

Eleventh-grade students' Struggle with Reading Comprehension activities in the EFL

Classroom: A Phenomenological Study

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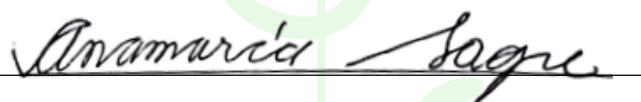
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Abstract

Reading is one of the most important skills, but some students have difficulties comprehending written texts, which affects their overall language skills and critical thinking ability. This study aims to explore the lived experiences of 11th-grade students who have had difficulties with reading comprehension activities in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. Through a phenomenological approach, this study aims to answer the following questions: What are the lived experiences of 11th-grade students who struggle with reading comprehension activities in the EFL classroom? Research data resources were collected through in-depth interviews. The expected outcome of this study is to describe the aspects that provide life to the phenomenon faced by these students in terms of reading comprehension, and going deeper may also reveal the impact of these difficulties on students' general language skills and critical thinking.

Keywords: Reading, Reading comprehension, Students who struggle with reading

Resumen

La lectura es una de las destrezas más importantes, pero algunos estudiantes tienen dificultades para comprender textos escritos, lo que afecta a sus destrezas lingüísticas generales y a su capacidad de pensamiento crítico. Este estudio pretende explorar las experiencias vividas por estudiantes de 11° curso que han tenido dificultades con las actividades de comprensión lectora en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). A través de un enfoque fenomenológico, este estudio pretende responder a las siguientes preguntas: ¿Cuáles son las experiencias vividas por los estudiantes de 11° grado que tienen dificultades con las actividades de comprensión lectora en el aula de EFL? Los recursos de datos de la investigación se recogieron mediante entrevistas en profundidad. El resultado que se espera de este estudio es describir los aspectos que dan vida al fenómeno al que se enfrentan estos estudiantes en términos de comprensión lectora, y profundizar en ellos también puede revelar el impacto de estas dificultades en las habilidades lingüísticas generales y el pensamiento crítico de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: Lectura, Comprensión lectora, Estudiantes con dificultades para leer

Introduction

As globalization continues to bring people from different cultures and languages together, the ability to communicate in a foreign language has become increasingly important. Nowadays, our Colombian society, through education, has the acquisition of a foreign language (FL) as one of its objectives; therefore, working on improving all the competencies is indispensable.

The four basic English Competencies (writing, listening, speaking, and reading) are crucial to FL teaching and learning. From the above skills, reading constitutes one of the most essential skills through which students learn expressions, critical thinking, and meet the world. “Reading is the process of constructing meaning from written texts. It is a complex skill requiring the coordination of a number of interrelated sources of information” (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 18). It is complex since a mental process is necessary to develop the skill, which is impossible to gain without senses (sight and touch), and it requires a long time to learn. It is also complex due to code-meaning assimilation between symbols (vowels and consonants; numbers, punctuation marks, etc.) and semantics.

It is thought that when learning a new language, speaking is an essential skill that must be developed. However, according to Septia (2022), reading ability is important for students because it allows them to obtain data, expand their knowledge, and broaden their thinking by reading any text. Additionally, Yurko and Protsenko (2020) suggested that reading in English is a handy skill for life and one of the fastest ways to learn and remember a language. The ability to read effectively is an essential skill for personal and professional success; therefore, reading in English is a precious asset in today’s globalized world. It is also known that in the most significant percentage of situations, the first contact with foreigners is through digital

communication, which means that reading is indispensable to developing understanding between people in these communicative spaces.

Even though some phenomenological studies have explored different learners' experiences when learning a FL, proficiency maintenance (Ostovar-Namaghi & Rahmanian, 2018), listening development (Burbano et al., 2019; Chang & Zhang, 2021), and reading strategy (Scott, 2011; Tercanlioglu & Demiröz, 2015), few have focused on reading comprehension. The study by Salim (2013) suggests that informing students about language learning strategies in reading comprehension and using appropriate strategies can improve learners' reading comprehension achievement. However, because this study was conducted with a specific group of learners in a specific context and only examined the use of language learning strategies in English reading comprehension among these learners, the study's findings were limited to that context. Therefore, he suggests that future research should focus on other contexts, such as learners learning different languages or in different educational systems. In our research, we reiterate and are aware that very few phenomenological studies based on reading comprehension have been conducted. Other studies focus on working on and solving reading problems but not on how it is perceived by the person or group suffering from reading comprehension deficiencies. At Universidad de Córdoba, many studies have investigated L2 reading comprehension, to our knowledge; however, no study at Universidad de Cordoba has researched students' experiences of struggle when they have to read in a language that is not their own.

It is known that the Four basic English Competencies represent an essential feature in the students' learning process because they significantly support their learning experience. However, in a Colombian public school, some 11th-grade students show severe complications in text comprehension when developing reading activities; these students present a considerable lack of

reading comprehension, impacting their text comprehension, and understanding skills. During some observations we performed, we could obtain information about the reading state of the students. When the teacher was conducting reading activities with the students, we could notice that some of them were confused. Therefore, they started interrupting the teacher and asking him about things they did not know when reading. Thus, confirming that there are severe problems with reading activities. These students needed help understanding simple sentences in the form of short text, so some students seemed lost and confused. Based on our analysis and extra information gained from a discussion with the teacher, it is evident that certain students in the course revealed deficiencies in their comprehension of written texts.

Consequently, this research aims to describe the lived experiences of students who struggle with reading comprehension activities in the EFL classroom. The study sought to expose these students' emotions, thoughts, and perceptions when reading and comprehending texts in an FL and any challenges they face related to language barriers, cultural differences, or other factors that may affect their understanding. Through a phenomenological study, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of struggling readers in FL. Thus, with this study, we can answer the following question: What are the lived experiences of 11th-grade students who struggle with reading comprehension activities in the EFL classroom? It helped us as researchers recognize the different causes that originate the deficiencies presented in students in reading and not letting them properly comprehend meanings in texts.

The subsequent paragraph is intended to mention the pertinence of the present study. It is significant since we seek to understand the reasons that cause students' low reading comprehension; this study will help other teachers, and us understand the different students' lived experiences present when acquiring reading ability in that specific context. Besides that, it

can be helpful for them to create or develop strategies focusing on the information revealed so that these new strategies can be more effective and assertive in teaching a FL. Even with the information obtained in this study, researchers can use the results to further research on the subject.

During the incoming chapters, we will work on the theoretical framework of this study; in this specific chapter, the conceptual framework and literature review will be tackled.

Theoretical framework

This chapter has two major sections. The conceptual framework is the first section, defining the study's concepts. A review of earlier research on subjects relevant to the current study is included in the second section, the literature review.

Conceptual Framework

This part of the study discusses the theories of the principal concepts. The concepts we are clarifying are reading and reading comprehension.

Reading is a complex cognitive process that requires integrating visual, auditory, and semantic information (Price & Mechelli, 2005). Reading entails converting visual codes into sounds, allowing us to comprehend a word's meaning. This process requires recognizing the letters or symbols, using knowledge of the sounds that those letters represent to pronounce the word, and then comprehending its meaning. Reading implies more than just recognizing letters; it also implies converting these symbols into meaningful sounds and linking them to their corresponding meanings. According to Cline et al. (2006), reading requires a combination of skills, knowledge, and strategies on the reader's part. Therefore, reading requires comprehending and interpreting written texts using various strategies and knowledge appropriate for the reader's intended purpose. A reader must be able to comprehend and interpret written texts by applying

various strategies that help them understand the information. In that sense, the reader's role in this process is crucial to building meaning from texts. For that reason, a reader should possess sufficient prior knowledge, such as a known rich vocabulary that lets them understand what is read.

Reading can be a tool for obtaining and storing information as new knowledge through decoding. According to Tinker & McCullough (1962), reading assumes a dual functionality; on the one hand, it serves as a manner of getting meanings from the read information. On the other hand, it implies creating new meanings from the reading but only with the reader's preceding knowledge. This means it does not matter if the exact text is given to ten readers; by the end, there will be ten different creations of meaning because each reader has a different background knowledge. Both reading functions are significant for language learning; the ability to extract meaning from text is critical for developing reading comprehension skills, which are required for academic and professional success.

Furthermore, the active process of creating new meanings from the text aids in developing critical thinking skills, essential for language and lifelong learning. In this regard, Jenkinson (1973) states that reading must always be present in acquiring the language. This is valid because of the authenticity that reading provides to readers when building new meanings and while thinking critically. Reading exposes students to the written word to develop vocabulary, comprehension, and grammatical knowledge. Reading allows learners to understand the language's structure and rhythm better, which is necessary for achieving fluency. Although reading is an important skill, too many students of all ages struggle to become proficient readers (Rasinski, 2017), which interferes with FL acquisition. Consequently, exploring a similar reading

concept with a different meaning is necessary. It implies more than understanding the writing but also the inferred information necessary to get a distinct point of view.

Reading comprehension is a process that modifies the knowledge the reader possesses since it persuades him/her to interpret and analyze the content he/she reads to understand it meaningfully (Sari et al., 2020). Reading comprehension reforms the reader's prior knowledge by creating a new product of information about what has already been read. The importance of this lies in how helpful it is to the reader's understanding to possess the ability to restructure what has already been learned with what is to be learned by reading different contents. Following Ahmadi (2013), reading comprehension aims to understand the real meaning of a text based on prior knowledge about linguistics, contexts, and culture. It works by synchronizing what is known with the new to be learned to consolidate a new block of information. Therefore, as the reader interacts with the text, they use their linguistic knowledge to decode the multiple-category words, their world knowledge to grasp the context in which the text was written, and their knowledge about a specific topic to understand the text's content. It means that in order to obtain the ability of reading comprehension, the reader must possess considerable prior knowledge and a sufficient understanding of contextual and cultural aspects to achieve a productive immersion when reading any text because it also helps readers build a more profound knowledge of what they read by promoting active interaction with the text and boosting critical thinking.

Understanding what one reads is a fundamental competence and a gateway to a safer, more productive, and fulfilling existence. The reader must interact and engage with the text for understanding to work (Wulandari et al., 2014). Developing and enhancing one's comprehension abilities is critical for personal and professional development. It allows people to navigate difficult situations and make educated decisions based on solid reasoning and understanding. To

properly engage with and absorb the content, the reader must interact with it and go deeply into it. Active participation with the text not only aids comprehension but also helps the reader retain and apply what they have learned. Reading comprehension is a mutual process where a reader extracts and builds meaning from something written (Snow, 2002). In agreement with Snow (2002), reading comprehension involves three elements to understand a text: the reader, the text, and the activity. The reader provides the cognitive process capabilities such as inference, memory, attention, and critical analytics. Motivation is another capability in the form of attitude, interest in reading, knowledge in linguistics, vocabulary, and experiences in the form of prior knowledge. While the text provides different meanings that it may have, like the type of text, such as literature, history, arguments, and so forth.

Moreover, how the text is written to process the information is another capability students must develop. Finally, the activity engages the reader by challenging them to develop good reading to solve some questions that can be answered by decoding and comprehending the text. In conclusion, reading comprehension consists of simultaneous processes that lead the reader to compile numerous details to consider when performing a reading, such as prior knowledge of linguistics items, the context of the reading, and its cultural aspects.

Literature review

Some phenomenological studies have explored different learners' experiences when learning a FL. For example, they have investigated proficiency maintenance (Ostovar-Namaghi & Rahmanian, 2018), listening development (Burbano et al., 2019; Chang & Zhang, 2021), and reading strategy (Scott, 2011; Tercanlioglu & Demiröz, 2015). Although some have been focused on reading comprehension (Salim, 2013), only a handful have explored the lived experiences of students who struggle with reading. In this sense, Gilroy (2013) aimed to describe

the experiences of students who struggle with reading. It attempted to understand students' perspectives to give teachers strategies that can be useful for those students. The study was conducted in a Pennsylvania middle school; the data came from interviews with 6 participants selected for this study. This study concluded that students who had problems with reading know these issues but seek and appreciate opportunities to improve their weaknesses.

Previously, Camargo and Orbegozo (2010) investigated the association between reading comprehension of English as a foreign language and life experiences while employing the Sight Word Strategy. This study included fifth graders from a public school in Bogotá. Tape recordings, field notes, archive data, and students' perspectives were used to collect data. Analysis revealed that sharing life experiences and interacting produced understanding and meaning formation in each Sight Word approach stage. Further research into a more comprehensive definition of reading comprehension and life experiences correlation as an appropriate objective for English as a foreign language was suggested by the study.

Moreover, Reece (2017) investigated the reading attitudes and decision-making abilities of first-year college students enrolled in remedial language arts classes. This phenomenological case study collected data on eleven first-year college students enrolling in developmental language arts classes in northeast Georgia using a questionnaire, direct observation, and interviews. The data analysis revealed patterns prevalent across several cases, including a lack of parental participation, poor K-12 learning experiences, misunderstanding of the term "good reader," a sense of loss or lack of direction, apathy in reading, and reading as a punishment. Reece suggested that by evaluating these individuals' reading attitudes and experiences, parents and educators can better identify the best strategy to address reading motivation and decision-making issues and assist future students in becoming better readers and better learners.

In another study, Castaño (2019) investigated the benefits and obstacles a group of undergraduate students encountered while introducing a critical reading unit inside a reading comprehension course at a public university in Medellín, Colombia. The research question was: What are the gains and challenges experienced by undergraduate students during implementing a critical reading unit? An intrinsic case study was conducted, and data sources such as video recordings of all lessons, samples of students' work, and students' reflections were collected and analyzed deductively and inductively. According to the findings of this investigation, students encountered specific benefits and obstacles during the critical reading unit, this critical reading unit helped students to understand the four principles of critical reading (identify author's position and how this influences the reader; think about texts from multiple perspectives; uncover hidden messages in texts; identify silenced and marginalized voices in texts), and also helped them to understand the role of language in positionality, some obstacles were lack of grammatical knowledge and cultural background. Finally, the study has consequences for both teaching and research. The former comprises, among other things, the necessity to provide pupils with appropriate scaffolding to carry out the activities. The latter includes determining how this system would perform in other contexts and with students exposed to different materials.

Lastly, Tovar and Guerrero (2021) aimed to understand how English instructors describe their perceptions about applying and developing an interactive approach to reading in the EFL classroom and to design three interactive reading units for high- intermediate learners. Through interviews, the phenomenon studied concerned the reading process in the EFL undergraduate context, specifically understanding EFL faculty members' perceptions of their reading practices. It took place in a public university in southern Colombia, with 14 full-time members faculty and five part-time. The knowledge orientation results revealed that most participants wanted to

ensure the students understood the text's tenets. It also revealed that although some of the participants needed to contain more information about how and what actions to take in the stages used in the interactive reading, namely, pre-reading, during-reading, and after-reading, they did have some implicit ideas of how to do this.

These studies are meaningful for our research because they performed an immersion into the reading comprehension field, providing significant outcomes. Thanks to them, it is possible to perceive how the students' lived experiences, opinions, skills, and perceptions are helpful tools to develop new teaching strategies that combat those deficiencies in reading comprehension. However, these studies did not focus on exploring the lived experiences of participants in the reading comprehension aspect. To this end, our study explored the lived experiences of students who struggle with reading comprehension in a foreign language.

Methodology

The main purpose of this research is to describe the lived experiences of three 11th-grade students in a public school in Monteria who struggle with reading comprehension in FL activities. In the present chapter, a clear definition of the type of the study sets the methodological framework, suitable data analysis and the conclusions interpretation, while the context enriches the research and position it in a specific field. The participants provide the source of information to analyze and building the findings, and data collection supports the data collected to compose the structure of research outcomes.

Type of the study

In this study we used a qualitative design. Van Maanen (1979) states that qualitative research "is an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come with terms with the meaning, not the frequency

of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (p. 520). Humans are social beings; we behave in different ways and have different conceptions of the world or things; even if we are referring to something in particular, there will be something different in each person’s mind. For that reason, qualitative research explores each self-experience to obtain a new subjective viewpoint on what is being studied and how that perception about something impacts the individual life. Therefore, our research possesses a qualitative design due to our interest in understanding why this phenomenon is present in the student’s educational process. Of course, this movement cannot be presented by information based on numerical data but on the student’s own experiences.

In this line, as Pathak et al. (2013) state, “Qualitative research is used to understand people’s beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions, and it generates non-numerical data” (p.1). Qualitative research provides a deeper understanding of people’s emotions and thoughts. This method requires collecting and analyzing non-numerical data such as words, pictures, and observations. Qualitative studies are adequate when studying complex phenomena like emotions, social interactions, and cultural or educational practices. Qualitative research enables researchers to gain deep and comprehensive insights into people’s actions, feelings, and thoughts in different settings.

From the variety of qualitative research designs, our study used phenomenology to understand the lived experiences of 11th grader students who struggle with reading comprehension when developing FL activities. The purpose of phenomenological studies is to explore lived experiences and their importance. “Lived experience is a private, subjective phenomenon that, in and of itself, in its primary and unitary form, cannot be described or analyzed from the outside” (Tappan, 1997, p. 647). Lived experiences are intrinsic to a person,

so understanding and describing them must be focused on the person; otherwise, it would be mere speculation to explain the phenomena that occur. “Lived experience responds not only to people’s experiences but also to how people live through and respond to those experiences. The work on lived experience focuses on everyday life occurrences and self-awareness” (Given, 2008, p. 490). Given refers to a depiction of a person’s experiences and decisions, as well as the knowledge gained from them; that is to say, this knowledge gained from the experiences has been meaningful for each person.

According to Van Manen (1997), “lived experience can never be grasped in its immediate manifestation but only reflectively as a past presence” (p. 36). For Manen, lived experiences are understood in retrospect, which makes sense since it is often impossible to determine the relevance of a decision or a value judgment in daily life. However, even if it is an immediate or long-term consequence, its relevance cannot be determined since, as this author says, it involves a lifetime. People are constantly making decisions that influence their lives and future actions, so in retrospect, it is impossible to determine the full significance of a lived experience. This study considers the relationship between lived experiences and students struggling to comprehend reading. According to the lived experience, we can visualize the students’ reading comprehension and thus be able to determine and expose reasons for the current condition of this ability.

Among the different approaches that exist in phenomenology, we applied a transcendental phenomenology (TPh) mainly attributed to the work of Husserl; it is a philosophical method applied in qualitative research that aims to delve into the nature of human experience (Moustakas, 1994). As we are working on the lived experiences of the participants, TPh become the best option to use to explore those participants’ memories related to human

experience. The authentic TPh lies in the cancellation of the subjective considerations that the researchers may possess about the phenomena (epoche), thus allowing the purest investigation of the phenomena. This protocol allows the phenomena to be presented and to manifest their meaning with respect to their context (Moustakas, 1994). In other words, we as researchers must not intervene on the participants responses due to the core principle of TPh is do not interfere in the process to maintain a pure essence of the lived experiences.

Context and participants

This research was developed at a public institution in the northern part of Monteria, Colombia. Most of the students are in low strata; they belong to low-income families. The school has three headquarters. Grades are available from primary to the 11th secondary. This school has a population of 1,658 students and 74 teachers, of whom 5 are English teachers, four are directors, three are guidance counselors, and 13 are administrative staff members. This institution has an interesting detail; it has organized blocks where students move to them to receive classes. The main campus has classrooms, laboratories, and computer rooms; they have enough chairs, fans, board, and a video projector, industrial workshops, a library, a school store, a cafeteria, sports facilities, recreational areas for students, and even a farm. All the classrooms are suitable for performing the teaching-learning process.

The participants who were selected to be part of our study as interviewees were three; participant 1, a female who is eighteen years old; Participant 2, a female who is 16 years old; Participant 3, a male who is eighteen years old. They were selected by some observations we performed at the classroom and considering suggestions of the English teacher who was in charge of that group.

Data Collection Techniques

This section discusses the methods used to collect data for this study. In-depth interviews were the strategy we used to answer the research question: What are the lived experiences of 11th-grade students who struggle with reading comprehension activities in the EFL classroom?

Mears (2012, p.170) states, “In-depth interviews are purposeful interactions in which an investigator attempts to learn what another person knows about a topic, to discover and record what that person has experienced.” In-depth interviews are purposeful interactions where investigators aim to gain comprehensive knowledge and understanding by exploring the interviewee’s experiences, thoughts, feelings, and the significance they attribute to them. These interviews provide valuable insights by delving into what individuals know, their personal experiences, and the meaning they derive from them.

This study used the in-depth interview method to collect data with three 11th graders who struggle with reading comprehension activities at a public school in Monteria, Córdoba. To build the questionnaire of the interview questions we relied on Seidman's 3 interview series, focused on; Life History; Details of Experience; and Reflection on the Meaning (Seidman, 2006). This method consists of three moments in the interview where each one focus on a different topic. For example, interview one; focused on life history. In this moment, we as researchers, aimed to give context to the lived experiences of the participants by asking them about their lived experiences with respect to the topic studied. Then, interview 2: focused on: the details of the experience. In this part, the details of what the participants provide were fundamental since we seek to obtain details of the lived experience with respect to the topic studied. Finally, the interview three; focused on: reflection of the meaning. In this part we asked the participants to reflect on their answers to work on their meaning of the experiences.

In the following table, some questions we asked for the interviews organized in their 3 movements based on Seidman method:

Table 1

Sample questions from the in-depth interviews.

Interview one: Focused on: Life history.	Interview two: Focused on: Details of experience.	Interview three: Focused on: Reflection of the meaning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How was your experience reading for the first time in English? - Have you read anything in English that is not related to the English subject? - How did you feel about taking the English part in the ICFES tests? - How was the experience of having to understand texts in English in the ICFES? - How did you feel when you finished answering the English questions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe what your emotions are like when you try to understand a text in English, what happens at that moment? - Is there any type of reading comprehension activity in which you feel it is very difficult for you? - Have you noticed any differences in the reading comprehension activities, which ones are difficult or easy for you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Based on what you have said about your experience and reading comprehension, how do you see the importance of reading comprehension in your academic life? - What would be your strategies to improve your reading comprehension skills in a foreign language?

	- What do you do when you don't understand a part of the text in English?	
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Note: the questions were asked in Spanish when developing the interviews with the participants.

Table 2

Sample questions from the in-depth interviews translated into Spanish.

Entrevista uno: Centrada en: Historia de vida.	Entrevista dos: Centrada en: Detalles de la experiencia.	Entrevista tres: Centrada en: Reflexión
- ¿Cómo ha sido tu experiencia leyendo por primera vez en inglés? - ¿Has leído algo en inglés que no esté relacionado con la asignatura de inglés? - ¿Cómo te sentiste al realizar la parte de inglés en las pruebas del ICFES? - ¿Cómo fue la experiencia de tener que entender textos en inglés en el ICFES?	- Describe cómo son tus emociones cuando intentas comprender un texto en inglés, ¿qué ocurre en ese momento? - ¿Hay algún tipo de actividad de comprensión lectora en la que sientas que te resulta muy difícil? - ¿Has notado alguna diferencia en las actividades de comprensión lectora,	- Basándote en lo que has dicho sobre tu experiencia y la comprensión lectora, ¿cómo ves la importancia de la comprensión lectora en tu vida académica? - ¿Cuáles serían tus estrategias para mejorar tu capacidad de comprensión lectora en una lengua extranjera?

- ¿Cómo te sentiste cuando terminaste de responder a las preguntas en inglés?	cuáles te resultan difíciles o fáciles? - ¿Qué haces cuando no entiendes una parte del texto en inglés?	
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These in-depth interviews were developed according to the following path. Firstly, we chose three students who have shown notable deficiencies in reading comprehension activities. The students were the focus of our research due to the significance of their experiences. Second, we organized three in-depth interviews where we asked the students about their reading comprehension experiences in the English course to obtain information about their perspective on that competency. Third, when the first in-depth interview was done, we analyzed the data collected and determined how to conduct the second and third to cover more details by considering new questions to get the most resounding possible results. Finally, we compiled all the gathered data to start analyzing. Since we sought the vast majority of information about the students' experience to discover important reasons for the problem, in-depth interviews played a crucial role when providing information from the focus of the research, the students.

Data analysis

The data we analyzed comes from in-depth interviews. This elicitation procedure provided data regarding eleventh graders' perceptions about their reading; this data helped us answer our research question: What are the lived experiences of 11th-grade students who struggle with reading comprehension in FL activities?

The method that used to analyze the data is Giorgi's method. According to Koivisto (2002) "Giorgi's method of analysis aims to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon as

experienced by a human through identifying essential themes” (p. 68). Giorgi’s method is a method of analysis that focuses on comprehending the meaning of a phenomenon. A systematic analysis is conducted to find key themes after gathering complete descriptions of participants’ experiences through interviews or other qualitative techniques. These themes encapsulate the phenomenon’s essence and provide insight into the participants’ ideas, feelings, and actions. To execute a proper analysis of the data, we reviewed the paper by Giorgi (2012) and follow the next steps:

- First reading whole descriptions in order to get sense of the whole.
- Identifying Meaning Units
- The psychological value of what the subject said is made explicit (Re-Grouping Meaning Units in Clusters and Transformation of the Meaning Units into Descriptive Expressions)
- Expressions are review; an essential structure of the experience is written.
- The essential structure is used to clarify and interpret the raw data.

Before proceeding to the analysis, we as researchers must assume the attitude of putting aside all our assumptions and perspectives on the phenomenon. Therefore, it is mandatory to focus on consciousness as such, and not on human consciousness. So, it means that we must analyze strictly the information given by participants without adding personal point of views on it. Once this attitude was stablished, we moved to the following steps.

After collecting the data, we read it several times to familiarize ourselves with the information and thoroughly comprehend all the data gained. By immersing ourselves in the data, we sought to acquire complete knowledge of the participants’ reading comprehension struggles. After we understood the data, the next step is identifying meaningful units within the transcripts.

A meaning unit is any word, sentence, or paragraph that conveys a particular aspect of the participants' experiences with reading comprehension struggles. Each meaning unit should reflect a distinct and meaningful aspect of the participants' experiences.

Following the identification of meaning units, the next step was to organize them into clusters based on similarities and common themes. These clusters aim to capture the most essential characteristics and dimensions of the participants' experiences. We could identify patterns and repeating themes in the data set by grouping the meaning units into clusters. Once the clusters had been established, the meaning units within each cluster were transformed into descriptive statements. Descriptive statements are brief and relevant descriptions of each cluster. These expressions highlighted the participant's essential experiences with reading comprehension.

We collected each cluster's descriptive expressions and analyzed their relationships. We examined the data's broad themes, relationships, and consequences. Finally, we synthesized and integrated the results. By synthesizing and integrating the findings, we aimed to provide a thorough knowledge of the lived experience of the student who struggle with reading comprehension.

Findings

In the present chapter, we will present the outcomes and analysis related to the participants' experience regarding their struggle with reading comprehension activities in the EFL classroom in a public school in Monteria. The main phenomenon of this study is reading comprehension, an essential skill that every 11th-grade student should develop. This skill will be used the most during the English section in the ICFES (an exam that every 11th grader must take). Therefore, this research aimed to describe the lived experience of students who struggle

with reading comprehension activities. Our research question was: What are the lived experiences of 11th-grader students who struggle with reading comprehension activities in the EFL classroom? We proceeded to interview three 11th-grade participants who struggled with reading comprehension activities, and then a data analysis procedure was applied using Giorgi's method (Giorgi, 2012).

These participants' experiences related to their struggle with reading comprehension activities in the EFL classroom are based on several categories, which provide meaningful first-hand information with an undoubted degree of relevance in our study.

An experience of pessimism and fear.

Participants consistently express emotions of fear, nervousness, and a sense of danger associated with the challenges of reading and comprehending texts in English. This attitude is manifested in the participants' experiences while performing reading comprehension activities, resulting in the germination of unfavorable thoughts that create an atmosphere of doubt and negativity.

Negative emotions experienced by participants reach a point where they openly acknowledge the dominance of pessimistic thoughts that may compromise their cognitive functions. As an example, we can see from participant 2 and 3 who were asked about how they felt when facing reading comprehension texts, participant 2 expressed: "Nerviosa. Me veía como si fuera a equivocar. No la entendía muy bien," and participant 3: "Estaba asustado porque era un tema nuevo, una palabra nueva, significado nuevo." These negative emotions are closely linked to pessimistic attitudes, in which individuals commonly doubt their abilities and anticipate failure. They felt negative from the beginning which, which unbalances their positive emotions, thus causing fear and pessimism that may alter their reading comprehension abilities in English.

This experience may have been so intense that participants openly manifested that negative thoughts were taking over their minds.

The experience of reading as imbued with fear and negative thoughts strongly manifests in the participants' experience, who express fear of making mistakes and an anticipatory belief in poor performance. As expressed by participants who were asked about how they felt when reading and explaining what they understood about the text, we have examples from participant 1: "Con miedo, en peligro. Siento que voy a decir todo eso mal" and participant 2: "Tenía miedo. Porque pensaba que me iba mal. Tenía un pensamiento súper negativo." These examples provide insight into the participants' emotional challenges, where fear and pessimistic expectations hinder the development of reading activities and diminish their confidence in these. This fear of making mistakes burdens reading comprehension activities and approaching them with a pessimistic attitude can directly impact their overall perception of these activities.

Participants express a feeling of fear when facing readings on new topics; they believe that their reading would be meaningless or that they would not understand much of the information. As an example from the collected data, we have from Participant 1: "Pero si no he visto ni he escuchado nada del texto solamente me toca leerlo, y no lo voy a entender," and Participant 3: "Estaba asustado porque era un tema nuevo, una palabra nueva, significado nuevo." Not having a minimum of prior knowledge of the subject to be read, is directly a cause that this process would not be satisfactory, even before trying, the participant had this negative idea of their ability.

Language barriers, such as little knowledge of vocabulary and comprehension problems, further amplify these negative emotions, contributing to a cycle that may impede engagement and interest in reading and learning English. Participant 1 commented: "Por lo general no estudio

tanto así el inglés y no me sé muchas palabras, entonces estaría leyendo por leer simplemente y no saber el significado.” This manifestation of pessimism is affected clearly by self-perception of insufficient vocabulary, usually leading participants to self-sabotage their reading process. This is also exemplified in Participant 2: “Se me dificulta para leerlo, por eso no leo.” Finally, a pessimistic attitude like the one presented previously made the participants give up without even starting to read the text. Participants' language barriers involve a severe participatory role of the pessimistic and fearful attitudes.

An experience of confusion, insecurity, and disappointment.

A recurring pattern of disappointment, confusion, and insecurity is revealed among participants, highlighting challenges in vocabulary, cognition, and emotions associated with reading in English. The interviewees state that they have doubts and worries about these activities due to their little understanding. These feelings are linked to a poor vocabulary and a negative perception of reading skills.

The influence of confusion on the participants' lived experiences is notorious as it causes them to enter into a state of uncertainty because they rarely understand the English language through reading comprehension activities. A clear representation of the participants' confusion when reading in English can be evidenced when they were asked about the first time they had to read and comprehend in English: “Pues, más o menos, más o menos porque prácticamente, o sea, no entendía muchas cosas de la lectura” commented by participant 3. This state of confusion arises when contrasting the participants' poor understanding of English with the readings to be understood, and, in the same line of thought, participant 1 expressed when asked about how she felt when she had to comprehend a text “a veces confundida por lo que ajá yo el inglés, yo no lo

entiendo.” Confusion begins initially in the first contact with reading and that, as the participant progresses in developing these activities, this confusion transforms into insecurity.

The participants’ feelings of insecurity occurred due to poor reading comprehension during the reading activities. This is evidenced in the participants’ nervousness and embarrassment when developing these activities, as evidenced by their experiences. This is evident when participants develop reading comprehension activities and fail to grasp what the readings are about. This was recorded when participant 1 was asked about the experience when presenting the ICFES exam and she stated: “Insegura, porque tenía que responder cosas que entendía poco.” We can notice that the participant experiences insecurity when understanding the reading; this does not allow them to answer the questions clearly about the reading. This feeling experienced does not only denote insecurity. Additionally, when Participant 2 was asked about how she felt when reading in English in the comprehension activities, she stated, “Como si estorbara la clase, me siento insegura al leerla así.” Insecurity when comprehending English brings up other negative feelings, such as self-rejection.

The presence of constant nervousness and embarrassment when expressing themselves reveals a prominent barrier that participants face when reading in English, negatively impacting their confidence and ability to communicate their thoughts effectively. The presence of this feeling may interfere with the participant's reading experience, when participants were asked about how they felt when reading, understanding, and explaining texts in English, participant 1 expressed, “Los nervios siempre me dan, Y la vergüenza es porque... Por lo que vaya a decir.” This feeling of nervousness and embarrassment suggests an emotional charge, which is present when the participant develops reading comprehension activities. At the same time, these trigger insecurities that are evidenced in the form of fear, as expressed by Participant 2, “Si yo no

entiendo el texto de lo que dice ahí. Me siento con miedo, de explicar el texto y que no diga lo que yo expliqué." Here, the connection between the poor comprehension of the text and the fear associated with being unable to express what is read can be more clearly evidenced. There is a connection between the difficulties in understanding the text and the fear of being unable to express what they have read, which indicates insecurity manifested through nervousness and embarrassment.

Disappointment was the culmination of the participants' negative feelings about their English reading comprehension experiences. It uncovered their appraisals of their feelings regarding their ability to comprehend English texts. When Participant 1 was asked how she felt when explaining what she understood from reading, she said, "Yo, que yo misma me digo que voy a hacerlo mal. No debería de ser así." This negative attitude exposed how the participant reacted when failing to understand the reading; disappointment and reflection are found when expressing his/her little ability to comprehend. On the other hand, the participant 2 was asked if she had understood the readings of the ICFES tests, she commented: "Me sentí mal, porque en la pre-icfes daban las clases...como para venírseme a olvidar aquí en las ICFES." She expresses that despite receiving special classes for this test, she presented difficulties and did not obtain the expected results, thus reflecting disappointment.

Pronunciation as a thorn the flesh.

The participants perceived they need to pronounce correctly when developing reading comprehension activities. This indicates a perception of the reading comprehension of texts that revealed a recurrent practice of reading comprehension in the classroom. It generated worries about getting the words right and not making mistakes when reading for their classmates, which provoked a disturbing element when comprehending readings. This can be understood because

students expressed they read-aloud in the classroom when developing reading comprehension activities. However, this resulted in students struggling to pronounce the words in the text well, resulting in little understanding.

The participants possess a tendency to think in which they determine that pronunciation is relevant when developing reading comprehension activities in the classroom. Participant 1 was asked about what he thought about reading in English in the classroom, and stated the following: "pues, como no leo casi en inglés, es un poquito raro y las pronunciaciones ya tendría que uno que practicarlas." In addition to his low interest in reading in English, it can also be noted that he considers pronunciation relevant to work on reading in English and his intention to practice pronouncing words well. This same participant also added: "más que todo va en el enfoque de la pronunciación porque ajá eso lo tengo muy en cuenta." Making clear the importance of pronunciation in her reading process. Due to her answers, this participant was asked why she believed that pronunciation was relevant when it came to understanding the readings in English and he stated: "Porque, o sea, hay muchas que se pronuncian casi igual, pero siempre tienen su diferencia. Entonces, se pueden confundir en las palabras que uno pronuncia y como las pronuncias." This participant is concerned about pronouncing the words of the texts well and not so much about understanding what the readings are about.

The experience of the other participants is similar to the previous one. Participant 2 was asked about how he felt when reading in English and he expressed: "Mal porque no sabía pronunciar las palabras bien. No sabía pronunciar". This experience is based on the negative feeling generated by not knowing how to pronounce the words in the text of the English readings on the participant's part. However, this same participant, when asked how he felt when he had to perform aloud readings, added negative emotions when he stated: "Con miedo, en peligro. Siento

que voy a decir todo eso mal.” expressing that when performing aloud reading, it produces negative emotions on him that affect his reading. The participants find themselves in need of having to practice the pronunciation of the words beforehand in order to be able to say them well in class; as an example of this, this same participant mentioned: “porque antes estudio bien, estudio las palabras para pronunciarlas bien.” On the other hand, participant 3 also considers that pronunciation is essential in the reading comprehension activities and also, that the teacher’s support in the full development of the readings in class is fundamental: “nos ayuda también cómo pronunciar bien las palabras y eso.”

To conclude this chapter, the present research has provided a detailed insight into the lived experiences of struggling readers. The interviews revealed different emotions that participants experience when engaging in comprehension activities. These emotions are portrayed when participants explore new topics, including exploring unfamiliar vocabulary, which carries a significant emotional charge that hinders participants’ development of reading comprehension activities. This emotional background highlights the challenges that struggling readers have to go through and how this has hindered the proper development of their comprehension skills in the English language.

Within what has been exposed, it is vital to highlight the importance students give to pronunciation in reading comprehension. The participants have exposed a perspective that indicates that they have this ideology quite profoundly rooted. This thought is highlighted since, according to what was exposed, the participants experimented different emotions determined not so specifically by how much they understand, but also by how they pronounce or express what they read. The emotions that were most exposed were the negative ones, reasoned by the lack of ability to pronounce, and this also entailed a lack of understanding of the reading.

Additionally, we can highlight the crucial role of the teacher and the technological tools used by the participants to solve the gaps in understanding. According to those above, the role of educators is of great relevance and significance. The participants show great appreciation towards their teacher and see in him more than a source of information, someone who motivates them and helps them overcome their deficiencies in reading, having a determining role in their motivation. We can also highlight the practical usefulness of tools such as the translator, which the participants use to decipher words and facilitate their understanding. These findings highlight the importance of teaching and the use of technology to address learning deficiencies. Overall, the importance of these results lies in their ability to contribute to the ongoing debate on language teaching by fostering an environment that addresses the emotional aspects of reading comprehension and language learning in general.

Discussion

In the coming chapter, the themes that emerged from the findings will be discussed regarding the lived experience of the students who struggle with reading comprehension. The findings revealed that students who struggle with reading comprehension activities in the EFL classroom experience different emotions such as fear and pessimism. The participants also exposed negative perceptions regarding reading comprehension and the support they had.

The findings of this study can be discussed in the context of Zeidner's work on test anxiety. Test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety that occurs in testing situations (Zeidner, 1998); it is characterized by feelings of fear, nervousness, and apprehension, which may affect a person's ability to perform well on a test. The negative emotions expressed by participants, such as fear, pessimism, and nervousness, can be interpreted as manifestations of test anxiety since the participants experience these types of feelings and emotions at the moment of developing

reading comprehension activities, in a context that can be assumed evaluative, because they present these activities, and their comprehension is considered for grading in their classes. Since, the participants experience these types of feelings and emotions at the moment of developing the reading comprehension activities, in a context that can be assumed evaluative, as a result of this, test anxiety, expressed in the participants fear, pessimism, and nervousness directly affects their comprehension of the texts, as expressed by the participants.

Regarding reading perception, it was identified that participants focused on pronouncing the words in English texts when developing reading comprehension activities which results in little understanding. Thus, this study is consistent with previous research that found that focusing on pronunciation when performing read-aloud can affect reading comprehension. For example, Gibson (2008, p.30) states, “For the speaker, such is the working memory processing capacity required for decoding, recoding, and articulation that there is little room left for comprehension.” This implies an energetic and mental approach to developing read-aloud that demands significant use of mental capacity, so much so that there is no opportunity for comprehension. This happened in our study; students seem to have put more effort into pronouncing well than comprehending what they read. On the other hand, when producing pronunciation, students can be distracted by paying attention to avoid making mistakes in the words they pronounce (Birch & Fulop, 2020). This directs students to practice their pronunciation so that when it is their turn to read aloud, they pronounce the words correctly. This can be evidenced in the findings when participants comment that they practice beforehand how they will pronounce the words.

Our study has exposed the influence of confusion on participants’ reading comprehension activities and how this leads to negative emotions that further hinder their ability to comprehend the text. These statements reaffirm D’Mello & Graesser (2014), who argue that confusion is

more than an unintended consequence of complex learning activities; it also plays an important role in learning activities aimed at higher levels of understanding and is linked to poor learning outcomes. Although D'Mello and Graesser do not expose the reading experience, they do provide quite relevant insights into the aspect of confusion in the classroom; they expose that confusion is often present in classrooms and that this leads to poor outcomes. We relate this to our participants' struggles regarding their reading comprehension and how this confusion hinders their ability to comprehend what they read.

The present study highlights the critical impact of emotions in the context of reading comprehension activities in the EFL classroom. Negative emotions such as fear and pessimism can hinder the development of reading activities and decrease students' confidence in their abilities, as expressed above. This is consistent with previous research that has emphasized that emotions significantly influence learning (Meyer & College, 2014; Pekrun & Perry, 2014) and play a determinant role in establishing the quality of learning, and according to Sinatra et al. (2014) are not only present in the educational context, and substantially impact learning outcomes. Following this same idea, DeCuir-Gunby and Williams-Johnson (2014) highlight the importance of emotions in shaping students' performance and overall approach to learning, whether in the classroom or other contexts. These studies are related in that they all expose the importance of emotions for learning, whether negative or positive; in our case, the participants expressed the presence of negative emotions, which directly affected the development of their comprehension activities and possibly the acquisition of the language.

This research provides a unique perspective based on the students' lived experiences of struggling with reading comprehension of English texts. Since there is other research that focused on developing phenomenological studies but only on reading difficulties such as Gilroy's

research (2013). Our study goes further and focuses on searching for the experiences that students who struggle with reading comprehension of English texts have in the classroom to describe the factors, feelings, emotions, and perspectives that characterize that phenomenon that is present in students. Something relevant to highlight about our study is that participants share with us how they experience negative feelings and emotions when comprehending English readings. In addition, and curiously, there was a perception that links reading aloud and understanding texts. It is relevant to mention that we, as researchers, did not intervene in the process; thus, all the results were based on the answers obtained by the students in the in-depth interviews without modifying or persuading their answers.

The findings of this research have implications for educational pedagogical practice that suggest modifications in the teaching procedure related to this topic. Specifically, it is recommended that teachers develop precise strategies for teaching reading comprehension since there are better strategies for this topic than the implementation of read-aloud. Although implementing reading aloud have positive effects on vocabulary knowledge when working in groups, it has no significant effects on reading comprehension or other aspects, such as expository and narrative language. (Baker et al., 2020).

Conclusion

In this research we made use of phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of students who struggle with reading comprehension in classroom activities, as a tool to obtain information, we applied in-depth interviews to capture relevant first-hand information from the participants regarding the research topic. As a result, we found multiple negative feelings and emotions that emerged from the participants' experience of struggling with reading comprehension in English. Also, we were able to identify that the participants focused on

pronunciation when developing reading comprehension activities. However, that is because the participants' teacher performed read-aloud while developing reading comprehension activities in order to actively engage them.. Another finding is that the participants made use of the translator to understand the words they did not understand in the texts, and it is understandable because they are in an initial stage of learning English and require assistance. Assistance that they also seek in the teacher who facilitates their process, and it is totally valid.

At the time of developing the interviews we had certain limitations, for example, we did not have a suitable place to conduct the interviews comfortably. Therefore, the noise of the environment was a factor when we had to make the transcriptions. On the other hand, another relevant limitation was that the participants did not have the desired involvement because they lacked the vocabulary and motivation to respond to the interview interactions. One participant in particular mentioned that she had an event in the past regarding reading but was not willing to talk about it, so it could have been a good opportunity to analyze her experience but due to her denial it could not be given.

Finally, we suggest for future research to address other contexts such as students in private schools, students in rural areas, among others, so that researchers can broaden their range of action. Another suggestion for future research is to specifically address the lived experiences focused on the feelings and emotions that emerge from the experience of reading and comprehending texts in English when there is no foreign language acquisition because it was an important and reiterated topic that participants mentioned. And finally, another recommendation for future research is that it be conducted with many more participants in order to have more samples from which to analyze this phenomenon and thus have a better picture of it.

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“VIGILADA MINEDUCACIÓN”

Appendix

Appendix 1: Consent from the educational institution



UNIVERSIDAD DE CÓRDOBA
FACULTAD DE EDUCACIÓN Y CIENCIAS HUMANAS
DEPARTAMENTO DE IDIOMAS EXTRANJEROS



Montería, octubre 26 de 2023

Licenciada Nemecia Ayub Naranjo, Rectora
INEM-Institución Educativa Lorenzo María Lleras

Cordial saludo,

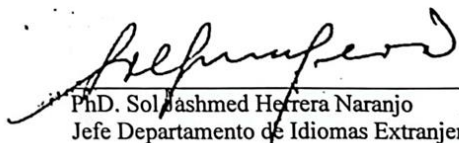
Amablemente solicitamos su autorización para realizar la investigación titulada "*Pedagogía de Describing the lived experience of 11th grader students who struggle with Reading comprehension activities in the EFL classroom*" (Describiendo las experiencias vividas de estudiantes de grado 11° que presentan dificultades con las actividades de comprensión lectora en el aula) en la escuela secundaria de su institución.

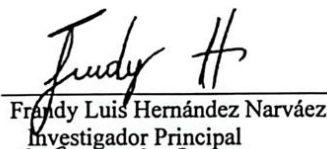
La investigación busca explorar las experiencias de los estudiantes con relación a su comprensión lectora en una lengua extranjera, en este caso inglés. La investigación se llevará a cabo durante un tiempo aproximado de 1 mes y será desarrollada por los estudiantes del Programa de Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con énfasis en Inglés. Los investigadores del proyecto son los estudiantes Luis Almanza Pestana y Frandy Hernández Narváez asesorados por el PhD. José David Herazo. Los datos obtenidos serán usados en el trabajo de opción de grado de los estudiantes mencionados teniendo en cuenta el principio de anonimato.

Les solicitamos de manera respetuosa que se nos permita llevar a cabo los procesos de entrevistas a estudiantes en su institución con el acompañamiento del docente Elkin Vergara, como también el ingreso a su institución de los estudiantes mencionados previamente.

Agradecemos su atención.

Atentamente,


PhD. Solashmed Herrera Naranjo
Jefe Departamento de Idiomas Extranjeros


Frandy Luis Hernández Narváez
Investigador Principal

Recibió y aprobó:


Nemecia Ayub Naranjo, Rectora

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"VIGILADA MINEDUCACIÓN"

Appendix 2: Consent from participants



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CONSENTIMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR EN LA INVESTIGACIÓN

Exploring the lived experience of 11th grader students who struggle with reading comprehension activities.

Luis Daniel Almanza Pestana; Frandy Luis Hernández Narváez

Introducción: Se le invita respetuosamente a que participe en un estudio de investigación dirigido por los estudiantes Luis Daniel Almanza Pestana y Frandy Luis Hernández Narváez de la Universidad de Córdoba, Montería. Se le invita respetuosamente a que participe debido a nuestro interés en explorar sus experiencias en el fenómeno que pretendemos explorar. Por favor lea este formulario cuidadosamente y haga cualquier pregunta que pueda tener antes de decidir si desea participar en el estudio.

Propósito: El propósito de este estudio es **EXPLORAR LAS EXPERIENCIAS VIVIDAS DE LOS ESTUDIANTES EN RELACION A SU COMPRENSION LECTORA EN INGLES.**

Procedimientos: Si acepta participar en el estudio, se le pedirá que:

- ✓ Participar en una entrevista grabada en audio sobre sus experiencias vividas en la comprensión lectora en una lengua extranjera, en este caso inglés (aproximadamente 3 entrevistas de 30 min – 1 hora cada una).

Riesgos/beneficios: La participación en esta investigación no conlleva riesgos previsible más allá de los experimentados en la vida cotidiana.

Compensación: No hay compensación por participar en esta investigación.

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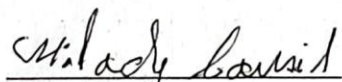
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INSTITUCIONALMENTE
Res. MEN 2598 de 22 de marzo de 2010, vigencia: 4 años

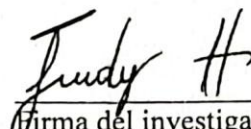
Confidencialidad: Todos los datos serán confidenciales, accesibles sólo a los investigadores principales y se almacenarán en un ordenador protegido con contraseña. Al término de la investigación o tras un periodo de 2 años, todas las fuentes de datos se borrarán permanentemente. Las grabaciones de la entrevista, se borrarán una vez transcritas. La confidencialidad se mantendrá en la medida en que lo permita la tecnología utilizada.

Participación voluntaria: La participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Si no desea participar en este estudio, no está obligado a hacerlo. Incluso si decide participar, es libre de retirarse de la participación en cualquier momento sin penalización. Si decide no participar, no habrá penalización ni juicio.

Contactos y preguntas: Si tiene preguntas sobre este estudio de investigación, no dude en ponerse en contacto con Luis D. Almanza y Frandy L. Hernández al WhatsApp: 3113859521 y 3008447027; o el email: ldalmanza53@gmail.com y fdlhn2222@gmail.com

Declaración de consentimiento: Su firma a continuación indica que ha leído la información proporcionada anteriormente, que ha tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas y que acepta participar en este estudio. Se le entregará una copia de este formulario para su archivo.


 Firma Tutor


 Firma del investigador


 Firma del investigador

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ALMANZA
 Firma Tutor

Frandy L. Hernández
 Firma del investigador

Judy H.
 Firma del investigador





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Anthony Páez
Firma Tutor

Frandy H
Firma del investigador

Luis D. Almanza
Firma del investigador

