



Implementation of legends of the Zenú indigenous people as a pedagogical strategy to improve reading comprehension in fifth grade students in a region of Córdoba (Colombia)

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Summary

This paper presents the implementation of a research project that aims to strengthen the levels of reading comprehension in fifth grade students in an educational institution in a village in Córdoba. The modality of propositional research is adopted with which it is proposed as a solution to pedagogize the legends of the Zenú indigenous people. In the diagnostic-articulating phase, the difficulty in the elements of inference and critical comprehension stood out; after which workshops were developed with work on oral histories, literal, interpretative and evaluative analysis. The results show significant advances in the ability to extract implicit information, motivation for reading action and recognition of the Zenú culture. In addition, the process enhanced the participation of the educational community, typical of the cycle of reflection in Research-Action. It is concluded that working with oral tradition not only favors communicative skills, but also builds cultural identity of the territory.

Keywords: Zenú Legends, Pedagogical Strategy, Reading Comprehension, Research-Action, Oral Tradition

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Introduction

Reading comprehension, on the other hand, has been central to children's expectations of educational and social growth. According to proponents of Chall's position on text comprehension, reading comprehension is anticipated not only in the areas of knowledge where the text is most apt, but also in the acquisition of "critical or critical understanding skills" on how to read texts and contexts to imagine oneself reading. On the other hand, the Colombian Ministry of National Education maintains that reading and comprehension at different levels and contexts is essential for the person over a long period of schooling and that "Learning to read is infinite". However, the results of various national standardized tests reveal a deficiency in the belief in reading competence in rural areas. Certain geographical areas have different socioeconomic and cultural particularities than others, this is not taken into account when establishing the forms of activity that the student will develop when reading. Tacklessly, a feeling of boredom is generated with the task.

Reading, as the ability to extract, interpret and evaluate the information in a text, depends on both cognitive and sociocultural factors. Thus, meaning is not only found in the written document, but in the dialogue that the reader establishes with his own experience and his context referents; In this sense, the proposals of Bernal and Chust and Bravo et al. indicate how reading is benefited when it is anchored in the student's cultural heritage. This is because the reference to their culture enhances interest and motivation towards the text and facilitates, at the same time, the acquisition of analysis strategies at inferential and critical levels. On the other hand, oral tradition is presented as a particularly valuable resource due to its function of transmitting, through story and legend, values, worldviews and narrative structures that students identify with their environment. This generates emotional recognition with reading, while working with cultural images expands interpretative possibilities. In fact, the student feels called to reflect on his or her own identity, as well as on the conceptions that his or her community has about the organization of human life and nature. Thus, the sociocultural theory of reading maintains that learning is not an isolated self-correcting process, but takes place in the social context and in relation to the discourse that occurs in it. By integrating indigenous legends into the process of teaching reading, the classroom becomes a collaborative space in which the student is no longer a passive receiver, but a co-producer of meaning for which self and collective experiences are mobilized. Thus, the use of oral tradition not only improves the effectiveness of reading practices, but also promotes the appreciation of cultural diversity and the strengthening of local identity, in line with standards that tend to a mostly contextual and inclusive teaching.

In a region of Córdoba (Colombia), the situation does not seem to be unrelated to this problem: primary school students, particularly in fifth grade, show low performance in CL, especially at the inferential and critical levels. In other words, recipients present difficulties when they are presented with extensive reading or with greater conceptual complexity, which leads to mechanical reading, that is, focused on mere decoding of words, without going deeper into the interpretation of ideas and meanings. In addition, according to the referent, the L would be a task related to routine activities, not very motivating, due to being decontextualized from the immediate, while its approach would be far from its cultural references, which may be key to motivate their connection and interest in texts. Hence, reading, in this case, is a practice that is closer to decontextualization and demotivation, and far from being an activity imbricated with the daily dynamism and cultural identification that surrounds it. Because of its particle. In the context of ICH in the context of ICH, some studies have highlighted the need to include the sociocultural background of students in the Wilma Echoes (Bernal & Chust, 1991), arguing that the use of a scaffolding stimulates results. greater involvement and understanding.

In this sense, oral tradition is especially appropriate as a source of stories and legends that uninvassively link the literate world with the cultural features of a community. The Zenú aboriginal population, who formerly inhabited Cordoba, has a varied compendium of legends that, through their oral transmission, disseminate values, beliefs and uses. These manifestations popularize the local idiosyncrasies and provide, at the same time, linguistic and conceptual richness appropriate for the

ideal levels of reading comprehension. These undoubtedly combine a literary character, other mutually involved facets, such as the worldview of the ancestors, the link with the planet and the elaboration of an inscription of belonging. By recognizing texts according to their own culture, by mouth or written, young people try to provide emotional and cognitive stimulation, increasing motivation and drive to read.

Working with these legends, therefore, is not only important for the recovery of oral tradition. The theoretical references that address reading comprehension —such as the proposals of Van Dijk and Kintsch, for example— indicate that the reader infers meanings from his previous knowledge and the social context in which he finds himself, as well as from the possible inferences from the plot itself. Thus, by incorporating stories related to the life of the student community itself and its collective memory, more natural connections are established and the reading experience is more meaningful, which reinforces inferential processes as well as critical or evaluative interpretation. Precisely from this same perspective, the conception of Fals Borda and, closer chronologically, of Freire, with respect to AI highlights in a very special way the need to actively involve the community in the solution of educational problems. When we talk about reading, this implies that it is necessary to take into account that it is a process that is enriched by the active participation of local actors, whether teachers or students, indigenous leaders or parents, in decision-making. In other words, this paper will address an AI process whose objective was to improve reading comprehension based on the vindication of the legends of the Zenú people. The motivation behind this choice is based, in the first place, on the need to build a pedagogy appropriate to the sociolinguistic specificities of the region. Secondly and no less important, indigenous identity will end up being made invisible or underestimated, so it will seek not only to rescue it but also to reinforce it. On many occasions, several authors throughout history have pointed out that intercultural education, far from disintegrating, promotes coexistence and mutual respect to the extent that diversity is conceived as a fundamental element of citizenship education.

This proposal proposes oral tradition as an enhancer of the development of reading and writing skills in fifth grade students and the following hypothesis is assumed: Immersing children in the plot of a "legend" of their environment will not only awaken their interest in reading, but will also enhance their inferential and critical analytical capacity. allowing them to articulate the ideas presented in the legend with their reality. Therefore, beyond the reading moment, the activities developed from the text – such as questionnaires, debates, written productions and dramatizations of episodes – will seek to promote reflection and autonomy in children, who will be transformed from mere receivers to builders of meaning Díaz Barriga, A, 2002, p.30. On the other hand, the presence of a Zenú leader and adults from the community will enable the school's contact with the extracurricular world, incorporating orality and direct interaction with traditional sources that will enrich the learning process. In summary, this proposal integrates the local culture into the classroom and identifies the Zenú oral tradition as something more than a resource: it is an essential element that is part of the training process. From the construction of dialogue with reading theories and participatory methodologies of action research, it is expected to obtain concrete evidence of the effectiveness of this proposal in increasing reading skills, in addition to a greater appropriation of active cultural identity by children. Finally, this experience lays the foundations for the formulation of an educational legacy that responds to a social need for inclusion, respect for diversity and comprehensive education.

3. Methodology

3.1. Approach and type of research

The study was limited to **Action-Research**, combining qualitative and quantitative resources in a cyclical process of diagnosis, planning, action and joint reflection. This design facilitated direct intervention in the classroom, incorporating the perspective of the local community to contextualize the pedagogical strategy.

3.2. Context and participants

The research was carried out in a rural educational institution located in a region of Córdoba (Colombia). We worked with a group of 27 fifth-grade students (16 girls and 11 boys), aged between 9 and 11 years. In addition, two teachers participated and local leaders were accompanied by inputs on the Zenú oral tradition.

3.3. Design of the intervention

The Action Research cycle was structured in four main stages:

1. **Diagnosis:**

- Application of a reading comprehension test, adapted from ICFES guidelines and proposals by Lazzarato (1999).
- Classroom observations to identify reading habits, and surveys to assess knowledge of Zenú legends.

2. **Planning:**

- Selection of five legends representative of the Zenú tradition and preparation of reading guides with activities focused on the literal, inferential and critical levels.
- Coordination with community leaders and adults to narrate the oral legends.
- Training of teachers in didactic strategies that integrate reading, orality and cultural reflection.

3. **Action (Implementation):**

- Development of weekly workshops for reading and discussing legends, alternating oral storytelling with individual or group reading.
- Recreational and written production activities (summaries, quizzes, dramatizations) aimed at deepening reading comprehension.

4. **Evaluation and reflection:**

- Application of a final reading comprehension test with characteristics similar to the diagnostic test.
- Focus group meetings with teachers and students to systematize progress and difficulties.
- Adjustment of strategies, thinking about the continuity of the experience in the long term.

4. Results

4.1. Initial diagnosis

The reading comprehension test revealed that 65% of the students were in "very low" or "low" levels. Most showed deficiencies in the inferential stage, with 70% of incorrect answers in questions that required deductions. Surveys and discussion groups highlighted the lack of familiarity with indigenous stories from the environment and little enthusiasm in reading practices.

4.2. Implementation of the strategy (Action)

For eight weeks, the reading and narration of Zenú legends was carried out, followed by activities designed for each level of comprehension:

1. **Literal Dimension:**

- Identification of characters, scenarios and temporal sequences.

- Use of concept maps and fact-checking questions.

2. **Inferential Dimension:**

- Group discussions where students formulated hypotheses about the motivations of the characters or the relationship between events.
- Prediction exercises and connection with real-life situations.

3. **Critical Dimension:**

- Debate on the validity of the messages implicit in legends and their significance for today's culture.
- Comparison with other well-known stories, encouraging the reasoned expression of points of view.

Class observations showed increasing student participation and motivation. In addition, the presence of adults from the community telling the oral stories provided a cultural and affective value that aroused curiosity and respect for the stories. Textual productions showed an increase in the clarity of ideas and in the ability to link information.

4.3. **Final results**

At the end of the intervention, a reading comprehension test was applied with a format similar to that of the initial diagnosis:

- **Quantitative improvements:**

- 70% of students achieved "basic" or "high" levels, with an emphasis on greater mastery of inferential reading (25% increase in inferential questions answered correctly).
- The percentage of those who were at "very low" or "low" levels was reduced to 10%.

- **Qualitative advances:**

- In focus groups, children expressed a more positive outlook on reading, relating it to the fun and self-knowledge of their region.
- Several written productions (recreations, commentaries) reflected the appropriation of values and elements of the Zenú tradition (care for nature, communal solidarity).
- The faculty noted greater fluency in oral participation and willingness to explore longer or more complex readings.

4.4. **Reflection and adjustments**

Consistent with the Action-Research, a final session was held with teachers and local leaders to reflect on the process:

1. The strategy of linking stories from the oral tradition to the reading exercise was key to motivating students and giving a cultural meaning to the act of reading.
2. The collaborative work between teachers and the community fostered the relevance of the materials, as a balance was achieved between the curriculum and indigenous identity.
3. The continuity of the intervention was proposed, expanding the proposal to other grades and incorporating new narrative forms (stories from other regions, oral interviews) to continue strengthening reading comprehension and the recognition of cultural diversity.

Discussion of the results

Consequently, the results obtained have shown that the incorporation of the legends of the Zenú people in the reading teaching process increased motivation, improved reading comprehension and allowed students to describe inferences and critical readings. All the information collected throughout the final evaluation reinforces the thesis of the importance of bringing students closer to social and educational situations, bringing them closer to cultural references similar to the student. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed by Van Dijk and Kintsch in 1983 was validated, reading makes sense when the reader can establish relationships with something previously learned, and this exercise ceases to be purely formal to become an important and meaningful activity. On the other hand, sociocultural theory indicates that the oral modality was of great importance, since offering the opportunity to express these legends by people from the community allowed students to exercise greater cognitive processes, opening themselves more naturally to inference and critical reading. According to Halliday, language contributes to the formation of meanings, and the demonstration concludes that when children relate the Zenú legend to the conversation in the classroom, they can acquire interpretive skills beyond literal information. This result is also in accordance with the oral tradition arguments put forward by Ong in 1987 and Talita in 2011, which not only convey cultural information, but also engage listeners in meaning-making.

Similarly, there was a relationship between motivation and cultural relevance due to the way in which students approached reading. By seeing themselves reflected in the stories, the students not only increased their desire to read, but there was also a greater identification and impact. This situation also coincides with our view of contextualized education, which argues the need to adjust the content to the knowledge of the environment and the interest of the students. Thus, culture was not an "ornament" but a central element in the intrinsic motivation to read and understand. On the other hand, Fals Borda's Research-Action approach shows promise in relation to the involvement of community and educational leaders and students in the community. Since the Zenú stories operated as a connection between oral and social tradition, cognitive reading and collective learning. Another issue to be highlighted was the greater willingness to debate and generate hypotheses and ideas detected through the varied facility to raise and argue during the activities. On the other hand, it would lead to an incipient critical reading. In this regard, Freire also specifies that reading implies asking and interpreting reality. Likewise, the educational community could include this cultural richness and strengthen critical reading and promote indigenous respect in all forms. In this regard, it is once again argued that reading does not only imply a reading machine but a space for the cultural construction of meaning and current criticisms.

Finally, the comparison of the initial and final results suggests that the strategy applied was not exclusively aimed at overcoming specific deficiencies, but at a genuine stimulus for the transformation of culture. In fact, the opportunity to work with Zenú legends as a unique pedagogical resource opened new dimensions of interaction, strengthened the love of reading and, above all, created an environment in which orality, writing and local identity converge in an integrating act. In this sense, the importance of addressing reading as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon was confirmed, which requires the combination of coherent theoretical frameworks and pedagogical practices that are sensitive and relevant to the needs and cultural richness of students. In fact, this suggests that the strategy presented would be equally relevant in other contexts, supporting the assumption that the intersection of culture and academics is a valuable and effective way to harness students' potential.

Conclusions

In this sense, the findings of the research, whose articulating axis were the legends of the Zenú people, point out that not only were there very substantial improvements in inferential and critical comprehension —the final reading reported averages higher than the first result, both from individual and group tests—, but also that the links between the children and their sociocultural dynamics were strengthened. By making the oral tradition visible in the classroom, the learning environment dignified orality, and through the active interaction of students and the community,

reading gained a sense of co-responsibility. Fundamental aspects to empower reading, and a comprehensive vision of education, which moves away from a simple consumption activity. Not only should the contents be the insulating vehicle of the curriculum, but also a bridge from the environment to concrete experience and as a mediator of meanings. Likewise, the Research-Action modality was constituted as a catalyst, which allowed teachers, local leaders and families to be part of a shared project, and to give relevance to relevant activities, with the cultural elements of the environment – in this case, the Zenú narratives – being a factor of academic appropriation. Beyond the cultural richness that rural areas entail, they can be a focus to energize educational processes and awaken the identities and sense of belonging of students. And what conclusions do they draw from this panorama? That reading comprehension, in rural dynamics, has to be conceived as a multidimensional phenomenon. Integrating the oral tradition, as a pedagogical practice, is a curricular renewal that harmonizes the curricula. The study confirmed the relevance of sociocultural theories of reading, since the appropriation of reading and critical comprehension were reflected in the familiarity of the text by the children. It was an epistemological contribution to contemplate best practices for rural students. Likewise, the conclusions of the fieldwork showed that the Research-Action modality was an effective method to escape from school routines. Finally, the elevation in levels of comprehension, and the high participation in discussions and written productions, demonstrated that the use of narratives such as the Zenú was a cultural and academic enabler. Therefore, new possibilities of application are opened in other rural and urban contexts, where one's own oral stories are a source of power and contribute to learning, and to promote mobilizations. For these reasons, the experience being situated by its participants, sheds light on other people's stories or narratives that allow us to rethink education as a situated space and reading beyond school consummation, but as a tool of formative and mobilizing power.

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