

**EVALUATION OF AN ONLINE ENGLISH READING STRATEGIES COURSE
TAUGHT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PANDEMIC PERIOD**

***AVALIAÇÃO DE UM CURSO ON-LINE DE ESTRATÉGIAS DE LEITURA EM
LÍNGUA INGLESA MINISTRADO NO INÍCIO DA PANDEMIA***

***EVALUACIÓN DE UN CURSO EN-LÍNEA DE ESTRATEGIAS DE LECTURA EN
LENGUA INGLESA ADMINISTRADO EN EL INICIO DE LA PANDEMIA***

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ABSTRACT: Given the new social scenario due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in which teaching practices are carried out under the condition of constant adaptation, this article aims to analyze the activities developed in a Basic English Reading Strategies Course offered as an optional subject to undergraduate students in a multicampus university. We present the students' final averages to discuss their level of reading comprehension and performance in the course and propose a reflection on online teaching to undergraduate students during the pandemic period, in which Emergency Remote Education (ERE) was adopted as an alternative measure to contain damage in education. Based on the study done through bibliographic review and a survey answered by two hundred students, we came to the conclusion there is still some need for interaction maintenance between students and teachers during the isolation period, as well as the synchronous class model for the success of the subject.

KEYWORDS: Reading strategies. English reading strategies. Online teaching. Remote teaching. English for specific purposes (ESP).

RESUMO: Dado o novo cenário social, gerado pela pandemia de Covid-19, no qual as práticas docentes realizam-se sob a condição de constante adaptação, o presente artigo busca analisar as atividades desenvolvidas no curso de Estratégias de Leitura em Língua Inglesa do nível básico ofertado como disciplina optativa a alunos de uma universidade multicampi, apresentar as médias finais dos estudantes para discutir seu nível de compreensão leitora e desempenho no curso, além de propor uma reflexão acerca do ensino on-line para graduandos durante o período pandêmico, em que se adotou o Ensino Remoto Emergencial (ERE) como medida alternativa de contenção de danos na educação. Com base em uma revisão bibliográfica e em uma pesquisa por meio de questionário, realizada com duzentos alunos, constata-se a necessidade de interação entre discentes e docentes durante o período de isolamento, bem como a importância do modelo de aulas síncronas para o bom aproveitamento da disciplina.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Estratégias de leitura. Leitura em língua inglesa. Ensino on-line. Ensino remoto. Inglês com fins específicos (IFE).*

RESUMEN: *En este nuevo escenario social, generado por la pandemia del Covid-19, en el cual las actividades docentes se realizan bajo la condición de constante adaptación, este artículo busca analizar las actividades desarrolladas en el curso de Estrategias de Lectura en Lengua Inglesa del nivel básico ofrecido como asignatura optativa para los alumnos de una universidad con muchos campus, presentar las notas finales de los estudiantes para discutir su nivel de comprensión lectora y desempeño en el curso, además de proponer una reflexión sobre la enseñanza en-línea para graduandos durante el periodo de la pandemia, en que se adoptó la Enseñanza Remota de Emergencia (ERE) como una medida alternativa de contención de daños en la educación. Con base en una revisión bibliográfica y en una investigación por medio de un cuestionario, realizada con doscientos alumnos, se constató la necesidad de interacción entre discentes y docentes durante el periodo de aislamiento, así como la importancia del modelo de clases síncronas para el bien aprovechamiento de la asignatura.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Estrategias de lectura. Lectura en lengua inglesa. Enseñanza en-línea. Enseñanza remota. inglés con fines específicos (IFE).*

Introduction

In addition to teaching vocabulary related to a particular area, *English for Specific Purposes (IFE)*, or *English for Specific Purposes (ESP)* in English, comprises the study of the English Language (LI) focusing on the specific technical knowledge of the focused area (HEEMANN, 2009). In order to develop specific language skills, teaching from the IFE approach aims to identify skills concerning certain needs of students to enhance them, with the objective of enable them to perform personal, academic and professional activities by making use of this learning.

From the perspective of the IFE approach, then, a focus is given to the skills to be developed by the *learner* according to their needs for real use, *whether they are active (production)* - writing and speaking - or *passive (comprehension)* - reading and listening.

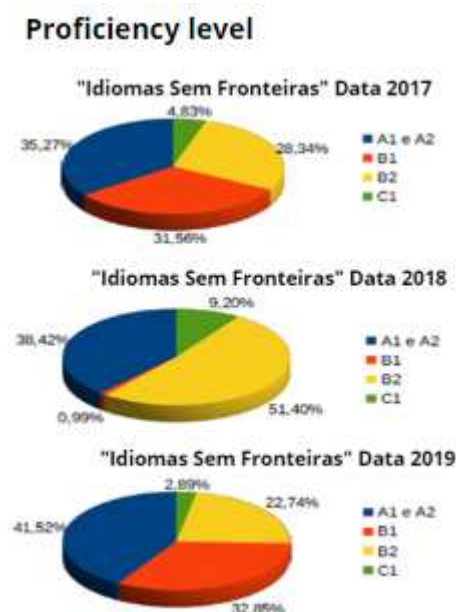
According to Nazzi-Laranja (2019), the application of IFE in Brazilian universities took place through the national project of Teaching Instrumental English in Brazilian Universities, which was coordinated by PUC/SP until the 1990s (CELANI, 1998). In this project, it was possible to verify the difficulty of undergraduates in understanding texts in English, so that the skill for which it was focused was reading.

Since then, the ability to read in English has continued to be highly requested for academic purposes by university students. For Paes-Landim (2019, p. 620), "[...] with the advancement of digital technologies that have led us into the age of information and

communication, language studies have become increasingly important." Thus, it seems relevant to us that we seek to observe how the teaching of the English language has been given in the distance learning (EaD) scope to better understand the possibilities offered by virtuality, as well as to trim possible edges in order to make necessary improvements. Here, we will emphasize reading from the perspective of the IFE approach.

In this article we will present a proposal for evaluating an online course of reading strategies in English language offered, under the English Language Program of Unesp (PLIU), for undergraduates of the São Paulo State University "Júlio de Mesquita Filho" (Unesp) as an optional semiannual discipline during the second semester of 2020. The course was planned from the survey of proficient students of Unesp conducted in the Language without Borders Program (IsF). According to the mapping, approximately 40% of Unesp students were at proficiency level A1 or A2, which are equivalent to the basics. We present the levels in the years 2017, 2018 and 2019 in the following chart:

Graph 1 - Percentage of English language proficiency levels of Unesp students between 2017 and 2019



Source: Form created by *Google Forms*

We will analyze the material available to the students and the material used in class, synchronous classes, as well as the exercises proposed as asynchronous activities. In the analysis presented, we take into account the *feedback* given to teachers by students at the end of the subject to try to answer the following questions: 1. Are synchronous classes (live lessons) essentially necessary or are the material provided and asynchronous activities (recorded classes)

enough to learn the skill in focus?; 2. Does the tutoring offered meet the need for assistance at times when there were doubts?; and 3. Was the discipline efficient in presenting reading strategies in LI to students at levels A1 and A2?

This article: (i) will discuss the differences between Distance Learning and Remote Learning; (ii) will present an analysis of the activities carried out for the development of English-language reading strategies; (iii) discuss the research conducted with students about their impressions about the course; and (iv) will conclude by presenting a final reflection on the proposed course.

A look at the context in which the classes took place: EaD x Remote Education

As pointed out earlier, the course in question was offered in the modality of distance learning and in the format of optional discipline for undergraduate students of Unesp. During the second semester of 2020, undergraduates from different courses were also able to enroll in the semiannual discipline "English Reading Strategies" so that they could develop the aforementioned skill in order to become able to perform academic productions, enjoy these and even make their readings of personal interest.

Being an online course, aligned within the modality of Distance Education, the entire program of development of classes was properly structured according to the specificities of this learning context. According to Hodges (2020) apud Duarte, Pedro and Rondini (2020, p. 43), "[...] EaD has resources and a multidisciplinary team prepared to offer content and pedagogical activities, through different media on online platforms". Although it did not have a team specialized in networks of access to EaD, the course was planned by the teachers and coordinators of the English Language Program of Unesp, professionals in the area of Bachelor of Letters, who have offered online courses to the various campuses of Unesp.

Thus, the discipline had a virtual learning environment, a term presented by Morgado (2001), for the sharing of activities, materials and exercises elaborated with certain digital tools for pedagogical purposes and for communication between students and teachers - the *Google Classroom platform*. For synchronous classes, the tool used was the *Zoom video conferencing platform*.

It is essential that, in order to conduct the analysis that will be made about the progress of the course observed, let us consider the social context in which the classes took place in 2020, the year in which, due to the COVID-19 virus, the quarantine became official in the country, according to the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO). For this

reason, primary and higher education institutions had to adapt their classes to Emergency Remote Education (ERE), as a measure of damage containment, to conclude the school year.

For the purpose of clarifying what the ERE is, we mentioned that

In contrast to the experiences that are planned from the outset and designed to be online, emergency remote education (ERE) is a temporary change from teaching to an alternative teaching mode due to crisis circumstances. It involves the use of fully remote teaching solutions for education or education that would otherwise be taught in person or as combined or hybrid courses and would return to this format as soon as the crisis or emergency subsided. The primary goal in these circumstances is not to recreate a robust educational ecosystem, but rather to provide temporary access to education and educational support in a way that is quick to configure and is reliably available during an emergency or crisis. (HODGES, C. *et al.*, 2020) (Our translation).

Unesp students are students of classroom courses, but were forced to adapt to remote education due to the measures of social distancing that culminated in the temporary closure of the university. Due to quarantine, these students had to reconcile domestic, professional, and academic activities at home, and had to learn how to better manage the time that should be devoted to studies. Given the profile of students that characterizes the student of the course we are analyzing, we can make a comparison of this with the one that covers students of distance education courses.

In a face-to-face course, students expect to have support and assistance from the teacher, in addition to constant interaction, even if they are also active in their training process. It is worth remembering that the figure of the teacher, even though it is not the centerpiece of the teaching-learning process, is of paramount importance for face-to-face courses, even today, in which they are happening remotely due to the pandemic period. The relationship that is built between teacher and student and between the students themselves promotes the sharing of information and the collective construction of knowledge.

According to Paes-Landim (2019, p. 620), "the essence of distance learning is the fact of being mediated by technologies. Students should seek this knowledge so that they can make good use of educational tools." In this type of teaching, the student is aware that the mediation of knowledge will take place between him and the technological tools most of the time, unlike the student of the face-to-face modality, who hopes to be able to interact whenever he/she can with the educator and with a group of people with whom he shares doubts, feelings, insecure and similar expectations in relation to learning. To verify this difference does not mean that the apprentice of face-to-face courses does not exercise his autonomy in the teaching-learning process, but rather that the apprentice of distance learning courses can present a more

predisposition to interact with technological tools and the virtual environment. Observing this fact is not a means that there is no insecurity or feeling of loneliness on the part of distance undergraduate students.

We assume the concept of autonomy in the teaching-learning process as "the control that each individual exercises over their learning or as the ability to learn and choose their own learning strategies" (PAIVA, 2012, *apud*-LANDIM, 2019). Autonomy in relation to learning should be stimulated by teachers, who play the role of mediators between knowledge and students, both in virtuality and in face-to-face. Becoming a self-employed student is a process of building practices that will provide greater awareness about what is learned, how to do it and for what purposes, so that its realization on an emergency basis requires a certain level of digital literacy and different views of discipline and commitment to the study itself.

Looking at this new reality seems pertinent, due to the profile of the students, even if the course "English Reading Strategies" took place online, in the modality in which it was offered from the beginning. Especially in a Foreign Language (LE) course, one has to think about how to maintain the interaction between teachers and students and how to take advantage of information and communication technologies (TICs) and digital information and communication technologies (TDICs) in order for learning to be enhanced.

The TICs and TDICs have changed the forms of production and acquisition of information and knowledge, as they have streamlined and democratized access to various sources of information previously available in other technological tools, such as books, in addition to having expanded the opportunities for interaction between different people (FINARDI; PORCINO, 2014).

Analysis of the activities carried out for the development of reading strategies in English

The course "English Language Reading Strategies" (ELLI) was designed for basic proficiency level students (A1 and A2), as previously presented, and had two classes (of 100 students each, totaling 200 students) and two tutors for each. Their class schedule was organized with a weekly two-hour synchronous meeting through *the Zoom video conferencing platform*, a virtual classroom that students accessed through links sent by teachers. The Google *Classroom* platform was used for posting and performing asynchronous activities, whose workload was one hour per week. The mixture between synchronous and asynchronous meetings is more productive for the development of the course, in the sense that it promotes more moments of interaction between teachers and students. Through *Zoom*, students also

participated in the tutoring offered by teachers so that they could ask questions about learning English in general and the activities performed both asynchronously and synchronously.

Next, we present the course schedule with the contents planned to be worked according to the reading skills that were presented to the students.

Figure 1 - Schedule of activities of the English Language Reading Strategies Course (ELLI).

Date	Schedule
03/08 a 07/08	Divulgation
10/08 a 14/08	Registration of interested parties with proof of proficiency level via form
17/08 a 21/08	Selection and divulgation of students' list of those who can subscribe to the course
24/08 a 28/08	Students' subscription day
31/08 a 04/09	Setling Week
07/09 a 11/09	Reading strategies introduction (layout, inference, cognates)
14/09 a 18/09	Keywords and False cognates
21/09 a 25/09	Skimming
28/09 a 02/10	Scanning
05/10 a 09/10	Skimming and Scanning
12/10 a 16/10	Cohesion
19/10 a 23/10	Coherence
26/10 a 30/10	Speech markers
02/11 a 06/11	Reference elements
09/11 a 13/11	Assignments and Exams

Source: Material from the English Language Reading Strategies (ELLI) course

We will present below the activities of synchronous classes, the activities posted to be done asynchronously, as well as the extra materials available in *Google Classroom*.

Activities performed in synchronous classes

The course was intended for undergraduate students from various areas, so the purpose was to mobilize and develop the necessary strategies for reading in LI by preparing for reading texts of different genres, which were compatible with the level of proficiency of the students, and by encouraging the improvement of other linguistic skills so that they could progress consistently in learning English. It is important to mention that, during the classes, teachers communicated with the students both through the mother tongue and through the target language due to the students' level of proficiency.

The first classes of the course start the study of the contents already shown in the schedule, as we saw, from the introduction to reading strategies. In order to conceptualize the strategies before we stop at the activities, we mentioned that:

[...] reading strategies aim to develop skills such as deducing the meaning and use of non-family lexical items; understand the explicit and implicit information within the sentence; understand the communicative value of judgments; selectively extract relevant points from the text; distinguish key ideas from secondary ones, etc. Reading skills are developed by different types of activities. These activities aim to develop reading strategies [...] (HEEMANN, 2009, p. 144, our translation).

At first, the senses of layout, inference and cognates are introduced through the method of exhibition-dialogued classes, in which teachers began synchronous meetings through *brainstormings*, a technique that induces students to share ideas and impressions with the class in order to start the discussion of the proposed theme.

The instigating questions sought to make a survey about the students' reading habits: whether they read newspapers and how often, whether they had the habit of reading in other languages and, if so, what types of text. After observing some images with the first page of news taken from some sites, students had to think about the following questions: "a) What textual genre can we relate to both photos, and why?"; "b) What types of information do we expect to find in texts of this genre?"; and "c) Although they are written in different languages, it is still possible to recognize them, why do you think this happens?". Through this survey, the class was conducted in order to make students analyze the compositional characteristics of headlines from newspapers in different countries and reach the level of *recognition of specific layout types* of certain textual genres, in this case, the news genre.

The *concepts of keywords, note taking and mind mapping* were also presented for the class to perform a group exercise, through the *Google Breakout Rooms* tool, in which they should analyze newspaper headlines to verify how much of the texts they could understand, observe whether the vocabulary employed was very specific, whether it was necessary to use contextual information (world knowledge) to decant the meaning of the texts and whether the images collaborated with the comprehension process.

The mentioned exercise composes a good mechanism for triggering schemes, which are "abstract structures, constructed by the individual himself, to represent his theory of the world" (LEFFA, 1996, p. 35, apud HEEMANN, 2009, p. 142). Through visual stimulation, the reader activates cognitively structured knowledge so that there is interaction between their knowledge of the world, their previous knowledge and the text (HEEMANN, 2009).

Exercises to recognize false cognates and keywords were explored with activities of filling gaps; other exercises that were also done asked the students to identify cognate words in a short text, recognize the main information that would be treated from the apprehension of the meaning of the title and to associate the image of the texts with the cognates identified in it in order to predict the subject that would be addressed and make productive inferences, that is, to deduce

the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items through contextual tips (working with the formation of words - prefixes and suffixes, with the recognition of related words in a text [...]) (HEEMANN, 2009, p. 144, our translation).

According to Baldo (2009), successful reading in the second language would be the result of a process of vocabulary acquisition, especially contextual vocabulary, that is, words and expressions whose meanings and meanings are more specific and specific to certain topics and themes. The knowledge of grammatical structures would not determine, then, the reader's ability to make inferences that will lead him to a productive reading if his L2 information repertoire does not have a vast and varied lexical collection.

More proficient readers at L2 are able to mobilize the reading strategies they use in L1 more easily than less proficient readers. Proficiency, then, is related to the number of words known in the second language, because learning the lexicon is what enables the reader to mean in the new language, as well as to make associations, which would confer greater capacity to make inferences (BALDO, 2009).

How readers take advantage of context to implement reading strategies matters more than the number of times they use them. Thus, the ability to build meaning from the reading of texts in LE is related to the recognition of resources that facilitate understanding; if the reader cannot see the presence of these resources in the texts, no matter how many times he makes use of the rereading, for example, because his ability to make productive inferences will be limited (BALDO, 2009).

The strategy focused next was *skimming*, a quick reading strategy whose objective is to decant the main idea of a text through the use of title, images and keywords. The *brainstorming* performed in this introductory *skimming class* caused students to recognize general ideas regarding the context of the environments exposed through the keywords and figures presented. In this activity, the objective was to make the class identify a certain place according to exposed

words and images, a technique to induce the student to recognize the basic function of *skimming*.

Of the exercises done, we will report two. The first was based on the reading of a journalistic article taken from the *News in Levels* website for the recognition of its main subject, its probable place of publication and the most curious fact it conveys. The second caused students to work as a group to read, through *Google Breakout Rooms*, summaries of popular children's books among them, so that they would answer dog-based questions, such as what happened at the beginning and end of the book; what keywords they found that helped to better understand the synopsis of the books; whether they knew their reproductions on film and if not, would watch them after reading the summary. The guiding questions served to guide the students during the reading, in order to make them direct the focus to what at that time was considered relevant.

In the first exercise mentioned, the students were given time to read the subject alone, already in the second, the time given for execution was longer in view of having been done in a group, something that would promote the exchange of ideas and interaction between the students.

The use of *skimming* for reading academic texts was also addressed in this class, as well as two of the formats *in which this skill can be used*, *skimming for paragraphs*, in which the paragraphs of a text are read individually to formulate sentences that express their main ideas, and *skimming for gist*, in which the first sentences of the paragraphs are read in order to decant the most relevant information, the topics themed in each part.

The strategy that came to be studied next was *scanning*, a strategy in which the reader reads quickly with the intention of finding specific information in the text. To introduce *scanning*, the class began with some games whose goal is to find certain objects, so students would be beginning to focus on what is requested at a given time rather than paying attention to observe details considered less important. Then, the proposed exercise required the apprentices to put into practice the technique exercised in *brainstorming* while reading a text to find the answers to the questions asked.

The next exercise had the same objective, but required a positioning of the students in relation to the content of the text read. By reading the summary of Winston Churchill's biography, students should answer some questions regarding certain information from the politician's life and, for this, should reflect on the information read, their prior knowledge of the history of man and the question "4. *Why should we be thankful for him?*" (Why should we be grateful to him?). In this question, students could answer that we should be grateful to

Churchill or not, and this requires a critical sense of what is read, what is something to be valued and that could be encouraged in more activities. According to Leffa (1989) apud Heemann (2009, p. 149) (Our translation),

Critical reading [...] leads the reader to take a stand before the text questioning the objective for which the text was produced, the type of reader for whom it was written and the previous knowledge assumed by the author. In critical reading, there is a position of the reader about the text read.

The text used in this activity was also removed from the *News in Levels* website. To apply the *scanning* students had to answer, in addition to the question already commented, to the questions: "1. Who was Winston Churchill?" (Who was Winston Churchill?), "2. What is he most remembered of?" (For what is he much remembered?), "3. What are the other sides of him?" (What are the other sides of it?). These are questions that make the student check certain parts of the text quickly and avail themselves of a first reading in which he focused on the more general aspects to now remember the parts in which he can find specific information.

Another reading activity that mobilized the scanning strategy was done in group, by the *Google Breakout Rooms* tool, according to others of which we have already talked about. Students read the summary of James Paul Gee's book *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*, a slightly more complex text in terms of content and vocabulary, to answer some questions and discuss how the activity with teachers went. The following is an image of the activity issues.

Figure 2 - Image of slides presented for Elli course *scanning* strategy

Questions:

1. What is the broadest definition of literacy?
2. Define "visual literacy", accordingly to the text.
3. In the fifth paragraph the author mention that literacy could be multiple. Explain this concept and illustrate with your own examples.
4. What is the author most-likely opinion over video-games?
5. Summarize this text in a few lines covering the main topics.

Source: English Language Reading Strategies (ELLI) course material

The questions of this activity, in Portuguese, are respectively: 1. What is the broader definition of literacy?; 2. Define "visual literacy", according to the text; 3. In the fifth paragraph the author mentions that literacy may be multiple. Explain this concept and illustrate it with your own examples; 4. What is probably the author's opinion on video games? and 5. Resume this text in a few lines addressing the main topics. The first three questions cause the reader to

try to identify the answers in specific parts of the text. The fourth question requires the reader to watch out for what he has read and to be able to perceive the presence of the author's point of view in the text. The fifth question proposes an exercise of summation, that is, of synthesis of the main ideas that are discussed, transforming into written text all the information that it could understand.

To close the content, there was a class on *the use of skimming and scanning together*, as they are strategies that should be used by the reader according to their needs. In the same text, depending on the type of activity that the reader performs, there will be the need to now make use of *scanning* or *skimming*. According to Leffa (1989, p. 94) apud Heemann (2009, p. 143), "the good reader is the one who knows how to select from the numerous possible activities of the act of reading the one that is most appropriate to the text and the purpose of a given reading".

There was also concern about the use of dictionaries, physical and online (in this case, the use of the *Thesaurus* tool) for the act of reading, since they are tools that offer information on the use and recognition of synonyms and antonyms.

The last contents studied in the course were *cohesion* and *coherence*, *discourse markers* and *reference elements*. The use of connectives as establishing mechanisms of cohesion and their functions (expressing similarity, introducing and adding items to the sentence, inserting temporal mark and indicating frequency, contrasting and distinguishing ideas, showing reasons and consequences, emphasizing), as well as the types of cohesion (lexical and grammatical) and their methods of realization (anaphoric and cataphoric reference), the conceptualization of coherence and the implicit notions of this phenomenon (chronology, importance, comparison) and the use of possessive pronouns and adjectives were the linguistic mechanisms addressed at the end of the discipline. The exercises related to these themes were traditional, of selecting appropriate connectives and filling gaps, that is, of recognizing the textual elements already mentioned and understanding their functionality and implication of meaning in the texts.

The final evaluation was the last activity performed synchronously. During synchronous class time, students responded to a test designed in the Google Forms, whose questions addressed the content taught throughout the course to apply the strategies learned. Of the total of 200 students enrolled, 21 did not complete the course. The students who attended the course until the end of the semester made the final evaluation and obtained good results. The final average (made between the grades of the activities developed throughout the course and the final evaluation score) of the students, shown in the following tables, demonstrates their performance and the course utilization.

Table 1 - Percentage of averages obtained by students in Class 1

Averages obtained by students in Class 1	Percentage of students in Class 1 with their averages
Grade 5	2,2%
Grades 7 and 7.5	30%
Grades 8 and 8.5	21%
Grades 9 and 9.5	18,8%
Grades 10	27,7%

Source: Prepared by the authors

As we see in table 1, most students averaged above 7, which demonstrated a good use of the course. Of the 90 students who completed the course, only two (2.2%) obtained the minimum average for approval.

The following is table 2:

Table 2 - Percentage of averages obtained by students in Class 2

Averages obtained by students in Class 2	Percentage of students in Class 2 with their averages
Grade 5	2,2%
Grade 6	2,2%
Grades 7 and 7.6	2,2%
Grades between 8 and 8.8	5,5%
Grades between 9.2 and 9.8	27,5%
Grades 10	60,4%

Source: Prepared by the authors

As we can see in table 2, the use of the course was also satisfactory, and in this case, two students had a grade of 6 (2.2%) and two had a score of 5 (2.2%). Of the 91 students, the majority scored above 8.

In both classes, there were students who did not complete the course either because they locked the course or because they reached the maximum number of absences allowed. In class 1, the percentage of non-graduates was 10% and, in class 2, the percentage was 11%.

We consider that the programmatic content of the course contemplated the learning of aspects related to the knowledge of the world and also of linguistic aspects. The deduction of

causes and effects, the identification of the relationships between main and secondary ideas, the recognition of cohesive devices in written discourse and their meaning for interpretation, the recognition of communicative functions of texts written according to certain form and purpose, the identification of speech markers, the anticipation of the meaning of words from the context and the activation of schemes, as well as the use of *skimming* and *scanning* are fundamental strategies that second language readers should have (BROWN, 2001, apud KADER, 2008).

Asynchronous activities and extra materials

The asynchronous activities included the contents studied in the synchronous meetings and served as a form of reinforcement for the students, who practiced at home the reading skills learned. While in synchronous classes the students exercised in groups and shared their views and impressions about the texts they read, in asynchronous activities it was necessary to try to apply the resources learned alone, since in contexts of exams and academic exams, for example, they will have to read and interpret texts in English autonomously.

Organized in form format made through *the Google Forms tool*, asynchronous activities consisted mostly of exercises for reading authentic texts, such as journalistic articles taken from news sites, in which students should use *skimming and scanning techniques* to find general ideas and specific information, as well as test their knowledge about keywords, layout and false cognates. According to Heemann (2009) and Grellet apud Heemann (2009, p. 151, our translation),

Grellet (1996) suggests getting students used to always reading authentic texts and that this, in a way, does not represent a problem, because "the difficulty of a reading exercise depends more on the activity that is required than on the text itself" (p. 7). Acting in this way would encourage students to have contact with authentic texts from the beginning.

In the exercises related to cohesion and coherence and the markers of discourse and reference elements, the aim was to make the students study the use of linking words (connective), reflect on the effects of meaning that promote depending on the enunciative objective that the texts sought to achieve and employ the most appropriate to fill selected excerpts.

To complement the students' studies, in Google Classroom were posted short videos produced by teachers, which dealt with the content studied in the classes. The videos served so that students could access, in a summarized way, the main information about reading skills before or after synchronous meetings, so that they functioned as a kind of synthesis of the

classes. In addition, teaching materials on instrumental English were made available to further their studies if they wanted to.

Given that the course took place online, associating synchronous classes with asynchronous activities proved to be very productive, since the students were not completely alone throughout the teaching-learning process. Contact with teachers increased the possibilities of dialogue among students, who had synchronous classes to answer questions, in addition to the tutoring offered. Regarding the students' point of view regarding the way the discipline was conducted, we will deal in the next section, in which results obtained through research with the classes are presented.

Results obtained from research done with students

At the end of the course, the students answered a questionnaire formulated by the teachers, who wanted to have feedback from the classes in order to improve both the activities that were proposed and the methodology addressed during the meetings. There was also interest in knowing how the students had experience with the discipline during the semester, whether it actually met their expectations, whether it became an extra weight during the study in the pandemic period, if there was any difficulty related to the use of technological resources, etc.

The questionnaire asked students to anonymously assess the quality of the activities proposed during the course, the adequacy of the activities to the basic level, the tutoring offered during the week and their level of satisfaction with the course, as well as asking if synchronous class with all students was important or if a video with the content would be sufficient and whether they had suggestions to improve the course. To analyze more clearly the results obtained in each class, we will call classes Class 1 (of which 76 students answered the questionnaire) and Class 2 (of which 87 students answered the questionnaire), as we mentioned when we analyzed the performance of the classes based on the final average grades.

The following table shows the percentage of students in Class 1 who gave grades 5, 4 and 3 for the aspects related to questions 1, 2, 3 and 5 of the questionnaire, which were respectively: "1. Quality of activities proposed during the course"; "2. Adequacy of activities to the basic level"; "3. Tutorials during the week"; and "5. What is your level of satisfaction with the course? (1-little satisfied/5-very satisfied)".

Table 3 - Percentage of grades given by students (Class 1).

	Number of answers	Percentage of students who gave a score of 5	Percentage of students who gave a grade of 4	Percentage of students who gave a grade 3
Question 1	76	79%	18,4%	2,6%
Question 2	76	76,3%	19,7%	4%
Question 3	76	90,8%	6,6%	2,6%
Question 5	76	79%	18,4%	2,6%

Source: Prepared by the authors

Regarding question 4, "Was the synchronous class with all students important or a video with the content would be enough?", only 7 students answered that only video with the content would be sufficient, 2 students did not answer this question, and 67 think synchronous classes are important, among which a few students answered that both forms would be efficient. In this question, the students mentioned some factors that, for them, weighed when considering the synchronous class important, the most recurrent were: the synchronous class proved to be the best time to answer questions; provided interaction during the pandemic; made learning more dynamic; allowed students to meet new people; it was the moment when the teacher-student and student-student interaction materialized. These notes made by the students correspond to their student profile, outlined at the beginning of this article, when we found that the student of Unesp undergraduate courses, because he is in the face-to-face modality, prioritizes interaction.

Question 6, "What suggestions would you give for this course?" received 49 answers. Among the suggestions given, those that were most repeated said that there could be courses focused on other language skills besides reading, continuity of the course for the other levels of proficiency in the language, offering more than one class per week, and making available the recorded classes to review the contents so that students who may miss the synchronous meeting do not miss explanation from teachers.

Next, we present the table with the percentage of students in Class 2 who gave grades 5, 4, 3 and 2 for the aspects related to questions 1, 2, 3 and 5 of the questionnaire. Not all students answered all questions.

Table 4 - Percentage of grades given by students (Class 2)

	Number of answers	Percentage of students who gave a score of 5	Percentage of students who gave a grade of 4	Percentage of students who gave a grade 3	Percentage of students who gave a grade 2
Question 1	87	72,4%	23%	4,6%	-
Question 2	87	70,1%	19,5%	8%	2,3%
Question 3	80	88,7%	8,7%	2,5%	-
Question 5	87	71,3%	23%	5,7%	-

Source: Prepared by the authors

In question 4, 6 students answered that they prefer recorded videos rather than synchronous classes, 80 prefer synchronous classes and 1 student who participated in the survey did not answer. The vast majority of students cited the same factors mentioned by Class 1 to emphasize their preference for live classes, as well as made the same suggestions for the course in question 6.


If, on the one hand, most of the answers pointed to positive results, on the other hand, there was also the pointing about group activities during synchronous classes that were performed with the *Google Breakout Rooms tool*. Some students found these activities a little confusing. The lack of familiarity with the TDICs may have given a barrier in the performance of the students in that activity. For this reason, we consider it appropriate that teachers present the tools they will use in class and prepare even a short tutorial, if they deem it necessary, because it is imperative to ensure that the resources used in the classes are accessible to all.

The analysis carried out so far referred to the classes of the second semester, as we mentioned, but it is important to highlight that the beginning of the course, first semester of 2020, coincided with the beginning of the pandemic in Brazil. Although all students returned to their homes, the course was offered online because the proposal was that it be taught to students from the thirty-four units of Unesp. After three classes, we asked the students of the first semester entry class to answer a questionnaire about the challenges they were facing to participate in the course. Among the options were internet connection, time management, health care, use of course platforms and understanding of activities.

Figure 3 - Image of one of the questionnaire questions given to students entering the first semester of the ELLI course (What has been the biggest challenge of studying online during quarantine?)

Challenges of studying during the quarantine

Which is the hardest challenge for online studying during the quarantine? 0 pontos
(qual tem sido o maior desafio de estudar on-line durante a quarentena?)

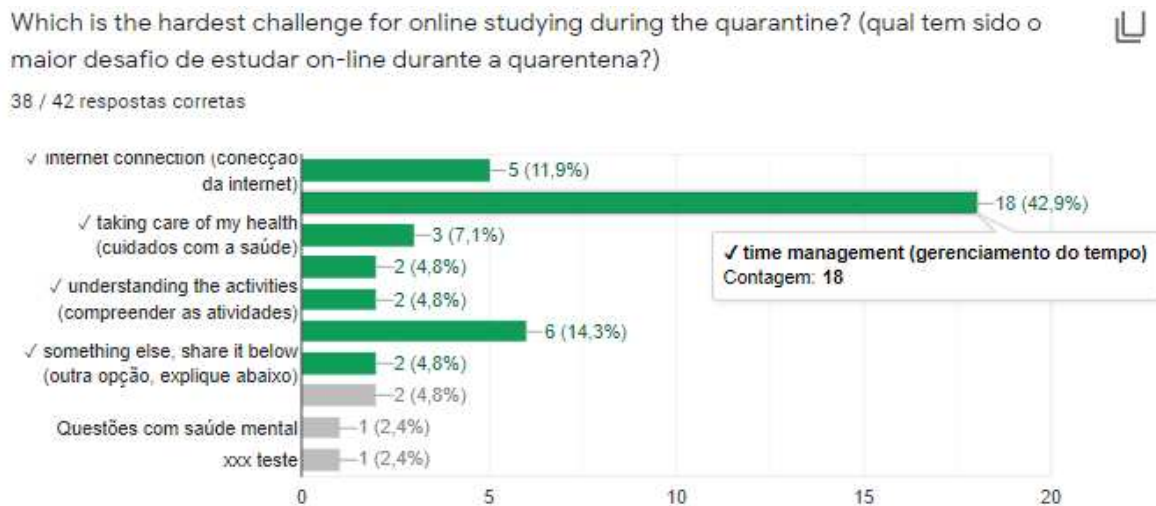


- internet connection (conexção da internet)
- time management (gerenciamento do tempo)
- taking care of my health (cuidados com a saúde)
- using Google Classroom or Zoom (usar as plataformas do curso)
- understanding the activities (compreender as atividades)
- None (nenhum obstáculo)

Source: Form made with *Google Forms*

One of the results that drew the most attention was the fact that most of the students complained of lack of organization of time to do the activities. When the consultation was made, the expectation was that they would say that their greatest difficulty would be related to internet access or health problems, however, as we can see in the following chart, not all of them highlighted these problems:

Graph 3 - Percentage of the greatest challenges of studying online during the pandemic pointed out by students



Source: Form made with *Google Forms*

As we can see from the graph, 42.9% answered that the biggest challenge was the management of study time, 11.9% of the students who participated in the research considered that the internet connection was the biggest challenge they faced during the online study in the quarantine period, 7.1% voted for health care, 4.8% revealed that understanding the activities was more challenging and the same percentage of students considered it more challenging to *use Zoom platforms and Google Classroom*. Like other options, 4.8% of the students mentioned the difficulty with the focus during the classes. 14.3% revealed that they had not dealt with any challenge.

We saw that the classes of the second semester of 2020 showed preference for synchronous classes. One student, in the research with Class 1 and Class 2, mentioned that synchronous classes contributed to their commitment to studies, which, in a way, surprised us, because we believed that asynchronous activities were more facilitating, since the student performs them according to their availability of time. However, some students mentioned that it was at the time of the weekly synchronous meeting in which one actually learned, a factor that may justify the difficulty of dealing with asynchronous activities and the time devoted to studies.

Final considerations

Unesp receives 50% of students from the public school system each year (PINTO, 2021). According to Mariani *et al.* (2021), English has been an obstacle for these students in Enem (High School National Exam), which may justify the level of proficiency of most undergraduate students, A1 and A2 as noted, even though there are students from public schools with a higher Level of English.

According to Pinto (2021), to serve basic level students in LI of the thirty-four units of Unesp, the course was planned to be taught online and, during its offer, was not harmed with the beginning of the pandemic. The researcher stated that the results of the course exceeded expectations since, according to research with students, some pointed to the fact that they felt backed by teachers during synchronous discussions and some commented that the course, including, became a way to keep in touch with colleagues and meet students from other units, which was very positive with all the tension of the pandemic.

In this year 2021, the course is being reformulated with the support of the Institute of Education and Research in Pedagogical Practices (IEP3) of Unesp and has already provided a book of extra activities (PINTO *et al.*, 2021) prepared by its teachers. The aim of the book is to

offer a first contact of undergraduate students with reading in English and offer more options for them to continue with language studies at the academic level.

In this article, we focus on the online teaching of English reading strategies carried out in the English Language Reading Strategies course offered by the coordinators and teachers of PLIU, analyze the activities proposed by the teachers and reflect on the social context in which the classes took place and the influence that quarantine exerted on the learning process of their students.

Based on the data obtained through research with students and the analysis of the activities developed during the course, we saw that synchronous classes were essential, not being considered replaceable by asynchronous classes only or by the extra materials and English exercise sites, as well as the tutoring offered fulfilled its role of aiding mechanism. According to the students' performance in the activities applied during the course and in the final evaluation, we found that the proficiency of students in reading comprehension was well developed, since the majority of students (67.5% in Class 1 and 93.4% in Class 2) obtained grades between 8.0 and 10.0, which demonstrates their good performance. Thus, we believe that the discipline proved to be efficient in presenting English reading strategies to students of A1 and A2 levels.

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