





Voz de América, un sitio web para evaluar la comprensión de lectura

Voice of América, a website to assess reading comprehension

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Artículo de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica

Enviado: 17/12/2024

Revisado: 15/01/2025

Aceptado: 11/02/2025

Publicado: 07/03/2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33262/concienciadigital.v8i1.3331>

Cítese:

Chimbo Cáceres, E. M., Ayala Tipanluisa, D. L., Suárez Mosquera, W. E., & Barrera Gutiérrez, M. I. (2025). Voz de América, un sitio web para evaluar la comprensión de lectura. *ConcienciaDigital*, 8(1), 62-76.

<https://doi.org/10.33262/concienciadigital.v8i1.3331>



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La revista es editada por la Editorial Ciencia Digital (Editorial de prestigio registrada en la Cámara Ecuatoriana de Libro con No de Afiliación 663) www.celibro.org.ec



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Palabras claves:

Sitio web de Voice of America, comprensión lectora, estrategias de lectura, herramientas de tecnología del aprendizaje y el conocimiento

Keywords:

Website Voice of America, reading comprehension, reading strategies, technology tools of learning and

Resumen

Introducción: La lectura constituye en una destreza fundamental en el aprendizaje de inglés como lengua extranjera; la cual, combinada con herramientas tecnológicas permite un desarrollo efectivo del idioma. **Objetivos:** El objetivo de este estudio fue investigar el efecto del sitio web Voz de América en la comprensión lectora en estudiantes de séptimo semestre de una carrera de idiomas de una universidad pública del Ecuador. **Metodología:** Se realizó un estudio cuantitativo con un diseño preexperimental y la población estuvo conformada por 35 estudiantes de séptimo semestre. Además, se realizaron diez intervenciones de 30 minutos cada una, en las que se utilizaron varios reportajes informativos del sitio web Voice of America y diferentes herramientas LKT. Además, se utilizaron una variedad de instrumentos, incluida una encuesta sobre el uso de Tecnologías de Aprendizaje y Conocimiento (LKT), una prueba previa y posterior basada en la prueba estandarizada FCE y una encuesta modelo de aceptación de tecnología (TAM). Finalmente, al aplicar el SPSS se aceptó la hipótesis alternativa (H1) con un valor de p de 0.001, indicando que el sitio web La Voz de América fue efectivo para el desarrollo de la comprensión lectora de los estudiantes universitarios. **Resultados:** Los resultados mostraron que el promedio del post-test fue más alto que el del pre-test, con una diferencia de 1,6 puntos. **Conclusiones:** Las intervenciones tuvieron un impacto positivo en los estudiantes a través del desarrollo de diferentes actividades como discusiones grupales, grabaciones de audio, debates, predicciones, respuestas a preguntas y tareas escritas que promovieron un ambiente comunicativo y fomentaron su pensamiento crítico. **Área de estudio general:** educación. **Área de estudio específica:** aprendizaje de idiomas. **Tipo de estudio:** Artículos originales.

Abstract

Introduction: Reading is a fundamental skill in the learning of English as a foreign language, which, combined with technological tools, allows an effective development of the language. **Objectives:** The objective of this study was to investigate the effect of the Voice of America website on reading comprehension in seventh-semester students of a language program at a public university in Ecuador. **Methodology:** A

knowledge

quantitative study was carried out with a pre-experimental design and the population was made up of 35 seventh-semester students. In addition, ten interventions of 30 minutes each were made, in which several informative reports from the Voice of America website and different LKT tools were used. In addition, a variety of instruments were used, including a survey on the use of Learning and Knowledge Technologies (LKT), a pre- and post-test based on the FCE standardized test, and a model technology acceptance (TAM) survey. Finally, when applying the SPSS, the alternative hypothesis (H1) with a p value of 0.001 was accepted, indicating that the Voice of America website was effective for the development of reading comprehension of university students.

Results: The results showed that the post-test average was higher than the pre-test average, with a difference of 1.6 points.

Conclusions: The interventions had a positive impact on the students through the development of different activities such as group discussions, audio recordings, debates, predictions, answers to questions and written tasks that promoted a communicative environment and encouraged their critical thinking.

General area of study: education. **Specific area of study:** language learning.

Type of study: Original articles

1. Introduction

In today's digital age, access to online educational resources has transformed how students learn and develop their skills. According to Alías et al. (2020), the significance of technological advancements in education emphasizes the need to ensure that students worldwide have access to effective learning methods. One of the most prominent resources is the Voice of America (VOA) website, which offers informative content in English that can be utilized to enhance reading comprehension among higher education students. It is a comprehensive English learning platform that provides various resources for reading, writing, pronunciation, and vocabulary, catering to learners at all levels, from beginners to advanced (Barella & Linarsih, 2020).

Reading plays a crucial role in the development of students' English proficiency. Students comprehend and assimilate the text content during reading, producing suggestions, interactions, and comments. According to Astuti et al. (2020), reading is a source of language input that enriches students' understanding and allows them to utilize this

knowledge in productive activities. Thus, it not only allows students to reinforce their reading skills but also plays a role in developing other language skills, such as listening, speaking, and writing. Voice of America provides news and articles written in English, which are excellent for improving reading comprehension and expanding vocabulary. The materials are written in clear and concise language, making them easy to understand. The platform includes a variety of resources, such as listening and reading materials like news, contextualized vocabulary, film reviews, stories, and content related to American history. This study aims to investigate the effect of the Voice of America website on the development of reading comprehension skills in university students.

This research is guided by the concept of Technology-based learning which refers to the use of technological tools and resources in education to improve the teaching and learning process. Likewise, LKT tools play a fundamental role in the research since LKTs have been recognized as innovative tools in education, providing resources to support education. According to Alías et al. (2020), these technologies can be integrated into classroom teaching to boost student engagement and help teachers manage the technology efficiently. Therefore, these tools are designed to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies using digital resources such as educational games, collaborative learning platforms, and interactive multimedia resources. Therefore, the research seeks to determine the effectiveness of technological tools, specifically the Voice of America website, in improving students' reading comprehension skills in the Andean Region in Ecuador.

1.1. Voice of America Website

According to Astuti et al. (2020), incorporating Voice of America (VOA) into English language teaching offers numerous benefits. Firstly, VOA's easy accessibility allows learners to access various educational resources and content through multiple platforms, facilitating flexible and convenient language engagement. Furthermore, VOA's engaging and informative content captivates learners' interest and encourages active participation. Additionally, VOA's interactive website enables learners to actively engage with the content through interactive exercises, quizzes, and multimedia resources.

Voice of America website provides accurate and reliable information. For this reason, it is known for its veracity and objectivity in covering news from the United States and the world. According to Dierking (2018), news stories usually are on topics related to education, health and lifestyle, technology, science, and general news. As a result, students can look to Voice of America for information to provide them with the most current news.

Additionally, it provides engaging and informative content; that is, the website catches the students' interest with its reports and news that are interesting, informative, and

comprehensive for the students. Diverse topics expose learners to real-world contexts, enhancing their language skills and cultural knowledge. Likewise, it exposes students to vocabulary related to actual global issues that are broadly discussed, providing them with relevant vocabulary to communicate authentically. As a result, learners are highly interested in using these materials since they fulfill their specific communicative needs through a wide range of words and expressions.

1.2. Reading comprehension

Spratt et al. (2011) mentioned that reading skills refer to the ability to comprehend and process the content of a written text. Therefore, reading comprehension goes beyond the simple decoding of words. It involves the ability to connect ideas, identify relevant details, infer implicit meanings, recognize text structure, and evaluate the coherence and validity of the information presented. Thus, reading comprehension is one of the most basic and essential tools for human beings throughout their learning process, especially in their academic and professional performance.

Furthermore, the reading process is active and constructive, in which readers use their prior knowledge, decoding skills, and reading strategies to extract information, construct meaning, and evaluate the text's coherence. Additionally, the reading process encompasses a series of mental and cognitive activities that a person carries out when interacting with a written text to understand its meaning. It involves several stages that take place throughout the entire reading process. According to Nuttall (1996), three sequential stages of reading help learners proficiently comprehend English texts: before, during, and after reading.

Likewise, it is necessary to consider several factors, such as the type of readers, their previous knowledge to analyze the text, and how they interpret and study the texts to measure the reading comprehension. Similarly, the role of teachers in the field of reading comprehension is crucial because, with the help of teachers, students obtain the necessary guidelines and elements to learn to analyze texts and improve reading comprehension.

2. Methodology

This research project was based on a quantitative approach because the project collected and used statistical and numerical data. According to Smith & Hasan (2020), quantitative research aims to measure a phenomenon, to quantify and express in figures the parameters studied in a population. The quantitative approach was required in this research since the data was collected through pre-test and post-test implementation. Thus, with the information obtained from the tests, it was attempted to establish whether the VOA website is useful for improving students' reading comprehension.

The research was experimental because it was a study that sought the cause and effect of

the problem. According to Pandey & Pandey (2015), experimental research is a scientific method for obtaining rigorous, precise, and accurate results. Therefore, this research manipulated the independent variable to study how the dependent variable differs, which requires control, manipulation, and observation. Additionally, a pre-experimental design was carried out. According to Hakimah (2023), employing a single-group design minimizes the possibility of confounding variables that could occur with the multiple-group design. The research took a single group to perform interventions to use the Voice of America website to help students improve their reading comprehension skills. Likewise, it sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the LKT tools as a formative assessment tool for students.

The population that was used in the research was the seventh-semester students of *Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros* program at a public university in the Andean Region in Ecuador. The participants were 35 students whose ages were between 20 to 21 years old. The university is in Ambato, Tungurahua – Ecuador.

Alternative hypothesis: the voice of America website does influence the improvement of reading comprehension.

Null hypothesis: the Voice of America website does not influence the improvement of reading comprehension.

The research was carried out using various instruments. Firstly, a survey regarding the use of Learning and Knowledge Technological (LKTs) tools was implemented before the interventions and test application. The survey consisted of 15 multiple-choice that were validated by five experts. The second instrument was a pre-test and a post-test to measure the students' reading comprehension levels before and after the implementation of the VOA website. The reading section of the First Certificate in English (FCE) was used as a pre-test and post-test in which parts 5 and 7 of this exam were considered. The test consisted of two parts with sixteen multiple-choice questions. Finally, a survey based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was provided to the students to determine the acceptance level Voice of America website. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is a widely recognized model that attempts to understand how people adopt and use new technologies.

3. Results

Regarding the use of learning and knowledge technologies, the survey shows the following results:

Table 1

LKT diagnostic survey results

	Always	Almost always	Sometimes	Almost never	Never
Does the use of LKT help you to improve your learning?	7	17	10	1	0

Note. LKT Survey responses.

Table 1 shows a general view of the results of the survey, where 17 students, confirmed that “almost always” the use of LKTs can help improve their learning. Similarly, 10 participants affirmed that “sometimes” they can improve by using these tools. In addition, 7 students, claimed that they can “always” constantly enhance their learning by using LKTs. On the other hand, only one student, indicated “almost never”, stating that in certain situations these tools cannot improve students' learning. According to the results, it was evident that most students could enhance their learning by using LKT tools. Therefore, they have become valuable and indispensable tools in their educational process, especially in the current era in which the use of technology plays an important role in learning and assessing.

3.1. TAM model survey results

Table 2 shows the results of the first dimension relating to perceived usefulness, questions 1, 2, 3, and 4. The questions refer to how satisfied students were with the use of LKT tools (Question 1), how satisfactory was the use of this tool (Voice of America) during their lessons (Question 2), how students felt about the use of this tool (Question 3), and how students rate the ease of the tools used (Question 4). Most of the students selected the options 'totally satisfactory' and 'satisfactory.'

Table 2

Ease of use

	Totally satisfactory	Satisfactory	Somewhat satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Totally unsatisfactory
Question 1	13	18	3	1	0
Question 2	11	21	2	1	0
Question 3	13	19	2	1	0
Question 4	14	17	4	0	0

Note. Table 2 shows the data from the TAM model survey and ease of use construction.

Therefore, based on the results, it can be perceived that most of the participants found the website easy to use without major problems and were satisfied with its use. Likewise, the option 'somewhat satisfactory' had some responses indicating their neutrality regarding the use of the website. Finally, there was a minority of participants, only one respondent in the 'unsatisfactory' option.

Table 3

Perceived usefulness

	Totally satisfactory	Satisfactory	Somewhat satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Totally unsatisfactory
Question 1	13	18	3	1	0
Question 2	13	18	5	1	0
Question 3	11	16	7	1	0

Note. Table 3 shows the data from the TAM model survey, Perceived usefulness construct.

Table 3 reveals the results of the second dimension of TAM's survey concerning the perceived usefulness of questions 5, 6, and 7. They refer to the usefulness of the contents (Question 5), the use of the tools and their help to improve understanding (Question 6), and the learning level (Question 7). The results showed that most of the participants responded with "satisfied" or "totally satisfied". It reflects that the students considered the website useful and provided them with relevant content for their purposes in the classroom. On the other hand, a moderate number of participants chose "somewhat satisfied" related to the platform's usefulness. Finally, in each of the three questions, there was only a student who considered the level of usefulness of the Voice of America website to be "dissatisfied". Based on the results, it can be understood that the Voice of America website was very useful in the classroom during the interventions since it presented relevant news content that was of students' interest and helped them to improve their reading comprehension.

Table 4

Intention of use

	Totally satisfactory	Satisfactory	Somewhat satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Totally unsatisfactory
Question 1	7	18	9	1	0
Question 2	9	18	7	1	0
Question 3	11	17	6	1	0

Note. This table shows the data from the TAM model survey and the intention of using the construction.

Table 4 reports the results of the third dimension concerning the intention to use the Voice of America tool in terms of student motivation to use the tools (Question 8), if the student would like to use these technological tools in the classroom again (Question 9) and if the student would like to use the technological tools to learn other subjects (Question 10). The results showed that most students answered “satisfied” followed by “totally satisfied”. Thus, it shows that the participants have a high predisposition to continue using the Voice of America website in the future and even consider using it in other subjects. On the other hand, a moderate number of participants reported they were “somewhat satisfied” with their intention to use it. This group indicates that, although they do not have a clear decision to continue using the website, there is a possibility that they will use it in the future. Finally, there was only a student who selected the option “dissatisfied” concerning their intention to use it, indicating that the Voice of America website did not generate enough motivation or interest to consider using it again.

Table 5

Attitude of use

	Totally satisfactor y	Satisfactory	Somewhat satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Totally unsatisfactory
Question 1	13	15	6	1	0
Question 2	12	20	2	1	0

Note. Table 5 shows the data from the TAM model survey and attitude of use construction.

Table 5 reports the results of the fourth dimension of the TAM model concerning Voice of America's attitude of use about how the student found the visual aspect of the tools (Question 11) and how he found the format of colors, size, and shapes (Question 12). The most selected options were “satisfied” and “totally satisfied”. Thus, it indicates that the visual aspect of the website, including elements such as colors, sizes, and format, was well received and appreciated by most of the participants. On the other hand, a smaller number of students reported being “somewhat satisfied” with the visual aspect of the website. Finally, only one student reported being “dissatisfied” with it. According to the results obtained, the Voice of America website was well-received and accepted by most students. Their attitude during the use of the website was predominantly positive as is reflected in the responses previously mentioned.

Table 6

Pre and post average scores over

Results	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
Average over 10	5.2	6.8	1.6
Percentage	52 %	68 %	16 %

Note. Pre- and post-test scores of seventh-semester students.

Table 6 shows the average scores of the 35 students who took the pre-test and the post-test FCE reading section. It compares the average scores of both tests and the difference between them. In the pre-test, there was an average of 5.2 out of 10. Meanwhile, after the interventions using the Voice of America website, an average of 6.8 out of 10 was obtained, indicating a difference of 1.6 between both. Based on the results obtained, it was possible to determine that the implementation of the Voice of America website had a significant impact on the improvement of the student's reading comprehension. In the same way, it was evidenced that the website had a favorable outcome on the student's critical and comprehension development.

4. Discussion

The study's findings provide support to the arguments proposed by some authors who defended the VOA website as a valuable tool for promoting reading comprehension.

First the results obtained in the survey based on Learning and Knowledge Technologies (LKT) revealed that students improve their learning by using tools such as Canva, Nearpod, Quizizz, and Mentimeter. As stated by Hernández (2018), LKT tools help to reinforce didactic activities, since during teaching, teachers can give explanations, clarify doubts, and follow up on students' activities. In addition, students mentioned that they consider LKT tools indispensable to promote classroom interaction. These results support the findings of Alías et al. (2020), who indicated that incorporating LKTs into classroom teaching can improve student participation and engagement.

Additionally, LKT tools were essential in this research, as they allowed for a more effective reading comprehension assessment through Quizizz or Nearpod. As Tello et al. (2023) mentioned, they can improve assessment because they reduce correction time, increase reliability, and facilitate teachers' application. Thus, LKT tools help in assessment, especially formative assessment, which is fundamental in assessing learning processes. As mentioned by Ismail et al. (2022), formative assessment provides valuable information to adapt and optimize learning. Therefore, through these tools, it was possible to monitor students' progress in more detail and assess their understanding easily during the interventions. These findings support what Zeballos (2020) stated, indicating that

evaluation is an essential component in the learning processes facilitated by LKT.

The present research investigated the effectiveness of the Voice of America website in the development of students' reading comprehension. With the results obtained, it was evident that there was a significant improvement. These results support the previous findings of Anaktototy & Huwae (2020), who stated that the Voice of America had a significant impact on students' reading comprehension development. In their study, they used news reports as the basis for conducting small group discussions, which reinforced the value of using VOA resources to enhance reading and communication skills development in the educational setting. In this regard, it affirms the point stated by Astuti et al. (2020) that learners are interested in using VOA content as it satisfies their specific communicative needs through words and expressions. Similarly, as mentioned by Faliyanti & Anggraena (2019), learners are motivated to learn from relevant VOA materials that fulfill their language skills.

Furthermore, the pre-test and post-test findings indicated that Voice of America was successfully incorporated into developing reading comprehension through the reading process during the interventions. Therefore, it was crucial to employ various strategies before reading, such as watching videos, examining the title, and making predictions. As highlighted by Anaktototy & Huwae (2020), these pre-reading strategies help connect learners' prior knowledge with new information, aligning with Vygotsky (1978), who emphasized that learners learn by relating their existing knowledge to new learning. Furthermore, students carried out different activities while reading, including taking notes, creating concept maps, and answering questions. Banditvilai (2020) explained that this phase enhances comprehension of the text structure, clarifies content, and identifies the main idea. Finally, students participated in post-reading activities, such as debates, audio recordings, and writing tasks; as Ahmed et al. (2024) pointed out, these strategies facilitate students to transfer their knowledge gained from reading to real-life situations and contexts.

Finally, another relevant aspect comes from the analysis of the Technology Acceptance Model that supported the usefulness aspects of the Voice of America website for the development of English language skills. These findings are aligned with Barella & Linarsih (2020), who stated that the VOA website provides reading, writing, pronunciation, and vocabulary content that offers a lot of materials suitable for students of different levels. Therefore, the students participating in this research seem to have positively valued the diversity of resources offered by this digital platform, assuring they will use it in the future.

5. Conclusions

- The findings indicate that the Voice of America website was an effective tool for

developing reading comprehension. Throughout the interventions, students' critical thinking skills were enhanced as they analyzed and interpreted news from the website. Additionally, the focus of the interventions was communicative, encouraging students not only to read but also to engage in discussions with their classmates, share viewpoints, and develop oral and written expression skills, which facilitated comprehensive learning and the enhancement of multiple language skills. Furthermore, the use of various digital tools such as Nearpod, Quizizz, Padlet, and Canva made the classes more dynamic and motivating for students, allowing for a more efficient assessment of their progress. Therefore, based on the results of this study, the alternative hypothesis (H1) is accepted with a p-value of 0.001, indicating that the implementation of the website was effective.

6. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in relation to the article presented.

7. Authors' Contribution Statement

All authors contributed significantly to the elaboration of the article.

8. Financing costs

This research was funded entirely with the authors' own funds.

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