Guided reading for the development of reading comprehension in elementary school students

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Abstract

Developing reading comprehension in students has become an odyssey for teachers because even though reading comprehension is one of the most essential pillars to develop during the educational process, students have difficulties in understanding what they read, with little vocabulary, little interest in reading, and with difficulty in applying the levels of reading comprehension. Taking into account the demands of today's society, it was necessary to establish improvements for reading comprehension and to innovate the teaching methodology, thus pointing out guided reading. The objective of this work was to determine how guided reading improves reading comprehension in elementary school students. The research is correlational type with the use of the hypothetical deductive method

starting from general premises to reach a particular conclusion, for the analysis of the data the statistical software SPSS was used, with the application of the chi-square statistical model to test hypotheses according to the relationship between variables, resulting in a value of 0.007 approving the alternative hypotheses. As a last point, it was determined that guided reading allows improving reading comprehension in students.

Keywords: reading, reading comprehension, guided reading, reading interest, reading levels

Resumen

Desarrollar la comprensión lectora en los estudiantes se ha convertido en una odisea para los docentes porque a pesar que la compresión lectora es uno de los pilares más esenciales a desarrollar durante el proceso educativo, los estudiantes presentan dificultades en comprender lo que leen, escaso vocabulario, poco interés lector, y con dificultad pueden aplicar los niveles de comprensión lectora. Teniendo en cuenta las demandas de la sociedad actual, fue necesario establecer mejoras para la compresión lectora e innovar la metodología docente señalando así la lectura guiada.
El objetivo de este trabajo fue, determinar de qué manera la lectura guiada permite mejorar la comprensión lectora en los estudiantes de primaria. La investigación es tipo correlacional con el uso del método hipotético deductivo partiendo de premisas generales para llegar a una conclusión particular, para el análisis de los datos se usó el software estadístico SPSS, con la aplicación del modelo estadístico chi cuadrado para probar hipótesis de acuerdo a la relación entre variables, dando como resultado un valor de 0,007 aprobando las hipótesis alternativas. Como último punto se determinó que la lectura guiada permite mejorar la comprensión lectora en estudiantes.

Palabras clave: lectura, comprensión lectora, lectura guiada, interés lector, niveles de lectura

Introduction

"Reading comprehension involves the interaction between the reader and the text to be read" (Murillo & Naranjo, 2021, p.14). That is, it is one of the most essential skills to develop during the teaching-learning process. However, difficulties and low levels of reading comprehension among students are a concern for educational institutions. A large number of students do not understand what they read—not because reading is not encouraged in the classroom, but rather because they do not comprehend, often due to the fact that the strategies applied by teachers are not always effective for reading comprehension. At the international level, as indicated by Duvillier and McCaffrey (2022), following the COVID-19 pandemic, "four out of five children in Latin America and the Caribbean will not be able to understand a simple text." In this sense, reading comprehension has been significantly affected. In our country, this issue represents a great challenge. As UNESCO (2021) states: "In Reading for 7th grade EGB, 26.1% of students in Ecuador reached at least Level III performance in ERCE 2019" (p.18). This means that they achieved a minimum level of competence, but still, 73.9% of students remain below the minimum level of competence.

Given this problem, it is necessary to implement improvements in reading comprehension, which is why this research topic was undertaken. Strengthening this skill is essential, and it can be achieved through the application of innovative teaching methods such as guided reading.

1.1. Reading Comprehension

According to Roldán (2019, p.3), reading comprehension "is the interaction between the reader's knowledge of the world and the explicit ideas in a text. In summary, the text becomes a set of linguistic elements that must be understood, represented, interpreted, or applied." Based on this, the reader acquires the ability to relate the information they read to their own reality, leading to a deeper understanding and enabling them to express their own opinions. In the academic field, developing this skill is crucial, as it is essential for learning in all areas of knowledge, from reading children's stories to comprehending complex academic texts.

1.2. Levels of Reading Comprehension

The literal level refers to a student's ability to recognize key ideas and important words within a text. In this regard, Cervantes et al. (2017) state that at this level, students "capture what the text says without any intervention in the intellectual structure of the reader." Therefore, the reader focuses on extracting explicit ideas and information. Key skills at this level include identifying the main idea of a paragraph or text and recognizing the chronological order of actions presented in a passage.

At the inferential level, students must develop the ability to establish connections between ideas and infer content that is not explicitly stated in the text. As Cieza (2023, p.5) explains, "At this level, the reader does not merely absorb textual information but also actively interacts with it, employing reasoning and prior knowledge to infer details, themes, and underlying meanings."

Critical reading has an evaluative nature, involving the reader's formation, value judgment, and knowledge of the text. This level is essential, as it allows students to formulate their own opinions about the content, compare it with other sources, and assess the accuracy and acceptability of the information.

1.3. Reading Skills

Reading skills enable individuals to understand and process written information. They can be divided into two categories: decoding and vocabulary. According to Zamudio and Rendón (2023, p.23), decoding "is the skill a reader acquires to interpret a written code in order to understand the message embedded in a text. In other words, it is the ability to decipher meaning through codes." Thus, this skill is fundamental for reading comprehension, as it allows the reader to grasp the meaning of a text.

Conversely, Figueroa and Gallego (2021) describe vocabulary as the ability to understand the meaning of words and connect them with ideas within a text. This skill is essential for proper reading comprehension. If a student has a limited vocabulary, they will struggle to understand what they read. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to implement different methods—such as guided reading—to strengthen reading skills. This method exposes students to new words and allows them to read aloud with the teacher, who provides support and correction when necessary, thus enhancing comprehension.

1.4. Reading Strategies

The guided reading model relies on and can be developed through various reading strategies. As Lucas and Chancay (2022, p.10) indicate, strategies before reading may include "introducing the text, motivating students, activating prior knowledge, and stating reading objectives." These processes help the reader recognize and evaluate what they already know or do not know about the text.

During reading, Lucas and Chancay (2022) suggest strategies such as "summarizing the reading content, making hypotheses and predictions about the story's ending, looking up word definitions in a dictionary, and formulating questions to ensure comprehension" (p.10). These strategies are designed to enhance reading comprehension. Additional techniques include underlining key information, pausing to reflect, taking notes, paraphrasing, and identifying the text structure.

Finally, after reading, strategies such as summarization, synthesis, mind maps, reflections, and discussions can be applied. These approaches help deepen text comprehension, enabling students to analyze, verify information, and express opinions. Additional strategies include sampling, prediction, inference, and cause-effect analysis.

1.5. Guided Reading

Guided reading is a method in which, as Verano and Espinoza (2019) state, "a small group gathers, where each student reads a text aloud while the teacher assumes the role of mediator, provides instructions, suggests activities, and intervenes to improve reading" (p.23). In guided reading, the teacher supports, monitors, and guides students as they engage in reading activities, using strategies such as prediction, anticipation, confirmation, and self-correction to develop reading skills.

1.5.1. Stages of Guided Reading

Verano and Espinoza (2019) describe guided reading as taking place in several stages:

Before the guided reading, the teacher forms groups and selects books according to the students' reading ability. The teacher introduces the book, provides instructions, asks questions, and familiarizes students with the text. During the guided reading, the teacher first reads aloud while students follow along. Then, students read aloud independently, and the teacher observes, providing support as needed to help with unknown words. After the guided reading, the teacher facilitates a discussion, reviews whether initial hypotheses were correct, assigns activities such as summaries, and helps students draw conclusions (pp.23-24).

1.6. Selection of Texts

According to Romero (2019), in guided reading, "the teacher selects books based on the level that students are capable of reading and understanding, providing more tailored texts rather than simply using the standard textbooks for the course, as not all students in a class read at the same level" (p.99). If the text is appropriate, engaging, and suited to the student's reading level, reading becomes more dynamic and enjoyable.

1.7. Importance of Guided Reading in Reading Comprehension

As Verano and Espinoza (2019) state, "its importance lies in the development of students' reading skills, as it enhances their ability to predict texts, decode, read fluently, comprehend, expand vocabulary, and analyze text content" (p.23). In other words, implementing guided reading in the classroom fosters various skills, including critical thinking, fluency, comprehension strategies, and a love for reading.

1.8. Guided Reading and Reading Comprehension Levels

Guided reading helps students identify main ideas, answer comprehension questions, think inferentially, and critically analyze texts. This enables them to assess information, detect biases, and form their own opinions.

1.9. Guided Reading and Reading Skills

Teachers must implement methods to strengthen students' reading skills, particularly decoding and vocabulary (Ovalle, 2006). As Verano and Espinoza (2019) emphasize, guided reading improves decoding, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary (p.23), exposing students to new words and enriching their understanding.

Methodology

2.1. Research Approach

This study adopts a mixed-method approach. According to Bagur et al. (2021), "The mixed approach allows for merging perspectives and collecting both qualitative and quantitative data throughout the research process" (p.2). Therefore, the research follows a quantitative approach, as data was collected through surveys as a primary source, and a qualitative approach, as documentary research was conducted to develop the theoretical framework.

2.2. Correlational Research Type

This study is correlational, as it seeks to determine whether there is a relationship between the guided reading method and reading comprehension in elementary school students. As stated by Vizcaíno et al. (2023), "Correlational research aims to determine whether a statistical relationship exists between two or more variables" (p.9740). To achieve this, the data obtained from the survey was analyzed using the SPSS software.

Additionally, the hypothetico-deductive method was applied. As Sánchez (2019) explains, this method "starts from general premises to arrive at a specific conclusion, which forms the hypothesis to be tested for validity" (p.108). Through this method, the study demonstrated how guided reading contributes to improving reading comprehension.

2.3. Research Technique

The study employed surveys as a research technique, targeting 40 teachers. The questionnaire served as the instrument, which, according to Ávila et al. (2020), is an "empirical method for data collection that uses a form designed to obtain responses" (p.72). The survey gathered information on the relationship and influence between the variables.

To analyze the data, Chi-square testing and factor analysis were applied, as these methods assess the relationship between the two variables: guided reading and reading comprehension, and verify the hypotheses.

As indicated by Lastre et al. (2019), "The Chi-square test is used to analyze the dependency relationship between two qualitative variables." Through this test, hypotheses are verified by analyzing the relationship between variables: If the significance level is less than 0.05, there is a

correlation between the variables, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. If the significance level is greater than 0.05, no relationship exists, and the null hypothesis is accepted. On the other hand, factor analysis is a descriptive data reduction technique. Its purpose is to eliminate redundant or excessive data, which may arise when collecting information from multiple variables. This technique operates by reducing data complexity to identify underlying, unobservable factors (López & Gutiérrez, 2019). In essence, it simplifies large datasets to enhance data interpretation. If the significance level is greater than 0.7, there is a correlation between the variables. If the significance level is less than 0.7, no correlation exists.

Resultados

This section presents the Chi-square test results for the following related variables:

3.1. Reading Skills and the Literal Level of Reading Comprehension

This study aimed to establish the relationship between decoding and vocabulary skills, which are developed through guided reading, and the literal level of reading comprehension. Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated.

- **Ha (Alternative Hypothesis):** Guided reading, by developing decoding and vocabulary skills, enhances students' ability to comprehend texts at the literal level.

- **Ho (Null Hypothesis):** Guided reading, despite developing decoding and vocabulary skills, does not enhance students' ability to comprehend texts at the literal level.

Table 1

Chi-square test between reading skills promoted by guided reading and the Literal Level of reading comprehension

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (bilateral)
Pearson Chi-square	9,930[a]	2	0,007

Source: Own elaboration (2024)

In Table 1, the Chi-square result is 0.007. Since this value is less than 0.05, the alternative hypothesis is validated. This confirms that guided reading, by developing decoding and vocabulary skills, improves students' ability to comprehend texts at the literal level, enabling them to identify main ideas and understand the content more effectively.

3.2. Reading Strategies and the Inferential Level of Reading Comprehension

At the inferential level of reading comprehension, students infer implicit information from the text. The relationship between Question 1, which examines whether guided reading employs various comprehension strategies, and Question 5, which focuses on whether guided reading helps

students better understand texts at an inferential level, led to the formulation of the following hypotheses:

- **Ha (Alternative Hypothesis):** Guided reading, by employing comprehension strategies, allows students to better understand texts and develop inferential reading comprehension.

- **Ho (Null Hypothesis):** Guided reading, despite employing comprehension strategies, does not help students better understand texts or develop inferential reading comprehension.

Table 2

Chi cuadrado de Estrategias y nivel Inferencial de comprensión lectora.

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (bilateral)
Pearson Chi-square	8, 711 [a]	1	0,003

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

In Table 2, the Chi-square result is 0.003, which indicates a statistically significant relationship between the variables. This validates the alternative hypothesis, confirming that guided reading, by incorporating comprehension strategies such as summarization, paraphrasing, and discussions, helps students develop inferential reading comprehension.

Students who develop critical reading comprehension can formulate reasoned judgments about what they read. Based on the responses to Question 6, which examines whether guided reading fosters critical reading comprehension, and Question 3, which focuses on the development of meaningful learning, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- **Ha (Alternative Hypothesis):** Guided reading, by fostering critical reading comprehension, promotes meaningful learning.

- **Ho (Null Hypothesis):** Guided reading, despite fostering critical reading comprehension, does not promote meaningful learning.

Table 3

Chi cuadrado de entre el nivel crítico y aprendizajes significativos

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (bilateral)
Pearson Chi-square	14,422 [a]	1	0,000

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

In Table 3, the Chi-square result is 0.000, validating the alternative hypothesis. This indicates a strong correlation between critical reading comprehension and meaningful learning, as students develop the ability to verify information and express well-founded opinions.

Additionally, factor analysis was conducted, yielding the following results:

3.4. Time and Interest in Reading and the Inferential Level

Question 3 examines whether guided reading encourages students to dedicate more time to reading and develop greater interest.

Question 5 focuses on whether guided reading helps students develop inferential reading comprehension, enabling them to understand the meaning of a text beyond what is explicitly written.

Table 4

Correlation matrix between Time and Interest in Reading and the Inferential Level

Correlation Matrix		
Correlation	Value	Question 5: Do you believe that Guided Reading, as a method where the teacher directs the reading process through reading strategies, helps students better understand the meaning of the text beyond what is explicitly written?
	Question 3: Do you believe that the Guided Reading method, as a cooperative reading method, allows students to dedicate more time to reading and develop a greater interest in it?	,733

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

Based on the correlation matrix, it was observed that the value is 0.733 between questions 3 and 5. Therefore, there is a relationship between the time dedicated to reading and interest in it, and the development of the inferential level of comprehension in students.

3.5. Literal Level and Inferential Level

Question 4 focuses on the fact that the guided reading method, where the teacher guides and provides instructions, allows the student to better understand the reading, identify the main ideas, and understand the subject of the reading, thereby developing the literal level of comprehension. Question 5, on the other hand, focuses on the fact that guided reading allows the development of the inferential level, as the student understands the meaning of the text beyond what is written.

Table 5

Correlation Matrix between Literal Level and Inferential Level

Correlation Matrix		
Correlation	Value	Question 5: Do you consider that Guided Reading, being a method in which the teacher guides the reading process through reading strategies, would allow the student to better understand the meaning of the text beyond what is written?
	Question 4: Do you consider that through Guided Reading, where the teacher guides and provides direct instructions about the reading, students can better understand the reading, identify the main ideas, and understand what the story is about?	,787

Source: Own creation. (2024)

Based on the correlation matrix, a value of 0.787 was obtained, which indicates a correlation between the literal level of comprehension and the inferential level. This suggests that students must first have the ability to identify the main ideas and make predictions about what a text is about just by reading the title or observing the cover, before analyzing the information that is implicitly included..

3.6. Inferential Level and Critical Level

Question 5 focuses on the fact that guided reading allows the development of the inferential level, as it enables the student to understand the meaning of the text beyond what is written. Meanwhile, question 6 indicates that guided reading allows students to identify and evaluate the ideas in the text and express opinions about what they have read.

Table 6

Correlation Matrix between Inferential Level and Critical Level

Correlation Matrix		
Correlation	Value	Question 6: Do you consider that Guided Reading, being a method focused on reflection and understanding of the text, would allow students to identify, evaluate the ideas in the text, and express opinions about what they have read?
	Question 5: Do you consider that Guided Reading, being a method where the teacher guides the reading process through reading strategies, would allow the student to better understand the meaning of the text beyond what is written?	,808

Source: Own creation. (2024)

Based on the correlation matrix, the value obtained between questions 5 and 6 was 0.808, indicating that there is a relationship between the inferential level of comprehension and the critical level. This suggests that, with the help of the teacher, students must develop the ability to understand the information that is implicitly present in the text, and then critically express an opinion about the content of the text they have read.

Conclusions

It was demonstrated with a chi-square value of 0.007 that guided reading, by developing decoding and vocabulary skills, improves literal comprehension of texts. With a chi-square value of 0.003, it was determined that guided reading, by employing various comprehension strategies such as summaries, paraphrasing, and discussions, allows students to understand texts on an inferential level. And with a chi-square value of 0.000, it was proven that guided reading, by fostering critical reading skills, promotes meaningful learning. Thus, guided reading, through the use of strategies and the development of reading skills, enhances the levels of literal, inferential, and critical reading comprehension.

Based on the results obtained, it was determined that guided reading improves reading comprehension, as the results from the factor analysis (Tables 7, 8, 9) show a correlation between questions 3 and 5 with a value of 0.733. This method utilizes certain aspects of reading comprehension, such as the time dedicated to reading and interest in it (Table 7), in order to better develop literal comprehension. Guided reading helps students identify the main ideas of a text and understand its content.

Regarding the students' comprehension levels, the factor analysis results (Tables 8 and 9) indicate a relationship between guided reading and both inferential and critical reading comprehension levels. This helps students develop the ability to identify ideas in the text and use them to deduce information that is not explicitly stated, which in turn fosters critical thinking about the content of the text.

In conclusion, it was determined that guided reading promotes reading interest and comprehension. Through the reading strategies it employs, guided reading encourages the development of reading skills such as decoding and vocabulary, while also strengthening reading comprehension levels.

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