

10. The pedagogical practices to develop reading comprehension component abilities in an english program for business purposes



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Resumen

Este proyecto de investigación involucró un estudio exploratorio de caso único que se centró en analizar las prácticas pedagógicas utilizadas para desarrollar las habilidades componentes de la comprensión lectora dentro del programa de lectura de los cursos de inglés para fines comerciales en la licenciatura en Comercio y Negocios Internacionales ofrecido en una universidad mexicana. Para obtener una descripción del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de las habilidades de comprensión lectora al leer en inglés, el estudio consideró las opiniones de tres instructores de inglés. A través de entrevistas individuales semiestructuradas y procedimientos convencionales de análisis de contenido, los datos revelaron que los instructores consideraban que la lectura en inglés era fundamental para el crecimiento académico y profesional de los alumnos. También se identificó que los instructores emplean prácticas de instrucción de comprensión lectora que benefician la comprensión lectora de textos en inglés de los estudiantes. Las áreas de mejora fueron identificadas y discutidas como las implicaciones del estudio.

Palabras clave: *habilidades componentes para la comprensión lectora, lectura en una segunda lengua o lengua extranjera, inglés de negocios, perspectivas del maestro.*

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Abstract

This research project involved an exploratory single case study that focused on analyzing the pedagogical practices used to used reading comprehension component abilities within the reading curriculum of the English for Business Purposes (EBP) courses in the B. S. in International Business and Commerce offered at a mexican university. To obtain a description of the teaching and learning process of reading comprehension abilities when reading in english, the study considered the views of three EBP instructors. Through semi-structured individual interviews and conventional content analysis procedures, data revealed that EBP instructors considered reading in english fundamental for learners' academic and professional growth. It was also identified that instructors employed reading comprehension instructional practices that benefit students' reading comprehension of texts in english. However, areas of improvement were identified and discussed as the implications of the study.

Keywords: *reading comprehension component abilities, reading in a second/foreign language, English for Business Purposes, teachers' perspectives.*

Résumé

Ce projet de recherche impliquait une étude de cas unique exploratoire axée sur l'analyse des pratiques pédagogiques utilisées pour utiliser les capacités de la composante de compréhension de la lecture dans le programme de lecture des cours d'anglais à des fins commerciales (EBP) du B.S. en affaires et commerce international offert dans une université mexicaine. Pour obtenir une description du processus d'enseignement et d'apprentissage des capacités de compréhension de lecture lors de la lecture en anglais, l'étude a examiné les points de vue de trois instructeurs EBP. Grâce à des entretiens individuels semi-structurés et à des procédures d'analyse de contenu conventionnelles, les données ont révélé que les instructeurs EBP considéraient la lecture en anglais comme fondamentale pour la croissance académique et professionnelle des apprenants. Il a éga-

lement été identifié que les instructeurs utilisaient des pratiques pédagogiques de compréhension en lecture qui profitent à la compréhension en lecture des élèves de textes en anglais. Cependant, des domaines d'amélioration ont été identifiés et discutés comme les implications de l'étude.

Mots-clés : *capacités de compréhension de la lecture, lecture dans une langue seconde/étrangère, anglais à des fins commerciales, perspectives des enseignants.*

Introduction

A contemporary society is more likely to be successful when its members are literate. While reading skills may not secure success for individuals, success is less likely to be achieved when individuals are not good readers (Grabe, 2009). Consequently, educational systems are confronted with the challenging responsibility of developing effective reading programs at tertiary levels. Most educational programs are expected to promote the development of language abilities in students' first language (L1) and in english as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL). Mexico is not the exception as english proficiency is considered a fundamental asset for upward economic mobility. Consequently, english language programs offered by mexican higher education institutions aim at creating opportunities for their students to develop the necessary skills that guarantee their success. Among these skills, higher education students should be able to effectively comprehend informational texts in spanish and english.

Typically, higher education institutions in Mexico offer EFL or English for General Purposes (EGP) courses for their student-population. However, as Davies (2008) emphasizes, following an ESP model may be more applicable because the goal of english language programs in higher education institutions is to provide their students with opportunities to access discipline-specific information in english and perform effectively in real-world professional situations in english. Mexican universities may focus their resources (e.g., time, financial, human) in shifting from EGP to ESP courses to fulfill their learners' english language needs according to their professional field. An example of this is the EBP program considered in this study.

ESP courses consider reading an important language skill. Hirvela (2013) emphasizes that “reading is at the heart of much of what ESP students do, both in acquiring knowledge of the target community discourse and in conjunction with the use of another skill” (p. 77). That is, reading in English is crucial for ESP learners to be able to tackle informational discipline-specific texts and use information within those texts in other academic tasks. Additionally, by providing ESP learners with opportunities that promote reading development, their learning and language skills are strengthened which result in academic and professional success. For instance, Eccius-Wellman and Santana (2020) explored the variables that could anticipate a successful development of English. A learning background questionnaire and an adaptive placement test to identify language proficiency level was answered by 1188 students from four Mexican universities. Multiple regression identified variables that could anticipate the participants’ proficiency in English. For example, reading was found to be an essential predictor of proficiency. The researchers concluded that irrespective of the students attending public or private high schools, they may develop the same proficiency level if provided with multiple opportunities to read texts in English. Therefore, promoting Mexican college students’ reading abilities in English is critical for English learning.

Considering the role of reading in academic settings, the instructional approaches implemented to develop reading abilities play a central role as well. According to Grabe (2009), reading abilities should be directly taught to promote their growth and improvement. However, some reading comprehension instructional approaches are based on traditional notions. Typically, ESP learners read texts and perform traditional activities which lead to frustration and discouragement. For example, learners read highly challenging texts that include new vocabulary items, complex grammatical features, and lack of transparency in the organization of information (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). While reading instructional time is mostly devoted to testing main ideas after reading a text rather than helping learners understand (Anderson, 2014), time could be used on activating students’ background knowledge as a strategy that enhances comprehension by allowing students to make connections with the new material and enhance comprehension.

Moreover, it appears that the instructional approaches to develop english language proficiency and reading skills in mexican academic contexts favor more traditional teaching practices, such as translating texts or finding new words and their meaning. In terms of language skills development, Eccius-Wellman and Santana (2020) highlight that english is predominantly taught by utilizing communicative instructional practices and lessons are more teacher-centered and textbook-driven. Moreover, it seems that business english courses lack a precise approach for students to develop a solid approach to tackle the texts they are required to read. For example, despite not describing a clear and systematic approach to develop reading skills in the EBP classroom, Donna (2000) explains a potential approach to help business students read materials such as the news. Since time in the business field is limited, the author proposes an approach to reading the news in english in which learners skim and scan within a time limit (e.g., 3 minutes). Next, students summarize the text as much as possible, followed by answering a set of simple and improvised comprehension questions for students to answer rapidly. Teachers may also ask vocabulary questions or allow students to read the text once more. Although these instructional practices may be valid in specific teaching and learning situations, they may not lead ESP learners into becoming “the readers that they need to be to succeed in academic contexts” (Grabe & Stoller, 2011, p. 204).

Engaging ESP learners in reading development lessons such as those described above may be insufficient, as Hedgcock and Ferris (2018) highlight, “Reading, learning to read, and teaching reading, are neither easy nor effortless” (p. 3). Therefore, instructors should be knowledgeable about the process of reading in a foreign language, as well as the array of effective evidence-based instructional practices which in turn lead learners to employ reading comprehension component abilities while reading. For this reason, the purpose of the study was to understand how reading comprehension component abilities were developed by considering the views and pedagogical practices of three EBP instructors. The three participants were engaged in individual semi-structured interviews to determine the reading instructional practices they employed and whether reading in english was viewed as an important element for their learners academic and professional growth. A case study research design was followed to gather and analyze qualitative data.

The study focused on addressing the following research questions:

1. How do EBP instructors identify the development of reading comprehension component abilities?
2. How do EBP instructors promote reading comprehension component abilities through their instructional practices frequently and directly?
3. How familiar are EBP instructors with effective reading comprehension instructional practices?
4. What challenges do EBP face when developing reading comprehension component abilities among their learners?

Conceptual framework

Reading comprehension

Grabe (2009) explains that reading “can simply be defined as a complex ability to extract, or build, meaning from a context” (p. 8). The author further indicates that to strengthen the definition of reading, it is essential to recognize the component abilities that support the reading comprehension process. Specifically, reading comprehension is accomplished by component abilities such as word recognition, vocabulary knowledge, sentence processing, strategy combinations, discourse awareness, use of background knowledge, comprehension monitoring, and reading fluency over an extended period. For reading comprehension to materialize, these component abilities jointly operate in a network of skills and processes. Consequently, to promote each of these abilities, Grabe (2009) encourages language instructors to implement ten evidence-based instructional practices which he describes as “effective reading-instruction practices” (p. 46). That is, by setting up reading instruction based on these pedagogical practices, learners will inherently develop the key component abilities to become fluent and effective readers. To achieve this, ESL/EFL programs could embed each of the practices in their established reading instruction or identify specific practices as the central elements of an entire language

program (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). A summary of each instructional practice is provided in the following section.

Grabe's set of 10 instructional implications for L2 reading comprehension

Grabe (2009) highlights the relevance of ten evidenced-based reading comprehension instructional practices to support the development of ESL/EFL learners. Specifically, ESL/EFL reading instruction should:

Ensuring word recognition

A central component of fluent reading comprehension is fast and automatic word recognition (Anderson, 2014; Grabe & Stoller, 2011). When readers lack word recognition skills, their reading comprehension process slows down or is hampered (Grabe, 2009). Therefore, language instructors are encouraged to facilitate activities in which decoding skills are practiced. Reading instruction should incorporate activities in which the smallest and the largest units of language (e.g., letter-sound correspondences, syllables, words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, an entire text) are practiced, resulting in equipped ESL/EFL readers with tools to “crack the code and read words that are decodable” (Anderson, 2014, p. 173). Some examples of word recognition tasks are word and phrase-recognition exercises, timed semantic connection exercises, lexical access fluency exercises, and variations of these tasks (Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Grabe & Stoller, 2018).

Emphasizing vocabulary learning

Anderson (2014) affirms that research in reading comprehension has systematically revealed that “vocabulary knowledge is one of the best predictors of readers’ comprehension” (p. 177). That is, for students to become proficient readers, they need extensive vocabulary. ESL/EFL instructors can foster

a learning environment that provides numerous exposures and opportunities to interact with useful lexical items. According to Grabe and Stoller, (2011), vocabulary instruction can be strengthened by, a) creating print-rich environments, b) carefully choosing lexical items for direct instruction, c) recycling target words deliberately and frequently in meaningful activities (Anderson, 2014), and d) engaging learners in vocabulary practice by employing and recycling new words. Specifically, Nation (2001) proposes four guidelines to be integrated into language learning: a) judiciously controlling the vocabulary included in written texts; b) discussing unfamiliar vocabulary as it naturally surfaces; c) teaching vocabulary in tandem with other language activities; and d) teaching about vocabulary (e.g., spelling rules, word structure, mnemonic techniques, paraphrasing activities, puzzles). The author also proposes avoiding teaching lists of isolated words as it does not contribute to learners' vocabulary development, nor it assists them when dealing with unknown words. Eventually, the combination of these elements will help students recognize new words, motivate them to employ those new words, and incorporate them into their word knowledge.

Furthermore, the following are evidence-based strategies to promote the development of vocabulary growth: a) concept-definition maps (Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Grabe & Stoller, 2018); b) flashcards for vocabulary learning vocabulary (Anderson, 2014; Nation, 2001; Grabe et al., 2011); c) vocabulary improvement activities using existing word lists (e.g., M. West's General Service List, Coxhead's Academic Word List) (Anderson, 2014; Nation, 2001), d) identification of word morphological features activities using most frequent prefixed and suffixed word list (White et al., 1989), and Shaywitz's prefix list (Anderson, 2014), e) corpus tools and resources such as the websites www.lextutor.ca (Cobb, s. f.) and <https://www.wordandphrase.info/> (Davies, 2008); and f) activities for learners to become word collectors (Grabe et al., 2011).

Activating background knowledge in appropriate ways

Grabe (2009) specifies that background knowledge is a key element for learners to build an interpretation of a text and achieve comprehension.

Learners with topical and/or cultural prior knowledge are more likely to make connections between their knowledge bases and the information in a text. To support this process pre- and during-reading activities, such as the following, may be useful: a) employ reading guides and text preview tasks; b) discuss important ideas help learners associate information; c) utilize semantic mapping; and d) elicit learners' beliefs about the text's topic and identify whether these can be confirmed by the information in the text.

Ensuring effective language knowledge and general comprehension skills

According to Grabe and Stoller (2018), for comprehension to happen, language learners should be reasonably familiar with the grammar of the target language as well as be able to identify main ideas in a text. Although reading lessons are not to concentrate on the development of grammar knowledge, Grabe (2009) maintains that learners' grammatical awareness and syntactic processing (Grabe, 2009) is key for their development of reading comprehension abilities. Hedgcock and Ferris (2018) suggest that "a during-reading or after-reading analysis of how key grammatical constructions are used in authentic contexts can facilitate second language development" (pp. 195-196). For instance, learners may be engaged in a verb analysis task in which they identify verb tenses and explain where and why each tense is used. For this activity to be helpful, it is vital that instructors analyze texts beforehand as its purpose is to ease its comprehension.

Moreover, attention should be given to teaching main idea comprehension, rather than testing it (Grabe, 2009; Grabe & Stoller, 2018). Main idea comprehension tasks should engage learners in conversations (e.g., small groups) in which they, first, explore the text and identify main ideas. Then, with the instructor's help, learners identify connections between sections of the text and its main ideas. After that, learners indicate where main ideas are located and provide evidence that supports their identification (e.g., using why questions). Next, instructors may ask learners how they identified main ideas and how it helped them comprehend the text. Finally, learners

may be involved in a summarizing task by using the main ideas identified in the discussion.

Teaching text structure and discourse organization

ESL/EFL reading lessons should engage learners in becoming aware of how information is organized in expository texts. As learners read, discourse structure awareness allows them to rely on organizational patterns and discourse markers to comprehend the text effectively. Moreover, discourse structure awareness instruction can be offered to learners *through* pre-, during-, and/or post-reading tasks (Grabe & Stoller, 2018). A pre-reading task may engage learners in identifying a text's headings and subheadings, circling discourse markers, and recognizing the purpose (e.g., compare-contrast) of each paragraph in the text. Learners could also fill in an outline of the text, identify and highlight lexical transition words used in each organizational pattern (e.g., problem solution). A post-reading activity could engage learners in discussions about where and how they found organizational patterns in a text. Finally, an effective activity that promotes discourse structure awareness and recall of information is the employment of discourse-specific graphic organizers (DSGOs) (Jiang, 2012). DSGOs are carefully designed to display the organizational patterns used to convey information in a text. The activity may be used before, during, or after reading by to fill out the corresponding graphic organizer, to then discuss how and why they organized the information in their DSGOs and how the information in the text was signaled.

Promoting strategic reading rather than teaching individual strategies

According to Grabe (2009) reading instructional practices that help students build their own repertoires of reading strategies are more effective than activities where isolated strategies are practiced. Moreover, to help

students engage in reading texts strategically, instruction usually includes teacher modeling, teacher scaffolding, and moving to gradual application of strategies when reading. In a nutshell, the strategies employed by successful readers according to Grabe and Stoller (2018) include: a) planning goals before reading, b) forming predictions before reading, c) reading selectively according to goals, d) rereading as appropriate, e) monitoring reading continuously, f) identifying important information, g) filling in gaps through inferences and prior knowledge, h) guessing unknown words to continue reading, i) using discourse-structure information to guide understanding, j) integrating ideas from different parts of the text, k) building interpretations while reading, l) summarizing main ideas, m) attempting to resolve difficulties, and n) reflecting on the information in the text. When students face challenging texts, they should resolve comprehension problems by applying a subset of strategies without much conscious thought. However, if these strategies fail, to support comprehension learners may change their approach to reading the text by employing a conscious selection of strategies. At this point, strategic readers may reread the text, reconsider initial predictions, reexamine discourse markers and try to unravel complex phrases, among other fix-up strategies.

Building reading fluency rate

According to Grabe (2009) any ESL/EFL reading program should commit time and effort to develop reading fluency. Reading fluency consists of accurate and automatic word recognition, fast processing of information across texts, appropriate employment of syntactic information, and sustained reading for a considerable amount of time. Learners should be introduced to the benefits of engaging in fluency, rate, and recognition, for them to recognize the relevance of reading at a fast rate and comprehend information successfully. The tasks that can be used to develop reading fluency involve a) purposeful reading, b) repeated reading, c) oral-paired reading, and d) reading aloud, (Grabe, 2009). Learners can also engage in reading or rereading a passage under time constraints so that every time they reread the passage, they do it in less time.

Promoting extensive reading

Grabe (2009) and Hedgcock and Ferris (2018) concur that there is substantial evidence to support the inclusion of extensive reading (ER) to enhance reading comprehension abilities of ESL/EFL learners. Specifically, Grabe (2009) explains that for reading curricula that seek to develop advanced reading proficiency, engaging learners in reading a lot is not an option. That is, for students to become good readers they should be engaged in reading activities constantly. Moreover, based on L1 and L2 reading research, Hedgcock and Ferris (2018) explain the gains ESL/EFL learners attain when involved in ER. For example, ER promotes automaticity, increases background knowledge, supports vocabulary and grammar knowledge, boosts the productive skills (speaking and writing), and reinforces learners' confidence and motivation to read and learn the target language. Specifically, Grabe (2009) provides a set of guidelines to implement ER:

1. Make reading materials accessible, appealing, and interesting for the learners;
2. Create multiple opportunities for free reading in the classroom;
3. Encourage learners to read a lot;
4. Assemble a classroom library;
5. Have conversations with learners about what they like to read and why;
6. Read to students about topics they appreciate;
7. Raise learners' curiosity about particular topics;
8. Permit learners to read all types of materials;
9. Have conversations with learners about what you (the instructor) are reading and why you are interested in that topic; and
10. Motivate learners to suggest reading materials.

Developing intrinsic motivation for student learning

ESL/EFL learners know that learning to read in another language is a demanding process. Therefore, the reading curriculum and instructors

should incorporate ways to offer motivational support for them to become confident when reading. Grabe (2009) suggests asking learners to share their reading and general interests; sharing and explaining your (as the instructor) reading and general interests; building a sense of community and group cohesiveness in the classroom; encouraging learners to help each other; allowing learners to experience success when working on reading tasks; raising curiosity about the topic of more complex passages; challenging learners in line with their reading abilities; considering learners as active participants; making a connection between curriculum material and learners' background language, experiences, and academic interests; and helping learners to increase their knowledge about reading topics to value the gains they attained through reading.

Planning a coherent curriculum for student learning

For any academic reading program to be effective, it should incorporate reading comprehension pedagogical practices previously described. Grabe (2009) explains that a cohesive and effective reading curriculum would be built upon a balance between language development and content (discipline specific material) learning. This balance becomes an ideal academic situation for instruction and the employment of reading comprehension component abilities because it creates opportunities to:

- a. engage learners in ER programs;
- b. provide authentic purposes for reading;
- c. increase motivation;
- d. encourage learners to employ reading strategies to tackle complex texts;
- e. set up opportunities for learners to work collaboratively in projects;
- f. require learners to reread passages and recycle reading strategies; and
- g) provide a rationale to interpret, evaluate, and integrate information from various texts.

Grabe and Stoller (2018) indicate that the ten instructional practices can serve as “starting points” (p. 131) in conversations that focus on enhancing ESL/EFL reading comprehension instruction. The key is to pay attention to the reading comprehension component abilities that would best support ESL/EFL learners’ reading development for them to eventually become fluent and efficient readers (Grabe and Stoller, 2018, p. 43). Regardless of the learners’ English language proficiency level, the flexibility and versatility of these evidenced-based instructional practices allow instructors to implement them accordingly and to enhance reading comprehension development in their classrooms.

Research design and method

The goal was to gather data to gain deep insight as to *how* reading comprehension abilities were developed and to understand the case itself rather than generalize it to a greater population; therefore, a single case study model (Yin, 2018) was followed. The study worked toward collecting and analyzing qualitative data generated from semi-structured interviews with three EBP instructors.

Context of the study

This study focused on the development of reading comprehension abilities in the B.S. in International Business and Commerce offered at Universidad de Sonora, Campus Hermosillo. This program has been offered since 2004.

Characteristics of the business for english purposes courses

Business majors take six mandatory EBP courses which they begin in the second year of the program. Depending on their english language proficiency, they must take four english for general purposes (EGP) courses offered

by the Department of Foreign Languages at the same university, as a graduation requirement. Students are expected to take the EGP course any time before fulfilling all their credits. Particularly, Business majors who possess a beginner language proficiency level, (e.g., A1 or A2 level according to the Common European Framework of References), are required to take those extra courses to reinforce their language skills. Another important characteristic is that the program follows a mandated textbook series.

Participants

The study included a purposive sample which Miles et al. (2018) describe as “people, nested in their context and studied in depth” (p. 31). The participants were individuals immersed in the case’s peculiar context who possessed unique and valuable knowledge related to the program. Additionally, the participants were considered a convenience sample as they were chosen based on their “ease of accessibility” (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2012, p. 81).

The participants were two female and one male instructors whose ages ranged from 36 to 46 years old. The three instructors earned a BA in ELT and a master’s degree in Education. Additionally, the instructors’ years of experience in teaching English ranged from 5 to 13 years. They had earned key certifications, for example, Cambridge English Certificate of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) International. The three instructors were Mexican, and Spanish was their first language. Specifically, during the Fall 2020 semester, when the data was collected, the three EBP instructors were teaching various EBP courses procedure.

Participant recruitment process

Because the data collection procedure took place during the Fall of 2020 when lockdown was mandated due to the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, participants were not recruited in person or on site. Interactions with participants were via email, WhatsApp, and/or videoconferencing tools such as Zoom.

Data collection method

Individual semi-structured interviews with the EBP instructors were conducted from mid-november to the beginning of december 2020. Before each interview took place, the participant-instructors were asked to sign their informed consent and email it. Interviews were performed in english language, via Zoom which allowed the researcher to record each interview and generate their corresponding transcripts. After each interview, the transcripts generated by Zoom were cleaned to confirm their accuracy.

Instrumentation

The interviews aimed at obtaining rich descriptions related to the EBP instructors' perspectives related to their reading comprehension pedagogical practices. For this purpose, the EBP Instructor Interview Protocol (see Appendix A) was followed. The first section of the protocol focuses on greeting the interviewee and showing appreciation for their valuable participation and signing the corresponding informed consent forms. Section two provides the purpose of the study and the twelve open-ended questions that concentrate on promoting the development of reading comprehension in english. Particularly, the first half of the questions focused on the students whereas the other half addressed the instructors. Importantly, the twelve questions were based upon the ten evidence based instructional practices recommended by Grabe (2009) which were previously discussed.

Data analysis process

A conventional content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was followed to examine the data gathered through the semi-structured interviews. After ensuring accuracy of each interview transcript, they were printed and read multiple times to allow the most salient categories emerge from the data. First, the data were carefully read and reread to identify what they portrayed. Secondly, each set of data was read again to gain an

in-depth insight about the categories they illustrated and based on those categories, labels for potential codes were created. Segmentation, re-categorization, and relabeling the data were performed various times to identify the most prominent themes in the data to address the research questions.

Findings

RQ1. How do EBP instructors identify the development of reading comprehension component abilities?

The EBP instructors' views about the importance of developing reading comprehension in English were considered to answer this overarching research question. In a nutshell, the instructors seemed to concur in reading in English being important for a positive development of English. Additionally, they mentioned that by reading, students develop other areas of the language such as general and specialized vocabulary as well as speaking. For example, Instructor 1 explained: "Reading is one of the skills that have to be developed; I mostly tell them that reading is important; besides comprehension and for vocabulary development" (personal communication, 2021).

Furthermore, Instructor 2 said: "I think it is part of the integrated activities...and it also makes it more interesting because the consolidation of a reading can be speaking and then it takes you to vocabulary for business" (personal communication, 2021).

According to Instructor 3: "this is really important because this is one of the topics ... it's the hardest to teach, reading they do need it a lot" (personal communication, 2021)

RQ1.1. How do EBP instructors promote the reading comprehension component abilities through their instructional practices frequently and directly?

To answer this question, the participants were encouraged to describe the pedagogical approach, activities, and elements included their reading comprehension lessons. Although the instructors explained that they used a

variety of teaching strategies and carried out activities, it seemed they lacked an approach. For instance, Instructor 1 explained:

“I don’t have an approach per se...we don’t really work based on a plan or like a whole class only for reading ...my focus is on before questions, vocabulary development, graphic organizers, identify main and secondary ideas, and summaries...also like what you think the writer meant, like inferences.” (personal communication, 2021)

Specifically, Instructor 2 said:

“using tools like interactive maps and...questions they have to answer by skimming and scanning...and after they read and post in the discussion forum, we have a whole class discussion about what they read... I encourage them to just interpret the idea, getting the whole idea, so I ask them to focus on the general idea.” (personal communication, 2021)

Similarly, Instructor 3 mentioned:

“I use two types of activities to work with reading, every textbook has 6 units, so they have one reading per unit in the student’s book, and one in the workbook... we read out loud, after that we underline the words that we didn’t understand, we explain them, then we answer comprehension questions, or we read quietly, individually, and those are the two types that I use.” (personal communication, 2021)

Additionally, to address this question, the three EBP instructors were asked about the frequency in which they carried out reading lessons. Based on their answers, it was revealed that reading lessons were not offered frequently. To illustrate, while Instructor 1 responded, “once a month,” Instructors 2 and 3 indicated, “once a week.” Particularly, Instructor 2 explained, “it’s per unit, I’ll say there are four per month plus the one that we use in the virtual platform or extra materials related to the topics.” (personal communication, 2021)

Furthermore, to complement the participants' answers to the previous questions, they were asked to describe the types of texts in English they incorporate in reading lessons. Interestingly, the EBP instructors mentioned that they made an effort to utilize authentic reading materials even though they reported to use reading lessons included in the mandated textbook. They also gave examples of the reading materials that students would read in their classroom. For example, to this question, Instructor 1 answered:

“the reading passages in the textbook and also several passages from the *International Business* textbook that the professor suggested, most of the texts they're exposed to are controlled and for educational purposes, but what I do...I try to use more authentic materials, for example, biographies or materials on, not any website.” (personal communication, 2021)

Likewise, Instructor 2 explained: “I provide them with extra materials, the types of readings they are given are articles, business articles ... like authentic materials that are updated.” (personal communication, 2021)

According to Instructor 3: “letters; they first have to read letters... case studies and the readings on business scenarios, and the readings are quite interesting because they talk about market research or business development.” (personal communication, 2021).

RQ1.2. How familiar are EBP instructors with effective instructional practices?

The participants were asked a set of questions that would yield data to identify the type of reading instructional practices they utilized in their classrooms and perceived effective. One of the questions focused on the reading activities they regularly carried out during the three stages of a reading lesson (e.g., pre, during, post reading). Based on the data, only one participant explained that they involved their learners in a pre-reading activity. Specifically, Instructor 3 mentioned that in terms of pre-reading activities, “when they arrive, when I am getting ready to start the lesson, they tell me what the news was [from the BBC, CNN websites] about.” (personal communication, 2021)

Regarding during-reading activities, reading aloud was identified as a common practice. For example, Instructor 1 said, “I asked them to read out loud voluntarily in class.” (personal communication, 2021) Similarly, Instructor 3 explained, (personal communication, 2021) “read out loud, but I always do it voluntarily, I ask them to read only until the first period (in the text), it’s really short, but for them to lose fear of reading out loud in another language.” (personal communication, 2021)

Carrying out a discussion among the students was reported to be the most common post-reading activity. Particularly, Instructor 1 described: “most of them turn into speaking, they are required to take notes or answer questions, we discuss or we debate, we share them, most of the time are speaking.” (personal communication, 2021)

Likewise, Instructor 2 briefly said, “after we did the reading and reading comprehension questions, it becomes a speaking class.” (personal communication, 2021)

During the semi-structured interviews, the participants were asked what they needed to be strong and effective reading instructors. The purpose of this question was to determine whether they needed more information and/or tutoring to become familiar with effective instructional practices for reading lessons. One of the concerns expressed by Instructors 1 and 2 was choosing suitable materials that promote reading comprehension abilities to accommodate their learners’ needs and interests. For example, Instructor 1 stated, “I’ve tried to look for books on reading, I have one that has examples, so I adapt them and use them with my students, I also look for different activities online, I try to adapt them to use them.” (personal communication, 2021)

Similarly, Instructor 2 reflected, “choosing the right, the appropriate material, the length, the level, vocabulary that is not too easy or too difficult, but somehow challenging.” (personal communication, 2021)

Another salient pattern in the data was their concern about having a repertoire of teaching strategies to become strong and effective reading teachers. Instructor 2 briefly said, “I think getting strategies and breaking the barrier that reading is boring.” (personal communication) According to Instructor 3, “different strategies to work because honestly, I work with

the same ones that have resulted effective, so different ways to approach to reading.” (personal communication, 2021)

Specifically, Instructor 3 explained, “for me it would be awesome to have strategies for working with big classes. That is a big necessity because classes are quite big.” (personal communication, 2021)

Instructors 1 and 3 added that they needed strategies to identify whether learners were understanding the reading materials. Instructor 1 explained: “reading comprehension takes more time, you can read something and not understand it, just because you read it and you answer the questions or complete an activity, it doesn’t mean you understand the whole messages, “I can read it, but am I really understanding everything?” so it is a process that takes time.” (personal communication, 2021)

Likewise, Instructor 3 reflected: “strategies to improve reading, well not improve because there is a difference between knowing to read and understanding the reading, and the students know how to read, but what I’m struggling with is the understanding...it really takes you longer to detect the students that aren’t getting it because they are too many.” (personal communication, 2021)

Interestingly, Instructor 1 made a case about how useful and beneficial it would be for them to have access to multiple reading resources with their corresponding structured lesson plans and the allocated time for each section of the reading lessons. Specifically, Instructor 1 suggested: “I believe that I need to have the resources and planning that goes with the steps that I am going to follow, how to structure it in time.” (personal communication, 2021)

RQ1.3. What challenges do EBP instructors face when developing reading comprehension component abilities among their students?

This question focused on the difficulties encountered by the three EBP instructors, and from their perspective, the difficulties their learners faced. When they were asked about the challenges their learners encountered during reading comprehension lessons, they slightly disagree about their learners’ view of reading in English. On the one hand, Instructor 3 was

positive about their learners' perspective of being able to read and comprehend text in English. Instructor 3 explained,

“they do ... they actually say it, “Teacher you should include more readings” or “Teacher you should give us more readings” ... they want something specific for English, for learning English, they do want to and they ask for it... they realize the necessity of English in business, the necessity of reading and writing in business.” (personal communication, 2021)

On the other hand, Instructors 1 and 2 were doubtful as to whether their students considered reading and comprehending text in English important. For example, Instructor 1 stated: “I don't think they consider it something that's a requirement, or really important for their academic growth.” (personal communication, 2021)

Similarly, Instructor 2 stated: “I think they aren't aware, some of them aren't aware ... about the importance of reading and they are more concerned about speaking ... they aren't used to read in Spanish.” (personal communication, 2021)

Another potential challenge was related to the students' lack of reading comprehension abilities to tackle texts. In other words, each instructor provided examples of reading comprehension abilities that their learners seemed to ignore. For example, Instructor 1 described: “I ask them to read out loud and they cannot pronounce, when they see the printed or written form of the language, they don't really grasp the whole meaning.” (personal communication, 2021)

Besides not being able to follow sound-letter correspondences, it seemed that learners were not able to infer or connect prior knowledge with new information, as well as utilize context to guess the meaning of new words in the texts they read in English. For example, Instructor 2 added:

“be able to give their points of view about what they have read, interpreting what they have read, some of them are used to answer with short answers, but not to express fully, also, getting the meaning from context because they don't do it.” (personal communication, 2021)

Similarly, Instructor 3 described the same issue and added a problem with new vocabulary by saying:

“When they have to infer... that’s when I see that they struggle, when a question requires them to infer information or guess the meaning from context...I would also say that new vocabulary, students hit a wall when there’s new vocabulary and they don’t understand... waste a lot of time looking for the meaning of the words without continuing with the text. Students get stressed with one word they don’t understand.” (personal communication, 2021)

The mandated textbook series was another difficulty reported by the instructors. While Instructor 1 stated “the topics of the textbook are outdated”, Instructor 2 explained: “I still don’t understand why we’re using the same book ... I use it because that is the one they told me to use, but in terms of updated, it shows something about 1980.” (personal communication, 2021)

Briefly, Instructor 3 mentioned that “the book that we have been using is dated.” (personal communication, 2021)

Having classrooms with students who have different language proficiency levels was highlighted as a significant challenge. In other words, the difference among their learners’ proficiency level was considered an aspect that impacted the development of reading comprehension abilities. For example, Instructor 2 described, “with lower levels, they cannot work with some materials...they won’t be able to understand.” (personal communication, 2021)

Along with this issue, the difficulty to identify learners’ needs in their large groups was emphasized by the instructors. To describe this situation, Instructor 2 explained: “most of the time they are 40 students ... in terms of getting to know each of them and their needs, it’s something impossible.” (personal communication, 2021)

Likewise, Instructor 3 stated: “one of the hardest parts is because the classes are numerous ... it’s takes longer to detect the students that are only looking at the book...who is actually understanding the reading ...that’s the biggest problem I have.” (personal communication, 2021)

Interestingly, the participants differed in terms of learner motivation to read. Instructor 1 explained,

“it will be motivation, when someone is motivated to do something even though you find challenges or barriers, you try to overcome them because that drive, most of the students tell me, “I don’t read”, or they ignore reading assignments and just continue.” (personal communication, 2021)

Conversely, Instructors’ 2 and 3 perspectives in terms of motivation were more optimistic. For example, Instructor 2 mentioned:

“I’ll say that it is good, they are not like, so happy but reading, unless it is something controversial or something out of the ordinary, they love it, but the general attitude and motivation is kind of positive; they work, but if there’s something with a plus, they enjoy it more.” (personal communication, 2021)

Similarly, Instructor 3 explained: “I have to say that it isn’t a bad scenario that I have; it isn’t that they are or aren’t motivated, it’s part of their responsibilities so they do it because they have to and they don’t complain.” (personal communication, 2021)

Discussion of the findings

This section describes the overarching themes identified by data analysis procedure.

Theme 1: the importance of reading in english for business majors’ academic and Professional Growth

Reading in english has a significant role in higher education settings such as ESP programs, as it heightens language proficiency and inherently supports student academic and professional growth. In this study, the three EBP instructors shared compelling evidence that supports the importance of promoting reading in english. For instance, Instructor 1 suggested,

“Reading is one of the skills that we have to develop... I mostly tell them that reading is important...I ask them:

What do you want to do after you graduate? And they usually respond, *I want to study a master's degree*, so I explain that most of the things they are going to read are in English, especially if they are in international business.” (personal communication, 2021)

Likewise, Instructor 3 indicated: “this is really important because this is one of the topics that every teacher needs; it's the hardest to teach, reading... they [students] need it a lot.” (personal communication, 2021)

Later, when asked about the challenges that they face when involving their students in reading comprehension lessons, they expressed concerns about their students' view of reading in English. Specifically, they were asked whether their learners considered reading in English a fundamental element to be a successful student and professional. Instructor 1 emphasized: “I don't think they consider it something that's a requirement, or really important for their academic growth, it's like they aren't reading in English or Spanish.” (personal communication, 2021)

Instructor 2 explained: “I think they aren't aware... about the importance of reading and they are more concerned about speaking.” (personal communication, 2021)

Interestingly, Instructor 3 emphasized: “they do... they actually say it: *Teacher you should include or give us more readings*. (personal communication, 2021).

Understanding the different perspectives teachers and students had in terms of considering reading comprehension in English essential for academic and professional growth was key for this study. It might be that by engaging students in reading lessons more frequently and talking to them about the benefits of reading and comprehending text in English benefits their overall learning, student motivation could be positively impacted.

Theme II: reading comprehension instructional practices

The instructors were asked about their instructional reading comprehension approach and any teaching strategies or activities they used to develop reading comprehension component abilities. It seems that the instructors deliver reading comprehension lessons by mainly carrying out the reading

lesson included in each unit of the mandated textbooks. One of the instructors considered that the best approach to follow during reading comprehension lessons was a learner-centered environment in which students work collaboratively to help each other. Furthermore, in terms of the teaching strategies or activities implemented in the reading lessons, the instructors indicated that they usually asked their students to work in pairs or small groups, answer pre-reading questions to activate their prior knowledge, read aloud or individually, analyze and study new vocabulary, use graphic organizers, summarize, skim and scan texts to answer comprehension questions, focus on the general idea of texts, and answer post-reading comprehension question by discussing them as a whole class. Understanding the pedagogical approach and the specific learning experiences offered by the instructors informed this study in terms of recognizing what the instructors were already doing to develop reading comprehension component abilities.

Equally important, evidence related to the development of reading comprehension strategies also informed the purpose of this study. Teaching students a variety of reading comprehension strategies and how to combine them is another crucial reading comprehension component ability that assists readers to handle a variety of texts (Grabe & Stoller, 2018). Various reading comprehension strategies were addressed by the instructors. They highlighted that they encouraged their students to interpret the information while they read to obtain a better understanding of the texts. This was also the case with practicing how to scan texts as the instructors agreed that they advise their students to identify key information, main ideas, and secondary ideas to answer post-reading comprehension questions.

Theme III: Unanticipated Finding Related to English Language Proficiency Levels and Large Classrooms

Although this theme is not part of Grabe's evidence-based instructional practices for the reading comprehension classroom, the analysis of the data featured it as a prominent theme. Despite taking a placement english language test as part of the admissions process, the results that aspiring students obtain are not considered for placing them in EBP courses that align to their language development needs. According to the Business major's program

of study, students take six mandatory EBP courses irrespective of their actual proficiency level which results in heterogeneous classrooms.

This poses a challenge to the EBP instructors, specifically to those teaching Business English (BE) I and II, as they need to identify their students' proficiency levels once they start the course to meet all their needs during the semester. Proficiency levels may range from students who are bilingual or whose first language is English, to students who have not taken an English language course yet. In this matter, the EBP instructors indicated that having students with different language proficiency levels in the same classroom impacts their lesson planning decisions, and that they cannot use the same reading materials with all their students. This situation forces instructors to design various reading comprehension activities to accommodate their learners' proficiency level. Notably, this situation requires the instructors to invest more time in planning reading comprehension lessons.

Similarly, the instructors reported that besides having heterogeneous classrooms, in most cases such groups consist of forty to forty two students. Consequently, identifying students who need additional assistance is one of their major challenges. Interestingly, the instructors indicated that they struggle to identify whether students are truly comprehending texts as a result of having too many students in the classroom. Even though Grabe (2009) does not address these issues directly, the instructional practices he proposed may be adapted to tackle some of these situations. For instance, while beginner students are given opportunities to develop general comprehension skills, advanced learners may practice reading fluency or word recognition.

Implications of the study

Gaining an understanding of the reading instruction implemented in the EBP courses was the main purpose of this study. Clearly, developing reading comprehension is a priority as described in the previous section. The EBP instructors indicated that reading in English is fundamental for student overall growth, academic and professional; however, the findings also revealed concerns that instructors had about reading instruction. For example, Instructor 3 explained that teaching reading comprehension was one of the

toughest skills to teach and emphasized, “there’s no special formula that is going to help.” (personal communication, 2021) Additionally, they considered that their major challenges as reading instructors were working with a dated textbook series, selecting appropriate reading material, familiarizing with more effective reading comprehension teaching practices, and having large classrooms with different proficiency language levels. To support the instructors, these issues became the focus of a set of actions or recommendations that can serve as starting points to enhance the instructional practices and the overall EBP reading program.

An important action to take for the enhancement of the EBP reading program could be the creation of a professional learning community which could consist of all the stakeholders involved in the decision-making process. One of the main objectives of this community would be to offer training and professional development (PD) opportunities. Mainly, through these PD opportunities, practitioners could become familiar with and explore evidence-based practices and theories promoting effective reading comprehension instructional practices that translate into student reading comprehension component ability growth. Grabe (2009) has pointed out the need for training opportunities that assist reading comprehension instructors in EEL contexts to become effective reading teachers. Grabe and Stoller (2018) have explained that after analyzing the learning-teaching conditions, the learners’ characteristics and their goals, and the program constraints, stakeholders may incorporate minor modifications in the established reading program. The key is to pay attention to the reading comprehension component abilities and instructional practices that would best support students’ reading comprehension development for them to eventually become fluent and efficient readers. Consequently, a positive point of departure could be this study’s overarching findings. In other words, reading comprehension teaching practices that focus on vocabulary growth and effective employment of reading comprehension strategies could be the first topics of training opportunities and upgrades to the established EBP reading program.

The instructional practices to develop both reading comprehension component abilities could be shared with the practitioners as well as emphasizing the importance of engaging students in explicit, systematic, and consistent instruction in which students are given multiple opportunities

to practice. Furthermore, other areas that would contribute to the development of reading comprehension in this context could be the selection of a textbook series that contains current topics and provides opportunities for an overall development of reading comprehension abilities. The goal of having a community of practice would be the construction of a coherent reading curriculum which is Grabe's (2009) tenth instructional implication. A reading curriculum that balances the development of language and discipline-specific content and which provides systematic and direct instruction as well as numerous opportunities to practice word recognition, vocabulary growth, general comprehension skills practice, text structure and discourse organization awareness, strategic reading development, reading fluency, extensive reading opportunities, and increasing motivation to read.

Based on the above, it is possible to say that this study contributes to the enhancement and strengthening of the reading curriculum of the EBP program in question. Although the scope of the study is narrowed and focuses on a small sample. The results and the data revealed several points of departure that can assist the stakeholders to work collectively for the purpose of transforming and adapting the reading curriculum to better suit their students' needs.

Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

Despite the efforts made to include the overall aspects that could potentially support this research project, some limitations should be noted. The first limitation is related to the role of the researcher and the considerations made upon the qualitative nature of the study. That is, the analysis of the outcomes may have been influenced by the perspective and experience of the researcher. Because the researcher has worked with the EBP instructors, there is a personal and professional association which could have led to potential bias. Therefore, attempts were made to conduct the study in an ethical manner to avoid exerting any type of influence on the collection and analysis of the data.

Given that this study aimed at gathering evidence that revealed the instructional practices utilized in the EBP classrooms, performing classroom observations could have yielded useful data to support this study's findings. Key teaching and learning episodes focusing on the development of reading comprehension component abilities could have been identified and used to strengthen the data collected from the interviews with the EBP instructors.

Additionally, self-reported data may reflect participants' experiences and beliefs, or they may be based upon what participants believe are the expected or acceptable responses. Because the evidence used to address this study's research questions consisted of self-reported data from the semi-structured interviews, it was important to report it as another potential limitation of this study.

Conclusion

Reading plays an important role in ESP university programs such as the target program. As observed in the findings of this study, the instructors acknowledged that reading in English plays a key role in students' academic and professional success. According to Hedgcock and Ferris (2018) "Reading, learning to read, and teaching reading, are neither easy nor effortless" (p. 3). In other words, for a reading program to be successful, its designers and practitioners should acknowledge that reading does not only entail decoding words and making meaning from those words. It may be more likely for students to succeed and become effective readers through the implementation of a reading program that recognizes that reading is a complex process that takes time, must be deliberately developed, and requires a lot of practice. Consequently, reading programs should consider that training is a key element in guiding instructors to become effective teachers of reading and who in turn guide learners to become effective readers of English. Pre-service and in-service English language instructors should be offered opportunities to learn about the complexities involved when developing reading comprehension in their classrooms.

First, instructors should know that for reading instruction to be effective, it must be explicit, systematic, constant, and engaging. Secondly, training

should engage instructors in learning about the essential reading comprehension component abilities and the instructional teaching practices that promote those abilities as well as the research that underpins them. Training should also involve teachers in opportunities to explore and practice these reading comprehension teaching practices as well as develop and select reading materials. Ultimately, instructors should be engaged in reflecting about their reading comprehension teaching experiences. The findings of this study have revealed that these instructors strive to provide their students with positive reading comprehension learning experiences. Their endeavors could be supported by creating a professional learning community whose goal is to enhance the reading comprehension element of their course programs and their instructional practices.

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Appendix A

EBP Instructor Interview Protocol

EBP Instructor: 1 2 3 4

Date and Time:

EBP level(s):

I. Greetings and study explanation / overview

Interviewer: Hello, how are you today? I am conducting this study as part of my dissertation whose purpose is to learn more about the development of reading comprehension component abilities in the english language. I really appreciate your participation because you will help me understand how EFL/EBP reading comprehension component abilities are taught and learned with adult learners. Also, thank you for signing the corresponding consent form and filling out the open questionnaire sent to your email.

Interviewer: As part of my research, I am interested in how reading comprehension component abilities are developed through your EBP courses. In particular, I am interested in the reading instructional practices employed to teach adult learners of english, (EBP learners) like your students, as well as the development of reading comprehension component abilities that assist learners in reading texts in english.

II. Topics for semi-structured interview

The literature in developing reading comprehension skills in EFL and/or ESP classrooms indicates that reading is a critical skill to ensure learners' academic success, particularly in ESP courses. Considering this information, please answer the following questions.

Focus on the learners

1. Can you please describe the current approach employed to teach reading comprehension skills?
2. Please explain if business majors consider reading in english an important element for their academic and professional growth.
3. What strategies that you are currently using do you consider effective in terms of developing reading comprehension abilities among your EBP learners? / Could you mention some of the elements you include in your reading lessons? Can you please describe any of the activities used to develop and/or promote reading comprehension skills? / From the activities mentioned, which would you say benefit learners' development of reading comprehension abilities? / What are some examples of reading practices that you find more effective and important for learners to develop? / What reading strategies do you consider useful for learners to experience success when reading texts in english?
4. What kind of texts are learners exposed to in the classroom?
5. How often are reading lesson given to learners?
6. What are your learners' attitudes towards reading in english?
7. What is difficult for your students in terms of reading? What challenges do they face during reading comprehension tasks?
8. What else has an impact in your learners' reading comprehension development?

Focus on the Instructor

1. What helps you be a strong and effective reading instructor?
2. Does the Foreign Languages Department support you in any instructional decisions you make to help learners develop reading comprehension abilities? Explain.
3. Are you given freedom to implement innovative methods, approaches, and materials that assist learners, such as in their reading comprehension development?

4. Please share the most difficult or challenging part of teaching reading comprehension skills in the EBP program.

III. Demographics and Professional Background

Gender	
Female _____	Male _____
I prefer not to say _____	
Age	
Years of experience teaching	Degrees of Education
English for general purposes _____	BA in English Language Teaching
English for specific purposes _____	_____
	Master in _____
	PhD in _____
	Certifications:
Training or Professional Development programs	Other information