The didactic strategy: a catalyst for reading comprehension in students

La estrategia didáctica: catalizador de la comprensión lectora en los estudiantes

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is a priority need in all educational areas and must be developed with the support of appropriate strategies. In this sense, the main objective of this study was to demonstrate the effectiveness of didactic strategies to improve reading comprehension in students of the Educational Institution Laboratory of Research and Pedagogical Innovation "El Amauta" of the Daniel Alcides Carrión National University (Peru), using pertinent strategies to address the literal, inferential and critical levels of the text. To achieve this purpose, the scientific, inductive-deductive, analytical-synthetic and statistical methods were applied, before, during and after the implementation of the didactic strategy, organized in eight processes that covered the different levels of reading comprehension. The sample consisted of 25 students, and the results, according to Student's t-test ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$), confirmed the validity of the proposed objective. In conclusion, the didactic strategies significantly improve reading comprehension in the students of the Pedagogical Research and Innovation Laboratory "El Amauta".

Keywords: comprehension, strategy, reading.

Resumen

La comprensión lectora es una necesidad prioritaria en todos los ámbitos educativos y debe desarrollarse con el apoyo de estrategias adecuadas. En este sentido, el objetivo principal del presente estudio fue demostrar la eficacia de estrategias didácticas para mejorar la comprensión lectora en los estudiantes de la Institución Educativa Laboratorio de Investigación e Innovación Pedagógica "El Amauta" de la Universidad Nacional Daniel Alcides Carrión (Perú), utilizando estrategias pertinentes para abordar los niveles literal, inferencial y crítico del texto. Para alcanzar dicho propósito, se aplicaron los métodos científico, inductivo-deductivo, analítico-sintético y estadístico, antes, durante y después de la implementación de la estrategia didáctica, organizada en ocho procesos que abarcaron los distintos niveles de comprensión lectora. La muestra estuvo conformada por 25 estudiantes, y los resultados, según la prueba t de Student ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$), confirmaron la validez del objetivo planteado. En conclusión, las estrategias didácticas mejoran significativamente la comprensión lectora en los estudiantes del Laboratorio de Investigación e Innovación Pedagógica "El Amauta".

Palabras clave: comprensión, estrategia, lectura.

Introduction

The term "didactics" implies knowing, demonstrating, and instructing, which translates into the processes of teaching and learning (Casasola, 2020). Teaching is an action that educators perform within their pedagogical practice; thus, didactics plays a fundamental role in helping them achieve the competencies established in the educational curriculum, addressing key questions such as: how is teaching conducted? and when is teaching conducted?

Didactic strategies are activities intentionally planned by educators to enhance student learning. These can be classified into cognitive, metacognitive, and resource management strategies (Valle et al., 2006). Essentially, all three share a focus on the cognitive aspect of learning. The Ministry of Education proposes various strategies that promote reading comprehension, emphasizing the importance of these being organized by the educator, who is considered the specialist in educational strategic planning. The student, in turn, is the direct recipient of these strategies. Those centered on the student are known as active strategies and encourage self-directed learning (Ministerio de la Protección Social, 2003).

In this context, the Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación, 2017) identifies key strategies such as reading various types of texts and employing metacognition. Designing effective didactic strategies represents a constant challenge for educators, as their creative and critical thinking will largely determine the achievements reached in text comprehension.

Moreover, reading comprehension remains one of the most relevant educational issues, not only in Peru but throughout Latin America. Most students experience difficulties in understanding what they read. Cieza (2023) asserts that reading comprehension is a process of constructing meaning at literal, inferential, and critical levels through interaction with the text. Similarly, Ochoa et al. (2019) note that understanding a text involves an active engagement from the reader, which depends on factors such as prior knowledge, motivation, and disposition (Solé, 2006). Thus, reading comprehension is a dynamic interaction between reader and text, which cannot be passive when obtaining, interpreting, and reflecting on content.

Understanding a text entails recognizing both its explicit and implicit elements, making it essential for educational institutions to teach macro and micro textual structures. Sánchez and Reyes (2015) argue that this comprehension can occur directly, when the text is understood immediately (requiring prior knowledge), or indirectly, through mental processes such as comparison and analysis. Both types of comprehension are interrelated and complement each other in the reading process.

According to Solé (2000, cited in Munayco, 2018), reading comprehension integrates cognitive, critical, and affective factors of the reader, evidenced in skills and abilities that facilitate effective reading. Pinzas (2003, cited in Munayco, 2018) defines it as a constructive, interactive, strategic, and metacognitive process. These processes allow the reader to actively engage with their environment and enrich their understanding of the world.

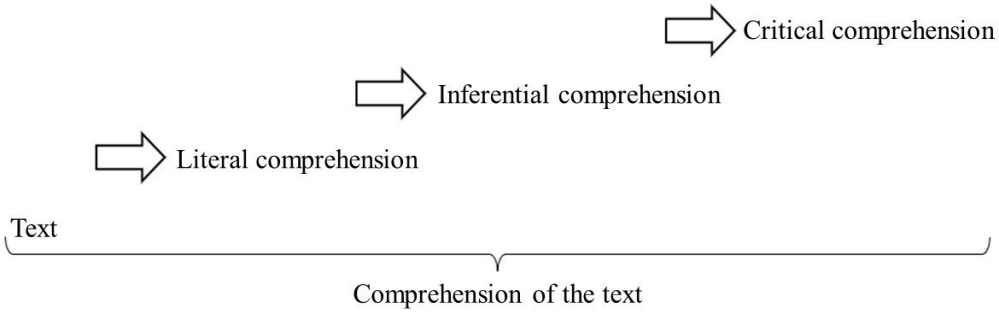
According to Solé (2012, cited in García et al., 2018), the reading process involves "actions that allow the reader to activate their prior knowledge to construct ideas about the content, organize relevant information, pause when necessary, and even return and reflect" (p. 158). Therefore, this process requires cognitive, metacognitive, and attitudinal strategies, applied to various levels of overall text comprehension, enabling access to both objective and subjective information.

-Literal level: this is the initial stage of reading comprehension and lays the foundation for deeper interpretations of the text.

-Inferential or interpretive level: this requires going beyond the explicit meaning, connecting the text with prior experiences to deduce implications, formulate hypotheses, and anticipate outcomes.
-Critical or evaluative level: this allows for reflective analysis of the text, assessing the validity of arguments and the quality of evidence presented.

For reading comprehension to be effective, it is crucial for the reader to articulate these three levels correctly. In this regard, the role of the educator is key to developing competencies in each of them. Expert readers employ strategies to identify literal facts, infer implicit ideas, and construct meanings from them. These inferences contribute to the formation of opinions and evaluations. Reading is, therefore, a constructive activity that involves constant interaction between reader, text, and context (Neira et al., 2015). In contrast, less experienced readers often struggle even to identify literal facts. Consequently, comprehension of the text requires an efficient articulation of the three mentioned levels, as explained in the following diagram:

Figure 1.
Articulation of reading comprehension levels.



The above figure illustrates the proposed strategies for addressing the different levels of text comprehension:
-Literal: involves a detailed and complete reading of the text.
-Inferential: focuses on identifying implicit ideas.
-Critical: allows for evaluative judgments, whether favorable or unfavorable, about the content.

The articulation of these three levels is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the text. Among them, the inferential level represents the greatest challenge, as it requires going beyond what is explicitly stated, significantly involving the reader's prior knowledge of the world (Silva, 2014). Inference is constructed from the literal level and leads into the critical level, where the reader expresses their reflective thought about what they have read.

As a basis for the study, the reported reading comprehension achievement levels from 2019 to 2022 were taken into account, showing an average of 56.5%. This result reveals that students are only at halfway to the expected level in evaluations, highlighting the persistence of the problem across all regions of Peru.

The results of the PISA (2022) test indicate a slight improvement compared to previous assessments, although this variation is statistically insignificant (less than 0.05%). Furthermore, Peruvian students are unable to surpass level 2 of the test, which is considered the minimum required to comprehend complex texts. This issue, present for decades, has yet to be resolved despite various efforts made by the educational system and teachers.

In both national and international evaluations, a high percentage of students struggle to interpret, analyze, or reflect critically on texts. These difficulties are associated with several factors, including a lack of reading habit formation, the use of ineffective teaching methodologies, and the limited application of appropriate didactic strategies.

In the Peruvian context, while numerous studies on reading comprehension in basic education students exist, the progress made so far has been limited. Specifically, in the Pasco region, studies remain scarce. This is evidenced by the results of the 2022 Censal Evaluation, where most second-grade secondary students were placed at the beginning level, with only a small percentage achieving a satisfactory level (Ministerio de Educación del Perú, 2022). These low levels of reading comprehension negatively impact overall academic performance, especially in areas that require textual analysis. Despite efforts such as the implementation of reading promotion programs, results remain inconsistent.

The Educational Institution Laboratory of Research and Pedagogical Innovation "El Amauta" of the Daniel Alcides Carrión National University, is not exempt from this issue. Therefore, this study aimed to promote a didactic strategy to improve reading comprehension, theoretically grounded and developed through a methodological proposal detailed in the following sections.

Methodology

This research adopted a quantitative approach, applied in nature, with an explanatory level and a pre-experimental design, allowing for the observation of the effect of a didactic strategy on reading comprehension by comparing results obtained before and after its implementation, in line with the study's purpose.

The population comprised 124 students from the Educational Institution Laboratory of Research and Pedagogical Innovation "El Amauta" of the Daniel Alcides Carrión National University. From this population, a non-probabilistic sample was selected by the researchers, consisting of 25 third-grade students who were informed about the study's objectives and asked for their informed consent to participate, with their active collaboration throughout the process.

For the development of the study, the general scientific method was employed, enabling the identification of the problem, obtaining and verifying results, and formulating well-founded conclusions. Additionally, specific methods such as inductive, deductive, analytical, synthetic, and statistical were used, facilitating a rigorous procedure to verify or refute the proposed hypothesis and establish causal relationships between variables to generate new knowledge. Pre- and post-intervention tests were applied to measure the dependent variable before and after the implementation of the didactic strategy, in order to observe changes in the results.

To collect information, a structured question framework was designed as a basis for the analysis, development, and systematization of reading. Subsequently, a questionnaire was administered to gather students' perceptions regarding their reading comprehension. This instrument was previously validated using Cronbach's Alpha statistic, achieving a value of 0.83, indicating high reliability. The validation was supported by favorable opinions from experts and university students from the Faculty of Education at the Daniel Alcides Carrión National University.

Survey and observation techniques were employed for data collection, enabling the acquisition of relevant information based on the established objectives.

Figure 2.

Didactic strategies for reading comprehension.

Process 8. *Present the most relevant conclusions.*
Process 7. *Provide a critical and evaluative analysis.*
Process 6. *Find other sources to strengthen arguments.*
Process 5. *Argue and interpret themes and sub-themes.*
Process 4. *Create a visual organizer.*
Process 3. *Summarize the reading by answering questions.*
Process 2. *Turn themes and sub-themes into questions.*
Process 1. *Identify the themes and sub-themes.*

Once the didactic strategy was implemented and applied, following the stages of the process represented in Figure 2 of the study, the collected data were tabulated, classified according to the levels of reading comprehension and students' perceptions. The data were statistically processed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS version 27, in accordance with the research objectives.

Results

The following presents the results obtained from the data collection, classification, and systematization process, aligned with the objectives set forth in this research.

Table 1.

Didactic strategy at the literal level.

		Before		After	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Never	2	8%	0	0%
	Sometimes	15	60%	6	24%

	Almost always	7	28%	15	60%
	Always	1	4%	4	16%
	Total	25	100%	25	100%

The preceding table demonstrates that following the application of the didactic strategy, results improved towards "almost always" and "always," while responses indicating "never" and "almost never" decreased. Thus, the didactic strategies influenced the literal level of reading comprehension.

Table 2.
Didactic strategy at the inferential level.

		Before		After	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Never	4	16%	1	4%
	Sometimes	14	56%	9	36%
	Almost always	6	24%	11	44%
	Always	1	4%	4	16%
	Total	25	100%	25	100%

The previous table shows that after the application of the didactic strategy, results improved towards "almost always" and "always," while responses indicating "never" and "almost never" decreased. Therefore, the didactic strategies influenced the inferential level of reading comprehension.

Table 3.
Didactic strategy at the critical level.

		Before		After	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Never	4	16%	0	0%
	Sometimes	13	52%	11	44%
	Almost always	7	28%	10	40%
	Always	1	4%	4	16%
	Total	25	100%	25	100%

The preceding table demonstrates that after the application of the didactic strategy, results improved towards "almost always" and "always," while responses indicating "never" and "almost never" decreased. Thus, the didactic strategies influenced the critical level of reading comprehension.

Table 4.
Didactic strategies in reading comprehension.

		Before		After	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Never	3	12%	0	0%
	Sometimes	14	56%	9	36%
	Almost always	7	28%	12	48%
	Always	1	4%	4	16%
	Total	25	100%	25	100%

The preceding table demonstrates that after the application of the didactic strategy, results improved towards "almost always" and "always," while responses indicating "never" and "almost never" decreased. Therefore, the didactic strategies influenced the reading comprehension of the students at the Laboratory of Research and Pedagogical Innovation El Amauta – UNDAC.

Table 5.
Statistical differentiation of measures of central tendency and dispersion of didactic strategies and reading comprehension.

		Pre-test	Post-test
N	Valid	25	25
	Lost	0	0
Mean		26.64	33.40
Median		26.00	33.00
Mode		24[a]	31
Std. Deviation		5.780	5.307
Variance		33.407	28.167
Range		20	18
Minimum		18	24
Maximum		38	42

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.

Additionally, when comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test, a significant difference was found in the measures of central tendency. The mean increased by 6.76 points, the median reached a value of 7.00, while the minimum value increased from 4 to 6 points. Furthermore, the reduction in standard deviation from 5.780 to 5.307 and in variance from 33.407 to 28.167 suggests a greater concentration of results around the mean after the intervention, reinforcing the evidence of a generalized improvement.

Table 6.
Normality test.

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Difference	.961	25	.427

*. This is a lower limit of true significance.

a. Lilliefors significance correction.

According to the normality test, a significance value of 0.427 was obtained, which is greater than 0.05. This indicates that the data follow an approximately normal distribution, justifying the use of the Student's t-test for paired samples.

Statistical test
-Null hypothesis (Ho): Didactic strategies do not improve reading comprehension in students at the Laboratory of Research and Pedagogical Innovation El Amauta – UNDAC.
-Alternative hypothesis (Ha): Didactic strategies improve reading comprehension in students at the Laboratory of Research and Pedagogical Innovation El Amauta – UNDAC.

-Significance level (α): 0.05
-Decision criterion: If the p-value < 0.05, reject the null hypothesis.

The result obtained from the t-test was a p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, there is statistically sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

Table 7.
Paired samples test.

		Paired differences							
					95% confidence interval of the difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	T	df	Sig. (two-tailed)
Pair 1	Post-test Pre-test	-6.760	6.648	1.330	4.016	9.504	5.085	24	.000

Statistical conclusion

The results allow us to conclude that the implemented didactic strategies significantly improve reading comprehension in students of the Laboratory of Research and Pedagogical Innovation El Amauta – UNDAC, as supported by empirical evidence and statistical analysis conducted.

Discussion

The use of methodological and didactic strategies helps to reduce problems associated with reading comprehension and facilitates meaning construction (Jiménez et al., 2020). Based on the results obtained in this research, it is evident that the application of a variety of methodological strategies effectively helps to overcome difficulties in textual comprehension. Additionally, it allows students to grasp the fundamental meanings of the content read, validating the purpose of the intervention.

Burga (2022) asserts that strengthening didactic strategies leads to a direct improvement in students' reading comprehension. In line with this assertion, this study demonstrated that following the application of the didactic strategy, students improved their ability to interpret and understand texts, supporting the initial hypothesis of the study and providing empirical evidence for this relationship.

Moreover, Asuero (2022) argues that didactic strategies such as elaboration, focus, integration, verification, organization, and metacognitive strategies significantly influence reading learning in children. This claim aligns with the findings of this research, as the methodological process utilized encompassed these components, developing from basic skills to more complex cognitive processes, which facilitated a gradual and sustained improvement in participants' reading comprehension.

Additionally, Rivera & Alberca (2020) note that didactic strategies impact higher levels of reading comprehension, as they promote the organization of information at the literal, inferential, critical, and analogical-critical levels. This perspective is reflected in the study's results, where a significant improvement was observed across the three levels of comprehension analyzed (literal, inferential, and critical), validating the effectiveness of the proposed didactic approach.

Varas-Ruiz (2021) states that implementing strategies before, during, and after reading significantly improves reading comprehension. Similarly, this research evidenced an improvement following the use of these strategies, confirming that their proper application positively affects overall text comprehension, both explicit and implicit.

Finally, the study by Tipantuña & Rochina (2024) highlights that the use of strategies based on Web 2.0 tools allowed students' reading comprehension levels to rise from low to medium and high, fostering a more dynamic, playful, and effective reading experience. This assertion resonates with the findings of this study, where it was confirmed that the implementation of motivating and integral didactic strategies significantly improved the comprehension levels of students at the Laboratory of Research and Pedagogical Innovation El Amauta – UNDAC.

Consequently, it is demonstrated that the appropriate application of didactic strategies substantially contributes to the development of reading competencies in students, positively impacting their academic performance.

Conclusions

Didactic strategies significantly contribute to improving reading comprehension among students at the Laboratory of Research and Pedagogical Innovation El Amauta – UNDAC, as evidenced by the results in Table 4 and, particularly, in Table 7, where the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. This result statistically validates the hypothesis posed in the study.

The use of pertinent didactic strategies generates notable progress in reading comprehension levels: literal, inferential, and critical. This improvement is comparably observed in the results obtained before and after the intervention, as presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Furthermore, the application of the proposed strategy, following appropriate methodological sequences, could be replicated in other contexts of basic or higher education, anticipating favorable results in reading comprehension. The key lies in strengthening the progressive and interrelated development of literal, inferential, and critical levels during the reading process.

Therefore, it is essential for those responsible for student training to actively promote the use of intentional and well-structured methodological and didactic strategies. These strategies will enable sustained improvements in the overall comprehension of texts, fostering deeper and more meaningful learning.

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