Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Acquisition in the EFL Classroom

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Improving the Use of Vocabulary Learning Strategies In Students To Promote The Acquisition of the English Language

Kelly Angulo Petro
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Abstract

This was a descriptive research that aimed at determining the influence of vocabulary learning strategies used by 6th grade students at a private school on the Colombian Caribbean coast. To do so, it was necessary to identify what vocabulary learning strategies students apply into the English language acquisition process according to the discovering and consolidating dimensions (Schmitt's taxonomy, 1997) as well as determining how these strategies influence students' language acquisition.

Results showed that students were not prepared to communicate orally but prepared to remember words meanings, spellings and even word order through a sentence construction practiced. It was also found that learners had no opportunity to speak with native English speakers and this fact effects students' vocabulary strategies application to reinforce language acquisition.

Key words

Vocabulary learning strategies, discovery and consolidating dimensions, oral competence, English language acquisition process.

Resumen

Este fue un estudio descriptivo que tuvo como objetivo determinar la influencia de las estrategias de aprendizaje del vocabulario utilizado por los alumnos de 6 º grado en una escuela privada en el Caribe Colombiano. Para ello, fue necesario identificar qué estrategias de aprendizaje de vocabulario los estudiantes aplicaban en el proceso de adquisición del idioma inglés de acuerdo con las dimensiones descubriendo y consolidando (según la taxonomía de Schmitt, 1997), así como determinar cómo estas estrategias influían en la adquisición del idioma.

Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes no estaban preparados para comunicarse oralmente, sino que eran capaces de memorizar y evocar el significado de las palabras, deletrearlas, e incluso, con algún grado de dificultad, reconocer el orden de las palabras dentro de una construcción de oraciones. También se encontró que los estudiantes no tuvieron la oportunidad de comunicarse con hablantes nativos, descuidándose con ello estrategias de vocabulario que refuerzan la adquisición de la lengua.

Palabras clave

Estrategias de aprendizaje de vocabulario, dimensiones descubrir y refuerzo, competencia oral, procesos de adquisición del idioma inglés.

1. Introduction

Vocabulary learning strategies are essential for all sort of communication: reading, speaking, listening and writing. That is why, if any school wants to have successful students in the English acquisition process, it is important to work on vocabulary learning (Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997), (Smichtt, 1997), (Horwitz ,1988) found that vocabulary acquisition was considered by learners to be the most crucial part of language learning. Based on the previously mentioned statement, Schmitt's taxonomy concerning the discovering and consolidating dimensions were of primary interest in this research.

Private schools in Monteria have paid, from teachers teaching experience, little attention to vocabulary learning strategies difficulties. Based on the research context of interest, 6th grade students at a private school on the Colombian Caribbean coast, it was noticed (during the observation process) that students lack vocabulary for oral communications. Taking into consideration that when they were in class, the teacher asked them questions but students did not participate actively or they did not answer other questions when talking among themselves. Even recognizing what the teacher said (meanings of words) they did not engage in the conversation, not even a sentence was used to answer (were not able to participate orally). Taking into account this difficulty, it was determined to do a research study to improve students' vocabulary strategies based on the assumption that teachers and students do not pay attention to the vocabulary acquisition. It would be difficult to express and communicate well in the second language. Taking into account this point of view we would say that finding vocabulary learning strategies for students to be applied in Monteria private schools will be useful and would help them to be more successful in the English learning process. This descriptive study aims at finding answer to the research question, **how can vocabulary learning strategies influence the acquisition process of the English language**?

1.1 Objectives

1.1.1 General objective

To determine the influence of vocabulary learning strategies used by students of sixth grade into the acquisition process of the English language.

1.1.2 Specific objectives

›   To identify what vocabulary learning strategies students apply into the English language acquisition process according to the discovering and consolidating dimensions.

›   To specify how these strategies influence students' language acquisition.

2. Literature Review

This section includes some studies about vocabulary learning strategies and some interesting explanations about how the language strategies work in the process of English acquisition.

›   Griswold, Gelzheiser & Shepherd, (1987) tested groups of eighth graders with and without learning disabilities on a sentence completion task after they had studied a list of words. Although students with learning disabilities learned a smaller percentage of unknown words than students without disabilities (36.7 versus 67.4%), the two groups did not differ in the strategies used to learn the words, or in the amount of time spent studying the words.

Griswold, *et al* (1987, p.625) also found that the strategies used did not account for the percentage of unknown words that students learned. The vocabulary learning score was accounted for primarily by the reading and vocabulary skills students had prior to the study, as measured by performance on standardized reading vocabulary and comprehension tests. Thus, students who knew more word meanings prior to studying unknown words learned

them easier due to the fact that they can associate them. Some authors suggested that "Previous knowledge is of great importance when learning vocabulary. That is to say, students connect based knowledge and the new one, like a bridge between the old and the new linguistic aspects.

The results of this study have implications for the timing of vocabulary interventions, and the importance of explicitly highlighting the semantic associations between words as one way to help students to build background knowledge.

›   In the second and third study, there is an explanation about the use of Vocabulary learning strategies (Ahmed, 1989 & Schmitt's taxonomy, 1997). This explanation is given below.

Ahmed (1989) was the pioneer in the field of studying vocabulary learning strategies. He investigated 300 Sudanese learners of English to find out the micro-strategies these students used as well as the strategy patterns used by good and poor learners. By applying a think aloud task, direct observation, and an interview to the learning 14 new words, he arrived at 38 micro-strategies, which were categorized into six macro-strategies:

›   Information sources
›   Dictionary use
›   Memorization
›   Practice
›   Preferred source of information, and note taking.

Cluster analysis was then performed to produce five groups of students; three of them comprised mainly good learners and two poor learners. The strategy patterns used by good students and poor learners could be distinguished.

Schmitt studied a representative sample of 600 Japanese from different levels of learners; junior high school, senior high school, university and adult students. In each of the four groups the subject came from different kinds of schools: lower, medium and higher prestige level ones. He used his taxonomy of Vocabulary Learning strategies created by

himself as a research instrument. The study used yes/no questions that they considered helpful even if they did not use them. (Subjects were asked to mark the top 5 most helpful strategies). In Schmitt's research there were interesting results. First the comparisons of the two sets of data – the most used strategies and the most helpful strategies revealed some overlaps. There were six strategies in common, they were: "bilingual dictionary", "verbal repetition" "written repetition", "say a word aloud", "study the word's spelling", and "take notes in class". Second, the patterns of the strategies used changed over time as a learners either matures or becomes more proficient in the target language. Many of the strategies became more important with age involving the kind of deeper processing (imagination, association, analysis).

All of these studies contribute to this research since with Schmitt's taxonomy (1997), and Ahmed's (1989) investigations, it was discovered, what the most useful strategy for students was, in terms of quality when they build their vocabulary as well as the strategies students used the most in the foreign language (in terms of quantity). These points of view could be considered as relevant and useful tools in the learning and teaching process due to the fact that without vocabulary, sentences could not be produced and as a result, there will be lack of communication or no communication at all.

3. Theoretical Framework

This section provides some general theoretical considerations: Language Learning Strategies, Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS), its Classification, and how could these vocabulary learning strategies influence the target language learning according to Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy.

3.1 Language Learning Strategies

In the field of language learning acquisition a number of definitions on Language Learning Strategies (LLS) have been defined by many researchers. O'Malley & Chamot (1990) define LLS as "the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information". Another important definition about

LLS was given by Oxford (1990), "Specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that students, often intentionally, use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language. Strategies are tools for the self-directed involvement necessary for developing communicative ability".

Based on the aforementioned information, it could be seen that the authors considered vocabulary strategies as a mean to develop communication in a foreign language. Besides, they follow a discipline that promotes their ability to develop their knowledge in an accurate way. On the contrary, students who do not have any strategy seem that they do not have equal opportunities to learn easily any lesson or topic and their learning process is not successful at all. That is why, in this research, identifying what vocabulary learning strategies and how these vocabulary learning strategies influence the acquisition process of the English language is of great interest since it may explain how these learners could communicate in the target language. Compared with traditional approaches, in which vocabulary is often taught unsystematically in class and teachers tend to leave their students to learn vocabulary on their own without much instruction or guidance, teachers following this new research-based approach focus on words students are expected to meet frequently, and present words systematically based on a careful consideration of needs analysis.

Vocabulary instruction is personalized according to learners' different learning needs, goals, and styles. Since most vocabulary learning takes place outside of the language, learners are also trained to raise their awareness of the knowledge involved in knowing a lexical item and the process of learning a new word. Substantial emphasis on vocabulary learning strategies helps students become independent language learners inside and outside class.

3.2 Vocabulary Learning Strategies Concept

Vocabulary Learning Strategies is a relevant issue in this research, although, it is an important topic in the acquisition of a second language. Many researchers have tried to explain the importance of this issue in the teaching language process. For example - Oxford (2000, p.5)

suggests that, "analytic strategies are directly related to the learning end of the continuum, while strategies involving naturalistic practice facilitate the acquisition of language skills, and guessing and memory strategies are equally useful to both learning and acquisition."

3.2.1 Direct Strategies

Direct strategies are used directly to learn a target language and to this group belong memory strategies that help the learners to store and retrieve new information; cognitive strategies that help the learners to produce new language by different tools; and compensation strategies that help the learners to use the language regardless that there are many gaps.

3.2.2 Indirect Strategies

Indirect strategies are used indirectly and support learning without involving the target language directly. In this group are included: metacognitive strategies that help the learners to control their own learning, affective strategies that help the learners to arrange their emotions and motivation, and social strategies that help the learners to cooperate and learn with their peers.

From the theory stated above, it seems to be that language teachers can not only be concentrated on developing the communicative competence, but it is also necessary to encourage learners to work on the lexical and how they could use the new words of the language appropriately using different strategies. As Oxford said, "the acquisition of new vocabulary follows two processes that help learners to develop the ability to recognize words, to memorize and to use them in real context". Also, using new words form the L2 involves being able to use the second language communicatively in any of the four main language skills such as, speaking, writing, reading and listening. As well Oxford (1990) observes that language learning strategies encourage greater overall self-direction for learners. Self-directed learners are independent learners who are able to assume responsibility for their own learning and gradually gaining confidence, involvement and proficiency. Besides, in this part of the research, consensus is found with Nation (1990) since he stated that, there is no interest in vocabulary learning.

However, it is thought that vocabulary is the one which builds the language since, "words are interwoven in a complex system in which knowledge of various levels of a lexical item is required in order to achieve adequate understanding in listening or reading or produce ideas successfully in speaking and writing". Nation (2001), applies the terms *receptive* and *productive* to vocabulary knowledge description covering all the aspects of what is involved in knowing a word.

On the other hand, vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) are steps taken by the language learners to acquire new English words. In the English language, there are many which are proposed by many researchers like: (Oxford, 2000; Nation, 2001; and Gu, 2003). Furthermore, in the English language learning, there is a proposal of vocabulary learning strategies developed by Schmitt in 1997. He developed his own taxonomy in a research that he carried out with 600 Japanese learners. Also, some teacher's suggestions and some features taken from Oxford's taxonomy.

The use of VLSs counts on a number of factors such as proficiency, motivation, and culture (Schmitt, 2000). This is because culture and environment can influence students' preferences for exacting learning strategies. Also, Schmitt claims, that learners are mostly inclined to use basic vocabulary learning strategies. This in turn makes strategy instruction an essential part of any foreign or second language program. However, a greater knowledge of vocabulary learning strategies could be very useful in supporting teachers to plan their lessons more effectively and give guidance to students in adopting successful strategies. Over the decades, many researchers have made an effort not only to classify, but also gather, these strategies in order to support learners' learning. Schmitt is an important researcher in the learning of a language. He has provided his taxonomy in Vocabulary Learning Strategies and has used his taxonomy in many of his research projects founding many evidences which suggest that students really use strategies to acquire new vocabulary, by discovering and consolidating.

3.3 Classifications of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Even though, vocabulary learning strategies is a new area in which many researchers have investigated some essential classifications of vocabulary

learning strategies were found. Some of the classifications are so general but there are others that provide new ideas and details to the different strategies. For instance, Gu & Johnson (1996) "note L2 vocabulary learning strategies as metacognitive, cognitive, memory and activation strategies. Metacognitive strategies consist of selective awareness and self-initiation strategies. Cognitive strategies in Gu and Johnson's taxonomy involve guessing strategies, skilful use of dictionaries and note-taking strategies. Memory strategies are classified into practicing and encoding categories. And Instructing strategies include such strategies as association, imagery, visual, auditory, semantic, and contextual encoding as well as word-structure (i.e., analysing a word in terms of prefixes, stems, and suffixes)". Although, Gu and Johnson's taxonomy includes important aspects in vocabulary learning strategies that promote the acquisition of a second language. Thus, this research study will be based on Schmitt's Taxonomy (1997) because he uses several strategies to work with the four skills used in learning a foreign language.

3.3.1 Schmitt's Taxonomy

In Schmitt's taxonomy, there are 58 strategies that were divided into two dimensions: Discovery and consolidate. And they were divided into five categories social, memory, cognitive, metacognitive and determination strategies. Determination strategies were added by Schmitt and the other ones were adopted from Oxford's (1990), language learning strategies "(memory, cognitive, metacognitive, social, compensation and affective)".

Schmitt (1997) developed a comprehensive inventory of vocabulary learning strategies which is divided into two groups. The first one determines the meaning of new words when learners encounter them for the first time. The second one consolidates meaning when learners encounter words over again. The former group contains determination and social strategies and the latter contains cognitive, metacognitive, memory and social strategies. Schmitt includes social strategies in both categories since they can be used for both purposes. Schmitt's dimensions are defined as follows:

3.3.1.1 Discover dimension: are strategies used for the discovery of a new word's meaning by determination and social strategies.

3.3.1.1.1 Determination strategies (DET): The strategies are used to discover a new word's meaning without recourse to another's expertise when learners don't know a word. For instance, learners can use a dictionary, analyse any available pictures or gestures or guess meaning from textual context.

3.3.1.1.2 Social strategies (SOC): The strategies are employed to ask someone who knows. Learners can ask teacher or classmates about information in a variety of ways, such as a synonym, paraphrase, or L1 translation of new word.

3.3.1.2 Consolidating dimension: Are strategies used for consolidating a word once it has been encountered by social, memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

3.3.1.2.1 Social strategies (SOC): They can also be employed to consolidate learned words by interacting with other people like studying and practicing meaning in a group.

3.3.1.2.2 Memory strategies (MEM): The strategies (traditionally known as mnemonics) involve connecting the word to be retained with some previously learned knowledge, using some form of imagery, or grouping. A new word can be integrated into many kinds of existing knowledge (i.e. previous experiences or known words) or images can be custom-made for retrieval (i.e. images of the word's form or meaning attributes).

3.3.1.2.3 Cognitive strategies (COG): The strategies are similar to memory strategies, but are not focused so specifically on manipulative mental processing. They include repetition and using mechanical means to study vocabulary. Another kind of cognitive strategy is using study aids. Taking notes in class invites learners to create their own personal structure for newly learned words, and also offers the chance for additional exposure during review.

There seems to be that memory strategies and social strategies lead towards "… (c) learning the meaning of the words, (d) making a strong memory connection between the forms and the meanings of the words, and (e) using the words" Brown and Payne (1994, as cited

in Hatch & Brown, 1995) but that application of the words may not go beyond oral communication into sentence patterns and away from spontaneous practice of the language.

3.3.1.2.4 Metacognitive strategies (MET): Students used the strategies to control and evaluate their learning, behaving an overview of the learning process in general.

Furthermore, Schmitt (1997), suggested a classification of the vocabulary learning strategies which consist of a discovering dimension and a consolidating dimension, as shown below.

Table 2.7 A Taxonomy of Schmitt 's Vocabulary Learning Strategies (1997)

Discovering Dimension

Determination strategies

› Analyse part of speech
› Analyse affixes and roots
› Check for L1 cognate
› Analyse any available pictures or gestures
› Guess from textual context
› Bilingual dictionary (e.g. English-Thai dictionary)
› Monolingual dictionary (e.g. English-English dictionary)
› Word lists
› Flash cards

Social strategies

Ask teacher for an L1 translation
Ask teacher for paraphrase or synonym of new word
Ask teacher for a sentence including the new word
Ask teacher for meaning
Discover new meaning through group work activity

Consolidating Dimension

Social strategies

› (Consolidation) Study and practice meaning in a group
› (Consolidation) Teacher checks students' word lists for accuracy
› (Consolidation) Interact with native speakers

Memory strategies

› Study word with a pictorial representation of its meaning
› Imagine word's meaning
› Connect word to a personal experience
› Associate the word with its coordinates
› Connect the word to its synonyms and antonyms
› Use semantic maps
› Use "scales" for gradable adjectives
› Peg Method1
› Logic Method2
› Group words together to study them
› Group words together spatially on a page
› Use new word in sentence
› Group words together of a word
› Study the spelling of a word
› Study the sound of a word
› Say new word aloud when studying
› Imagine word form
› Underline initial letter of the word
› Configuration
› Use keyword Method
› Affixes and roots (remembering)
› Part of speech (remembering)
› Paraphrase the word's meaning
› Use cognates in study
› Learn the words of an idiom together
› Use physical action when learning a word
› Use semantic feature grids

Cognitive strategies

› Verbal repetition
› Written repetition
› Word lists
› Flash cards
› Take notes in class
› Use the vocabulary section in your textbook
› Listen to tape of word lists
› Put English labels on physical objects
› Keep a vocabulary notebook

Metacognitive strategies

› Use English–language media (songs, movies, newspaper, etc.)
› Testing oneself with word tests
› Use spaced word practice
› Skip or pass new word
› Continue to study word over time

Adopted by Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy

In this research project it was decided to apply Schmitt's taxonomy (inventory) because it was found to be the most complete one taking into account that it covers myriad of strategies students commonly apply when learning new vocabulary and how they could influence the acquisition process of a language even though students did not realize or are conscious of their use.

4. Methodology

This section describes the research methodology this study will follow. We will define some aspects such as the type of study, the setting and the population and the data collection techniques.

4.1 Research Design

This was a descriptive research. This type of enquiry describes what exists and may help to uncover new facts and meaning. The purpose of descriptive research is to observe, describe, and document aspects of a situation as it naturally occurs Polit & Hungler (1999).

Based on the previous statements it can be said that this investigation deals with data that will provide an account or description of individuals, groups or situations. The instruments used in this research task were: a Questionnaire, two interviews, and Observation.

There is no experimental manipulation or indeed any random selection of groups, but a natural group (the entire group) as this is in experimental research.

4.2 Participants

The participants for this study were 14 male and 10 female 6th grade students from a private school on the Colombian Caribbean coast. The students' age average is between 12 and 14 years old. Most of them are in **A1** beginner's level according to the Common European Framework. They come from low and middle income families and they enjoy learning English because they see this subject as important tool to have a better life style in the future.

4.3 Data collection procedures

The data collection for this study is taken through the following techniques: in class observation, a questionnaire, as well as a students' interview and a teacher's interview. "In general, documents are any preserved recording of a person's thoughts, actions or creations (Potter, 1996)". The examination of instruments can help to discover which vocabulary learning strategies students use the most and how those strategies that influence the acquisition learning process.

4.3.1 Participant Observation

Schensul and Lecompte (1999) define participant observation as "the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting".

This type of observation was applied to notice the problem that the students had about vocabulary learning strategies and how it influences the language acquisition process.

4.3.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire is a relatively popular means of collecting information considering that it enables the researcher to collect data in the field settings, and the data themselves are more amenable to quantification than discursive data such as free-from field notes, participant observers' journals, the transcripts of oral language (Nunan, 1986, p. 143).

The questionnaire was applied to identify which vocabulary learning strategies students used more according to Schmitt's taxonomy.

4.3.3 Interview

Oral interview has been widely used as a data research tool in vocabulary acquisition studies. In addition, it is used in research through surveys; researchers utilize it to find information about the stages and processes of language acquisition (Johnston, 1985).

This technique was applied in this task in order to identify which vocabulary learning strategies students apply more according to Schmitt's taxonomy. (See Appendix 2 and 3)

4.4 Data Analysis

The chart above shows explicitly the data collection instruments used, the procedures to collect the data and the research aspects that each instrument concentrates on.

The analysis of the data was done by triangulating the information gathered from the questionnaire, student's interview, and teacher's interview, in class observation as well as Schmitt's taxonomy.

5. Results

This section presents the results according to Schmitt's taxonomy and the instruments applied.

5.1. Discovery and consolidating dimension applied by students in the acquisition process of the English language.

Discovery dimension

The results presented here will be based on the determination and social strategies. From the Determination strategy evidences, it was noticed that most of the time students try to guess the meaning of the word using a bilingual dictionary (42%) while 17% used a monolingual dictionary. This may hinder the acquisition and improving of the target language, though students do not start thinking (orally communicating) in English. See graphics 1 and 2.

Graphic 1. Determination strategies Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire

I use a bilingual dictionary to find out the meaning of a new word

42%

58%

■ Sí
■ No
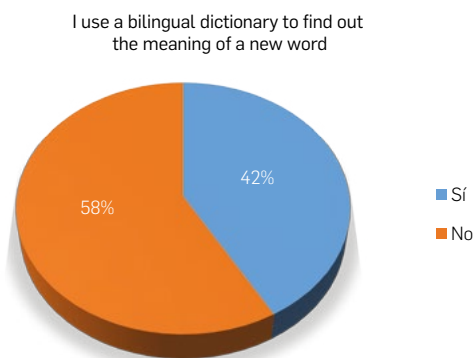
Graphic 2. Determination Strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire

I use a bilingual dictionary to find out the meaning of a new word

42%

58%

■ Sí
■ No
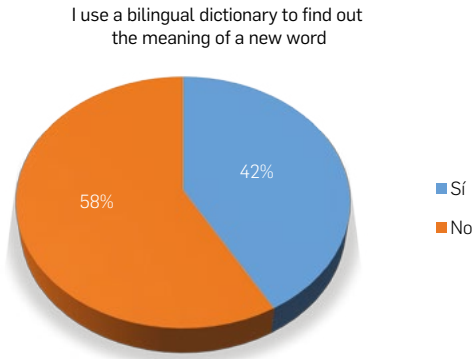
Based on the following question and answer from the teacher's interview it could be determined that:

Question: What kind of dictionary do your students use, monolingual or bilingual? And Why?

Answer: "they use bilingual dictionary because it is easier for them to understand, *but this understanding is based on translation which may hinder a natural communication into the second language. This tendency may also explain why students have difficulties when communicating orally (Italic added)*" (Interview to the teacher from 6th grade– see appendix #3).

In regard to the **Social strategy** findings, it was noticed that they do not have the opportunity to ask a native speaker for the meaning of new words or even worse to establish a conversation with them. This result was obtained from the questionnaire (See graphic 3).

I ask a native speaker for the meaning
of a word in L2 (e.g. English)
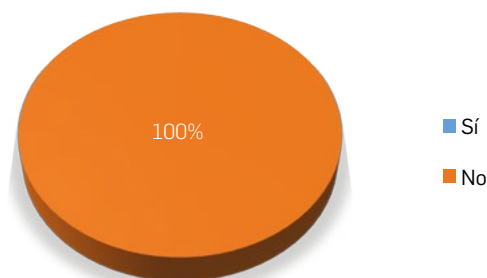
This strategy was also corroborated in students' interview as mentioned below:

Question: have you ever spoken with a native speaker?

Answer: "no, I have never spoken with a native speaker". This information was confirmed by the teacher in her interview.

Question: Do you think they have the opportunity to practice their English with native speakers?

Answer: "No, I do not think that, because most of them do not speak really well and probably they will be scared to talk with a native speaker." Students do not have a real contact with the target language. That could be the reason for their demotivation and apathy to learn the target language.

Consolidating dimension

In this dimension, the Memory, Cognitive, and Metacognitive strategies results were present.

Taking into consideration **Memory strategy** outcomes, during the interview to the teacher, she mentioned doing lots of activities con-

cerning word practice (both spelling and meaning) through sentence constructions as a manner to contextualized words study. An instance of these findings is the following:

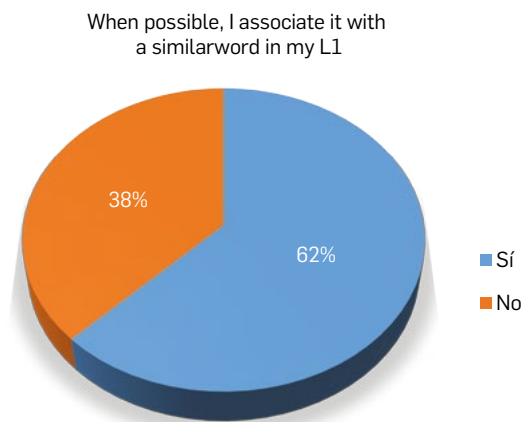**Question**: Which activity do you plan to build their vocabulary?

Answer: "I write the new vocabulary on the board and students repeat them several times in order that they get the pronunciation of the word and finally I write some sentences for them to grasp their meaning," (Interview with the teacher from 6th grade– see appendix #3)

Moreover, another interesting finding, which may explain this lack of oral use of the language is the questionnaire about Schmitt's taxonomy applied to the students where the highest percentages in the memory strategies correspond to word memory (83%), and word association (62%) (See graphs 4, 5, and 6).
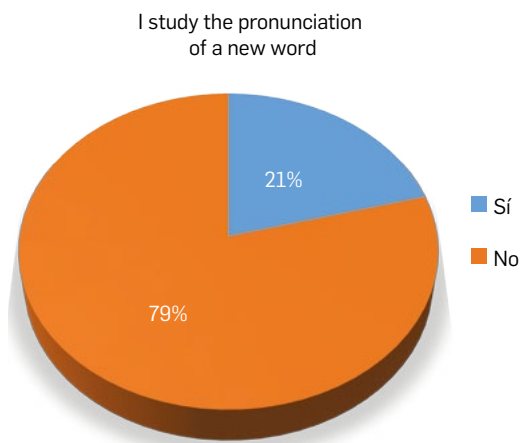
Graphic 4. Memory strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire

I say the word aloud when studying
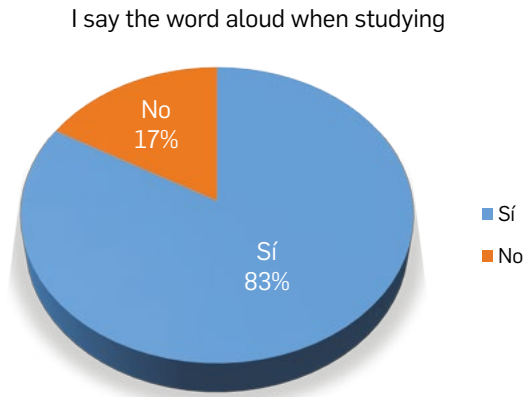
Graphic 5. Memory strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire

When possible, I associate it with
a similarword in my L1

38%

62%

■ Sí

■ No

Graphic 6. Memory strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire

I study the pronunciation
of a new word

21%

79%

■ Sí

■ No

Cognitive strategy

Based on the **Cognitive strategy** results, it could be explained why students' oral interaction is limited in terms of language production when being asked to participate. Evidences of this tendency are the highest percentages referring towards learning vocabulary (75%) by contextualizing their use and memorizing (the word itself and its pronunciation) (50%) while making an effort to use it orally (42%) (See graphs 6, 7, and 8). Even though still the focus for learning the language relies on language acquisition from vocabulary building and memorizing than in oral use.

Graphic 6. Cognitive Strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire

I study the pronunciation
of a new word

21%

79%

■ Sí
■ No
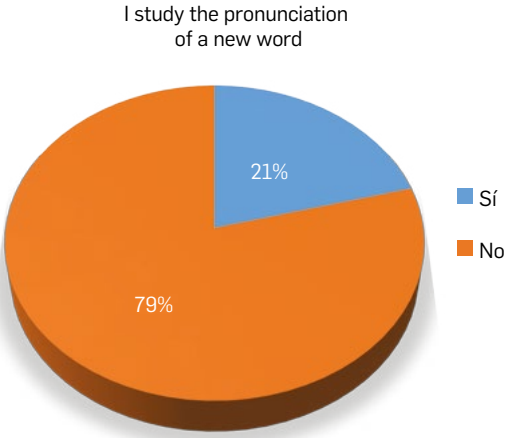
Graphic 7. Cognitive Strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire

Make an effort to use new vocabularyin writing

25%

75%

■ Sí
■ No
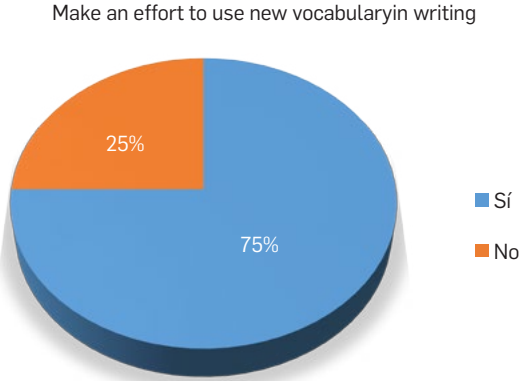
Graphic 8. Cognitive Strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire

Say the word aloud

■	Sí
■	No
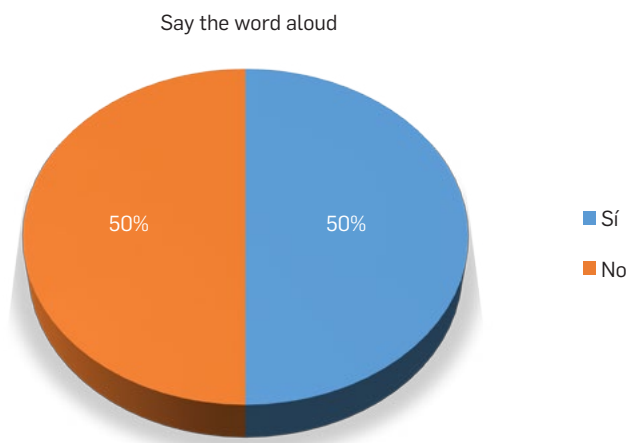
These findings could support what the teacher did in class: she used words to construct sentences with minimum of difficulties in word order, but the word itself was applied according to the appropriate meaning from context, when teaching speaking interaction was almost null. It would be of great importance to remember that these results stand for students' vocabulary strategy use (those results were students' chosen options from the questionnaire).

In addition, during the interview stage it was also found (as well as on the observation and the questionnaire) that more than 80% of the students repeated the new word with the intention to learn them as well as the language pronunciation, but it does not guarantee a spoken production. The next finding illustrates this tendency:

Question: How do you learn new words in English?

Answer: "The teacher writes the word on the board and she repeats the word several times then, we do the same and in this way we learn the new word." (Interview to student from 6th grade– see appendix #2).
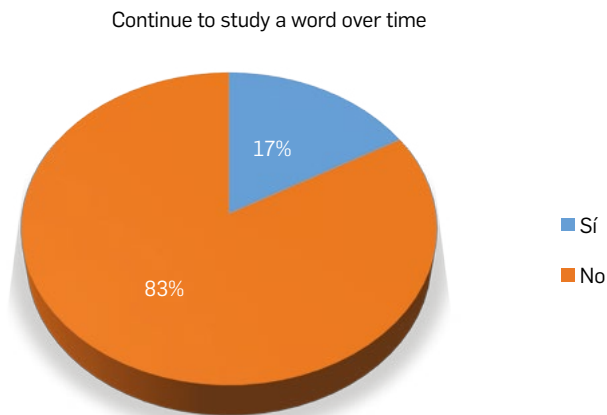
It could be noticed from the **Metacognitive strategy** outcomes that the highest percentage refers to English language media (the use of a tape recorder). (42%) confirming why students understood what the teacher said, taking into account that there exists a pronunciation

emphasis based on listening activities. However, the spoken language is neglected after the listening activities. Furthermore, it was found that when students learn a new word they rarely continue practicing it (17%) or practice the new vocabulary on regular basis (17%) (See graphs 9, 10, 11, and 12).

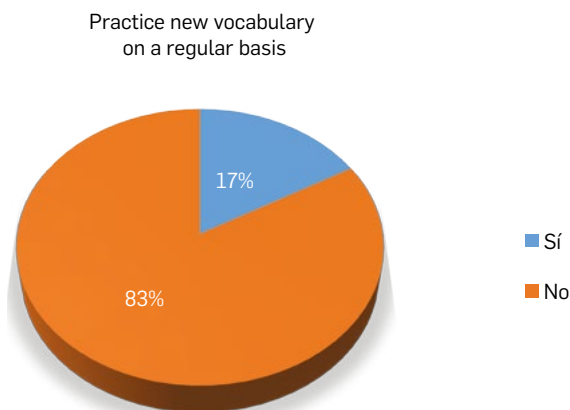**Graphic 9.** Metacognitive strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire

Make an effort to use in speaking
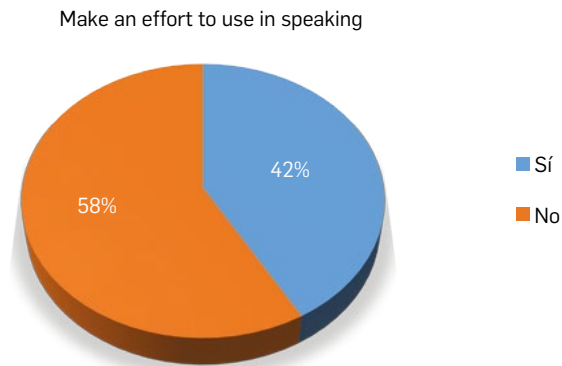
Graphic 10. Metacognitive strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire

Continue to study a word over time

Practice new vocabulary
on a regular basis

Graphic 12. Metacognitive strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy
from the questionnaire

Test oneself with word tests
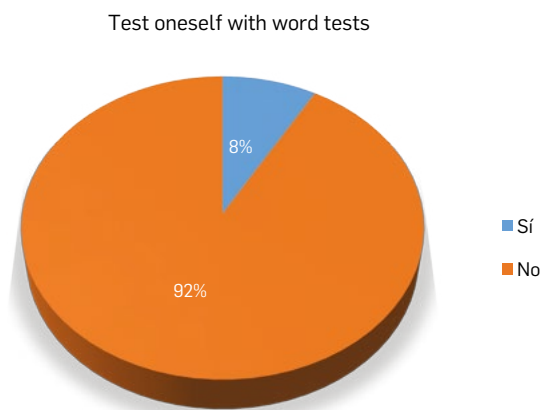
An evidence of this statement is this comment from the student's interview:

Question: When you listen something in the tape recorder do you understand?

Answer: "yes, I understand but it is difficult for me to answer to the teacher in English about what I listened". (Interview to student from 6th grade– see appendix # 2).

On the other hand, in the teacher's interview it was found that translation into students' first language hinders the oral competence since it occupies learners' processes to understand what is said rather than using the target language as the single vehicle to reach comprehension towards oral communication.

Question: How do you know that your students understand the listening activities in class?

Answer: "yes they understand because they translate into Spanish among themselves what the questions were. But it is difficult for them to answer the question in English" (Interview to teacher from 6th grade- see appendix # 3).

5.2 The influence of discovery and consolidating strategies, students apply into the acquisition of the English language

The results presented here will be based on how the identified inventory of discovery and consolidating strategies influence the acquisition of the English language in these students.

The analysis of this category is organized by responding to the findings of the discovery dimension and then the consolidation dimension.

Discovery dimension

It was noticed from the **Determination strategy** evidences that the use of a bilingual dictionary (42%) rather than a monolingual one (17%) hinders the acquisition and improving of the target language, though students do not start thinking (orally communicating) in English. (See interview to the teacher from 6th grade- see appendix #3).

Moreover, from the **Social strategy** findings**,** it was found that having no oral exposure to communicate with a native speaker also has a negative influence in the development of the English language acquisition (See graph 3), (students' interview), and (teacher's interview).

Consolidating dimension

In this dimension, the Memory, Cognitive, and Metacognitive strategies results are presented.

Based on the **Memory strategy** outcomes during the interview to the teacher it was observed that there was a great emphasis on word practice specifically on spelling and meaning. That could explain why students easily recognized words and meaning from the teacher when speaking to them, even thought they were unable to respond orally. In fact, their understanding was based on a synchronic translation what is thought to be negative if the spoken language is the purpose (Interview with the teacher from 6th grade- see appendix #3, also See graphs 4, 5, and 6).

Cognitive strategy

Based on the **Cognitive strategy** inventory results, there was still a major emphasis on learning vocabulary (75%) and memorizing (50%). However, the oral competence was not reinforced in class. (42%). Once again, the teacher reinforcement towards students' language acquisition is being focused on the ability to recognize linguistic items, which do not contribute to develop communicative competence and oral production (See graphs 6, 7, and 8).

In addition to this, it was identified that more than 80% of the students repeat the new word but it does not guarantee a spoken production since rehearsal strategies were mostly used to remember vocabulary (Interview to student from 6th grade- see appendix #2).

Considering the **Metacognitive strategy** outcomes, it may confirm why students commonly understand what the teacher says based on a translation process - See interview to teacher from 6th grade- see appendix # 3, (explanations, instructions, questions, etc...). The use of a tape recorder represents 42% when talking about media strategies, but no spoken language tasks or activities followed. (See graphs 9, 10, 11, and 12 and interview to student from 6th grade- see appendix # 2).

6. Conclusions and Limitations

Several conclusions can be drawn after the analysis and discussion of the data. The uses of Memory and Cognitive strategies were used the most by the sixth graders while social strategies were found to be the least reported. It may point towards not only what components of the target language are reinforced (through the vocabulary language strategy), but also the strategies that were neglected towards the language acquisition process (specifically in spoken language).

Firstly, it was found that the students learned the new vocabulary using the memory strategies (repeating word aloud and its pronunciation) and cognitive strategies (making an effort to use the word, using them in written contexts). Those strategies are of great importance to acquire the language, but are not enough if students really want to improve their oral competence and hence participating in real social encounters (conversations).

On the other hand, it was seen that the social strategies (asking a native speaker for the meaning of a word in L2 in the discovery dimension and consolidating dimensions) had the slowest use despite their importance to develop the oral competence.

Moreover, it was noticed that the use of memory and cognitive strategies are not enough for the language acquisition process bearing in mind that those strategies just promote memorizing and remembering the words, but when they have to speak, the interaction is almost null.

Besides that, it was identified, as established through the observation, that when vocabulary was already taught in preceding classes and evaluated in subsequent ones, students do not know how to use it in real context or they forget the meaning of the words. This argument is supported by Oxford and Scarcella (1994) when they propose a new "research-based approach to vocabulary teaching after examining relevant research concerning student motivation and need, the complexity of knowing a word, as well as factors that affect L2 vocabulary acquisition."

This research does not suggest that memory and cognitive strategies are not worthy for teaching, but it is important to develop the social,

determination, and metacognitive strategies too, because when those strategies are used teachers and students have the right environment to achieve communicative processes.

Naturally, there were some limitations in this study. There is also the danger of participants believing that they use a strategy, but it might not necessarily be the case. It would be a good idea then to consider some more open questions to let students support their choices.

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