

**Enhancing English Reading Comprehension through Project-Based Learning Approaches**  
**Mejorando la Comprensión Lectora en inglés a través de Enfoques de Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos**  
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**Abstract**

This research explores how Project-Based Learning (PBL) approaches enhance English reading comprehension by actively engaging students in contextualized, meaningful learning experiences. Through a comprehensive literature review of studies conducted from 2009 to 2024, this paper examines the effectiveness of various PBL strategies, including collaborative projects, integration of ICT tools, and continuous formative assessments. Findings indicate that PBL not only improves reading comprehension but also fosters critical thinking, motivation, and long-term retention. However, challenges such as the need for teacher training and resource adaptation are identified. The study concludes with practical recommendations for educators to implement PBL effectively in diverse educational contexts.

**Keywords:** Project-Based Learning, Reading Comprehension, English Language Teaching, Educational Methodologies, Learning Strategies

**Resumen**

Esta investigación explora cómo los enfoques de Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos (PBL) mejoran la comprensión lectora en inglés al involucrar activamente a los estudiantes en experiencias de aprendizaje contextualizadas y significativas. A través de una revisión exhaustiva de la literatura de estudios realizados entre 2009 y 2024, este artículo examina la efectividad de diversas estrategias de PBL, incluidas actividades colaborativas, integración de herramientas TIC y evaluaciones formativas continuas. Los hallazgos indican que el PBL no solo mejora la comprensión lectora, sino que también fomenta el pensamiento crítico, la motivación y la retención a largo plazo. Sin embargo, se identifican desafíos como la necesidad de capacitación docente y la adaptación de recursos. El estudio concluye con recomendaciones prácticas para que los educadores implementen el PBL de manera efectiva en diversos contextos educativos.

**Palabras clave:** Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos, Comprensión Lectora, Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés, Metodologías Educativas, Estrategias de Aprendizaje.

## Introduction

In Ecuador, English language education has gained significant importance within the educational framework, driven by the necessity to enhance students' language proficiency in an increasingly globalized world (U.S. Mission Ecuador, 2019). Despite ongoing initiatives aimed at improvement, challenges in English reading comprehension persist, as reflected in unsatisfactory performance in both national and international assessments (Hincapié & Muñoz, 2022). This situation has led to the exploration of innovative teaching methods to enhance student outcomes in this essential area.

In response, a revised National Curriculum was introduced in September 2016, providing a comprehensive structure aligned with the educational requirements of Ecuadorian learners (Ministerio de Educación de Ecuador, 2016). Project-Based Learning (PBL) has emerged as an effective pedagogical approach that facilitates in-depth and contextualized learning. It engages students in meaningful projects that necessitate the application of knowledge and skills to real-world scenarios, thereby enhancing reading comprehension (Castellano, 2020). Numerous studies highlight that PBL significantly boosts reading abilities by actively engaging students in the learning process and promoting critical thinking (Yanchapaxi, 2022).

This literature review seeks to examine existing research on PBL and assess its effectiveness in improving English reading comprehension by analyzing data from past studies and empirical findings (Yanchapaxi, 2022).

## Materials and Methodology

This study utilizes a descriptive literature review to explore the question: How does Project-Based Learning (PBL) influence the enhancement of reading comprehension in English? To address this, a wide range of scholarly materials, including scientific articles, theses, and other research documents published between 2009 and 2024, were gathered and analyzed. The

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research relied on reputable databases such as Google Scholar, SciELO, ERIC, ORG, and various university repositories. Both Spanish and English keywords were employed, including terms like Project-Based Learning (PBL), reading comprehension, English language teaching, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and assessment, with no restrictions on language.

Tabla 1

## Bibliographic Revision on PBL and English Reading Comprehension

No	Author & Year	Country	Objective	Methodology	Main Results	Implications	Recommendations
1	Aristizábal & Andrade (2023)	Brazil	To reflect on reading comprehension to support decoloniality and content contextualization in higher education.	Critical Analysis	Highlights the importance of using reading comprehension to enhance learning and promote a relational, dialogic approach to second language acquisition.	Emphasizes contextualized learning and critical thinking.	Incorporate culturally relevant texts to enhance contextual learning.
2	Coria (2018)	Mexico	To explore the benefits of PBL as an educational methodology fostering technological and collaborative skills.	Theoretical Review	PBL promotes technological and collaborative skills, enhancing interaction and participation among students and teachers.	Demonstrates PBL's role in interactive and participatory learning.	Integrate ICT tools to support collaborative learning environments.
3	Domínguez et al. (2017)	Cuba	To emphasize the importance of developing English	Descriptive and Diagnostic Analysis	Improves English reading comprehension, which is essential for	Validates the relevance of reading comprehension in professional contexts.	Align projects with real-world professional scenarios.

			reading comprehensi on for professional training.		accessing information and professional performance.		
4	Martí et al. (2018)	Colombia	To develop skills and competencie s through PBL in a technological environment.	Action Research	Effective in undergradua te and postgraduate education, fostering integrated skills and challenging,c ollaborative learning.	Confirms the effectiveness of PBL in advanced educational settings.	Implement PBL strategies across different educational levels.
5	Nacato (2021)	Ecuador	To identify the effects of PBL on developing reading comprehensi on in English.	Bibliographic- Documentary Research	PBL positively affects reading comprehensi on, motivation, confidence, and other language skills.	Validates PBL's holistic impact on language skills and motivation.	Apply PBL in classes to improve foreign language reading skills.
6	Segura (2021)	Spain	To evaluate the impact of PBL on English reading comprehensi on and explore its implementati on challenges.	Literature Review, Case Analysis, Critical Reflection	PBL is valuable but faces challenges such as resistance to change and lack of time, requiring committed teachers.	Highlights the complexity of PBL implementation in diverse contexts.	Provide teacher training and time management strategies.

To enhance the efficiency of the search process, Boolean operators and parentheses were applied, with the AND/AND operator playing a crucial role in identifying documents containing multiple keywords simultaneously. The search strategy prioritized key phrases like “Project-Based Learning,” “reading comprehension,” and “English Language Teaching,” while other related terms were considered secondary. Studies focusing on the impact of PBL on English reading comprehension were included, whereas those published before 2009 or related to Problem-Based Learning (PBL) were excluded.

The review process involved multiple steps: initially, papers were shortlisted based on the relevance of their titles and abstracts. Subsequently, an in-depth examination of the selected papers was carried out to evaluate their significance and quality. Key concepts and critical findings were extracted from each source to provide a detailed understanding of the current research landscape. Finally, the collected data were thematically organized to create a cohesive narrative on the design of project-based learning activities, highlighting best practices, challenges, and classroom implementation recommendations, as summarized in Table 1.

### **Result Analysis**

This section presents the findings related to the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) and its impact on English reading comprehension. The results indicate positive effects on student engagement and reading skills, although challenges such as teacher preparation and adaptation of projects were noted. Key elements analyzed include the principles of PBL, the roles of teachers and students, and the integration of technology. These findings highlight PBL's potential to enhance reading comprehension while also pointing out areas for improvement.

#### **Project-Based Learning (PBL)**

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an educational approach that promotes active student participation by creating opportunities to apply classroom knowledge to practical activities that benefit both the educational community and society at large (Ministerio de Educación de Ecuador, 2018). This methodology fosters creativity and contextual learning environments where students can engage in meaningful projects.

In 2020, the Ministerio de Educación de Ecuador introduced the “Juntos Aprendemos” program, which incorporated PBL into public schools to enhance educational outcomes by encouraging creativity and critical thinking among students (Arias et al., 2024).

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According to Coria (2018), PBL is rooted in the constructivist theories of Piaget, Dewey, Bruner, and Vygotsky, which view learning as a mental construction process, combining both new and existing knowledge. This approach supports interdisciplinary learning and encourages students to explore their interests in small groups, enhancing their skills through experiential learning.

### **Project-Based Learning in English Teaching**

According to the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI, 2023), Ecuador ranks 80th out of 113 countries in English proficiency, showing lower-than-average performance compared to other nations. Quito leads with a score of 513, while Guayaquil and Cuenca scored 465 and 462 respectively. In contrast, Santo Domingo recorded the lowest performance with a score of 366. This highlights the need for innovative teaching methods such as PBL to enhance English proficiency across the country.

### **Phases of PBL in Language Teaching**

- PBL in language teaching involves six key phases:
  - Diagnosis: Identifying learning needs and goals,
  - Planning: Designing project activities and defining roles,
  - Implementation: Carrying out the planned activities,
  - Execution: Actively engaging in tasks,
  - Evaluation: Assessing learning outcomes and processes,
  - Monitoring: Continuously tracking progress and providing feedback (Pérez, 2022).
  - According to Fragoulis & Tsiplakides (2009), the phases are:
  - Speculation: Selecting the project topic and setting a research-friendly environment,
  - Activity Design: Forming diverse groups, assigning roles, and planning information sources,
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- Realization: Executing activities, organizing information, and presenting results,
- Evaluation: Assessing both the process and the final products, including self and peer evaluation.

Despite extensive theoretical support, Fragoulis & Tsiplakides (2009) noted a lack of empirical studies on PBL's impact in foreign language education. In contrast, García (2019) provides practical guidelines, recommending:

- Motivational questions to initiate student interest,
- Problem-solving challenges to drive inquiry,
- Collaborative groups for cooperative learning,
- Guidance in research and information use,
- Product development or solution creation, and
- Reflective evaluation at the end of the project.

## **Reading Comprehension**

### **The Reading Comprehension Process**

Reading comprehension involves not just decoding text but also understanding the underlying meaning. This process is crucial for overall learning across subjects as it enables access to knowledge in various domains (UNESCO, 2022). To ensure effective reading comprehension, students and teachers should consider three essential questions:

- What do we read?
  - Why do we read?
  - How do we read?
  - Different reading styles cater to specific goals:
  - Globalized Reading for general ideas,
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- Focused Reading for specific information,
- Extensive Reading for overall comprehension,
- Intensive Reading for detailed understanding,
- Critical Reading for text evaluation (Clouet, 2010).

### **Reading Comprehension in English Language Teaching**

Aristizábal & Andrade (2023) suggest that reading comprehension in English facilitates the acquisition of specialized knowledge, especially when such information is unavailable in the native language. It also aids in understanding complex dialogues and narratives across diverse contexts.

They further emphasize that effective reading instruction requires:

Comprehensive training for both teachers and students,

Development of reading competence, and

Access to interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary academic content, which helps reduce negative perceptions of foreign language reading, often linked to cultural resistance and coloniality.

### **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)**

The CEFR provides a standardized framework to assess language proficiency from A1 to C2 levels, offering guidelines for teaching and evaluating foreign language skills. Although widely used in Europe, its application varies globally, with educators customizing the levels for better instructional alignment (EF-Education, 2021).

### **CEFR Reading Comprehension Categories**

- Reading comprehension in CEFR is categorized based on:
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- Reading for Orientation: Quick, selective reading for specific information,
- Reading for Information and Argument: Detailed examination of longer texts,
- Reading for Pleasure: Enjoying literature and non-fiction,
- Following Instructions and Correspondence: Practical reading tasks.

These categories provide a comprehensive framework for evaluating reading skills at different proficiency levels (Instituto Cervantes, 2020).

**Tabla 2**

Shows the scales of illustrative CEFR descriptors related to reading comprehension

Level	General Reading Comprehension
C2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Understands virtually any type of text, including abstract and complexly structured texts, or literary and non-literary texts with colloquialisms.</li><li>- Comprehends lengthy and complex texts, appreciating subtle distinctions in style and meaning, both implicit and explicit.</li></ul>
C1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Comprehends lengthy and complex texts, including literary works, newspaper or magazine articles, and professional publications, with re-reading and reference tools.</li><li>- Understands texts outside their field of expertise in full detail.</li></ul>
B2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Reads independently, adapting style and speed to different texts and purposes.</li><li>- Uses reference sources selectively and has a broad active reading vocabulary but may struggle with uncommon idioms.</li></ul>
B1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Reads straightforward factual texts related to personal interest areas with satisfactory comprehension.</li></ul>
A2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Understands short, simple texts on familiar topics using common everyday or work-related vocabulary.</li><li>- Comprehends brief texts with high-frequency vocabulary, including internationalisms.</li></ul>
A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Understands very short and simple texts sentence by sentence.</li><li>- Recognizes familiar names, words, and basic phrases, with the possibility of re-reading for better understanding.</li></ul>
Pre-A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Recognizes familiar words or signs accompanied by images, such as menus with photos or picture books containing familiar vocabulary.</li></ul>

Note. Instituto Cervantes (2020, p. 66)

### Assessment of Reading Comprehension in English

Traditional standardized tests provide a limited and prescriptive assessment of students' English reading comprehension. To accurately evaluate their skills, alternative assessment

methods are necessary, focusing on tasks that mirror real-life reading situations and expert-level reading activities. This approach helps students understand what it truly means to master a language in a societal context (Heymo, 2009).

## **Project-Based Learning in the Development of English Reading Comprehension**

### **Relationship between PBL and English Reading Comprehension**

Reading comprehension involves not only recognizing words but also interpreting their meaning, connecting ideas, and applying the content to specific needs, thereby optimizing time and effort. It is a process that integrates reading, analytical, and critical thinking skills for thorough understanding (Grellet, 1981).

In Ecuador, English reading skills are essential for academic and professional success across all educational levels (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2004).

Project-Based Pedagogy, although introduced later, has significant potential to enhance English learning through collaborative and practical experiences. However, its implementation has been superficial, contributing to the challenges in English teaching and learning (Fandiño-Parra et al., 2012).

Research indicates that PBL significantly improves English reading comprehension by actively engaging students in meaningful tasks, fostering critical thinking, and encouraging collaboration (Hincapié & Muñoz, 2022).

### **PBL for the Development of English Reading Comprehension**

PBL enhances students' reading comprehension more effectively than traditional methods, promoting critical thinking, judgment, interpretation, and information synthesis (Ñacato, 2021). PBL also supports the development of productive language skills, motivating students to

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research, develop, and present projects in English, thus enhancing their overall language proficiency (Solórzano-Intriago & Loor-Salmon, 2023).

### **Technologies in PBL for English Reading Comprehension**

ICT (Information and Communication Technology) integrated with PBL enhances students' problem-solving abilities and reading comprehension by developing their mental and technological skills.

Teachers can design projects leveraging ICT tools, which not only support learning but also encourage educators to learn alongside their students (Martí et al., 2010).

The integration of ICT improves literal, inferential, and critical levels of reading comprehension, thus positively impacting students' English language acquisition (Aguirre et al., 2021).

### **Assessment of PBL in Developing English Reading Comprehension**

Multiple evaluation tools can be employed in PBL, including:

- Observation templates, rubrics, questionnaires, and learning diaries.
  - Self-assessment: Students evaluate their own progress using teacher-provided resources.
  - Co-assessment: Peer evaluation guided by criteria set by the teacher.
  - Hetero-assessment: Evaluation by external individuals, such as teachers or parents.
  - Effective assessment in PBL involves analyzing data, interpreting results, and preparing comprehensive reports (Segura, 2021).
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## **Analysis of Implemented PBL Projects for Developing English Reading Comprehension**

Literary project-based learning enhances English reading comprehension by combining PBL with literary activities, leading to:

- Improved reading comprehension,
- Vocabulary enrichment,
- Positive attitudes towards reading,
- Enhanced critical thinking skills.

The research shows that both teachers and students have a favorable perception of PBL, recognizing its impact on comprehensive language skill development (Yanchapaxi, 2022).

### **Key Implications and Recommendations:**

- **Alternative Assessment Methods:** Develop real-life task-based assessments to evaluate English reading comprehension more effectively.
  - **Integration of ICT:** Incorporate digital tools into PBL activities to enhance reading comprehension and language proficiency.
  - **Teacher Training:** Provide specialized training for teachers to implement and manage PBL effectively, ensuring a deeper engagement in the learning process.
  - **Collaboration and Critical Thinking:** Design PBL activities that foster collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.
  - **Literary Activities:** Combine PBL with literary activities to enrich vocabulary and promote positive reading habits.
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An examination of the literature on Project-Based Learning (PBL) and its impact on English reading comprehension reveals a range of significant findings. The evidence suggests that PBL encourages a more dynamic and meaningful teaching approach, enhancing reading comprehension by actively engaging students in the educational experience. For instance, Zhang & Ma (2023) found that integrating real-world projects into English instruction not only boosts student motivation but also supports the practical use of language skills, particularly in reading. This strategy, which aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Hymes' Communicative Approach, has been proven effective in promoting deeper, context-based learning.

However, implementing PBL is not without challenges. Tenesaca et al. (2024) noted that time constraints and limited resources can limit the broader application of PBL in classrooms. Additionally, the success of PBL is largely dependent on the level of teacher preparation and training. According to Olarte & Guzmán (2022), effective PBL requires teachers to be well-prepared to facilitate projects that genuinely enhance reading comprehension. This highlights the crucial role of teacher training as part of effective PBL implementation.

Moreover, the effectiveness of PBL varies according to educational contexts and students' proficiency levels. Research by Chen and Lee (2021) suggests that PBL is more effective for students with intermediate reading comprehension skills. In contrast, for students at lower proficiency levels, the outcomes are more inconsistent. This suggests a need to tailor PBL activities to students' proficiency levels or to combine PBL with other supportive teaching methods that can provide additional guidance, particularly in the early stages of learning.

The findings also reveal parallels and divergences with existing literature. On one hand, the research supports the effectiveness of PBL in English language instruction, consistent with Paul Nation's theory, which emphasizes the importance of active exposure and practice in vocabulary learning. On the other hand, the reliance on factors such as resource availability and

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teacher expertise is in line with the challenges observed in other communicative language teaching approaches.

### **Conclusions**

This research concludes that Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an effective teaching strategy for enhancing English reading comprehension, particularly in educational settings that support active and meaningful learning experiences. The key findings demonstrate that PBL not only aids in the acquisition of language skills but also develops critical competencies such as problem-solving, collaboration, and the practical application of knowledge, thereby boosting students' motivation and engagement in learning English.

The reviewed literature suggests that PBL facilitates the transfer of reading skills to real-world contexts, promoting long-term retention and understanding as opposed to traditional methods that emphasize memorization. Nevertheless, the study also identified several challenges, including insufficient resources, time constraints, and the need for specialized teacher training, which can hinder the effective implementation of PBL.

Furthermore, the impact of PBL was found to vary according to students' proficiency levels and educational contexts. Specifically, PBL is more effective for students with intermediate English proficiency, whereas the outcomes are less consistent for beginners. This emphasizes the need to adapt PBL activities to suit the specific requirements of each student group for optimal effectiveness.

In conclusion, while Project-Based Learning (PBL) shows great promise in enhancing English reading comprehension, further research is needed to investigate its application across various contexts and proficiency levels. This will help maximize its effectiveness and offer more detailed guidelines for integrating PBL into English language teaching as well as other subject areas.

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