LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND ENGLISH PROFICIENCY: Case study

Daniel Rios Villamizar

Daniel Rios Villamizar is undergraduate student at the University of Pamplona, Colombia his research interests are educational and cultural issues related to foreign language teaching.

Abstract

This paper presents the results of an exploratory case study conducted in a public University in Cucuta, Norte de Santander Colombia. The objective of this research is to identify the most common language learning strategies used by EFL students and to describe the relation among the strategies and the English level. 8 students were selected by purposive sampling as participants. The data was collected through an English online test, a survey designed by Oxford (1989) and a semi-structure interview. The results indicate that social strategies are the most used by efficient learners, compensatory by more efficient and metacognitive by high proficiency learners. Besides, the results reveal that, the higher the Language Learning strategies frequency of use is, the higher the proficiency level students have.

Key words: Language learning strategies, proficiency, efficient learners, more efficient learners and high proficiency learners.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio de caso de tipo exploratorio realizado en una

universidad pública ciudad de Cúcuta Norte de Santander, Colombia.

El objetivo de esta investigación es identificar las estrategias de aprendizaje para la lengua más utilizadas por estudiantes de lenguas extranjeras y describir la relación entre las estrategias de aprendizaje de la lengua y el nivel de competencia en la lengua Inglesa. 8 estudiantes fueron seleccionados a través de método de selección de propósito como los participantes. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de un examen en línea, una encuesta diseñada por Oxford (1989) y una entrevista semiestructurada. Los resultados indican que las estrategias sociales son las más usadas por aprendices eficientes, las compensatorias por más eficientes y las meta-cognitivas por aprendices de alto nivel de la lengua. Además, los resultados revelan que, cuanto más alto es la frecuencia de uso de las estrategias de aprendizaje para la lengua, mayor es el nivel de lengua los estudiantes. .

Palabras claves: Estrategias de aprendizaje de la lengua, Nivel de competencia, Aprendices eficientes, aprendices más eficientes y estudiantes del alto nivel de competencia.

Introduction

Learning a foreign language may be a difficult task. That is why many learning/ teaching methodologies such as, Whole Language, Total Physical Response, Natural Method, Task Based Learning, Communicative Method and so on., have been adopted in order to facilitate the language acquisition and to develop communicative ability of students in the target language. However, despite of the huge effort to teach a foreign language properly maybe choosing the suitable material, employing the TICS, implementing new teaching techniques etc., the proficiency

36

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

level of our students remains disproportionate in terms of language acquisition, even when they take together the same English classes, in the same grade or semester some students achieve a good proficiency and some other students do not. That difference in English level could be related to the use of language learning strategies as one of the main variables that would influence English students proficiency.

Indeed, some authors as is the case of, Chamot (1998), Cohen and O'Malley (1990) highlight the importance of Language Learning strategies in teaching and learning process of foreign languages. Oxford (2003) stated that "among main factors that help determine how and how well students learn a second or foreign language are language learning strategies". (p.43). Similarly, Harris (2001) stated that "Our ability to use these kinds of tools or strategies was one of the reasons why we became successful linguists. So why do we not share them with our learners? We may have been lucky in that we developed a wide repertoire of strategies". (p. 15).   The use of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) could be the strongest set of instruments in order to achieve proficiency in foreign languages.

The researcher was interested in carrying out this study, firstly, because foreign language students may face some difficulties when they attempt to acquire proficiency in the target language. English teachers may have a sight of the student's preferences and the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the use of language learning strategies in the learning process.

37

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

Literature Review

This section presents the main foundations of language learning strategies (LLS) and English proficiency.

Language Learning Strategies

When learners face several different tasks such as reading a chapter or a book, or preparing a written summary of a passage, they have several options to complete them successfully. These options are called language learning strategies (Richard and Lockhart, 1995). Those options or language learning strategies are among the main factors that help to determine how and how well students learn a second or foreign language (Oxford, 2003). According to Nunan (1999), language learning strategies are mental and communicative processes used by learners in order to learn and use a language which focuses on the importance of learning strategies of students being aware of what they have and what they are doing for their learning process, for instance, when a student has clear goals for improving their English skills or a student identifies his or her English mistakes to get over them. If students are conscious of learning they will become more effective students. In addition, Wong and Nunan (2011) conducted a research on learning styles and strategies of more effective and less effective learners; they suggest that the learners' attitudes influence their learning process because less effective students perceived English just as a subject and the more effective students believed that English is a tool to communicate and they enjoy learning inside and outside the classes.

Hismanoglu (2000) has categorized language learning strategies based on the performance of EFL students. However, the most comprehensive category was designed by Oxford (1990). Her classification of learning strategies complemented these previous models. Oxford identified 62 language learning strategies categorized in two major groups of direct strategies including memory, cognitive, compensation and indirect strategies including metacognitive, affective and social.

The direct strategies are involved inconscious-mental processes, while indirect strategies are consciously used. In other words, cognitive strategies enable learners to interact in the target language; metacognitive strategies help learners to control and regulate their learning; affective strategies help learners deal with their feelings and emotions; and social strategies promote learning through interaction with the speakers of the target language. Memory strategies help learners store and retrieve information; compensation strategies, on the other hand, are employed when learners need to keep communication going despite a gap in their linguistic knowledge. Given that compensation strategies are primarily geared to facilitate communication, they are not perceived as directly linked to learning as other strategies are.

Proficiency

The concept of proficiency has changed over time. In the past, foreign language teaching and learning have been focused on grammar and lexis. However, in the recent years, more

attention has been given to the communicative competence and the appropriate use of language in different context (Harley et al, 2002). Nowadays, to master a language is highly related to student's proficiency which is described by Chomsky (1965) in two important definitions; Firstly, as the learner's knowledge using in the target language. Secondly, as the learner's behavior in front of language tasks and challenges.

Furthermore, the learning process is influenced by several factors, such as the social context, student's motivation, age, capabilities, and learning opportunities (Spolsky, 1989). Those factors enable the language learner to increase the knowledge in at target language. Besides, this can be related to the language learning strategies mention by Oxford (2003) who argued that, social, affective and metacognitive strategies may influence on the student language acquisition process. Language learning strategies could determine the English students 'proficiency.

In this field, several studies have been conducted. For example, Rahimi, Riazi and Saif (2004) conducted a study aimed to analyze the variables affecting learners' choice of strategies, and the relationship, if any, between these variables and learners' patterns of strategy. In this research a group of 196 EFL Persian learners in post-secondary school with low-, mid- and high-proficiency in EFL participated as the sample. Data was gathered through different instruments such as: the TOEFL, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, 1990). Also, a motivation questionnaire and, Learning Style Questionnaire Soloman and Felder (2001) were applied.

The results pointed out the variables that affect learners' choice of strategies, the variables taken into account were proficiency, motivation, learning style, gender and years of language study. In regards to use of strategy categories and learning style, learners reported moderate use except for metacognitive strategies whose mean was

40

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

significantly higher than the means of all other strategy categories. The mean for memory strategies, on the other hand, was significantly lower than all other strategy groups, except for the social strategies. In conclusion, the participants' perceptions of their English proficiency level significantly affected their strategy use with more proficient learners employing more strategies in all categories including overall. As the findings demonstrated, graduate students with differential perceptions of their English ability vary in their strategic approaches to language learning. Additionally, the fact that students at different ages tended to use diverse strategies could greatly help producers in their way to develop suitable learning materials.

Wong & Nunan (2011) attempted to explore whether there were identifiable differences in learning styles, strategy preferences, and patterns of practice and use between more effective and less effective learners studying at the tertiary level in the Hong Kong context, and whether any differences were consistent with findings in other contexts. The participants were 674 undergraduate university students in Hong Kong. Data collection of this study consisted of a two-part online survey. The first part requested biographical and attitudinal information and the second part of the survey consisted of a thirty-item questionnaire adapted from the original Willing (1994) survey. This survey asked students to indicate their attitude towards thirty key in class and out-of-class strategies by rating them on a four point scale. The results revealed that in relation to differences between the overall learning style of more effective and less effective learners that the dominant style for more effective students was 'communicative' with over 50% of the students taking part in the survey being assigned to this style. This was followed by 'analytical' then authority-oriented. The less effective students were split between authority-oriented and communicative, with the authority-oriented students just edging out the communicative learners.

Finally, based on the results of differences in enjoyment of learning English between more effective and less effective learners, they revealed a significant difference between more and less effective students. Seventy-eight per cent of more effective but only twenty-seven per cent of less effective students reported enjoying English a great deal. On the other hand, twenty-four per cent

of less effective students reported that they did not like learning English at all.

Lopera (2011) developed an exploratory case study aimed to identify effects of reading strategy on undergraduate students during a reading comprehension course. 26 undergraduate students in a Colombian university participated in this project. Data collection instruments as a reading comprehension tests, teacher's field notes and self-reflection in class at the strategy instruction phase, and a learning perception questionnaire were applied. Data analysis showed that students improved in reading comprehension after having had the strategy instruction. Results revealed that reading strategy instruction is indeed very useful. Also, it was noted that when students applied reading strategies, they became more self-confident and this in turn enhanced their motivation.

Finally, when students applied the reading strategy approach, the use of dictionaries decreased considerably. This paper showed that students improved not only in EFL reading comprehension but also in knowledge of strategies. With the strategy instruction, students were able to develop meta-cognitive awareness in using reading strategies. Moreover, students' attitudes and motivation changed positively toward reading in a foreign language. Specifically, students gained self-confidence as they showed they could interact with different kinds of readings. Finally, as the students applied the reading strategies as they read, the use of a dictionary was reduced as a consequence of reading strategy instruction. However, with these and no doubt other students, it was necessary to guide them in order for them to become autonomous.

Methodology

This study was based on mixed methods research approach, because it allows the researchers to combine and quantitative and qualitative research techniques and instruments to analyze a specific situation (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

42

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

This study adopted main components of qualitative research approach, which is defined as an inquiry process with the purpose of understanding social and humanistic problems. The qualitative enquiry building a complex and holistic illustration, conformed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a real setting (Creswel,1994). Moreover, this research adopted case study design in which is defined as an empirical inquire that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within real life context (Yin, 1984).

The research design of this project is divided into two types of case study, exploratory and descriptive cases study. The exploratory case study usually responds to the question What' or 'how many' or 'how much' questions. 'Who' and 'where' questions in order to predict the outcomes associated to a specific phenomenon (Hamkim,1987). Consequently, this current research explored what kinds of LLS are most used for efficient, more efficient and high proficiency EFL students. Moreover, according to Hakim, C (1987) descriptive case study may focus on a particular issue or aspect of behaviour with the objective of refining knowledge in a particular area, in order to provide a better understanding of causal processes.

Consequently, this research project adopted descriptive case study in order to illustrate in detail the relation between the use of LLS and English proficiency. Several instruments were used firstly proficiency test to categorize English participants such as effective, more effective and high proficiency students, secondly interviews to know participant's preferences related to LLS. Those Instruments complemented the exploratory phase to describe how LLS could be related to English students' proficiency.

43

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

Description of the context

The research took place at the Public University of Pamplona, Villa del Rosario campus.

Participants were students of eight and night semester of foreign languages a program of Faculty

of Education. Currently, the faculty offers; Bachelor's degree in Spanish Language and

Communication, Degree in Childhood Education, Degree in Special Education, Bachelor of Social

Sciences and Bachelor of Foreign Languages, English – French. The focus of the Foreign Languages

program is to educate graduates with a high academic level who promote changes and innovation

in pedagogy in order to educate new Colombian generations.

Participants

The research was carried out with ninth and eight semester English students of the foreign

languages program at a public university in Colombia. The population was comprised of 16

students both women and men. The ages of the students range from 17 to 28 years old. They

come from different regions of Colombia and Venezuela. The sample consists of three men and

five women who were part of the Anglophone literature class. Participants were selected by

purposive sampling which allows the researcher to analyze a case pointing out some specific

features in which the researcher is interested in. Kluver (1996) claims that purposive sampling is

common when special skills are required to form a representative subset of population.

Each participant took an English placement online test proposed by Kaplan international

English (see appendix A). At the end the results were given on the screen and sent by email

44

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona,
Colombia.

classifying participants according to the Common European Framework categories. The students were categorized taking into account the level that they obtained in this order; Level B1 "effective students", level B2 "more effective students" and C1 "high English proficiency students".

Instruments

Three instruments to gather data were selected, two quantitative data collection instruments, which include an online English test and a survey and finally an interview as a qualitative instrument.

Quantitative Data Collection Instrument

English proficiency Test

A proficiency test is a systematic quantitative data collection instrument, which measures a student´s level in a language. It provides a general view of the language learning process because the learner may see the strengths and weakness in the target language. Kaplan's free English proficiency test was chosen because it examines approximately four language skills, which are listening comprehension, grammar and vocabulary and reading comprehension.

The online test was composed of 50 multiple choice questions, divided into 3 sections. The first is a grammar test (30 questions), the second a listening comprehension section with two

45

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

parts: the first part (7 questions) and the second part (8 questions) finally, a reading exercise (5 questions). At the end the results were given on the screen and by email taking into account the Common European Framework categories, which were recommended as validation of language ability by the European Union Council (2008).

In addition, based on the overall results, a bar chart showed the comparison students' results with the maximum score suggesting what language skill should be reinforced and which was the most remarkable skill among listening, grammar, vocabulary and reading. Finally, an email was sent with the general results and a brief description of the learner´s level.

In this research a link to take the test was sent to the participants through and inbox message using Facebook platform. The participants had a week to answer the test and sent the results to the researcher's email. All the scores were collected and participants were categorized taking into account the final proficiency score as "less efficient" or "more efficient" to select the purpose sampling.

Strategy Inventory for language Learning (SILL)

Strategy inventory for Language Learning is a quantitative instrument developed by Oxford (1990). It was first designed as an instrument for assessing the frequency of use of language learning strategies by students at the Defense language Institute in Monterey, California. Two revised versions of the SILL exist, one for foreign language learners whose native language is English (80 items) and the other for learners of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL,

46

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

50 items). It is estimated that 40 to 50 major studies carried out in the world, including a dozen

dissertations and thesis which have been done using the SILL. These studies have involved an

estimated 8000 to 8500 language learners. Within the last 10 to 15 years, the SILL appears to be

the only language learning strategy instrument that has been extensively checked for reliability

and validated in multiple ways (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). The version 7.0 of SILL contains 50

items, and is characterized into six subscales: (a) memory strategies (items 1 to 9), (b) cognitive

strategies (items 10 to 23), (c) compensation strategies (items 24 to 29), (d) metacognitive

strategies (items 30 to 38), Affective strategies (items 39 to 44), (f) Social strategies (items 45 to

50).

These SILL 50 items were evaluated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from one to five.

The number indicated how often the learner uses the strategies. One means Never or almost

never true, two is generally not true, three is Somewhat true and four Generally true for me.

During the data collection process through the survey SILL some steps were carried out,

Firstly, a survey was adapted from Strategy Inventory for Language Learning version 7.0 (SILL)

Oxford (1990). Secondly, the SILL was passed to a digital version using Google Drive which is a file

storage and synchronization service provided by Google (see appendix B). Finally, the digital SILL

was administrated by personal e-mails of each participant. Once the participant filled out the

survey, the information was retrieved in an Excel spreadsheet and sent it to a personal google

count of the researcher automatically.

In this case study, the ESL/EFL 50 items version 7.0 of SILL was employed as an instrument to reveal the range and frequency of language learning strategies used by efficient, more efficient and high proficiency EFL students.

Qualitative Data Collection Instrument

Participant Observation

The first data collection instrument used in this case study was a participant observation, Dewalt (2002) defines "participant observation as the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities, it provides the context for development of sampling guidelines and interview guides." During this process the setting, population characteristics, language and so on were described (See appendix C). However, due to the fact that the issue of this study is not tangible, it was not evidently through observation identifying LLS used by English students.

Interviews

Six participants were interviewed (three male and three female students) One- on- one interviews were employed in order to focus on particular answers of each participant. According to Creswell (2004) interviews are data collection processes in which the researcher asks questions and records answers from only one participant in the study at a time.

The interviews were addressed based on survey (SILL) results taking into account the research purpose and questions. Five participants were interviewed

individually, this process took about 10 minutes per participant, the interviews were composed of twelve questions including demographic questions and open- ending questions to know students' perception about the use of LLS in their English proficiency (see appendix D). The interviews were conducted in the middle of the research process and were conducted in Spanish and then questions and responses were translated into English (see appendix E).

One of the interviews was conducted through Skype due to the location of the participant and time. According to Sullivan (2013) the new technologies and approaches have increased the number of instruments used to collect qualitative data in a research, Skype is one of the programs selected to conduct interview with people from a different geographical position. The Skype conversation was recorded and then the responses were translated from Spanish to English.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was based on explanatory sequential design for purpose of this research; the researchers proceeded to analyze the raw data sequentially. Firstly, the researcher analyzed the quantitative data and secondly the qualitative data.

The quantitative data was obtained from the Strategy Inventory Language Learning, it was organized systematically in an excel spreadsheet using the program Google Drive, where a digital version of SILL Oxford (1990) was adapted by the researcher, this digital instrument was administrated by e-mails to each participant. The data was compiled and overall organized in

columns and lines in a excel spreadsheet. Later on, the researcher classified the information

hence, demographic questions, and language learning strategies used by efficient, more efficient

and high proficiency students. A Likert scale was employed from one to five to reveal their

preferences related to LLS use and frequency taking into account the categorization of Oxford

(1990). Indeed, a statistic technique the Mean was used to calculate the LLS frequency for each

group, effective, more effective and high proficiency students and another Mean was used to

calculate the six types of language learning strategies used by each group as well.

Quantitative Data Analysis

As was mention before, Based on explanatory data analysis design, the quantitative data was

analyzed first.

Online proficiency test

As can be seen from figure (1), according to online English placement test, among the

eight participants chosen to take the test, the majority (38%) of the participants got a B2 level or

High intermediate level, in addition the number of participants with C1 level (25%) and B1(25%)

level was the same and only the 12% of the sampling has an A2 proficiency level.
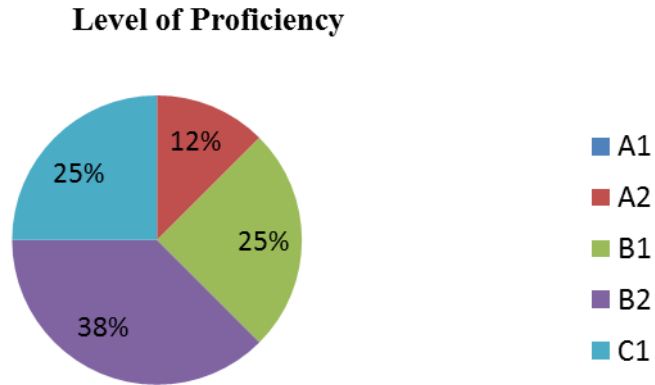
50

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

Level of Proficiency

Figure 1. Kaplan English online test results.

The results showed in the figure (1) that the sampling population was grouped according to their level of proficiency, as follows, the first group "effective" students composed by one participant with A2 and two participants with B1 proficiency level, the second group "more effective" composed by three students with B2 level and finally the "high proficiency" group composed by two students with a C1 level.

Survey Strategy Inventory for language Learning (SILL) results

The researcher found that the most language learning strategies used by effective students were Social (3,9) followed by Metacognitive (3,8) language learning strategies. On the contrary, the language learning strategies less used by this group are Memory, Affective and Cognitive strategies scored in (3,0). See table (1)

Table 1

Frequency of language learning strategies use by effective participants

Effective	Memory	Affective	Cognitive	Compensatory	Metacognitive	Social	Total Average
Participant A	3,3	2,7	2,8	5,0	3,7	4,0	3,6
Participant B	2,3	3,2	3,4	2,7	3,8	4,3	3,3
Participant C	3,2	3,2	3,0	3,0	4,0	3,3	3,3
Total	3,0	3,0	3,0	3,6	3,8	3,9	3,4

Measuring the students Language learning strategies effective students' preferences, a set of language learning strategies between Social and Metacognitive which were found as the most frequently used by this sample category as it is illustrated in the bar chart (2).
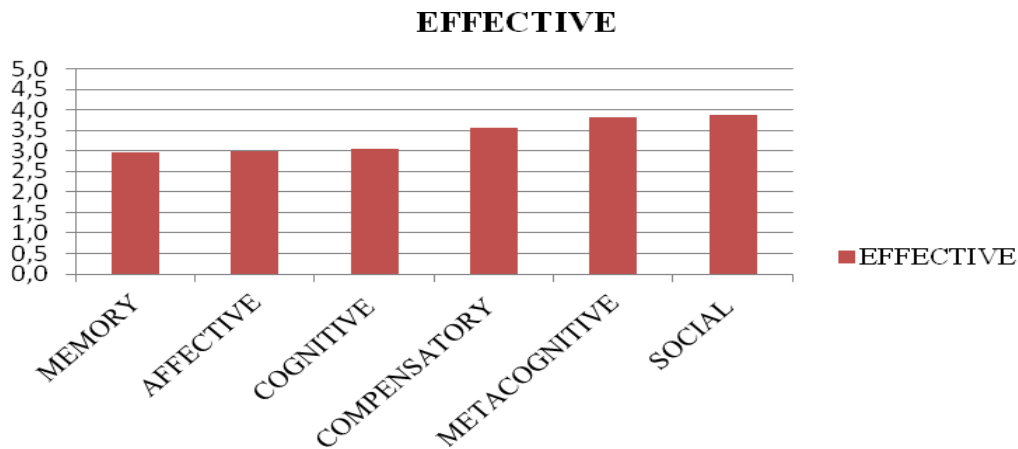

Figure 2. Frequency of language learning strategies use by effective participants.

Regarding the 'more effective students', the compensatory (4,0) Language learning strategies were highly used by them followed by affective strategies

52

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

(3,8). On the another hand, memory (3,3) and metacognitive (3,6) were found lowly used by them. (See table 2)

Table 2

Frequency of language learning strategies use by more effective participants

More Effective	Memory	Affective	Social	Metacognitive	Cognitive	Compensatory	Average
Participant D	3,7	4,2	4,0	4,6	4,5	5,0	4,3
Participant E	3,6	3,7	3,5	3,7	3,8	3,7	3,6
Participant F	2,6	3,4	3,7	2,6	2,7	3,3	3,0
Total	3,3	3,8	3,7	3,6	3,7	4,0	3,7

In addition, as it could be evidenced in chart bar (3) compensatory and affective learning strategies were highly scored by the effective sample category.
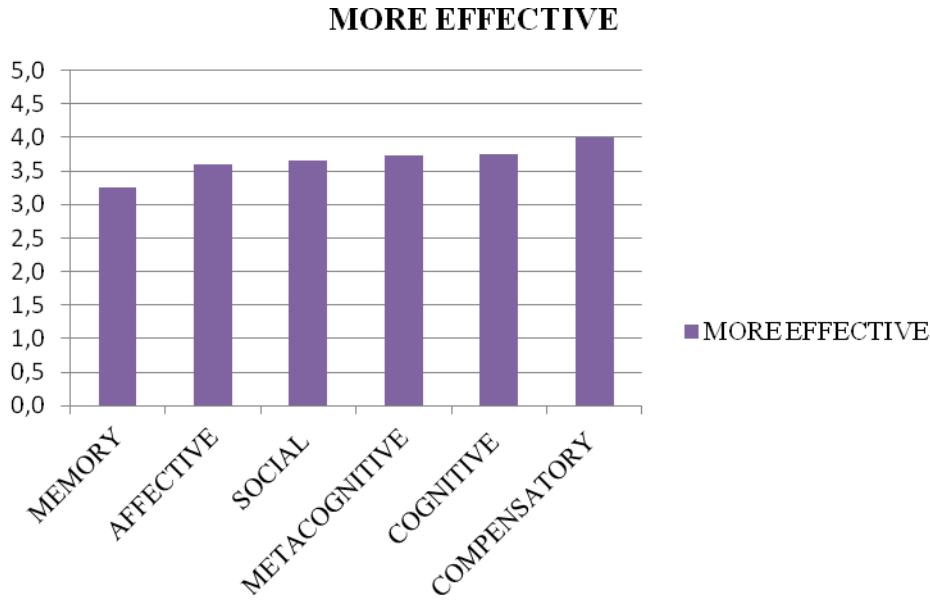
53

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

Figure 3. Frequency of language learning strategies use by more effective participants.

Finally, the category labeled high proficiency students, the analysis revealed that Memory (3,7)

and Affective (3,8) Language learning strategies were less used by high proficiency students. In

contrast, Metacognitive (4,9) and Social (4,7) were the most commonly used by them. (See table

3).

Table 3

Frequency of language learning strategies use by high proficiency participant

High							Total
	Memory	Affective	Compensatory	Cognitive	Social	Metacognitive	
Proficiency							Average

54

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona,
Colombia.

Participant							
G	4,8	4,3	4,2	4,8	4,5	5,0	4,6
Participant							
H	2,6	3,2	4,0	4,0	4,8	4,8	3,9
Total	3,7	3,8	4,1	4,4	4,7	4,9	4,2

Two main ranges of languages learning strategies Metacognitive and Social were selected

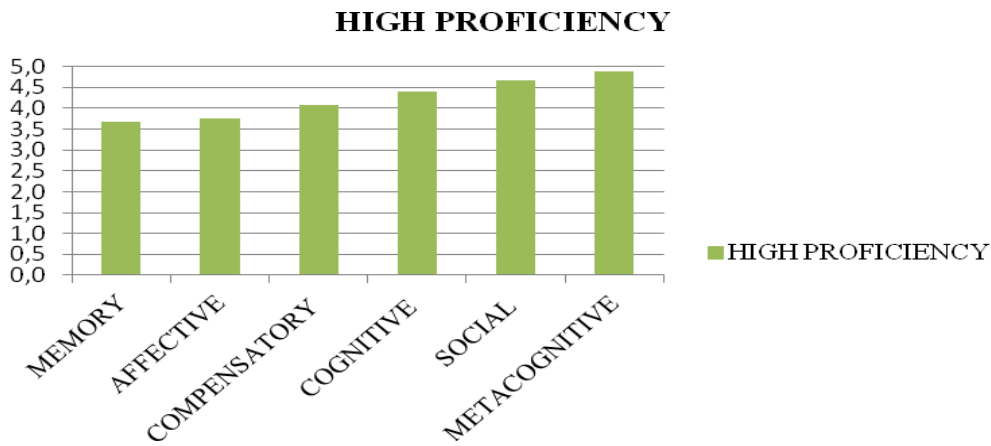for high proficiency students as it is shown in the bar chart (4).

HIGH PROFICIENCY

Figure 4. Frequency of language learning strategies used by high proficiency participants.

These previous results revealed the most LLS used by the three categories stablished by

the researcher. Likewise, different types of LLS were evidenced for each category showing that

social strategies were the most used by effective students and the compensatory strategies were the most used by more effective students and finally the metacognitive strategies were the most used by high proficiency students.

Indeed, as is shown in the bar chart (5) the results revealed that the high proficiency students got the highest score of LLS frequency of use. It means, students of this category tended to use all six LLS' types (Metacognitive, cognitive, social, affective, and compensatory and memory) more frequently than other categories of students.
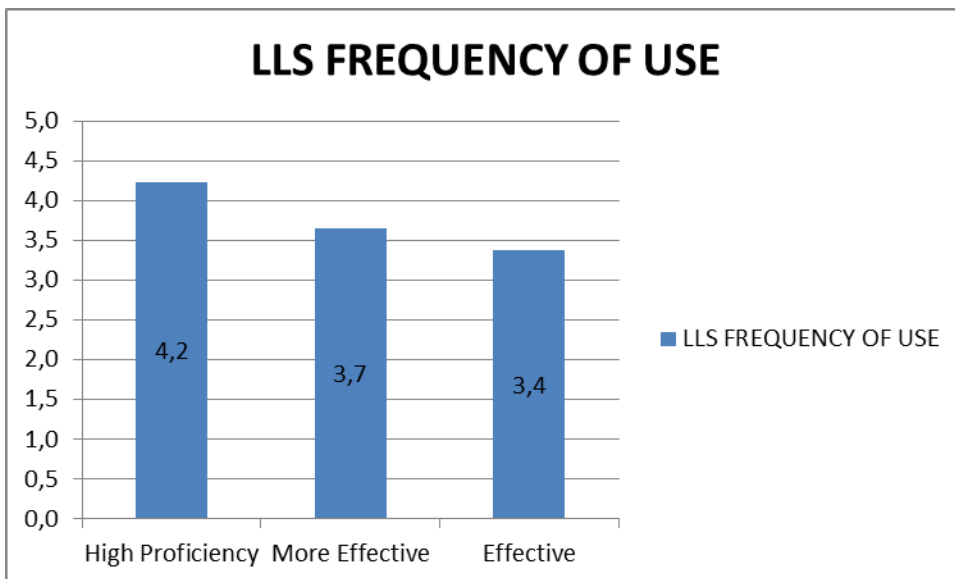
<figure>

LLS FREQUENCY OF USE

High Proficiency: 4,2
More Effective: 3,7
Effective: 3,4

Legend: LLS FREQUENCY OF USE

</figure>

Figure 5. Language learning strategies frequency of use.

Qualitative data analysis

Following explanatory analysis design after having analyzed the quantitative data then the

qualitative data is analyzed in this section.

Interviews

The qualitative instruments selected in this research project were interviews; the records were listened several times to check and translated the participant's answers making note about the first impressions. The participants' answers were analyzed question by question to categorize the data in order to perceive what strategies were in common among participants.

Interview report results

Six participants were interviewed individually, three females and three males, the majority of the participants were among 20- 24 years old and all of them were students. In general, the participants affirmed that they know what language strategies are, but all of them did not know the categorization of the language learning strategies for language acquisition proposed by Oxford. However, most of them had received lessons about the importance of learning strategies (See table 4).

Table 4

Demographic questions answer*s*

	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D	Participant E	Participant G
1.Sex	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male

2.Age	20-24	20-24	20-24	25-30	20-24
3.Language	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish
4.Occupation	Student.	Student	Student	Student	Student

From the question related to the different activities to study English, it was perceived that the preferences varied from participant to participant. Each participant had different techniques to study, but some of the most common strategies were: to watch English TV and videos, write down new vocabulary, to read articles from the internet and to listen to English music and radio.

It was perceived that the main obstacle faced by the participants was related to the affective strategies, three out of five did not feel comfortable speaking with people with a higher level because they feel anxious and nervous or they are afraid of making mistakes. On the other hand, the participant G, which is high proficiency had the same obstacle as the other participants, but, the learner overcame the difficulties facing the situations and not to avoid social interaction. On the question "Do you think English teachers should teach the language learning strategies as a tool to facilitate the Level of proficiency?" All the participants agreed that teachers should teach some language learning strategies because the second language acquisition may be a collaborative and cooperative process. And 1 out of 5 participants stated "that with the language learning strategies, the learner could make a significant progress in little time".

In relation with the survey results, the effective group which used social and metacognitive strategies argued that they planned their tasks and time in order to do every activity they have to do. Also, they considered social strategies as a tool to be in contact with others and learn from them as it showed in participant C answer "Social strategies are media to be in touch with others.". In addition, they considered social and metacognitive strategies useful to increase their English proficiency but one out of two claimed that "I have to use those strategies more frequently" (See table 5).

Table 5

Effective group description of the use of Social and Metacognitive strategies

Question	Participant B	Participant C
8. According to survey (SILL) the language learning strategies used by you are Social and Metacognitive. Why do you use them?	I plan things because I am very distractive and I don't want to forget my tasks. I usually use social strategies in the classroom. When I don't understand something I ask to someone.	I consider that time planning is important. And auto evaluation is relevant. Social strategies are media to be in touch with others.

Concerning to the more effective group, the more common strategies among them were compensatory and cognitive. The reasons argued were different from

participant to participant. According to the participant E, he used cognitive strategies to practice

English language skills. The other participant stated that those strategies are related with her

learning style. Both participants perceived a positive influence in their level of proficiency as it is

evidenced in participant D answers "those strategies facilitate my learning process." and

participant E answer "Because these strategies help me to practice listening, writing and speaking"

(See table 6).

Table 6

More effective group description of the use of compensatory and cognitive strategies

Question	Participant D	Participant E
8. According to survey (SILL) the language learning strategies used by you are compensatory and cognitive. Why do you use them?	Because I know what my learning style is, therefore those strategies facilitate my learning process. The process is faster and I don't like to learn things by heart.	Because these strategies help me to practice listening, writing and speaking.

The participant G with a high proficiency level reveled that his preferences with the

metacognitive and social strategies were the result of a trial and error process (see appendix F). In

consequence, he had read some articles about efficient ways to learn a second language. Hence,

he changed his study strategies and frequency he perceived a significant improvement in his

English proficiency (See table 7).

Table 7

High proficiency participant description of the Metacognitive and Social strategies.

Question	Participant G
8. According to survey (SILL) the language learning strategies used by you are Metacognitive and social?	I use those strategies because I made a comparison between the activities that have been efficient for my learning process and the ones that haven't. it is call trial and error. Through the internet I read some articles about how I can learn a language.

Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to identify the category of language learning strategies used by

EFL students of the University of Pamplona. Eight participants were selected among eighth and

ninth semester students; they were divided as effective, more effective and high proficiency

learners. The division was done based on the results of the online English proficiency test.

The results from the data analysis show common preferences and differences among the three groups in relation with the type language learning strategies. The efficient participants used more the Social and Metacognitive strategies; however the high proficiency participants used more the metacognitive and social strategies too. In contrast, the more effective participants preferred the compensatory and Cognitive strategies. There was a similarity among the efficient and high proficiency learners. But it was perceived that the high proficiency participants were more aware of the effectiveness of those strategies rather than the effective learners.

Likewise, this research answered if there was a relation among the language learning strategies and the learner´s proficiency level. It can be concluded that, the relevant factor in the effectiveness of the language learning strategies was not the type of strategies used by the learners. The key was the frequency of use of those strategies in the learning process. It means, no matter the strategy chosen to study, the English proficiency increased if the learners used a set of LLS constantly.

In general, the frequency of the use of Language learning strategies obtained in this research was the following, the effective learners (2,4), the more effective learners (3,7) and high proficiency learners (4,2). These results supported that there was a positive relation in terms of language learning strategies frequency and the learner's proficiency level.

Also, the participants in general agreed on the idea that teachers should teach or at least

62

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

inform them about the tools and variety of strategies for learning a second language. Some of them knew about the strategies but no this knowledge is superficial. A course or section related to language learning strategies could be included in the curriculum of the career.

Future researches could be conducted based on this project, it might be recommended to study why the metacognitive and social strategies were the most common among the learners and if there is a relation between LLS and students' autonomy. In addition, it could be possible to establish a connection among the learner´s autonomy and the frequency of language learning strategies.

Concerning to the limitations of this project, it was perceived that among the 26 students of the English linguistic subject, only 8 students showed a positive attitude to participate in this process, the rest of the group complained because of the time demanded to answer the test and survey and others did not want to participate. The lack of information of the learners about Oxford (1990) categorization of the language learning strategies, did not allow them to give a detail and specific reason in their strategies preferences.

Further, the online test did not assess a speaking skills on the target language, consequently, this factor could influence on the general proficiency and position of the learners.

To conclude, the findings were useful and valuable for English teachers and EFL students because participant could realize the importance of language learning strategies in order to improve the English proficiency. Besides, the participants were aware about adding more language

63

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

strategies in their English learning process.

References

Council of Europe.(2008). Common European framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR). Retrieved from: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework_en.pdf Downloaded: 02/04/2014

Creswell, J (2004). Collecting Qualitative Data. Mason, K. (4th ed) Educational Research Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research.

Dewalt, K. & Dewalt, B. (2002). Participant observation: a guide for fieldworkers. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press

Harley, B. et al (2002). The development of second language proficiency. Cambridge University press. Retrieved from : http://books.google.com.co/books?hl=es&lr=&id=-MBfUFEkdHsC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=language+proficiency+development&ots=hhc-8b1eP3&sig=BHdYfRDY6lbV1WifRjdk9qf45h4#v=onepage&q=language%20proficiency%20development&f=false . Downloaded: 24/03/2014

Harris et al, (2001). Helping learners learn: Exploring strategy instruction in language classrooms across Europe, Council of Europe Publishing.

64

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

Hismanoglu, M. (2000). Language Learning Strategies in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching.

The Internet TESL Journal, 6 (8).

Retrieved from: http://iteslj.org/Articles/Hismanoglu-Strategies.html downloaded: 16/09/2013

Johnson, B.& Onwuegbuzie,A. (2004). Mixed methods research:a research paradigm whose time

has come. Downloaded: 02/04/2014

Lopera, S. (2011). Effects of Strategy Instruction in an EFL Reading Comprehension

Course: A Case Study Antioquia University, Medellín Colombia. Retrieved

from:Universidad Nacional revistas, Revistas UNAL

Mhttp://www.revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/rt/printerFriendly/29057/36859

Oxford, R. (1990). Language Learning Strategies: what every teacher should know. New

York: Newbury house. Downloaded : 02/05/2013

Oxford, R. (2003). Language Learning Styles and tsrategies: an Overview. Retrieved from:

http://files.fernandamunoz.webnode.es/2000000401816e19114/_2003_oxford_r._la

ng._learning_tyles_and_strategies.pdf. Downloaded : 02/05/2013

Richards, J. & Lockhart, C (1996). "Reflective Teaching in second language classrooms", Cambridge

Language Education. Retrieved from:

http://www.quedelibros.com/libro/76597/Reflective-Teaching-in-Second-Language-

Classroomspdf.html

Rahimi M,et Al (2004), An investigation into the factors affecting the use of language learning strategies by Persian EFL learners Laval University, Québec. Retrieved from: http://ravansanji.ir/files/ravansanji-ir/51886957Persian%20EFL%20learners%20-rahimi-riazi-saif.pdf

Wong, L. & Nunan, D. (2011).The learning styles and strategies of effective language learners. Elsevier Volume 39, Issue 2, June 2011, Pages 144–163. Retrieved from: http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0346251X1100056X?np=y Downloaded: 02/03/2014

Sullivan, J. R. (2012). Skype: An appropriate method of data collection for qualitative interviews? The Hilltop Review, 6, 54_60 Hakim, C,(1987) Research Design: Strategies and Choices in the Design of Social Research. London, Unwin Hyman, pages 61 – 75.

Yin, K. (1984). *Case study research: Design and methods.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage publications.

Yin, K. (2003). Case Study Research Design and Methods. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A, English Proficiency Test online

KAPLAN INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH

» ENGLISH LEVEL TEST

The test is divided into 3 sections:
. 1. Grammar test (30 questions)
. 2. Listening test Part 1 (7 questions) and Part 2 (8 questions)
. 3. Reading test (5 questions).

All the questions are multiple choice. Read the question carefully and click on the answer you think is correct. If you cannot answer a question, click on the 'next' button.

Please fill in your name and email and get the results direct to your inbox after you have finished the test.

First Name*	
Last Name*	
Country*	Afghanistan ▾
Email Address*	

☑ I would like to receive promotional offers and information about products and services from Kaplan and its partners.
View our privacy policy.

SUBMIT

» Review

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE KAPLAN INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH TEST

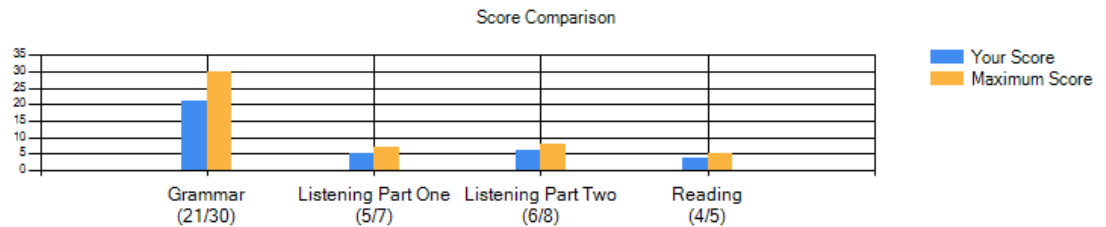Based on your overall results, your English level is **Higher Intermediate**
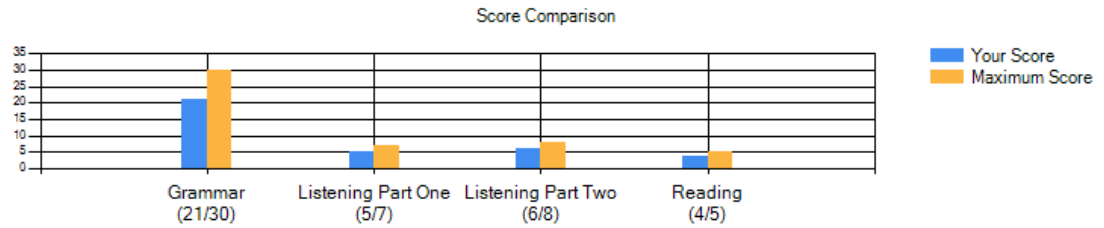
Score Comparison

Your Score
Maximum Score

Grammar (21/30) Listening Part One (5/7) Listening Part Two (6/8) Reading (4/5)

Figure 5. Kaplan platform English proficiency test.

Figure 6. Participant E, bar chart results

The English online test was retrieved from:

http://quiz.kaplaninternational.com/quiz/English%20Level%20Test

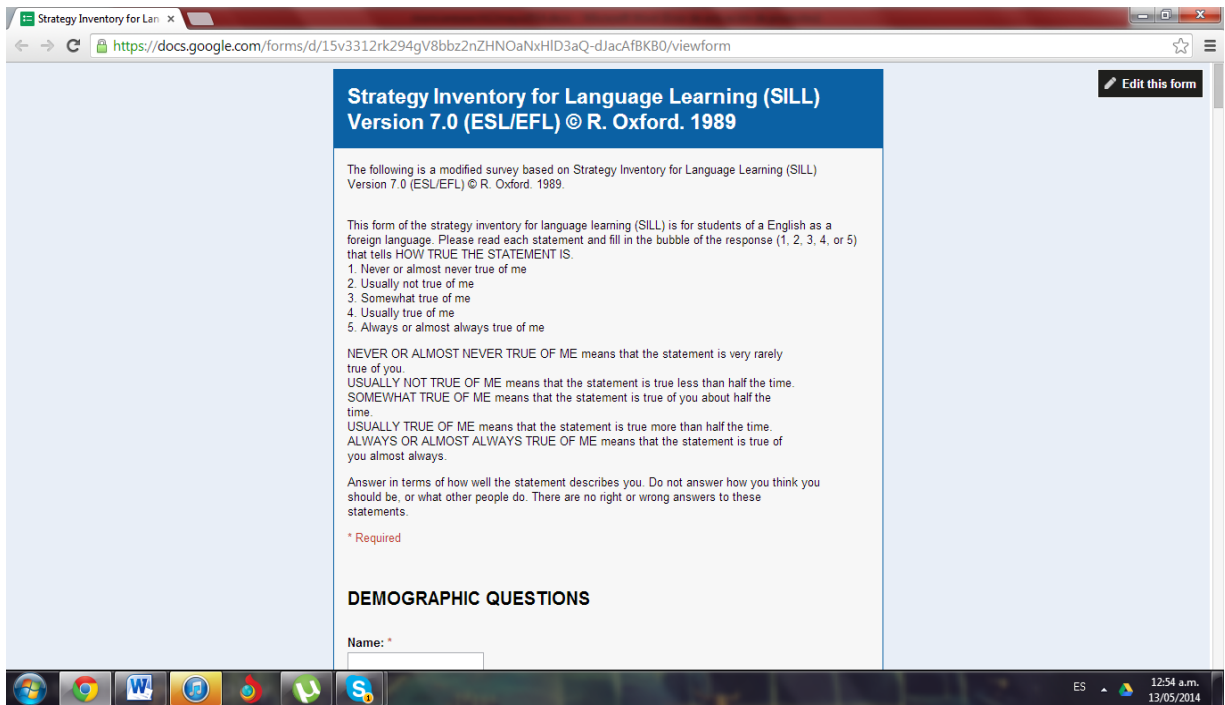Appendix B, On-line Survey SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning)

Figure 7. Online survey platform.

The survey was retrieved from:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/15v3312rk294gV8bbz2nZHNOaNxHlD3aQdJacAfBKB0/viewform

?embedded=true

Appendix, C Observation Field Note

Date: May 03 2013   **Time:** from 09:00 AM to 12:00 M   **Duration:** 3:00 hours

Researcher: Daniel Rios Villamizar

Participants: 25   **Purpose:** This observation attempts to identify the observable Language learning strategies used by EFL students.

ITEMS	Description	COMMENTS
OBSERVABLES LANGUAGES LEARNING STRATEGIES	Some students asked a favor or posed a question in English. During their English class.	Some students during English class (applied linguistics) talked in English the most part of time. However, at the moment to ask a favor talked in spanish eg: "tienes un sacapuntas?"
	Some students asked teacher for clarifying some doubts or for receiving extra-information. All these questions were posed in English to different person teacher and students.	
	Some students used a lot of gestures at the moment to do their oral presentation.	
	While students were doing their oral presentation some of their class mates wrote in their notebooks.	
	Few students took out their English dictionaries and started searching unknown words.	

70

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

Space:	This observation took place in the foreign language laboratory. It has 30 computers, Air condition, TV, a white board and a teacher´s desk. Some computers are against the wall and the other in the middle there is not face to face contact with the others students.	
The Individual actors:	The majority of individuals are Colombian people, only two are Venezuelan students all of them are foreign language students English and French. The ages of the students varied from 18 to 30 years old. It supposes they have level B1 for this semester (Seventh).	

Appendix D, Spanish interview Form

Como influyen las estrategias de aprendizaje en la proficiencia de la lengua?

Las siguientes preguntas son parte de un proyecto investigativo, esta información será usada para

propósitos académicos y sus respuestas serán anónimas.

Preguntas demograficas:

1. sexo :   ___ Masculino ___   Femenino

2. Edad :   ___   16-20   ___   20-24   ___25-30

3. ¿ Cual es su idioma natal?

    ___ Español   ___ Ingles ___ Otro

4. ¿Cual es su ocupacion?

    ___ Estudiante   ___ Empleado   Otro   _____

Contenido

5. a). Conoce las estrategias de aprendizajes para las lenguas extranjeras?

    ___   SI   ___   No

   b). Según rebeca Oxford hay 6 tipos de estrategias aprendizaje para el aprendizaje

   de una lengua extranjera. Las conoce SI____ No ____

6. Ha tenido usted alguna instrucción por parte de los profesores de técnicas para

   facilitar el aprendizaje del inglés?   __   SI   ___   No

7. Mencione algunas actividades que realiza para estudiar o practicar inglés.

8. Según la encueta SILL (strategy inventory for language learning) el rango de

   estrategias que usted mayor utiliza es _____ . y _____.

   ¿Por qué las utiliza?

9. ¿Considera usted que las estrategias _____que usted

72

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona,
Colombia.

emplea le han ayudado a mejorar su nivel de inglés? ___Si ___ No Por qué?

10. ¿Considera usted que si incrementa el repertorio de estrategias de aprendizajes para estudiar aumentaría su nivel de inglés?   ___ Si ___ No

11. ¿Cuál ha sido el mayor obstáculo que ha tenido en el proceso del aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera?

___ Se le dificulta organizar su tiempo para estudiar y evaluar su proceso de aprendizaje.

___ Se siente nervioso al hablar en inglés.

___ Se le dificulta memorizar palabras o vocabulario nuevo.

___ Se le dificulta entender la idea general de una conversación o texto escrito si desconoce algunas palabras de vocabulario.

___ Se le dificulta hablar con personas nativas que lo corrijan y ayuden a mejorar su nivel de inglés.

___ Se le dificulta mantener una conversación en ingles porque no recuerda como se dice alguna palabra o frase.

___ Otro ¿Cuál?

12. Cree usted que los docentes deben enseñar estrategias de aprendizaje para que los estudiantes tengan herramientas que faciliten el aprendizaje de la segunda lengua

_____Si   _____No.

¿Por qué?

73

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

APPENDIX E, English interview format

How do language learning strategies influence the EFL student´s proficiency level?

The following questions are part of a research project with an academic purpose. The answers are anonymous.

Demographic questions:

1. sex :   ___   Male   ___   Female

2. Age :   ___   16-20   ___   20-24   ___ 25-30

3. What is your native language?

    ___ Spanish   ___   English   ___   Other

4. What is your occupation?

    ___Student   ___ Employee   Other   _____

    Content:

5. a. Do you know what language strategies are?

    _X_ Yes   ___   No

    b. According to Oxford there are 6 categories of language learning strategies. Do

    you know what are they like? Yes____ No ____

6. Have you ever received instructions about language learning strategies and second language acquisition? Yes _____ No _____

7. Name some activities you do to study English -

8. According to survey (SILL) the language learning strategies used by you are

    _____ . and _____.

    ¿why do you use them?

9. Do you consider that the social and Metacognitive strategies have helped to improve your Level of proficiency?

    ___Yes ___ No . Why?

10. If you add more strategies to your learning process, your English proficiency will increase? ___ Yes ___ No

11. What has been the main obstacle to achieve your English proficiency?

    ___ It is difficult for me to organize my time to study.

    ___ I feel nervous and anxious using the English language.

    ___ It is difficult for me to memorize new words and expression.

    ___ it is difficult for me to understand a conversation or text if I don't know every word.

    ___ it is difficult for me to start a conversation in English with a native speaker or student with a high level.

___ Other

_____

12. Do you think English teachers should teach the language learning strategies as a tool

to facilitate the Level of proficiency? Yes ____ No ___

Why?

APPENDIX F, English interview example (participant g)

How do language learning strategies influence the EFL student´s proficiency level?

The following questions are part of a research project with an academic purpose. The answers are

anonymous.

Demographic questions:

1. sex :   <u> X </u> Male   ___ Female

2. Age :   ___ 16-20   <u> X </u> 20-24   ___25-30

3. What is your native language?

<u> X </u> Spanish   ___English   ___ Other

4. What is your occupation?

       X_ Student   ___Employee   Other   _____

Content:

5.   a. Do you know what language strategies are?

       X_ Yes   ___ No

b. According to Oxford there are 6 categories of language learning strategies. Do

you know what are they like? Yes____ No _X

6. Have you ever received instructions about language learning strategies and second

language acquisition? Yes _X__No _____

7. Name some activities you do to study English

-        I read many books at least 3 per month.

-        I listen to audiobooks and I usually read aloud to check the pronunciation.

-        I watch series and movie s in English on weekends.

-        I use web sites with exercises and challenges in English.

-        I translate every email I received from Spanish to English.

-        I usually listen to music in English.

-        I listen podcast and radio every day.

8. According to survey (SILL) the language learning strategies used by you are

metacognitive and   Social.

¿why do you use them?

77

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona,
Colombia.

I use those strategies because I made a comparison between the activities that have been efficient for my learning process and the ones that haven't. it is call trial and error. Through the internet I read some articles about how I can learn a language.

9. Do you consider that the social and Metacognitive strategies have helped to improve your Level of proficiency?

X Yes ___ No . Why?

These strategies have positively influenced my language proficiency. Since I change my study habits, I have perceived a significant improvement.

10. If you add more strategies to your learning process, your English proficiency will increase? X Yes ___ No

11. What has been the main obstacle to achieve your English proficiency?

___ It is difficult for me to organize my time to study.

___ I feel nervous and anxious using the English language.

___ It is difficult for me to memorize new words and expression .

___ it is difficult for me to understand a conversation or text if I don't know every word.

___ it is difficult for me to start a conversation in English with a native speaker or student with a high level.

_X__ Other

When I started the university, I was shy and I didn´t participate in the classes

78

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.

because I thought that my English was not good.

12. Do you think English teachers should teach the language learning strategies as a tool

to facilitate the Level of proficiency? Yes_X_ No ___

Why?

Teaching learning strategies can help the others students to apply them and improve their English level. Students could apply new strategies.

79

Open. Writ. Doors. J.
ISSN 2322-9187 • July-December 2014. Vol. 11 • Number 1 • Pamplona, Colombia.