. It still is a career.   b. It is not a career anymore.   c. It will be a career.

10. The U.S.A. is one of the _____ visited countries in the world.

        a.more   b. most   c. least

11. New York City is the city that never sleeps. There is _____ night entertainment.

        a.little   b. much   c. a lot of

12. _____ study for the exam?

        a. Did you   b. Have you   c. Are you

13. If he were a good professional, he _____ hired.

        a. would be   b. wilbe   c. can be

14. This amazing offer _____ be ignored.

        a. shouldn't   b.wasn't   c. isn't

15. As a tourism specialist, you have to be _____ to convince people to come to your city.

        a. asked   b. able   c. against

16. "Here you go! This map will _____ you to where you want to go."

        a.show   b. point   c. guide

17. If you offer to show tourists where Simon Bolivar lived, you _____ be able to do so.

a. can   b. must   c. could

18. You look tired. You _____ slept last night.

a. must nothave   b. couldn't   c. should'vebeen

19. Take the form _____ the table.

a. of   b. off   c. on

20. You never understand how romantic Paris is _____ you see it with your own eyes.

a.since   b. when   c. until

E. WRITING (Points   /22)

Write about the topic below. Include an introduction, body and conclusion.
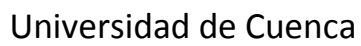
"Describe a good friend. Write where, when and how you met him/her and your favorite activities. (Min. 100 words)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

TOTAL   /80

Appendix 4: Example of Academic Reading Test

ACADEMIC READING PRETEST

NAME: _____   DATE: _____

Early stimulation promotes children's learning ability

What causes a child to be a "slow learner" – one who just doesn't learn like other children in the classroom?

DR. DOBSON: There are many hereditary, environmental, and physical factors that contribute to one's intellect, and it is difficult to isolate the particular influences. For many children who have difficulty in school, we will never know precisely why their ability to learn is limited. Let me tell you what is now known about intellectual development that may explain some – but not all – cases of learning deficits.

Accumulating evidence seems to indicate that some children who are slow learners and even those who have borderline retardation may not have received proper intellectual stimulation in their very early years. There appears to be a critical period during the first three to four years when the potential for intellectual growth must be seized. There are enzyme systems in the brain that must be activated during this brief window. If the opportunity is missed, the child may never reach his capacity.

Children who grow up in deprived circumstances are more likely to be slow learners. They may not have heard adult language regularly. They may not have been provided with interesting books and puzzles to stimulate their sensory apparatus. They may not have been taken to the zoo, the airport, or other exciting places. They may not have received daily training and guidance from adults. This lack of stimulation may inhibit the brain from developing properly.

The effect of early stimulation on living brains has been studied in several fascinating animal experiments. In one study, researchers divided littermate rats into two identical groups. The first was given maximum stimulation during the first few months of life. These rats were kept in well-lighted cages, surrounded by interesting paddle wheels and other toys. They were handled regularly and allowed to explore outside their cages. They were subjected to learning experiences and then rewarded for remembering.

The second group lived the opposite kind of existence. These rats crouched in dimly lit, drab, uninteresting cages. They were not handled or stimulated in any way, and were not permitted outside their cages. Both groups were fed identically.

At 105 days of age, the rats were sacrificed to permit examination of their neurological apparatus. The researchers were surprised to find that the high-stimulation rats had brains that differed in several important ways: (1) the cortex (the thinking part of the brain) was thicker and wider; (2) the blood supply was much more abundant; (3) the enzymes necessary for learning were more sophisticated. The researchers concluded that the stimulation experienced during the first group's early lives had resulted in more advanced and complex brains.

It is always risky to apply conclusions from animal research directly to humans, but the same kinds of changes probably occur in the brains of highly stimulated children.

By James Dobson

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE READING

    A. TRUE OR FALSE.
1. There is a single factor that affects intelligence.   T F
2. It is possible to know exactly the reason children´s ability to learn is limited.   T F
3. There are many cases of children´s leaning insufficiencies.   T F
4. Understanding intellectual growth during the first years is essential for physical development.   T F
5. Lack of brain stimulation does not affect learning performance.   T F
6. Animals have never been used in studies about the effect of early stimulation on brains.

T F

7. Slow learners always visited the zoo in their early years.   T   F

B. MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. **Lack of stimulation refers to:**
    a. Visits to the zoo
    b. Exposed to books
    c. absent of hearing adult language
    d. daily training

2. **At the beginning of the experiment the first group of rats were …**
    a. Killed
    b. Outside the cage
    c. Provided with toys
    d. Fed with cheese

3. **What must be activated in the brain during a sort period of time in childhood?**
    a. The intellect
    b. The enzyme systems
    c. Learning abilities
    d. Nervous system

4. **The first group of rats in the experiment were more motivated …**
    a. At 105 days of age
    b. In the cortex
    c. In the first few months of existence
    d. Outside the cage

5. **Low stimulated children …**
    a. read interesting books
    b. surely be slow learners
    c. have been at airports
    d. probably be slow learners

ANSWERS

1	2	3	4	5

C. SYNONYM MATCH

1. ISOLATE _____	a. UNCLEAR
2. DEFICIT _____	b. SEPARATE
3. BORDERLINE _____	c. REFINED
4. INHIBIT ____	d. INSUFFICIENCY
5. GROWTH ____	e. RATIONAL
6. SOPHISTICATED ____	f. RIGHT
7. ADVANCED ____	g. PROGRESSIVE
8. STIMULATION ____	h. DEVELOPMENT
9. PROPERLY ____	i. OBSTRUCT
10. INTELLECTUAL ____	j. MOTIVATION

D. SPELLING

1. the second group _____(elvdi) the opposite kind of existence

2. there are _____(nezmey) systems

3. physical _____ (afcrost) that contribute to one's intellect

4. why their ability to _____ (elanr) is limited

5. resulted in more advanced and _____ (opmxcle) brains.

## Appendix 5: Questionnaire about Attitude towards learning English

CUESTIONARIO SOBRE ACTITUDES HACIA EL IDIOMA INGLÉS

Complete marcando de esta manera ☑ el siguiente cuestionario escogiendo la mejor opción que describa su acuerdo o desacuerdo con respecto a su actitud hacia la lectura académica en inglés. Le tomará aproximadamente de 5 a 10 minutos.

Valores: MA= Muy de acuerdo, **A**= De acuerdo, **N**= Ni en acuerdo, ni en desacuerdo, **D**=En Desacuerdo, **MD**= Muy en desacuerdo.

1	Estudiar Inglés -es importante porque me hará más educado	1 MA	2 A	3 N	4 D	5 MD
2.	Conociendo el idioma inglés me ayudará con el estudio de otras asignaturas					
3.	Siento orgullo cuando estudio inglés					
4.	Me emociono cuando me comunico en inglés con otros					
5.	Me siento preocupado/a cuando hablo inglés					
6.	Estudiar inglés me ayuda a tener buenas relaciones con amigos					
7.	Me gusta opinar durante las lecciones de inglés					
8.	Adquiero más conocimiento y entiendo más cuando estudio inglés					
9.	Estudiaré más inglés en el futuro					
10.	No siento ansiedad cuando tengo que contestar una pregunta en mi clase de inglés					
11.	Es divertido estudiar otro idioma como el inglés					
12.	Puedo concentrarme cuando estudio inglés					
13.	Cuando escucho a un estudiante hablando bien en inglés, me gusta practicar con él o ella.					
14.	La curiosidad me hace estudiar bien el inglés					

Paúl Leoncio Bernal Arellano

15.	Tengo buenas emociones cuando estudio inglés					
16.	Prefiero estudiar en mi idioma antes que estudiar en otro idioma					
17.	Estudiar inglés me da más confianza para expresarme					
18.	Estudiar inglés me ayuda a mejorar mi personalidad					
19.	Pospongo mis tareas de inglés lo más posible					
20.	Estudiar inglés me ayuda a obtener nueva información que puedo asociar con mi conocimiento previo					
21.	No puedo resumir los puntos importantes de un contenido en inglés sin ayuda					
22.	Francamente estudio inglés solo para pasar los exámenes					
23.	Disfruto realizando actividades en inglés					
24.	No me gusta estudiar inglés					
25.	Me siento incomodo cuando tengo que hablar inglés frente a mis compañeros					
26.	No estoy relajado cuando tengo que hablar en la clase de inglés					
27.	Desearía hablar inglés fluidamente					
28.	Estoy interesando en hablar inglés					
29.	En mi opinión las personas que hablan más de un idioma están mas preparados					
30.	Estudiar inglés me ayuda a comunicarme de manera efectiva en inglés					
31.	No puedo aplicar el conocimiento del idioma inglés en la vida real					
32.	Estudiar inglés me hace sentir más confiado					
33.	Siendo honesto, tengo poco interés en mi clase de inglés					
35.	Desearía tener amigos nativo hablantes de inglés					
36.	Estudiar inglés me permite crear nuevos pensamientos					
37.	Cuando falto a una clase de inglés, nunca pregunto a mis compañeros acerca de tareas o sobre lo aprendido en clase					

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| 38.	No estoy satisfecho con mi rendimiento en inglés					
39.	En mi opinión, el idioma inglés es difícil y complicado de aprender					
40.	El idioma inglés tiene el contenido que cubre muchos campos del conocimiento					
41.	No me siento entusiasta para asistir a una clase de inglés					
42.	Conocer el idioma inglés es un objetivo en mi vida					
43.	Espero con deseo la clase de inglés					
44.	No presto ninguna atención cuando el profesor de inglés está explicando la clase					
45.	Puedo analizar el contenido de artículos en inglés.					

MUCHAS GRACIAS POR SU PARTICIPACIÓN!

Appendix 6: Questionnaire about Attitude towards academic reading in English

CUESTIONARIO SOBRE ACTITUDES HACIA LA LECTURA ACADÉMICA EN INGLÉS

Complete marcando de esta manera ☑ el siguiente cuestionario escogiendo la mejor opción que describa su acuerdo o desacuerdo con respecto a su actitud hacia la lectura académica en inglés. Le tomará aproximadamente de 5 a 10 minutos.

Valores: MA= Muy de acuerdo, **A**= De acuerdo, **N**= Ni en acuerdo, ni en desacuerdo, **D**=En Desacuerdo, **MD**= Muy en desacuerdo.

1) El inglés es una idioma importante en mis estudios universitarios.
   MA ☐   A ☐   N ☐   D ☐   MD ☐

2) Me gusta leer en inglés cuando los temas de lectura se relacionan con mi carrera.
   MA ☐   A ☐   N ☐   D ☐   MD ☐

3) Pienso que puedo aprender inglés en general leyendo más material relacionado a temas de mi carrera.
   MA ☐   A ☐   N ☐   D ☐   MD ☐

4) La lectura académica en inglés me ayuda a mejorar mis otras habilidades del lenguaje. (Comprensión auditiva, habla, gramática, vocabulario y escritura)
   MA ☐   A ☐   N ☐   D ☐   MD ☐

5) Mi actitud es positiva cuando hago ejercicios de lectura en inglés académico.
   MA ☐   A ☐   N ☐   D ☐   MD ☐

6) Me siento más confiado leyendo material en inglés relacionado a mi carrera.
   MA ☐   A ☐   N ☐   D ☐   MD ☐

7) La lectura académica en Inglés me ayuda a estar actualizado en relación a los últimos avances en mi carrera.
   MA ☐   A ☐   N ☐   D ☐   MD ☐

8) Mi actitud en general hacia el aprendizaje del Inglés cuando leo Inglés académico es positiva.

MA ☐   A ☐   N ☐   D ☐   MD ☐

9) Aprendo más de mi carrera cuando leo lecturas académicas.
MA ☐   A ☐   N ☐   D ☐   MD ☐

10) La introducción de lectura académica en nuestra escuela sería una buena decisión que podría cambiar la actitud en general de los estudiantes hacia al aprendizaje del inglés.
MA ☐   A ☐   N ☐   D ☐   MD ☐

MUCHAS GRACIAS POR SU PARTICIPACIÓN!

Appendix 7: Questionnaire about students' preference between academic and general

English reading

ACADEMIC READING APPLIED TO MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CUENCA TO ENHANCE READING PERFORMANCE AND POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH LEARNING

Dear Student: Your honest answer is really appreciated, since the information you provide here will help us for the improvement of the teaching and learning English at the University of Cuenca.

Choose the best option that applies to you.

1. I like learning English at the UC when the topics are related to my field of studies.

☐ strongly agree   ☐ agree   ☐ somewhat agree   ☐ disagree ☐ strongly disagree

2. English literature related to my career should be included in our study plan.

☐ strongly agree   ☐ agree   ☐ somewhat agree   ☐ disagree ☐ strongly disagree

3. I feel very motivated reading academic articles related to my career.

☐ strongly agree   ☐ agree   ☐ somewhat agree   ☐ disagree ☐ strongly disagree

4. I feel very motivated reading general English material.

☐ strongly agree   ☐ agree   ☐ somewhat agree   ☐ disagree ☐ strongly disagree

5. What would you like to read about?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____05/01/2016

Paúl Leoncio Bernal Arellano