



Strategies to strengthen reading comprehension in basic education: review of current evidence

Estrategias para fortalecer la comprensión lectora en educación básica: revisión de evidencias actuales

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Abstract

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Reading comprehension is an essential skill in basic education, as it is the basis for cross-curricular learning and the development of critical thinking. This article presents a systematic review of 15 scientific studies published between 2016 and 2024, with the aim of identifying and analyzing effective pedagogical strategies to strengthen this skill in primary school students. The bibliographic search was conducted in academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and SciELO, using key terms such as "reading comprehension," "pedagogical strategies," "basic education," and "critical reading,"

and applying rigorous inclusion criteria. Thematic analysis allowed the findings to be categorized into three axes: innovative teaching approaches (such as the use of ICTs, gamification, and project-based learning), interventions based on metacognitive processes and self-regulation, and practices contextualized according to sociocultural variables. It was found that the most successful strategies are those that combine explicit instruction, active teacher mediation, and meaningful activities that promote a love of reading. Challenges were also identified related to teacher training, the technological gap, and the lack of sustained policies that prioritize reading as a cross-curricular focus. It is concluded that reading comprehension must be addressed from a comprehensive and contextualized perspective, combining pedagogical resources, teacher training, and institutional commitment to improve academic performance and educational inclusion.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, basic education, pedagogical strategies, critical reading, systematic review.

Resumen

La comprensión lectora constituye una competencia esencial en la educación básica, al ser base para el aprendizaje transversal y el desarrollo del pensamiento crítico. Este artículo presenta una revisión sistemática de 15 estudios científicos publicados entre 2016 y 2024, con el objetivo de identificar y analizar estrategias pedagógicas eficaces para fortalecer dicha habilidad en estudiantes de nivel primario. La búsqueda bibliográfica se realizó en bases de datos académicas como Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC y SciELO, utilizando términos clave como “comprensión lectora”, “estrategias pedagógicas”, “educación básica” y “lectura crítica”, y aplicando criterios de inclusión rigurosos. El análisis temático permitió categorizar los hallazgos en tres ejes: enfoques didácticos innovadores (como el uso de TIC, gamificación y aprendizaje basado en proyectos), intervenciones basadas en procesos metacognitivos y autorregulación, y prácticas contextualizadas según variables socioculturales. Se evidenció que las estrategias más exitosas son

aquellas que combinan instrucción explícita, mediación docente activa y actividades significativas que promuevan el gusto por la lectura. Asimismo, se identificaron desafíos relacionados con la formación docente, la brecha tecnológica y la falta de políticas sostenidas que prioricen la lectura como eje transversal del currículo. Se concluye que la comprensión lectora debe abordarse desde un enfoque integral y contextualizado, que articule recursos pedagógicos, formación docente y compromiso institucional para mejorar el desempeño académico y la inclusión educativa.

Palabras clave: Comprensión lectora, educación básica, estrategias pedagógicas, lectura crítica, revisión sistemática.

Introduction

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in the academic, cognitive, and social development of students in basic education. It is not just a matter of decoding words, but of interpreting, reflecting, and constructing meaning from diverse texts, which is essential for learning in all areas of the curriculum. In a global context characterized by immediate access to large volumes of information and the need for critical thinking and autonomy, training competent readers becomes an unavoidable pedagogical priority.

Several studies have shown that low levels of reading comprehension negatively affect school performance, create difficulties in acquiring new knowledge, and limit students' opportunities for personal and social development (Hernández and Rivera, 2020; OECD, 2019). In Latin America, regional and international assessment reports, such as ERCE or PISA, reveal that a significant percentage of students do not achieve satisfactory levels of textual comprehension, especially in socially vulnerable contexts. This situation raises the need to critically review the teaching strategies used in the classroom and to strengthen evidence-based pedagogical practices.

The purpose of this literature review is to identify and analyze effective strategies that have been shown to improve reading comprehension in elementary school students. To this end, recent and relevant studies were selected that cover interventions in different school contexts, active methodologies, the use of educational technologies,

and metacognitive approaches. Particular emphasis was placed on research that provides solid empirical data on the effects of the strategies applied and that can be replicated or adapted by teachers in real school settings.

Among the most relevant strategies identified in the literature are: explicit teaching of comprehension strategies (prediction, inference, summarization, question formulation); the use of graphic organizers; guided and shared reading; reciprocal teaching; practices based on reading fluency; and the incorporation of interactive digital tools. Most of these strategies promote the development of metacognitive skills, critical thinking, and an active attitude toward reading (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Palincsar & Brown, 1986; Gutiérrez & López, 2021).

It also analyzes the role of the teacher as a mediator of the reading process and the importance of creating rich, contextualized, and emotionally safe literacy environments. The article also addresses the challenges teachers face in effectively applying these strategies, especially in heterogeneous classrooms or those with limited resources.

In short, this review not only systematizes the most recent evidence on reading comprehension, but also seeks to offer practical and well-founded guidance that contributes to improving teaching and learning processes in basic education, with the aim of training critical, reflective, and autonomous readers.

Methodology

This research is part of a systematic literature review with a qualitative approach, aimed at analyzing educational strategies designed to strengthen reading comprehension in elementary school students. The main methodological objective was to identify, evaluate, and synthesize recent evidence on effective pedagogical interventions that contribute to the development of reading skills at this stage of schooling.

A descriptive-interpretative design was adopted, based on the content analysis of scientific research published between 2016 and 2025. The qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth examination of the didactic, technological, and psycholinguistic elements used in

teaching strategies, highlighting key patterns, benefits, challenges, and recommendations.

Selection criteria

- The inclusion criteria for the selection of sources were as follows:
- Scientific articles, academic theses, and reviews published in peer-reviewed journals.
- Publications in Spanish or English that explicitly address teaching strategies for reading comprehension at the elementary school level.
- Publication date between 2016 and August 2025.
- Empirical, systematic, or theoretical studies with critical analysis of results.
- Exclusion criteria included duplicate documents, opinions without empirical evidence, or publications aimed exclusively at other educational levels (early childhood or upper secondary education).

Sources and databases

The bibliographic search was conducted in recognized databases such as Dialnet, Scielo, Redalyc, ERIC, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Scopus. To ensure comprehensiveness, combinations of keywords were used, such as: "reading comprehension," "teaching strategies," "basic education," "critical reading," "meaningful learning," and "reading interventions."

Analysis procedure

- The methodological strategy consisted of:
- Identification and retrieval of information: Initially, 74 documents were located, of which 15 key sources were selected after applying the selection criteria.
- Data organization: An analysis matrix was used to classify each source according to: author, year, country, type of study, population, strategy applied, and main results.
- Content analysis: A thematic coding approach was used to identify patterns, emerging categories, and recurring approaches in reading strategies.

- Synthesis and interpretation: The findings were integrated in a comparative manner, highlighting the similarities, contrasts, methodological strengths, and limitations in the studies.

Results

Based on the analysis of the 15 selected sources, various strategies used to strengthen reading comprehension in elementary school students were identified. These strategies were grouped into four broad thematic categories: metacognitive approach, use of digital resources, project-based learning (PBL), and intentional teacher mediation.

Metacognitive strategies for reading development

Most studies (García, 2020; Mendoza, 2021; Rodríguez & Ramos, 2017) agree on the effectiveness of using metacognitive strategies, such as prediction, question formulation, inference, and monitoring comprehension during reading. These actions allow students to develop awareness of their own reading process and self-regulate their comprehension. The effectiveness of explicit teaching of these strategies is highlighted, especially in contexts of reading expository texts.

Integration of digital and multimodal resources

A second body of evidence (Zambrano, 2021; Ortega & Rodríguez, 2023; Jiménez & Vega, 2020) highlights the positive impact of digital technologies such as infographics, interactive applications, hyperlinks, and online reading platforms. These tools facilitate the comprehension of complex texts through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic stimuli, improving motivation and access to content adapted to different levels of reading ability.

Project-based learning and critical reading

PBL is emerging as a key methodology for promoting critical and functional reading in school contexts (Naranjo, 2022; Escamilla & Vargas, 2021; Cárdenas & Londoño, 2022). Evidence shows that linking reading to interdisciplinary projects significantly improves the ability to analyze, synthesize, and argue. In addition, projects allow

students to apply what they have read in real-life situations, consolidating meaningful comprehension.

Teacher mediation and innovative teaching practices

Several studies (Álvarez & Méndez, 2019; López & Salinas, 2018; Bravo & González, 2020) highlight the key role of the teacher as a strategic mediator. The use of progressive scaffolding, Socratic questions, and reading modeling are effective practices. Research indicates that dialogic interaction between teachers and students enhances comprehension, especially when it is adapted to the needs of the group and the types of text are diversified.

Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of the selected articles:

Table 1. Document analysis matrix

| Autor y año | Tipo estrategia | de Contexto educativo | Nivel escolar | Resultados clave | Limitaciones destacadas |
|---------------------------|---|---------------------------------|----------------------|---|--|
| García (2020) | Metacognitiva | Escuela pública urbana (Méjico) | 5° y 6° EGB | Mejora en inferencias y autorregulación lectora | Dificultad en estudiantes con bajo nivel inicial |
| Mendoza (2021) | Enseñanza explícita de estrategias | Zona rural (Perú) | 4° EGB | Incremento en comprensión literal e inferencial | Escasa continuidad e docente |
| Rodríguez & Ramos (2017) | Metacognitiva y preguntas guiadas | España | 3° ciclo de primaria | Fortalece análisis textual y evaluación crítica | Falta de capacitación docente |
| Zambrano (2021) | Recursos digitales interactivos | Ecuador (urbano) | 6°-7° EGB | Aumenta la motivación y comprensión multimodal | Limitaciones tecnológicas |
| Ortega & Rodríguez (2023) | Plataformas digitales de lectura | Chile | 5° EGB | Mejora del vocabulario y comprensión general | Requiere acompañamiento docente constante |
| Jiménez & Vega (2020) | Multimodalidad con videos e infografías | Colombia | 4°-6° EGB | Estimula lectura activa y mayor retención | Dificultades de conectividad |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|---|---|
| Naranjo (2022) | ABP con enfoque crítico | Costa Rica | 6°-7° EGB | Desarrolla pensamiento crítico y lectura funcional | Alto requerimiento de planificación |
| Escamilla & Vargas (2021) | Proyectos interdisciplinarios | México (urbano) | 5° EGB | Promueve habilidades integradas: lectura, escritura, expresión oral | Evaluación poco estandarizada |
| Cárdenas & Londoño (2022) | ABP con enfoque comunicativo | Colombia | 4°-6° EGB | Fortalece argumentación y uso del texto en contexto | Resistencia inicial del profesorado |
| Álvarez & Méndez (2019) | Mediación docente intencionada | Perú | 3° ciclo EGB | Mejora comprensión inferencial con acompañamiento constante | Requiere formación continua del docente |
| López & Salinas (2018) | Andamiaje y modelado lector | Argentina | 2° ciclo | Aumenta participación y comprensión autónoma | Limitado a docentes experimentados |
| Bravo & González (2020) | Tutoría entre pares y lectura guiada | Ecuador (zonas periurbanas) | 5°-7° EGB | Refuerza comprensión literal e inferencial | Dificultades en grupos grandes |
| Torres & Ríos (2019) | Uso de cuentos y dramatización | Bolivia | 4° EGB | Favorece comprensión emocional y simbólica | Resultados variables por grupo |
| Paredes et al. (2021) | Aplicación de rúbricas de comprensión | Venezuela | 6° EGB | Mayor autonomía lectora y autorreflexión | Requiere tiempo y ajustes |
| Olivares (2022) | Gamificación y comprensión | Ecuador (privado) | 5° EGB | Mejora atención y comprensión en tiempo limitado | Falta generalización a otros niveles |

The results show that reading comprehension in basic education can be significantly strengthened through specific teaching strategies, supported by intentional intervention on the part of the teacher. A constant in most of the studies analyzed is the effectiveness of metacognitive and explicit teaching strategies (García, 2020; Rodríguez & Ramos, 2017; Mendoza, 2021), which allow students to become aware of their reading process, activate prior knowledge, and monitor their comprehension. This coincides with previous research, such as that of Solé (2012), who highlights that teaching students to think about their own reading increases autonomous and critical learning.

Likewise, the use of digital and interactive resources has been shown to have a significant impact, especially in terms of motivation, access to diverse texts, and stimulation of multimodal learning (Zambrano, 2021; Ortega & Rodríguez, 2023). This trend responds to the growth of the techno-pedagogical approach in post-pandemic basic education, where platforms such as Book Creator, Storyjumper, and Kahoot have been valued for their ability to integrate gamification with reading (Olivares, 2022; Hinojo-Lucena et al., 2019). However, several studies warn that their use without teacher mediation can lead to distraction or a superficial approach to the text, as pointed out by Jiménez & Vega (2020) and López & Salinas (2018).

On another front, project-based learning (PBL), with communicative or interdisciplinary approaches, is emerging as one of the most powerful strategies for developing deep reading comprehension and textual analysis skills in real contexts (Naranjo, 2022; Cárdenas & Londoño, 2022). These approaches integrate reading with writing, oral communication, argumentation, and collaborative work, aligning with the proposals of Freire (1997) and Cassany (2006), who emphasize that reading is a social, critical, and situated act. However, its implementation requires teachers with solid didactic training, collaborative planning, and institutional support.

On the other hand, teacher support, gradual scaffolding, and formative assessment through rubrics and peer tutoring have also proven to be key for students to advance from literal comprehension to inferential and critical levels (Álvarez & Méndez, 2019; Bravo & González, 2020; Paredes et al., 2021). This reinforces Vygotsky's (1978) proposal on the zone of proximal development, where learning is enhanced through interaction with others.

Despite these positive findings, structural limitations persist that condition the sustainability of these strategies, such as teacher turnover, lack of connectivity or adequate materials in rural contexts, or limited training in critical reading (Escamilla & Vargas, 2021; Morales, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to promote public policies that strengthen initial and continuing teacher training, access to relevant technologies, and the creation of reading communities of practice.

Finally, it should be noted that the most successful strategies are not exclusively technological or innovative, but rather those that combine pedagogical intent, active student participation, sociocultural context, and reflective assessment. Future research should focus on exploring sustainable strategies that are adaptable to different socioeconomic levels and that include student voice in the assessment of their own comprehension.

Conclusions

The evidence reviewed highlights that the most effective reading comprehension strategies integrate explicit teaching of metacognitive skills, interdisciplinary work, and constant teacher mediation. These practices promote active, critical, and reflective reading from the early years of schooling, with a direct impact on overall academic performance.

The use of digital and interactive technologies such as gamification and multimedia resources has been shown to improve student motivation and participation, especially in contexts where reading is often perceived as a compulsory task. However, their effectiveness depends on pedagogical design, teacher training, and equitable access to resources.

Likewise, reading comprehension must be approached as a complex process influenced by sociocultural, emotional, and contextual factors. Strategies that consider these elements, such as collaborative reading, the social-emotional approach, or project-based learning, show more significant results in vulnerable populations.

There is an urgent need to train and support teachers in the development and application of diversified, sustainable strategies adapted to the realities of their students. This training must be

coordinated with inclusive educational policies that recognize reading comprehension as a cross-cutting theme in school learning.

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