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Working together to encourage equity through literacy communities: a challenge of the 21st century

20th European Conference on Literacy Minute Book

Complutense University of Madrid
3-6 July, 2017



Trabajando juntos para fomentar la equidad a través de comunidades de lectura y escritura: un reto para el Siglo XXI

6º Foro Iberoamericano sobre Literacidad y aprendizaje Libro de actas

Universidad Complutense de Madrid
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Libro de Actas. 20th European Conference on Literacy + 6º Foro Iberoamericano sobre Literacidad y Aprendizaje

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Spanish Association of Reading and Writing (AELE)/Asociación Española de Lectura y Escritura (AELE)

Research Group of the University Complutense of Madrid "Studies on Communication and Languages for Inclusion and Equity Educational (ECOLE)"/ Grupo de Investigación de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid "Estudios sobre Comunicación y Lenguajes para la Inclusión y la Equidad Educativa" (ECOLE)



Printed in Madrid, España. 2017
Impreso en Madrid, España. 2017

ISBN 978-84-697-7919-4



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MAIN TABLE OF CONTENTS/TABLA DE CONTENIDOS PRINCIPAL

20th European Conference on Literacy	1
6º Foro Iberoamericano sobre Literacidad y Aprendizaje	1493
Authors table of contents/tabla de contenidos de autores	2967

MINUTE BOOK

20th European Conference on Literacy

Complutense University of
Madrid 3-6 July, 2017



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20TH EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON LITERACY



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communities: A Challenge of the 21st century

Complutense University of Madrid

3-6 July, 2017

MINUTE BOOK

Organized by:

AELE, Spanish Reading and Writing
Association

Research Group of UCM (Complutense
University of Madrid) “Communication and
Languages Studies for Inclusion and Equity
in Education”– ECOLÉ

In cooperation with:

IDEC, International Development in Europe
Committee of the International Literacy
Association

FELA, Federation of European Literacy
Associations

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The use of reading strategies in foreign language instruction in higher education setting

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KEY WORDS: foreign language, instruction, reading, strategies, university education



ABSTRACT:

Reading is a complex psychological process of constructing the meaning in response to the text which requires interactive use of graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cues. While reading, different reading strategies are used. The study explores the students' use of reading strategies in a foreign language classroom in higher education setting and potential effects of the frequency of testing reading comprehension, language learning environments (blended and face-to-face), and gender on the use of reading strategies. The participants were the undergraduate biotechnology engineering students learning English as a foreign language at the University of Kragujevac, Serbia. The instruments involved an English language placement test and Inventory of reading strategies in a foreign language. The reading strategies the participants used most frequently included using prior knowledge to understand the written text, re-reading for better understanding and for details, and using text features such as tables and graphs. The students' higher scores on the language placement test indicated more frequent use of reading strategies. Moreover, the students exposed to blended language learning used reading strategies more frequently than their peers exposed to face-to-face instruction. The students' use of reading strategies in a foreign language may also be affected by the frequency of testing reading comprehension and by the participants' gender.

INTRODUCTION:

Reading is a complex process of understanding the meaning of a written text, employing various cognitive skills such as letter and word recognition, knowledge of syntax, and recognition of text types and text structure (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 483). For most foreign language students in higher education setting reading is a basic academic competency and crucial segment of foreign language learning which involves comprehension of written information, understanding of the purpose of written materials, paying attention to details, and analyzing and integrating information obtained from the text (Engineering Competency Model, 2015, p. 11). In order to understand the main ideas, purpose, and details in the text and to be able to critically analyze and integrate information, the foreign language readers need to consolidate the grammar knowledge, expand vocabulary, and develop reading strategies.

Strategies are deliberate cognitive steps taken by the learners to aid the acquisition, storage, and retrieval and use of new information (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1983). Language learning



strategies are also referred to as learning techniques, behaviors, or actions which can lead learners to proficiency in a foreign language (Oxford & Crookall, 1989). Two notable approaches to categorizing strategies involve: 1) categorization according to their psychological functions into memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies (Oxford, 1990), or cognitive, metacognitive, affective or social (Cohen, 2010); and 2) categorization according to the skill area to which they relate into listening and reading strategies (receptive skills), speaking and writing strategies (productive skills), vocabulary learning, and translation strategies (Cohen 2001; Cohen 2010).

Reading strategies include those ones for: a) building reading habits in the target language – e.g. making a real effort to find reading material that is at one's level or within the zone of proximal development; b) developing basic reading skills – e.g. planning how to read a text, monitoring to see how the reading is going, checking to see how much of it is understood, and making summaries in one's mind or in the margins of the text; and c) determining what to do when encountering unknown words and structures – e.g. guessing the approximate meaning by using clues from the surrounding context, using a dictionary so as to get a detailed information of individual words meaning (Cohen, 2001; Cohen, 2010, p. 168).

Foreign language instruction may refer to various learning environments such as traditional face-to-face (F2F) instruction in the classroom, computer-mediated instruction, and blended learning environment. Widespread access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) has facilitated the rapid growth of blended learning approaches in higher education context. Since the term blended learning is relatively new, there are still ongoing debates regarding its precise meaning (Oliver & Trigwell, 2005; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). In higher education setting blended learning is defined as a 'combination of technology and classroom instruction in flexible approach to learning that recognizes the benefits of delivering some training and assessment online but also uses other modes to make up a complete training program which can improve learning outcomes and/or save costs' (Banados, 2006, p. 534). In the context of language learning and teaching, blended learning is defined as the environment that combines face-to-face instruction and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (Neumeier, 2005, p. 164; Stracke, 2007, p. 57).

OBJECTIVES:

The study examines the students' use of reading strategies in a foreign



Haiyan Bai	551
Brenda Bairnals	2924
Sulanita Bandeira da Cruz Santos	2735
Valéria Barbosa de Resende	2156
Sirlene Barbosa de Souza	2170
Catalina Barragán Vicaria	420
Celeste Bates	134
Verona Batiuk	1525
Andamana Bautista García	86
Barbara Bayless	114
John D. Beach	436
Sara Ann Beach	114, 147
Margot Belet	455
Sara Elena Benavides De León	2373
María Ester Bentivoglio	1637
Snježana Berak	660
Susana Berdejo	2841
Ana Paula Berford Leão dos Santos Barros	2187
William P. Bintz	471, 479
Carmen Lucia Bizerra Bandeira	1653
Dragana Bjekić	487, 1465
Milevica Bojović	487, 501
Isabel Cristina Bolívar Carrillo	2384
Eliana Borges Correia de Albuquerque	1968