

The study of reading comprehension in English as a Foreign Language in the current educational context

O estudo da compreensão leitora em Inglês como Língua Estrangeira no contexto educacional atual

El estudio de la comprensión lectora en Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en el contexto educativo actual

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Abstract

Teaching and learning English as a foreign language requires more attention within society each day. Consequently, the reflections surrounding said language and its related aspects are continuously increasing. This review paper seeks to study the research of strengthening reading comprehension in English. Therefore, several databases, open and closed, institutional repositories, and books are researched through documentary analysis, resulting in identifying several ways to conceptualize reading comprehension and its strengthening in the English area in different educational levels that have existed in the past years. However, reading stands out in studies as a cognitive process that transcends translation. Lastly, it is concluded that reading, as a multidimensional reality in which various elements intervene, implies changes in the didactic perspective reflected in the way of approaching it within the education system to enhance its acquisition and reach the benefits it offers.

Keywords: Reading; English; Foreign language; Education; Didactics; English teaching.

Resumo

O ensino e aprendizagem de inglês como língua estrangeira requer cada dia mais atenção por parte da sociedade. Consequentemente, as reflexões sobre esta linguagem e os aspectos a ela relacionados são cada vez maiores. O objetivo deste artigo de revisão é estudar pesquisas relacionadas ao fortalecimento da compreensão da leitura em inglês. Consequentemente, por meio de análise documental, são investigadas diversas bases de dados abertas e fechadas, repositórios institucionais e livros, o que resulta na identificação de que nos últimos anos se detalha a existência de diversas formas de conceituar a compreensão leitora, bem como de tratar seu fortalecimento. área de inglês em diferentes níveis educacionais. Contudo, a leitura destaca-se nos estudos como um processo cognitivo que transcende a tradução. Por fim, conclui-se que o ato de ler, enquanto realidade multidimensional em que intervêm uma diversidade de elementos, implica mudanças na perspectiva didática refletidas na forma como é enquadrado no sistema educativo, a fim de potencializar a sua aquisição e alcançar os benefícios ele oferece.

Palavras-chave: Leitura; Inglês; Língua estrangeira; Educação; Didática; Ensino de Inglês.

Resumen

La enseñanza y el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera cada día requiere más atención al interior de la sociedad. Por consiguiente, las reflexiones en torno a dicha lengua y los aspectos relacionados con esta continuamente están aumentando. El presente artículo de revisión tiene como objetivo estudiar las investigaciones relacionados con el fortalecimiento de la comprensión lectora en inglés. Consecuentemente, mediante análisis documental se indaga diversas bases de datos, abiertas y cerradas, repositorios institucionales y libros, lo cual da como resultado identificar que en los últimos años se detalla la existencia variadas formas de conceptualizar la comprensión lectora, así como de tratar su fortalecimiento en el área de inglés en los distintos niveles educativos. No obstante, sobresale en los estudios la lectura como un proceso cognitivo que trasciende la traducción. Finalmente, se llega a la conclusión de que el acto lector, como realidad multidimensional en la cual intervienen diversidad de elementos, implica cambios en la

perspectiva didáctica reflejados en la forma de ser abarcado al interior del sistema educativo en aras de potenciar su adquisición y alcanzar los beneficios que ofrece.

Palabras clave: Lectura; Inglés; Lengua extranjera; Educación; Didáctica; Enseñanza de Inglés.

1. Introduction

The study of the teaching and learning processes related to English as a foreign language (EFL) is reaching greater attention in education. Specifically, it is considered that the requirement to innovate and adapt the didactic teaching processes of language exists (Del Campo, 2010). English has an even bigger scope with each passing day (Olín, 2018; Castro & Jessup, 2022). Reflection becomes essential for the formative environment when faced with how the internalization and management of English and everything related to it is enhanced.

Reading comprehension stands out as one of the most relevant aspects of the English acquisition process. The above when keeping in mind that according to Patiño (2018) modern society demands that reading texts in a foreign language must be within the capabilities of the subject. So, it becomes crucial that students reach the necessary development to comprehend everything they read, whether it is in their native tongue or a different one. Therefore, it is essential to conduct a didactic analysis referring to the formative processes related to this topic when examining the importance of the act of reading in the area of English teaching as a foreign language, not only for its implications in the access of knowledge but also for its effect in the learning of a language itself.

The starting point is identifying that in the Constitución Política Colombiana de 1991 (Colombian Constitution of 1991), the necessity of providing an integral education that fosters the active performance of the subject in the social area is presented. Hence, in the Lineamientos Curriculares de Idiomas Extranjeros 1988 (Foreign Language Curricular Guidelines of 1998) the acquisition of a foreign language as an instrument of meeting with information and culture is stipulated as necessary for the student. As a consequence, from the Ley General de Educación, Ley 115 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN], 1994) (General Education Law, Law 115 (Ministry of National Education [MEN in Spanish], 1994); to the Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje en el área de inglés (Basic Rights of Learning in the English area) (MEN, 2016); the teaching of a foreign language, English, is regulated as an essential element of Colombian education.

The above-mentioned acquires an even greater value when also mentioning Kohler (2005), since this author identifies that the human being is in an era where it is surrounded by information. This is why Espinoza and Campuzano (2019) mention that it is important to provide what is necessary for understanding all types of knowledge from the educational sphere. Therefore, appreciations such as those of Bolarín et al. (2019), who state that knowing diverse languages is the entrance to universal information, stand out. In other words, in a world where knowledge goes beyond sociocultural barriers, the necessity of managing several languages and the study of elements related to them is recognized, in a way that allows access to information.

Seclén (2015) and Castro and Jessup (2022) highlight the use of English in current times. In a similar vein, Montero (2016) identifies this language as essential in diverse human contexts. Just like Villalobos (2011), Camelo (2017) and the Education First Institute (2021) establish a concomitance between language proficiency, job skills, and socio-economic development. Said differently, English gained international strength due to its role in the globalized world, human development, socialization processes, internationalization, and social and labor insertion. For this reason, it is mentioned that several academic processes, entertainment activities, and daily actions are mediated using English language.

Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the acquisition of communication skills related to EFL, for which, in Colombia's case, according to Castro and Londoño (2021), reading comprehension is highlighted as one of the main skills. This is when thinking that reading is a necessary activity in multiple human spaces (Mohamedi, 2015). In other words, due to the function of

reading as a liaison between information and reader, learning how to read is one of the decisive aspects for the development of a person in their context. Especially when reading is thought of as an instrument to reach knowledge, both in the academic and disciplinary spheres, as well as in everyday life.

In particular, reading comprehension is detailed as essential in the school environment and formative processes, since it enhances learning (Díaz and Hernández, 2002). This is to the extent that it allows contrasting feelings and concepts (González, 2015). In addition to being one of the sources and means of access to information and knowledge (Castro and Londoño, 2021; Guerrero and Valderrama, 2021). Especially, by proposing comprehension as a process of exchange and significance (Casas, 2018). In summary, the authors identify reading as necessary for the search, creation, and processing of knowledge, the cause why this is thought of as one of the bases of construction, reconstruction, and changes of knowledge.

Therefore, it can be inferred that it is required to design, evaluate, and study the didactic processes and strategies used for the enhancement of reading comprehension in a foreign language within the school since it is the job of education to provide the students the acquisition of the necessary competences for its development in the current context (Castro et al., 2022). For this reason, the research and study processes related to reading comprehension in English in the educational field are supported. This highlights the need to understand what is read within society (Patiño, 2018). This is the idea that in the modern world, understanding of a second language becomes paramount (Casart, 2020).

Lastly, it is appropriate to point out that the development of reading comprehension in a foreign language, English, reaches an even more significant place in teaching due to its incidence in various skills acquisition (Matos, 2017). It is equally supported that it is essential since it favors cognitive development (Olín, 2018). It is also detailed that reading plays a leading role in the internalization processes of a foreign language (Fayad, 2015). To summarize, the reading act in the English language impacts academic performance and competence building, which is why its analysis, reflection, and main elements examination for didactics.

Afterward, the purpose, of this review paper is to highlight the obtained results in the study of several research papers centered around the reading improvement and comprehension process in English. Therefore, through the documentary analysis of several texts, which were acquired through a search in various bibliographic sources, it is possible to identify trends in categories such as year, nationality, the way of covering and conceptualizing the process of reading comprehension in English, the type of strategy used for its strengthening and the educational level on which the research is focused. Lastly, the importance of reflection on the teaching and learning process of reading in EFL is highlighted, the teacher's work in this process, to achieve transformations in the didactic perspective of foreign languages.

2. Methodology

For the study of information found about previous research related to the use of didactic strategies to increase reading comprehension in English as a foreign language and related topics, documentary research was used, which according to Peña & Pirela (2007) allows the researcher to organize and structure data present in several texts in a summarized, concise and useful way for their research. Espinosa et al. (2009) and Schernn (2023) agree, and they mention that documentary analysis facilitates, that various documents are categorized for their research use. In other words, this type of analysis is one of the ways through which a great quantity of information can be processed, in such a way that it favors its study, reflection, and analysis.

Guiding questions were used for this study to facilitate the search and classification of information, which allowed for a detailed interpretation of the information found. Similarly, it was taken, as standards of inclusion that the documents were a result of this study and that they took place in an educational context. The inquiry process took place through the Access of several national and international databases, like SciELO, Redalyc, Dialnet, as books and institutional repositories. Keywords and descriptors such as “reading comprehension”, “English”, “Foreign language”, “didactic strategy” and “strengthening of

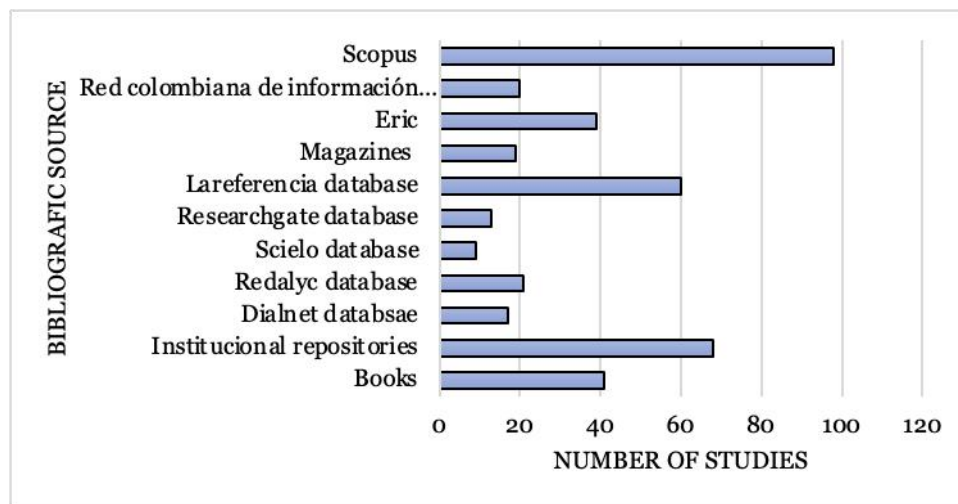
reading comprehension” were used particularly in these, which provided a wealth of information.

Finally, the chosen research papers were processed and analyzed in an Excel table. For this, categories such: 1. author of the study, 2. title of the research, where this study took place, 3. Participants of the study, 4. general objective, 5. methodology, 6. Results and 7. Conclusions. In this part of the study there are considered some reading comprehension concepts, types of strategies used to strengthen the studied skill and other aspects related to reading in the text, and the kind of proposal were used. This provided the processing of the data, and the identification of trends, currents of thought, and customs about the reality studied.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis of results starts with Figure 1, which shows the amount of research found, according to the source of information consulted.

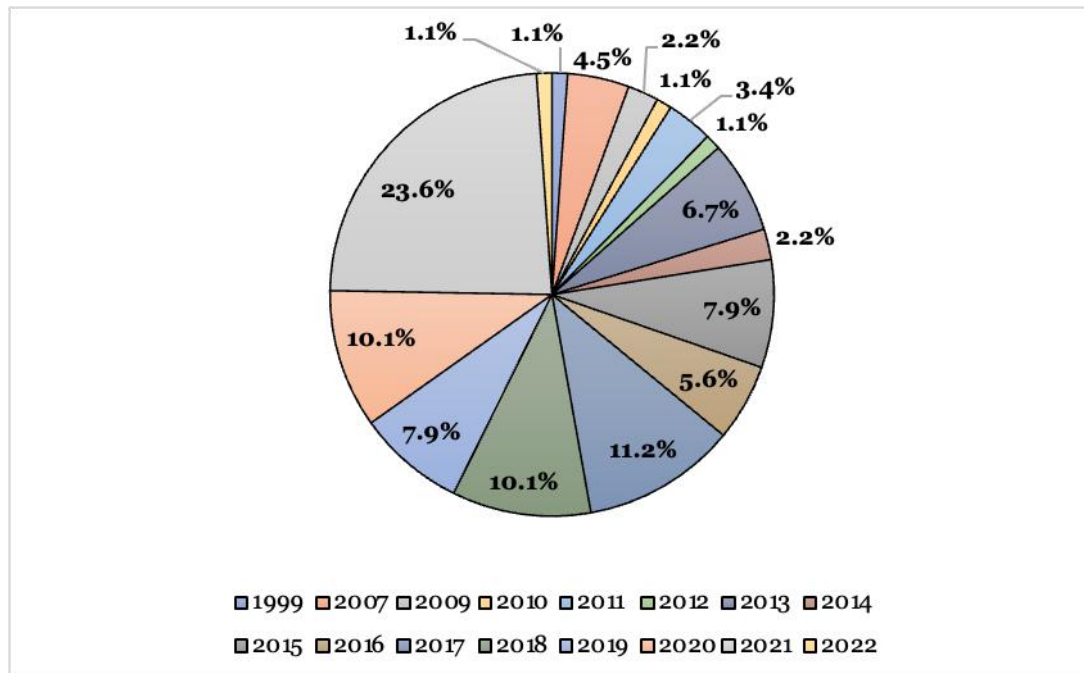
Figure 1 - Number of research Studies according to their bibliographic sources.



Source: Own elaboration based on different sources.

Specifically, in Figure 1 it can be identified that 405 documents related to reading comprehension, teaching English as a foreign language, and the use of didactic strategy for its improvement. However, according to the inclusion criteria, the amount decreased to 89 research papers. In the same way, it can be detailed that information was in several open and closed databases, as well as institutional repositories and books. Lastly, it stands out that the database with the most content related to the mentioned topics was Scopus, followed by several institutional repositories and Lareferencia. On the other hand, the bibliographic source with the least number of studies related to the topic was Scielo. Also, Figure 2, next, highlights the percentage of research papers found relating to the interesting topic according to the year when they were developed.

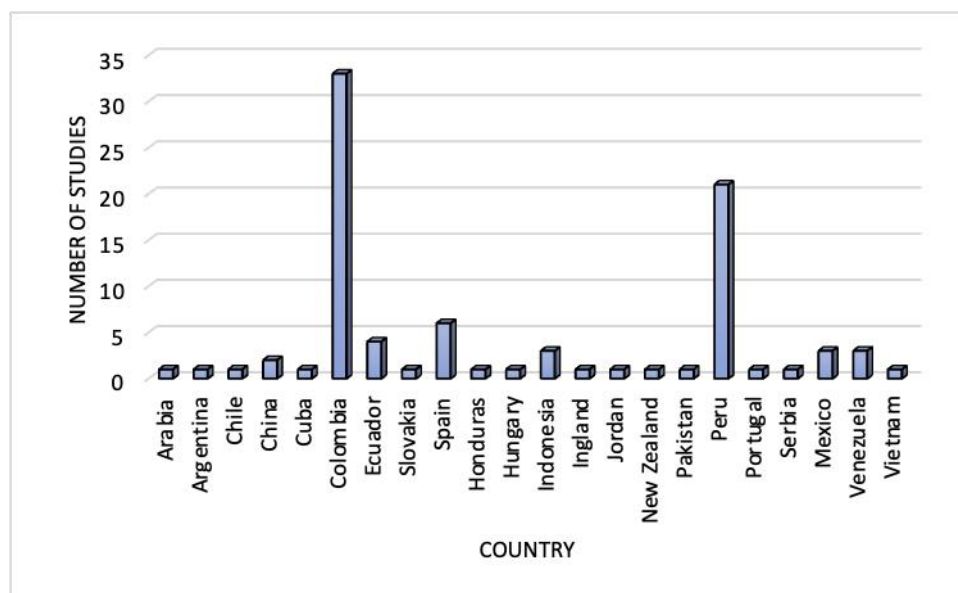
Figure 2 - Distribution of research related to the topic of interest according to the year of publication.



Source: Own elaboration based on different sources.

Figure 2 proves that the information that was found dates from the 90s until the year 2022. Particularly, it can be observed that in the year 2021 the study of topics related to reading comprehension in English as a foreign language in educational contexts was more widely accepted in the research field. Contrary to the years 1999, 2010, 2012 y 2022, just the years in which said theme was not dealt with as frequently. Finally, it is important to note that 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2008 did not present research related to the topic. The analysis continues with the graph shown below, which shows the amount of research production that were found in its place of origin (Figure 3).

Figure 3 - List of countries and number of documents found related to the subject of interest.



Source: Own elaboration based on different sources.

Thus, from the analysis of Figure 3, the study on the subject is predominantly carried out in South American countries. In the meanwhile, it is recognized in the Colombian context that there was the space in which the greatest amount of research papers was found, followed by Perú. Finally, it is good to mention that some studies were also found overseas other than Latin America. This analysis continues in Table 1, which presents how the authors of different studies tend to conceptualize the reading comprehension process.

Table 1 - Conceptualization of reading comprehension in the group of documents studied.

Epistemological position of conceptualizing reading comprehension	Number of studies
Levels of literal, inferential, and critical reading comprehension	19
The bottom-up, top-down, and interactive reading models	9
Reading from the stages before, during, and after the reading act	2
The bottom-up, top-down, and interactive reading model in relation to other ways of approaching reading comprehension.	3
The moments before, during, and after in relation to other ways of approaching reading comprehension.	1
The moments before, during, and after and the literal, inferential, and critical levels.	1
The bottom-up, top-down, and interactive reading model and the literal, inferential, and critical levels.	4
The bottom-up, top-down, and interactive reading model and moments of reading comprehension.	1
The bottom-up, top-down, and interactive reading model, reading comprehension levels, and reading comprehension moments.	2
The bottom-up, top-down, and interactive reading model, moments of reading comprehension, and other ways to encompass reading comprehension.	1
The bottom-up, top-down, and interactive reading model, levels of reading comprehension, moments of reading comprehension and other ways to cover reading comprehension.	2
The multilevel didactic model.	1
Reading comprehension skills and strategies.	1
Oral reading.	1
Extensive reading.	1
Reading or reading comprehension in general.	32
No mention of reading comprehension.	8
Total	89

Source: Own elaboration based on different sources.

Subsequently, according to the data shown in Table 1, there is a tendency to work on reading from its generality (Moreno, 2019). As well as from the current levels of literal, inferential, and critical reading comprehension, as Barboza and Galván (2013); and Arroyo (2021), among others, do. Similarly, there is a large amount of research that encompasses the topic of the bottom-up, top-down, and interactive reading model, both individually and related to elements such as the levels of reading comprehension (Figuroa, 2021) or the schema theory and componential approaches (Gutiérrez, 2018).

Similarly, it is highlighted that some research that encompasses the reading comprehension levels, the moments of the reading act, and other postures different to those previously mentioned (Saez, 2019; Vargas, 2020). Similarly to those studies that analyzed reading by relating the reading moments and reading comprehension levels (Olivares, 2021). So, the variety of currents or ways of understanding the act of reading is proved. Lastly, the presence of research groups different to those previously mentioned is recognized.

Finally, in a general way, it can be seen that, despite a great number of studies referring to reading comprehension in English a foreign language, as well as several ways to approach it, generally it is not explicitly related to reading and English in a simultaneous way. Also, it is worth highlighting the leaning of these research papers toward working on previous knowledge, motivation, context, vocabulary, and language management, both jointly and separately, as decisive factors in the strengthening of reading, regardless of whether it is in a native or foreign language.

On the other hand, Table 2 shows the amount of research related to the strategy used to strengthen reading comprehension in English.

Table 2 - List of the number of research according to the type of strategy used.

Type of strategies	Number of studies
Didactic strategy	2
Didactic strategy and teaching strategy	1
Didactic strategy and learning strategy	1
Learning strategy in general	3
Learning strategies according to their classification (cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social)	3
Learning strategy and teaching strategy	1
Learning strategies and metacognition	2
Metacognitive strategies	4
Learning strategies and motivation	1
Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies	3
Learning strategies and cognitive strategies	1
Cognitive strategies	1
Metacognition	4
Emerging	58
Overview	4
Total	89

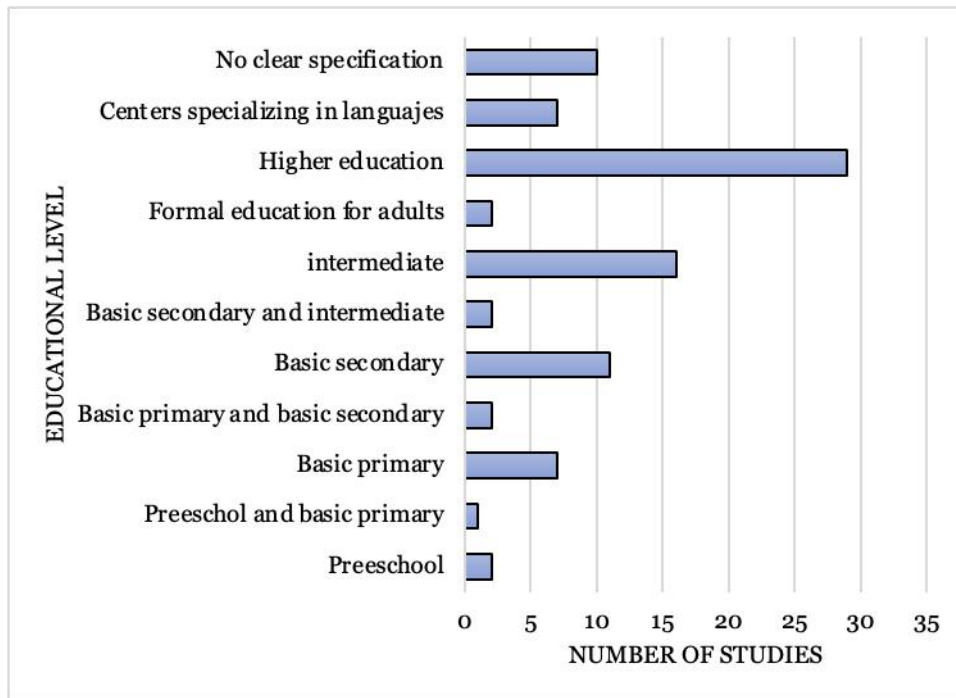
Source: Own elaboration based on different sources.

Table 2 shows a propensity to work on this topic from the emerging category, in which all those research studies whose improvement plan did not include the didactic strategy or its typology or topics related to these were classified. Thus, it was possible to find the constructivist strategies (Mora and Montero, 2011); the sociocultural focus in the teaching and learning of English (Cabaleiro, 2017); and active methodologies (Cedeño, 2017); among others. In particular, many journals are mainly focused on the use of ICT in the development of reading, as is the case of the works done by Bernal (2021) and Pinilla et al. (2021).

Similarly, from Table 2 it can be recognized that there is an inclination to work with learning strategies, either in general or from their classification into cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Sometimes these are even related to topics such as metacognition (Manzano & Hidalgo, 2009); motivation (Castellanos & Garzón, 2013) or other type of strategy. Lastly, it was possible to observe in the chosen research group a lack with respect to the concept of didactic strategy and its use in the area of strengthening reading comprehension in detail, to such an extent that there were cases in which it was mentioned superficially in order to focus on other aspects of the educational act.

To conclude the analysis of the results, Figure 4 shows the amount of research on reading comprehension in English, its enhancement, and related topics, according to the educational level at which they are developed.

Figure 4 - Distribution of research according to educational level.



Source: Own elaboration based on different sources.

For the elaboration of Figure 4, the Colombian General Education Law, Law 115 of 1994, which establishes the distribution and classification of educational levels in Colombia, is considered. Likewise, these levels are related to the equality established in the *Cartilla Técnica de la Tabla de Equivalencias CAB* (Technical Chart of the Table of Equivalences) (2021) of the Andrés Bello agreement, to facilitate the processing of international information. In the first instance, it can be detailed in this graph that there is a propensity to study the topic in higher education, as is the case with the documents developed by Arancibia (2010) and Delgado (2015).

At the same time, there is a second predisposition to reading study comprehension in English as a foreign language and related subjects at the intermediate school level, as in the works of Saavedra (2020) and López & Novoa, (2021). There are studies located at the basic secondary level, such as the research developed by Ardila et al. (2021) and Rojas (2019). Finally, it can be detailed that the topic of interest has been researched from preschool to higher education, including studies located in educational settings such as specialized language centers and training programs for adults.

4. Discussion

From the information found, it was possible to recognize a great inclination toward the investigative analysis of topics related to the formative processes in the EFL field. The previous premises related to the fact that the management and acquisition of a foreign language promotes the subject performance in society (Patiño, 2018; Bernal, 2021). The reason for this, in the readings carried out, the significance of English in globalized and world contexts is highlighted (Cabaleiro, 2017; Castro & Jessup, 2022). In summary, it can be inferred from the documentary review that due to the importance that the use of English as a foreign language has obtained in various fields, there is a need for the development of study processes for its strengthening in the educational system.

Definitely, in the set of analyzed documents, it was possible to recognize a predisposition to place reading comprehension in English as a main fact in the educational activity and language area. This is because it is identified as

essential to achieve the exchange of information in a clear, concise, and understandable manner (Ardila et al., 2021). In addition, it is one of the key skills to ensure that the student develops what is necessary to perform in the different spaces in which they interact (Olín, 2018). Translated differently, it can be argued that reading in EFL is seen, on the one hand, as one of the skills to develop in the formative process. And on the other hand, as a vehicle of knowledge that favors aspects such as language acquisition and immersion in academic, disciplinary, scientific, cultural, and everyday knowledge.

In a different line of analysis, although a great variety of theories regarding the conceptualization of reading comprehension were found, most of the studies agree with Castro and Londoño (2021) who mention that it is an activity that goes beyond translation. In other words, it is stated that reading requires more than the decoding of symbols and signs, especially when it refers to the reading comprehension of English as a foreign language. For such reason, Llanos and Montenegro (2019) argue that reading consists of a process of signification from the content of the document and the mental processes developed by the person. Put differently, reading comprehension is seen as a complex thinking activity.

From another point of view, when analyzing the different texts processed by the present study, although a great variety of content related to the types of strategies, forms and instruments used to promote reading comprehension in English and related topics was found, a considerable part of them coincided in focusing on different elements that characterize reading comprehension. Thus, it is recognized that the role of language management is directly related to the results of reading in English (Mera, 2022) and Toledo Sarracino & Leopoldino dos Santos (2022). According to the documentation, one aspect that promotes the improvement of reading activity in EFL is considered a linguistic proficiency.

Similarly, in these documents, the role of vocabulary is rescued as decisive in the act of reading (Moreno, 2019). At the same time, previous knowledge in reading is recognized as a basis for the comprehension and signification of the text (Saavedra, 2020). The context is also positioned as an aspect to consider in the reading activity (Bonilla and Bustamante, 2021). Finally, the issue of motivation in the reading act is mentioned; this is considered from two realities, on the one hand from the author, in harmony with Loaiza (2009) who mentions that the composer of the text and its intentionality must be mentioned when reading. And on the other hand, from the interest of the reader, which according to Del Campo (2010) stipulates the way to encompass the text. In summary, it is possible to recognize the multifactorial character that should be aimed at when designing strategies that intend to influence reading comprehension in English.

Finally, it is possible to abstract from the results of the bibliographic study the importance of didactic innovations in the area of learning and teaching English. The previously related in agreement with Camelo (2017) and Bernal (2021) who highlight the need of building new didactic realities in which students access a foreign language in a meaningful way. In particular, it could be inferred that new ways of approaching the development of reading comprehension in English as a foreign language are required, since, as mentioned by Llanos and Montenegro (2019) the development of this skill is conditioned by how it is approached in the formative process. That is to say, the didactic means by which it is contemplated and intended to impact reading comprehension in EFL affects its promotion and scope.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the process of bibliographic research related to reading comprehension in EFL and its fostering, it was possible to conclude that the acquisition of a foreign language is of great importance internationally in the current educational context. This is justified by opening doors to the encounter and approach of knowledge of various kinds. Hence the importance of studying educational processes related to this topic, since it is recognized that the means, forms, strategies, and procedures used in teaching are key to language learning.

Thus, from the documents studied, it is possible to identify that because English is one of the most widely distributed languages worldwide, it acquires a leading role in most of the educational systems of several countries, especially in Colombia.

For this reason, the amount of research related to its acquisition that highlights the fostering of competencies and skills related to said language, including reading, is justified. Thus, reading comprehension skill becomes a trend to be studied in research groups and prestigious institutions overseas. And as one of the essential elements to be developed in EFL field is the way reading comprehension is taught. However, a double mission is considered in the learning process and how this skill is developed in English lessons. At the same time, it is seen as a means for the internalization of information among the learners and the new language speakers.

Finally, according to the results of the processing of the documents dealt with by this research, it can be concluded that reading comprehension in English, as a complex reality, requires the continuous didactic study of strategies that foster its development. They mentioned when thinking that the educational process must guarantee the person everything necessary to act in the environment, in which English and the skills related to it are increasingly acquiring a greater scope. Consequently, the processes of design, selection, analysis, evaluation, and restructuring of the educational practice are essential in the theoretical-practical construction of knowledge in the teaching process. The teacher's action is highlighted, employing observation, reflection, and research can achieve such transformation in the formative reality of languages.

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