

A PLAYFUL APPROACH TO MOTIVATE COMPREHENSIVE READING IN ENGLISH

Un enfoque lúdico para motivar la lectura comprensiva en inglés

Uma abordagem lúdica para motivar a compreensão leitora em inglês

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Reading comprehension in English as a foreign language faces challenges related to low student motivation and participation. This study aimed to analyze how a playful approach contributes to motivating reading comprehension in English among elementary school students. **Materials and methods:** A qualitative approach with a non-experimental, descriptive design was used. Sixty sixth-grade students and three English teachers from a public school in Chone, Ecuador, participated. Data were collected through classroom observation forms and semi-structured interviews focused on the use of playful strategies, motivation, participation, and reading comprehension. **Results:** The findings reveal that activities such as games, songs, visual materials, stories, and interactive activities significantly increase students' motivation, participation, and confidence during reading tasks. The systematic integration of these strategies facilitates vocabulary acquisition, the identification of main ideas, and contextual understanding of texts. **Discussion:** The playful approach creates a positive emotional environment that reduces anxiety and fosters reading autonomy, aligning with Self-Determination Theory and previous studies that highlight its effectiveness for meaningful learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). **Conclusions:** We conclude that the playful approach is an effective pedagogical tool for strengthening motivation and reading comprehension in English at basic levels. Further research with larger samples and mixed-methods designs is recommended to generalize the findings.

Keywords: playful approach, reading comprehension, motivation, English as a foreign language, meaningful learning.

RESUMEN

Introducción: La comprensión lectora en inglés como lengua extranjera enfrenta desafíos relacionados con la baja motivación y participación estudiantil. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar cómo un enfoque lúdico contribuye a motivar la lectura comprensiva en inglés en estudiantes de educación básica. **Materiales y métodos:** Se empleó un enfoque cualitativo con diseño no experimental y alcance descriptivo. Participaron 60 estudiantes de sexto grado y tres docentes de inglés de una institución educativa pública en Chone, Ecuador. Los datos se recolectaron mediante fichas de observación de clases y entrevistas semiestructuradas, enfocadas en el uso de estrategias lúdicas, motivación, participación y comprensión lectora. **Resultados:** Los hallazgos revelan que actividades como juegos, canciones, materiales visuales, cuentos y dinámicas interactivas incrementan significativamente la motivación, participación y confianza de los estudiantes durante las tareas de lectura. La integración sistemática de estas estrategias facilita la adquisición de vocabulario, la identificación de ideas principales y la comprensión contextual de los textos. **Discusión:** El enfoque lúdico crea un ambiente emocional positivo que reduce la ansiedad y fomenta la autonomía lectora, alineándose con la Teoría de la Autodeterminación y estudios previos que destacan su efectividad para el aprendizaje significativo en EFL. **Conclusiones:** Se concluye que el enfoque lúdico constituye una herramienta pedagógica efectiva para fortalecer la motivación y la comprensión lectora en inglés en niveles básicos. Se recomienda ampliar la investigación con muestras más grandes y diseños mixtos para generalizar los hallazgos.

Palabras clave: enfoque lúdico, comprensión lectora, motivación, inglés como lengua extranjera, aprendizaje significativo.

RESUMO

Introdução: A compreensão leitora em inglês como língua estrangeira enfrenta desafios relacionados à baixa motivação e participação dos alunos. Este estudo teve como objetivo analisar como uma abordagem lúdica contribui para motivar a compreensão leitora em inglês entre alunos do ensino fundamental. Materiais e métodos: Foi utilizada uma abordagem qualitativa com delineamento descritivo não experimental. Participaram 60 alunos do sexto ano e três professores de inglês de uma escola pública em Chone, Equador. Os dados foram coletados por meio de formulários de observação em sala de aula e entrevistas semiestruturadas focadas no uso de estratégias lúdicas, motivação, participação e compreensão leitora. Resultados: Os resultados revelam que atividades como jogos, músicas, materiais visuais, histórias e atividades interativas aumentam significativamente a motivação, a participação e a confiança dos alunos durante as tarefas de leitura. A integração sistemática dessas estratégias facilita a aquisição de vocabulário, a identificação das ideias principais e a compreensão contextual dos textos. Discussão: A abordagem lúdica cria um ambiente emocional positivo que reduz a ansiedade e promove a autonomia leitora, alinhando-se à Teoria da Autodeterminação e a estudos anteriores que destacam sua eficácia para a aprendizagem significativa em inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL). Conclusões: Conclui-se que a abordagem lúdica é uma ferramenta pedagógica eficaz para fortalecer a motivação e a compreensão leitora em inglês nos níveis básicos. Recomenda-se a realização de pesquisas adicionais com amostras maiores e metodologias mistas para generalizar os resultados.

Palavras-chave: abordagem lúdica, compreensão leitora, motivação, inglês como língua estrangeira, aprendizagem significativa.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension plays a crucial role in the process of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), as it enables students to access information, develop vocabulary, and strengthen overall language competence. However, in many educational contexts, students experience difficulties in understanding texts in English, often accompanied by low motivation, limited participation, and anxiety toward reading activities. These challenges can negatively affect students' academic performance and their attitude toward learning the language, particularly at basic education levels where reading skills are still developing.

In recent years, educational research has emphasized the importance of implementing innovative and student-centered methodologies that promote motivation and meaningful learning. One such methodology is the playful approach, which integrates games, recreational activities, storytelling, songs, and interactive resources into the teaching-learning process. Playfulness allows learners to engage with language in a dynamic and emotionally safe environment, reducing fear of making mistakes and encouraging active participation. In the context of EFL instruction, playful strategies have been identified as effective tools for enhancing students' interest and involvement, particularly in reading activities.

From a pedagogical perspective, the playful approach goes beyond mere entertainment; it serves as a structured and intentional strategy that fosters cognitive, social, and emotional development. By linking playful activities to clear learning objectives, teachers can facilitate vocabulary acquisition, activate prior knowledge, and support students in understanding the main ideas and contextual meaning of texts. Moreover, play-based learning aligns with motivational theories, such as Self-Determination Theory, which highlights autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key factors influencing students' intrinsic motivation.

Despite the growing body of literature supporting the benefits of playful strategies in language learning, there is still a need for empirical studies that explore how these approaches specifically influence motivation and comprehensive reading in English at the basic education level. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the use of a playful approach in teaching comprehensive reading in English and to examine its impact on students' motivation, participation, and reading comprehension. By focusing on classroom practices and teachers' perceptions, this research seeks to contribute pedagogical insights that support the effective integration of playful strategies in EFL reading instruction.

Playful Approach

According to Piedra (2018), playfulness encompasses various fundamental dimensions of human life,

including games, fun, recreation, and imagination. These elements contribute to the construction of a sense of place and identity and promote meaningful learning.

Piedra also tells us that “from a curricular perspective, playfulness can be considered as the creative and joyful potential that exists in each of us and is expressed through different means such as music, sports, art, and others.”

This approach is especially valuable in English language teaching, as it allows for the creation of dynamic, motivating, and emotionally safe learning environments where students engage spontaneously.

When playful activities such as songs, theatrical games, dramatizations, sports competitions, or artistic activities are integrated, language ceases to be perceived as a rigid grammatical structure and becomes a functional means of expression and communication.

Thus, learning English not only becomes more meaningful, but also more accessible and natural, especially for children and young people. In this sense, play is not just a complement, but a central pedagogical resource that promotes both language acquisition and the student's overall development.

Andrade (2021) states: The playful approach includes enjoyable activities for children which, carried out in an entertaining environment, allow them to learn through play.

Elements such as songs, stories, and gestures become motivational tools that facilitate spontaneous learning and promote the development of their potential in the classroom

Recreational teaching resources

“The teaching... [of English] has undergone numerous changes over time in primary education, when students are in the early stages of their cognitive development, which should be taken advantage of for language learning” (Mangione, 2024). Therefore, it is necessary to implement teaching resources adapted to literature, such as stories, songs, and games, which in turn help to develop motivation for meaningful learning.

According to several recent studies, the playful approach not only facilitates an emotionally safe and motivating atmosphere, but also directly improves reading comprehension in English by allowing students to actively engage with the text through meaningful and contextual activities.

For example, Pazmiño Pavón et al. (2020) observed that playful activities such as vocabulary games, interactive stories, and group dynamics are associated with an increase in motivation and performance in English reading comprehension tasks.

The role of the teacher in applying the playful approach

The role of the teacher is a determining factor in the effective application of the playful approach to teaching English, since game-based learning requires intentional and structured pedagogical mediation. Jannah and Asmara (2023) point out that, within playful learning, teachers take on multiple roles, including that of learning facilitator, designer of educational activities, observer of student progress, and guide of the educational process.

These roles allow playful activities to be carried out in an organized manner and in line with learning objectives, preventing play from being perceived solely as a recreational activity. The authors also highlight that teacher planning and constant guidance favor the creation of emotionally safe learning environments, which increase student motivation and active participation. In this sense, the role of the teacher is essential for integrating the playful approach as a meaningful pedagogical strategy that contributes to the development of language skills, especially in processes such as reading comprehension in English.

Playfulness and meaningful learning in EFL

Playfulness plays an important role in promoting meaningful learning in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching context, as it encourages active student participation and knowledge construction based on contextualized experiences.

The playful approach allows students to interact with the language in a dynamic way, facilitating the connection between linguistic content and their prior knowledge, which strengthens comprehension and retention of learning.

In this sense, Cevallos Triguero and Palma Villavicencio (2022) affirm that the use of playful strategies in

English teaching contributes to students developing more meaningful learning by actively engaging in the educational process.

Likewise, game-based learning promotes motivating educational experiences in which enjoyment is integrated with clear pedagogical objectives, favoring a deeper understanding of linguistic content. From this perspective, game-based pedagogy emphasizes that playful activities allow students to find meaning in learning, increasing their motivation and commitment (Heidari-Shahreza, 2024).

In the context of reading in English, playfulness facilitates the comprehension of the meaning of texts and the development of reading skills, establishing itself as an effective strategy for promoting meaningful learning in EFL.

Types of playful strategies applied to reading in English

Playful strategies applied to reading in English represent an effective pedagogical alternative for promoting motivation and reading comprehension in contexts of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL).

According to Chica-Salvatierra & García-Farfán (2022), the use of structured language games in the classroom allows students to actively interact with the language, facilitating vocabulary acquisition and comprehension of the meaning of texts. The authors state that these playful strategies contribute to making the reading process more dynamic and participatory, which increases student interest and improves their willingness to read in English.

According to Uquillas Jaramillo et al. (2023), playful strategies linked to reading, such as interactive storytelling, dramatic reading, and prediction activities before and during reading promote the development of reading skills by allowing students to anticipate information, identify main ideas, and understand the context of the text.

The authors point out that these activities promote active and collaborative participation, facilitating the construction of meaning in the text in a gradual and meaningful way.

In this sense, playful strategies applied to reading in English not only stimulate motivation but also strengthen reading comprehension by integrating play with clearly defined pedagogical objectives.

Benefits of a playful approach to reading comprehension

According to Ruiz Villacrés and Paredes Rodríguez (2023), the use of game-based learning in the process of teaching reading in English contributes to a significant development of reading comprehension among students.

The authors state that by integrating playful activities such as board games and contests with motivational elements such as points, challenges, and rewards, students significantly improved their reading comprehension performance, especially in areas such as identifying main ideas, vocabulary, and literal comprehension, compared to traditional methods.

This improvement is associated with an increase in active participation and interest in reading, which favors key cognitive processes for interpreting the meaning of English texts.

Hidalgo Rojas et al. (2025) argue that educational research shows that playful activities not only improve basic reading skills, but also facilitate deeper text analysis processes, promoting inferential and critical levels of comprehension.

The author argues that when students participate in playful dynamics such as dramatizations, narrative games, and group activities that require interpretation and discussion of texts, comprehensive cognitive development is fostered, including reasoning, memory, and critical thinking, which together strengthen their reading comprehension.

Likewise, it is stated that these playful experiences generate positive emotional states, which increase intrinsic motivation to read and contribute to consolidating a more meaningful interaction with English texts, an essential characteristic for meaningful learning in EFL contexts.

Comprehensive reading

Comprehensive reading is essential for learning at all educational levels. However, many students face challenges in this area, which can lead to a lack of interest in reading. The implementation of a playful approach can be a practical solution to address these problems, as it intrinsically encourages student engagement by

teaching them in an active and dynamic way that will help motivate them in a meaningful way to spark their interest in comprehensive reading.

According to Venegas et al. (2021), one of the main challenges for teachers is to develop communication skills in students, and the playful approach has been identified as an innovative and effective methodology to achieve this, as it integrates activities that help improve students' relationships and self-confidence within the classroom.

Connection between a Playful Approach and Comprehensive Reading

Studies have found that playful activities not only make reading more enjoyable but also improve reading comprehension. For example, a study conducted by Cruz (2018) found that incorporating playful strategies significantly contributed to strengthening students' reading comprehension.

For these reasons playful activities create a collaborative and participatory learning environment where students feel comfortable exploring and expressing their ideas without fear of making mistakes, as this approach aims to motivate them to feel confident and comfortable when engaging in the classroom.

Motivation for reading

Reading is one of the fundamental skills in learning English as a foreign language. According to Deci & Ryan (1985), with their Self-Determination Theory (SDT), human motivation is based on three fundamental psychological needs, which are: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Applied to reading in English as a foreign language, this theory takes on relevance. When students feel they can choose how and what to read (autonomy), when they perceive that they can understand and progress (competence), and when they feel connected to their peers or teachers around the activity (connection), their motivation to read and learn increases significantly.

Reading, then, is not only a skill to be developed, but also a means of awakening students' genuine interest and fostering their commitment to the language, especially in contexts where they face linguistic and academic barriers.

This means that when working on reading in English as a foreign language, it is important to consider these three motivational elements. If students feel autonomous in choosing what they read, competent in understanding the text, and connected to their learning environment, they are more likely to engage with the task.

In this sense, reading not only serves an academic function, but can also become a meaningful experience that enhances the desire to learn, especially when it is tailored to the interests and needs of the student.

Motivation for the English language learning process

Motivation in the process of learning any language is, without a doubt, the foundation and driving force behind learning. The reason for learning the language plays an important role, as it provides an incentive to learn better, as expressed by Leguizamón (2019), motivation symbolizes the driving force behind learning, and the purpose for learning a language plays a fundamental role, as it develops as an incentive for more meaningful learning.

When students have clear reasons for learning English, such as communicating with other people like foreign friends or their favorite artists, accessing cultural content, or achieving personal or academic goals, their attitude toward the language changes positively.

In addition, they feel more engaged, curious, and willing to participate in activities. Hence the importance of teachers seeking strategies that connect with their students' interests and emotions, as this can significantly strengthen their motivation and, therefore, their performance in the classroom.

Emotional influence of a playful approach on comprehensive reading

Learning is not only built on content and cognitive skills, but also on the emotional experiences that students have in the classroom. In this regard, Peñafiel et al. (2025) emphasize that emotions play an essential role in teaching and learning processes, as they directly influence motivation, academic performance, and the overall development of students.

Beyond that, this perspective allows for an understanding that teaching involves not only transmitting knowledge but also dealing with the emotional aspects that determine how students learn and relate to the educational environment.

According to Sitorus et al. (2025) learning through play promotes both cognitive development and social-

emotional skills, such as emotional self-regulation and anxiety control, allowing students to feel more comfortable and motivated during the reading process.

On the other hand, research conducted in educational contexts shows that playful strategies increase participation and interest in reading, generating positive emotional links with the activity of reading that contribute to a greater willingness to face challenging texts (Herrera García, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This research was developed using a qualitative approach, with a non-experimental design and a descriptive level, as it aimed to analyze the use of a playful approach in teaching comprehensive reading in English without manipulating variables, but rather by observing teaching practices as they develop in the natural context of the classroom. Besides, this approach allowed for an examination of how the playful strategies employed by teachers relate to student motivation, participation, and reading comprehension, in accordance with the overall objective of the study.

The study was conducted at an educational institution in the city of Chone, with sixth-grade students in General Basic Education. The population consisted of 60 students, divided into two parallel classes: 30 from sixth grade "A" and 30 from sixth grade "B."

Also, three English teachers also participated: the two teachers responsible for the parallel classes observed and an additional teacher, who was included to broaden the perspective on the use of a playful approach in teaching reading in English.

Moreover, the participants were selected through purposive sampling, as they were directly involved in the English language teaching-learning process, which allowed for the collection of relevant information to identify the playful strategies used by teachers.

Besides, the following two instruments were used to obtain the information: the observation sheet and the interview.

The observation allowed for direct analysis of the development of English classes, student behavior, and the methodological strategies used by teachers in the classroom.

The structured observation form was designed to record indicators related to the objectives of the study, such as the use of playful strategies, the level of student participation, classroom interaction, motivation, and comprehension of English texts.

On the other hand, the interview was administered to teachers to learn about their perceptions of the influence of the playful approach on student motivation, participation, and reading comprehension in the classroom.

The instrument used was a semi-structured interview, consisting of semi-open questions aimed at exploring teaching practices, difficulties in teaching reading in English, and the assessment of the use of playful elements in the classroom.

The observation form was developed based on the research objectives and 10 indicators related to the playful approach, motivation, participation, and reading comprehension in English language learning.

The interview was designed based on the conceptual foundations of the playful approach and comprehensive reading, allowing detailed information to be collected with 12 questions about the strategies used by teachers and their perception of the impact of these strategies on the students' learning process. It should be noted that both instruments were corrected and validated in two weeks by three teachers specializing in English within the higher education institution.

Firstly, authorization was requested by the educational institution and participating teachers to conduct the study. Secondly, direct observations were carried out over a period of three weeks in both parallel classes (sixth "A" and sixth "B"), systematically recording the information using the observation form. During this process, the playful strategies used by the teachers, the participation of the students, and their level of comprehension of the English texts were analyzed.

After the observation stage was completed, individual interviews were conducted with the three English teachers, each lasting approximately 10 to 15 minutes, which allowed for a deeper understanding of their

perceptions of the use of the playful approach and its relationship to student motivation and reading comprehension.

The data obtained through observation sheets and interviews were organized into qualitative analysis matrices. Afterwards, a thematic categorization process was carried out, grouping the information into dimensions linked to the study's objectives, such as playful strategies, student participation, motivation, and reading comprehension.

Finally, the results were interpreted in terms of the general objective and specific objectives, which made it possible to identify the playful strategies used by teachers and determine the elements of the playful approach that promote participation and reading comprehension in English classes.

RESULTS

Question 1: The interviewed teachers agree that playful activities are commonly incorporated at the beginning or during English lessons to capture students' attention. Besides, games, songs, videos, and flashcards are dynamics that teachers frequently use to create a learning atmosphere and increase students' interest in the lesson.

Question 2: Playful activities are usually planned; however, teachers also adapt them during the lesson depending on students' reactions and needs. These activities are connected to reading tasks through pre-reading vocabulary, visual support, and contextual activities that prepare students to understand the text more easily.

Question 3: Visual materials are considered the most useful resources for reading comprehension, especially with young learners and beginners. Teachers also mention the use of stories, songs, videos, and digital games as complementary tools depending on students' age and proficiency level. Furthermore, these ideas are supported by Asrul et al. (2020) found that "students who were taught using audiovisual media understand the lesson better if teachers display content related to any audiovisual material."

Question 4: The classroom environment created through playful strategies is described as active, motivating, and emotionally positive. Consequently, students become more engaged, participative, and confident, which encourages interaction and reduces fear of making mistakes while they read.

Question 5: Playful activities are perceived as effective in achieving reading comprehension goals. Hence, teachers report that students understand the general meaning and context of texts more easily when games and visual aids are used before or during reading tasks.

Question 6: All teachers emphasize the importance of adapting playful activities according to the age of students and their English level. Although similar resources can be used across levels, the complexity of the tasks is adjusted to meet students' cognitive and linguistic abilities.

Question 7: Students show higher participation and motivation when playful reading activities are applied compared to traditional methods. For this reason, teachers highlight the need for classroom control to avoid distraction and maintain focus on the learning objectives of the class. According to Misas (2021) the traditional method is based on memorizing and repeating vocabulary, while the playful approach promotes motivation and communicative use of the language, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of learning.

Question 8: The most common emotions observed during playful activities are joy, confidence, and enthusiasm. In some cases, initial frustration may appear, but it decreases as students become familiar with the methodology. This view is supported by Tekman & Yeniasır (2023) who point out that game-based learning environments reduce anxiety and stress, while increasing motivation and creating a positive emotional environment that encourages students to express their ideas and feelings more easily.

Question 9: According to the teachers, playful strategies contribute positively to reading comprehension. Moreover, this improvement is noticeable when students can identify main ideas, relate vocabulary to context, and respond more confidently to reading tasks.

Question 10: Playful activities have a positive impact on students' reading confidence. Students demonstrate a greater willingness to read aloud, interpret texts, and participate in reading activities, even those with learning difficulties. In addition to Tekman & Yeniasır (2023) show that playful learning has positive effects on both reading comprehension and students' emotional well-being. Students who worked in playful environments

understood texts more easily, showed greater interest in reading, and were more able to interpret content in a meaningful way than those who received traditional teaching.

Question 11: Reading autonomy is encouraged to some extent through playful strategies. While not all students read independently, teachers observe increased interest and initiative, especially when activities are enjoyable and cooperative.

Question 12: Playful dynamics help students retain vocabulary and contextual information more effectively. Vocabulary games, visual associations, repetition, and pre-reading activities are identified as the most effective strategies for improving retention. According to Liu (2024), strategies such as visual support, repeated exposure, and structured segmenting of content significantly improve vocabulary learning and retention, as learners have more time and cognitive space to process new words. This supports the idea that playful dynamics through games, pre-reading activities, and contextual interaction help learners retain vocabulary and contextual information more effectively.

Table 1. Summary of interview answers

Aspects	Summary
Activities that teachers incorporate into classes	Games, songs, videos, flashcards, visual materials, and playful dynamics.
Purpose of playful activities in the classroom	Create a positive learning environment and increase students' interest and motivation
Connection between playful activities and reading	Playful activities are used mainly before reading to introduce vocabulary and context.
Most used resources for reading comprehension	Visual materials, stories, songs, videos, and digital games, depending on the students' level.
Classroom environment	Active, motivating, and emotionally positive, students feel confident and participate more.
Effectiveness for reading comprehension	Help students understand the main ideas and context without focusing on every word.
Adaptation to students' level	Activities are adapted according to age and English proficiency.
Student participation	Students participate more than in traditional classes, although classroom control is needed.
Students' emotions	Joy, confidence, and enthusiasm are commonly observed; frustration is minimal.
Impact on reading confidence	Students feel more confident reading aloud and interpreting texts.
Reading autonomy	Encourages reading initiative in some students, especially through cooperative activities.
Vocabulary and content retention	Vocabulary games, visual associations, repetition, and pre-reading activities improve retention.

Elaborated by: Jasmín Anahí Fariás Fajardo and Mary Angie Vélez Zambrano.

Table 2: Playful approach observed in the English language teaching-learning process.

Playful approach	Always %	Usually %	Sometimes %	Never %	Total %
The teacher starts the class with playful activities aimed at reading in English.	70	20	0	10	100
Playful-literary resources such as stories, songs, or games are integrated to promote reading comprehension.	100	0	0	0	100
Vocabulary in English is reinforced through games or participatory dynamics.	90	10	0	0	100
It is verified whether students understood the text they read through some playful activity	90	10	0	0	100

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Table 1 shows evidence that in 70% of the observed classes, the teacher “always” began the lesson with playful activities focused on reading in English, while in 20% of the cases this usually occurred later in the class because the activities became routine and students did not immediately pay attention. The frequent use of playful activities at the beginning of the lesson supports learners’ attention and engagement, which facilitates reading comprehension in foreign language learning (Cameron, 2001).

In 100% of the observed classes, the teacher “always” used playful literary resources such as stories, songs, or games integrated to promote reading comprehension.

In 90% of the classes observed, the teacher “always” reinforced English vocabulary through games or activities that involved student interaction.

Likewise, in 90% of the classes, the teacher “always” verified students’ understanding of the texts through playful activities.

Table 3: The percentage of motivation observed in the English language teaching-learning process.

Motivation	Always %	Usually %	Sometimes %	Never %	Total %
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The teacher creates a recreational environment that encourages active participation and group interaction.	60	40	0	0	100
Enthusiasm and interest from students are observed when working with texts in English.	70	30	0	0	100
The activities promote student autonomy when reading in English.	100	0	0	0	100

Elaborated by: Jasmín Anahí Fariás Fajardo and Mary Angie Vélez Zambrano.

According to Table 2, the results indicate that in 60% of the observed classes, the teacher “always” created a recreational environment that encouraged active participation and group interaction, while in 40% of the classes, this usually occurred due to the large number of students, which limited full participation. A positive and recreational classroom environment increases students’ motivation and promotes active participation during language learning activities (Harmer, 2015).

In 70% of the observed classes, students “always” demonstrated enthusiasm and interest when working with English reading texts. However, in 30% of the classes, this enthusiasm usually varied because students worked in small groups, which sometimes caused distraction.

Additionally, in 100% of the observed activities, student autonomy in reading English texts was “always” promoted. When students are encouraged to work autonomously, they become more motivated and develop stronger reading skills in a foreign language (Pinter, 2017).

Table 4: Teaching and learning process for comprehensive reading in English

Motivation	Always %	Usually %	Sometimes %	Never %	Total %
Activities are clearly structured and sequenced, with materials and instructions appropriate to students’ level.	100	0	0	0	100
Class interactions and tasks show that students understand the text (accurate answers in pair/group work, relevant follow-up questions, and correct use of vocabulary from the text).	100	0	0	0	100
The teacher provides feedback based on reading progress during playful activities.	80	20	0	0	100

Elaborated by: Jasmín Anahí Fariás Fajardo and Mary Angie Vélez Zambrano.

Table 3 demonstrates that in 100% of the observed classes, the teacher “always” implemented clearly structured and sequenced activities, using materials and instructions appropriate to the students’ level.

Furthermore, in 100% of the classes, student interactions and tasks showed that learners “always” understood the reading texts, as evidenced by accurate answers, relevant follow-up questions, and correct use of vocabulary.

Finally, in 80% of the observed classes, the teacher always provided feedback based on students’ reading progress during playful activities. Continuous feedback during reading tasks helps students monitor their understanding and improves their overall reading performance (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to analyze how a playful approach contributes to motivating comprehensive reading in English among basic-level students. The findings obtained through classroom observations and teacher interviews indicate that the systematic use of playful strategies significantly enhances students’ motivation, participation, and reading comprehension. These results confirm that incorporating playful elements into English reading lessons creates a more engaging learning environment that supports both cognitive and emotional aspects of language learning.

To begin with the first specific objective, which focused on identifying the playful strategies used by teachers in reading-related activities, the results show that games, songs, videos, flashcards, visual materials, stories, and pre-reading activities are the most frequently used resources. Beyond that, teachers consistently noted that these strategies are mainly applied at the beginning of the lesson to introduce vocabulary and context before reading. This practice facilitates students' understanding of the texts, as it activates prior knowledge and reduces language barriers. These results coincide with those of Cruz (2018), who state that playful strategies reinforce reading comprehension by creating a collaborative and participatory learning environment.

Similarly, Asrul et al. (2020) highlight those audiovisual resources improve comprehension by making content more accessible and meaningful for learners.

The second specific objective, which focused on identifying the playful elements that promote participation and reading comprehension, revealed that visual support, vocabulary games, contextualized activities, repetition, and positive emotional environments play a fundamental role, based on both observation data and interview responses. Students showed higher levels of enthusiasm, confidence, and willingness to participate during playful reading tasks compared to traditional teaching.

These results support the conclusions of Tekman & Yeniasır (2023), who argue that game-based learning reduces anxiety and increases motivation, fostering a positive emotional climate that encourages students to express ideas and participate more actively in reading activities.

Furthermore, the observation results showed that in 100% of the classes, playful literary resources were integrated into reading activities, and vocabulary was consistently reinforced through games. This systematic use of playful strategies contributed to students' ability to identify main ideas, understand context, and apply new vocabulary appropriately. These outcomes are consistent with Liu (2024), who emphasizes that visual support, repeated exposure, and structured activities significantly improve vocabulary retention and reading comprehension. Additionally, the promotion of student autonomy observed in all classes reflects the principles of Deci & Ryan (1985) Self-Determination Theory, which highlights autonomy, competence, and connection as essential components of intrinsic motivation. When students felt capable of understanding texts, supported by their peers, and free to participate in enjoyable activities, their motivation toward reading in English increased notably.

From a pedagogical perspective, the results suggest that the playful approach is not only a complementary strategy but also a significant methodological alternative for teaching reading in English in basic education. The active, motivating, and emotionally positive classroom environment observed throughout the study contributed to greater student participation and confidence in reading tasks. This supports Harmer's (2015) assertion that a positive classroom environment improves motivation and learning outcomes, especially in foreign language contexts.

LIMITATIONS

However, despite the positive results, this study has certain limitations. The research was conducted with a relatively small sample and over a limited period of three weeks, which may restrict the generalizability of the results. In addition, the qualitative nature of the study focused on classroom practices and teachers' perceptions, which could be complemented by future quantitative testing. Nevertheless, these results provide meaningful pedagogical insights into the effectiveness of a playful approach to motivating reading comprehension among beginner-level English learners. Therefore, further research with larger samples, longer intervention periods, and mixed-methods designs is recommended to reinforce and extend the evidence presented in this study.

CONCLUSIONS

Motivation constitutes a key element in the teaching and learning process of the English language, particularly in the development of reading comprehension. The findings of this study demonstrate that the incorporation of a playful approach in English teaching contributes significantly to strengthening students' motivation, engagement, and willingness to participate actively in reading activities. Through the use of games, songs, stories, visual resources, and interactive tasks, reading in English is perceived as a meaningful and enjoyable experience, which fosters a positive attitude toward language learning.

The evidence obtained shows that the playful strategies applied by teachers promote the creation of a positive learning environment in which students feel emotionally safe and confident when interacting with texts in a foreign language. The integration of technological resources and playful instructional materials facilitates reading comprehension by capturing and maintaining students' attention for longer periods, while also supporting vocabulary acquisition and the understanding of the overall meaning of texts. In this context, playful activities are consolidated as effective pedagogical tools that strengthen both motivation and English language learning.

Likewise, the findings indicate that playful elements positively influence students' active participation and the development of reading comprehension in English. The use of visual resources, vocabulary games, interactive activities, songs, and group dynamics enhances student engagement during the reading process, facilitating

the identification of main ideas and the understanding of contextual meaning, while also fostering a motivating and emotionally supportive learning environment. However, despite these positive results, the study is limited by a relatively small sample size and a short intervention period, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research is recommended to include larger samples, longer intervention periods, and mixed methods approaches to further examine the impact of playful strategies on motivation and reading comprehension in EFL contexts.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of responsibility of authorship

We, the authors of the aforementioned manuscript, DECLARE that we have directly contributed to its intellectual content, as well as to the genesis and analysis of its data; therefore, we are able to take public responsibility for it and accept that their names appear on the list of authors in the order indicated. Furthermore, we have complied with the ethical requirements of the aforementioned publication, having consulted the Declaration of Ethics and Publication Malpractice.

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