Importancia y uso de técnicas de lectura que facilitan la adquisición de vocabulario en estudiantes de inglés de segundo año, educación superior

Importance and Use of Reading Techniques to Facilitate the Acquisition of Vocabulary in Higher Education English Sophomore Students

Yuliana Vásquez-González[1]
yuliana.vasquez@up.ac.pa
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4087-3765
Universidad de Panamá. Centro Regional Universitario de Coclé.

Anel Hernández-Ruíz[2]
anel.hernandezr@up.ac.pa
https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6134-3229
Universidad de Panamá. Centro Regional Universitario de Coclé.

Solangel González-Ovalle[3]
solangel.gonzalezo@up.ac.pa
https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7083-9759
Universidad de Panamá. Centro Regional Universitario de Coclé

Juan Samaniego-Melgar[4]
juan.samaniego@up.ac.pa
https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1639-3768
Universidad de Panamá. Centro Regional Universitario de Coclé

Resumen. Adquirir un nuevo vocabulario a través de la lectura es un desafío para los estudiantes de segundo año de inglés como segunda lengua. Para lograr una adquisición efectiva, es importante conocer las técnicas de lectura que faciliten este proceso. El objetivo de este estudio era determinar las diferentes técnicas de lectura a las que recurren los estudiantes de segundo año de inglés para adquirir vocabulario y medir su frecuencia de uso. Se utilizó cuestionario con escala LIKERT. Los resultados muestran que el 81.3% utiliza técnicas de lectura para adquirir nuevo vocabulario, el 28,1% nunca utiliza el diccionario y al menos el 46.9% lee entre frecuente y siempre siendo un 12,5% el que lee siempre. El análisis de los resultados obtenidos demuestra la importancia del uso frecuente de técnicas de lectura para la adquisición de vocabulario enfatizando que el mismo depende de la frecuencia en que las palabras aparecen en el texto.

Palabras clave: Técnicas de lectura, frecuencia de lectura, adquisición de vocabulario, estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, escala Likert.

Abstract. Acquiring new vocabulary through reading is challenging for second-year English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. To achieve effective acquisition, it is important to understand the reading techniques that facilitate this process. This study aimed to determine the different reading techniques employed by second-year English students to acquire vocabulary and measure the frequency of their use. A Likert scale questionnaire was used. The results show that 81.3% use reading techniques to acquire new vocabulary, 28.1% never use a dictionary, and at least 46.9% read frequently or always, with 12.5% reading. The analysis of the results demonstrates the importance of frequent use of reading techniques for vocabulary acquisition, emphasizing that vocabulary acquisition depends on the frequency with which words appear in the text.

1 Introduction

Learning English in a Spanish-speaking country is a real challenge since you must make an extra effort compared to when you are in a country where the majority of the people around you speak English. Therefore, students need to work hard on their linguistic skills, at the same time expanding their vocabulary and thus leaving the basic lexicon so that their acquisition process could be effective and many doors open for them. This is what EFL sophomore students have to face. When freshmen English students go to sophomore year, they are expected to use a richer and expanded vocabulary, which allows them to have freedom in the target language.

Nonetheless, this vocabulary acquisition is a process that never stops once they join the major, so why is sophomore year a key year to see this advance? During the first level, students start to meet the grammatical rules to understand the language structure and become familiar with it, so the second year is the perfect year to keep track of this skill. However, this is not the outcome observed at the university level. On the contrary, most of the students are not reaching this expectation.

Many factors may lead to this reality, such as wrong methods, wrong use of these methods, lack of practice, lack of interest, etc. If the students do not expand vocabulary, they are dangerously willing to stick to the basic use of the language which prevents them from fulfilling proper speaking and writing communication. As a consequence, they can feel insecure or uncountable with a language and they can drop out. "Students in their second year of college encounter developmental, academic, and institutional challenges that, if not addressed, will lead to the sophomore slump. Which is identified as one of the most significant reasons for attrition in this group" (Sterling, 2018, p. 148), or not getting the jobs of their dreams after finishing their major in English.

Street (2019) states that "Research suggests that reading may be one of the best tools for improving a language learner´s vocabulary" (para. 1). Street´s assertion that reading is a potent tool for vocabulary expansion is rooted in the cognitive processes involved in language acquisition. When a learner encounters unfamiliar words in a reading context, they are forced to engage in active problem-solving.

They must decode the meaning of the words, consider its context, and integrate it into their mental lexicon. This process not only solidifies meaning of the new word but also establishes connections between it and other words, enhancing comprehension and recall. Moreover, repeated exposure to unfamiliar words in various reading materials reinforces their understanding and helps to embed them into the learner´s long-term memory.

Perhaps, a study through a questionnaire that investigates the techniques of reading, and frequency between EFL students in higher education will yield conclusions that will open avenues for future research and set a precedent to clarify this issue. This research delves into the frequency with which students read to acquire new vocabulary. Analysis of the data can provide possible answers.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of lexical approach and constructivism. The Lexical approach addresses that language learning is acquiring and organizing lexical units (words and phrases) rather than mastering grammatical rules (Nation, 2001). Vocabulary plays a crucial role in language comprehension and production. Constructivism, on the other hand, emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing their knowledge through interaction with their environment (Piaget, 1970). This framework suggests that effective vocabulary acquisition occurs when learners actively engage with language and use strategies to make meaning.

In addition to that, "many studies have shown that the acquisition of words from reading depends largely on the frequency of words in the text and that an important factor that affects the rate of acquisition is the conceptual difficulty of the words" (Daskalovka, 2014, p. 3). Word frequency refers to how often a word appears in the language. Studies have consistently shown that learners are more likely to acquire words they encounter frequently in their reading materials. Repeated exposure to a word helps to solidify its meaning and embed it into long-term memory.

On the other hand, conceptual difficulty refers to the complexity of the meaning of a word, including its abstractness, its relationship to other words, and its cultural

context. Words that are more abstract or have multiple meanings may be more challenging to acquire than concrete words with straightforward definitions. Additionally, words that are culturally specific or unfamiliar to the learner may also pose difficulties.

Research has explored the effectiveness of various reading techniques in facilitating vocabulary acquisition. For example, highlighting keywords and phrases can help learners focus on important information and improve recall (Mueller, 2020). Flashcards are useful to create visual aids for vocabulary review and practice, enhancing memory and retention (Brown, 2021) Active reading techniques, such as summarizing, questioning, and predicting, can encourage learners to engage critically with the text and to make connections between new and existing knowledge (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) Repetition, through repeated exposure to new vocabulary in different contexts, is essential for solidifying word meanings and integrating them into long-term memory (Nation, 2013). Finally, using a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words and explore their meanings, synonyms, and antonyms can expand vocabulary knowledge and deepen understanding (Nation & Schmitt, 2000).

Research has also consistently highlighted the importance of vocabulary in language acquisition. For instance, Nation (2013) emphasizes the need for extensive reading to facilitate vocabulary acquisition. More recent studies have explored the effectiveness of specific reading techniques in enhancing vocabulary learning. For example, Kim and Kim (2021) investigated the impact of word-mapping strategies on vocabulary acquisition among English language learners. Their findings suggest that word mapping can significantly improve vocabulary knowledge and retention. Similarly, Lee and Park (2022) examined the benefits of contextualized vocabulary instruction and found that providing learners with opportunities to encounter new words in meaningful contexts can enhance their vocabulary acquisition.

2 Materials and Methods

This research was focused on EFL sophomore students at the university level who were promoted to the junior stage. The study is quantitative, non-experimental, observational, retrospective, transversal, and descriptive.

By literature review, the following reading techniques facilitate vocabulary acquisition: Highlighting (Yurchak, 2018, para. 2), Flashcards (Martínez, 2023, para. 7), Active reading (The beanstack team, 2022), Repetition (Serrano & Huang, 2018), and Using a dictionary (Martínez, 2023, para. 4). as a base to establish the questions for the survey.

The instrument used was a questionnaire with a Likert scale to measure the frequency with which students used reading techniques. It was done through Google form and the generated link was sent to the students.

The questionnaire included the following questions: How often do you read? How often do you use reading techniques to acquire new vocabulary? How often do you use underlining or highlighting techniques? How often do you use the vocabulary cards technique? How often do you use active reading techniques? How often do you use repetition techniques? How often do you use a dictionary?

The instrument items followed a Likert scale to measure the frequency with which they used reading techniques. The participants were selected by census consisting of 35 EFL sophomore students at the university level with an age range of approximately 18 to 35 years. As a limitation, only 33 of them answered the survey.

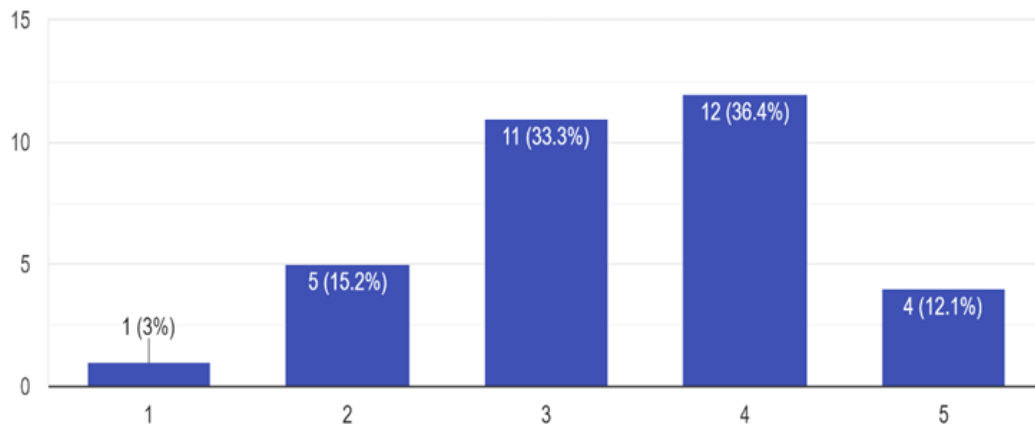## 3. Results and discussion

Fig. 1. The image shows the results of the frequency students read.

The frequency is measured from 1 to 5. Where 1 is never; 2 is rarely; 3 is sometimes; 4 is often and 5 is always. The frequency with which students read can influence the use of reading techniques to acquire vocabulary.

The frequency with which students read, whether high or low, gives us a previous reference of how frequently students can use these reading techniques. If a student rarely or never reads, there is little chance of adopting a reading technique to acquire vocabulary. However, those students who read sometimes, more often, or always are more likely to resort to reading techniques to acquire vocabulary, since they have an active reading habit. Most students (about 81.3%) read sometimes, often, or always, indicating a high level of engagement with reading materials.
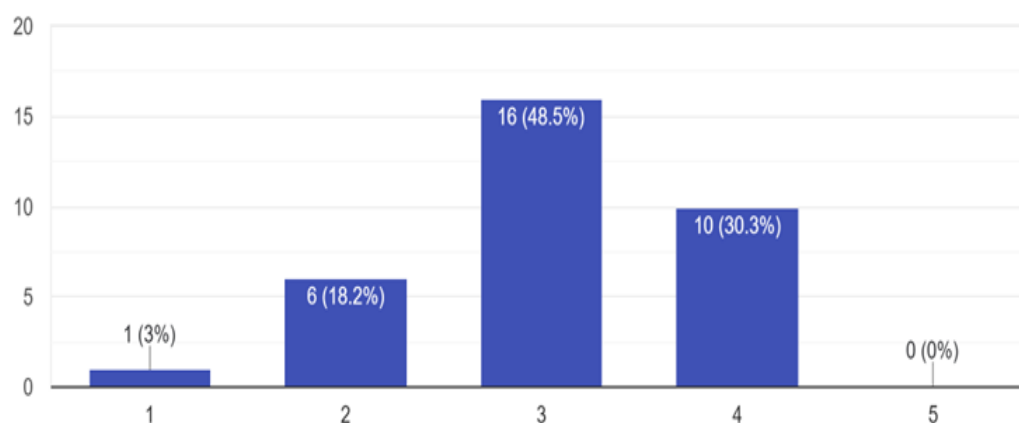
Fig. 2. The image shows how frequently students use reading techniques to acquire vocabulary.

A large proportion of students (78.2%) use reading techniques sometimes, often, or always to acquire new vocabulary, suggesting an active approach to learning.

48.5 % of the participants read sometimes. This last data shows a significant percentage of students who use reading techniques to facilitate their vocabulary acquisition.

Table 1.

Frequency of use of Reading techniques that facilitate vocabulary acquisition according to EFL sophomore students at the university level.

Frequency	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
The student reads.	3.1%	15.6%	34.4%	34.4%	12.5%
The student uses reading techniques to acquire new vocabulary	3.1%	18.8%	46.9%	31.3%	0.0%
The student uses underlining or highlighting techniques	12.5%	18.8%	25%	18.8%	25%

The student makes use of the vocabulary card technique	28.1%	25%	43.8%	3.1%	0.0%
The student uses active reading techniques	6.3%	34.4%	46.9%	12.5%	0.0%
The student uses repetition techniques	3.1%	21.9%	40.6%	25%	9.4%
The student uses a dictionary	28.1%	21.9%	18.8%	28.1%	3.1%

Source: by the author

Regarding to the usage of highlighting or underlining techniques, it can be seen that 25 % of the participants use them. However, 12.5 % never use them. Underlining or highlighting techniques are relatively evenly distributed, with a significant portion of students (about 68.8%) using them sometimes, often, or always. It means most of the participants know about highlighting or underlining as reading techniques, but some others simply do not use them. It brings some other gaps, to know if the highlighting or underlining techniques are unknown to the participants or if they use or do not use them.

On the other hand, differently from highlighting and underlining, the majority of students (about 43.8%) use the vocabulary card technique sometimes, indicating its popularity among the surveyed students. Moreover, a significant proportion of students (about 59.4%) use active reading techniques sometimes and often, indicating quite an awareness of the importance of active engagement with texts.

The usage of repetition techniques is distributed across various frequencies having a substantial 75% of the participants using them sometimes, often, or always.

About 50% use a dictionary sometimes, often, or always, indicating its importance in their vocabulary acquisition process. However, half of them, 28.1% never and 21.9 rarely use it indicating lower usage or significance as a technique to acquire vocabulary.

In the survey, an extra open question was added as what other reading technique do you use? Their answers give a variety of options. It provided interesting techniques that they consider to help with their vocabulary acquisition through reading as seen in Figure 3.
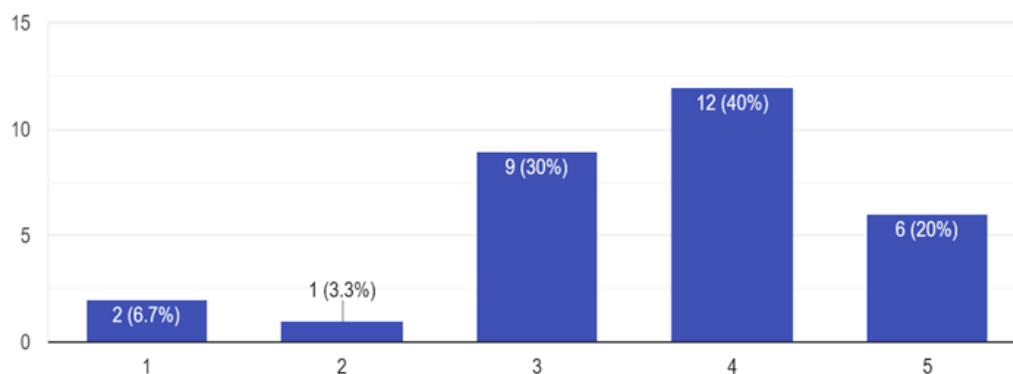

Fig. 3. The image shows how frequently students use other techniques, different from the ones proposed, that they feel are effective for acquiring vocabulary when reading.

Other techniques such as summarizing (40%), scanning 30%), and analyzing (20%) are most frequently used by the participants.

4. Conclusions

This research delved into the frequency with which EFL sophomore students use reading techniques to acquire vocabulary. According to the results obtained, most of the sophomore students read somehow, indicating a high level of engagement with reading materials. Overall, the data suggests that the surveyed EFL sophomore students at university levels demonstrate an active engagement with reading techniques for vocabulary acquisition, with varying frequency of usage across different techniques. The study found that some students are partially unaware of how crucial reading techniques usage can be for vocabulary acquisition. On the other hand, the data showed that students also apply techniques such as summarizing, scanning, and analyzing to acquire new vocabulary when reading. An extension study suggests measuring the efficacy of each listed reading technique to see how they facilitate their vocabulary acquisition based in context.

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