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TEMA:

A Bibliographic Analysis of the Impact of Recreational Reading on English
Vocabulary Acquisition in
Ecuadorian Contexts

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RESUMEN

Este estudio investiga el papel de la lectura recreativa en la mejora de la adquisición de vocabulario en inglés, centrándose en el contexto educativo ecuatoriano. A través de una exhaustiva revisión bibliográfica, se analizaron quince estudios clave para examinar cómo la lectura extensiva contribuye al desarrollo del vocabulario en estudiantes de EFL. Los hallazgos demuestran consistentemente que la lectura libre voluntaria no sólo apoya el crecimiento léxico sino que también fortalece la fluidez lectora y la motivación del aprendiz. Las teorías fundamentales, incluido el modelo de lectura voluntaria libre de Krashen, destacan la importancia de la exposición continuada a materiales lingüísticos auténticos. Sin embargo, el análisis también revela importantes retos en Ecuador, como el acceso limitado a los recursos de lectura, la formación insuficiente de los profesores y las barreras socioeconómicas, que dificultan la aplicación satisfactoria de los programas de lectura. El análisis subraya la necesidad de un enfoque holístico que integre materiales de lectura accesibles, un diseño contextualizado del programa, la preparación de los profesores y estrategias de motivación. Este estudio concluye que aunque la lectura recreativa tiene un gran potencial para mejorar el dominio del inglés, su éxito en Ecuador requiere esfuerzos coordinados que aborden las necesidades locales y las limitaciones sistémicas. El artículo ofrece recomendaciones prácticas para desarrollar iniciativas de lectura sostenibles y eficaces en escuelas ecuatorianas.

PALABRAS CLAVES

Recreational reading, vocabulary acquisition, English as a Foreign Language, educational context

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of recreational reading in enhancing English vocabulary acquisition, focusing on the Ecuadorian educational context. Through a comprehensive bibliographic review, fifteen key studies were analyzed to examine how extensive reading contributes to vocabulary development in EFL learners. The findings consistently demonstrate that free voluntary reading not only supports lexical growth but also strengthens reading fluency and learner motivation. Foundational theories, including Krashen's Free Voluntary Reading model, highlight the importance of sustained exposure to authentic language materials. However, the review also reveals significant challenges in Ecuador, such as limited access to reading resources, insufficient teacher training, and socio-economic barriers, which hinder the

successful implementation of reading programs. The analysis underscores the necessity of a holistic approach that integrates accessible reading materials, contextualized program design, teacher preparation, and motivational strategies. This study concludes that while recreational reading holds great potential for improving English proficiency, its success in Ecuador requires coordinated efforts that address local needs and systemic limitations. The article provides practical recommendations for developing sustainable and effective reading initiatives in Ecuadorian schools.

KEYWORDS

Recreational reading, vocabulary acquisition, English as a Foreign Language, educational context

1. INTRODUCCIÓN (OBJETIVO DEL ARTÍCULO)

Recreational reading, also referred to as extensive reading or free voluntary reading (FVR), involves the selection of texts by learners based on personal interest and enjoyment, without the constraints of formal evaluation or classroom requirements (Krashen, 2004; Yamashita, 2021). This approach is distinct from intensive reading, which emphasizes close analysis of shorter texts, focusing on grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension tasks (Day & Bamford, 2002). The fundamental idea of recreational reading is to cultivate a natural exposure to language, allowing learners to absorb new structures and vocabulary in context through engaging materials. Recent research has reiterated that such exposure significantly aids in second language (L2) development by providing authentic input that enhances comprehension and overall language competence (Lee, 2019; Liao et al., 2020). Specifically, in EFL settings where contact with the target language is minimal, recreational reading has been recognized for improving language fluency, intuitive language use, and particularly vocabulary acquisition (Jeon & Yamashita, 2020). Moreover, extensive reading is often credited with increasing learners' confidence and motivation by presenting them with meaningful and enjoyable language experiences that extend beyond textbook confines.

2. MARCO TEÓRICO

Vocabulary acquisition theories and processes

The process of vocabulary acquisition encompasses both the breadth of knowledge—how many words learners recognize—and the depth—how well they understand, use, and manipulate those words in various contexts (Nation, 2013). While direct vocabulary instruction, such as word lists and explicit teaching, is often emphasized in classrooms, incidental learning, which happens unconsciously as learners are exposed to language, has gained recognition as a powerful mechanism for vocabulary development (Webb & Nation, 2017; Peters & Webb, 2018). Extensive reading offers numerous opportunities for incidental learning, enabling readers to repeatedly encounter new words in diverse contexts, reinforcing meaning and proper usage (Pulido & Hambrick, 2008). Notably, empirical studies have demonstrated that engaging in regular extensive reading can lead to measurable improvements in vocabulary size and richness, particularly when learners select texts that are slightly above their current proficiency level—what Krashen termed the "i+1" principle (Pellicer-Sánchez, 2020; Kim & Kim, 2022). These findings underline the dual function of reading: it not only enhances vocabulary breadth but also deepens understanding by contextualizing word meanings across different linguistic and cultural scenarios.

EFL Learning Contexts

In EFL contexts, where learners typically have limited access to authentic language outside the classroom, supplemental language input becomes essential (Richards & Renandya, 2020). The scarcity of real-life interaction with English speakers often hampers vocabulary development and fluency. This situation is especially pertinent in Latin American countries, including Ecuador, where challenges such as insufficient authentic materials, minimal exposure to native-like language input, and resource-limited schools persist (Ramos-Holguín & Aguirre Morales, 2021). Recent comparative analyses suggest that although extensive reading has universal benefits for EFL learners, its impact is maximized in contexts where learners have access to appealing materials and receive consistent encouragement from teachers (Cisterna & Jiménez, 2019; Yamashita & Noro, 2023). Furthermore, it is crucial to align reading materials with students' cultural and linguistic realities to maintain relevance and boost engagement. This alignment not only improves language learning outcomes but also fosters a positive attitude toward English as a foreign language. Motivation plays a pivotal role in the success of recreational reading programs. Wigfield and Guthrie's (1997) model of reading motivation emphasizes that intrinsic factors—such as personal interest and enjoyment—are central to sustained reading engagement. The model also highlights self-efficacy, or learners' beliefs in their reading capabilities, as a key determinant of their willingness to engage with texts. Contemporary studies have affirmed that students who display a positive attitude toward English reading are more likely to achieve substantial vocabulary gains (Lai, 2019; Lee & Lee, 2021). In the Ecuadorian context, building a culture of reading within the classroom is vital. Educators must create a supportive environment that not only provides access to diverse and culturally meaningful texts but also encourages students to view reading as a pleasurable and rewarding activity (Andrade & Alarcón, 2020; Moreta & Ortega, 2023). Additionally, integrating peer discussions and reading circles has

been shown to reinforce motivation and accountability, fostering a more dynamic and participatory learning experience.

The Ecuadorian Educational Context

English language education in Ecuador has undergone significant reforms, particularly since the national curriculum was updated to mandate English instruction from early grades with the goal of achieving B1 proficiency by high school graduation (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016). Despite these policy advancements, multiple studies have documented a persistent gap between curricular objectives and actual student outcomes, particularly concerning reading habits and vocabulary acquisition (Vera & Castillo, 2019; Bravo & Valle, 2022). A variety of factors hinder progress, including socioeconomic disparities, lack of school libraries, and limited training opportunities for teachers in fostering reading programs (Chávez & Guevara, 2021). Nevertheless, there have been promising initiatives aimed at integrating extensive reading into school curricula. Pilot projects report improvements in both vocabulary development and student motivation when consistent reading programs are implemented with appropriate support (Rivas et al., 2020; Sarmiento & López, 2024). These findings suggest that with targeted interventions—such as improving access to reading materials and providing professional development for teachers—recreational reading can become a transformative tool for English language learning in Ecuadorian classrooms.

3. METODOLOGÍA

The current research is structured as a bibliographic review and analysis, aimed at compiling and critically examining existing studies on how recreational reading influences English vocabulary acquisition, with a special focus on the Ecuadorian educational framework. According to Hernández Sampieri, Fernández-Collado, and Baptista Lucio (2018), a bibliographic review involves a systematic process of gathering, selecting, and evaluating documented sources to provide an updated understanding of a particular research topic, enabling the identification of theoretical trends and research gaps. To carry out this study, a defined search strategy was established, prioritizing the consultation of high-impact databases such as Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar, as well as Latin American platforms like Redalyc and SciELO. The review included scholarly works published primarily between 2019 and 2025 to ensure recent perspectives, although classic and highly influential texts were also incorporated for foundational purposes (Krashen, 2004; Nation, 2013). The search was guided by a set of key terms, including recreational reading, extensive reading, vocabulary acquisition, EFL, and Ecuadorian education, to ensure the coverage of the topic from different angles. As highlighted

by Siddaway, Wood, and Hedges (2019), a bibliographic review goes beyond merely summarizing previous research—it also aims to critically appraise and integrate insights from various studies to build a cohesive understanding of the subject. Therefore, this study analyzed the selected works by categorizing findings into thematic clusters, contrasting methodologies, and evaluating their relevance to the Ecuadorian context. The analytical process followed a qualitative content analysis approach, identifying dominant themes, commonalities, and discrepancies across the literature. This allowed the study to present a nuanced synthesis of how recreational reading is connected to vocabulary learning in EFL environments, while simultaneously pointing out areas that remain underexplored. In line with the principles outlined by Cooper (2017), transparency was ensured throughout the review process by clearly defining the selection criteria, documenting the search process, and detailing the methods of analysis. The review’s scope incorporated both global and local research to provide a well-rounded perspective that could serve as a foundation for further empirical studies and practical interventions in Ecuadorian classrooms.

4. ANÁLISIS DE RESULTADOS

The bibliographic review encompassed fifteen key studies investigating the link between recreational reading and vocabulary development in English as a foreign language, with particular attention to the Ecuadorian context. Most of the literature emphasizes that extensive reading fosters improvements in vocabulary knowledge, reading fluency, and broader language proficiency. Influential works by Krashen (2013) and Day and Bamford (2018) underline that voluntary, pleasure-driven reading not only strengthens learners' vocabulary but also contributes to overall linguistic progress. Complementary research by Camargo (2019) and Núñez and Herrera (2020) further confirms that students who engage regularly in recreational reading show enhanced lexical competence, supporting the notion that vocabulary acquisition can occur incidentally through enjoyable reading. Specific to Ecuador, studies by Bravo and Valle (2022), Rivas et al. (2020), and Moreta and Ortega (2023) document low rates of recreational reading and highlight structural obstacles such as inadequate access to reading materials, insufficient teacher training, and a lack of institutional frameworks to sustain extensive reading initiatives. These barriers present significant challenges to the effective

implementation of long-term reading programs. Methodologically, longitudinal research by Kim and Kim (2022) and Peters and Webb (2018) reinforces the importance of sustained exposure to graded reading materials, showing that this practice contributes progressively to vocabulary growth. Additionally, works by Lai (2019) and Andrade and Alarcón (2020) emphasize the critical role of learner motivation, indicating a direct link between positive reading attitudes and lexical development. The global pattern is clear: recreational reading is a powerful tool for expanding vocabulary and improving reading skills. However, Ecuadorian studies suggest that without proper support—such as teacher guidance and well-designed materials—the potential benefits of extensive reading can be significantly diminished.

5. DISCUSIÓN

This bibliographic review reaffirms that recreational reading is widely recognized as an effective strategy for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners. Krashen's (2013) Free Voluntary Reading model remains foundational, asserting that consistent and enjoyable reading experiences facilitate natural vocabulary learning. Day and Bamford's (2018) insights further stress that extensive reading boosts both lexical knowledge and learner motivation, contributing to greater reading fluency. Nevertheless, the Ecuadorian context presents complex challenges. As noted by Bravo and Valle (2022) and Chávez and Guevara (2021), despite national policy goals (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016), factors such as limited educational resources, lack of specialized teacher training, and socioeconomic inequalities continue to impede the full realization of extensive reading programs. Moreta and Ortega (2023) also highlight that rural communities are particularly disadvantaged, lacking even the minimal infrastructure needed to support regular reading habits.

Motivation emerges as a pivotal element in the success of reading initiatives. Studies by Lai (2019) and Andrade and Alarcón (2020) demonstrate that the existence of reading programs alone is not enough—students' engagement and interest are essential for meaningful outcomes. This points to the importance of incorporating motivational strategies, such as offering diverse and appealing reading options, providing learner autonomy, and fostering interactive reading activities that sustain students' interest over time. Yamashita and Noro (2023) emphasize the need for contextual adaptation of extensive reading programs. Their findings suggest that

tailoring reading materials to align with learners' cultural backgrounds and equipping teachers with effective methodologies are critical for maximizing program impact in local settings. In essence, while the literature clearly supports the global effectiveness of recreational reading, the Ecuadorian context demands a comprehensive strategy that integrates material access, teacher preparation, and learner motivation to achieve lasting and meaningful results.

6. CONCLUSIÓN

This study's bibliographic review has demonstrated that recreational reading plays a crucial role in fostering vocabulary acquisition and overall language proficiency in EFL settings. Foundational theories, particularly Krashen's (2013) Free Voluntary Reading model and Day and Bamford's (2018) extensive reading principles, establish that regular and enjoyable reading exposure substantially contributes to lexical growth and reading fluency. In Ecuador, while the theoretical framework aligns with global findings, practical implementation faces significant challenges. Socioeconomic disparities, lack of adequate resources, and insufficiently trained teachers hinder the successful integration of extensive reading practices. Nevertheless, local studies have shown that when well-designed reading programs are introduced, especially with strong motivational components and cultural relevance, positive outcomes in vocabulary development and learner engagement are achievable. To bridge the gap between theory and practice, Ecuadorian educational institutions must adopt a holistic approach that not only increases access to reading materials but also invests in teacher development and creates a culture of reading that values learner autonomy and sustained motivation.

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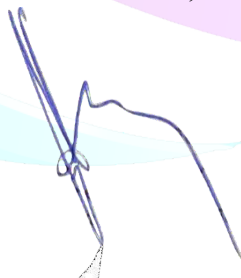
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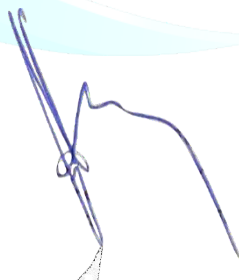
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