

The Use of Reading as an Effective Language Acquisition Strategy

for Adult English Language Learners

Xinia Nagygellér Jiménez

Latin American University of Science and Technology ULACIT

Author Note

This paper was presented as a final research project in August, 2013 as a requirement to obtain the degree of Master in English Language Teaching with a concentration in Management and Assessment of English Programs.

### Abstract

Reading has for long been thought as a passive, receptive skill, and as such it is usually not given the important place it has in second and foreign language learning programs. Although there is ample research supporting the idea that reading helps learners acquire vocabulary and grammatical structures in a contextualized way and that it may be an optimal strategy to provide them with comprehensible input, the reality is that even in English language majors reading is still not given the place it deserves. This study was designed to investigate the issue of improved language acquisition through the inclusion of instruction in reading in integration with the other language skills at the college level. A review of the relationship between reading and language acquisition as well as the ways in which reading may benefit adult language learners was performed first. Then a method consisting of written questionnaires, pre and posts tests, and a class observation was implemented to obtain data from a group of adult learners involved in a university reading course. The analysis of the results obtained supports the claim made in this study and suggests that adult language learners want and benefit from exposure to challenging and extensive kinds of reading.

**Keywords:** reading, language acquisition, vocabulary, adult language learners, comprehensible input

The Use of Reading as an Effective Language Acquisition Strategy for  
Adult English Language Learners

As a receptive skill that presents students with not only vocabulary in context but also idioms, collocations, and grammatical structures among others, reading can be used as an effective strategy to improve the rate of acquisition in language learners. Nevertheless, this skill is not always given enough importance or is poorly treated in language learning programs. This may be due to the fact that most programs focus on the development of productive skills, that is, speaking and writing, as proof that acquisition and learning have occurred.

However, contrary to what that focus implies, reading is a very active skill which involves a lot of brain processes that allow the learner to make sense of new information. Besides of working on putting together words and phrases to reach comprehension of complete ideas, reading allows for the transmission of knowledge about culture, discourse patterns that are appropriate in different circumstances in the target language, the development of inference-making strategies and imagination, and it is one of the main means to transmit knowledge coming from all kinds of disciplines or fields.

Furthermore, as children, most of the acquisition we experience regarding our native language is provided through information in written format, and at school, a lot of time is devoted to developing reading skills so that knowledge can be transmitted in this way. Hence, if the second or foreign language learning process resembles the developmental stages an individual goes through in the acquisition of his first language, as claimed by some scholars like Krashen (1982), and reading skills are usually encouraged and valued in first language situations, it is just appropriate to conclude that such kind of skills is desirable and should be included in the instruction of second or foreign language learners.

In the case of adult English language learners at the college level, the development of reading skills through work on reading strategies is necessary so that they can more steadily and rapidly acquire the vocabulary, structures, and other aspects of the language. It would be the ideal situation to find that these students arrive at the classroom with refined reading skills in their own or first language. However, that is not always the case; what is more, they usually present poor reading skills, do not know strategies to aid their understanding of written texts, and many do even express a lack of interest in reading. This last situation is somewhat worrying because if they are not constantly exercising this skill, they are not taking advantage of the benefits reading can offer them, especially in the case of acquiring the target language in a more natural and contextualized manner.

Because of all these reasons, reading is a skill that should be developed in second or foreign language learning situations, for its development can bring a good number of benefits to language learners. In the case of adult learners at the university level, by including instruction on reading strategies and exposing them to written texts more frequently, they can develop the skills they lack and improve their rate of language acquisition.

Based on these assumptions, this research project has as a main purpose to investigate how the development of reading skills support and enhance the acquisition of English vocabulary and structures of adult language learners. The investigation will focus on university students in the English Language Major at Universidad Tecnica Nacional who are enrolled in a basic reading course. It is expected that the information and conclusions obtained after the investigation on this topic will serve to point out how this language program can promote more reading and work on the development of reading skills in order to help learners acquire language in a more efficient way.

The presentation of this research project begins with a review on the relationship between language acquisition and reading. An overview of theories, hypotheses and findings linguists and second language acquisition scholars have made in the past helps to understand how these two topics are related and how they support each other. Then a description of the kind of language learners the investigation will focus on is provided with the purpose of identifying their needs and the kind of reading instruction they would benefit the most from.

Next, the methodology followed for data collection, a description of subjects studied, and the instruments used for the project are presented and discussed. After that, the discussion of findings and how they help to support the initial claims of the research is provided. Finally, the conclusions reached based on those findings and their implications for the classroom are explained, and recommendations about possible necessary actions for the improvement of the reading course studied and for future research on this matter are discussed.

## **Literature Review**

### **Language Acquisition and Reading**

Language acquisition is an inherently human characteristic. Different theories and theorists have tried to explain how it is that children first acquire language. A celebrated figure in language acquisition research, Chomsky (1959) proposed decades ago that an innate device or capacity in the human brain for the acquisition of language is the source of our ability to communicate with others. This theory is known as Universal Grammar, and it explains that all languages share general principles that allow a child to learn the vocabulary and the morphological, syntactical, and phonological systems of a language. Besides of this innate predisposition for language acquisition, it is also accepted by scholars that language is learned

when there is interaction with others in a social environment. As explained by Klein (as cited in Constantino, 1999), acquisition in this context is “a spontaneous learning, which is based on meaningful and purposeful communication with speakers of the target language” (p. 8). Hence, those words, functions, and structures that help the child to express his ideas and wants are more easily acquired due to the meaningful nature they have.

In the case of the acquisition of a language other than a mother tongue, Krashen (1981) explains that this is a process very much like that of a child learning his or her first language in the sense that communication in first language learning settings is normally natural and includes meaningful interaction, an idea which supports Chomsky’s and Klein’s claims. Moreover, the term acquisition was enunciated by Krashen (1981) when he differentiated it from learning. He stated that different from acquisition, learning involves the conscious study of language forms and formal instruction of rules, whereas acquisition takes place in an unconscious way when the individual is able to make sense of the language to which he is exposed.

Research on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theory has provided ample knowledge that can direct SLA practice. The first important point to understand the field, as made by Hall, Smith & Wicaksono (2011), is that SLA theory has been built following three different approaches: (1) linguistic, studying the structure and accuracy of language; (2) cognitive, mostly dealing with the psychology of learning; and (3) sociocultural, concerning the contexts in which language is used and which affect it. Each of these approaches has had its own focus of study and each one has provided useful and informed insight into the second language acquisition process.

From a language acquisition perspective, reading seems to be related to the development of linguistic, cognitive and socialcultural abilities in the child. As children acquire more competence in the use of language, their cognitive abilities also increase and develop until they

are able to use language as a means to achieve a goal or communicate their thoughts and needs (Vacca, Vacca, & Gove, 1995). Hence, possessing oral proficiency in a language may help to reach reading proficiency and viceversa.

One of the challenges for language learners and which deals with their proficiency in the use of language is the background knowledge they possess and which allows them to connect new ideas to previously applied patterns, words, and forms. As explained by Constantino (1999), “Reading comprehension becomes efficient if the reader is able to relate the written material to his or her own experience or knowledge structures, called schemata” (p.38). As a result, reading in a language other than his mother tongue constitutes a more challenging task for a language learner, since some kind of stored knowledge needs to exist so that new information can be comprehended.

In one of his hypotheses of second language acquisition, Krashen (1982) explains the importance of providing language learners with a good amount of comprehensible input for acquisition to take place. The importance of this hypothesis lies on its attempt at answering the question of how it is that an individual acquires language. Krashen (1982) has stated that in order to acquire knowledge, “we [need to] understand language that contains structure that is ‘a little beyond’ where we are now” (p.21). This idea is represented by the author with the formula  $i + 1$ , where  $i$  represents the starting point or stage of knowledge the person is in and 1 means the extra effort the learner will have to make in order to understand and acquire new material. Consequently, with this hypothesis Krashen proposes that first we acquire knowledge and then we create rules. This kind of acquisition is based on the learning context, not on the conscious study of structures. Wang and Tinker Sachs (2011) agree with this view by claiming that “while

successful language learning actually involves a myriad of factors...adequate amount of comprehensible input is essential” (p.68).

The relevance of these claims in terms of the development of reading skills in the language learner is in the realization that reading constitutes a great source of contextualized language forms or input. This input aids language learners in building their vocabulary in the target language and in understanding how those forms are used by its native speakers (Ray, 2005; Rodrigo, 2006). When the language learner reads, he is being exposed to the language. This exposition is needed especially in foreign language learning contexts, since repeated exposition to the target language by frequent reading can lead to better comprehension and knowledge of a language. As explained by Hafiz & Tudor (1990) accuracy of usage is promoted by exposition to reading materials, by high reading frequency and a good quantity of reading, basically due to the fact that learners acquire vocabulary through multiple exposures. In this way, they are able to see how a vocabulary item works not only in one context but also in the multiple contexts in which it may be used. In turn, this promotes acquisition and accuracy in usage of the item in all language skills.

### **Reading and Adult Language Learners**

**Characteristics of this group of learners.** Learning a second language is not the same as learning a mother tongue, and research suggests that it is even more complex for adult learners given their special characteristics. Because this kind of students has different goals in learning a second language, special consideration must be given regarding issues at the cognitive, affective and linguistic level for classroom instruction (CAELA, 2007). Adult language learners have the singular characteristic of being goal-oriented, which means they usually want to learn another language to fulfill a need or demand they have. Bailey (2006) reports that through the answers



to an essay prompt, Merrifield was able to identify the four major goals or purposes for learning English of a group of more than one thousand adult immigrant language learners. Those four goals were (1) to gain access to information and resources to orient themselves in the world, (2) to express ideas and opinions with confidence to be heard and taken into account, (3) to solve problems and make decisions on their own and without mediators, and (4) to learn how to learn and thus be ready to keep up with world changes. Moreover, other motifs for learning a language include the adults' need to continue studies, advance in their careers and find new work or business opportunities, help their children in their studies, and be able to interact with native speakers or other users of the language (CAELA, 2007). Given these purposes, it is easy to see that adult language learners benefit more when instruction takes into account their needs and wants, so that they engage better in learning activities that represent some kind of value and immediate gain in order to obtain more from them.

Knowles (1990) describes a set of adult learner characteristics which guide and support adult learning theory. He claims that adult learners are self-directed in their learning, reservoirs of experiences that serve as resources as they learn, and practical and problem solving-oriented learners; also, adult learners want to be able to apply what they learn in their lives as soon as they obtain it, and they want to understand the reason why something is to be learned.

Another important characteristic of adult learners is their previous learning experience. Many an adult language learner may not be used to current language teaching practices as they may be more used to teacher-centered methodology with little participation on their part. Hence, their participation may be limited at times, especially if they are immersed in a group in which many classmates are younger or more experienced with the language.

**Reading class activities for adult learners**

The strategies utilized by language instructors in the classroom in order to achieve improved reading skills are highly linked to the development of other skills necessary for linguistic competence. In regards to this and according to the Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA, 2007), the following constitute some general strategies that should be considered when teaching adult learners: (1) teachers need to know their students and their needs well, (2) visual material is an aid to instruction, (3) tasks should be modeled before students are to do them, (3) the class environment has to be safe and non-threatening, (4) teachers need to be careful with their speaking and writing in order not to cause misunderstandings, (5) teachers need to support tasks by offering scaffolding to students, (6) the use of authentic materials is recommended, (7) students should not be overloaded with work or material, and (8) teachers need to have both routine as well as varied activities in each class. In the case of reading skills, these strategies should focus on the ways teachers support learners and how they present the learning materials so that students are able to acquire language in a more natural and meaningful way, which should also be the purpose behind exposure to reading material and reading activities.

In addition, two important aspects to consider in teaching adult learners are first the authenticity of the text used, for if it represents language as it is used in real life, it will help them learn from useful input; and secondly, the authenticity of the task, which means learning what is to be done with the language they are exposed to. If materials are authentic and drawn from real-life situations, they will be more relevant to the adult learner (Bailey, 2006). The idea of authenticity here refers to the way the input presented in class activities replicates the use of language in the target language community, and not exclusively the use of resources or materials

originally produced for native speakers as the term is usually conceived. Actually, there seems to be a lot of disagreement about what kind of materials is better for reading, either authentic or simplified and graded. As Schmidt (1998) explains, “Graded reading materials can serve as a bridge providing comprehensible input, skills practice, and increased confidence leading to eventual fluent handling of authentic texts” (para.4). Then it follows that the most important consideration in terms of selection of reading materials should be what they can offer to help learners comprehend and make meaning of the texts they are exposed to while they develop their reading skills.

Finally, another point to take into consideration in reading material for a language course is that the input the material provides should be interesting and motivating for the reader.

Schmidt (1998) suggests that the importance of

maximizing high interest input in any form is its potential as a resource for communication in the classroom. As students spend much of their time in a communicative classroom interacting, they need something to communicate about.

Common sources are the students' own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Reading exposes students to new experiences and points of view that can then be shared and discussed. (Extensive Reading in English, para. 6)

Consequently, besides of contributing to language acquisition, reading and appropriate reading strategies for adult learners can be a source for classroom interaction and the development of other skills by integrating them.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Context**

The participants of this project are a group of 13 students enrolled in the course called “Reading 1,” which is part of the two reading courses in the English as a Foreign Language Major (ILE), at Universidad Tecnica Nacional, main campus in Alajuela, and their teacher. The purpose of this course is to provide students with instruction on reading strategies and vocabulary recognition procedures that will enable them to advance in the acquisition of the target language and to increase their passive as well as their active vocabulary.

This course is imparted during the second quarter of the major’s curricula, and students enrolled in it may also be taking the courses Grammar II, Pronunciation I, and Integrated English II as it is planned for this level in the program. Their proficiency in the language is expected to be at least at the A1 level of English language proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which is used at the institution to describe the competences learners are expected to develop and achieve at each level of their language studies.

Reading I is a theoretical and practical 3-credit course that is developed in 14 weeks with one weekly session of three and a half hours. Since this course is part of an initial two-year diploma program (which can be extended for one and a half more years to obtain a Bachelor’s degree), it aims at developing language skills that allow a learner of a foreign language to comprehend, appreciate and discuss academic and nonacademic texts, and to analyze and use vocabulary in context.

Regarding the course objectives, there are three general objectives that guide language instruction in this course: (1) to develop reading strategies to understand and interpret different

text types through the acquisition of language and structures in order to improve reading efficiency, vocabulary, grammar, and communicative competence; (2) to develop appreciation for reading and critical thinking through the analysis and discussion of academic and nonacademic texts at an appropriate linguistic level, so that reading comprehension skills develop gradually and steadily; and (3) to integrate basic reading knowledge and skills through class activities that promote critical thinking in ethical, cultural, and current contexts, in order to obtain a higher level of communicative competence in the language (Carrera de Inglés, 2008).

### **Procedures**

The methodology employed to collect data that support the initial claim made in this research, that reading must be explicitly incorporated and developed in a language program (in integration with the other language skills) so that rate of language acquisition is improved, includes a series of data collection procedures, both quantitative and qualitative.

Following the application of those procedures, an analysis of the data obtained was performed in order to look for supporting evidence for the assumption which is the basis of this research. Once this stage was completed, the interpretation of research findings helped to arrive at important conclusions. Finally, after the discussion of those findings and conclusions, some considerations on the outcomes obtained and their implications in the development of reading skills to support effective language acquisition were identified. Those considerations are offered in the conclusions and recommendations section of this report.

### **Instruments for Data Collection**

For the collection of data related to the focus on reading in a course at the college level, the main approach applied in this research was qualitative in nature. As explained by Richards (2001), the purpose of applying qualitative methods is to focus on specific characteristics which

determine variables that are important for the evaluation and assessment of the effectiveness of the methodology and activities used in a course program. Additionally, quantitative strategies were also used. As Lynch (2003) points out, the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection helps to get a complete picture of the teaching-learning situation and to have access to a variety of perspectives and kinds of research data. Therefore, both methods were incorporated in the data collection phase of this project.

In order to gather the qualitative data, first a questionnaire consisting of 14 close-ended statements and questions and three open questions was applied to the students taking the course. Its purpose was to find out what the learners' expectations of the course were and if they were being fulfilled, their perspectives on the development of the course and the teaching methodology, and their view on how their learning has been enhanced and promoted by these aspects. The answers to the questions were recorded on a 4-point Likert scale, in which students checked their degree of agreement or disagreement and how often they presented the behaviors suggested in the statements with which they were presented. The questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

Moreover, a class observation was carried out by the evaluator in order to obtain first hand information by experiencing the teaching methodology and the learning process in the actual context where the course takes place. Appendix B presents the semi-structured form prepared for this observation and which includes 12 topics or aspects for assessment.

The second approach for data collection was quantitative, and it involved the analysis of scores students obtained in the course. The scores examined correspond to a diagnostic test taken on the first day of class, and which was then reapplied on week nine. The purpose of this

analysis was to compare the scores obtained in both examinations in order to identify students' gains and improvement in reading skills after instruction. The diagnostic test used can be found in Appendix C.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Questionnaire Results**

The first data collection procedure applied for this research, a structured questionnaire, aimed at obtaining information about how reading and its link to language acquisition were perceived by the subjects who were enrolled in the course Reading I. In the first part of the questionnaire, subjects provided personal information that was relevant to understand better their interest towards the acquisition of a second language. This information was related to their gender, age, and whether or not they were working at the moment of the study.

The information obtained shows that in terms of gender, the group was composed of 8 females and 7 males. Moreover, the ages of these subjects ranged between 18 and 40, being most of them between ages 18 and 20 or below 25.

Subjects' personal information revealed that 73 % (11) of them work during the day, whereas only 27% (4) of them are unemployed or just students at the moment.

Next, the questions and statements presented to subjects were divided into three major areas: (1) general aspects of the course, (2) subjects' involvement with reading in the target language, and (3) subjects' attitudes towards reading in general. Three more general questions about the course followed those three sections.

The "general aspects of the course" section of the questionnaire presented subjects with four statements they had to strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with. In general,

the tendency for this section was to agree or strongly agree with the statements, and very few if any of the subjects disagreed with some of them. None strongly disagreed with any of them. A presentation of each statement and a thorough description of the results obtained are given next.

Statement 1 read: “Taking a course that focuses on acquiring reading strategies for better comprehension has helped you acquire vocabulary on varied topics.” Subjects agreed in 73% of the cases and 27% of them strongly agreed, as illustrated in Figure 1.

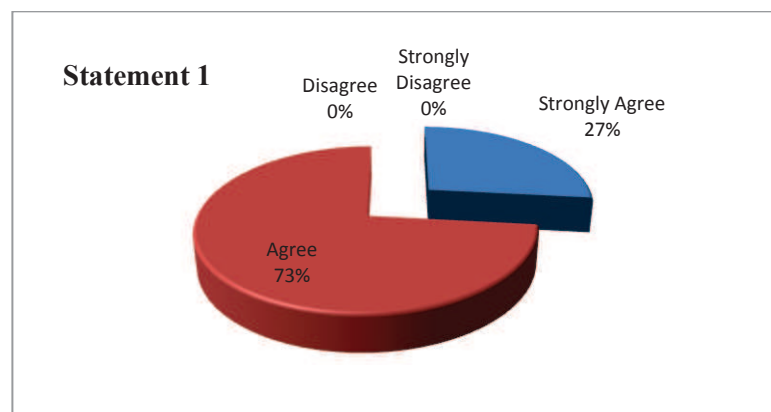


Figure 1. General aspects of the course, statement 1

Similar results were obtained for statement 2: “The work on readings has helped you notice how the structures of English sentences are used,” for most subjects agreed or strongly agreed with it. In this case, however, one subject (6%) disagreed with the statement (Figure 2).

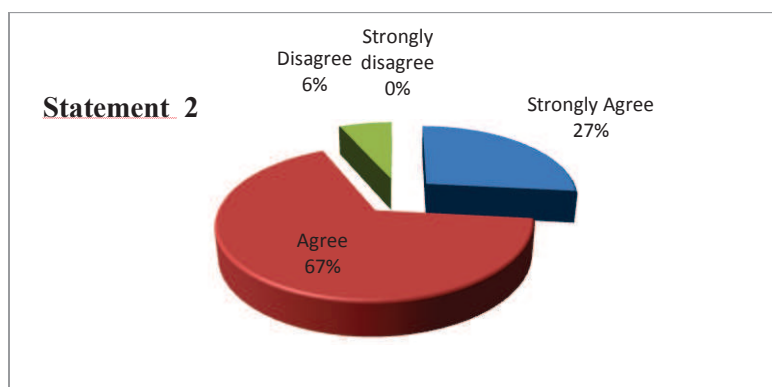


Figure 2. General aspects of the course, statement 2



Answers to statement 3 were in total agreement again. The statement was: “You feel that the strategies for understanding new words and the ideas in texts have been useful in the process of learning the language.” Sixty percent of those surveyed agreed and forty percent strongly agreed. These results are presented in Figure 4.

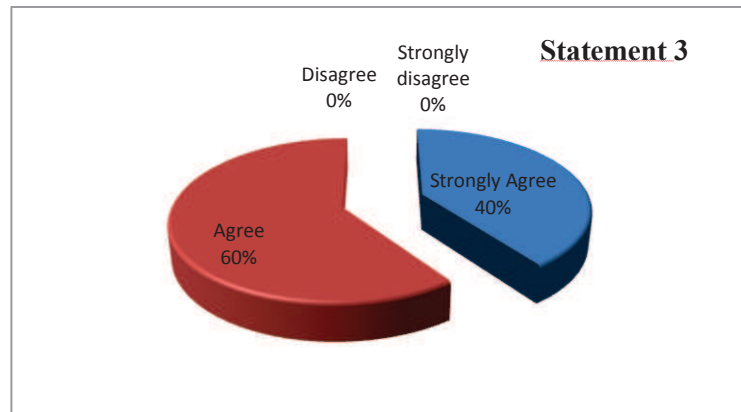


Figure 4. General aspects of the course, statement 3

The last statement in this part of the questionnaire followed a similar trend, since only 7% of subjects disagreed with the statement which read: “Overall, you feel that this kind of course is useful and effective in advancing your learning.” Figure 5 provides an account of these results.

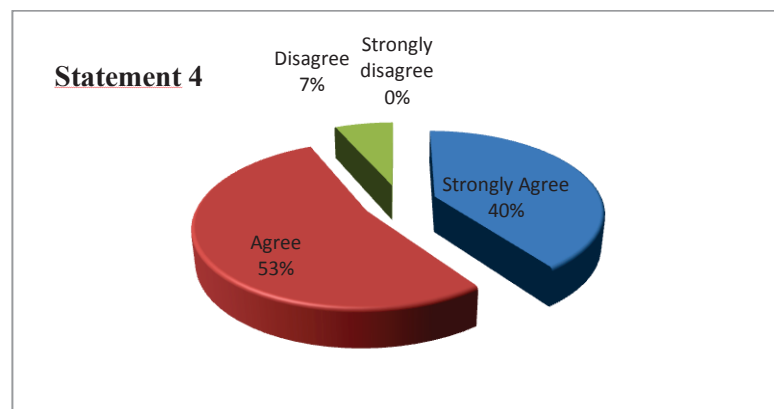


Figure 5. General aspects of the course, statement 4

In the following section of the questionnaire, the emphasis was on unveiling how much subjects were actually involved with reading either for pleasure or for class assignments. In this case, four questions were presented and they were meant to be assigned an adverb that graded the frequency in which subjects performed some actions. The scoring adverbs were *frequently*, *sometimes*, *rarely*, and *almost never*.

The results obtained for question 1, “How often do you read for pleasure?” indicated that the subjects in this group tend to read because they like it. 33% of them said that they read for pleasure frequently, and 40% did so sometimes, as illustrated in Figure 6. In total, 27% of them are not interested in reading for pleasure.

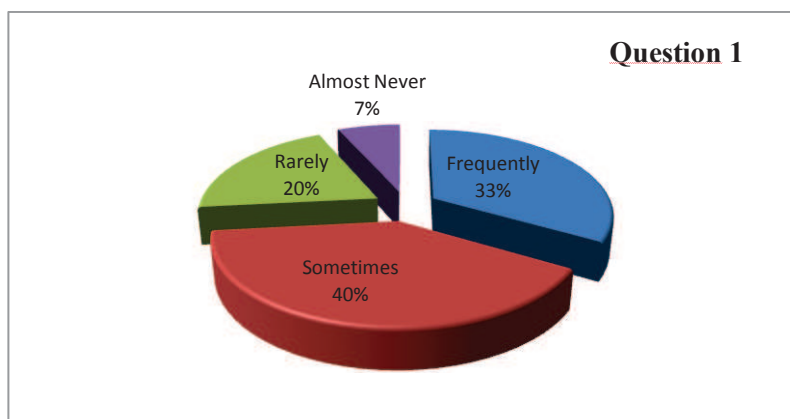


Figure 6. Involvement with reading, question 1

Question 2 in this part obtained results not too far from those above. The question was: “How often do you read material in your native language?” to which the options *sometimes* and *frequently* obtained 47% of answers each, and only 6%, or one subject, indicated almost never reading in his native language. (See Figure 7 for an illustration of these data)

On the other hand, question 3, which asked how often subjects read material in English, the target language in their major, had similar results. Most subjects indicated reading in English frequently or sometimes (47% and 33%, respectively), and only 3 subjects (20%) indicated that

they rarely read in this language. This information is shown below in Figure 8.

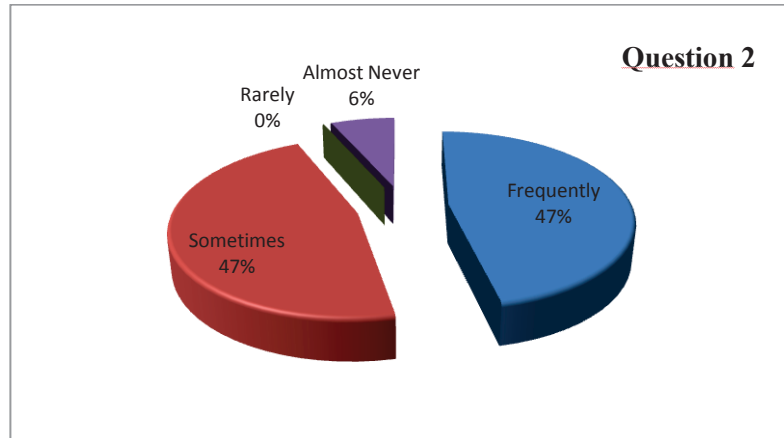


Figure 7. Involvement with reading, question 2

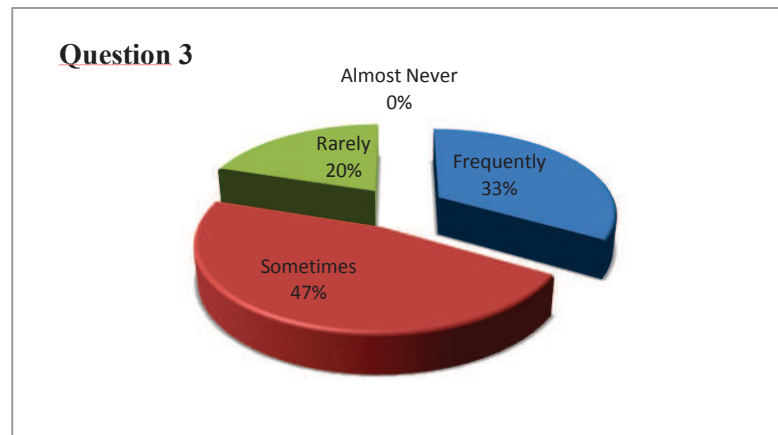


Figure 8. Involvement with reading, question 3

Finally, the last question asked subjects whether they read in the target language only because they had to do it as part of a class assignment. As illustrated in Figure 9, results were more varied this time. Nevertheless, they indicate that reading in English is not something subjects do just because they have to in order to fulfill class assignments. Most of them (53%) rarely do it because of that reason, and 27% sometimes do it with that purpose in mind.

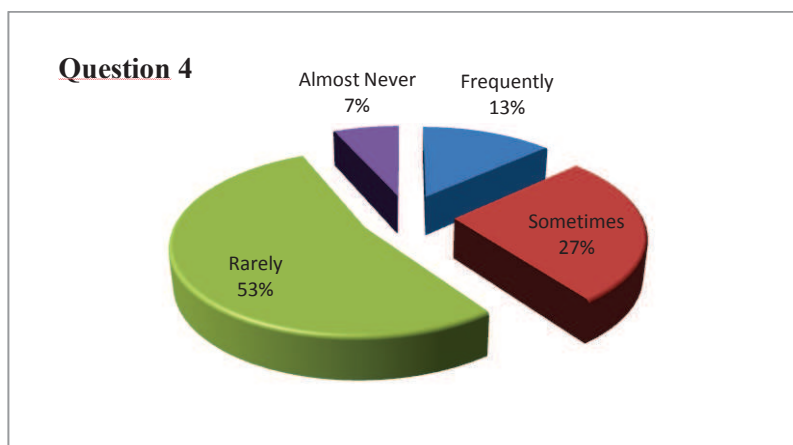


Figure 9. Involvement with reading, question 4

The next section of the questionnaire presented six statements to the subjects and one more time, they had to show their degree of agreement or disagreement with each one. The purpose of this section was to check on subjects' attitudes and preconceptions about reading as a skill that promotes language acquisition and their attitudes towards the reading course they were taking.

The first statement read: "You really enjoy reading." Figure 10 shows how 33% of subjects disagreed with this proposition, while 27% agreed and 40% strongly agreed with it. This means that most of them enjoy the activity of reading.

The second statement presented to subjects in this section stated that reading was one of their favorite activities to do outside the classroom in order to acquire new vocabulary and structures. The information in Figure 11 shows the results obtained: most of them were in agreement with the statement, 60% in total when adding the *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* responses, in contrast to 40% who disagreed with this idea.

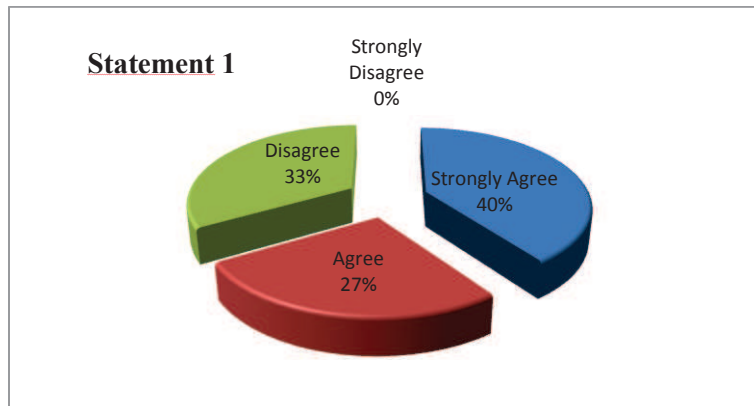


Figure 10. Attitude towards reading, statement 1

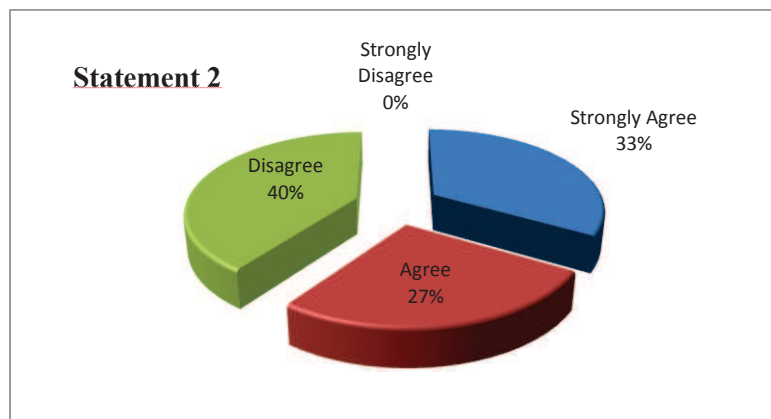


Figure 11. Attitude towards reading, statement 2

Statement 3 proposed that reading was as important in acquiring a language as listening, writing, and speaking. Subjects showed more agreement than disagreement once again. As Figure 12 shows, 53% of those surveyed agreed strongly and 40% of them agreed to this idea. Just 7% (one subject) of them disagreed. Hence, 93% of subjects consider reading an important skill comparable to the other three they were presented with.

“You would like to have more advanced reading courses in the major you study” was the fourth statement presented to subjects. The numbers show similar results to those for other

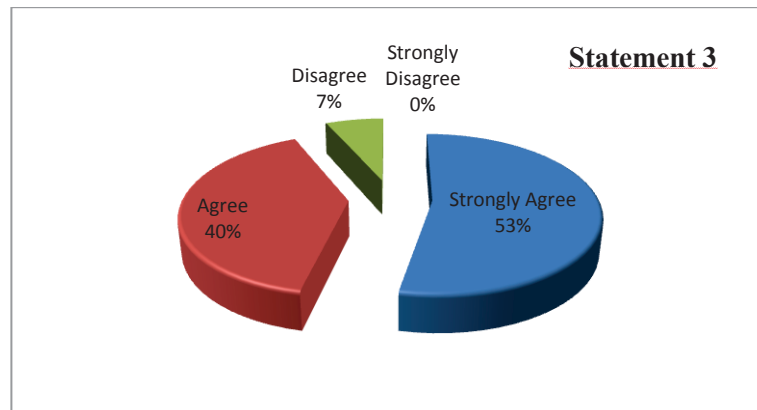


Figure 12. Attitude towards reading, statement 3

statements, since the tendency was also to agree with this statement. Twenty percent of subjects, however, showed disagreement with this idea. (See Figure 13)

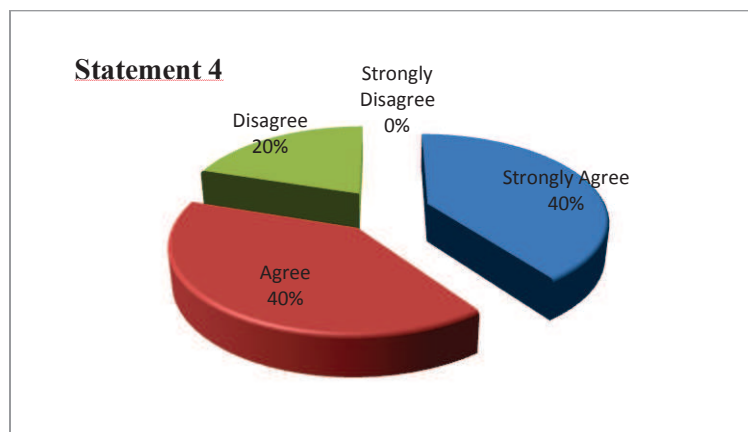


Figure 13. Attitude towards reading, statement 4

In statement 5 (Figure 14), the results show that most subjects (80% in total) considered that they had had enough practice on reading strategies in Reading 1.

The last statement in this part of the questionnaire also obtained a high percentage of general agreement. The statement read: “You feel you have acquired enough skills and strategies that help you be a better reader.” In Figure 15, it is easy to observe how a majority of subjects

expressed their agreement with this idea. Four of them (27%) were in disagreement, however.

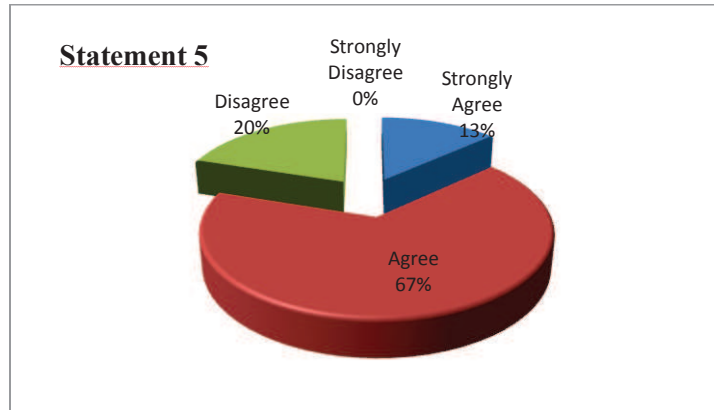


Figure 14. Attitude towards reading, statement 5

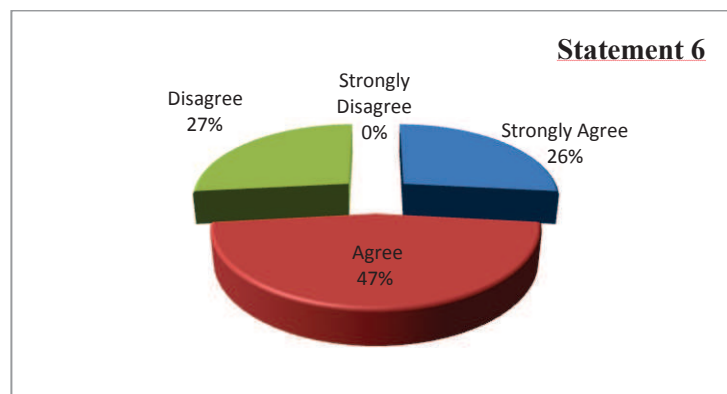


Figure 15. Attitude towards reading, statement 6

After the third major division in the questionnaire, subjects were presented with two open-ended questions about the reading course and a prompt for comments or any other ideas subjects may have wanted to add at the end. The sentences were: (1) In your view, what are the advantages of a reading course when learning a new language? (2) In your view, what aspects of this kind of course might need to be improved or reconsidered?, and (3) Please add any additional comments, clarifications, or suggestions you may have here.

A review of the results of the two questions is given below. The prompt for comments either did not receive relevant responses for this study or was not answered by most subjects. Therefore, it is not going to be taken into account in this analysis.

The first of the questions showed five major elements subjects identified as advantages brought about by receiving specific instruction on reading: (1) learning about culture, (2) learning the language, (3) learning vocabulary, (4) learning grammar, and (5) acquiring reading strategies.

Of these 5 advantages, the most important one seems to be learning vocabulary, which was mentioned by 38% of respondents. Learning the language and acquiring reading strategies followed in importance, as they were mentioned by 22% of subjects in each case. Finally, learning grammar was mentioned by only two subjects (11%), and learning about culture only by one (6%). This information is illustrated in Figure 16 below.

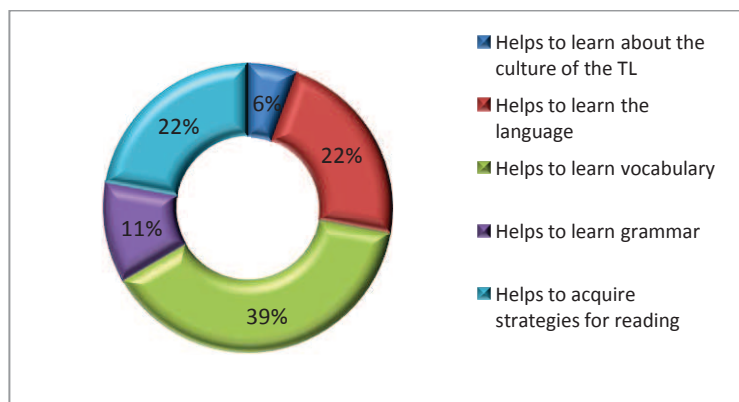


Figure 16. Advantages of a reading course for SLA as seen by students

The second question presented in this part and which centered in knowing what improvements or considerations subjects believed were important for a course of this nature obtained six different suggestions, being the most important the use of more extensive



reading material, as mentioned by 40% of subjects. The second idea in importance was the use of more attractive class activities. Third, the inclusion of more speaking activities and the use of more challenging readings and activities were mentioned in 13% of the answers in both cases. The use of more varied kinds of readings and making classes smaller were also mentioned, but only by 7% of subjects each time. A representation of these results is given in Figure 17.

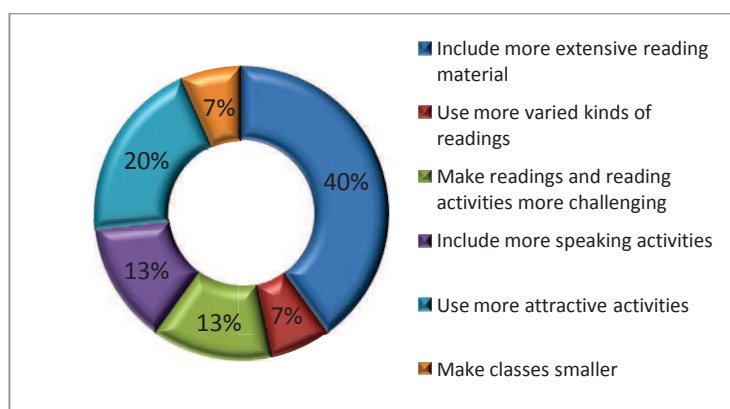


Figure 17. Possible improvements for the reading course as seen by students

**Class Observation Results**

As part of this research project, a class observation was carried out in the reading class in order to gather relevant information about the kind of activities performed, materials used, the class environment, and the interaction between students and the instructor. Most importantly, a key point to observe was the way in which language acquisition and the development of reading strategies were pursued throughout the class content and activities.

In regards to class activities, it was observed that all of them were contextualized by means of a pre established topic in the coursebook. Based on that topic, the instructor began the class with pre reading activities that included a video about the unit of study. Students were asked

to take notes about its content and then share with partners what they had understood. Next, the instructor asked questions and began a discussion of the topic with the whole class. In this way, there were multiple language skills involved in the task, since students did not only watch the video, but listened to it, wrote ideas they comprehended about the topic, and then talked about them with each other and the instructor. Following the discussion of the topic that served as the context for all class activities, the instructor provided explicit instruction on the reading strategies that were going to be practiced in the class with the help of a PowerPoint presentation which also had sample paragraphs he used for explaining and eliciting answers from the students. More examples were given in the coursebook, and written exercises to practice the strategies presented were completed. In general, work on vocabulary recognition and acquisition was done mostly by identifying meaning from context clues in short paragraphs and by matching focus words with synonyms. Worksheets were also used to provide more practice on the vocabulary related to the class topic.

The reading selections were quite short, sometimes only one or two paragraphs long, although in some units in the coursebook the readings have the format of a letter, an online article, a book review, and so forth. Students worked diligently completing tasks which included reading and finding the answers to some questions to assess reading comprehension, or completing some cloze exercises, as in the case of exercises about vocabulary in the texts. As a general rule, students seemed to have no problems with the reading selections and with the completion of exercises based on them.

Moreover, in this observation it was possible to identify positive interaction between the class and the instructor and between students and their peers. The instructor tried to elicit

information or prompt students with a few questions on the topics so that they would participate and express their opinions or volunteer their answers.

The class environment was quite relaxing and conducive to students' participation. The teacher used non-threatening techniques to involve students, mostly by eliciting and activating previous knowledge from them. In addition, he corrected them by changing the wording of their oral mistakes and he constantly worked on clarification of meaning.

### **Weeks One and Nine Test Results**

As explained above, another procedure (quantitative in nature) in data collection for this project consisted in the comparison between the test scores obtained by the group of subjects enrolled in a reading course. A diagnostic test which included exercises on the topics that were going to be developed in the course was first applied during week one, in the first class of the period. The same test was applied nine weeks later after instruction on the most relevant topics and reading strategies of the course had been delivered. The test scores collected in this manner were then compared for each subject in order to observe whether the second set of scores showed numbers that would support the idea that instruction on reading strategies and the development of reading skills at the college level have a positive impact on language acquisition.

The results of this comparison show that, in general, test scores improved. Out of the 15 subjects, eleven or 73.33% improved their test scores. The most evident improvement was found in the case of subject 3, who had scored a 58 in week one and who went to obtain a score of 83 when the test was reapplied in week nine. No improvement was found for three (20%) of the subjects, who actually obtained the same scores both times the test was applied, and subject 13, who obtained the highest grades of all both times, did even get a lower score in week nine.

The mean test score in week one was 74.4, and in week 9 the mean was 79.7, a difference of 5.3 points. Table 1 shows the grades obtained by all subjects in the two occasions the test was applied, and Figure 18 represents the percentages of improvement or lack of it that those scores show.

Table 1.

*Test scores obtained by subjects in weeks one and nine*

Subject #	Week 1 Test Scores	Week 9 Test Scores
1	80	87
2	75	77
3	58	83
4	65	70
5	78	87
6	78	81
7	61	64
8	83	83
9	84	86
10	76	76
11	71	71
12	62	70
13	97	93
14	77	88
15	71	79

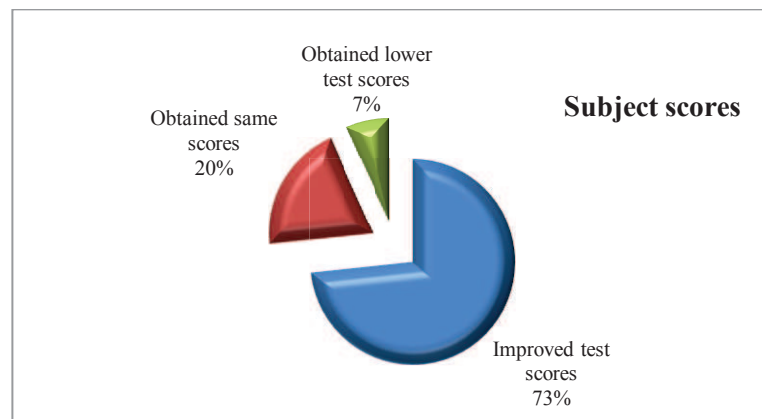


Figure 18. Results of Week Nine Test Scores

Another comparison between weeks one and nine test scores is presented in Figure 19. In this case the scores obtained in both weeks have been ranked in five groups which include different grade ranges. The first group represents the grades obtained that were below 60. There was one in week one and none in week nine. In the second group, three scores were between 60 and 70 in week one and there was only one in week nine. The information that these two groups provide is that low scores were more commonly obtained the first time the test was applied than the second time (4 low, failing grades compared to only 1). Then those scores in the range of 70 to 80 are very close for both applications of the test. However, in week one only a few subjects (4 of them) scored grades higher than 80, whereas in week nine most subjects (8 of them or double the ones in week one) scored grades in the ranges of 80 to 90 and 90 to 100. Actually, the only subject who scored grades higher than 90 did so in both weeks, even though his grade in week nine was slightly lower than the first one he had obtained. These numbers indicate a tendency to obtaining higher, improved grades in the second application of the test for most subjects.

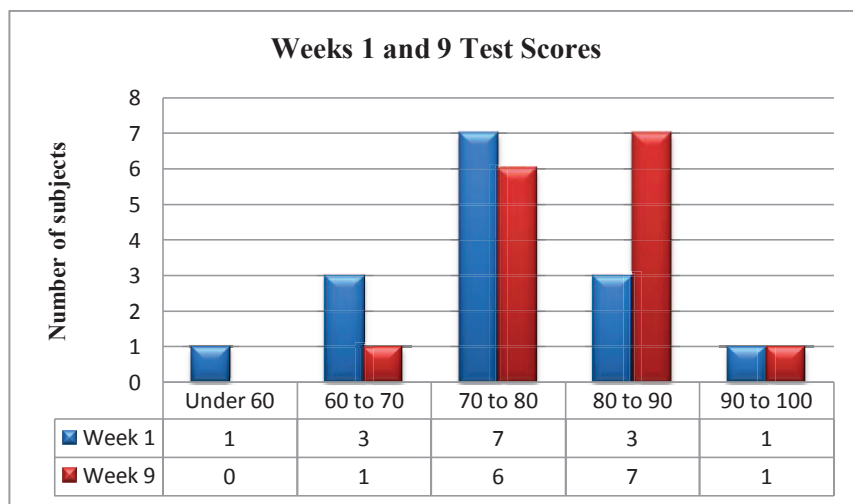


Figure 19. Comparison of grades obtained in weeks one and nine test scores

## Results

After analyzing the data obtained through the three collection procedures used for this research, some important aspects regarding the use of reading as a strategy for better language acquisition at the college level were identified.

First, the answers subjects gave for the questionnaire applied provided some useful insight as to how they perceive reading courses. In general, the most common answers given by subjects to those questions that asked for degree of agreement showed that they did either agree or strongly agree with the statements with which they were presented. In the case of the first section in the questionnaire, the purpose of the statements was to find out subjects' views and opinions related to the usefulness and the effectiveness a reading course may have in helping them acquire vocabulary, grammar structures, and strategies that would allow them to become better readers and hence more proficient language learners. Since most of the answers were in agreement, this first finding suggests that subjects have experienced the development of strategies that allow them to understand texts in the target language better. As Krashen (2000) has claimed in his Input or Comprehension Hypothesis, "the development of literacy and the development of language in general occur in only one way: When we understand messages" (p.2). Hence, the first finding suggests that subjects consider or feel that the course has been useful and has achieved its objectives.

Second, the section in the questionnaire that refers to subjects' involvement with reading overviews how much they practice reading skills. The purpose behind the questions in this section is to assess if they have a like for reading and if they have developed the habit of reading regularly, especially in the target language. Subjects' answers highlight the fact that most of them

see reading as an enjoyable activity, either in their native language or in English, as most answered that they read in these languages frequently or sometimes. Moreover, they seem to believe that reading is as necessary as the other language skills for language acquisition, for most subjects indicated that they think reading is as important when studying a language as listening, speaking, and writing. Resulting from this view, it is possible to state that they have achieved the development of reading strategies, and that they would like to continue working on them in order to become better readers.

The first of the open questions included in the questionnaire, on the other hand, specifies the advantages or assets that the subjects see in taking a reading course that aims at aiding their language learning experience. In brief, they believe the course does help them not only to acquire vocabulary but to advance in the learning of the language in general. The answers to the second question, on the other hand, reveal that subjects would like to be exposed to more varied, challenging, and extensive kinds of reading. Krashen (2000) expresses that reading “is the source of much of our vocabulary knowledge, writing style, advanced grammatical competence, and spelling” (p.2), and subjects’ responses at this respect seem to be guided by the same conclusions.

In regards to the information obtained by means of the class observation performed, the most salient points deal with the class methodology and the way vocabulary and reading texts are presented to students in the reading course. To begin with, even though the focus of the course is on reading, this is not the only skill used in class activities. Actually, activities are designed following an integrated approach in which all the other language skills have some participation. There is discussion and interaction based on the class topic. Furthermore, that topic provides a context that is meant to make readings and reading activities more meaningful language input. In terms of the resources used in this kind of course, it was found that they are not limited to printed

texts, but that visual and aural materials are used in order to help the integration of language skills. Finally, this observation also showed that the kind of methodology used in the class created a friendly and relaxed environment that promoted interaction and work.

The last of the data collection procedures used, the diagnostic test applied in weeks one and nine helped to assess subjects' progress after instruction on reading strategies. In general terms and taking into consideration the mean scores obtained during both test takings, there was some improvement in test scores after nine weeks of instruction and practice of reading strategies. The most important finding regarding test scores, however, is not in those mean scores, but in the fact that in week nine there was a tendency to obtain higher scores, as many subjects' scores were in grade ranges higher than the ones they had been before, during the application of the test in week one. This information suggests that there was general improvement of test scores after working on reading skills.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Conclusions**

From the findings presented above, it is possible to arrive at some conclusions that support the idea that reading can and should be used as an effective language acquisition strategy in the instruction of second and foreign languages for adult learners. These conclusions are presented next.

In the first place, reading and written materials expose language learners to input that, when comprehensible, may help to increase their possibilities for language acquisition. Krashen (2006), one of the most fervent advocates for reading as a source of comprehensible (and hence learnable) input, reports that results from two separate one-year studies on language classes that



included or supported the use of reading for language learning showed significant superiority of the subjects in those classes as compared to other subjects who did not have this kind of exposure. He also mentions the case of adult language learners who were able to improve their knowledge of the language just by reading some series of books (called the Sweet Valley Kids series) and without receiving formal instruction at the same time (Krashen, 2000). These examples support the claim that reading may serve as a way to provide language learners with the sort of input they need to advance their learning. Related to this idea, the subjects of the present study have expressed their belief that their acquisition of vocabulary and their language acquisition in general has been benefited and improved by taking a reading course that focuses on those aspects and on the development of reading strategies meant to aid their language learning process. As a result, a reading course of this nature seems to achieve the goals it was created for.

Secondly, another conclusion obtained from the analysis of the questionnaire and the observation performed is that college language learners can benefit from more challenging and more extensive reading tasks. Second language acquisition research has widely pointed out that language input that is adequate in amount and at the optimal structural level (that is, comprehensible enough) is necessary for second language learning to successfully occur (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Since reading is being taught in this program with the fundamental purpose of acquiring vocabulary and encouraging the development of strategies that will enable learners to acquire more language by themselves at the present as well as in the future, it is paramount that they be exposed to larger doses of input.

Moreover, the majority of subjects in this study indicated that they believed the course had provided them with tools to obtain gains from reading activities; nevertheless, they also pointed out as a possible improvement that they would like to read more, and some of them

would even like to have more advanced reading courses in the future. The curriculum of the English as a Foreign Language Major at Universidad Tecnica Nacional, however, does only include two reading courses in the first two quarters of the initial two-year degree. Actually, these courses were structured and designed with the idea of helping learners acquire more vocabulary and have them receive more exposure to the language after an evaluation of the old curricula showed that students lacked enough vocabulary and the kind of structures they needed to have a better performance in composition courses. This means that unless they continue with the Bachelor's degree, in which literature courses are taught, reading abilities will have to be encouraged in different ways and as part of other courses, hopefully in an integrated way.

In the specific case of adult language learners at the college level, Day & Bamford (1998) explain that reading extensively helps the development of sight vocabulary or sight words, (commonly-used words and that recognizable by a learner through his oral vocabulary), of their general vocabulary, and of world knowledge. They go further to state that this kind of reading is also a way to promote students' confidence and positive attitudes when reading in the second language, all of which may impact their academic success. Therefore, the inclusion of more extensive kinds of reading for courses like the ones in this language major would bring about important positive implications to improve adult learners' language skills.

In relation to the last point made above, the results of this study show the value of integrating skills in second and foreign language settings. In the observation carried out, it was possible to see that during class activities subjects were prompted to use an array of language skills not only to make sense of written material but also to express their ideas about the class topics and to interact with the course instructor and their peers. Anderson (1994) states that in

academic settings reading is the most important instrument to achieve success in learning another language. He suggests that “with strengthened reading skills, ESL readers will make greater progress and development in all academic areas” (p.177). If this statement is true, a similar claim may be made about the power of reading to aid in advancing in language acquisition and reaching a higher level of competency in the target language. If reading is developed in unison with the other macro skills (listening, speaking, and writing), learners may obtain more from instruction and exposure to written input, since they will be using what they learn for more meaningful activities and for communicative purposes.

### **Recommendations**

Some implications for the use of reading to support and enhance the acquisition of English vocabulary and structures stem from of the results obtained in the present study and from the conclusions discussed before:

- The first point that has to be considered is that reading courses aid in the development of language competence; as a result, they need to be part of any extended language learning curriculum such as the English Language Major at Universidad Tecnica Nacional.
- Second, the reading selections at this level need to be more challenging and more extensive while providing adequate comprehensible input. Since class time may not be enough for work on longer reading selections, some ways to do this could be through homework activities and graded assignments that can be checked and reported during class time. Also, reading can be incorporated in different courses as a way to expose learners to comprehensible input related to the course content.
- Reading will help the development of other language skills inasmuch as it is practiced with

an integrated skills approach such as the one used in the Reading 1 course this project is based on.

- Reading activities should be contextualized in order to be more meaningful, giving learners material about different topics and which they can use in real life situations. Adult learners, in special, will benefit from learning vocabulary and language that they can use immediately and for their daily needs.

Even though the results of this project point to a positive scenario for the use of reading as a strategy to improve second language acquisition, it is necessary to mention that given the small sample of subjects and the limitations in terms of time and procedures used, the findings and conclusions obtained may not be generalized to other groups or settings. Consequently, more studies and even curriculum evaluations of reading courses should be carried out in the future in order to find more support for the claims made here.

## References

- Anderson, N.J. (1994). Developing active readers: A pedagogical framework for the second language Reading class. *System*, 22 (2), 177-194. Retrieved from [http://www.imamu.edu.sa/Scientific\\_selections/files/DocLib/Developing%20Active%20readers.pdf](http://www.imamu.edu.sa/Scientific_selections/files/DocLib/Developing%20Active%20readers.pdf)
- Bailey, K.M. (2006). *Issues in teaching speaking skills to adult ESOL learners*. 113-164. Retrieved from [www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/.../comings\\_ch5.pdf](http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/.../comings_ch5.pdf)
- Carrera de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera. (2008). *Reading I course program*. Universidad Tecnica Nacional. Costa Rica
- Center for Adult English Language Acquisition CAELA. (2007). *What are factors to consider when planning for, setting up, and evaluating a workplace program for immigrant workers?* Retrieved from [www.cal.org/caela/esl\\_resources/faqs.html](http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/faqs.html)
- Center for Applied Linguistics. (1998). *Research agenda for adult ESL*. Retrieved from [http://www.cal.org/caela/esl\\_resources/agenda.pdf](http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/agenda.pdf)
- Chomsky, N. (1959). Review of verbal behavior. *Language*, 35, 26-58.
- Constantino, M. (1999). *Reading and second language learners*. Retrieved from <http://www.evergreen.edu/k12outreach/.../2ndLangLrners.pdf>
- Day, R., & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive reading in the second language classroom*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hafiz, F.M., & Tudor, I. (1990). Graded readers as an input medium in L2 learning. *System*, 18 (1), 31- 42.
- Hall, Smith, & Wicaksono. (2011). *A brief introduction to some of the main themes in Second Language Acquisition research*. Retrieved from [cw.routledge.com/textbooks/hall/](http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/hall/)

downloads/sla.pdf

Knowles, M. S. (1990). *The adult learner: A neglected species* (4th edition). Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing.

Krashen, S. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. (First Internet edition, 2002). Pergamon Press Inc. Retrieved from [http://www.sdkrashen.com/SL\\_Acquisition\\_and\\_Learning/SL\\_Acquisition\\_and\\_Learning.pdf](http://www.sdkrashen.com/SL_Acquisition_and_Learning/SL_Acquisition_and_Learning.pdf)

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. (First Internet edition, 2009). Retrieved from [http://www.sdkrashen.com/Principles\\_and\\_Practice/Principles\\_and\\_Practice.pdf](http://www.sdkrashen.com/Principles_and_Practice/Principles_and_Practice.pdf)

Krashen, S. (2000). Has Whole Language Failed? *ESL Magazine*. 1, 8-10. Retrieved from [www.usc.edu/dept/.../text/Krashen\\_WholeLang.PDF](http://www.usc.edu/dept/.../text/Krashen_WholeLang.PDF)

Krashen, S. (2006). Stephen Krashen: Pleasure reading. *Young Learners Sig*. Retrieved from [http://www.educ.ualberta.ca/staff/olenka.bilash/best%20of%20bilash/Stephen\\_Krashen%20pleasure%20reading.pdf](http://www.educ.ualberta.ca/staff/olenka.bilash/best%20of%20bilash/Stephen_Krashen%20pleasure%20reading.pdf)

Lynch, B. K. (2003). *Language program evaluation: Theory and practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mitchell, R., & Myles, F. (2004). *Second language learning theories* (2nd ed.). London: Arnold.

Ray, B. (2005). Teaching grammar with TPRS. *The International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 1 (2), 30-37.

Richards, J. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. New York: Cambridge.

Rodrigo, V. (2006). The amount of input matters: Incidental acquisition of grammar through listening and reading. *The International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 2 (1),

10-13.

Schmidt, K. (1998). *Extensive reading in English communication courses*. Retrieved from

<http://extensivereading.net/docs/schmidt.html>

Vacca, J.A., Vacca R.T., & Gove, M.K. (1995). 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. *Reading and learning to read*. New York:

Harper Collins College Publishers

Wang, Y., & Tinker Sachs, G. (2011). Comprehensible input through extensive reading:

Problems in English language teaching in China. *Asian EFL Journal*. 53, 61-71.

**Appendix A**

Questionnaire for the Students Enrolled in the Course Reading I

**Questionnaire on Perspectives about Reading as a Strategy for Foreign Language Acquisition**

**Course:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Subject #:** \_\_\_\_\_

This questionnaire has the purpose of obtaining relevant information about the inclusion of a reading component that helps to develop reading comprehension strategies in the English as a Foreign Language Major at Universidad Tecnica Nacional. The information gathered will serve to understand how reading and its link to language acquisition are perceived by students enrolled in a reading course. The information collected will be strictly confidential. Thank you for filling out this questionnaire.

**Instructions:** Please tick the appropriate box for each question and provide comments at the end of the questionnaire.

<b>1. General aspects of the course</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
1. Taking a course that focuses on acquiring reading strategies for better comprehension has helped you acquire vocabulary on varied topics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The work on readings has helped you notice how the structures of English sentences are used.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. You feel that the strategies for understanding new words and the ideas in texts have been useful in the process of learning the language.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Overall, you feel that this kind of course is useful and effective in advancing your learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>2. Involvement with Reading</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Almost never</b>
1. How often do you read for pleasure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. How often do you read material in your native language?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. How often do you read material in English?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. When you read in English, do you do it just because it is part of a class assignment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>3. Attitude towards Reading</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
1. You really enjoy reading.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Reading is one of your favorite activities to do outside the classroom to help you acquire new vocabulary and structures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. You feel that reading is as important in acquiring a language as listening, writing, and speaking.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. You would like to have more advanced reading courses in the major you study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



5. You consider that the practice on reading strategies in the courses you have been enrolled in has been enough.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. You feel you have acquired enough skills and strategies that help you be a better reader.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. In your view, what are the advantages of a reading course when learning a new language?

---



---



---

16. In your view, what aspects of this kind of course might need to be improved or reconsidered?

---



---



---

9. Please add any additional comments, clarifications, or suggestions you may have here:

---



---



---

Thank you very much!

**Appendix B**

Class Observation Form

<b>Class Observation Form</b>	
Course: _____	Period: _____
Schedule: _____	Professor: _____
Observer: _____	
Date of Observation: _____ Time: _____	
Aspects to observe	Notes and comments
1. Warm-up, elicitation or introductory activities used	
2. Kinds of techniques/activities used through the class	
3. Skills employed in an integrated way by students	
4. Students' participation in the activities	
5. Focus on vocabulary acquisition	
6. Focus on reading strategies acquisition	
7. Focus on reading comprehension	
8. Materials used for class activities	
9. Mix of whole group, pair, small group, and individual work	
10. Students' interaction with peers and teacher	
11. Students' attitude towards reading tasks	
12. Class environment	

**Appendix C**

Diagnostic Test Applied on Weeks One and Nine

**UNIVERSIDAD TECNICA NACIONAL**  
**COURSE: Reading I**  
**Professors: Calvo, Nagygellér, González, Herrera, Salazar**  
**II-2013**

Points: 70

Score:

**Diagnostic Evaluation**

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part I.** Read the following sentences. Use the words in the box to complete the sentences logically. (12 pts.)

kind      punish      break      annoyed      traditions      budget      date  
 complaint      wonder      couple      look forward to      abroad      fee

1. Marie is really in love. She is really \_\_\_\_\_ getting married this year.
2. I have no \_\_\_\_\_ about my job. Everything is fine.
3. Food and clothes are so expensive nowadays! I guess we'll have to prepare a \_\_\_\_\_ and buy only the necessary things.
4. I had a great teacher in first grade. She was always \_\_\_\_\_ and smiley, and she never \_\_\_\_\_ pupils if they didn't do their work well.
5. My sister met a great boy last week. They went on a \_\_\_\_\_ last night. They make such a beautiful \_\_\_\_\_! I \_\_\_\_\_ if this is going to be a long-term relationship...
6. We have just finished the lesson. Now we will take a \_\_\_\_\_ for twenty minutes.
7. Now that I have the chance, I will try to go \_\_\_\_\_ to study a Master's degree. I want to learn from other people and cultures.
8. In all private schools, parents need to pay a moderate \_\_\_\_\_ for the students' materials.
9. People from different cultures usually have different ideas, customs and \_\_\_\_\_.

**Part II.** Write "F" for fact beside the statements below that are facts. Write "O" for opinion beside the statements below that are opinions. (8 pts.)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Washington, D.C. is the Capital City of the United States.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Whales are superior to dolphins.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Whales are mammals.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Stephen King is talented.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Abraham Lincoln was the best president the United States has ever had.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Britney Spears sings better than Madonna.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Will Smith starred in the movie Men in Black.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Beethoven is the greatest composer that ever lived.

**Part III.** Read the following texts and complete the exercises that follow. (40 pts.)

**Choosing to Study Overseas**

Every year, thousands of students choose to study in another country for a semester, the summer, or a year. Studying overseas can be an exciting experience for many people.

**Why Do It?**

Living in another country can help you learn a language, and about another culture. You will see the world in a new way, and learn more about yourself. Overseas study may also look good on your future resume. Many companies today want employees who speak a second language, or have experienced living or working in another country.

**Making the Right Choice**

Once you decide to study overseas, you have to make some choices. To choose the right country or school, ask yourself: Where do I want to go and why? How much do I want to pay? How long do I want to study overseas? Do I want to live with a host family, with roommates, or alone?

**Getting Ready to Go**

Get your passport and visa early! Before you go, learn some of the language, and read about some common customs in your host country. Learn about the money. Bring some of it, and a credit card, with you.

**Once You Are There**

After the first few weeks overseas, many students will feel a little homesick. They may miss their family, friends, and familiar ways of doing things. Remember that it takes time to get used to a new place, school, and culture. When you feel sad or homesick, try to talk to others, or write about your feelings in a notebook.

**A.** The statements below are about the reading. Choose the correct answer to complete each one. (4 pts.)

1. One reason for studying in another country is to
  - a. learn a language.
  - b. develop your resume.
  - c. both a and b
2. According to the reading, one question to think about when choosing the right school or country is
  - a. Do I need better language skills before I go?
  - b. What is the local food like?
  - c. Do I want to live with roommates?
3. The reading suggests that you should take \_\_\_\_\_ with you.
  - a. a credit card
  - b. common customs
  - c. books
4. Many students will feel \_\_\_\_\_ after a few weeks.
  - a. afraid
  - b. happy
  - c. homesick

**B.** The words in italics are vocabulary items from the reading. For each group, circle the word that does not belong. (5 pts.)

- |                      |                  |                |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1. <i>experience</i> | happening        | future         |
| 2. workers           | <i>employees</i> | bosses         |
| 3. clothes           | traditions       | <i>customs</i> |
| 4. <i>miss</i>       | dislike          | hate           |
| 5. usual             | <i>familiar</i>  | strange        |

**C.** Complete the sentences below using the words in italics from A. Be sure to use the correct form of the word. (5 pts.)

- All the \_\_\_\_\_ voted to go to a French restaurant for their company dinner.
- This house feels very \_\_\_\_\_. I feel like I've been here before.
- Peter cried for two hours on his first day at school. He \_\_\_\_\_ his mother so much.
- Different countries have different \_\_\_\_\_, especially about eating.
- Traveling through Africa for six months was the greatest \_\_\_\_\_ of my life.

**Lifelong Learning**

Five years ago, Rachel Lopez graduated from college with a degree in history. Today, she works for a large software company. Now twenty-seven, Rachel takes classes twice a week after work. She is learning to use the computer program PowerPoint. "I enjoyed college, but my job doesn't use information I learned when I was doing my degree," Rachel says. "This course is helping me to do my job better. In the future, I might go back to school and get an MBA."

In the past, when students graduated from college and got a job, they usually stopped studying. Today, lifelong learning is becoming more common. In the United States, people can return to school in their late twenties, thirties, or older to get a higher degree, such as a master's or Ph.D. Like Rachel, many more are taking training courses to improve their workplace skills. With many classes now available through the Internet, it is easier for people to get degrees or training by distance learning.

Mayumi Hosoya, who is forty, teaches Japanese at a community college in New York. "Next semester, I'll be teaching some of my classes using the Internet. This is new for me," says Mayumi. "At the moment, I am taking a course to learn how to teach this way." At the same time, Mayumi's seventy-year-old mother and father are taking a distance learning course in Art History. "We love the subject," says Mayumi's father, "and now we can study with people from all over the world. I never thought learning could be this much fun!"

**A.** Decide if the following statements about the reading are true (T) or false (F). If you check (✓) false, correct the statement to make it true. (4 pts.)

- |   | T                        | F                        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Rachel graduated when she was twenty-one years old.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Rachel believes that her university studies prepared her well for her current job. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Lifelong learning is becoming more common today.                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Mayumi Hosoya is taking a course to learn how to use the Internet.                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**A.** Look at the list of words from the reading. Match each word with a definition on the right. (5 pts.)

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. graduated _____ | a. abilities, things you can do   |
| 2. software _____  | b. to go back to a place or thing   |
| 3. return _____    | c. get better   |
| 4. improve _____   | d. to have received an academic degree or diploma                         |
| 5. skills _____    | e. programs and instructions that are put into a computer to make it work |

**B.** Complete the sentences below using the vocabulary from part B. Be sure to use the correct form of the word. (5 pts.)

- Li Mei learned many new \_\_\_\_\_ while she was working in Antarctica on a research ship.
- Juan really needs to \_\_\_\_\_ his English so he can get a better job.
- Sarah had to leave school to work and earn money, but now she would like to \_\_\_\_\_ and do a Ph.D.
- This computer has some great \_\_\_\_\_ on it. You can draw pictures and play great games.
- My sister will \_\_\_\_\_ from high school tomorrow, so we are going to the ceremony.

**Changing Families**

**A** Families in almost every country are changing. In North Africa, in the past, many people lived in extended families. Fifty to a hundred people lived together in a group of houses. These were all family members—grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, children, and grandchildren. But now this traditional family is breaking into smaller groups.

**B** The traditional Japanese family was also an extended family—a son, his parents, his wife, his children, and his unmarried brothers and sisters. They lived together in his parents’ home. But this tradition is changing. Now most adults do not live with their parents. They have new problems. Men and women spend a lot of time at work. They don’t spend a lot of time together as a family. This can be very difficult.

**C** In Europe, in traditional families, the woman stayed home with the children and the man had a job. But families all over Europe are changing. The number of divorces is going up. The number of single-parent families is going up too. In Sweden, more than 40 percent (40%) of all children have parents that are not married. More and more countries are recognizing gay partnerships and marriages. For example, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Hungary, and the U.S. state of Vermont all recognize these as legal unions. In much of Europe, many people live alone. In France, more than 26 percent of women between age thirty and thirty-four live alone, and more than 27 percent of men of the same age live alone.

**D** There are also big changes in Quebec, Canada. In 1965, a traditional family was important. Almost 90 percent of men and 93.5 percent of women were married. But in 1985, only 49 percent of men and 51.7 percent of women were married! Now more than one-third (1/3) of all babies have parents that are not married. More than one-third of all marriages end in divorce.

**E** There are many new types of families. The world is changing, and families are changing too.

**A.** Main ideas. Circle the letter of the correct completion for each sentence. (2 pts.)

1. The main idea is that \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - a. in North Africa, families are big, but in Europe, they're small
  - b. families around the world are changing
  - c. 1/3 of all marriages end in divorce
  
2. The writer thinks that new families are \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - a. good because they are small
  - b. different from families in the past
  - c. bad because people don't live together

**B.** Read the text again. Match the following main ideas with the correct paragraphs. Write the letter (A, B, C, D, or E) of each paragraph in the appropriate blank. (5 pts.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_ The number of single-parent families and divorces is higher nowadays.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Everything is changing and the family is too.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ In the present, adults have little time to share with others.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ The concept of traditional family is changing.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ The traditional family is not the same: there are less married people and more marriages end in divorce.

**C.** Cohesion. Find and circle the meaning (antecedent) of each underlined pronoun. (5 pts.)

1. Fifty to a hundred people live together in a group of houses. These are all family members.
2. Men and women spend a lot of time at work. They don't spend a lot of time together as a family.
3. Now most adults do not live with their parents. They have new problems.
4. They don't spend a lot of time together as a family. This can be very difficult.
5. More and more countries are recognizing gay partnerships and marriages. For example, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Hungary, and the U.S. state of Vermont all recognize these as legal unions.

**Part IV.** Read the following paragraph. You will find some **boldfaced** and numbered words. In the blank spaces, write the part of the speech they stand for according to the context. (10 pts.)

Once upon a (1) time there **was** (2) a dear little girl who was loved by **everyone** (3) who looked at her, but most of all by her **grandmother** (4), and there was nothing that **she** (5) would not have given to the **child** (6). Once she gave **her** (7) a little riding hood of red velvet, which **suit**ed (8) her so well that she would **never** (9) wear anything else; so she was **always** (10) called 'Little Red Riding Hood.'

- |          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____  |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____  |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____  |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____  |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |