Abstract

In evaluations conducted in 2006, the International Student Assessment Program (PISA), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, and the Organization for Education, Science and Culture Of the United Nations (UNESCO) found that in the fields of reading comprehension, the students in elementary school in Mexico were below the educational level of the developed countries (OCDE, 2007)[1][2]. These assessments reflect the great problem that exists within the national education system as students fail to develop adequate reading skills that allow them to assimilate and apply knowledge related to it. Therefore, it is considered that a fundamental aspect to achieve a meaningful learning is the understanding of texts.

This research presents the results of the application of a reading comprehension workshop, aimed at students of the last grade of elementary school in Mexico, which aimed to improve reading comprehension by teaching different strategies that allow students to have a better understanding in the texts.

Changes in text comprehension were measured using a pretest-post test design, with a control group, (Campbell and Stanley, 1966)[3].

Using a T-student test of related samples: t (29) = -2.15, p = .04, there were found statistically significant differences in the experimental group from pretest to posttest: M = 4.09 to M = 4.96, respectively.

In conclusion it can be affirmed that the procedures used in the workshop did contribute to the improvement of the understanding of texts.

Keywords: educational intervention, students, reading comprehension.

1 INTRODUCTION

Scholars consider reading comprehension to be indispensable for the acquisition of knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and specialized skills (Díaz, 2006, Walter 2004)[4][5].

Reading competence is the ability of an individual to understand, use and reflect on written sources in order to achieve goals, acquire knowledge, develop personal potential as well as participate in society.

This definition surpasses the traditional idea of decoding and interpreting the written texts and, instead, implies that reading comprehension not only involves the comprehension of the written source but also the use in different tasks and the reflection to fulfill a wide variety of purposes.

There is little question about reading as a universal activity, where the reader establishes contact with his/her surroundings. However, in a globalized world, the disadvantages around reading can be observed, especially in those countries where the educational scenario is not very encouraging, and the possibilities of access education do not offer opportunities to compete in intellectual areas nor to develop abilities. For this reason, it is important to address reading comprehension at schools where students become “the main character”; and reading is a personal statement for a better future” (Alarcón, 2004)[6].

Reading is a permanent practice in almost all scenarios and scholar situations. However, students lack adequate strategies to understand the authors’ intended meanings. This becomes clear when they are presented with actual written sources as has been pointed out by the United Nations, Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2006)[7].

Reading is a fundamental part of the learning process, for several reasons; in the first instance, because an interaction between the reader and the text is needed. Moreover, because only through
reading, students can solve doubts and practice what they have learned. Isabel Solé argues that “the aims of reading are diverse as well as its purpose: reading as a hobby, search for information, read for informative purposes, apply what was read to do a job, among another list of tasks, are some examples. The most important is to know that reading is an essential part of our daily lives, and that depending on our aims it would be its use.

Students of elementary school encounter reading on a daily basis as part of their academic process as well as in everyday life. Reading is a tool and an academic requirement that demands: to select, analyze, comprehend and interpret information that sometimes does not occur with success. Similarly, reading involves the comprehension of written texts and, although, sometimes reading can be performed apparently with ease, in reality leaves much to be desired. Therefore, reading is an ability that requires lots of attention since provide students the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and at least understand their surroundings. In other words, reading is an essential tool that approaches students to knowledge and to a successful learning (Solé, 2000)[8].

In Mexico, the reading quality still does not meet societal expectations nor is it at the educational level that everyone wishes for the country. Evaluations conducted in the last decade showed unsatisfactory results at all levels. In primary school, the assessment of achievements in mathematics and Spanish show that approximately half of the students have not achieved the goals established in the program curricula, which means that the students learning has not been guaranteed yet.

Insufficient acquisition of basic competency in reading comprehension, which is necessary for all forms of educational goals is a problem manifested at all levels of learning and all types of schools (SEP, Programa Nacional de Educación. 2001-2006)[9].

In the Mexican Education System, several formative problems have been identified in relation to reading capabilities. Sánchez y Andrade (2009)[10] cite the results reported by the National Institute for the Education Assessment (INEE), where it is shown that only 32% of the students of six grade within primary school obtained a satisfactory reading level.

For this reason, students may still progress through levels as normal, but will continuously lack in reading skills. As adults, they will struggle to comprehend the ideas and concepts in what they read.

According to Anderson and Pearson (1985)[11], reading comprehension is the process of elaborating the meaning via learning relevant ideas and relating them to previously learned ideas; it is the process through which the reader interact with the text. No matter the length of a paragraph, the process evolves the same way.

According to the evaluation conducted by PISA (2006)[12], Mexico obtained unfavorable results with respect to the reading comprehension test for students of the basic level (primary). For this reason, it is essential to work for the improvement of reading at this level, designing adequate strategies, techniques and cognitive procedures that help students to achieve a better performance in the reading process (Martínez, 2005)[13] and that facilitate students’ comprehension of texts. This will aid in the achievement of their academic success.

2 METHOD

2.1 Objective

The aim of this study was to improve the reading comprehension of students of six grade (primary) by teaching them different reading comprehension strategies through a workshop that allow them to use the skills learned effectively and, as a result, improve their comprehension of texts.

2.2 Participants

A non-probabilistic sample was used. Participants were a total of 62 students from a public school located in the Municipality of Cholul, in the state of Yucatan, Mexico. The sample included two groups of six grade within primary school, aged between 11 and 13 years old. A pretest was conducted and based on the results the two groups were formed; a control group and, an experimental group with 31 students for each one.
2.3 Instrument

The reading comprehension section within the Spanish area of the learning achievement assessment (in reading comprehension) ENLACE (National Assessment for learning achievement in school centers) was utilized for both measurements; pretest and posttest. This examination is intended to be conducted every year in Mexico by the Secretary of Public Education (SEP) to all public and private schools of basic level. The aim of this assessment consists of obtaining additional information about the operation of school education in Mexico through the learning of mathematics and Spanish in students of third, fourth, fifth and sixth grade across the country.

The assessment consist of reading a brief relate that tells a story. The questions asked consisted of eleven items related to the theme of the reading performed. Every question had four response options, one correct and three distractors. Students were asked to only underline the option that seems correct to them. Every question assessed a category related to the comprehension of texts, according to the test ENLACE.

2.4 Procedure

A quasi-experimental design was used. The independent variable was deliberately manipulated “Educational Intervention for the teaching of Comprehension Reading Strategies” in order to observe its effect on the dependent variable “reading comprehension”. A pretest-posttest design was utilized and two intact groups (one of them, the control group) Campbell y Stanley (1966) [3].

For the present research, approval from authorities was granted. The pretest-posttest design was carried out within the classroom. Students were asked to collaborate and instructions were provided in groups. While the instrument was delivered, students were told to read the text and once finished, answer the test. The questionnaire with the eleven items was handed in once participants returned the text. The assessment lasted 30 minutes approximately for every classroom.

The reading comprehension workshop included eleven lessons, one lesson on a weekly basis with a duration of an hour approximately, within a period of two months on a regular class schedule. Strategies implemented included: Identification of the main idea of the text as a whole and at the beginning and the end of the text; use of inferential meaning, from dictionaries and punctuation marks; use of diagrams; elaboration of summaries as a strategy for reading comprehension and underlying, and elaboration of conceptual maps for the same purpose.

Examples of session 1 and 2 from the workshop are shown below

| Session 1 | Objective: To get to know what a reading comprehension technique is and what is it for |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Description of Activities</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading comprehension techniques</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Introduction of facilitators to the group and presentation of the workshop</td>
<td>Elaborated sheet, pencils</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading comprehension assessment</td>
<td>Students will commence answering some questions in order to see whether they are paying attention to what they read.</td>
<td>Question sheet, pencils</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identification of students’ knowledge about reading comprehension techniques</td>
<td>Students will be asked to write down what they do when they read a text. What strategies they use? What strategies they know? What are useful? Etc. Later they will discuss what they wrote.</td>
<td>Elaborated sheet, pencils</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitator’s presentation</td>
<td>Presentation and description of reading comprehension techniques, Hand in the reading “Rumplestilskin” to students and then form groups to answer the questions.</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading comprehension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Session 2
Objective: To identify the main ideas of a text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Description of Activities</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The main idea of a text</td>
<td>Feedback from the previous session</td>
<td>Students will be questioned about the topic revised the previous session and what they learned that day.</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of students about the main idea of a text</td>
<td>Verbally, students will be asked whether they know what the main idea of text is, how they identify it and what is it useful for.</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identification of main topic of a text</td>
<td>Individually, students will be provided with 2 informative readings. At the end, questions will be delivered in order to respond, analyse and understand the text. The main idea of the text is among the questions.</td>
<td></td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Responses will be analyzed in teams and the main idea will be identified.</td>
<td>Markers, chalk</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Responses will be written on the board and the aim of the exercises will be returned.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Before the intervention (pretest), students’ level of reading comprehension obtained by the t-test (57) = 2.51, p = .015 indicated a significant difference, in favor of the group considered as control group. It should be noted, that both groups obtained less than 50% of the total score from the test utilized. However, group B was considered as the experimental group given that showed a lower mean (4.09) compared to group A, which obtained a mean of (5.29) from a maximum score of 11 and a minimum of 0.

Unlike in the pretest, the experimental group showed an advantage M = 4.96 over the control group (which did not receive the intervention) M= 4.68 in the posttest. Although, no significant differences between groups were found in the posttest (55) = -.49, p = .62, it can be noted that before the educational intervention the mean of the control group was higher (M = 5.29), and after, the mean of the experimental group is increased (M = 4.96).

In order to confirm the above mentioned, a paired sample t-test was carried out for the experimental group which showed a significant difference: t (29) = -2.15, p = .04 in favor of the experimental group comparing the pretest and posttest results: M = 4.09 to M = 4.96, respectively.

Some recommendations for future interventions will be to involve teachers in the process. For the present intervention, support from teachers in certain activities contributed revising readings related to topics from the academic agenda. Consequently, the activity was considered positive and, reinforcing for students.

For this reason, participation of teachers and didactic readings should be considered for future research. Furthermore, comprehension reading strategies should be promoted not only when teaching Spanish but also when studying other subjects since this may reinforce and improve the comprehension of texts.

Finally, it should be noted that the present results reflect the work done in 11 sessions, of an hour on a weekly basis, therefore, in order to observe significant results it would be convenient to increase the number of hours and sessions scheduled in advance.

4 CONCLUSIONS

As discussed previously, overall, students of sixth grade within primary school in Mexico are placed below the basic level in comprehension reading assessment (SEP, 2007) [14]. This was confirmed by the present educational intervention that showed that students lack training to consolidate areas linked to reading comprehension. However, indicators of improvement in the posttest showed that continuous training may increase the comprehension of texts.

As pointed out before, the experimental group obtained better results over the control group because they raised their previous score obtained in the pretest. However, students showed a drop in those categories where they obtained higher scores in the Pre Test. This event may be explained because
these topics were not addressed as part of the workshop content given that the diagnosis did not reveal difficulties in these categories.

Results obtained in the posttest demonstrated that students improved in those themes were they obtained lower scores in the pretest conducted previous the intervention.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the procedures employed in the present intervention, contributed improving (mild, but significant) the performance of the group who received the intervention. These findings, support the importance of teaching and practicing continuously strategies for reading comprehension. For this reason, it is indispensable to continue strengthening the good use of these strategies in order to improve students’ achievement in both, scholar settings and outside.

REFERENCES