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The effect of reading habits in the English language learning process: A literature review in the Ecuadorian context

El efecto del hábito de lectura en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés: una revisión sistemática en el contexto ecuatoriano

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Resumen

El hábito de lectura constituye un factor fundamental en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL), particularmente en contextos donde la exposición a la lengua meta es limitada, como en Ecuador. El problema científico planteado en esta investigación fue: ¿Qué efecto tienen los hábitos de lectura en el proceso de aprendizaje del idioma inglés? En consecuencia, el objetivo de esta revisión bibliográfica es “Analizar el efecto de los hábitos de lectura en el proceso de aprendizaje del idioma inglés en el contexto ecuatoriano”, con énfasis en la adquisición de vocabulario, la comprensión lectora, la motivación y la competencia lingüística general. Se empleó una metodología cualitativa de carácter documental mediante el análisis bibliográfico de estudios empíricos indexados en Scopus, SciELO y Web of Science relacionados con los hábitos de lectura y el aprendizaje del EFL. Los principales resultados indican que cuando existen pocos hábitos de lectura, estos afectan negativamente la competencia en inglés, especialmente en el desarrollo del vocabulario y las habilidades de comprensión. Por otra parte, la lectura extensiva y recreativa mejora significativamente la competencia lingüística, la motivación y la fluidez. La revisión destaca la importancia de promover una cultura lectora tanto en la lengua materna como en inglés, así como de implementar estrategias pedagógicas centradas en programas de lectura extensiva y prácticas orientadas al estudiante.

Palabras clave: hábitos de lectura, aprendizaje de EFL, lectura extensiva, adquisición de vocabulario, contexto ecuatoriano

Abstract

Reading habits are a fundamental factor in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly in contexts where exposure to the target language is limited, such as Ecuador. The scientific problem was: What effect do reading habits have on the English Language Learning Process? Accordingly, the objective of this literature review is to “Analyze the effect of reading habits on the English language Learning Process in the Ecuadorian context,” with a focus on vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, motivation, and overall language proficiency. A qualitative documentary methodology was employed through the systematic analysis of empirical studies indexed in Scopus, SciELO, and Web of Science related to reading habits and EFL learning. The main results indicate that weak reading habits negatively affect English proficiency, particularly in vocabulary development and comprehension skills. Conversely, extensive and recreational reading significantly enhance linguistic competence, motivation, and fluency. The review highlights the importance of promoting a reading culture in both the first language and English, as well as implementing pedagogical strategies focused on extensive reading programs and student-centered practices.

Keywords: reading habits, EFL learning, extensive reading, vocabulary acquisition, Ecuadorian context

Introduction

The English language learning process has become a global phenomenon, with millions of learners worldwide seeking proficiency in this lingua franca (Imran, 2024). Thus, the English Language Learning Process is a multifaceted and dynamic progression that involves the development of receptive and productive skills, linguistic knowledge, and communicative competence over time.

On the other hand, English has become a global language due to rapid internationalization and technological advancements. The efforts to acquire English proficiency have lasted for nearly half a century (I-Chin, 2016). In this sense, it's important to understand that the acquisition of the English language constitutes a dynamic and continuous process that is strengthened through sustained practice and consistent exposure to authentic linguistic materials. (Singh, 2024)

All over the world, children learn to talk on a roughly equivalent timetable. They do so by learning the language or languages of their environment. There is considerable debate over what cognitive, social, or specifically linguistic, innate capacities they bring to language learning. (Lieven, 2008) In turn, it has contributed to the field of applied linguistics by drawing attention to the fundamental importance of understanding the language learner as an active agent in the learning process. (Chong & Reinders, 2025)

According to Ifanti (2015) having the ability to cope with the demand in reading English and to develop reading habits in English is significant for EFL students because they are engaged much in reading English literature to achieve their academic success. In this sense, reading habits play a crucial role in English language learning, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts where exposure to the target language is limited. That means that the importance of reading is obviously high. (Akarsu & Dariyemez, 2014)

From a theoretical perspective, second language acquisition is strongly influenced by input, interaction, and output. According to Krashen (2004), learners acquire language when they are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current level of competence. In educational settings such as Ecuador, learners often rely on formal instruction as their primary source of linguistic input, making reading a key tool for vocabulary development, comprehension, and overall language proficiency.

In this sense, first of all, let's start by understanding that reading activity is a well-thought-out habit when repeatedly performed. It means that reading habits are often viewed in quantitative terms in terms of the quantity of materials being read, the rate of reading, as well as the average time spent reading, and this habit can be developed. (Chalukya, 2021)

According to Grabe and Stoller (2019), reading provides sustained exposure to meaningful language input. On the other hand, it facilitates the development of cognitive and linguistic skills necessary for second language acquisition. Furthermore, it provides vocabulary growth, grammatical awareness, and comprehension development.

Thus, students' reading habits play a decisive role in their language learning process. Moreover, reading habits refer to the frequency, consistency, and purpose with which learners engage in reading activities. Research in second language acquisition suggests that learners who develop strong reading habits tend to demonstrate higher levels of language proficiency, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension (Day et al., 1998).

According to, Henríquez et al. (2020) there is a need to develop proposals, at the curricular level, that contribute to the development of reading habits that strengthen a greater integral formation of the current students. Due to the new access to the information and the new ways to guide the English teaching-learning process.

Consequently, reading serves as a compensatory mechanism that increases exposure to the target language beyond limited instructional hours. However, in many Latin American educational systems, including the Ecuadorian context, students often exhibit weak reading habits, which negatively affect their performance in English learning (Jaramillo-Ponton et al., 2019).

From an input-based perspective, reading is a fundamental source of comprehensible input that facilitates natural language acquisition (Krashen, 2004). In contrast, weak reading habits restrict exposure to meaningful input, thereby slowing down the English language learning process and limiting linguistic development.

According to Argudo and Romero (2022), an individual's reading habits are linked to a considerable degree by the amount of material read and the intensity with which the reading activity is practiced. However, recent research suggests that although most of the students displayed positive attitudes towards reading and recognized that reading is essential for life and education, they did not make an effort to invest time in personal reading. (Nurul & Andi, 2020)

Concurring with Udu (2021) the fact that people's attitudes towards a teaching subject need to be studied from time to time. This is because attitude is not a permanent phenomenon. The uniqueness of the current research lies in its investigation of the attitudes of both professors and learners towards reading and writing skills.

In this sense, UNESCO (2021) has emphasized reading habits as a key indicator of educational development and human capital formation. Comparative data on children's reading practices indicate noteworthy global gaps in the number of books read annually. For example, children in numerous European countries are reported to read almost 25-27 books per year, while youngsters in Japan read around 15-18 books annually. In contrast, in some developing contexts, teens read an inferior number of books per year, have limited access to reading materials, a weak reading culture, and insufficient policies promoting reading habits. (UNESCO, 2022)

While specific large-scale statistics on the number of books that children read per year in Ecuador are still limited. On the other hand, national and regional educational reports indicate that reading habits among students remain a challenge. Moreover, Latin American countries, including Ecuador, face persistent gaps in reading comprehension and literacy engagement, particularly among school-age learners. These challenges are associated with socioeconomic factors, restricted access to libraries and books, and limited family and institutional encouragement of reading practices. (UNESCO, 2021)

According to the studies, Cajamarca and Gonzalez (2023) Ecuadorians do not read sufficiently, which reflects a generalized recognition of weak reading habits within the population. Furthermore, a significant percentage of the students suggested that reading habits are gradually being displaced by digital technologies, including smartphones, the internet, and social networks. Likewise, a considerable percentage of students expressed the perception that reading is often regarded as irrelevant in modern civilization.

In the Ecuadorian context, the deficiency of reading habits among students has direct implications for the development of human resources and long-term educational consequences. Weak reading engagement negatively affects cognitive development, critical thinking, and academic performance, which are essential competencies to knowledge-based societies (OECD, 2019). Furthermore, insufficient reading practice in early educational level can hinder the development of literacy skills that later support second language acquisition, including English language learning.

In this sense, the researcher's scientific problem was: What effect do reading habits have on the English Language Learning Process? Accordingly, the objective of this literature review is to “Analyze the effect of reading habits on the English language Learning Process in the Ecuadorian context,” with a focus on vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, motivation, and overall language proficiency.

Materials and methods

The present investigation has a qualitative paradigm with a documentary research approach based on a literature review design, which focuses on the understanding and interpretation of educational phenomena from a descriptive and analytical perspective. This paradigm aids in giving meanings, perceptions, and approaches of various authors regarding the effect that reading habits have on the English Language Learning Process.

By investigative, empirical and theoretical studies, this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effect of reading habits as a determining factor in EFL learning and to offer pedagogical visions for improving English language learning through reading-oriented strategies. These methods consist of the systematic analysis of scientific articles, academic books, and indexed journals related to reading habits and English language learning.

Thus, the techniques employed were document analysis and thematic categorization to identify key themes such as reading frequency, motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and reading comprehension. On the other hand, the study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, whose purpose is to analyze and interpret the information. The selection criteria included publications indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and SciELO databases published between 2015 and 2025.

The research method employed is content analysis, which facilitates the identification of trends, similarities, divergences, and gaps in the selected studies, thus providing a deeper understanding of the relationship between reading habits and English language learning. For data collection, bibliographic review techniques were applied, supported by systematization instruments such as analysis matrices and bibliographic records, in which variables such as author, year, objective, methodology, results, and conclusions of each previously reviewed study were recorded.

These methodological tools ensured the validity and reliability of the research process by allowing a rigorous organization of the information and its comparative analysis. In this way, the implemented methodology made it possible to construct a comprehensive and up-to-date view of the topic, supported by academic evidence from recent years. In sum, this qualitative approach enabled a critical interpretation of the contributions of different studies, generating relevant conclusions that may serve as a basis for future innovative pedagogical practices in the development of English habit reading.

During the review process of the 20th collected articles obtained from institutional repositories, databases, and scientific journals, it was possible to identify significant advances, approaches, and contributions that provided a broader and more enriching perspective on the research problem. Regarding their origin, 15th articles came from institutional repositories (70.59%), three from academic databases (17.65%), and two from scientific journals (11.76%). This classification made it possible to clearly identify the origin of the sources and, above all, to select those that genuinely contributed to strengthening the study.

After this process, eight out of the 20th reviewed articles were selected: four focused on the independent variable and four on the dependent variable.

Results

A search criteria selection was established to ensure methodological rigor. Among the exclusion criteria are articles that did not focus on the target population, such as undergraduate or postgraduate students, as well as those whose approach diverged from the central variables of the investigation, reading habits, and the English language learning process.

Studies whose conceptualization of the English learning process did not align with the perspective adopted in this research were also excluded. Nevertheless, two articles were partially incorporated because, although they did not meet all the criteria, they provided valuable insights that could be adapted to the analytical framework.

Cajamarca and Gonzalez (2023), suggest that sociocultural factors, technological influence, and low perceived value of reading contribute to the insufficient development of reading habits, which may negatively impact academic literacy and the English language learning process.

In this sense, the literature review revealed that reading habits ominously influence the development of English language proficiency. Reports show that learners who engage in frequent reading demonstrate higher levels of lexical knowledge, better academic performance, and improved comprehension than students with feeble reading habits (Grabe & Stoller, 2019; Nation, 2006). In English as a Foreign Language contexts, such as Ecuador, where the English exposure outside the classroom is limited. That's why reading serves as the main source of linguistic input and encourages prolonged language development.

On the other hand, the documentary analysis revealed that extensive reading practices contribute positively to learners' vocabulary acquisition and reading fluency, while also enhancing motivation toward English learning (Day et al., 1998; Krashen, 2004). Conversely, limited reading engagement was associated with weak reading habits, restricted vocabulary range, limited reading comprehension, and reduced confidence in academic reading tasks among EFL learners.

Research on English learning proposes that students with reading habits develop sturdier linguistic foundations, wider vocabulary, and improved comprehension skills. Notwithstanding, limited reading habits decrease opportunities for intellectual progress and

academic success, eventually impacting national educational quality and workforce competitiveness. In English as a Foreign Language contexts, such as Ecuador, where English is mainly limited to the classroom, the absence of reading habits further restricts learners' access to meaningful language input, slowing down the English language learning process.

Furthermore, extensive reading programs show a positive impact on learners' motivation, fluency, and lexical development (Day & Bamford, 1998). Studies conducted in Ecuador indicate that reading workshops, reading corners, and guided reading activities significantly improve students' engagement and reading performance (Jaramillo-Pontón et al., 2019).

Table 1. Synthesized findings on the effect of reading habits in EFL learning

Dimension	Main Results	Effect on Learning
Vocabulary acquisition	Frequent reading increases exposure to lexical items and contextual learning	High positive effect
Reading comprehension	Regular reading improves inferencing, decoding, and text interpretation	High positive effect
Motivation	Recreational and extensive reading enhance learner engagement	Moderate to high effect
Language fluency	Continuous reading practice improves reading speed and linguistic processing	Moderate to high effect
Academic performance	Strong reading habits correlate with better English achievement	High positive effect

The data synthesis suggests that vocabulary acquisition is the most directly affected component of the English language learning process, followed closely by reading comprehension. This aligns with input-based theories, which emphasize that exposure to meaningful texts facilitates language acquisition through repeated encounters with vocabulary and grammatical structures. Thus, this pattern confirms that reading habits function as a foundational mechanism for language development in EFL environments.

On the other hand, the analysis of regional studies evidenced that many Ecuadorian students exhibit weak reading habits in both their first language (L1) and English (L2), which negatively

affects their language learning outcomes. Furthermore, limited access to English reading materials, traditional grammar-focused instruction, and low reading motivation were identified as key barriers to the development of consistent reading practices.

Overall, the results demonstrated that reading habits have a strong and consistent positive effect on the English language learning process. The most significant impacts were observed in vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and learner motivation. In the Ecuadorian EFL context, promoting sustained reading practices emerges as a critical pedagogical strategy to enhance linguistic competence, academic literacy, and long-term language proficiency.

These results directly support the theoretical assumption that continuous exposure to meaningful written input through reading habits is a decisive factor in the successful second language learning process.

Discussion

The findings confirm that reading habits play a central role in English language learning, particularly in foreign language contexts with limited exposure to authentic input. The results align with previous international research highlighting that extensive reading enhances comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and overall language proficiency (Krashen, 2004; Grabe & Stoller, 2019).

According to Abid et al. (2023) the reading is an attempt to comprehend the writer's message for personal growth and success in the relevant fields. Thus, psychologists consider it a multifaceted cognitive process of constructing meanings from texts. In this sense, research showed a strong positive relationship among reading habits, study skills, and academic achievement in English, while a moderate positive relationship between reading habits and academic achievement in English.

Research on literacy development suggests that children who are exposed to regular reading activities develop stronger linguistic foundations, broader vocabulary, and better comprehension skills (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Conversely, limited reading exposure reduces opportunities for intellectual growth and academic success, ultimately impacting national educational quality and workforce competitiveness. In EFL contexts such as Ecuador, where English exposure is mainly confined to the classroom, the absence of reading habits further

restricts learners' access to meaningful language input, slowing down the English language learning process.

Therefore, promoting a reading culture from early childhood in Ecuador is essential not only for improving literacy rates but also for strengthening educational quality and human resource development. Public policies that encourage school libraries, family reading programs, and access to both printed and digital books can play a significant role in fostering lifelong reading habits and enhancing students' academic and linguistic development.

In the Ecuadorian context, weak reading culture, traditional grammar-focused methodologies, and limited access to reading materials contribute to low reading engagement. However, pedagogical interventions focused on promoting reading habits have demonstrated significant improvements in students' motivation and EFL performance.

Furthermore, reading habits contribute to the development of metacognitive strategies such as predicting, summarizing, and inferencing, which are essential for effective language processing and comprehension.

On the other hand, in the Ecuadorian educational context, several studies have reported that students' limited reading habits negatively affect their English learning outcomes, particularly in reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition (Jaramillo-Ponton et al., 2019). This situation is often associated with low motivation toward reading, traditional grammar-centered instruction, and insufficient access to English reading materials. As a result, students may struggle to achieve adequate levels of language proficiency due to reduced exposure to authentic and meaningful texts.

Therefore, integrating reading habits into the English language learning process is not only pedagogically beneficial but also essential in EFL environments. Promoting extensive reading programs, access to diverse reading materials, and reading-centered instructional strategies can enhance learners' motivation, autonomy, and overall language proficiency. In this sense, reading habits function as a foundational element that supports sustained exposure to language input and fosters long-term development in the English language learning process.

Despite the recognized importance of reading in language acquisition, the promotion of reading habits in English classrooms in Ecuador remains insufficiently addressed. Many educational practices still prioritize grammar-focused instruction over reading-based learning, which reduces students' engagement with meaningful texts and authentic language use. This gap

underscores the need for research that synthesizes existing literature on reading habits and their influence on English language learning within the Ecuadorian context.

Conclusion

In relation to the objective of analyzing the effect of reading habits on the English language learning process in the Ecuadorian context, the literature review demonstrates that reading habits exert a significant and direct influence on learners' linguistic development. The results indicate that consistent reading practices enhance vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, fluency, and motivation, all of which are essential components of effective English language learning in EFL environments.

The analysis also reveals that weak reading habits and the limited reading culture observed in Ecuador negatively affect students' exposure to meaningful English input, thereby hindering their comprehension and overall language proficiency. Additionally, the evidence confirms that the development of reading habits in the first language supports second language learning through the transfer of cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies.

Therefore, it can be concluded that reading habits function as a key determinant in the English language learning process in the Ecuadorian context. Strengthening reading culture, promoting extensive reading practices, and integrating reading-centered pedagogical strategies are necessary measures to improve English learning outcomes among university and postgraduate students.

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