Student Awareness of Social Practices by Using Reading Strategies Through Blogs

Conciencia en los estudiantes acerca de las prácticas sociales usando estrategias de lectura a través de blogs

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Abstract

This paper reports a qualitative action study carried out with learners from English Level 2 from the International Languages Institute at a public university in the city of Duitama, Colombia. This research arose from a problem reported in a diagnostic survey, which showed the development of reading activities to be monotonous, having scarce knowledge, and using limited reading strategies. Video recording extracts, student blogs and an open-ended questionnaire reported that the use of blogs promotes reading as a meaningful activity. Likewise, the use of strategies (making connections, asking questions, predictions, and imagery) empowered the students to interpret their knowledge and their world. In the same way, reading from blogs revealed reflections, experiences, and personal points of view to challenge and make sense of attitudes, situations, and progress in the social practices of individual students. Five workshops were designed and implemented by adopting the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) as a model to guide students in constructing their process as conscious readers.

Key words: blogs, CALLA model, reading strategies, social practices

Resumen

Este documento reporta una investigación de acción cualitativa llevada a cabo con estudiantes de inglés de nivel 2 del Instituto Internacional de Idiomas de una universidad pública en la ciudad de Duitama, Colombia. Este estudio surgió de un problema reportado a través de una encuesta de diagnóstico, la cual evidenció monotonía en las actividades de lectura y escaso conocimiento y uso de estrategias de lectura. Aspectos encontrados en las grabaciones de video, blogs de estudiantes y un cuestionario abierto informaron que el uso de blogs promueve la lectura como una actividad significativa. Así mismo, el uso de estrategias (conexiones, preguntas, predicción e imaginación) empoderó la forma como estudiantes interpretan su conocimiento y su mundo. Así mismo la lectura de blogs reveló creencias, experiencias, puntos de vista personales para desafiar y dar sentido a las actitudes, situaciones y avances en sus prácticas sociales diarias. Cinco talleres fueron diseñados e implementados tomando en cuenta el modelo Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) fundamental para guiar a los estudiantes a construir su proceso como lectores conscientes.

Palabras clave: blogs, estrategias de lectura, modelo CALLA, practicas sociales

Introduction

Interests, behaviors, and performances are an essential part of the personal and/or professional aspects that each student contributes to the university. These aspects are strongly connected to social practices given that they are the way a learner explores the language and its skills in a reflective, interpretative, dynamic, and constantly changing environment. However, interests, behaviors, and performances are not always displayed by learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) activities.

At the same time, EFL teaching and learning is a field that could benefit from understanding students' interests, behaviors, and performances. For instance, reading in a foreign language requires a process that includes word comprehension, as well as an interpretive and conscious understanding of meaning. In many cases, learners are asked to share their background knowledge about social aspects, make decisions, and actively participate in their own language learning processes.

At a public university in Colombia, I have witnessed that one of the main struggles for EFL students in my Level 2 course is reading. They are undergraduate students that attend one of the university's campuses located approximately 45 minutes away from the main campus. One of the main reasons why reading causes so many issues is that the students' comprehension level is low, as seen in their standardized test results. Another reason is their perceptions about reading in general. They feel that it is a mandatory activity, and the topics are uninteresting. Given their attitude toward reading, they lack motivation.

Similarly, I have seen that reading activities are not necessarily accompanied with strategies that can help the learner strengthen their reading processes, which could potentially be added with the use of technological resources. These tools entail a wider variety of learning modalities for different learning styles. Thus, students could explore the relationship between technological resources and their existing professional and personal interests that are strongly connected to their social practices.

Bearing in mind the different reasons and needs that exist among the undergraduate students and reading in a foreign language, the following study explores the use of different reading strategies through blogs, a technological alternative that could empower EFL students'

social practices. In doing so, students can also become conscious builders of their own knowledge and experiences.

Nowadays, reading and writing are considered as social practices since the reader draws meaning from what she or he understand, comprehend, and believe. Unfortunately, most of these practices are not taken outside of the classroom. Instead, students are unsure of how to put their skills into practice in real-life contexts. Consequently, they get stuck when it comes to reading, comprehending, or even finding interest in texts.

For this study, I worked with 10 undergraduate students in order to analyze how they constructed their social practices awareness while exploring reading strategies through blogs. As mentioned previously, the main challenge with the undergraduate students was a lack of knowledge about reading strategies and interest in the reading material. Because of this, blogs could help tackle students' real needs, interests, and majors, while reinforcing their reading competence.

As part of the study, the undergraduate students took a diagnostic survey. The diagnostic survey revealed that the students lacked reading strategies like making connections and predictions, asking questions, and providing imagery. Furthermore, the students mentioned that reading was one of their favorite activities to do during their spare time. However, the textbook and reading material provided in class focused solely on academic topics. Thus, they felt limited in their reading material. They also revealed that they lacked knowledge and use of specific reading strategies, for which most of them used dictionaries, translators, and note-taking as their only Spanish and English reading strategies. In terms of exploring new alternatives in their learning process, the students showed interest in dynamic and interactive activities. They were eager in leaving traditional classroom practices aside for experiences that connected to their realities.

Based on the students' reflections, the following study proposed to answer the research question: *To what extent does the use of reading strategies through blogs support students' construction of awareness regarding their social practices?*

Theoretical Framework

Social Practices in Reading

One of the main issues for this study is students' awareness of social practices in regard to reading. Baynham (2004, as cited in Chapeton, 2004) defined reading as a situated social practice, pointing out that "the activity of reading presupposes reading the social world and introduces the potential for critical, resistant readings, not simply accommodations to the givens of text" (p. 207). In this sense, readers make sense of the text based on prior knowledge, which enables them to express their thoughts, awareness, and self-criticality in terms of their reality. Additionally, reading is a social practice because a reader's understanding of the text depends on his or her social context (Alderson, 2000; Bernhart, 2000). Thus, the reading process is an active and flexible interaction between readers, texts, tasks, and the cultural conditions of the reading realities.

When undergraduate students at the university create meaning and suggestions for themselves and others based on a text, they are engaging in a social practice that goes beyond the classroom. Therefore, the students are exploring the language and its skills in a reflective, interpretative, and transformative manner within a context.

In the case of reading strategies, it is crucial for readers to find meaning and experience in the text. Technology can be used as a bridge to establish this connection, so that students become socially active and reflective practitioners. Likewise, technology can help engage readers with the text and its words beyond the classroom. Students can become socially active participants by using topics from the readings to reflect and cooperate with others, while using English as a means of communication.

Blogs can be a motivating tool to get students to act as social practitioners by empowering them to talk about their interests as they deepen their understanding. For this study, I wanted to help my students become more interactive, self-regulated, independent, self-aware, and supportive whilst better understanding imagery, connections, predictions, and inquiry as reading strategies inside and outside of the classroom.

EFL Reading and Reading Strategies

Analyzing and incorporating reading strategies can indicate how readers, in this case the students from the language institute, conceive and express meaning from a reading task for academic and personal purposes. According to Gaffney and Anderson (2000), reading encompasses the use of prior knowledge, whole language, and comprehension (p. 72). The previous suggests that reading is not only making sense of letters, symbols, or words. Instead, it is the comprehension of ideas, arguments, compliments, supports, challenges, analysis, discovery, interpretation of worlds, beliefs, perceptions, and more. At the same time, the reader is either rejecting, accepting, learning, and even teaching as he or she reads.

Brown (1994) mentioned that reading in the EFL context is best developed in association with writing, listening, and speaking activities. Even though the skill is labeled as "reading", the goals in teaching will best be achieved by capitalizing on the interrelationship of skills, especially the reading–writing connection (p. 284). The idea of interrelating skills allows students to construct meaning in different contexts and in relation with other skills. Strategic thinking, self-reflection, transformation, and exploration are all results of interrelating skills along with social practices.

Hudson (2007) referred to reading strategies as "those mental processes that readers consciously choose to use in accomplishing reading tasks" (p. 83). Hence, the analysis of using and incorporating reading strategies allows researchers to see how students consciously express what they are reading in the classroom. The idea is that this could shed light on students' comprehensions and reflections of their world based on the readings and strategies they use.

Oxford (1990) split learning strategies into the following categories: 1) Cognitive: the identification, retention, and retrieval of language elements; 2) Metacognitive: strategies to deal with the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of language learning activities; and 3) Affective: used by students when reading books or different sources to develop a positive attitude. For this study, I will be focusing on cognitive reading strategies through the use of the CALLA model.

The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA)

The following figure presents the stages of CALLA as a model that the researcher and the participants of this study followed during the implementation of five workshops.

Figure 1

CALLA Model
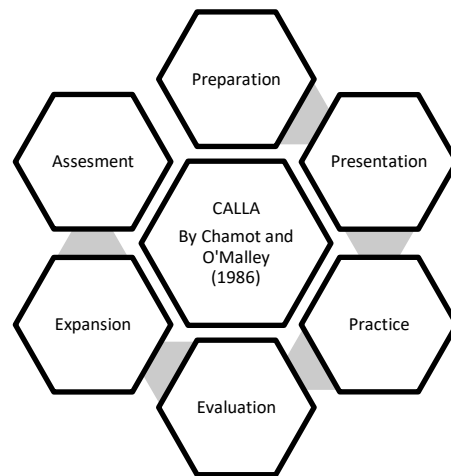
Note. Taken from Chamot and O'Malley (1999).

The CALLA model was developed by Chamot and O'Malley in 1999 as an instructional model for second and foreign language learners based on cognitive theory and research. CALLA aims at helping students become independent and self-regulated learners through the use of strategies that aid in their learning. The CALLA model has the following stages: preparation, presentation, self-evaluation, and expansion. I will detail each one below:

- *Preparation* refers to identifying objectives, eliciting prior student knowledge, developing vocabulary, and providing motivation.
- *Presentation* refers to presenting new information in varied ways, modelling processes explicitly, explaining learning strategies, and discussing connections to students' prior knowledge.
- *Practice* stage includes using hands-on/inquiry-based activities, providing different cooperative learning structures, using authentic content tasks, and asking students to use learning strategies.

- *Self-evaluation* is where students discuss their own learning, keep learning journals, and assess their strategy use.
- *Expansion* denotes students applying information to their lives, making connections between content subjects and the target culture, and relating information to their first-language knowledge of content and culture.

One of the main purposes of this study is to describe how students explore their reading strategies through the use of blogs as part of their daily social practices. To achieve this purpose, the study was carried out in four cognitive settings: making connections, predicting, using imagery, and asking questions. All four settings followed or adapted the stages of the CALLA model.

The model suggests ways in which the participants in this study can reflect and develop a strategic approach for their own learning and problem-solving. The cognitive model of learning is used to help the teacher/researcher know how to implement learning strategies so second-level English students can make use of their prior knowledge much more easily. This, in turn, allows students to achieve different aspects in terms of increasing and autonomously improving the use of language, while becoming aware of strategies that complement their learning. Another relevant focus of CALLA is the way students can activate their previous knowledge, such as personal and professional experiences, to use in different contexts.

Following the CALLA steps in the exploration and use of the aforementioned four cognitive settings permitted students to reconstruct the information given in the different articles posted by the tutor and learners in the blogs. They were able to use words displayed in the readings to understand different ideas, while arguing, complementing, and supporting the information and messages.

Furthermore, the model enabled students to develop awareness for the language that they are learning. For example, they were able to learn and comprehend content, ideas, points of view, skills, and the strategies necessary to be successful in both their future academic pursuits and social practices.

Research Design

This study was an action research, which Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) defined as a

form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of those practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out. (pp. 5-6)

The model of action research that I used can be seen in Figure 2. First, I identified the main issue of interest by means of a diagnostic test and needs analysis questionnaire. This helped me realize that my English as a Foreign Language Level 2 students needed an alternative that would allow them to explore their social practices. Additionally, they were unaware of reading strategies, and the use of blogs could help with the initial issues I had seen. In the second stage, I designed a proposal for students to explore reading strategies guided by the CALLA model. Thus, I created five workshops, which were redefined as the process progressed. After the first four months of this study, I entered the third step of the cycle called *act.* In this step, I implemented the five workshops. Then, I carried out a detailed analysis of the data gathered to produce a thorough reflection of the results. The implementation of each cycle allowed me to reflect on my students' needs, learning processes, perceptions, and performances. At the same time, I became aware of the main pedagogical changes that I had to implement for the future.

Figure 2

Four moments in action research

REFLECT → PLAN

OBSERVE ACT
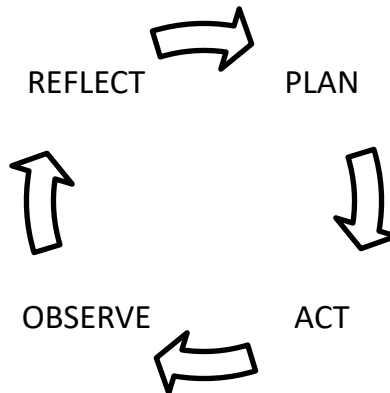
Note. Adapted from Kemmis, McTaggart, and Retallic (2004).

In addition to being an action research, this study was also situated in a qualitative paradigm. What this means was that I was in constant contact with the participants during the implementation of the five workshops. For this reason, this study supports Cresswell's (1998, p. 15) statement that qualitative action research is "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem."

Setting and Participants

This study was carried out with 10 undergraduate students, who attended the International Language Institute located at the Duitama campus. The campus is part of a public university, whose main campus is in Tunja, Colombia. The students were between the ages of 19 and 29. They were in the English as a Foreign Language Level 2 course. The group sessions were in class on Tuesday and Wednesday from 12 to 2 p.m. The participants studied different academic programs, such as engineering, agriculture, technology, business, math, design, and tourism.

In terms of ethical matters, the coordinator of the languages institute and the participants of this study were asked to sign a consent form to inform them about the project and ask for their participation.

Video Recording. According to Freeman (1998), video recordings can capture verbal and non-verbal interactions during class. Given the previous, video recordings could help me discover students' attitudes when exploring reading strategies through the CALLA model and the use of blogs. This instrument was essential in capturing students' processes, reactions, and performances when reading the texts selected by the teacher. Likewise, the recordings provided an evidence of students' concerns in terms of language limitations when asked to give a report or summary of the readings. It also captured the process that students followed when they put into practice the four main reading strategies (making connections, predictions, imagery, and asking questions).

Questionnaire. Wallace (1998) stated that questionnaires and interviews were useful when trying to understand participants' knowledges, opinions, ideas, and experiences during a research study. Also, questionnaires could be used to look for information, such as facts, personal perceptions, experiences, anecdotes, opinions, preferences, processes, and ideas. For this study, I used questionnaires to comprehend students' experiences when using blogs as an alternative in their reading processes.

Students' Artifacts. According to Hendricks (2009), many types of artifacts can be used to measure students' attainment of learning objectives or progress toward non-academic goals. Some artifacts can be used for formative assessment, which occurs during the instructional process to monitor the effectiveness of instruction or intervention. According to Hendricks (2009), it is helpful to create a flexible schedule to determine when to collect work from students. In this study, I developed a schedule before carrying out the five workshops and intervention in which students participated in the creation of their own blogs. I collected students' artifacts throughout four months. Worksheets, comments, contributions to the blogs, and printable reading resources were collected often from the initial implementation of the workshops until the end of the academic semester.

Pedagogical Intervention

Reading activities from printable texts and articles were used in the classroom with topics related to the English Level 2 coursebook. These resources were also published and uploaded to a blog that I created with my students. The blog was meant to put into practice reading strategies, while taking into account students' real-life interests like sports, cars, love, engineering, tourism, and more.

Blogging, as a new alternative, was considered as a technological tool to ameliorate the problematic situations that my students faced in terms of the adequate exploration and exploitation of reading strategies.

Nikula (2012) reflected on the development of different activities based on the use of tools from the web. Exploring and using blogs, wikis, and Prezi helped students eventually acquire and make use of their reading and writing skills, as well as becoming more aware of those skills. This observation accurately describes how the use of the four reading strategies (making connections, prediction, imagery, and asking questions) permitted students to reconstruct the information given in the different readings posted by myself and other learners in the blogs.

Aydan (2014) found blogs to be more interesting for students than traditional methods, especially because this technological tool helped them improve reflection and critical thinking skills. In addition, it permitted feedback and error corrections processes, while allowing them to be compatible with the nature of the reading classes. Students could use words displayed in the readings, thereby, understanding different ideas, arguing, complementing, and supporting all the information and the messages. Through the comments posted on the blogs, the participants were able to challenge, discover, and interpret worlds, beliefs, and perceptions.

Therefore, the pedagogical design of this research study was focused on the implementation of five workshops based on the exploration of EFL reading strategies (imagery, prediction, making connections, and asking questions) through the use of blogs in daily practices.

I designed and implemented the five workshops taking into account the CALLA model, which guided students in the use of reading strategies. The topics that I considered for the readings were chosen by the participants and related to their interests. The workshops were designed in English. Nevertheless, in some circumstances, I created a bridge between the first

and second language, such as in using the L1 for instructions. Similarly, some students used Spanish to communicate when they became frustrated and were unable to complete their worksheets or post their comments on the blogs.

It was pertinent and appropriate to plan, design, and implement the workshops over the course of four months. A workshop was implemented each month based on the university's schedule. In each session, students had the topics described and displayed to them, as well as the objectives, methodology, CALLA model, available time to complete tasks, and resources for each workshop. The chart below summarizes the different phases used in the pedagogical intervention (see Table 1).

Once students explored and put into practice the different reading strategies, they were prepared for a new lesson. Before beginning the lesson, students' background knowledges in terms of new vocabulary and expressions were activated. Students had to draw mental images, events, and characters from the reading resources.

Then, the reading strategies were introduced by showing students slides with examples and characteristics that demonstrated how to use the strategies. Students were given the name of the new strategy and, subsequently, a model was shown through a reading posted by one of the students in their blogs in order to help them imagine how to incorporate the strategy.

Once the particular strategy had been modeled to students, they had the chance to explore and apply it in their own blogs. The students could read the blog with the texts I had posted. There, they could comprehend the information by using diagrams, drawings, charts, and graphic organizers. Students made crucial decisions about whether or not to use the strategies in other reading material related to their degrees.

The following table (Table 1) shows the different stages of one of the workshops when exploring the reading strategies always taking the steps from CALLA model into account.

Table 1

Sample of Workshop Plan 4

Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia International Languages Institute Duitama English Class Level II	
Name of the Researcher: Paola Puerto **WORKSHOP # 4 - Asking questions** **TITLE: " A Picture paints a thousand words "**	
OBJECTIVES	**METHODOLOGY**
☆ To be able to understand what the "*Imagery"* strategy entails. ☆ To put the strategy learned into practice through a reading selected by students, taking their interests into account. ☆ To describe the use of the strategy. ☆ To reflect and share their opinions about using *Imagery* as a reading strategy. ☆ To share what they have read with other people and receive feedback about their thoughts and ideas**.** ☆ To explore the use of a blog in order to participate in a reading activity where students will have the chance to post comments and opinions on what they have read in the blog. ☆ To enable students to put the reading strategies learned in previous classes into practice.	**Teacher-researcher and Student role** **Preparation:** Once students have explored and put into practice the first and second strategies, they will be prepared for a new lesson by activating their background knowledge in terms of new vocabulary and expressions. This time, they will be making mental images of the events or characters in the reading resources. **Presentation:** Teacher will introduce the reading strategy by showing students slides with examples and characteristics on how to use it. The teacher will then give students the name of the new strategy. Subsequently, it is pertinent to tell students when to use it by modeling through a reading posted by one of the students in their personal blog. **Practice:** Once the teacher has modeled and explored the particular strategy with students, they will have the chance to explore and employ it keeping in mind the topics published on the teacher's blog. They will express what they comprehended through diagrams, drawings, charts, or a graphic organizer. **Self-evaluation:** In their blogs, students are asked to include their opinions about the use of imagery as a reading strategy. They will make crucial decisions about using or not using the strategy in other subjects related to their degrees. **Expansion: S**tudents will make personal decisions about the strategy used and thus will see the benefits and detriments of using it independently in new contexts and in other classes. Also, through the use of blogs, students can expand on the use of the strategies learnt in order to draw from the reading and construct conscious learning about the world or their professional or personal lives. After putting the strategy into practice, these actions can be evidenced when participating in discussions. **Duration: 1 hour 15 minutes** **Reflection** **RESOURCES:** Computer Worksheets Blogger Articles, reading resources

Data Analysis

Once I collected the qualitative data, I made sure to rigorously examine it. This study adhered to principles of and action research and adopted the Bryman's (1988) theories of *coding/indexing/categorizing, analysis; reading again; coding the text, and relating general theoretical ideas to the text*.

The video recordings were used as a means to identify students' performances in reading and discover how they followed the CALLA model in the exploration of reading strategies. At the same time, I could get a sense of their interpretations of their world through the different readings in their social practices. What was said by the participants was transcribed verbatim from each one of the video recordings.

In order to contrast the information collected from the video recordings, I made use of an open-ended questionnaire in order to ascertain the opinions and experiences of the students in terms of the use of blogs as an alternative to their existing reading practices (see Appendix 1).

To further the categorization of materials, it was necessary to use the students' artifacts, which were provided during the CALLA model workshops and in the students' blogs (see Appendix 2). All of the instruments allowed me to join, divide and categorize the data into specific categories and subcategories. The categories and subcategories intended to sum up the findings and to answer the research question: *To what extent does the use of reading strategies through blogs support students' construction of awareness regarding their social practices?*

First Category: Give a Flicker to Your Mind: Blogging Students' Reading Exploration and Reconstruction of Their Daily Social Practices

Participants in this research study were asked to create, design, and comment on different reading sources through blogs. They created their own blogs and uploaded readings that really caught their attention based on topics like sports, animals, engineering, cars, and arts.

This exercise allowed them to empower themselves as learners in different aspects. Firstly, they were active explorers of the four reading strategies: making connections, asking questions, predictions, and imagery. These readers and bloggers were able to construct perceptions and beliefs taking advantage of prior knowledge and personal conceptions in relation to different issues.

Secondly, with this experience participants achieved relevant progress in terms of becoming aware of reflective reading practices. This was seen in both their daily academic work and their personal blogs, for which they wanted to provide a meaningful purpose in their world.

Therefore, this category was called *"Give a flicker to your mind: Blogging students' reading exploration and reconstructing their daily social practices"* because the exploration and use of the four aforementioned reading strategies permitted students to reconstruct the information given in the different texts posted by both the teacher and learners in the blogs.

Participants or contributors "gave flickers" to their minds when they expressed what they comprehended in the texts through drawings. The information gathered from the readings was contrasted with real student experiences, which was reconstructed day by day by them as important social providers of ideas and knowledge. The following subcategories are examples of the students' reconstructions.

First Subcategory: Interpreting Worlds Through the Reading and my Own Beliefs. The comments posted in the blogs, the participants were able to challenge, discover, and interpret worlds, beliefs, and perceptions about the different topics first discussed in the classroom. Below, Explorer 2 and 3's comments on the teacher's blog are displayed.

> Explorer 3: It is an interesting article what explains the feel of people I like much. [sic] (Blog, February 20, 2015)
>
> **Explorer 2: interesting article, I not know that love had many effects on the health of people.and I believe that love should be pure, out of the heart… si me** parecio muy chevere esos datos curiosos todo lo que dice ahi sobre el amor, como por ejemplo que puede ser un buen analgesico , o que las personas que están en desamor pueden tener graves efectos de salud en el corazón , efectos sobre la salud. [sic] (Blog, February 20, 2015)

Explorers 2 and 3 presented their own interpretations and beliefs in relation to a topic, which was "love". In this part of the workshop, students were asked to read about curious facts related to love. Then, they had to post their comments about the article they read in their blog. In the examples above, it was interesting to see how the two explorers make remarks about their beliefs and the positive effects that love could have on their health.

As a result of this, reading exploration provided a close link between using and constructing meaning in different contexts. Furthermore, the reading strategies also invited the

use of strategic thinking, self-exploration, and transformation of reading activities into explorative and social ones related to students' interests.

The Second Category: It Happens That This is Real for You and Me!

This subcategory encompasses the thoughts and opinions students have in regard to three topics: love, music, and animals. The students' opinions went beyond the text and represented what they knew and had heard about these topics. In the following excerpts, the participants unveiled and confirmed that the reading experience is a social practice. Moreover, this category was an example that reading can enrich students' knowledges through conscious practice. They were able to use reading strategies to support their comprehension, as well as awaken their sense of meaning construction and freedom to express their inner feelings, perceptions, experiences, and thoughts.

First Subcategory: Prior Knowledge Activation. Students were asked to explore a reading and show what they comprehended from it through a poster. The text same was uploaded to the teacher's blog in order to receive comments and opinions. This activity permitted students to activate relevant background knowledge and previous experiences by means of making connections to the text they read. This subcategory has to do with an activation of valuable knowledge that helped to increase comprehension, understand what the readers explored, explore how the different topics connected to what the students knew and had experienced in their lives.

Activating their knowledge and connecting their thoughts created a space in which readers felt free and comfortable to express and talk about issues they were interested in, as shown in the example below:

> Teacher: the best fighter ….
> Explorer 1: fighter fighter …the best fighter of the history of Boxeo.
> Teacher: okay I see !!! and what about Fraizer …..
> Explorer 1: okay incluso incluso a él lo reclutaron cuando hubo la guerra en Vietnam y el dijo que no iba y se negó a ser reclutado entonces lo despojaron de sus títulos , incluso el no se llamaba Mohamed Ali, sino que se llamaba era Mmm no recuerdo bien el nombre mmmmm el se cambió de nombre y se cambió al islam y en islam él se llamaba Mohamed Ali.

The excerpt above was an example of the excitement and confidence Explorer 1 demonstrated when talking about a topic he had prior knowledge about. In this case, having a true interest in the topic contributed to better reading comprehension, as well as helping Explorer 1 activate prior knowledge.

Second Subcategory: Connecting and Unveiling Real Experiences. The student-bloggers confirmed and revealed that the information obtained from the words, both written and read, helped them look for and create spaces in order to shape daily practices. Additionally, the students mentioned that the readings helped them become more active participants and contributors of life experiences, which could be transformed into valuable perceptions and beliefs. Taking this into account, the participants made sense of meaning and prior knowledge in order to freely express their thoughts and become aware of themselves as self-critical readers of their realities.

In this study, the students' comments in the blogs were relevant in understanding how they made sense of their lives. It was a way for me to see how they wanted to change and impact their society, while understanding some of their perceptions based on experiences. In the following excerpts, the students reflected on previous experiences.

> Explorer 5: I started in the school, I always played with men, in the college it was a little more opened because there they did championships where organizations chose the best women in which I always was. Actually, at the university I'm with more discipline because I'm training from Monday to Thursday and we participate in sectional and inter-universities from Duitama. [sic] (Blog comment)

Blogging was a meaningful exercise where students had the opportunity to discuss real issues. They felt empowered to use the language in order to construct ideas, express feelings, make connections, share thoughts and reveal perceptions about their lives. The following extract shows that they have relevant points of view in terms of their experiences and real connections with soccer.

> Question 2: Ahora que usted ha creado su propio blog que opina de esta herramienta?
> Explorer 4: el blog es una herramienta muy útil en el ámbito de la comunicación y el aprendizaje en este caso para fortalecer la lectura en inglés.
> Explorer 5: es una herramienta creativa, didáctica, y mucho más práctica, para un aprendizaje más moderno.
> Question 5: Como ha sido su experiencia de aprendizaje a través de su blog?

Explorer 6: Es muy buena porque pude aprender de los artículos publicados conocer cosas nuevas que desconocía y cosas que afectan a la humanidad de igual manera uno reflexiona sobre las situaciones. (Questionnaire)

Taking into account the answers provided from the open-ended questionnaire, Explorers 5 and 6 talked about the experience of creating their own blogs and how it was a worthy exercise for them. They mentioned that they were able to make use of 21st century tools while strengthening their English level, gaining vocabulary, sharing their knowledge, and transforming their way of thinking and perceptions about their reality.

In the excerpt below, Explorers 6 and 7 revealed their reflections and connections in relation to the topic about love.

Explorer 7: Pues si ahí dicen muchas cosas que pasan a diario en la vida y pues tal vez sea como no se si lo escribió la profe o no, pero si es la opinión de una persona dice cosas que en la realidad pasan.
Explorer 6: bueno teacher entonces en español, pues el articulo estaba bueno, lo de la salud como dijo el lo de la salud, que uno está mal y solo y llega alguien y ufff
Teacher: Have you felt this way ¿Te ha pasado?
Explorer 6: Si ufffff muchas veces, he sentido que si uno esta tragado hasta se le olvidan los problemas y ya no me duele nada.

Aspects like their self-opinions and reactions to situations lead Explorers 6 and 7 to connect and react to the article, as it seemed to have caused an impact to their daily practices.

Asking questions was also relevant to exploring daily social practices since it gave students the opportunity to reflect on their health in relation to music.

Explorer 1: in my case I can't concentrate if is many music or ruido.
Explorer 10: osea q en casa de arriero asadon de palo? Porq tu eres musico nooo?
Explorer 1: pero precisamente porque me gusta tanto la musica es que le presto más atención a las melodías, las notas las letras y el ritmo y no a mis trabajos de la u.
Teacher: How many hours a day do you need to listen to music?
Explorer 4: Maximum one hour.
Explorer 8: I need music for everything.

Creating and contributing with readings and comments in the blogs led participants to interact and go beyond the most obvious conclusions. This indicates that students were using blogs as a new alternative to judge, analyze, and rethink the information they had read and how it impacted their realities. As teachers, we can also use blogs with our students to explore everyday topics and how they affect us. In the following sample, Explorer 9 reflected and made connections in relation to animals, which was one of the issues posted in the blog.

Explorer 9: I like animals, my favorite animals are dogs I have one dog and this is real I can feel all of this every day, this is my text and I want to say the animals help with avoid depression anxiete and stres. dogs can aese loneliness, reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, promote social interaction, encourage exercise and playfulness, and provide unconditional love and affection. [sic] (Blog post)

Explorer 9 confirmed that reading should be promoted by means of new alternatives and activities with meaningful strategies to empower learners in the use of language in order to construct ideas, express feelings, make connections, share thoughts, and reveal perceptions about life. Therefore, EFL participants are able to transform language into real practices, which allows them to move towards the use of language in a reflective way. This means that when students face different issues that arise during their time at the university and beyond, they will be able to express their thoughts.

The Third Category: Exploring Real Interests (What Really Matters to Me)

Reading should be about selecting a text that catches our attention. However, my Level 2 students were used to being forced to read about academic topics in English, which meant that they did not have the space to explore texts they liked in the classroom. Through this investigation, students took advantage of reading material that dealt with their preferences. Afterward, they were able to share their opinions and interpretations that went beyond the text itself. They used reading to make connections between what they knew and read before, as well as how these topics impacted their realities. They made predictions through headlines, titles, images, and sentences. By visualizing the information given in the text and drawing it, the participants found it easier to interpret written codes and messages. It was valuable to ask and answer questions that allow students to be aware of and reflect on their perceptions and stereotypes.

One of the most important factors, as seen in the examples, was the students' participation in comparing and connecting the reading topics to their real-life experiences. Their connections showed not only their capacity to agree, disagree, and reflect as students, it also displayed their interests as human beings full of knowledge and perceptions beyond the academic context.

The following extracts indicated the most relevant answers to questions about emerging positive reactions presented in the students' reading process and the use of blogs.

Teacher: Yeah, Edwin, it is perceived the real interest you have for that brand of cars, and it is really exciting too to know that your dream is to have your own Audi, but I would like to know what do you mean with those unforgettable moments?
Explorer 4: Teacher because the truth I mean to spend unforgettable moments with family, friends, going for walks in the truck, I hope, for my dear Colombia, listening to music, knowing variety of Colombian landscape, and that another beer profe ... [sic] (Video recording)

In the sample above, Explorer 4 shows excitement when he realized that the topic he was going to talk about had connection with information he had already read and knew about before. This permitted him to feel confident to speak and provide comments and opinions in the blog and also in the class.

Question 3: Que opina usted acerca de publicar artículos en un blog?
Explorer 1: Es chévere porque uno puede publicar lo que le gusta.
Question 4: ¿Qué opina usted acerca de comentar y recibir comentarios de artículos publicados por usted o por sus compañeros?
Explorer 8: es bueno porque esta sirve para conocer el gusto de los compañeros y así publicar más artículos y que sean del agrado. (Questionnaire)

These answers were carefully categorized according to their similarity and frequency. Their responses showed an improvement in students' reading processes, acquisition of vocabulary and new information, reflection, and awareness of different topics that related to their interests and realities. Their answers also reflect a true excitement to talk about their lives and background knowledge, while continuing to explore blogs as a tool for social practices.

Conclusions

For this study, I attempted to answer the research question: *To what extent does the use of reading strategies through blogs support students' construction of awareness regarding their social practices?* The different readings sparked the students' attention, and the use of blogs increased their awareness about social practices. Because of this, the participants were more willing to participate and contribute with their points of views about the topics that have impacted them. Topics like women in soccer, tourism in Boyacá, and love helped build a bridge for participants and I to transform and connect information to social practices and experiences.

Reading articles or texts that really matter to students increases their active participation. It also improves their interpretation of information and their socialization of opinions and experiences when students make sense of words and the intention of the author. Additionally, reading went beyond understanding the meaning of words or sentences in a book or article since the participants were able to connect their experiences to their practices as active social contributors and transformers while deepening their comprehension.

Exploring EFL student reading strategies not only led to experience, connection, information visualization, and the creation of mental images, but it also created a sense of critical and reflective thinking about the information they were receiving. Consequently, that same information could make a stronger impact on their lives and inspire a transformation in their current social practices.

The participants, through the comments posted on the blogs, were able to challenge, discover, and interpret worlds, beliefs, and perceptions that they learnt and had accepted or not. As I have mentioned in other occasions,

> Reading through blogs encourages students to socialize, interact and exchange knowledge in the classroom or other teaching/learning context. This excellent tool also raises awareness and invites learners to become the center of the learning process by means of promoting communication and strengthening the strategies that teachers and learners use in and out of the classroom. (2019, n.p.)

Based on my observations, I noticed that the participants took on several roles, such as that of *interpreters, observers, listeners, explorers, free promoters,* and *conscious thinkers* when putting into practice the different reading strategies. They were *interpreters* of the different topics they enjoyed. As *free promoters*, they posted and published comments in their blogs; and as *conscious thinkers*, they connected the different topics from the text sources to their prior knowledge and experiences.

Reading exploration became a combination of using and constructing meaning in different contexts with a close relationship between the rest of the language skills. Thereby, reading was a gateway to using strategic thinking, self-reflection, and transformation of texts into an explorative and social activity.

Unquestionably, the exploration of EFL student reading strategies through the use of blogs reveals students' beliefs, experiences, and personal points of view that lead students to challenge and make sense of their social daily practices.

About the Author:

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Appendix 1

Este cuestionario fue diseñado por la docente- investigadora Paola Yesenia Puerto Zabala, con el fin de recolectar información que permita analizar la posición de los estudiantes de Inglés nivel 2 frente al tema **"Strengthening EFL students' reading strategies to social practices in the new literacies".**

Teniendo en cuenta su papel como estudiante de Inglés nivel 2 en el Instituto Internacional de Idiomas de la UPTC en Duitama. Responda las siguientes preguntas relacionadas con el uso del *blog* como herramienta para fortalecer la habilidad de lectura .

Agradezco su participación y colaboración con este Cuestionario

Nombre (opcional) _Diego Chaparro_ Fecha _05 - 05 - 2015_

Cordialmente
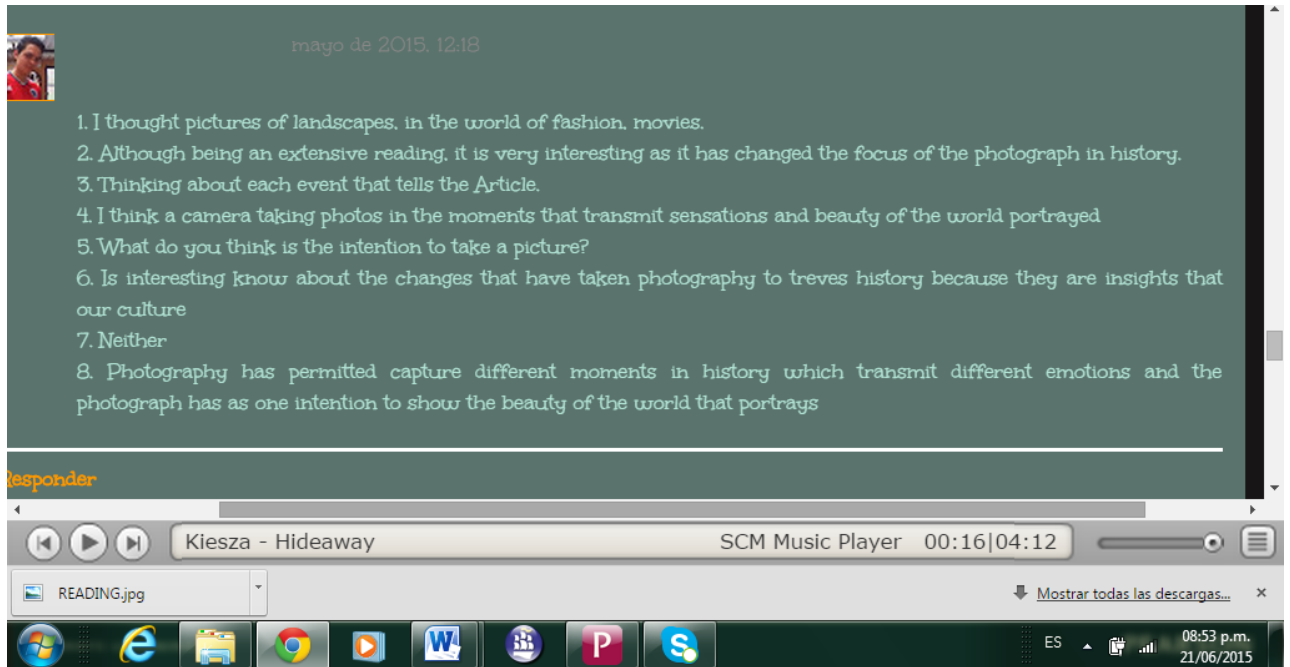
Paola Yesenia Puerto Zabala
M.A Student

Cuestionario

Open ended questionnaire 1

1. Antes de participar en este proyecto usted sabía que era un blog?
   (Explique su respuesta por favor)
   Si, es un sitio web donde se publican cosas acerca de distintos temas.

2. Ahora que usted ha creado su propio blog que opina de esta herramienta?
   Es una buena herramienta para consultar información y comentar acerca de distintos temas

3. Qué opina usted acerca de publicar artículos en un blog?
   Es un buen método para dar a conocer información importante o gustos hacia un tema en especifico

4. Qué opina usted acerca de comentar y recibir comentarios de artículos publicados por usted o por sus compañeros?
   Es bueno para aclarar dudas que surjan a partir de distintos temas y para corregir las posibles errores que puedan existir

5. Como ha sido su experiencia de aprendizaje a través de su blog?
   Ha sido una experiencia buena, ya que en el blog una puede publicar acerca de los gustos propios en distintos temas mientras se maneja el vocabulario en inglés.

Appendix 2

mayo de 2015, 12:18

1. I thought pictures of landscapes, in the world of fashion, movies.
2. Although being an extensive reading, it is very interesting as it has changed the focus of the photograph in history.
3. Thinking about each event that tells the Article.
4. I think a camera taking photos in the moments that transmit sensations and beauty of the world portrayed
5. What do you think is the intention to take a picture?
6. Is interesting know about the changes that have taken photography to treves history because they are insights that our culture
7. Neither
8. Photography has permitted capture different moments in history which transmit different emotions and the photograph has as one intention to show the beauty of the world that portrays
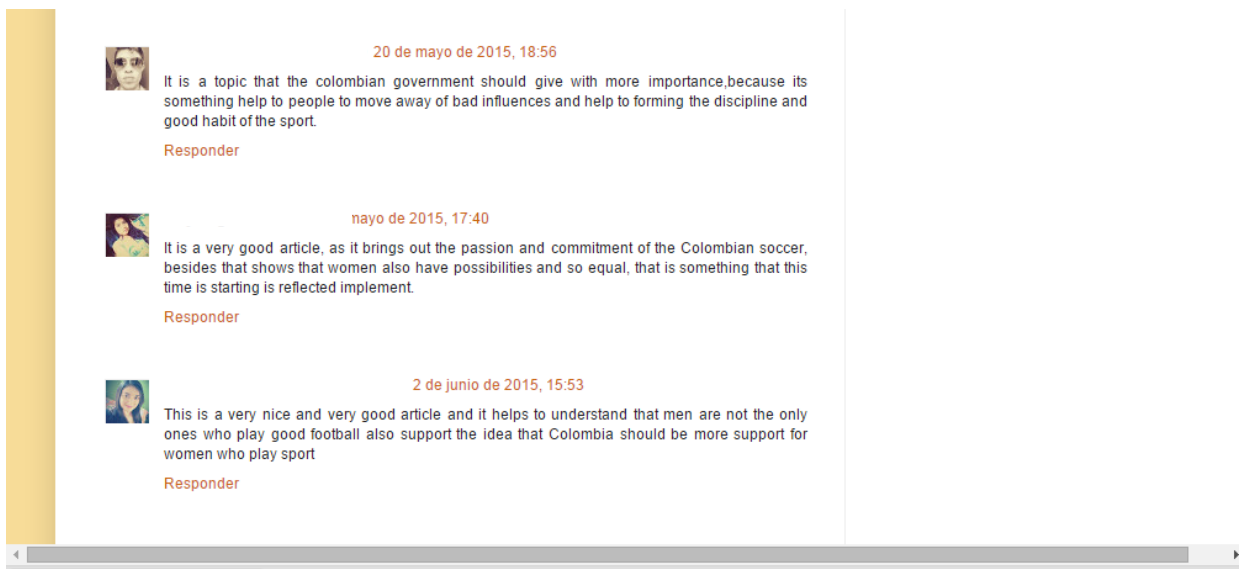
Responder

Kiesza - Hideaway   SCM Music Player   00:16|04:12

READING.jpg   Mostrar todas las descargas...

ES   08:53 p.m.   21/06/2015

20 de mayo de 2015, 18:56

It is a topic that the colombian government should give with more importance,because its something help to people to move away of bad influences and help to forming the discipline and good habit of the sport.

Responder

nayo de 2015, 17:40

It is a very good article, as it brings out the passion and commitment of the Colombian soccer, besides that shows that women also have possibilities and so equal, that is something that this time is starting is reflected implement.

Responder

2 de junio de 2015, 15:53

This is a very nice and very good article and it helps to understand that men are not the only ones who play good football also support the idea that Colombia should be more support for women who play sport

Responder