

# Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Acquisition in the Efl Classroom

*Compiled by María Guadalupe García  
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### **Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Acquisition in the EFL Classroom**

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# Preface

As educators we have a target goal and that is to promote students' success and nurture their desire to learn in a respectful and constructive environment. One of our greatest tasks is to implement effective methods and strategies that aid us to achieve our instruction goals in our classrooms related to vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Pikulski and Templeton (sf) say that it is impossible to exaggerate the power of words; they have changed and they will continue varying the course of history. Vocabulary is a great tool we can give students to succeed not only in education but also in their lives. Our language skills are essential to function in today's complex social and economic worlds.

Furthermore, vocabulary could be reflected more specifically in high levels of reading achievement. Besides, the report of the National Reading panel in 2000 concluded that its relevance has been worldwide recognized in the development of reading skills. Many researchers have noted the relationship between the growth in reading power and the growth in word knowledge.

This book comprises research articles related to reading comprehension and lexicon. They were conducted by students of the English Teaching Diploma at Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana in Monteria, Cordoba, (Colombia).

We hope they can support teachers by offering different ways to develop vocabulary and reading skills in their learners.



# Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Ajitha. R. Manjeshwar for her assistance in the style correction of this book and also to all the students of the English Teaching Diploma at Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Monteria who were the authors of the articles presented here. The findings of researches expressed in this manuscript do not reflect the policies or positions of this university.







**Part I:  
Reading Comprehension  
Articles**



## CHAPTER 1

# What Reading Comprehension Strategies Do 6<sup>th</sup> Graders from a Bilingual Section of a School in Montelibano Use to Understand Science Texts?

María Paula Vélez Rodríguez

### Resumen

El presente estudio se basa en la identificación de estrategias de lectura utilizadas por los estudiantes para comprender textos científicos. En algunas oportunidades las áreas trabajan de una forma aislada y manifiestan que los estudiantes no saben leer y de la baja comprensión de lectura que presentan frente a textos científicos. He aquí la importancia de saber e identificar las diferentes estrategias que utilizan y prefieren los estudiantes para entender lo que leen.

Alumnos de sexto grado presentan dificultades en la comprensión de lectura ya que no entienden algunos conceptos científicos, presentan carencia de estrategias de lectura que puede afectar varias áreas y procesos como la escritura y el lenguaje ya que pueden sentirse incómodos al momento de participar en clase y esto conllevaría a un atraso en el proceso de aprendizaje.

Para encontrar una solución al problema presentado anteriormente es necesario conocer las estrategias de lectura usadas por los estudiantes para entender aquellos conceptos que no comprenden en los textos científicos.

El colegio escogido para la realización del presente estudio está ubicado en Montelibano, Córdoba. Es una institución privada que pertenece a

una compañía minera. El colegio es mixto, tiene una sección bilingüe y la población es multicultural.

El documento de investigación está organizado en nueve secciones que incluyen la descripción del problema, la pregunta de investigación, objetivos, marco teórico, metodología, resultados, discusión, conclusiones y apéndices.

## Palabras Clave

Estrategias de lectura, Estrategias de comprensión, estrategias cognitivas, estrategias de compensación, estrategias afectivas, estrategias sociales, textos científicos.

## Abstract

The present study focuses on identifying reading comprehension strategies that students use to understand scientific texts. Content areas sometimes work separately and complain about the way students read and the low level of comprehension they have of scientific texts. Hence the importance of knowing the way learners prefer to read and better understand what they read.

6<sup>th</sup> graders have problems in reading comprehension because they don't understand some scientific concepts. They lack different reading strategies and the problem might also affect other areas such as writing and speaking because they feel uncomfortable participating in class and therefore they will not understand future topics.

To find a solution to the problem stated above it's necessary to know the strategies the students use to understand concepts, the strategies they use when they read scientific literature and the strategies the teachers use to explain how to read.

The school chosen for this study is located in Montelíbano, Cordoba; the institution belongs to a Mining Company so it's a private school. The school has a Bilingual section, urban and co-educational. One important characteristic to be mentioned is that it has a multicultural population.

The research is organized in the following nine sections that include the description of the problem, research questions, objectives, theoretical framework, methodology, results, discussions, conclusions and appendices.

## Key Words

Reading strategies, Comprehension strategies, Cognitive strategies, Compensation strategies, Metacognitive strategies, Affective strategies, Social strategies, Content area, and scientific text.

## 1. Introduction

The present study focuses on identifying reading comprehension strategies that students use to understand scientific texts. Content areas sometimes work separately and complain about the way students read and the low level of comprehension they have of scientific texts hence the importance of knowing the way learners prefer to read and better understand what they read.

6<sup>th</sup> graders have problems in reading comprehension because they don't understand some scientific concepts, they lack different reading strategies and the problem might also affect other areas and also their writing and speaking can be affected because they feel uncomfortable participating in class and therefore they will not understand future topics.

To find a solution to the problem stated above it's necessary to know the strategies the students use to understand concepts, the strategies they use when they read scientific literature and the strategies the teachers use to explain how to read.

The school chosen for this study is located in Montelibano, Cordoba; the institution belongs to a Mine Company so it's a private school. The school has a Bilingual section, urban and co-educational; one important characteristic to be mentioned is that it has a multicultural population.

The 6<sup>th</sup> graders classroom of the Bilingual section has 19 students, 8 boys and 11 girls between 11 and 12 years old. They have a high social and economic level. It's a multicultural classroom where the parents accompanied them in their learning process.

The research is organized in the following nine sections that include the description of the problem, research questions, objectives, theoretical framework, methodology, results, discussions, conclusions and appendices.

## 2. Research Problem

- › Students' don't understand science concepts easily.
- › Students have problems understanding science texts.
- › Both teachers and students are involved in the problem.
- › Most of the time, the students don't understand the concepts when they begin a new topic or lesson and they have to do a reading.

### 2.1 Research Questions

What reading comprehension strategies do 6<sup>th</sup> graders from a Bilingual Section of a School in Montelibano use to understand science texts?

- › Why do they use those specific strategies?
- › Which strategies do they prefer?

#### 2.1.1. Objectives

#### 2.1.2 General Objective

Identify what reading comprehension strategies do 6<sup>th</sup> graders from a Bilingual Section of a School in Montelibano use to understand science texts.

#### 2.1.3 Specific Objectives

- › Explain why 6<sup>th</sup> graders from a Bilingual Section of a School in Montelibano use those specific strategies to understand science texts.
- › Identify the strategies that 6<sup>th</sup> graders from a Bilingual Section of a School in Montelibano prefer when they read science texts.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Reading strategies are defined as learning techniques, behaviours, problem-solving or study skills which make learning more effective and efficient (Oxford and Crookall,1989). Singhal (2001) states that

comprehension or reading strategies on the other hand, indicate how readers conceive a task, how they make sense of what they read, and what they do when they do not understand. In other words, they are different methodologies used by students to understand better and solve difficulties during the reading in an effective way.

Barnett (1988) calls reading strategies the mental operations involved when readers approach a text effectively and make sense of what they read. Pearson and Gallagher (1983) identify better readers as having better ability to summarize and make effective use of background knowledge. It is possible to say, that better readers take the text and cover it all using different ways or methodologies of reading and they are conscious of the way they are reading, evaluating their process This could make the difference between a good reader and another that has difficulties in that specific skill.

Hosenfield (1977) identifies a good reader as one who tries to keep the meaning of the passage in mind, reads in chunks, ignores less important words, tries to guess the meanings of unknown words using contextual clues, and has a good concept of himself/herself as a reader. Following these studies, there have been attempts to instruct learners in using these strategies to make them better readers (Carrell, 1989; Block, 1992; Victori & Lockhart, 1995). These studies show a positive correlation between reading strategy instruction and reading proficiency.

Although a number of studies have attempted to conceptualize the notion of strategies used by language learners, as stated, Oxford (1990) offers a useful and comprehensive classification scheme of the various strategies used by learners. Within the context of reading strategies, the following six strategies can more appropriately be referred to as sub-strategies in the article written by (Singhal, 2001).

**Cognitive strategies** are used by learners to transform or manipulate the language. In more specific terms, this includes note taking, formal practice with the specific aspects of the target language such as sounds and sentence structure, summarizing, paraphrasing, predicting, analyzing, and using context clues. Techniques that help the learner to remember and retrieve information are referred to as **memory strategies**. These include creating mental images through



grouping and associating, semantic mapping, using keywords, employing word associations, and placing new words into a context.

**Compensation strategies** include skills such as inferring, guessing while reading, or using reference materials such as dictionaries.

**Metacognitive strategies** are behaviors undertaken by the learners to plan, arrange, and evaluate their own learning. Such strategies include directed attention and self-evaluation, organization, setting goals and objectives, seeking practice opportunities, and so forth.

**Affective strategies** such as self-encouraging behavior, to lower anxiety, and encourage learning. Lastly, **social strategies** are those that involve other individuals in the learning process and refer to cooperation with peers, questioning, asking for correction, and feedback; for example, while reading, a student may ask another individual for feedback about his/her reading responses (Singhal, 2001, p. 2,3).

It is important to recognize that the above strategies can be used to facilitate learning, or can be used to facilitate comprehension.

According to the many strategies offered from different authors including the ones mentioned in this study, teachers have to provide these options to students. The idea is to let them know that there are many ways in which they can learn to read and more over to understand what they read; this is not a one day process it takes longer but the results would be seen. Content areas are very good option to integrate reading skills because reading is not only the concern of language areas.

Bowers (2000) expresses that reading scientific texts is sometimes difficult for students; the teaching of science concepts combined with communications skills is an approach whose time has come for two major reasons:

First, there is a general recognition of the need to make instruction meaningful and relevant to the real world of students. There is a fine array of children's literature available today that teachers can use to introduce their students to the world in which they live and, concom-

itantly, to teach reading skills in a meaningful context. The vicarious experiences children have through excellent literature not only can be used to teach reading and writing skills in context, but can also be used to help students see themselves in what they read—which is very motivating. This meaningfulness and real-world approach has been shown to significantly enhance students' comprehension of what they read. To increase their self-esteem and sense of self-worth, all students, regardless of gender or ethnicity, need to see themselves reflected in what they read and study in school. The wide variety of high quality literature available today helps to accommodate this need; careful selection of what is to be read helps to assure that students can relate to what they are reading and, therefore, make it meaningful to their own reality. (Bowers, P, 2000, p.1).

According to Anderson and Roth (1989) cited by Chan and Sachs (2001), “understanding science is difficult because new information often appears incompatible with what students know”. Students tend to let their prior knowledge override text information and assimilate new information to what they already knew, often resulting in alternative conceptions. The beliefs that learning involves thinking and that it is extendible seem particularly relevant for scientific understanding that involves sense-making constructive learning activities (Chan, C. & Sachs, J, 2001).

Because of this reason, teachers have an important mission that consists of explaining to learners what learning is about. The use of the same strategy makes the students limit their learning capacities and it will be harder for them to get really involved in the process of constructing knowledge and learning.

Sometimes teachers just begin presenting information to students without taking into account what they “think”. Knowledge is very complex and the way we present it is different from the way others receive it. For this reason, it's very important to know the students beliefs about the way they learn and that has to be also with understanding scientific text, especially because those readings use a different terminology and most of the time concepts that students don't use frequently. It will be a good idea to analyze the way our students learn to learn and then begin

guiding them through the constructivist methodology. By identifying their reading strategies and preferences in this topic, it will be easier for both teachers and students to develop the process and improve in reading skills, in this case scientific texts.

## 4. Methodology

The methodology chosen for the research project is Ethnography. Ethnography is literally the description of culture (or of group of people that are perceived as possessing some degree of cultural unity). Ethnographic research can be done in different ways and for different purposes. So long as the basic principles are not violated, a wide variety of tools and methods can be employed, in isolation or in combination. (Van Lier, 1988, p.8)

The purpose of the present study is to describe the behaviour of a group in relation with the reading strategies 6<sup>th</sup> graders use to understand scientific texts, identifying what the participants are doing according to a specific process (reading) in a current situation.

Using Ethnography, a qualitative or descriptive research, it's possible to observe the classroom as it is without a different intervention that might interfere in the research. It is also possible to interpret what the participants of the study do according to the research question.

“Qualitative research is a useful approach wherever an investigator is concerned with discovering or describing second language acquisition”, in this case with one of the skills. Also a descriptive research in this case provides descriptions of naturally occurring phenomena connected with language development and processing. The procedures and methods associated with qualitative research have increasingly been incorporated into second language research in recent years because they give the possibility to explain different aspects of the research that are not possible through experimental research. (Selinger & Shohany, 1989, p.80)

According to the research question, the most appropriate techniques of data collection area survey (Appendix 1), an analysis of products

(Appendix 2) and an interview (Appendix 3). It's important to have the three sources of information so they will complement each other and follow the process of triangulation. The use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour may be defined as triangulation, it is also called the multi-method approach. (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 100).

Surveys and questionnaires are useful for collecting data from large groups of subjects. The items on surveys and questionnaires may vary in the degree of explicitness and specificity (Selinger & Shohany, 1989, p.10).

In the current research the survey was applied to 19 students (the whole class), while the interview and the analysis of product was applied only to 4 students, 2 boys and 2 girls, so it is possible to analyze the results in depth. The four students were chosen based on their scores in the science subject (2 with high level and 2 with low level).

The analysis used for this research was done following some steps. For the survey analysis, all the questions were tabulated and the information was organized in tables according to the categories mentioned in the theoretical framework considering the strategy and the frequency of use. Bar graphs for each table were constructed including the results of each category and the specific strategies of each one. To organize the results for question 7 where the participants had to choose their four favourite strategies inside the survey, the data was organized using another table and a graph showing the most relevant answers.

For the interview analysis, the interviews were transcribed and organized in separate tables, one for each student. The information from the interview was categorized according to the six categories mentioned in the theoretical framework. Only one emergent category for the present study appeared. This was rereading that refers to the return to the beginning of a sentence or paragraph and read it again (Rasinski & Padak, 1996, p. 67).

In this particular case, rereading appeared as an emergent category because it wasn't considered inside the theoretical framework.

The number of times a category appeared during the interview was counted for each student. Taking into account the frequency a strategy appeared during each interview, a bar graph was constructed to see the most frequent strategy the participant used.

## 5. Results

In the following section, the data evidenced in the survey is presented in tables according to the frequency of use of the strategies (Appendix 4) and a description of the results found in the interviews (Appendix 5).

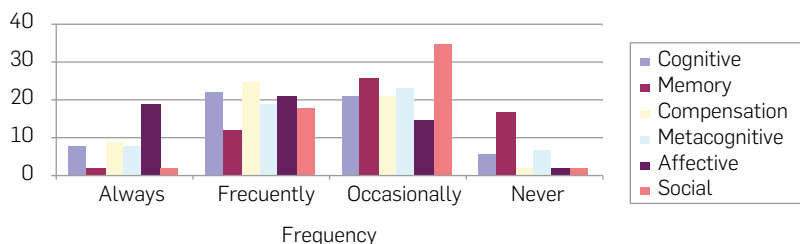
### Survey

#### General Results:

Table 1 (General results)

Frequency Strategies	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Cognitive	8	22	21	6
Memory	2	12	26	17
Compensation	9	25	21	2
Metacognitive	8	19	23	7
Affective	19	21	15	2
Social	2	18	35	2

Figure 1 (General Results)



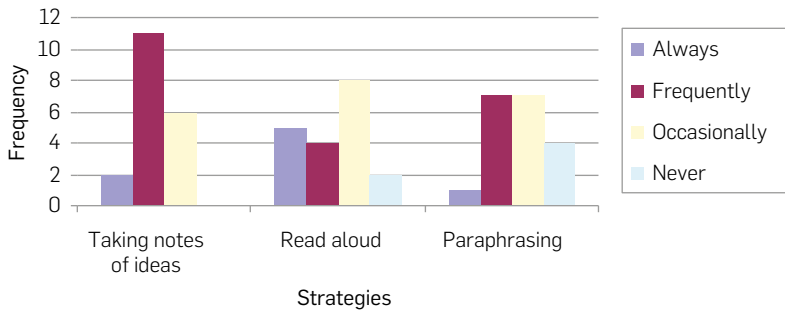
Most of the participants chose the affective strategy as one of their favourites and most used. The less used strategy by the participants was the memory strategy, only two of the students say that they use this strategy always and 12 said occasionally.

### Cognitive Strategies:

Table 2 (Cognitive strategies)

Frequency Strategies	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Taking notes of main ideas	2	11	6	0
Read aloud	5	4	8	2
Paraphrasing	1	7	7	4

Figure 2 (Cognitive Strategies)



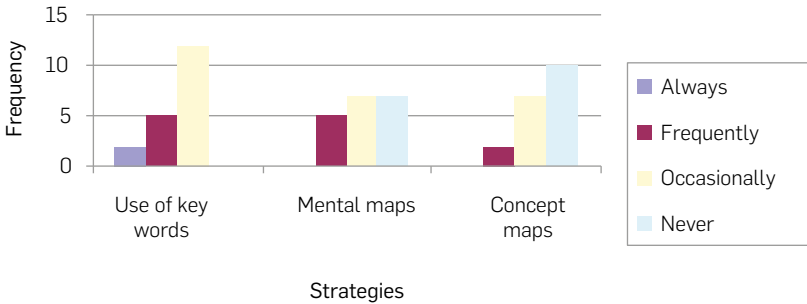
Inside the cognitive strategies, participants chose reading aloud as one of the most used; taking notes also apply, while paraphrasing is always used only by 1 participant.

## Memory Strategies:

Table 3 (Memory strategies)

<b>Frequency Strategies</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Never</b>
Use of key words	2	5	12	0
Mental maps	0	5	7	7
Concept maps	0	2	7	10

Figure 3 (Memory strategies)



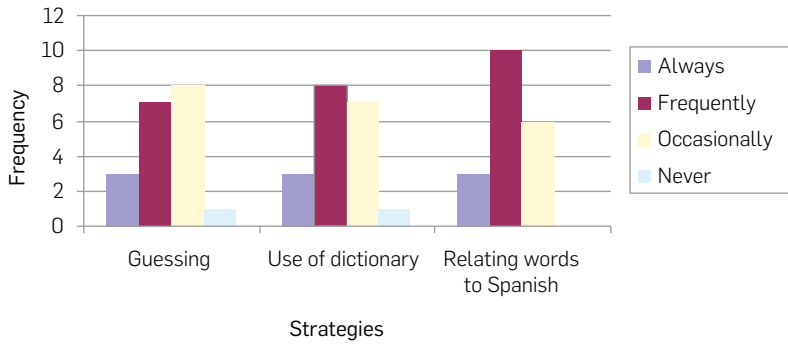
Memory strategies are not used very much by the participants, more than a half of the participants never use concept maps, and 11 occasionally use key words as a strategy.

## Compensation Strategies:

Table 4 (Compensation Strategies)

<b>Frequency Strategies</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Never</b>
Guessing	3	7	8	1
Use of dictionary	3	8	7	1
Relating words to Spanish	3	10	6	0

Figure 4 (Compensation Strategies)



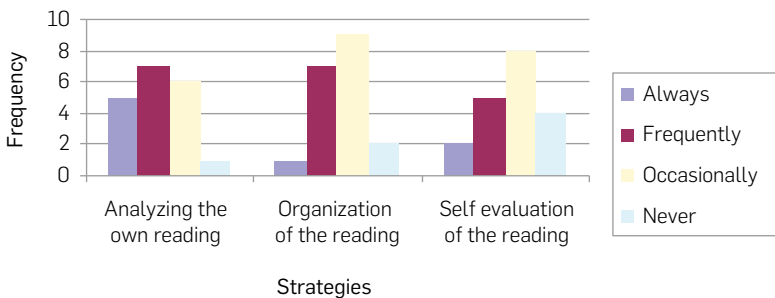
Compensation strategies appeared with a low frequency use, only 3 participants use at least one of the strategies always, the strategy most frequently used inside this category was relating words to Spanish.

**Metacognitive Strategies:**

Table 5 (Metacognitive strategies)

Frequency Strategies	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Analyzing their own reading	5	7	6	1
Organization of the reading	1	7	9	2
Self-evaluation of the reading	2	5	8	4

Figure 5 (Metacognitive Strategies)





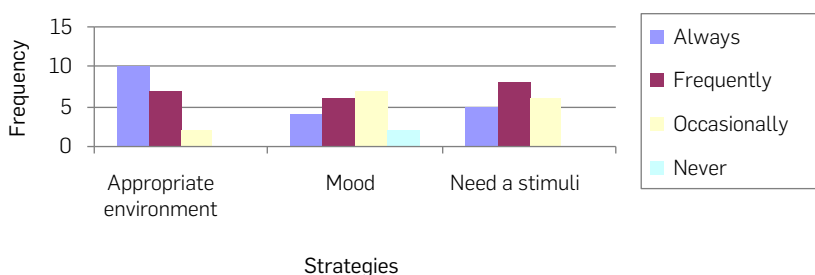
The category of metacognitive strategies is one of the less used with the memory category. Only 4 of the participants analyse their own reading, only one organizes the reading and 4 never evaluate themselves while reading.

### Affective Strategies:

Table 6 (Affective strategies)

Frequency Strategies	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Appropriate environment	10	7	2	0
Mood	4	6	7	2
Need a stimuli	5	8	6	0

Figure 6 (Affective strategies)



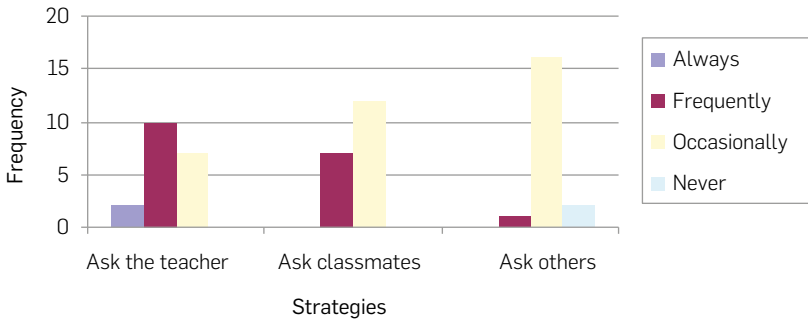
According to the affective category results, more than half of the participants need always an appropriate environment to read. 4 need to be always in a good mood and 5 need most of the time a positive stimuli.

### Social Strategies:

Table 7 (Social strategies)

Frequency Strategies	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Ask the teacher	2	10	7	0
Ask classmates	0	7	12	0
Ask others	0	1	16	2

**Figure 7 (Social strategies)**



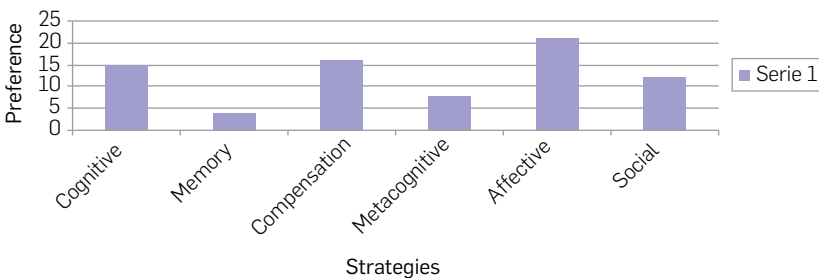
The social strategies category shows that almost all of the participants, (16 of them) occasionally ask others while more than half of the participants ask the teacher frequently to understand the text.

Question 7 from the survey refers to the four favourite strategies the participants prefer according to the survey. The data is presented in table.

**Table 8 (The four favourite strategies chosen by students)**

Question	1a	1b	1c	2a	2b	2c	3a	3b	3c	4a	4b	4c	5a	5b	5c	6a	6b	6c
N° of ss.	6	6	3	4	?	?	5	2	9	4	2	2	11	4	6	8	2	2
Affective = 21, Compensation = 16, Cognitive = 15, Social = 12, Metacognitive = 8, Memory = 4																		

**Figure 8 (Participant Preferences)**



When the participants were asked for their favourite strategies, more than half chose the affective category as their favourite, specifically question N° 5a that refers to having an appropriate environment to read. Question 3b refers to the use of dictionary and it was chosen by 8 of the participants. Social strategies such as asking to the teacher and cognitive as taking notes and reading aloud were also marked as

preferred. The less used strategies were the memory ones, none of the students chose creating mental maps or designing concept maps as favourite.

## Interview

- › Student A considers the compensation strategy useful for understanding scientific texts, specially the use of the dictionary. Memory and Cognitive strategies such as finding key words and paraphrasing are also used by the participant. The student also expresses that he didn't find any difficulties when he was reading the text provided before the interview.
- › Student B uses the cognitive strategy frequently emphasizing in reading aloud, he also considers it important and productive to ask the teacher to clarify his doubts. He mentions the use of the dictionary and searching for key words as an important tool during reading. Student B didn't find any difficulties while reading the text before the interview. Student C considers the use of dictionary and reading the text more than once relevant for her reading process. As student B she said that asking the teacher and reading out aloud are good and useful strategies. She had some vocabulary difficulties while reading the text before the interview.
- › During the interview, Student D mentioned many times that she uses the dictionary and that she finds it as an important tool to understand scientific texts. As Students B and C she uses the strategy of reading aloud and student C she reads the text as many times as necessary. Student D was the only one choosing the affective strategy telling that it's important to have an appropriate environment to read. During the reading she had difficulties with vocabulary.
- › Only Students C and D consider rereading, and both of them are girls.
- › All of the students mention that they use the dictionary while reading a text to solve difficulties.

Students A, B and C asked questions the teacher when they needed to clarify doubts.

Some examples of the participants mentioning the use of the dictionary (Appendix 5):

*“¿Qué haces cuando encuentras alguna dificultad para leer un texto de ciencias?”*

*Student A: “Busco las fuentes necesarias para poder entender la dificultad”.*

*Student D: “Lo leo hasta que lo entienda y busco las palabras que no entienda”.*

*“¿Qué tipo de fuentes?”*

*Student A: “Pueden ser fuentes de Internet, libros, diccionarios, guías”.*

Some examples of the rereading category (emergent from this study) expressed by students C and D (Appendix 5):

*¿Cómo leíste el texto, qué metodología usaste?*

*Student C: “Leí varias veces porque al comienzo no lo entendía y busqué una palabra que no entendía”.*

*Student D: “Leer en voz alta y leerlo varias veces”.*

## 6. Discussion

The current study is based on the reading strategies 6<sup>th</sup> graders use to understand scientific literature. Through the different analysis done it's possible to observe that the majority of the participants use the affective strategy to understand better science texts; in the interview some of the participants such as Student A and D mentioned this strategy, an example is when they said they like to read alone or in an appropriate environment.

When the participants were asked if they prefer to read using their own methodology rather than the teacher's all of them said that they prefer theirs. This answer can let us think that sometimes we as teachers are deciding over something that in most cases is a personal decision, taking into consideration that everybody has a different learning style. It does not mean that we have to let students do whatever they want, it is just that we have to give them the tools for them to choose over the wide variety of strategies so they can decide which one helps them more.

All the participants that were interviewed and many of the participants that answered the survey chose the dictionary as an instrument to solve difficulties; this is an easy way to find solutions but they must consider other alternatives such as internet, books or inferring meanings in the reading. Only participant A mentioned other sources different from a dictionary.

One of the most used strategy according to the survey and the interview was the social strategy. Many of the participants (survey and interview) think that it is useful to ask the teacher, this strategy is positive if the student is in the class but when they are reading at home or in a place where there are no teachers, they need to have an autonomous reading. It's important to emphasize and promote individual reading, teaching them or guiding them to find solutions to their needs.

Both, the survey and the interview coincide in that memory strategies are not frequently used. It's interesting to see how students are now trying to analyze, comprehend and not memorize. Even though the memory category offers different alternatives or strategies that could be useful for students but if they don't know how to make a summary, write main ideas or construct mental or concept maps, they won't do it.

All the participants from the interview think that the best strategies are the ones that they use because these are the ones that let them understand better. For a further study it would be interesting to ask them for the ones that they don't know or the ones that they haven't used so that teachers can work on those giving them more possibilities to choose.

In the interview it was observed that only students C and D, both girls, chose rereading as a strategy. Both consider that reading more than twice help them understand scientific texts. A different study could use this point to analyse a gender perspective and reading strategies, differences probably will appear.

The research paper also shows that there is no a representative difference between the strategies used by the students who are considered proficient in science according to scores and class development.

The research paper goals were reached and it was possible to identify some of the reading strategies 6th graders use, which strategies they prefer to use to understand science texts and the reason why. The suggestion is to continue searching and identifying learning strategies that help students develop and improve their reading.

## 7. Conclusions

Why is it important to know about student's preferences and strategies used? The idea is that teachers from different academic areas become interested in developing reading skills strategies that motivate students to read and understand, in this particular case, scientific texts.

Creating new strategies is important to know what they like to do or to apply exercises that promote their methodologies according to their learning styles. Sometimes we, as teachers, forget about the things that our students like, and most of the time those are the things that motivate their learning.

With this study doors are open to continue investigating, now that we have taken the first step that is identifying the strategies that students use to read and the ones they prefer. Further studies can be done with a bigger population to have more information. And other studies to see how students might improve reading skills through science texts using the strategies they prefer.

The invitation is for teachers, to analyse the interests of students and to take into account those aspects that help them improve their learning.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1

### Survey

#### 1. Cognitive Strategies

- 1a. When you are reading a science text you take notes of the main ideas
  - a. always \_\_\_
  - b. frequently \_\_\_
  - c. occasionally \_\_\_
  - d. never \_\_\_
- 1b. When you are reading a science text you read aloud to understand better
  - a. always \_\_\_
  - b. frequently \_\_\_
  - c. occasionally \_\_\_
  - d. never \_\_\_
- 1c. When you are reading a science text you transfer the idea of the author into your own words (paraphrase)
  - a. always \_\_\_
  - b. frequently \_\_\_
  - c. occasionally \_\_\_
  - d. never \_\_\_

#### 2. Memory Strategies

- 2a. When you are reading a science text you use key words as an important tool to understand
  - a. always \_\_\_
  - b. frequently \_\_\_
  - c. occasionally \_\_\_
  - d. never \_\_\_
- 2b. When you are reading a science text you create mental maps
  - a. always \_\_\_
  - b. frequently \_\_\_
  - c. occasionally \_\_\_
  - d. never \_\_\_



2c. When you are reading a science text you construct concept maps to help you remember concepts or ideas

a. always \_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_\_ d. never \_\_\_

### 3. Compensation Strategies

3a. When you are reading a science text you try to guess what is going to happen next

a. always \_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_\_ d. never \_\_\_

3b. When you are reading a science text you use the dictionary to look for important concepts

a. always \_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_\_ d. never \_\_\_

3c. When you are reading a science text you relate the vocabulary with some words in Spanish

a. always \_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_\_ d. never \_\_\_

### 4. Metacognitive Strategies

4a. When you are reading a science text you analyze the way you are reading

a. always \_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_\_ d. never \_\_\_

4b. When you are reading a science text you organize the reading in an specific way

a. always \_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_\_ d. never \_\_\_

4c. When you are reading a science text you try to find errors you made while you read

a. always \_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_\_ d. never \_\_\_

## 5. Affective Strategies

- 5a. When you are reading a science text you try to find the appropriate environment where you feel comfortable
- a. always \_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_\_ d. never \_\_\_
- 5b. When you are reading a science text you decide to stop reading because your not in a good mood
- a. always \_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_\_ d. never \_\_\_
- 5c. When you are reading a science text you need a stimuli such as an interesting topic
- a. always \_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_\_ d. never \_\_\_

## 6. Social Strategies

- 6a. When you are reading a science text you ask the teacher for explanation
- a. always \_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_\_ d. never \_\_\_
- 6b. When you are reading a science text you ask your classmates for an explanation
- a. always \_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_\_ d. never \_\_\_
- 6c. When you are reading a science text you need others to help you understand concepts
- a. always \_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_\_ d. never \_\_\_
7. From the questionnaire above, select the 4 strategies that you prefer to use when your reading science text. Write the number and the letter of your choices.

## Appendix 2

### Analysis of Products

#### Reading: Types of Machines

<i>Types of Machines</i>	SECTION 2
<p>The logs for your new home have been prepared. You used an ax to chop notches close to the ends. The notches will hold the logs to each other when they are fitted together to form the sides of the cabin. The sides of the log cabin will be about 2.4 meters high. You cannot lift the heavy logs without help, so you've gathered your neighbors together for a house-raising. However, neither the force you can apply with your muscles nor that of your neighbors will be enough to accomplish your goals. What is the solution?</p>	<p><b>Objectives</b></p> <p><b>Name and describe</b> the six types of simple machines.</p> <p><b>Evaluate</b> the mechanical advantage of simple machines.</p> <p><b>Design and construct</b> a compound machine.</p>
<p>One of your neighbors who has assisted at many house-raising takes charge. He and your other neighbors use long pieces of wood to roll a log into place at the bottom of the cabin. Then they use poles and rope to roll the log up to the top of the cabin. Construction takes place before your eyes! What did your neighbors know that you didn't? They knew how to use the resources around them as machines. The machines they used are <b>simple machines</b>, machines that have only one or two parts. There are six simple machines: the lever, the wheel and axle, the pulley, the inclined plane, the wedge, and the screw. Which of these machines might be used at a house-raising?</p>	
	

Text Book: HOLT, Physical Science, Page 109.

#### Methodology:

- Read the text
- Use the strategies that you consider necessary to understand the text.
- Answer some questions during the personal interview.

<b>Answers</b>				
<b>Question</b>	<b>Student A</b>	<b>Student B</b>	<b>Student C</b>	<b>Student D</b>
1. ¿Cómo leíste el texto?				
2. ¿Encontraste alguna dificultad cuando leíste el texto?				
3. ¿Cómo resolviste esa dificultad?				

## Appendix 3

### Semi-Structured Interview

Question	Answers			
	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D
1. Describe lo que haces cuando estás leyendo un texto de ciencias para entenderlo.				
2. ¿Entiendes más cuando lees por tu cuenta que cuando el profesor te da una metodología específica para leer? ¿Por qué?				
3. ¿Por qué crees que la estrategia o metodología que usas para leer textos de ciencias es la apropiada?				
4. ¿Qué haces cuando encuentras dificultades para leer un texto de ciencias?				
5. Si tuvieras que recomendar a alguien la forma más efectiva para entender una lectura de ciencias ¿cómo le sugerirías que leyera? Y ¿por qué?				

# Appendix 4

## Survey Analysis

### 1. Cognitive Strategies

- 1a. When you are reading a science text you take notes of the main ideas
- a. always \_\_2\_\_ b. frequently \_\_11\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_6\_\_  
d. never \_\_0\_\_
- 1b. When you are reading a science text you read aloud to understand better
- a. always \_\_5\_\_ b. frequently \_\_4\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_8\_\_  
d. never \_\_2\_\_
- 1c. When you are reading a science text you transfer the idea of the author into your own words (paraphrase)
- a. always \_\_1\_\_ b. frequently \_\_7\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_7\_\_  
d. never \_\_4\_\_

### 2. Memory Strategies

- 2a. When you are reading a science text you use key words as an important tool to understand
- a. always \_\_2\_\_ b. frequently \_\_5\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_12\_\_  
d. never \_\_\_\_\_
- 2b. When you are reading a science text you create mental maps
- a. always \_\_ b. frequently \_\_5\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_7\_\_  
d. never \_\_7\_\_

2c. When you are reading a science text you construct concept maps to help you remember concepts or ideas

- a. always \_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_2\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_7\_\_  
d. never \_\_10\_\_

### 3. Compensation Strategies

3a. When you are reading a science text you try to guess what is going to happen next

- a. always \_\_3\_\_ b. frequently \_7\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_8\_\_  
d. never \_\_1\_\_

3b. When you are reading a science text you use the dictionary to look for important concepts

- a. always \_\_3\_\_ b. frequently \_\_8\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_7\_\_  
d. never \_\_1\_\_

3c. When you are reading a science text you relate the vocabulary with some words in Spanish

- a. always \_\_3\_\_ b. frequently \_\_10\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_6\_\_  
d. never \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. Metacognitive Strategies

4a. When you are reading a science text you analyze the way you are reading

- a. always \_\_5\_\_ b. frequently \_\_7\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_6\_\_  
d. never \_\_1\_\_

4b. When you are reading a science text you organize the reading in an specific way

- a. always \_\_1\_\_ b. frequently \_\_7\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_9\_\_  
d. never \_\_2\_\_

4c. When you are reading a science text you try to find errors you made while you read

- a. always \_\_2\_\_ b. frequently \_\_5\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_8\_\_  
d. never \_\_4\_\_

## 5. Affective Strategies

5a. When you are reading a science text you try to find the appropriate environment where you feel comfortable

- a. always \_\_10\_\_ b. frequently \_\_7\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_2\_\_  
d. never \_\_\_\_\_

5b. When you are reading a science text you decide to stop reading because you're not in a good mood

- a. always \_\_4\_\_ b. frequently \_\_6\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_7\_\_  
d. never \_\_2\_\_

5c. When you are reading a science text you need a stimulus such as an interesting topic

- a. always \_\_5\_\_ b. frequently \_\_8\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_6\_\_  
d. never \_\_\_\_\_

## 6. Social Strategies

6a. When you are reading a science text you ask the teacher for explanation

- a. always \_\_2\_\_ b. frequently \_\_10\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_7\_\_  
d. never \_\_\_\_\_

6b. When you are reading a science text you ask your classmates for an explanation

- a. always \_\_\_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_7\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_12\_\_  
d. never \_\_\_\_\_



6c. When you are reading a science text you need others to help you understand concepts

- a. always \_\_\_\_ b. frequently \_\_1\_\_ c. occasionally \_\_16\_\_  
d. never \_\_2\_\_

7. From the questionnaire above, select the 4 strategies that you prefer to use when your reading science text. Write the number and the letter of your choices.

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1 <sup>a</sup>	1b	1c	2a	2b	2c	3a	3b	3c	4a	4b	4c	5a	5b	5c	6a	6b	6c
6	6	3	4			5	2	9	4	2	2	11	4	6	8	2	2

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# Appendix 5

## Interview Analysis

Interviewer: María Paula Vélez (**MPV**) Participant: Student A (**SA**)

	Interview	Categories
<b>MPV</b>	¿Cómo leíste el texto? ¿Qué metodología usaste?	
<b>SA</b>	Pues la verdad prácticamente no use una estrategia muy conocida o simplemente leí de una forma normal y fue fácil entender	
<b>MPV</b>	¿Encontraste alguna dificultad al leer el texto?	
<b>SA</b>	No, dificultades, ninguna.	
<b>MPV</b>	Algo que no entenderas...	
<b>SA</b>	Partes del vocabulario del texto.	Memory
<b>MPV</b>	¿Cómo resolviste esa dificultad?	
<b>SA</b>	Pues traté de leer lo que seguía del texto lo que seguía de las oraciones para poder entender.	
<b>MPV</b>	Para ti ¿qué es leer en una forma normal?	
<b>SA</b>	Leer en una forma normal es rápida y un forma en la que se pueda entender bien lo que se está leyendo.	
<b>MPV</b>	Yo te vi haciendo algo	
<b>SA</b>	Pues subrayando las palabras desconocidas.	Cognitive
<b>MPV</b>	Describe lo que haces cuando estás leyendo un texto de ciencias para entenderlo.	
<b>SA</b>	El texto me lo pongo en mi mente y trato de explicarlo con las ideas que yo tengo.	Memory Cognitive
<b>MPV</b>	¿Entiendes más cuando lees por tu cuenta que cuando el profesor te da una metodología específica para leer? ¿Por qué?	
<b>SA</b>	La verdad siempre entiendo yo cuando estoy leyendo solo, cuando estoy estudiando solo se me hace más fácil entender los temas.	Affective
<b>MPV</b>	¿Por qué crees que la estrategia o metodología que usas para leer textos de ciencias es la apropiada?	
<b>SA</b>	Por qué es la que se acomoda a la forma en la que a mí me gusta leer, me gusta escribir, la que a mi gusta estudiar y entender las cosas del tema.	

	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Categories</b>
<b>MPV</b>	¿Qué haces cuando encuentras dificultades para leer un texto de ciencias?	
<b>SA</b>	Busco las fuentes necesarias para poder entender esa dificultad que tengo.	
<b>MPV</b>	¿Qué tipo de fuentes?	
<b>SA</b>	Pueden ser fuentes de Internet, libros, diccionarios, guías.	Compensation
<b>MPV</b>	Si tuvieras que recomendar a alguien la forma más efectiva para entender una lectura de ciencias ¿cómo le sugerirías que leyera? Y ¿por qué?	
<b>SA</b>	Que leyera de una forma sola, con calma y tratara de entender bien el tema que está tratando.	Compensation
<b>MPV</b>	Cuando dices con calma te refieres a que	
<b>SA</b>	Con calma, a leerlo varias veces, entender lo que se está leyendo porque un tema que no queda bien prácticamente es un tema que no sirve.	Compensation
<b>MPV</b>	Nada de hacer resúmenes	
<b>SA</b>	Jamás hago un resumen, jamás hago un mapa conceptual a menos que el profesor lo ordene porque cada persona tiene su forma de entender	

Memory = 2, Cognitive = 2, Affective = 1, Compensation = 3

Interviewer: María Paula Vélez (MPV) Participant: Student B (SB)

	Interview	Categories
<b>MPV</b>	¿Cómo leíste el texto? ¿Qué metodología usaste?	
<b>SB</b>	Leí en voz alta varias veces.	Cognitive
<b>MPV</b>	¿Encontraste alguna dificultad al leer el texto?	
<b>SB</b>	No, ninguna.	
<b>MPV</b>	Describe lo que haces cuando estás leyendo un texto de ciencias para entenderlo.	
<b>SB</b>	Bueno el principal método que yo uso para entender un texto de ciencias es leerlo en voz alta también sacar el vocabulario y buscarlo en el diccionario las palabras que no entienda en el texto.	Cognitive Memory Compensation
<b>MPV</b>	¿Entiendes más cuando lees por tu cuenta que cuando el profesor te da una metodología específica para leer? ¿Por qué?	
<b>SB</b>	De las dos formas es muy fácil entender pero la que más me parece cómoda es cuando se lee en grupos o en parejas porque uno puede escuchar el texto no viéndolo ni leyéndolo uno sino escuchando y pensando con otros.	Social
<b>MPV</b>	¿Por qué crees que la estrategia o metodología que usas para leer textos de ciencias es la apropiada?	
<b>SB</b>	Correcta de cierta manera porque cada quien tiene su metodología y cada quien la escoge porque sabe usarla y la entiende así, por ejemplo a mí me parece que la mía esta correcta porque por lo menos yo entiendo más cuando escucho lo que estoy leyendo porque cuando leo el texto y no escucho me pierdo en los textos y no los leo bien.	Cognitive
<b>MPV</b>	¿Qué haces cuando encuentras dificultades para leer un texto de ciencias?	
<b>SB</b>	Cuando lo estoy leyendo si estoy en grupo y encuentro alguna dificultad le pregunto al compañero del grupo que este conmigo o al grupo con el que estoy trabajando y si estoy solo le pregunto a la profesora a preguntarle o a un compañero cercano.	Social
<b>MPV</b>	Si tuvieras que recomendar a alguien la forma más efectiva para entender una lectura de ciencias ¿cómo le sugerirías que leyera? Y ¿por qué?	
<b>SB</b>	Le sugiero la que yo uso, o sea cada quien tiene su forma de aprender y cada quien tiene sus diferentes análisis pero yo les recomendaría la de leer en alto y cuando no entienda preguntarle a la profesora o algún compañero porque uno queda sin dudas en el texto y lo puede entender.	Cognitive Social

Memory = 1, Cognitive = 4, Social = 3, Compensation = 1

Interviewer: María Paula Vélez (**MPV**) Participant: Student C (**SC**)

	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Categories</b>
<b>MPV</b>	¿Cómo leíste el texto? ¿Qué metodología usaste?	
<b>SC</b>	Leí varias veces por que al comienzo no lo entendía y busque una palabra que tampoco entendía.	Rereading Compensation
<b>MPV</b>	¿Encontraste alguna dificultad al leer el texto?	
<b>SC</b>	La palabra que no entendí.	
<b>MPV</b>	¿Cómo resolviste esa dificultad?	
<b>SC</b>	Buscando en el diccionario	Compensation
<b>MPV</b>	Describe lo que haces cuando estás leyendo un texto de ciencias para entenderlo.	
<b>SC</b>	Leo en voz alta y lo leo cuantas veces lo necesite para poder entenderlo mejor.	Cognitive Rereading
<b>MPV</b>	¿Entiendes más cuando lees por tu cuenta que cuando el profesor te da una metodología específica para leer? ¿Por qué?	
<b>SC</b>	Con mi propia estrategia porque yo la manejo.	
<b>MPV</b>	¿Por qué crees que la estrategia o metodología que usas para leer textos de ciencias es la apropiada?	
<b>SB</b>	Por qué es fácil y entendible	
<b>MPV</b>	¿Qué haces cuando encuentras dificultades para leer un texto de ciencias?	
<b>SC</b>	Trato de leerlo otra vez y si no lo entiendo voy donde la profesora y pregunto.	Rereading Social
<b>MPV</b>	Si tuvieras que recomendar a alguien la forma más efectiva para entender una lectura de ciencias ¿cómo le sugerirías que leyera? Y ¿por qué?	
<b>SC</b>	Leer en voz alta y cuando no entienda una palabra buscarla en el diccionario.  Porque puede leer la palabra varias veces pero si no la entiende tiene que buscarla en un diccionario.	Cognitive Compensation

Cognitive = 2 , Social = 1 , Compensation = 3 , Rereading = 3

Interviewer: María Paula Vélez (MPV) Participant: Student D (SD)

	Interview	Categories
<b>MPV</b>	¿Cómo leíste el texto? ¿Qué metodología usaste?	
<b>SD</b>	Leer en voz alta y leerlo otra vez	Cognitive Rereading
<b>MPV</b>	¿Encontraste alguna dificultad al leer el texto?	
<b>SD</b>	La palabra que no entendí.	
<b>MPV</b>	¿Cómo resolviste esa dificultad?	
<b>SD</b>	Buscando en el diccionario	Compensation
<b>MPV</b>	Describe lo que haces cuando estás leyendo un texto de ciencias para entenderlo.	
<b>SD</b>	Leo en voz alta y me gusta estar en un lugar donde no haya tanta bulla para concentrarme más y buscar las palabras en el diccionario.	Cognitive Affective Compensation
<b>MPV</b>	¿Entiendes más cuando lees por tu cuenta que cuando el profesor te da una metodología específica para leer? ¿Por qué?	
<b>SD</b>	Cuando leo por mi cuenta, porque me concentro más.	
<b>MPV</b>	¿Por qué crees que la estrategia o metodología que usas para leer textos de ciencias es la apropiada?	
<b>SD</b>	Por qué yo entiendo más y a veces aprendo más.	
<b>MPV</b>	¿Qué haces cuando encuentras dificultades para leer un texto de ciencias?	
<b>SD</b>	Lo leo hasta que lo entienda y busco las palabras que no entiendo.	Rereading Compensation
<b>MPV</b>	¿En dónde las buscas?	
<b>SD</b>	En el diccionario.	Compensation
<b>MPV</b>	Si tuvieras que recomendar a alguien la forma más efectiva para entender una lectura de ciencias ¿cómo le sugerirías que leyera? Y ¿por qué?	
<b>SD</b>	Que estuviera en un lugar callado para que se concentrara más y que leyera en voz alta y que buscara en el diccionario las palabras que no entendiera.	Affective Cognitive Compensation

Cognitive = 3, Affective = 2, Compensation = 5, Rereading = 2

## CHAPTER 2

# Enhancing 7<sup>th</sup> Graders Reading Comprehension in the Colombian Caribbean Coast through Task-Based Activities

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### **Abstract**

In the field of education, teaching is a complex task that requires teachers' effort, since they have to facilitate students' learning by making them feel motivated and willing to learn. The teaching process implies the designing of activities that would grasp the students' attention and engage them in the learning process.

Reading plays a fundamental role when gaining knowledge. Thus, it is of great magnitude to consider reading comprehension as a key factor for oral communication and interaction. Most of the time students are just exposed to speaking and writing activities since it is believed that a person who speaks and writes in a language knows it very well. Through this study the researchers have highlighted the significance of reading comprehension and dealt with how reading comprehension can be enhanced through the use of task-based activities among the 7<sup>th</sup> graders at La Salle, a private high school in Montería.

### **Key Words**

Reading comprehension, tasks, student's needs, standards, Task-based, authentic input, meaningfulness, diagnostic reading test, IRF interaction, outcome, feedback.

# 1. Objectives

## 1.1 General Objective

- › To identify to what extent reading tasks improve student's reading comprehension skills.

## 1.2 Specific Objectives

- › To improve the level of students' reading comprehension through the use of reading tasks.
- › To improve student's lexicon and vocabulary through the implementation of reading tasks.

# 2. Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is both to investigate the effectiveness and implement task - based reading activities to improve the students' level of reading comprehension. The importance of this study lays on the meaningfulness of using task- based activities for learners thus, making the learning process easier.

Furthermore, the implementation of reading tasks will foster students' lexicon and increase their vocabulary use in their daily life situations. This proposal will attempt to design meaningful reading activities involving real-world and local situations focused on developing reading skills to engage students in reading and improving their comprehension.

# 3. Literature Review

This paper provides a review of literature on Task- Based Activities to enhance reading comprehension and describes aspects, elements, characteristics to be considered when implementing Task- Based Activities in the classroom.

One issue that has emerged with frequency in the literature on Task Based Activities to enhance reading comprehension is the degree to



which the needs, interests and preferences of the students influence reading comprehension. To support this words, it has to be said that the most crucial factors to be taken into account when developing the activities are the kind of language and topics presented to the students. The primordial characteristic they should have is that they might be of students' interests and needs in the English class. According to Kennedy C. and Bolitho (1994) "the kind of English to be taught and the topic and themes will be based on the interests and requirements of the learners." (p. 3). This is, the activities to be developed must be based on the student's essential necessities and interests.

### **3.1 Students' Needs, Interests and Preferences**

Teachers make adjustments to their lessons to meet the needs of different students. Evertson and Emmer (2009) argued that "not being aware of learners' needs might cause students to be reluctant to learning making teaching process unsuccessful." (p. 34). As learners are not involved in reading activities of their interest, they find it tedious and hard to read a text in a foreign language.

Besides, the activities used in class are not appealing. Most of the time, teachers applied the same formats when practicing reading. These kinds of activities consist of filling in the gaps, translating, completing and organizing sentences among others. This situation might cause most of the students to get bored and not pay attention to the teachers' instructions. For these reasons, teachers should select their materials based on learners' preferences to make sense of the learning process.

Also, the way how the input or information is provided to the students is of great importance when providing readings to learners. Anderson (1988) found that "The difficulty of texts is determined by: information organization; familiarity of topics; explicitness and sufficiency of information; referring expressions" (p. 28).

It means the complexity of the task will lead students to failure or success in it. Whether the task is organized appropriately and the steps to follow are clearly stated, learners will go through the task easily, the information given should be as comprehensible as possible and students should feel comfortable with it.

Giving students the opportunity to be exposed to authentic texts engages them in the activity and provides them with interesting and real information which could attract and raise students' motivation. According to Nunan (1999) "Authentic materials help bring content to life, and ultimately make learning and using language more meaningful." (p. 212).

### 3.2 Standards

Standards, as stated by the Colombian National Ministry of Education, (2006) are "criterios claros y públicos que permiten establecer cuáles son los niveles básicos de calidad a los que tienen derecho los niños y las niñas de todas las regiones de Colombia." (p.6). From this, it may be concluded that standards common criteria that have been established to regulate the quality of the education in Colombia. These standards work as indicators to learners, teachers, school administrators, parents so that they can know what students are expected to achieve during and at the end of any given course and consequently they can improve, reinforce, and keep track of all the education process.

In order to improve the quality in language teaching, and taking into account the importance that reading in a second language bears, the "*Estándares de Competencia en Lengua Extranjera: Inglés* were created." These standards were adopted from the Common European Framework due to the acknowledgement of the necessity to establish a level in language teaching that could be comparable internationally. Besides, these standards were adopted because the Colombian National Ministry of Education is aware that learning a second language is an ability that is of an outstanding meaningfulness since it contributes to academic and professional life of people. Also it makes a society more competitive and gives access to a great number of knowledge that is out of our reach and influences the country's economy and development.

### 3.3 Task- Based Activities

#### 3.3.1 What is a Task?

As Skehan stated that a task is "An activity in which: meaning is primary; there is some sort of relationship to the real world; task com-

pletion has some priority; and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome” (Skehan, 2003 cited in Ellis, 2005, p. 67). Providing students with tasks foster them to produce meaning inside the classroom since the main focus of a task is on meaning and allows students to interact in a spontaneous exchange of meaning. However, form should not be left apart. Both meaning and form might be together to increase students’ abilities to produce meaning and accurate sentences or grammatical structures in the target language. When developing a task, completion plays an important part in the learning process as it makes the task significant enough to be graded or checked by the teacher. It must go together with the outcome. It means how students performed in the task and how successfully they constructed meaning to communicate.

“During a task students are required to do something in response to what they hear that will demonstrate their understanding” (Ur, 2003, p. 25). It must, therefore, be recognized that reading activities through tasks are quite helpful because those tasks urge students to present an outcome and finish the task, which leads them to the development of their reading skills.

It is important to highlight some distinctive qualities of a task which make it different and outstanding compared with a common reading comprehension question activity.

Firstly, the task is to focus primarily on meaning rather than form giving a sense of priority to comprehension and understanding as well. Reading should not be separated from speaking since it gives learners the chance to use the language received from a text. Using tasks to develop reading comprehension might allow teachers to do meaningful activities with the information they get from the reading. For instance, learners can have a discussion based on the topic they read to develop critical thinking.

Secondly, tasks involve real-world processes, which allow learners to make use of their previous knowledge to achieve the purpose of the task. Students should be involved in activities they find similar to the real world. The language they produce will be used in daily life situations and mirror the real life.

Finally, Tasks have a clear outcome; it gives more sense to the activities since learners construct and use the language to achieve an outcome and it might be encouraging for them. As (Bachman and Palmer quoted in Willis and Willis, 2007) defined “a language use task is an activity that involves individuals in using language for the purpose of achieving a particular goal or outcome in a particular situation.” (p. 12). In this way the outcome of a task is relevant in task. If there is not an outcome preceded by a series of activities, it is not a task but just an activity.

Based on our research, we observed that in theory very little has been said about reading comprehension in Colombia. Thus, the research group has decided to conduct this study to develop reading through the use of tasks in the classroom.

It is important to talk about the Task- based Approach considering the importance and the usefulness of applying tasks in the classroom to develop reading comprehension.

When providing students with reading activities, it is essential to elicit students to do something with the information they obtain from the text to make it a productive learning in which students build the language and use the information.

According to West (1994) “More effective than traditional comprehension questions is the current practice of providing a task where learners do something with the information they have extracted from the text.” (p. 4). From this, it can be said that the lack of attention and motivation of learners in the English classes is due to the implementation of non-attractive materials and activities to develop reading comprehension. For this reason, it is important to expose students to various types of reading activities to be in contact with the language, giving learners the chance to cope with a diversity of interesting reading material.

Also, it is essential to say that the input used to design reading materials should be as authentic as possible; the material should be very familiar to the students. They should be able to understand the input itself to obtain satisfactory results since authentic materials engage students spontaneously as they conform to their real life.

Tomlinson (1999) found that “ideally materials at all levels should provide frequent exposure to authentic input which is rich and varied” (p.13). It is clear, that authenticity is a synonym of variety enrichment in language learning process as learners are given the opportunity to be exposed different materials and reading activities related to their context and real life.

In addition, it has been considered that reading tasks are more helpful than doing a simple comprehension question practice since reading tasks can involve many things and can be developed in different ways. Moreover, one of the benefits of implementing reading tasks is that learners can get more information in less time. It means, they can avoid reading extensive texts and have them reduced to a minimum in a reading activity.

Enhancing reading comprehension constructed around a task is our main concern and proposal in this project. Having learners deal with a task gives a sense of meaningfulness and innovation in this field.

In this project the research group found it important to mention and define an important issue which is IRF interaction. According to McCarthy: In both display and reference questions teachers provide feedback to the pupils’ responses, usually on form, which also does not occur in natural adult-to-adult communication. In real world exchanges, feedback occurs after the purpose of the exchange has been achieved (1991).

IRF interaction refers to teachers giving input to the learners expecting a response and providing feedback to achieve the purpose of the lesson. Reading tasks reflect in some way this kind of interaction among the class giving learners the opportunity to exchange some information following a pattern given or information already learnt.

This project is proposed to improve reading comprehension by going through the stages of a task to increase student’s comprehension of a text. Each stage should have different activities which all together lead the learners to complete an outcome. Following all the stages a task might improve their comprehension as they manipulate the text as much as they can.

## 4. Method

As this study is concerned with students' behaviour which is a primary factor in this research, this process is based on all the components which turn around the learner, such as knowledge, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, attitudes and emotions from which many answers can be found to the inquiries of our research project through the use of data collection techniques.

This research is an objective research which presents only the information and the results gathered from the investigation. It means that it does not include or add the researcher's point of view, just the findings. A qualitative research involves a variety of features such as: identifying a research problem, describing, and understanding, analysing the data and reporting the results or sharing findings.

*According to Elliot (1992) objectivity refers to a method or procedure through which we acquire information: an objective test is an example of such a procedure. In common discourse, to be objective or to have an objective view is to see things the way they are.*

Besides, objective research includes collecting and analysing information and it focuses on giving the results obtained in this process. This is reflected in our research project because it is necessary to gather and analyse the outcomes related to students' reading process and how effective tasks are when developing students' reading skill. Finally, it is a tool that would help future researches to focus on developing the reading skill through the use of tasks.

### 4.1 Participants

The participants of this project are a group of 38 seventh grade students from La Salle School, of Monteria. Students' ages ranged between 12 and 13 years. It was a very enthusiastic group, full of energy and willing to learn.

When dealing with reading activities, they are very reluctant to read because they do not find it interesting. This attitude is shown every time they have to read something, especially in English. The teacher

involved in this research is a twenty-eight years old teacher with six years of experience in private and public schools.

## 4.2 Research Phases

### 4.2.1 Initial Findings Phase

This section is one of the most important stages of the research since it allows the research group to identify student's difficulties in reading comprehension and their reading level proficiency. In this phase, all the necessary information is collected through different instruments to determine the course to follow in this research project. Besides, it provides the necessary patterns to design appropriate reading tasks. The instruments used in this research project were: an interview, a questionnaire, observations, recordings, diaries, portfolios and reading tests.

The data collection techniques applied in this phase were:

› Interview:

Maguire (1998) stated that “an interview is a conversation such as one between a reporter and another person for the purpose of getting information.” (p. 472)

This tool was used with the purpose of collecting information about the teacher perception regarding the level of the students' reading comprehension and how it can be improved. From this, reading tasks in the classroom can be designed and applied to enhance learners' reading comprehension skills.

› Observation:

As Maguire (1998) pointed out “Observation is the act of noticing and recording a specific type of information with instruments.” (p. 600). The purpose of using observations is to notice how frequent the use of reading activities in the classroom and the level of English comprehension is. Also it can be observed learners' attitude towards

the development of reading tasks among other expected results such as: the improvement in their comprehension level and their attention in the reading tasks.

› Questionnaire:

Gillard (2003) defined a questionnaire as a “List of questions that a number of people are asked so that information can be collected about something”p.1020 This data technique is one of the most important data collections tool in this research project, as the learners were asked to answer some questions in a closed format. This information was taken into account for the development of the next stage. These kinds of questionnaires tend to be reliable and almost exact because the learners felt free when they answered the questions and expressed their thoughts and expectations.

The questions formulated in the questionnaire were easy and contained simple language, in order for students not to feel uncomfortable trying to understand them. They were yes, no questions. For instance: Do you like English? Do you like reading in English? And multiple choice like: what kind of reading do you like? A) Comics. B) Science. C) mystery.

The purpose of the use of this technique was to identify and recognize the common likes and dislikes among the population as this instrument will provide us with all the necessary information to design and implement suitable reading task for the learners.

› Diagnostic Reading Test:

Diagnostic tests have been widely used by teachers in their classroom to learn about students’ abilities and have a general view of learners’ skills and knowledge of a subject. It has been considered that teachers should know and take into account students’ English knowledge level, capabilities and skills to know what the starting point is. The reading diagnostic test was designed by the research group and applied during the English class. Students were asked to sit and behave properly because they were going to be evaluated. They were really worried. They expressed they had not studied for an exam; but after the teacher’s explained the main objective of the test, they distressed and relaxed. The reading compre-



hension test dealt with a short reading comprehension and a vocabulary part. The purpose of the implementation of this technique was to find out learners' reading comprehension level by testing them through one simple reading activity. The reading diagnostic tests helped the research group to observe students' attitude during reading activities.

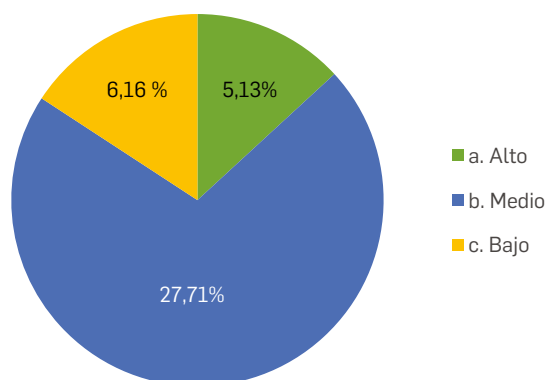
### 4.2.2 Findings

The research group carried out the interviews, observations, questionnaires and diagnostic reading tests in order to classify the population's English level and a way to find out the difficulties they face when reading a text. These instruments played a significant and fruitful role in this project as they unveiled the students' level of understanding while reading and based on this, the activities were designed to promote and reinforce reading comprehension among students.

Throughout the pre-implementation stage it was found that students were used to translating every word they found in the readings.

The diagnostic reading test helped out the research group to find student's difficulties when facing a reading activity. Firstly, it was found that learners' had poor reading comprehension skills and lack of motivation to carry out the reading tasks. Secondly, students were not able to grasp the information at the given time. It seemed students were not used to doing those kinds of reading activities. The graph 1 displays the level in which students were when they took the diagnosis reading.

Graph 1 Diagnostic reading



The results show that 71% percent of the sample (27 students) fall into the medium level category of reading comprehension. The research group did not expect the subjects to be in a medium level due to the lack of motivation and reading strategies found during previous observations and according to the results of the diagnostic test. Besides, surprisingly just 16% percent of the students (6 students) were found to be in a lower level. It was expected that most of the students would be in the low level range as they were not able to complete the reading activity.

Only 13% of the students (5 students) showed high level of reading comprehension. It means that only five did the activity satisfactorily and exhibited a better performance than the rest of their classmates. Therefore, it was meaningless to judge the students' level of reading comprehension just based on a single activity since there are many components, such as attitude, motivation and also affective filter that influence learner's performance. Since they did not expect to be evaluated, they were stressed even though they were told to be relaxed as they were not going to be graded.

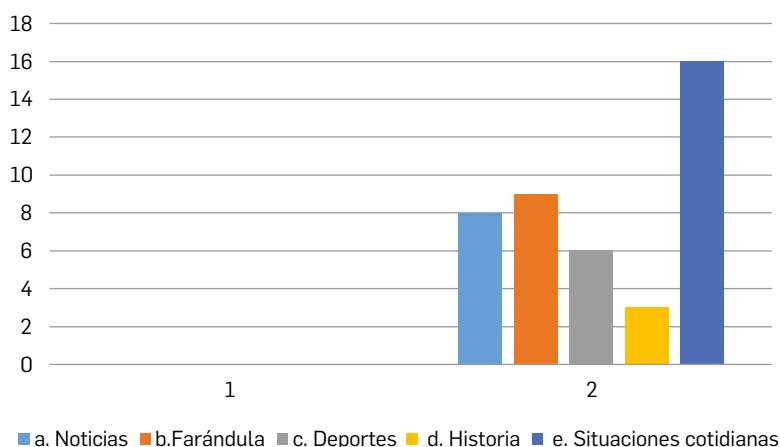
Besides, a questionnaire technique was used to determine essential aspects about students' learning and preferences such as: students' interest, likes, dislikes, opinions, preferences and attitude during the English class. Moreover, the research group found it important to identify the kind of activities and the topics students would like to learn during their English classes with the main purpose of making the class an enjoyable and meaningful for the students.

The topics and the information which students like and prefer to deal with are influential factors that would help the process since learners might be more interested in reading a topic of their preference and learning about these topics. It is fundamental to know what kind of topics they like or not to make learning process more interesting and build a little more confidence in reading activities. If learners are exposed to reading activities which engage in topics of their interest, it may affect learning in a positive way as learners might feel a connection between their daily life and English classes.

Moreover, in the questionnaire students had the opportunity to choose the topics they felt comfortable with. When students were asked about

the topics to be implemented during the reading activities in the class, they chose daily situations of life and entertainment as the most interesting ones, followed in order by sports, history and news (Graph 2). This question was important because through this the research group could have a guide when selecting the topics for the reading they were going to applied in the next stage.

Graph 2 Preference questionnaire

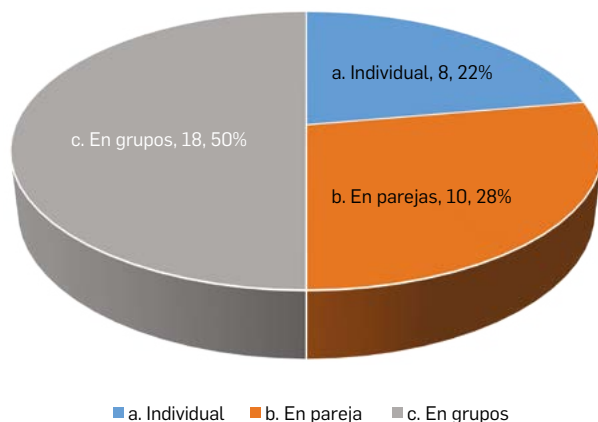


Students showed preference by two topics (daily situations and entertainment). This information was crucial for the designing of the reading activities which assured in some way the effectiveness of the tasks. Besides, those were influential factors which determined the course to follow in this project.

Taking into account other questions in the questionnaire, half of the students answered that they liked to work in groups (50% of the students). It has to be mentioned that during the observation stage, the students always displayed the desire to work in groups in the class activities. However, the other half of the learners cannot be left apart. Students who affirmed they liked to work individually or in pairs, which is the other 50% percent, developed their activities in the classroom in the way they preferred to work. In this way, the research group satisfied the student's likes and needs at that time. The way students interact in the activities was very important for the designing of the reading activities. This information is relevant to the course of

this research project since they will determine the success or failure of it. As students showed they liked and enjoyed working in groups, the researchers took advantage of this and put them to work in groups and included a cooperative and collaborative approach to develop the reading tasks.

Graph 3 Working style



### 4.2.3 Implementation Phase

In this stage, the information received from the data collection techniques helped the researchers to have a standard reading activity. This is an example of a reading activity based on the students' needs and likes to be implemented during the process. This might in some help the learners to improve their reading comprehension in foreign language.

One of the objectives of this research project is to improve reading comprehension through the use of tasks. Thus, the reading activities were designed taking into account students' preferences and level of reading.

Another important aspect in this section is the implementation of the stages in a task. It was essential to implement each of the reading stages to help students get more involved in the activities and promote their comprehension through it. As it might be more useful for them to go through a reading activity following a series of stages which

allow them to activate their knowledge and achieve the purpose of the reading. This is, not just giving the learners a simple reading, but giving them different tasks to do with the reading. For example, a pre-reading activity to activate their knowledge, during the activity and a post-reading activity were carried out to achieve our goals which are improving learner's comprehension and vocabulary.

Reading tasks were designed, refined and applied with the purpose of having learners going beyond the text. It means that students were not only asked to read a text, but they also had to do something with the information they got from the text as it was stated in the theoretical framework and as supported by West, (1994) who assures that tasks are a meaningful tool for having learners manipulate the language extracted from a text.

The tasks implemented were a real display of authentic input since all the topics involved in them were of learners' interest and involved meaningful and varied information as pointed out by Tomlinson (1999), who stated that class activities should be "rich and varied." Topics such as Michael Jackson's life and Colombian food gave a sense of having a variety and rich information of students' interest.

## 5. Results

The data obtained from this project were basically based on the instruments and techniques used to gather the information.

Each instrument had a purpose to collect and extract information starting from the diagnosis, the implementation and finally to the evaluation of the results.

The main objective of this research is to improve students' reading comprehension and motivation towards reading activities through the use of Tasks. Thus, the data collection techniques helped the research group to find ways to provide students with all the resources they need to increase their motivation towards reading.

To talk about the results, three categories were selected and they are the following:

### **5.1 The usefulness of tasks to develop learners' comprehension in reading activities**

Different tasks were implemented to reach the objectives proposed at the beginning of this project to show the usefulness of using tasks in improving students' level of comprehension and motivation towards reading activities. All of the tasks were designed taking into account several aspects, such as parameters of the tasks, students' needs and expectations. All the information gathered in the questionnaire applied to the students. Moreover, it was taken into consideration the sequence of a task or the task cycle; the pre-task, during task and post-task to help students enhance their reading comprehension towards reading activities while learning. It is relevant to know that all the tasks designed and implemented were based on what students are able to do taking as a guide the National Standards.

The research group found many benefits from using Tasks to increase their interest towards reading: those benefits aim at many influential aspects in reading and learning a language. Tasks promote motivation, creativity, interest and oral language skills. Those aspects will be discussed below.

One of the tasks which reflected and supported the benefits of using reading Tasks mentioned above is the task "a good menu". As learners expressed in the questionnaire their preferences towards talking about topics related to their context. The task was about Colombian food; the most relevant aspects observed during the implementation of the task is described below.

During the mentioned activity "a good menu", learners were more interested in participating and sharing their likes and preferences about food. They paid close attention to the pictures shown and the vocabulary presented. Also, they asked for extra information regarding the vocabulary. It was perceived that the students were concentrated and most of them were participating, mentioning the different kind of food and paying attention to the explanation given by the teacher. At the

beginning they asked the teacher questions in Spanish, then they used the vocabulary learned to express their likes. For instance:

Student: Teacher ¿Cómo se dice sopa de queso en inglés?

Teacher: cheese soup

After that the students shared their likes among themselves using the new vocabulary.

As it can be seen in the chart (Appendix #5) given to the students to do the reading activity; there were two customers and each one asked something different to eat. Students had to identify the food and circle it. During the task a listening activity about the topic was included to reinforce the reading and the vocabulary input. In the listening activity students had to select and circle some information about it. It was a little bit difficult for students to identify the specific aspects and they circled all the words they heard in the conversation. They could not understand what they were asked. The research group stopped the activity and helped students to focus on the details needed.

Learners seemed to be confused. The lack of vocabulary was evident and they found it hard to fill the chart. Later on, the teacher explained them one of the strategies to use when reading. They were told to use the inference strategy and shown with an example how to guess the meaning of some words without looking at the dictionary.

Also, students' attitude towards the tasks was quite positive. When students had to write and create a menu, it was observed that they were interested and asked for new vocabulary of food. Also, their resourcefulness played an important part during this task since they created their menus using many colours and their creativity.

In the second task, Michael Jackson's biography, during the pre-task the teacher started talking about the most important events of Michael's life and shared some rumors about his career supported by pictures. The students paid close attention to the activity and they participated in the comments about Michael Jackson's life and death. The pictures shown helped them to be concentrated and willing to pay attention. As Michael Jackson's life was controversial, it helped us to have them participate in the activity. However, it was difficult

for them to talk in English. In the activity they had to organize some pictures and sentences according to their previous knowledge about Michael Jackson`s life.

They organized the pictures in the correct order and were concentrated in what they were doing. As the topic chose was of interest to the students they were able to express their opinion and what they knew about Michael Jackson`s life. Also, the implementation of the pre-task helped the research group since it provided the students with the information about Michael Jackson`s life and important events of his career.

The implementation of reading tasks gives learners the chance to manipulate and interact with the language not only answering or completing information. Learners were urged to analyze and interact with different readings in the tasks. As it may be observed throughout the development of the tasks, students developed a better reading comprehension level.

## **5.2 Importance of using the stages of a task to improve reading comprehension**

The use of stages of a task played an important role in the course of this research project since learners encountered with the language at a more extensive way. As each stage of a task has its own purpose it helped students to be more involved and better prepared to deal with the task and achieve the goals. At the beginning of the implementation of the tasks it was observed that learners were not accustomed to these kind of tasks and they thought it was enough to do just one activity about the topic. The implementation of the second stage, the target task, helped us to recognize and identify students` abilities and to know what they were able to do with the language they got from the reading. The last stage of the task was of a great importance because it provided us with useful information about students` feelings, perceptions, weaknesses and strengths in reading comprehension. For instance in the task on Michael Jackson, based on the input the teacher gave the students about the artist life, the students were able to develop the “during task” and the “post tasks”. If the students had not been exposed to an input in the pre-task, they would not have been able to carry out any of the other activities. It is very important to highlight the positive effects of



developing these three stages for each task. Thanks to this the students were able to develop the whole task in a meaningful way.

### **5.3 How reading task promoted oral interaction among the students?**

This category emerged from all the results obtained at the last stage of this work. This category is an additional benefit from initial expected results. This is an emergent category which came out after the planning and the implementation of this project and took an important place in this paper for its valuable and significant contribution to the learning and teaching process.

One of the main features of the task is to promote oral interaction among learners since it provides with all the input and conditions to communicate and exchange information. The tasks designed by the research group gave students the possibility to interact using the target language. This type of interaction observed during the tasks is called (IRF) Initiation – Response – Feedback, Ellis Rod (1999). Interaction in which the learners had to follow a pattern. In IRF interaction the teacher initiates the conversation and the pupil gives the response, then the teacher gives a feedback. Even though IRF interaction is considered as a method which limits learners thinking, the research group truly believes it is a significant starting point to help learners improve reading and oral skills. In the tasks short conversations were observed between the students and the teacher in which they had the opportunity to answer some questions about the texts; the teacher asked a question and the pupil answered, then feedback was given if it was necessary. For instance during task #1: A good menu, at the moment of giving the students the input for the activity which was the vocabulary about food, the teacher showed the students some flash cards of different types of food, while doing this she asked the students simple questions, for example:

Teacher: Do you like Ajiaco?

Student 1: Yes, I do.

Teacher: Do you like avocado?

Student 2: No I don't. These students followed the pattern among them and the teacher walked around the class giving feedback when necessary. For instance:

Teacher: Do you like sour cream?

Student 3: No I do.

In this case, the teacher told the students the correct answer.

Seeing seventh graders at La Salle School interacting and using the target language in some way represents for us a great advance in improving reading skills. It is important to highlight the influence of motivating pupils to participate in the tasks and achieve goals which help them to interact within the class.

Tasks were not just raising motivation tool; they were also a way of promoting interaction and improving students reading comprehension through the use of the language in a meaningful and creative way.

## 6. Conclusions

Carrying out a research study leading to the implementation of reading task has been quite enlightening, rewarding and satisfactory. We, as teachers, found it rewarding to be involved in these processes which enrich our professional development, and lead us to acquire knowledge and experiences in the classroom and support for a deeper understanding of different events in teaching and learning process. It also gave us some clues of how to design attractive materials and tasks to enrich our teaching process every day. Apart from that, it gave us the experience to be active researchers in the classroom for finding a possible answer to all of our inquiries regarding teaching. Eventually, it may take us to a higher level of our professional development as teachers.

It can be said that seven-graders of La Salle School needed the implementation of reading tasks, besides the research group, found it necessary to enhance their reading comprehension skills and motivation towards reading activities. Therefore, the reading tasks reading tasks were designed to suit the requirements of these demands and they

suited perfectly. This reflects that teachers should pay more careful attention to all the aspects that might influence their performance and makes the teaching process more valuable and significant.

Besides, reading tasks helped learners to improve their vocabulary skills and increase their lexicon. It gave them the chance to encounter the language and learned many words and expressions of different and relevant topics which could be used in other settings such as academic situations.

Moreover, the results demonstrated that the use of interesting and attractive topics motivated the students to engage in the reading tasks as a great support to the comprehension process.

Using tasks to raise motivation was a significant option to deal with the phenomenon found as this implementation had some additional benefits to the development of reading comprehension; learners enhanced not only their reading comprehension skills, but also their vocabulary and motivation towards reading comprehension activities.

Also, using tasks provides one more benefit which is the improvement of oral interaction in the classroom. During the analysis of the results the research group found an emergent category which took a part in this work; It reflected how tasks improve oral interaction through (IRF) interaction in the classroom and learner`s pronunciation as well. Thus, Tasks provided teachers with many tools to foster students` motivation not only to listening activities but also to interact and use the target language.

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## CHAPTER 3

# Reading Strategies to Improve Inference Skills

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### Resumen

El contenido presentado en este trabajo de grado fue implementado para concientizar a un grupo de estudiantes universitarios sobre la importancia del manejo de las estrategias de lectura para mejorar su nivel de inferencia y así entender y analizar cualquier información implícita en sus artículos de estudio. El lugar donde se llevó a cabo este proyecto es la Universidad de Sucre, única Universidad pública en la ciudad, la cual acoge a una población proveniente de los estratos sociales más bajos y necesitados. Para este objetivo concreto se escogió un grupo de cinco estudiantes de cuarto semestre de la facultad de Biología.

La metodología utilizada incluyó análisis de lecturas del texto guía, construcción de material de aplicación, análisis de respuestas obtenidas en la práctica, y una entrevista posterior para analizar y comparar sus respuestas en la lectura y la explicación que dieron para haber escogido dichas respuestas, lo cual explica su nivel de inferencia. Los profesores participantes también aprendieron cómo elaborar materiales de lectura que profundicen la inferencia y apunten a las necesidades de sus estudiantes. Por lo menos dos de los cinco estudiantes participantes emplearon correctamente la mayoría de las habilidades propuestas. Los objetivos programados fueron alcanzados. Los resultados demuestran que se hace necesario un entrenamiento y una práctica sistemática de todas las estrategias que conllevan a un nivel de inferencia en la lectura comprensiva hasta que los estudiantes alcancen el nivel deseado no sólo en la asignatura de inglés, sino para un mejor desempeño de comprensión lectora en todas las asignaturas del currículo.

Los apéndices incluyen material de lectura comprensiva, solución de cuestionarios, entrevista preliminar, entrevista final, transcripción y categorización de las respuestas a la entrevista y análisis por categorías. El trabajo consta de catorce referencias.

## Palabras Clave

Estrategias, comprensión lectora, inferencia

## Abstract

The program presented in this practicum was implemented to increase a target group of university students' awareness of reading strategies to improve their level of inference, to understand and analyse implicit information in their pertinent readings. The setting for the project is the only public university in the city representing a low socio-economic background and a wide range of culture. A target group of 5 fourth semester students studying Biology were chosen for this program.

Strategies included analysis of the textbook readings, construction of a new material, application and analysis of their answers in the reading comprehension and an interview technique was used to understand how they chose each of the answers, and to compare their actions and their real knowledge about inference. Participant teachers also learned how to develop reading materials according to the needs of their students. Levels of success were measured by at least two of the five students, who used the most strategies in the sample. All program objectives were met.

Systematic training and practice of all these important inferring skills are necessary in graded exercises until the students acquire a very good level of performance in this very important level of understanding in English but it would also contribute to a better understanding in all the curricular subjects.

Appendices include reading comprehension material, reading text answers, preliminary interview, final interview, transcription and categorization of the interview, and analysis per categories.

## Key Words

Strategies, reading comprehension, inference

## 1. Introduction

Comprehensive reading is a linguistic and sociolinguistic process which is determined by the cultural reference, the interest, previous knowledge and even lifestyle of the reader.

There are many concrete strategies when applied in a systematical way let the reader obtain a deeper comprehension level each time.

Inference is one of these levels through which the reader discovers the implicit and explicit meaning of a reading text through the use of certain strategies such as understanding information. When not explicit in it, interpreting text by going inside it, identifying the main point or important information in a piece of discourse, distinguishing the main idea from the supporting details, extracting salient points to summarize, selective extraction of relevant points of the text, among others.

In our real context, students have always showed a superficial level in reading comprehension which concerns teachers as well as students, and which encourages teachers to search into solving strategies.

In this paper, a group of five university students have been observed in order to establish a real situation they would have in relation to inference as a higher level in reading comprehension: the handling they have on specific strategies and then, from these results, to promote a wide practice of most of these strategies to generate a learning which eases the interaction between students and reading texts.

In line with the results of the observation, this paper will present several comments based on the punctual experience which may implement inference work effectively.

The relevance of inference in a reading comprehension is that the reader strikes a critical attitude in front of a reading text, it means that he or she is able to judge, develop complement ideas, establish comparisons between the topic and his/her context, select and classify ideas, agree or disagree about the topic or the author, give reasons or justify an assumed position.

The paper has been organized in a conventional way which allows the reader go from conceptual and theoretical framework, through the application of some instruments which give results that sometimes agree completely with the theory and other times try to adapt the theory to the researched real situation.

This project has been conceived as a useful tool to improve reading skills of students who motivated this project; furthermore, it is available as a starting point for other teachers who wish to begin their own research.

## **2. Description of Problem**

### **2.1 Geographical Location and Characteristics**

The institution is located in Sincelejo, capital of the department of Sucre in the northern coast of Colombia. This city has a very hot climate all year round. It has a population of about 600,000 inhabitants. Most of the inhabitants are involved in agriculture and cattle raising. There are very few sources of employment as a result there is a serious socio-economical problem. Another pressing issue is the high drop out of high school students. They drop out before getting their diploma as they have very few opportunities to pursue university education.

### **2.2 Characteristics of the Institution**

The research was applied to a group of students from Universidad de Sucre, located in the north eastern urban area. It is the only public university in Sincelejo. The University is located in a populous district. Across the street there are some entertainment places such as a pool, a canteen, some bars where students spend their time drinking alcohol and playing games of chance, but this environment does not affect the inner environment of the university. There are only few public buses and a lot of mototaxis that bring students from all around the city. The university is structured in 7 buildings in a very big campus. There is an administrative building, a second building with a very modern library, a media laboratory and a conference room. There are other smaller buildings that have different faculties. One of the newest buildings is the one which was assigned to English department. It has three floors



with very comfortable classrooms, two laboratories provided with computers and all technological devices needed to develop appropriate communicative strategies.

### **2.3 Characteristics of Students**

Five 4<sup>th</sup> semester students studying Biology participated in this study: 2 boys and 3 girls. They are between 20 and 22 years. They belong to a group of 18 students from a lower socio-economic level. However, they always try to get the required material. They are very hard working students and show a great interest in learning English, although there are some students who have difficulties in understanding or applying knowledge.

The participants were chosen based on their performance in the last reading activities. So, two of them showed a high level of comprehension, and the other three participants showed a fair performance. During the project they were called participants A, B, C, D, and E to keep their anonymity.

Before their acceptance in being involved in the project, they were explained about the possibility to quit at any time they considered their rights were being violated.

### **2.4 Characteristics of Teachers**

All the English teachers at the university have a modern language degree. Some of them have a post graduate level. L2 is used in a 70%-80% of the class and most of them have a good English fluency. Teachers are currently using different teaching methods, but all of them must follow the rules explained by the coordinator of the department: develop three or four units of the textbook. It means that teachers have to apply strategies for developing the four basic skills proposed in each unit: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Besides, teachers should make students use the workbook and complete the required information from internet English addresses.

The English department has a total of 15 teachers, 3 are full time and the rest work part time.

## 2.5 Problem Statement

Through direct experience in teaching reading skills, our students from university degrees are able to answer questions based on information appearing in the text in an easy way. But they have difficulties to infer or deduce implicit information.

For this research the target group consisted of 5 fourth semester students studying Biology and an English teacher who was also the researcher plus a teacher from Universidad de Cordoba with whom the triangulation was made.

The participants have English classes 4 hours a week and every week the class is based on a reading. And this reading is analysed through four basic skills.

Two hours of the classes they practice audio-speaking exercises; then, the next two hours they practice reading-writing exercises. Every time they practice reading comprehension questions which demand an inference level through oral or written communication, they show limitations.

This situation demanded a special attention because the level of abstraction in this level must be high enough to read any text and be able to deduce the intention of the writer and the implications of the reading in the reader behaviour.

It affects learning outcomes in many specific situations, such as their analytical capacity to go beyond the explicit in any kind of input. Further, an unconscious reader is exposed to be alienated in thoughts, beliefs, and actions. In order to propose solutions to this current disadvantage, it was necessary to read theory about reading strategies in general, and specifically, about metacognitive reading strategies. Besides, it was necessary to read about methods, instruments, and others.

Through data gathering, it was important to notice which strategies were well handle, and we could observe which strategies were weak in practice and which ones were not practiced in order to be improved in a future action research.

### 3. Research Questions

Which reading comprehension strategies do a group of 5 fourth semester students of Biology faculty from a public university apply to improve inference skills for deducing implicit information.

- › Which of them are used spontaneously but unsuccessfully?
- › Which of them are not used?
- › Which of them are used spontaneously and successfully?

### 4. Objectives

#### 4.1 General Objective

To identify the reading comprehension strategies that students apply to infer implicit information in their specific readings in any subject to improve their real understanding about new vocabulary, intentionality, hidden purposes and even beliefs and thoughts of the author.

#### 4.2 Specific Objectives

- › To identify the reading strategies they use spontaneously and successfully.
- › To identify the reading strategies they use unsuccessfully.
- › To identify the reading strategies they do not use.

### 5. Theoretical Framework

“Reading is a receptive language process, it is a psycholinguistic process in that it starts with a linguistic surface and ends with meanings which the readers construct” (Goodman, 1987). This meaning varies depending on the reader’s social and cultural background, concepts, interests, views and lifestyles. To this respect, Wallace (1992) argues that reading “is an awareness of the way in which we use language” and the reading process could change from one reader to other. It depends on the reader’s own characteristics and the way the text is understood

and these can be influenced by the text itself, the particular interest of the reader and what is happening around him or her.

Referring to the aspects mentioned above it is assumed that the way readers read a text and overcome difficulties while reading is different. This means that the behaviour or strategies could change according to the reader. These strategies have been defined as learning techniques, problem solving or “study skills” which make them more effective and efficient” (Oxford and Crookall, 1989). To support this Wallace (1992) said that the settled list of strategies some authors have mentioned “have been selected from own readers experience”. In short, good learners “tend to use the same strategies as good experienced readers, for example they skip inessential words, guess from context and continue reading the text when they are unsuccessful in decoding a word or phrase”.

Aebersold and Field (1996) have found that, in general, more proficient readers exhibit the following types of behaviour that can be used to facilitate comprehension:

- › **Activating prior Knowledge** this enables the reader to make contrast of something they already have knowledge of and the new knowledge from the text.
- › **Clarifying** is making the meaning of the text clear to the reader.
- › **Context Clue** is using words surrounding an unknown word to determine its meaning.
- › **Drawing Conclusions** means the student uses writing and speaking to figure out something that is not directly stated in the reading.
- › **Evaluating** this involves encouraging the reader to make judgments and develop ideas from reading.
- › **Inferring** is giving a logical guess based on facts or evidence presented using prior knowledge to help the reader understand the meaning of a text.
- › **Predicting** is using the text to guess what will happen.
- › **Rereading** is a reading strategy that gives the reader another chance to make sense out of a challenging text. Establishing a purpose provides focus to the reader.

- › **Skimming and Scanning** are strategies that can assist a reader in getting specific information from the text. Visualizing encourages students to use mental images that emerge from the reading text.

Based on these strategies, we find **inferring** as the most problematic strategy to be developed by the chosen students, due to the habit to reproduce only the explicit information in the text. In this respect Nunan (1991) argues that reading comprehension at this stage consist on decoding written symbols into their aural equivalents. Inference has also been defined by Grellet, (1981, p. 14) as the “use of syntactic, logical and cultural clues to discover the meaning of unknown elements”. However, Kurland (2000) said that inference is a mental process by which we reach a conclusion based on specific evidence, and that inference may be guesses, but these guesses should be based on supporting evidence, by reasoning from the evidence. We agree with Grellet’s definition, as we have expressed in the first paragraph of this section, the cultural context and the way the text is understood can influence the reading comprehension process.

Reading strategies have been classified and adapted to the true purpose of reading specially to infer information (Grellet, 1981). The main ones are listed below (Munby quoted by Grellet, 1981, p. 4)

- › Understanding information when not explicit in the text.
- › Interpreting text by going inside it
- › Identifying the main point or important information in a piece of discourse
- › Distinguishing the main idea from the supporting details.
- › Extracting salient points to summarize (the text, ideaetc)
- › Selective extraction of relevant points of the text.

Pressley & Afflerbach (1995) have also added another group of good readers’ behaviours useful to improve inference skills:

- › Checking one cue with another (Cross-check).
- › Returning to the beginning of a sentence or paragraph and read it again (Reread).
- › Answering what is happening next (Predict and confirm).

- › Skipping an unfamiliar word and read to the end of the sentence or paragraph, thinking about what would make sense, then using the context, going back and reread to try to determine the word (skip, Read on and Go back).
- › Thinking about what you already know about the subject and the kind of material you are reading. Comparing the known information to what is said in the reading. (Connect Background Knowledge to the Information in the Text)
- › Thinking about the information given directly and the one is not directly stated in words, based on the clues the author has given. (Think about Explicit and Implicit Information).
- › Stopping and Thinking about the information that has been given in a longer text. (Stop and Review).
- › Telling what happened in the story and important events, and reviewing the presented information. (Retell and Summarize).
- › Using a story map, conceptual map, or other way to show what was included in what has been read. (Use a Graphic Organizer).

To this point, F. Grellet (1981, p. 4) argues that “to develop these strategies, several types of exercise can be used”. These exercises use some questions types which lead the students to develop two different functions.

### **1. To clarify the organization of the passage**

The questions can be about:

- › The function of the passage
- › The general organization (e.g. argumentative)
- › The rhetorical organization (e.g. contrast, comparison)
- › The cohesive devices (e.g. link words)
- › The intrasentential relations (e.g. derivation, morphology, hyponymy)

### **2. To clarify the content of the passage**

The questions can be about:

- › Plain fact (different reference)
- › Implied fact (inference)

- › Deduced meaning (supposition)
- › Evaluation

The above strategies, “are constantly related since a given exercise uses a certain type of question, with a certain function to develop a particular reading skill” (Grellet, 1981, p.5). Our research team finds it useful to develop those strategies and functions appropriately to improve the inference skills in the students. Since students don’t show any problem with questions to which they are required to find the answer from the text, like: true or false, open questions or multiple choice questions types, it is not our intention to dwell on the value of these question types but encourage the students to think and reason in order to give an answer or make a choice in relation to any not explicit information. To support this idea F. Grellet (1981) says that it is important to devise exercises in which there is no simple obvious answer but which will force the students to examine the text and the different possibilities carefully in order to make up their minds.

To reach the goal of having a critical reader, that recognizes not only what a text says, but also how that text portrays the subject matter, it is necessary to encourage our students to use strategies that would help them to overcome those difficulties they are presenting during their reading comprehension process. We find also necessary to discover the strategies they are already using spontaneously (without being taught), and that are giving them good results when they analyse questions, or the ones are not giving them good results or the ones they don’t use. To ratify these Baker and Brown (1984, p. 369) have said that “the successful readers appear to use more strategies than less successful readers and successful readers the same range of strategies”. In Relation to this, Carrel *et al* (1992) said that good readers will have a larger repertoire of strategies to draw upon than poorer readers will have.

On the other hand, as we mentioned before in this part the way the text is understood is connected with the reader’s own characteristic, as Kurland (2000) has pointed out, a non-critical reader might read a history book to learn the facts of the situation or to discover an accepted interpretation of those events. A critical reader might read the same work to appreciate how a particular perspective on the events and a particular selection of facts can lead to particular understanding.

If we aim critical readers it is also needed to have a critical reading that facilitates the student's process of going beyond the reading: to this respect Kurland (2000) says that, non-critical reader is satisfied with recognizing what a text says and restating the key remarks. Critical reading goes two steps further, having recognized what a text says, it reflects on what the text does by marking such remarks. And finally critical readers then infer what the text, as whole, means based on the earlier analysis.

However, "being a critical reader or having a critical reading does not guarantee that students will use the appropriate strategies" (Wallace, 1992, p. 5). Taking into account "that inference is an essential part of being human we engage in inference every day" (Kurland, 2000), this means that we as human beings are always interpreting actions to be examples of behaviour, characteristics, intentions or expressions of particular feelings. Referring to all this we find it useful to investigate the strategies the students are using successfully. Unsuccessfully, and those they don't use in order to improve their reading comprehension process, and encourage them to go farther and analyze deeper the different situations that could be presented in their lives.

From Wallace's (1992) Perspectives, "the teacher, by watching the various ways in which his or her learners' process texts, can encourage the use of those strategies which are observed to be most effective".

## 6. Methodology

### 6.1 Methodological Design

For the purpose of this research, a non-experimental or qualitative study was applied. There are some important concepts on what a non-experimental study consists of. Patten (2000, p.5) points out that in this type of research, participants are just observed without being intervened. A very important idea from Hannabus (1996, p.22) says that through a non-experimental research, the researcher is able to explicit some attitudes, thoughts, or feelings that only by the application of explicit instruments such as interviews and transcriptions may come into the concrete observation.



Non-experimental studies come in many forms and one of them is Ethnography.

Wilson (quoted in Nunan, 1992) relates ethnography with sociology and anthropology, because these sciences study human being in context, in relation with the others and the environment surrounding them. In this relationship each of the participants influence and is influenced by the others. “So, if we need to investigate a behaviour, we need to investigate it in the natural context in which it occurs...” (p.52).

In addition, Nunan (1992) highlights the ineluctable presence [as a positive factor] of subjectivity from all the participants in a research.

Van Lier (1988) also identifies cultural description as a central characteristic of ethnography. He presents two views of ethnography: the weak view and the strong view. The weak view is applied in linguistics and sees ethnography as “essentially inferior to psychometric, [measure of intellectual faculties] as it consists of unstructured and unsystematic observation.” (p.53)

It means that ethnography provides new “hypotheses” or “questions” to be proved or disapproved in a further experiment.

Van Lier talks on the strong view of ethnography as a “valid research paradigm in its own right....” (p54). From this point, ethnography involves the study of culture or characteristics of a group in a real world. “The researchers make no attempt to isolate or manipulate the phenomena under investigation, and insights and generalizations emerge from close contact with the data rather from a theory of language learning and use.... (p.55)

Van Lier (1988) classifies the characteristics of an ethnographic research as:

- › Contextual, because the research is carried out in the context in which the subjects normally live or work.
- › Unobtrusive, because the researcher avoids manipulating the phenomena under investigation.
- › Longitudinal, because the research is relatively long term.

- › Collaborative, because the research involves the participation of stakeholders other than the researcher.
- › Interpretive, because the researcher carries out interpretive analyses of data.
- › Organic, because there is interaction between questions/ hypotheses and data collection interpretation.

To carry out our research project we applied the following categories based on the reading strategies settled by Munby and Pressley & Af-flerbach which are referenced in the theoretical framework

- › Cross check
- › Reread
- › Relevant points
- › Predict and confirm
- › Skip, read on and go back
- › Connect background knowledge
- › Explicit and implicit information
- › Stop and review
- › Graphic organizer
- › Retell and summarize
- › Besides the strategies mentioned above, it was necessary to consider some emergent categories for other behaviours which appeared systematically. Empty words: non sense words according to the context.
- › Lack of understanding: when a word in text, instruction or option was not understood.
- › “Luckychete”: when the word in text, instruction or option was not understood, but the answer was correct.

We considered ethnography as the most suitable method for our project for many reasons such as,

- › It allowed us to observe and interpret our focus group behaviour in relation to their level of inference when reading.
- › It allowed us to observe in context without need of predicting.
- › It allowed us to observe objectively certain results but also let us to interpret them subjectively.

- › It let us triangulate our perceptions on some points and decide which ones were more acceptable.
- › It let us contribute to theory building and changing of behaviour from students when facing high level reading skills.

## 6.2 Instruments

The instruments applied in this research were: a reading material, the analysis of the reading comprehension product, and a semi-structured interview.

### 6.2.1 Analysis of Material

For the purpose of this research it was necessary to follow some steps. First, the existing material, the text book was revised in order to analyse whether the reading comprehension questions fulfilled the expectations of including inference level ones. The revision process proved that the questions from any reading text proposed in the textbook tended to evaluate an interpretative and explicit level. Second, the identification of the kind of questions which prove a high level of inference and deep understanding of a text. Third, the decision to design a completely new material which fitted to the research aims.

We think that a reading comprehension like the one we applied (Appendix A) was completely relevant with our purpose and with the students. First of all we chose a text which talked about apples and the process they needed to be kept during a long time. Besides, as our purpose was to know the strategies they used to infer information, we decided to design a questionnaire based exactly on the different strategies we knew from theory, which led students to get this level of comprehension. In our concrete questionnaire we designed the questions based on the following strategies.

**Question 1:** Deduct the title.

**Question 2:** Infer the purpose of the reading.

**Question 3:** Use Spider or conceptual map to find the topic and the supporting ideas, and establish the relation categories between them.

**Question 4:** Predict from the last paragraph information.

**Question 5:** Order the main ideas according to their presentation in the .text.

**Question 6:** Complete a cause and effect relation in a chart.

It is important to say that in questions 1 and 4 it was necessary to change some distracter choices because they caused confusion.

As we designed the questionnaire based on the different strategies we know about inference, all the answers gave us information about the strategies they use well, and those ones which produce some difficulties to be applied.

### 6.2.2 Analysis of product

One of the researchers practiced the activity in the university library. The five participants were seated in different tables and worked alone. They were not allowed to use dictionary. The teacher introduced the activity, the purpose of it, and the right they had to keep anonymity. The students were able to raise their hands and ask for any explanation to the teacher. They had two class sessions to finish the activity.

### 6.2.3 Interview

A semi structured interview in Spanish was applied with the purpose of collecting freely the respondents' significant ideas about the different topics we considered relevant to research. Preliminary interview consisted of sixteen questions (see appendix C). The tested student was very concentrated and disposed to answer the questions. She seemed to be pleased and confident.

But, later, piloting it with the help of the master, we realized there were too many important questions which did not really lead towards the research question solution. We also considered that we omitted the most important question: how each question was answered. So the definite interview (see appendix D) had 6 basic questions, which helped to discover the participants' performance on inference level in reading comprehension.

## 7. Results

### 7.1 Reading Text Material

The results of the analysis are presented below and are related to the research question.

Which reading comprehension strategies do students apply to infer implicit information in their specific readings in any subject to improve their real understanding about new vocabulary, intentionality, hidden purposes and even beliefs and thoughts of the author?

In table 1 different participants were observed and the results of their answers in a qualitative appreciation. For this purpose each answer was classified as right, fair, wrong or not answered.

**Table 1.** Relationship between participants and questions

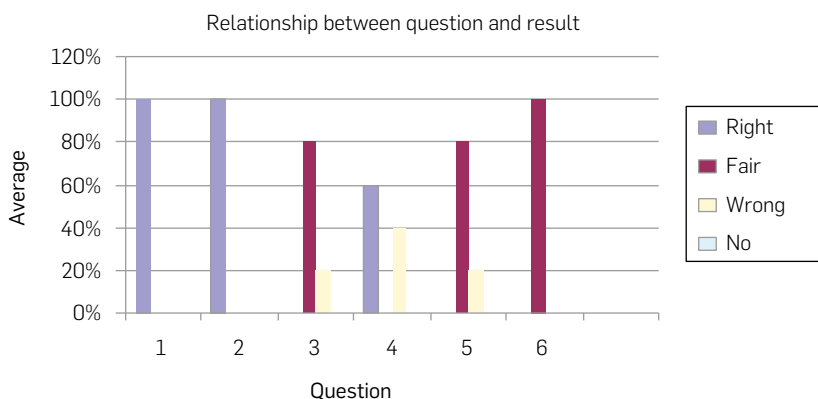
	Quest 1			Q 2			Q 3			Q 4			Q 5			Q 6					
	R	W	N	R	W	N	R	F	W	N	R	W	N	R	W	N	R	F	W	N	
<b>Participant A</b>	x			x				x			x			x					x		
<b>B</b>	x			x				x			x			x					x		
<b>C</b>	x			x				x			x			x					x		
<b>D</b>	x			x				x			x			x					x		
<b>E</b>	x			x				x			x			x					x		

R: right F: fair W: wrong N: no answer.

In table 2 qualitative results were organized and translated in terms of average.

100% of students answered right questions 1 and 2; question 3 was answered fairly by 80% of students and wrong by 20% of them: questions 4 was answered right by 60% of students and wrong by 40% of them; question 5 was answered fairly by 80% of them and wrong by 20% of them: and question 6 was answered fairly by 100% of students. So, it is deduced from these results that all the students tried to answer all the questions without omitting any of them.

**Table 2** Percentage of answers



In table 3 the answers were classified in production and identification ones. Production questions were those which demanded from the participant a wording structure building (e.g. questions 3, and 6); meanwhile, identification questions only demanded the placement of the explicit information from the text. (E.g. questions 1, 2, 4, and 5).

Then, answers were analysed separately and the results showed that students in general had a better performance in identification than in production. These results showed an average of 89% of good performance in identification questions over only 34 % in production questions.

**Table 3** Relationship between students and sort of questions

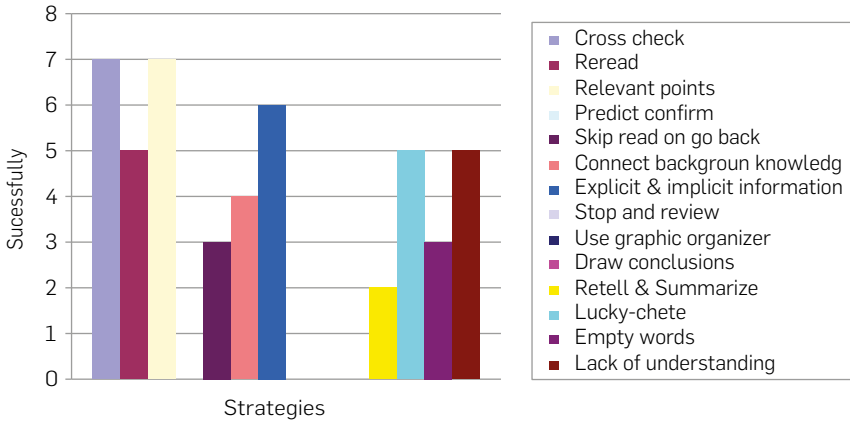
	<b>Part 1</b>	<b>Part 2</b>	<b>Part 3</b>	<b>Part 4</b>	<b>Part 5</b>
<b>Identification Questions</b>	16 questions = 100%	16 questions = 100%	16 questions = 100%	8 questions = 50%	16 questions = 100%
<b>Production questions</b>	14 questions = 41%	17 questions = 50%	10 questions = 29%	10 questions = 29%	8 questions = 25%

## 7.2 Interview

After analysing the participants' answers of the reading text and the interview the results showed the following information:

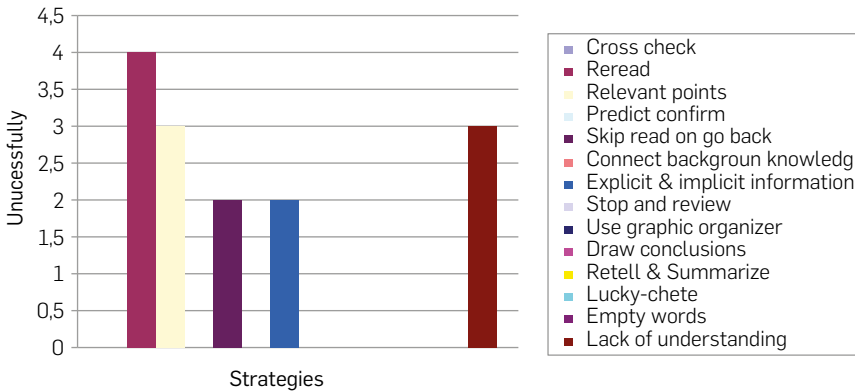
- › In relation to the successful strategies they used in this activity, we found that relevant points, cross check, implicit and explicit information.

## Successfully Used Strategies



- › However, the strategies that everyone has used in this activity were: predict and confirm, use graphic organizer and draw conclusions.

## Unsuccessfully Used Strategies



- › According to those which they used but were unsuccessful at least in this activity, were: reread, relevant points and lack of understanding.

## 8. Discussion

- › Participants 1 and 2 who obtained the best results in the reading test were the ones who used the most strategies in the sample. As

we mentioned in the theoretical framework researchers have found that good readers use more strategies than less successful readers.

- › Participants 1 and 2 use the same range of strategies: cross check, reread, relevant points, skip, connect background, and think about explicit and implicit information to this respect, Wallace (1988) has argued that good learners tend to use the same range of strategies, based on that the reading strategies have been selected from the own readers experience.
- › On the other hand, participants 3, 4 and 5 who had the highest number of wrong questions in the reading text had fewer amounts of useful strategies.
- › In spite of all of them using the inference strategy, when they were asked what inference is, they didn't know its meaning.
- › In relation to the more successful strategies, we found that they were relevant points, cross check, Implicit and explicit information.
- › However, the strategies that anyone has used in this activity were: predict and confirm, use graphic organizer and draw conclusions.
- › According to those which they used but were unsuccessful, at least in this activity, were: reread, relevant points and lack of understanding.

## 9. Conclusions

After reviewing the options again, it would be better if next time when writing the options for identification question types; they were written in nominal phrases instead of verbal phrases or using synonyms from the textual ideas in order to avoid doubts on the comprehension.

- › It is important to say that, next time, it would show a better level of inference whether the question asks for the construction of the steps from some drawings or from some key words because some students without being conscious of the question sense tried to relate the words in the option with the words in the text.
- › Instructions in English were a real obstacle to know whether students really knew the meaning of the purposed skills. We suggest instructions to be written in Spanish next time, in order to measure the level of understanding they have in relation to the text.



- › It is important to say that as participants showed in question six of the interview they are not conscious explicitly on the concept they are practicing in a punctual exercise; but that is not the reason for what they are not able to use it. Most of students have strong difficulties to express concepts in abstract; but they can apply them in concrete situations.

The participant students (as most of the teachers) showed through their explanations in the interview that they do not make a clear difference between infer and deduce. Even when looking for the meaning of each of them in the dictionary, one cannot clarify confusions. But meanwhile we can deduce a concept from the explicit information around this inference suppose that the reader makes later judgments or conclusions from explicit information he or she has read first. Further over, they show a tendency to replace the words in English with others they suppose are synonyms but actually have completely different meanings.

Infer information questions appear fairly frequently in reading comprehension texts all above in high levels of education, and their successful use on the part of students will greatly enhance their confidence, motivation, interpretation and academic results. Many teachers, perhaps due to their poor training and lack of awareness, tend to assume that most of the inferring skills are easily understood by students and that it is not therefore necessary to give any specific training in this theme. Analysis of student performance tests demonstrated that this is not completely true. Comparison of student performance in reading comprehension texts and the analysis of their explanations in a later interview, suggests that students should be helped in a better performance of skills such as Reread, Relevant Points and Lack of understanding. And to recognize the existence of other useful strategies such as Predict and Confirm, Stop and Review, use a graphic organizer and Draw Conclusions.

For all the reasons exposed above, it is necessary the systematic training and practice of all these important inferring skills in graded exercises until the students acquire a very good level of performance in this very important level of understanding not only in English but it also would contribute to a better understanding in all the curricular subjects.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A

Apples ripen in England in the autumn. Once ripe, they last up to a week or two. Apples are imported from other countries such as New Zealand to extend the season, but this alone will not make sure that you can have an apple at any time of the year. Many apples are picked just before they are ripe and then stored in a controlled environment. When stored carefully, some varieties of apple can last up to 12 months. So the apple you buy could be a year old.

How can you store an apple so that it will stay fresh? As apples ripen, the minerals and other chemicals in the cells that make up the apple tissue change. Starches in the cells change to sugars and the cell walls begin to break down, so when you bite into the apple it tastes sweet and juicy. If you want to keep an apple for longer you need to make sure it does not ripen too soon. You do this by picking the apple at the right time and then by storing it so that it ages slowly.

You can check how close apples in an orchard are to being ripe by testing one or two to see how much of minerals such as phosphorus, magnesium and potassium they contain. Cell walls need some of these minerals to maintain their rigidity. As the apple ripens, so the amount of each mineral in the fleshy part changes. By tracking the changes you can tell how ripe an apple is. Picking the apple at just the right time makes sure it will last longer.

Once picked the apple will continue to ripen, so this process needs slowing down. An apple is living and each of its cells continues to respire. This means that they continue to absorb oxygen from the air and give off carbon dioxide. As each cell respire, some of the stored food is converted to energy. The apple also gives off a gas called ethylene that helps to ripen the fruit. Controlling the atmosphere in the store can slow down the respiration rate in the apple cells. A slow-turning fan can keep the air circulating and blow away the ethylene as it is formed. If you decrease

the level of oxygen and increase the level of carbon dioxide then cell respiration slows. Some varieties of apple will tolerate high levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. For instance, Cox apples will tolerate 9% of carbon dioxide. These varieties can be stored for longer. Apples such as the Worcester will tolerate less, so cannot be stored for long periods.

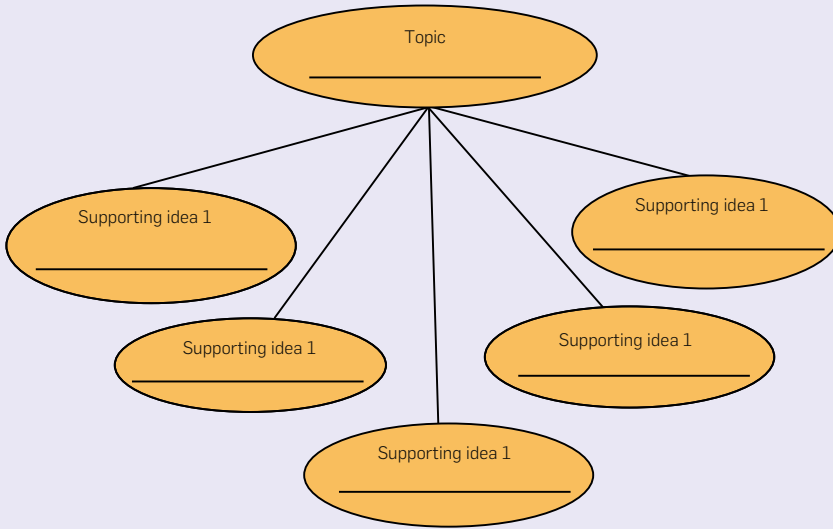
The apple store is also cooled. This makes sure that any chemical reactions, such as respiration, will take place at a slower rate than normal. Fruit such as apples cannot be frozen without becoming softer and mushy. This is because, as the water in the cytoplasm freezes, sharp crystals of ice form that burst the cell membranes and cell walls. As water freezes to form ice it expands and this will also cause the cell walls and cell membranes to burst.

Growing and selling apples and other fruits is big business, so it is in the interests of many to extend the shelf life of these products as long as possible. But do they taste the same as freshly picked apples? The industry claims they do. If you are lucky enough to live in an apple-growing area you could try your own experiment, but you may have to wait until next autumn.

### Reading Comprehension

1. According to the content, the title of this text could be
  - a. How to cultivate apples.
  - b. How an apple became a forbidden fruit.
  - c. How apples are stored.
2. The purpose of this text is
  - a. To show the chemical process in the respiration of an apple plant.
  - b. To show how important this product is in the world economy.
  - c. To explain how the time an apple needs to be ripen, can be modified chemically.

3. Fill in the spider map with the information requested. Establish a relation category such as: cause, effect, composition, distribution, etc.



4. Reading the whole text, you can infer that the author might be
- a biologist
  - a farmer.
  - an architect.
5. Order the following ideas on storing apples process in the order the text proposes them.

\_\_\_ Tracking the minerals level.

\_\_\_ Controlling temperature.

\_\_\_ Storing the apples.

\_\_\_ Picking the apples.

\_\_\_ Controlling gases level.

6. Complete the cause-effect chart

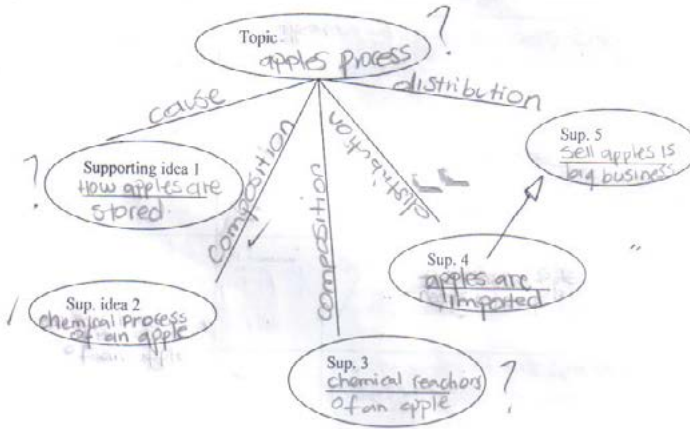
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Apples are imported from other countries such as New Zealand	Because
When you bite into a ripe apple it tastes sweet and juicy	Because
The apple store is cooled	Because
Levels of oxygen are decreased	Because
You cannot use freezing as a method to store apples	Because
An unripe apple contains phosphorus, magnesium and potassium	Because

# Appendix B: Reading text answers

## Participant 1

### READING COMPREHENSION

1. According to the content, the title of this text could be
  - A. How to cultivate apples.
  - B. How an apple became a forbidden fruit
  - C. How apples are stored.
2. The purpose of this text is
  - A. To show the chemical process in the respiration of an apple plant.
  - B. To show how important this product is in the world economy.
  - C. To explain how the time an apple needs to be ripen, can be modified chemically.
3. Fill in the spider map with the information requested. Establish a relation category such as: cause, effect, composition, distribution, etc



4. Reading the whole text, you can infer that the author might be
  - A. a biologist
  - B. a farmer
  - C. an architect

5. Order the following ideas on storing apples process in the order the text proposes them

- 3 tracking the minerals level
- 5 controlling temperature
- 2 storing the apple
- 1 picking the apple
- 4 controlling gases levels

6. Complete the cause-effect chart

Statement		Explanation
Apples are imported from other countries such as New Zealand	because	it is necessary to extend the season <sup>which</sup> and to sell apples from other countries
When you bite into a slice of apple it tastes sweet and juicy	because	starches in the cells change to sugars and the cell walls begin to break down, so taste sweet and juicy
The apple store is cooled	because	apple makes any chemical reactions such as respiration.
Levels of oxygen are decreased	because	cell respiration slows
You cannot use freezing as a method to store apples	because	as the water in the cytoplasm freezes, sharp crystals of ice form that burst the cell membranes and cell walls.
An unripe apple contains phosphorus, magnesium and potassium	because	cell walls need some of these minerals to maintain their rigidity



## Participant 2

### READING COMPREHENSION

1. According to the content, the title of this text could be
  - A. How to cultivate apples.
  - B. How an apple became a forbidden fruit
  - C. How apples are stored.
2. The purpose of this text is
  - A. To show the chemical process in the respiration of an apple plant.
  - B. To show how important this product is in the world economy.
  - C. To explain how the time an apple needs to be ripen, can be modified chemically.
3. Fill in the spider map with the information requested. Establish a relation category such as: cause, effect, composition, distribution, etc



4. Reading the whole text, you can infer that the author might be
  - A. a biologist
  - B. a farmer
  - C. an architect

5. Order the following ideas on storing apples process in the order the text proposes them

3 tracking the minerals level

5 controlling temperature

2 storing the apple

1 picking the apple

4 controlling gases levels

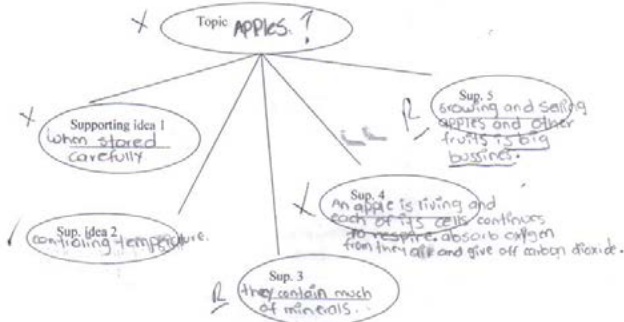
6. Complete the cause-effect chart

Statement		Explanation
Apples are imported from other countries such as New Zealand	because	techniques for growing apples for us seasons to extend the season? but this alone will not make sure that you have an apple at any time of the year.
When you bite into a ripe apple it tastes sweet and juicy	because	As apples ripen, the minerals and other chemical in the cells that make up the apple tissue change, sugars <del>and</del> break down change to sugar and the cell walls begin to break down
The apple store is cooled	because	This makes sure that any chemical reactions, such as respiration, will take place at a slower rate than normal.
Levels of oxygen are decreased	because	This is for control the <del>temperature</del> cell respiration, and make it <del>slower</del> slow
You cannot use freezing as a method to store apples	because	As the water in the cell plasma freezes, sharp crystals of ice form that burst the cell membranes and cell walls
An unripe apple contains phosphorus, magnesium and potassium	because	Cell walls need some of these minerals to maintain their rigidity

## Participant 3

### READING COMPREHENSION

1. According to the content, the title of this text could be
  - A. How to cultivate apples.
  - B. How an apple became a forbidden fruit
  - C. How apples are stored.
2. The purpose of this text is
  - A. To show the chemical process in the respiration of an apple plant.
  - B. To show how important this product is in the world economy.
  - C. To explain how the time an apple needs to be ripen, can be modified .  
chemically.
3. Fill in the spider map with the information requested. Establish a relation category such as: cause, effect, composition, distribution, etc



4. Reading the whole text, you can infer that the author might be
  - A. a biologist
  - B. a farmer
  - C. an architect

5. Order the following ideas on storing apples process in the order the text proposes them

5. tracking the minerals level
3. controlling temperature
2. storing the apple
1. picking the apple
4. controlling gases levels

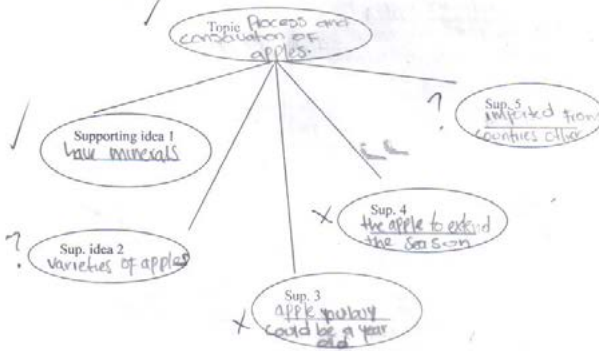
6. Complete the cause-effect chart

Statement		Explanation
Apples are imported from other countries such as New Zealand	because	to extend the season, this alone will not make sure that you can have an apple at any time of the year.
When you bite into a ripe apple it tastes sweet and juicy	because	if you want to keep an apple for longer you need to make sure it does not ripen too soon.
The apple store is cooled	because	this make sure that any chemical reactions, such as respiration, will take place at a slower rate than normal.
Levels of oxygen are decreased	because	A slow-turning fan can keep the air circulating and blow away the ethylene as it is formed.
You cannot use freezing as a method to store apples	because	this is because, as the water in the cytoplasm freezes, sharp crystals of ice form that burst the cell membranes and cell walls.
An apple apple contains phosphorus, magnesium and potassium	because	cell walls need some of these minerals to maintain their rigidity.

## Participant 4

### READING COMPREHENSION

1. According to the content, the title of this text could be
  - A. How to cultivate apples.
  - B. How an apple became a forbidden fruit
  - C. How apples are stored.
2. The purpose of this text is
  - A. To show the chemical process in the respiration of an apple plant.
  - B. To show how important this product is in the world economy.
  - C. To explain how the time an apple needs to be ripen, can be modified chemically.
3. Fill in the spider map with the information requested. Establish a relation category such as: cause, effect, composition, distribution, etc



4. Reading the whole text, you can infer that the author might be
  - A. a biologist
  - B. a farmer
  - C. an architect

5. Order the following ideas on storing apples process in the order the text proposes them

- 5 tracking the minerals level  
2 controlling temperature  
~~X~~ 1 storing the apple  
~~X~~ 4 picking the apple  
3 controlling gases levels

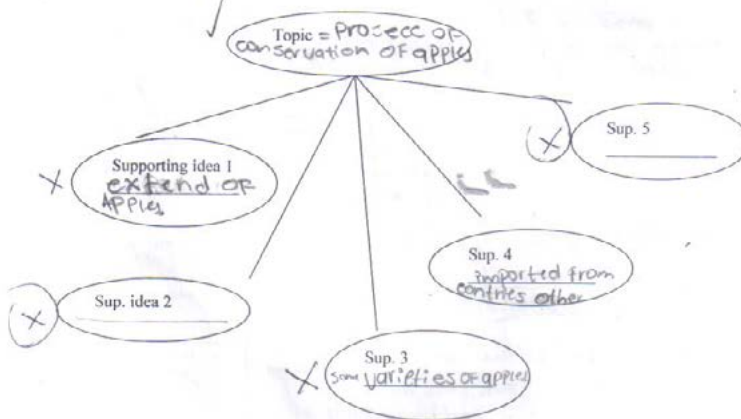
6. Complete the cause-effect chart

Statement		Explanation
Apples are imported from other countries such as New Zealand	because X	England, but this alone will not make sure that you can have an apple at any time of the year.
When you bite into a ripe apple it tastes sweet and juicy.	because X	If you want to keep an apple for longer you need to make sure it does not ripen too soon.
The apple store is cooled	because ✓	this makes sure that any chemical reaction, such as respiration, will take place at a slower rate than normal.
Levels of oxygen are decreased	because	increase the level of carbon dioxide then cell respiration slows.
You cannot use freezing as a method to store apples	because ✓	as the water in the cytoplasm freezes, sharp crystals of ice form that burst the cell membranes and cell walls.
An unripe apple contains phosphorus, magnesium and potassium	because ✓	cells walls need some of these minerals to maintain their rigidity.

## Participant 5

### READING COMPREHENSION

1. According to the content, the title of this text could be
  - A. How to cultivate apples.
  - B. How an apple became a forbidden fruit
  - C. How apples are stored.
2. The purpose of this text is
  - A. To show the chemical process in the respiration of an apple plant.
  - B. To show how important this product is in the world economy.
  - C. To explain how the time an apple needs to be ripen, can be modified chemically.
3. Fill in the spider map with the information requested. Establish a relation category such as: cause, effect, composition, distribution, etc



4. Reading the whole text, you can infer that the author might be
  - A. a biologist
  - B. a farmer
  - C. an architect

5. Order the following ideas on storing apples process in the order the text proposes them

- 3 tracking the minerals level
- 5 controlling temperature
- 2 storing the apple
- 1 picking the apple
- 4 controlling gases levels

6. Complete the cause-effect chart

Statement		Explanation
Apples are imported from other countries such as New Zealand	because	extend the season, but this alone will not make sure that you can have an apple at any time of the year.
When you like to pick an apple it tastes sweet and juicy.	because	If you want to keep an apple for longer you need to make sure it does not ripen too soon
The apple store is cooled	because	this makes sure that any chemical reactions such as respiration, will take place at a slower rate than normal.
Levels of oxygen are decreased	because	Increase the level of $CO_2$ carbon dioxide then cell respiration slows
You cannot use freezing as a method to store apples	because	as the water in the cytoplasm freezes, sharp crystals of ice form that burst the cell membranes and cell walls.
An apple contains phosphorus, magnesium and potassium	because	cell walls need some of these minerals to maintain their rigidity



# Appendix C: Preliminary Interview

## Semi Structured Interview

**PLACE:** Universidad De Sucre

**DATE:** September 20, 2007

### Questions

1. How did you like the topic? How did you feel yourself?
2. How did you like this kind of questions? Why?
3. Had you practiced this kind of questions before? How often?
4. Did you have a concept of inferring? What do you understand on it?
5. What is this kind of questions useful for?
6. Which question was the easiest for you? Why?
7. Which question was the most difficult? Why?
8. Did you deduce the meaning of any new word? What did you do to get it?
9. What kind of question did you like most? Why?
10. Do you think that any question did not demand any inference? Explain.
11. Do you think that it is necessary more explicit theory to know more about these questions patterns, or only through more exercise you can get a good handling of them?
12. Which additional pedagogic explanations would you require in order to understand these questions clearly?
13. What kind of school did you study?
14. How many hours a week did you have English?
15. Did you practice this kind of reading comprehension? Explain.
16. What kind of questions had you never practiced?

# Appendix D: Final interview

## Semi Structured Interview

**PLACE:** Universidad De Sucre

**DATE:**

### **PARTICIPANT:**

1. How did you do to answer the question? (it will be with all the questions of the reading text)
2. Which question was the easiest for you and why?
3. Which question was the most difficult and why?
4. Did you deduce the meaning of new words and how did you do to get it?
5. What kind of question did you like the most and why?
6. Do you think that any of the questions did not demand any inference? Explain

## Appendix E: Interview transcription and categorization

Question (INPUT)	Answer	Priori Category (red color)	Emergent Category (pink color)
<b>Participant 1</b>			
<p>According to the content, the title of the text could be:</p> <p>1. Deduction of the title</p>	<p>Lo que hice para responder la pregunta número uno, fue leer el texto, y ahí me preguntaban que de acuerdo al contenido, el pequeño texto de qué podría tratar mas o menos, y yo escogí la respuesta C. la opción A habla de cultivar manzanas, y el texto no dice cómo se cultivan. La B no la entendí. La C habla de todo el proceso de agregarles..., de su metabolismo, de cómo reaccionan ante una sustancia, digamos que a temperaturas, de esas cosas. Entonces por eso escogí la C.</p>	<p>1. rereading 2. cross check 3. skip</p> <p>Cross check</p> <p>Relevant point</p>	<p>1. lack of understanding 2. luckychete 3. empty words</p>
<p>the purpose of this text is:</p> <p>2. Infer the purpose of the reading</p>	<p>La segunda pregunta yo entiendo que se refiere al propósito del texto. Yo escogí la opción C. porque la opción A yo entendí que mostrar los procesos químicos en una planta. En la B entiendo que hablan de la importancia de este producto en la economía mundial. Bueno yo creo que esto lo mencionan pero no me parece lo más relevante. La C habla del tiempo que necesita una manzana para madurar y puede ser modificada químicamente y yo cogí esa porque ahí comienzan a explicar eso de los cambios de la manzana. Y al leer todo eso me parece que es lo que engloba el contenido.</p>	<p>Retell and summarize</p> <p>Relevant point</p>	

<b>Question (INPUT)</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Priori Category (red color)</b>	<b>Emergent Category (pink color)</b>
Fill in the spider map with the information requested.	En el punto número tres nos ponen como especie de un mapa conceptual donde hay que sacar el tema, nos tocó deducir el tema del texto y el tema que yo escogí fue los procesos de la manzana. Para encontrar las ideas yo no volví a leer todo. Como ya había leído yo ya tenía unas ideas y me ayudé de los mismos puntos de arriba.	Explicit and implicit information	
3. find the supporting ideas, establish the relation categories between them		Connect background knowledge to the information in the text	
Reading the whole text you can infer...	La pregunta número cuatro pues obviamente biólogo pues un granjero no va a saber de todos esos procesos químicos. El solamente se limita a la cosecha y recolección. Y el arquitecto, pues no tiene nada que ver.	Cross check	
4. Prediction from the given information		Rereading Relevant points	
Order the following ideas... in the order the text proposes them...		Implicit and explicit information	
5. Order of the main ideas according to their presentation in the text		Connect background knowledge to the information in the text	
Complete the cause-effect chart	El punto seis tenía que completar dando la razón o porqué y las respuestas las encontré en el mismo texto en forma explícita y también trabajé la mente	Connect background knowledge to the information in the text	
6. complete a cause and effect relation in a chart			
2. ¿Qué pregunta te pareció más fácil y por qué?	La pregunta más fácil fue la número cuatro, porque había que decir quién era el autor. Yo conociendo ya las profesiones en español, pues obviamente que yo la iba a saber.	Implicit and explicit information	

<b>Question (INPUT)</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Priori Category (red color)</b>	<b>Emergent Category (pink color)</b>
3. ¿Qué pregunta te pareció más difícil y por qué?	La más difícil que sentí fue la número seis. Porque de pronto no es solamente sacar la información del texto sino que también hablarlo con las propias palabras	Relevant points	Empty words
4. ¿Qué pregunta te gustó más y por qué?	el tipo de preguntas que más me gustan son las de selección, porque ya después de haber leído el texto y cuando me voy a contestar pues yo voy leyendo y voy descartando y deduzco la respuesta porque ya he leído el texto con respecto al vocabulario la verdad es que hubo más de tres palabras desconocidas, pero para poder deducirlas miraba lo que seguía más adelante.	Skip Cross check	Empty words
5. ¿Qué hiciste para conocer el significado de las palabras?		Rereading Think about implicit and explicit information	
6. ¿Con qué relacionas la palabra inferencia?	para mi inferir es como deducir, dar una idea general del texto	Think about implicit and explicit information	

### **Participant 2**

According to the content, the title of the text could be:	Bueno, en la pregunta 1, para llegar a escoger la respuesta, primero tuve que leer el texto, sacar una idea general desde las ideas que comprendí, que afortunadamente fueron la mayoría, ya que comprendí la mayoría de las palabras...."	Retell and summarize Relevant point
1. Deduction of the title		

<b>Question (INPUT)</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Priori Category (red color)</b>	<b>Emergent Category (pink color)</b>
the purpose of this text is:  2. Infer the purpose of the reading	En la segunda, hice un análisis detallado del texto. La respuesta más apropiada fue la C porque nos explica el tiempo que una manzana necesita para estar madura y como modificarla químicamente, y esto es lo que dice el texto, que las manzanas se cogen todavía verdes y se maduran químicamente estando ya almacenadas.	Cross check Connect background	
Fill in the spider map with the information requested.  3. find the supporting ideas, establish the relation categories between them	Para la tercera pregunta no quise salirme del contexto. El tema que puse fue la manutención de las manzanas por largo tiempo en un almacenamiento. Con las ideas secundarias lo que yo quise dar a entender fue poner cada paso para que la manzana esté en óptimo estado. Las ideas secundarias no fueron sacadas textualmente. Solo me guie por una palabra clave del proceso.	Rereading Relevant points	
Reading the whole text you can infer...  4. Prediction from the given information	El cuarto punto, si uno lee todo el texto, llega a la conclusión que tiene que ser un biólogo. Porque un granjero las cultiva pero no las almacena, pero el biólogo es el que sigue el proceso. El arquitecto no tiene nada que ver con esto.	Think about implicit and explicit information	Lack of understanding
Order the following ideas... in the order the text proposes them...  5. Order of the main ideas according to their presentation in the text	Para hacer el quinto punto, lo único que hice fue leer el texto. Era solo cuestión de analizar, porque aunque no decía con las mismas palabras, si uno analizaba, las encontraba.	Relevant points	

<b>Question (INPUT)</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Priori Category (red color)</b>	<b>Emergent Category (pink color)</b>
Complete the cause-effect chart	El sexto punto consiste en una afirmación y uno decide la causa que la originaba.	Skip, read on, go back	
6. complete a cause and effect relation in a chart	Las causas estaban explicitas en el texto y no hubo necesidad de hacer un análisis profundo.		
2. ¿Qué pregunta te pareció más fácil y por qué?	Los puntos más fáciles fueron el primero y el segundo, porque al leer el texto completo uno puede sacar una conclusión clara, y uno deduce de qué le están hablando. Fueron respuestas que no las pensé dos veces.	Cross check	
3. ¿Qué pregunta te pareció más difícil y por qué?	En la pregunta que tuve mayor grado de dificultad, fue en la tercera, porque buscar en el texto las palabras apropiadas para describir las ideas principales y secundarias, no es una tarea fácil.	Cross check	
4. ¿Qué pregunta te gustó más y por qué?	La pregunta que más me gustó fue la seis porque pone a prueba el nivel de análisis, el nivel de vocabulario, y como se puede uno desenvolver.	Think about implicit and explicit information	Lack of understanding Luckychete
5. ¿Qué hiciste para conocer el significado de las palabras?	En el texto encontré muchas palabras nuevas. Como no tenía diccionario yo hice lo que hago siempre: relaciono estas palabras nuevas con el texto anterior y con lo que le sigue, y así uno se hace una idea general, deduce lo que puede significar la palabra.	Think about implicit and explicit information	
6. ¿Con qué relacionas la palabra inferencia?	Por inferencia yo entiendo lo que nos quiere decir el autor. Porque en la pregunta cuatro, nos preguntan qué quiere inferir el autor, o sea que nos quiere decir de acuerdo con el texto.	Cross check	Lack of understanding Luckychete

<b>Question (INPUT)</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Priori Category (red color)</b>	<b>Emergent Category (pink color)</b>
<b>Participante 3</b>			
According to the content, the title of the text could be:	Escogí de la primera pregunta la C, porque hablaba de la conservación de las manzanas y me preguntaban sobre el título del texto.	Think about implicit and explicit information	Lack of understanding
1. Deduction of the title			
the purpose of this text is:	La segunda me preguntaba sobre el propósito del texto. Escogí la C porque hablaba el tipo de maduración de las manzanas; no escogí la A porque el texto no hablaba de la planta en sí sino de la manzana y la B porque no hablaba en ningún momento sobre la economía.	Relevant points	
2. Infer the purpose of the reading			
Fill in the spider map with the information requested.	La pregunta tres era como la relación de las categorías, su causa, efecto, composición y distribución. El tema, pues hablaba no más de las manzanas. Con relación a las ideas secundarias, pienso que son unos procesos para llegar a la conservación de la manzana.	Rereading	
3. find the supporting ideas, establish the relation categories between them			
Reading the whole text you can infer...	La pregunta cuatro preguntaba sobre el que narraba el texto. Escogí la A porque era un biólogo. No era la C porque no podía ser un arquitecto; y la B no se realmente qué significa.	Skip	
4. Prediction from the given information			
Order the following ideas... in the order the text proposes them...	En la pregunta cinco me pedían ordenar las ideas según el proceso que llevaban en la conservación de la manzana. Aquí no tuve qué regresar al texto, porque con la primera lectura lo analicé.	Cross check	
5. Order of the main ideas according to their presentation in the text			



<b>Question (INPUT)</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Priori Category (red color)</b>	<b>Emergent Category (pink color)</b>
Complete the cause-effect chart 6. complete a cause and effect relation in a chart	En la sexta pregunta me pedían la causa de las afirmaciones y prácticamente lo encontré todo en el texto.	Cross check	
2. ¿Qué pregunta te pareció más fácil y por qué?	La pregunta uno fue prácticamente la más fácil porque todo el texto se refería a la conservación. No me confundió la opción A porque no se habló en ningún momento de cómo cultivarlas y la B como no sabía qué era, estaba segura que era la C.		Lack of understanding
3. ¿Qué pregunta te pareció más difícil y por qué?	La pregunta más difícil fue la tres, porque aquí eran las ideas principales con relación a la manzana, y esas ideas me tocaba como desarrollarlas a mí misma y se me complicó un poco ordenarlas.	Relevant point	
4. ¿Qué pregunta te gustó más y por qué?	Me gustaría tratar de manejar más el tipo de pregunta como la seis.	Connect background knowledge	
5. ¿Qué hiciste para conocer el significado de las palabras?	En el vocabulario hubo muchas palabras que desconocía, pero con la ayuda de la profesora, y la capacidad de relacionar una palabra con la otra, fue que pude conocer algunos significados.		
6. ¿Con qué relacionas la palabra inferencia?	Con relación a la palabra inferir, pues sinceramente no sabría el significado.	Cross check	Lack of understanding

<b>Question (INPUT)</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Priori Category (red color)</b>	<b>Emergent Category (pink color)</b>
<b>Participante 4</b>			
According to the content, the title of the text could be:	1. Bueno. Con la primera pregunta, yo leí el texto y busqué las palabras que se asemejaban teniendo en cuenta la pregunta que me hacían, conociendo los conceptos que estaban en el texto.	skip	
1. Deduction of the title			
the purpose of this text is:	En la segunda, lo mismo. Leí por párrafo y busqué la respuesta que más se relacionara con la pregunta.		
2. Infer the purpose of the reading			
Fill in the spider map with the information requested.	En la tercera tuve que colocarle un título al texto y de ahí buscar las ideas secundarias que tenían relación con el título. Las busqué en el texto: cada paso que daban.		
3. find the supporting ideas, establish the relation categories between them			
Reading the whole text you can infer...	En la cuarta pregunta preguntaron quién era el que sembraba las manzanas.		
4. Prediction from the given information			
Order the following ideas... in the order the text proposes them...	En la quinta pregunta uno tenía que ordenar las ideas principales según el texto		
5. Order of the main ideas according to their presentation in the text			
Complete the cause-effect chart	En la sexta pregunta teníamos que dar el porqué de las preguntas.		
6. complete a cause and effect relation in a chart	Las respuestas se podían encontrar en el texto. Lo que había era que explicarlas.		

<b>Question (INPUT)</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Priori Category (red color)</b>	<b>Emergent Category (pink color)</b>
2. ¿Qué pregunta te pareció más fácil y por qué?	La pregunta que me pareció más fácil fue la sexta, porque las respuestas ya estaban en el texto de manera explícita.		
3. ¿Qué pregunta te pareció más difícil y por qué?	La pregunta número tres, porque teníamos que inventar el título, y según el título teníamos que colocar las características principales, lo que se me hizo complicado, porque tenía que inventarlas yo.		
4. ¿Qué pregunta te gustó más y por qué?	La pregunta que más me gustó fue la número tres, por qué tuve que volver a leer el texto para encontrar las respuestas y por el conocimiento que adquirí.		
5. ¿Qué hiciste para conocer el significado de las palabras?	Relacioné esas palabras con la oración y otras veces le pregunté a la profesora		
6. ¿Con que relaciones la palabra inferencia	Yo relaciono la palabra inferencia con el proceso de conocer significados de palabras que no conocía y para que mi vocabulario sea más extenso.		Lack of understanding

### **Participante 5**

According to the content, the title of the text could be:	1. La primera pregunta me piden que identifique el título. Yo contesté la C porque ahí vi que me hablaban sobre las manzanas y como las cultivaban.		
1. Deduction of the title			
the purpose of this text is:	En la dos, me estaban preguntando sobre el texto, el propósito del texto.		
2. Infer the purpose of the reading	Escogí la C porque ahí hablaban de la maduración, sobre el proceso de las manzanas		

<b>Question (INPUT)</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Priori Category (red color)</b>	<b>Emergent Category (pink color)</b>
Fill in the spider map with the information requested.  3. find the supporting ideas, establish the relation categories between them	En la tres me preguntaban unas características y el título. Para contestar las características leí el texto, pero no las contesté todas.		
Reading the whole text you can infer...  4. Prediction from the given information	En la cuatro me preguntaban quien cultivaba las manzanas y contesté la A, porque a mí me pareció que era el biólogo. No contesté la B porque no sé el significado ni la C, porque un arquitecto no se dedica a eso.		
Order the following ideas... in the order the text proposes them...  5. Order of the main ideas according to their presentation in the text	En la cinco solamente sabía que tenía que colocar unos números, pero no entendí muy bien		
Complete the cause-effect chart  6. complete a cause and effect relation in a chart	En la seis, tenía que colocar el porqué de lo que me estaban preguntando. La respuesta la saqué del contenido del texto.		
3. ¿Qué pregunta te pareció más difícil y por qué?	La pregunta que me pareció más fácil fue la pregunta cuatro, ya que como sabía el significado de las palabras, la pude contestar.		

<b>Question (INPUT)</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Priori Category (red color)</b>	<b>Emergent Category (pink color)</b>
3. ¿Qué pregunta te pareció más difícil y por qué?	La pregunta tres fue la que me pareció más difícil, ya que había que sacar la idea principal y otras características. No las pude sacar por falta de tiempo y también porque fue muy difícil sacar otras características, y otra cosa que no entendí bien que tenía que hacer.		
4. ¿Qué pregunta te gustó más y por qué?	El tipo de pregunta que me gustó más fue la de AB y C ya que leo menos y capto mayor información más rápido		
5. ¿Qué hiciste para conocer el significado de las palabras?	Con respecto al vocabulario, había palabras que no conocía, en algunos casos con la palabra que seguía lograba entender lo que quería decir, otras que preguntaba y otras que finalmente no entendí.		
6. ¿Con qué relacionas la palabra inferencia?	Con respecto a la palabra inferencia, no me quedó muy claro.		Lack of understanding

STRATEGIES	EMERGENT													
	Cross check	Reread	Relevant points	Predict confirm	Skip read on go back	Connect background knowledge	Explicit & Implicit information	Stop & review	Use graphic organizer	Draw conclusions	Retell & Summarize	Lucky-chete	Empty words	lack of understanding
1	S	xxx	xx	xx	x	xx	x			x	x	x	x	x
	U		x											
2	S	x	xx	xxxx	xx	x	xxx			x		x		
	U													
3	S	x					x				xx	x	xx	xx
	U		xx		x									x
4	S		x	x			x					x		
	U		x	x	x		xx							x
5	S	x									xxx		xx	xx
	U		x	x										x
TOTAL	S	7	5	7	0	3	4	6	0	0	2	5	3	5
	U	0	4	3	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3

S: Successfully U: Unsuccessfully

## CHAPTER 4

# How Cognitive and Metacognitive Processes Help EFL Learners to Approach Reading Passages Found in Tests

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify different cognitive and metacognitive processes through which EFL learners tackle reading comprehension tests. In order to carry out this project, it was necessary to use a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methodologies to validate the results and the conclusions derived from this study. Therefore, it was necessary to apply an interview, a survey and some reading comprehension tests in order to collect reliable data that helped reach the objective stated in this project.

The results obtained showed that learners made more use of the cognitive strategies rather than the metacognitive ones. They also showed that learners tend to use more cognitive strategies such as guessing the meaning of the words based on the context, reading pictures to have an idea about what they are about to read, underlining words, taking notes, and visualizing information about the text.

Taking all this into consideration, teachers should engage learners more with reading extensively and intensively, teach them all the cognitive and metacognitive strategies they can use as they approach reading passages so that they can identify those strategies they feel more comfortable with. In that way, teachers can extrapolate their use in the EFL classrooms by

increasing their reading comprehension processes. Reading becomes an important language skill for learners to become more analytic, critical, and problem solvers.

### **Key words**

Cognitive and metacognitive strategies, reading comprehension and language learning strategies.

### **Resumen**

El propósito de este estudio es identificar los diferentes procesos cognitivos y metacognitivos a través de los cuales los estudiantes de una segunda lengua afrontan exámenes de comprensión de textos. Para llevar a cabo este proyecto fue necesario utilizar una mezcla de metodologías cualitativa y cuantitativa para validar los resultados y las conclusiones derivadas de este estudio. Por lo tanto, fue esencial aplicar una entrevista, una encuesta y algunos exámenes de comprensión lectora para recolectar información confiable que ayudo a alcanzar los objetivos propuestos en este proyecto.

Los resultados obtenidos mostraron que los estudiantes hicieron más uso de las estrategias cognitivas que las metacognitivas. Los resultados también mostraron que los estudiantes tienden a utilizar más estrategias cognitivas tales como: Adivinar el significado de las palabras por el contexto, leer imágenes para tener idea de lo que van a leer, subrayar palabras, tomar notas y visualizar información acerca del texto.

Tomando todo esto en cuenta, los maestros deberían motivar cada vez más a los estudiantes con lecturas extensivas e intensivas y enseñarles todas las estrategias cognitivas y metacognitivas que ellos pueden utilizar cuando aborden pasajes de lectura, para que ellos puedan identificar con las que más se sientan cómodos e incrementar también su proceso de comprensión lectora. La lectura se convierte en una importante habilidad lingüística para que los estudiantes sean más analíticos, críticos y más capaces de aportar soluciones.

### **Palabras claves**

Estrategias cognitivas y metacognitivas, comprensión lectora y estrategias de aprendizaje de un idioma.



# 1. Introduction

While learning something specific or non-specific, people use different kinds of mental processes without them even noticing it. These processes are vital since they can facilitate people's learning. These mental processes are metacognitive and cognitive. A metacognitive process is defined by Meichenbaum, (1985, p.1) as:

*An awareness of one's own knowledge—what one does and doesn't know—and one's ability to understand, control, and manipulate one's cognitive processes.*

O'Malley and Chamot (1987) define cognitive strategies as

*...the process in which the learner interacts with the material to be learned by manipulating it mentally (as in making mental images or relating new information to previously acquired concepts or skills) or physically (as in grouping items to be learned in meaningful categories or taking notes on or making summaries of important information to be remembered).*

Thus, the implementation of those strategies can help learners to increase their learning processes, which can lead them to perform better in the different everyday tasks that they face at school or outside. In the case of the learners selected for this study, the implementation of the different aforementioned cognitive strategies, may lead them to have a better performance in the English part of the PRO-SABER test, which measures learners' English reading comprehension levels in order to comply with the language exit requirement.

This research intends to present the different cognitive and metacognitive processes and strategies that help learners to tackle reading comprehension tests, how they influence the learners' reading comprehension performance, and to identify the most common cognitive and metacognitive strategies used by them when it comes to taking reading comprehension tests. In order to carry out this research, it was necessary to select a group of ten learners from the Financial Administration and International Business Program at Cordoba University. The data collection techniques that were used included the following:

- a) Learners' interview
- b) Learners' reading comprehension test.
- c) Teacher interview

All the results and answers obtained from the different data collection techniques used were analysed in order to identify the most common cognitive and metacognitive strategies applied by the learners and how these influenced their reading comprehension test-taking performance.

The importance of this research lies on the identification of different mental processes used by learners, as well as the most common reading comprehension strategies through which EFL learners tackle reading comprehension tests. This research addresses English teachers, English learners and researchers who are interested in knowing about the different cognitive and metacognitive processes, which may influence learners' reading comprehension performance. With this research, potential readers and researchers would understand how important it is for learners to apply the aforementioned strategies so that learners can do well on reading comprehension test-taking performance.

## 2. Justification

As everyone knows, learning or acquiring knowledge is something that depends on how people use their mental capacity to carry out a set of tasks in real-life interaction both in the classroom and outside of it, which in our case, has to do with reading comprehension test-taking performance. In order to support the role played by metacognitive processes, as it comes to learning, some researchers such as Nietfeld & Shraw (2002), Thiede, Anderson, & Therriault, (2003) mention the importance that they have on the acquisition of knowledge by stating that:

*Metacognitive skills can be taught to students to improve their learning and when constructing understanding both cognitive and metacognitive elements are necessary.*

As it can be appreciated, language teachers are expected to lead learners to build their knowledge through the use of cognitive elements and

plan, guide, and evaluate it through the use of metacognitive strategies. Therefore, the more learners become skilful at performing metacognitive strategies, the more confident and independent they will become.

Having said that, this research aims to identify the different cognitive and metacognitive processes that learners have to go through when tackling reading comprehension tests, the influence they have on learners' performance and the most common reading comprehension strategies used by them when taking reading comprehension tests. This research sprang from the need to identify the reasons behind why senior learners from the Financial Administration and International Business Programs at Cordoba University showed poor English results in their last PRO-SABER test.

Learners are expected to comply with the language exit requirement, and on the other hand, to check the state of development of their competences in their academic program. The government also applies this test to gain some insights about:

- a) “Indicators of value added of high education regarding learners’ competences”
- b) “The institutions and their methodologies so that the government can monitor their progress”
- c) “The quality of the different programs and institutions of high education.”

For further interest, please refer to decree N° 3963–Article 189 of the Colombian Political Constitution and the law 1324 of 2009.

In this study, the researchers applied the following data collection techniques:

- a) Teacher’s Interview
- b) Reading comprehension test
- c) Learners’ survey

As for the data collection techniques, a mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies was used in order to validate the results and the conclusions derived from this study.

## 2.1 Research Question

- › How do cognitive and metacognitive processes help EFL learners to approach reading passages found in tests?

## 2.3 Context

This study was conducted at a public institution in Colombia, English has become more important nowadays among school, college, and university learners. In 2004, the Colombian government decided to implement the National Bilingual Program: 2004–2019: English as a foreign language: strategy for competitiveness” to learn a foreign language so that learners have access to new and better opportunities in this globalized world.

This research took place at Cordoba University, which is a public university. In this institution all the programs are required to take at least four levels of English. However, we decided to apply this research to 10 learners, whose age gap ranged between 20 and 24 years. Most of them came from a middle socio-economic income group and were enrolled in the Financial Administration and International Business Programs. They have to take nine levels of English due to the importance of this language for this program and because they have to be able to communicate in English to do business with foreigners. Also, another participant who was involved in this project was their English teacher whose age was 25 year.

The group of learners selected for this study took six levels of English. Their English performance is an average level which means that they still have some difficulties in terms of grammar rules and vocabulary. Their communicative competence is limited since for most of them the only opportunity to put into practice what they have learnt is in the English class.

## 2.4 Problem Statement

As English has become an international language, people use it for many purposes nowadays and one of them is to do business so that they can communicate and expand their business. So, it becomes an important need for any Financial Administrator and International

Business manager to learn how to communicate in English. For this reason, Cordoba University has implemented nine semesters of English for its learners to learn the language in their corresponding programs.

However, it is seen that learners still have some difficulties in their English learning process and it was reflected in the PRO-SABER test. The results were not as expected. So, an important question that came out was why is it that if learners have taken nine levels of English, the results were not as good as expected? That is why we decided to focus our research on these learners who took six levels of English and to find out what kinds of strategies they used and to see which ones were successful to them.

**Table 1** English module analysis. 70% of learners are between very low, low and regular.

# ESTUDIANTES	QUINTIL	NIVEL	PUNTAJE	RESULTADOS	%
53	I	A- a A1	< 9 - 9,5	Muy Bajo - Bajo	31.3
67	II	A1 a A2	9,6 -10,2	Regular	39.6
23	III	A2 a B1	10,3 - 10,6	Bueno	13.6
6	IV	B1	10,7 – 11	Muy Bueno	3.55
20	V	B1 a B+	> 11	Excelente	11.8
169					100%

Taken from: [http://limavirtual.unicordoba.edu.co/finanzas/documentos/saber\\_pro\\_genericas\\_2013\\_2.pdf](http://limavirtual.unicordoba.edu.co/finanzas/documentos/saber_pro_genericas_2013_2.pdf)

The results presented in table 1 show that there is a poor reading comprehension performance since the PRO-SABER test measures the learners' vocabulary and reading comprehension levels. It is also important to mention that most of the questions in that test belong to the literal reading comprehension level to see if the learners have difficulties in this regard. Therefore, they are more likely to exhibit difficulties in the other reading subcategories of the Inferential and Critical Levels.

## 2.5. Research Objectives

### 2.6. General objective

- › To identify the different cognitive and metacognitive processes through which EFL learners tackle reading comprehension tests.

### 2.7. Specific objectives

- › To find out the cognitive and metacognitive mechanisms used by EFL learners when it comes to taking reading comprehension tests.
- › To recognize the most common reading strategies implemented by them when taking reading comprehension tests.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

### 3.1 Language learning strategies

Learning language strategies have been used for a long time ago in a conscious and unconscious way by people in order to have better language learning. Some studies carried out by authors such as; Chomot & O'Malley(1994) & Oxford (1990, 1993, 1996) have shown the significance of these strategies in making language more efficient and in producing a positive effect on learners' language use and so the language learners use them to develop communicative competence and to improve their English performance in the different tasks they carry out. Oxford (1990) divided these strategies into two groups or categories, which are classified as being **direct**, dealing with the new language directly and **indirect**, dealing with the general management of learning.

### 3.2 Direct and Indirect Strategies

According to Oxford (1990, p.37) *direct strategies* refer to:

*Language learning strategies that directly involve the target language are called direct strategies*

On the other hand, Oxford (1990) points out that indirect strategy:

*Support and manage language learning without (in many instances) directly involving the target language... Indirect strategies are useful in virtually all language learning situations and are applicable to all four language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing.*

Weaver & Cohen, (2005) established that there are four different types of strategies such as: Cognitive, metacognitive, social and affective.

1. Cognitive strategies cover many of the processes or mental manipulations that learners go through in both learning the target language (e.g., identification, grouping, retention, and storage of language material) and in using it (e.g., retrieval of language material, rehearsal, and comprehension or production of words, phrases, and other elements of the target language)".
2. Meta-cognitive strategies allow learners to control their language learning by planning what they will do, checking how it is going, and then evaluating their performance on a given task. Metacognitive strategy use is not always observable, but from time to time you may notice your students engaged in planning strategies – talking out how they are going to say something or making planning notes".
3. Social strategies involve learners' choices to interact with other learners and native speakers, such as asking questions to clarify social roles and relationships, asking for an explanation or verification, and cooperating with others in order to complete tasks".
4. Affective strategies help students regulate their emotions, motivation, and attitudes and are often used to reduce anxiety and provide self-encouragement.

### 3.3 Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies

Another important categorization of language learning strategies is that of O'Malley and Chamot (1987). These authors state that the processes in which learners interact with material mentally (as in making mental images or relating new information to previously acquired knowledge) or physically, take notes and make summaries are called *cognitive strategies*. On the other hand, the processes, which involve planning for learning, monitoring ones comprehension, and production, and

evaluating how well one has achieved a learning objective are called *metacognitive strategies*. The following cognitive strategies, were used in this research: association, relation, and repetition.

- › **Guessing through context:** According to Yu-Ling, (2005, p. 20) “some other important sources of information should also be taken into account when guessing, such as knowledge of the subject being read, or knowledge of the conceptual structure of the topic”.
- › **Association:** Associating the new ideas and information with the prior knowledge is a good technique to learn new things.
- › **Scanning:** Roe. B, Kolodziej. J, Stoodt-Hill. D, Burns. C. (2013), suggest that: “Scanning means reading to find a specific bit of information... When scanning, readers run their eyes rapidly down the page, concentrating on the particular information they seek”.
- › **Repetition:** Schmitt (1997) establishes that: “Although repetition as a learning strategy is not much praised by those supporting the depth of processing hypothesis, it is popular among learners and may help them achieve high levels of proficiency”.
- › **Predicting:** Predicting is a process in which readers take the information available in a passage and their prior knowledge to guess what they are about to read. According to Robb (1996) “Predicting is a complex strategy that includes many other strategies. To predict, readers question and wonder, then read on to confirm or adjust and the process of confirming and adjusting involves finding support in the text.
- › **Global reading strategy:** According to Mokhtari, Kouider & Reichard (2002) this strategy is oriented toward a global analysis of a text. Examples include “I decide what to read closely and what to ignore;” “I think about what I know to help me understand what I read;” and “I have a purpose in mind when I read.” These strategies can be thought of as generalized, intentional reading strategies aimed at setting the stage for the reading act (e.g., setting purpose for reading, making predictions).
- › **Problem solving:** According to Mokhtari, Kouider & Reichard (2002) this strategy appears to be oriented around strategies for solving problems when text becomes difficult to read. Examples of these strategies include “When the text becomes difficult, I reread to increase my understanding;” and “I adjust my reading speed



according to what I read.” These strategies provide readers with action plans that allow them to navigate through text skillfully. Such strategies are localized, focused problem-solving or repair strategies used when problems develop in understanding textual information (e.g., checking one’s understanding on encountering conflicting information or rereading for better understanding).

- › **Support reading strategy:** According to Mokhtari, Kouider & Reichard (2002) It primarily involves the use of outside reference materials, taking notes, and other practical strategies that might be described as functional or support strategies. Examples include “I take notes while reading;” “I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it;” and “I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text.” Strategies such as these serve a useful function for some of the students who seem to invoke them as needed. These strategies provide the support mechanisms aimed at sustaining responses to reading (e.g., use of reference materials such as dictionaries and other support systems).

### 3.4 Reading Comprehension Concept

According to Bouchard & Trabasso (2003), reading is a process by which readers construct meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experiences, the information from the text and the opinion that the reader assumes regarding to the text.

### 3.5 Reading Comprehension as a Process

Reading is a complex process in which the reader interacts directly with the text in order to construct meaning. However, Grabe & Stoller (2002) consider that time, as well as enough training and dedication are not being given to develop reading comprehension skills in the mother tongue or second language. For example, according to a study carried out by (Durkin cited by Dreyer, 2003) in which he states that the time given for instructions in reading comprehension only reaches 2% and it seems that this percentage 20 years later has not changed despite of the success that this process might bring to these agents. Thus, to start changing the way in which reading comprehension is taught and assessed.

Nation & Angell (2006) suggest that: “Even though identifying what aspects, during the reading comprehension a student finds difficulties, it is necessary and it should conduct to an intervention that get students close to answer in a correct way to the requirements of the statements, questions or cognitive needs that required this reading comprehension process”.

Thus, to join all these concepts together in our research, it was necessary to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodology since both allow us to use their different characteristics to develop this work.

### 3.6 Learning Strategies

(Wenden cited in Lee Chien, 2010) establishes that “Learning strategies are the various operations that learners use in order to make sense of their learning”. Besides, Williams & Burden (1997) indicates that when learners are involved in a learning task, they have several resources which they use in different ways to finish or solve the task, so this can be termed process of learning strategy. In addition, Oxford (1990) defines learning strategies as, “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations.” It means that when a learner wants to learn something he/she has the capacity to look for the different strategies or methods to learn properly without fearing what the situation or school subject is.

### 3.7 Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

(Oxford cited in Lessard-Clouston Michael, 1997) defines language learning strategies as:

*“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”.*

Thus, it can be said then that LLS are any particular action that a learner decides to take while learning. As each person has his unique way of learning, so depending on what he/she is learning he/she seeks different ways to do so.

### **3.8 Metacognition**

Flavell (1971) argues that metacognition is the notion of thinking about thinking. It means that a person is aware about what he is currently doing. It can be said that metacognition is something deliberate, planned and intentionally goal-oriented that can be used to achieve cognitive tasks. Thus, it can be assumed that metacognition deals with the monitoring of the cognitive processes to accomplish cognitive goals.

Brown (1989) and Alderson's (2000) studies show that poor readers lack effective metacognitive strategies which affect directly their reading comprehension performances. On the other hand, successful L2 readers show a better performance while reading since they are more aware of how to approach these metacognitive strategies.

### **3.9 Cognitive perspective on learning**

Edgen & Kauchak (2003) state that cognitive learning theory assumes that learners are active in their attempts to understand the world. New understanding depends on prior learning. Learners construct understanding, and learning is a change in people's mental structures instead of changes in observable behaviour.

Cognitive theory focuses on an individual's thoughts as a crucial determinate of his or her emotions and behaviours. Our responses make sense within our own view of the world. Therefore, according to cognitive theory, it is important to change a person's thoughts and beliefs in order to change his or her behaviours.

According to cognitive theory, irrational responses are the result of automatic thoughts and erroneous beliefs. Cognitive reframing is a technique that is used to help the client examine his or beliefs and develop healthier ways of viewing the situation. Techniques such as the

STOP method are used to help the individual stop automatic thoughts and replace them with new thoughts.

## 4. Methodology

The research methodology that this study is going to implement is a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Ten Participants did multiple-choice reading comprehension achievement test, followed by a cognitive–metacognitive questionnaire on how they thought while taking the test. Besides, a teacher’s interview and a learners’ survey were used in the subsequent analysis.

In this study we used a qualitative approach which is appropriate for a deep understanding of how cognitive and metacognitive processes help EFL learners approach reading passages found in tests. The purpose of qualitative approaches is to describe groups of people by interpreting and classifying what they do, like, need and believe within their social context. In addition, the quantitative approach used in this study helped us to narrow down possible directions for follow up research. Also, it is important to mention that this type of research seeks precise measurement and analysis of target concepts.

### 4.1 Data Collection Techniques

#### Teacher’s interview

For the sake of our project, as means to achieve effectively the goals we have set for the study, we consider necessary the use of techniques such as interviews which Duff (2007) defines as instruments to collect data about the insights or perspectives of research participants. In our research, for instance, the main use of the interview is to get information about teachers’ perception with regard to learners’ cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

In this study a structured interview was applied to a teacher. According to Mackey & Gass (2005) “In structured (also known as standardized) interviews, researchers usually ask an identical set of questions of all respondents. Structured interviews resemble verbal

questionnaires and allow researchers to compare answers from different participants.”

## Survey

In Mackey & Gass (2005) words a survey is a one of the most common methods of collecting data on attitudes and opinions from a large group of participants; as such, it has been used to investigate a wide variety of questions in second language research. Also, as Dornyei (2003) notes, surveys provide a very efficient means for researchers to gather a good deal of information in a short time with little cost.

## Focus group

For the research team, we considered as an essential source of information in lights of the methodology and data collection techniques the use of a focus group. In the case of our target population, we required a focus group of ten learners, they were assessed in order to identify the different mental process through which EFL learners tackle reading comprehension tests. In order to understand the rationale of focus group in our research project within qualitative nature, it is relevant to be acquainted of what focus group is.

According to Asbury (1995) “focus groups are a data collection technique that capitalizes on the interaction within a group to elicit rich experiential data”. This assertion shows interaction as a key element in the effective development of the generation of data, which are advantageous evidences for strengthening the expected outcomes in the study as well as guiding the contributions of the participants towards successful results.

In addition, it is important to assume the usefulness of focus groups in qualitative studies in terms of not only data generation and collection but also it is less time consuming and more in-depth analysis of the information presented through the interaction and involvement of the participants within the research field.

## 4.2 Participants

The group selected for this study consisted of 37 learners in the age group of 20 -24 years. Most of them came from a medium social economical background level and received public education during their high school.

However, to do this research Project only 10 were chosen. They had a blended learning style. It is important to mention that the group has been attending three hours of English classes on Saturdays since the beginning of their career at the university.

Due to the nature of the course they are studying, it is important for them to complete nine levels of English classes so that they are able to communicate and develop the skills to promote and generate business with foreigners.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention that despite the fact that these learners have taken several levels of English classes throughout the career, their English level is basic with poor management of basic structure of the English language. They also lack vocabulary which influences their reading comprehension performance in a negative way.

## 5. Data Analysis

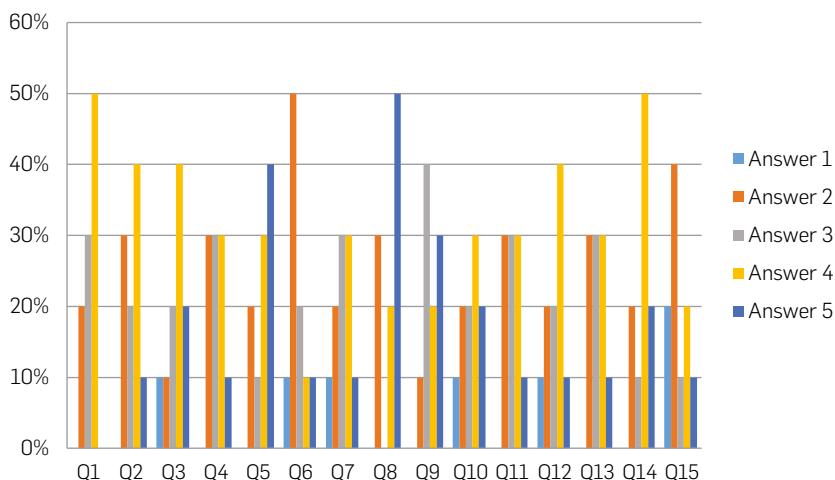
### 5.1 Analysis

This part of the research consists of some graphs that identify different cognitive and metacognitive processes through which EFL learners tackle reading comprehension tests.

The graph 1 shows the learners' cognitive and metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. Taking into account each question, we can see that:

**Question number one (Q 1):** 50% of learners always take notes while reading to help them understand what they read while,30% only do so sometimes and the remaining and 20% do so occasionally.

Graph 1. Learners's survey



**Question number two (Q 2):** 40% of learners usually preview the text to see what it is about before reading, another 30% of them do this only occasionally, 20% preview the next sometimes and the remaining 10% always do so.

**Question number three (Q 3):** 40% of learners usually underline or circle information in the text to help them remember it, 20% always do this, another 20% sometimes do it, a 10% of them do this occasionally and the remaining 10% never do it.

**Question number four (Q 4):** 30% of the learners usually used tables, figures and pictures in the text to increase their understanding, 30% do it sometimes, another 30% do this occasionally and finally only 10% of them always do it.

**Question number five (Q 5):** 40% of the learners always try to visualize information to help them remember what they read, 30% usually do it, another 20% do it occasionally and 10% of them do it sometimes.

**Question number six (Q 6):** 50% of learners occasionally check to see if their guesses about the text are right or wrong, 20% sometimes do it, a 10% always do it, another 10% usually do it and the other 10% never do it.

**Question number seven (Q 7):** 30% of the learners usually try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases, another 30% sometimes do it, 20% do this occasionally, 10% always do it and 10% never do it.

**Question number eight (Q 8):** 50% of learners always reread the text to increase their understanding when the text becomes difficult, 30% do it occasionally and the 20% usually do it.

**Question number nine (Q 9):** 40% of learners usually use dictionary to help understand what they read, 30% of them always use it, 20% usually use it and 10% only use it occasionally.

**Question number ten (Q 10):** 30% of learners sometimes try to get back on track when they get distracted or lose concentration, 20% of them always try to, another 20% sometimes, 20% do it occasionally and 10% never tried to get back.

**Question number eleven (Q 11):** 30% of learners sometimes read slowly but carefully to be sure they understand what they are reading, another 30% of them sometimes do it, another 30% do this occasionally and the last 10% always do it.

**Question number twelve (Q 12):** 40% of the learners usually adjust their reading speed according to what they are reading, 20% of them sometimes do it, another 20% do it occasionally, 10% always do it and 10% never do it.

**Question number thirteen (Q 13):** 30% of learners usually stop from time to time and think about what they are reading, 30% sometimes do it, another 30% do this occasionally and 10% never do it.

**Question number fourteen (Q 14):** 50% of learners usually think about what they know to help them understand what they read, 20% of them always do it, another 20% do it occasionally and 10% sometimes do it.

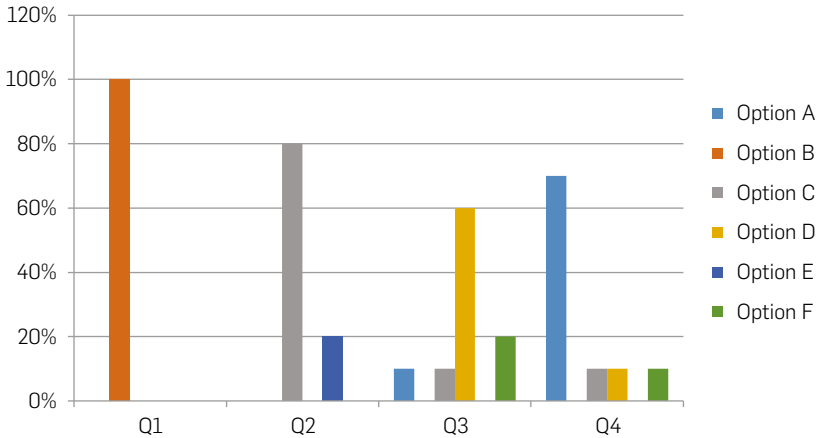
**Question number fifteen (Q 15):** 40% of learners occasionally use typographical features like bold face and italics to identify key features,



20% usually use this technique 20% never do it, 10% always do it and the remaining 10% only use it sometimes.

The graph 2 shows how accurate learners were at the moment of giving the most appropriate title that best summarizes each paragraph.

Graph 2. Reading comprehension test part A



**Question number one (Q 1):** The correct answer for this question was option B, based on the graph 100% of learners answered correctly.

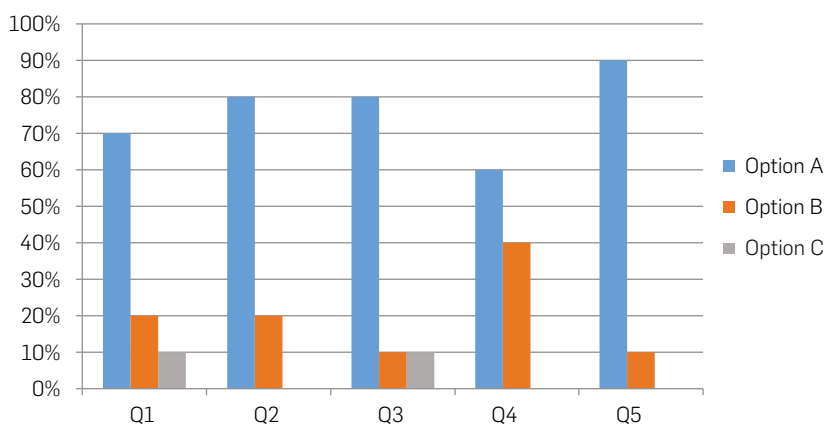
**Question number two (Q 2):** The correct answer for this question was option C, based on the graphic 80% of learners answered correctly and 20% of them chose option E.

**Question number three (Q 3):** The correct answer for this question was option D, based on the graphic 60% of learners answered correctly, 10% of them chose option C and the other 10% chose option E.

**Question number four (Q 4):** The correct answer for this question was option A, based on the graphic 70% of learners answered correctly, 10% of them chose option F, another 10% of them chose option D, and the last 10% chose option C.

The graph 3 shows how accurate learners were at the moment of remembering specific information from the text.

Graph 3. Reading comprehension test part B



**Question number one (Q 1):** The correct answer for this question was option A 70% of learners answered correctly, 20% of them chose option B and 10% chose option C.

**Question number two (Q 2):** The correct answer for this question was option A, 80% of learners answered correctly and the other 20% of them chose option B

**Question number three (Q 3):** The correct answer for this question was option A, and 80% answered correctly, while a 10% of them chose option B and 10% chose option B.

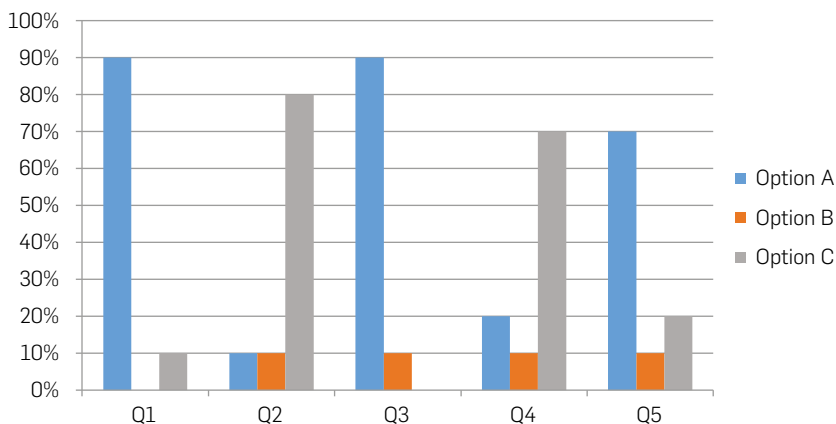
**Question number four (Q 4):** The correct answer for this question was option A, while the majority 80% answered correctly and the remaining 40% of chose option B.

**Question number five (Q 5):** The correct answer for this question was option A, 90% answered correctly and the other 10% of them chose option B.

The graph 4 shows how accurate learners were at the moment of choosing the correct reason or complement of the different situations given.

**Question number one (Q 1):** The correct answer for this situation was option A and 90% of learners gave the right answer and the remaining 10% chose option B.

Graph 4. Reading comprehension test part C



**Question number two (Q 2):** The correct answer for this situation was option C, for which 80% of learners answered correctly, and 10% chose option A and the other 10% option B.

**Question number three (Q 3):** The correct answer for this question was option A, the majority that is 90% and the other 10% chose option B.

**Question number four (Q 4):** The correct answer for this question was option C, here 70% of learners gave the correct answer, 20% chose option A and the other 10% chose option B.

**Question number five (Q 5):** The correct answer for this question was option A and 70% answered correctly. While 20% chose option C and the other 10% chose option B.

Taking into account the reading comprehension test, we could identify that the different cognitive and metacognitive strategies used by the learners while doing a reading test or exercise worked for them. However, about 10% to 20% of learners tended to choose a wrong answer in questions number two, three, and four. It means that learners did not use a unique cognitive or metacognitive strategy while reading, but a mixture of them since it could help them to tackle different reading comprehension tasks and achieve a better performance despite of the lack of vocabulary, time limitations, reading length, and previous knowledge about the different topics addressed in the texts.

According to the third graph in which learners had to remember specific information about the text in order for them to answer the four questions, we could identify that most of the learners answered them properly. However, in question number four it was kind of difficult for them to remember the information asked since 40% of them got it wrong. So, it reflects that learners made more use of their cognitive strategies in this type of questions to remember details and specific information about the text.

And, in the fourth graph in which learners had to be accurate at the moment of choosing the correct reason or complement of the different situations given, most of learners answered well, which means that learners understood the main ideas of the text but just about 20% of learners got some answers wrong.

Also, based on the teacher's interview, it can be noticed that the teacher favours the use of cognitive strategies during the teaching practice. That is why; most of the learners tend to use them more. However, the teacher is conscious about the minimal use of metacognitive strategies. Besides, the teacher has noticed the learners' improvement in their reading comprehension tests since he has taught the different cognitive and metacognitive strategies. In addition, the frequency with which he gives learners texts to practice these strategies has made learners more aware of the importance of them and how productive they can be at the moment of understanding and remembering information from a text.

### **Teacher's interview**

Based on the analysis of the teacher's interview we could say that from the teacher's perspective, learners have improved their reading comprehension (strategies or competence or performance) through the use of the different cognitive and metacognitive strategies taught during their university career. Also, the motivation he gives them is quite important for them to trust more in their abilities and understanding and the good grades they get from the reading comprehension tests is another high motivation for them too.

## 6. Conclusions

### 6.1 Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

Reading is a kind of challenge for some people since they do not like reading or they have problems in understanding the main idea of the text or of the whole text as such. But, for others it is easier and enjoyable since they make use of some strategies to do so.

Our project took ten learners from the Financial Administration and International Business programs at Cordoba University. These learners have taken seven English levels during their career and one of the tasks they face during the levels is to read different financial and business articles. So, they have to read and to comprehend the text, but for them this process has become easier to do because they have been making use of some cognitive and metacognitive strategies that the teachers have taught them during their career.

As this research focused on these strategies and sought to know which of them the learners used the most, an interview, survey and some reading comprehension tests were applied to get the answers needed. The result obtained showed that the learners made more use of the cognitive strategies rather than the metacognitive ones since they guessed the meaning of the words through the context, read picture, underlined words, took notes, and visualized information about the text.

On the other hand, learners made use of the metacognitive strategies as well but they did not use them as much as the cognitive ones. One of the reasons for this is that the teacher focused more on the cognitive ones according to the results gathered from his interview. Thus, it is necessary that teachers pay a lot of attention to the use of metacognitive strategies in order to have a balance and at the same time help learners to improve and monitor their reading comprehension process. Therefore, achieving a better performance in different tasks that involve readings.

The strategies used by the learners helped them to answer correctly, however it was seen that for some learners the strategies used were not the correct ones since in certain questions, 20% to 40% of them got some wrong answers. This could be because of the learners did not

apply the cognitive and metacognitive strategies at all or they chose the wrong strategies for that type of text provided.

To conclude, it can be argued that this study provided legitimate insights into what kinds of cognitive and metacognitive strategies learners used the most when tackling reading comprehension tests; however, it is important to mention that no matter the strategies used in the reading comprehension tests, what really matters was to understand what is being read and learners' improvement as a result of the application of these strategies.

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## CHAPTER 5

# Reading Authentic Material Texts: What strategies do good students use for successful reading?

Claudia Patricia Brunal Morales  
Orlando Ramón Mass Montes

### Resumen

En este estudio se investigó las estrategias utilizadas por estudiantes competentes en el uso del Inglés para comprender lecturas de material autentico de un colegio privado. Los participantes fueron 10 estudiantes de noveno y décimo grado del colegio La Salle de Montería. La información fue recolectada usando tres procedimientos diferentes: dos actividades de lectura, observación en la clase (la cual se llevó a cabo a ver como los estudiantes desarrollaban las actividades), una entrevista con los estudiantes y una entrevista con el profesor.

Concluimos, que los estudiantes aprovecharon su conocimiento previo para completar las actividades. También nos dimos cuenta, que la atención en clase ayuda a los estudiantes a tener éxito en Inglés tales como en las actividades de escucha, habla y lectura. Finalmente, nos pudimos dar cuenta que el uso de los materiales auténticos y la atención de los estudiantes afecta positivamente su desempeño y ayuda a ampliar sus ideas acerca de un tema específico.

### Abstract

A study investigated the strategies used by proficient English students of a private school to comprehend authentic reading material. Subjects were 10 students from La Salle School in Monteria. These students were

in ninth and tenth grades. Data was gathered using three different procedures: two reading activities, classroom observation (which was carried out to see how students dealt with the activities), an interview with the students and another interview with the teacher. -It was concluded that students took advantage of their previous knowledge to perform the activities. We also realized that attention in class helps the students to do well in English through activities such as listening, speaking and reading activities. Finally, we realized that the use of authentic material with attentive students affects positively their performance and helps them to widen their ideas about a specific topic.

## 1. Introduction

There are many authors that consider reading as a valuable tool for learning a foreign language. People who learn a second or foreign language empirically devote many of their learning time to the reading part (Suringi 1998). Dechant (1991: vii) cited in Suringi (1999) states that “Effective reading is the most important avenue to effective learning as reading is so interrelated with the total educational process that educational success requires successful reading”. Through reading students can learn much more vocabulary than they do through other language skills, besides they become familiar with grammar unconsciously. Reading has been called a passive skill, but in fact, it involves the reader in much the same way as listening includes the hearer (Landry 2002). This means that reading is not just sitting to scan a text but getting deeply into the intention of the writer and the message included in the text. In terms of what texts English learners should read, there are several theories that consider the use of authentic material beneficial for the student’s learning process. According to Guariento and Morley (2001) authenticity can be a way of maintaining or increasing the student’s motivation for learning, since, it gives the learner the feeling that he or she is dealing with real language.

The objective of this study is to identify what strategies good English learners use to deal successfully with authentic reading material. We also want to know if the use of authentic reading material affects the students’ performance when coping with non-teaching purposeful material. We also analyzed which activities they performed better in and in which they had problems. The subjects for this paper were 10 high school students from a private institution in Monteria. They were chosen among the best English learners in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades. The study subjects are aged between 14 to 16 years. All of them show an excellent academic record, not only in English, but also in other school subjects.

## 2. Literature Review

In her study “*Reading Strategies for Beginning and Proficient Readers*” Atterman (1997) centered her research on the importance of improving higher order thinking skills in third grade students, which are crucial

for obtaining higher performance in the academic field. For developing her study, Atterman(1997) took into account the American belief that reading is the most important skill to be developed in school.

“*Teaching Reading Strategies in an Ongoing EFL University Reading Classroom*” Song (1998) modified a training method developed by Brown and Palincsar (1984), which involved four different strategies: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting. She wanted to know if the training in reading strategies could increase the reading ability of EFL college students. Results obtained indicated the effectiveness of such a training. She also reported that the performance in some kind of reading comprehension questions is improved by the training method.

A third research we took into account was “*Reading Skills of Golden College Students*” done by Isonio (1996). This investigation comprised two different studies. The first one examined results of a reading assessment from 1991 to 1995, as well as the role of reading skills in the success of students. This study showed that students who had taken more English classes in high school obtained higher reading test scores. In the second study, a reading assessment test was applied to 19 students at the beginning and at the end of critical reading skill course. The study showed that 15 out of the 19 students showed increased score in the final test which meant an improvement of their reading skills.

The last work we analyzed was done by Sugirin (1999) at a university in Indonesia. In his work “Exploring the Comprehension Strategies of EFL Readers: A Multi-Method Study” he investigated the strategies used by language learners to comprehend texts in English. She used a multi-method approach to check on the validity of the individual methods. She also applied interviews, observations and a reading comprehension test. The results of this study showed that the readers shared features of both poor and good native readers.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

We supported our study taking into account some reading concepts, reading strategies and authentic material theory. We started by talking about reading in general, then what strategies and skills were used by

students according to some previous studies and some authors. Finally, we talked about the use of authentic material and its advantages.

According to the schema theory presented by Grellet (1991) as cited by Mass, Brunal and Guzman (2003), reading is an interactive process between what readers already know about a given topic or subject and what the text provides them with. Thus, previous knowledge about a topic turns the process of reading into a successful activity since the reader deepens his ideas. Nunan (1999) cited in Mass, Brunal and Guzman (2003) notes that reading is a constant process of guessing, and that sometimes what the reader brings to the text is often more crucial to what he finds in it. That is why students should be taught to use what they know previously to grasp new unknown elements, whether these are ideas or words (Grellet, 1991, p.17).

In order to accomplish any reading activity, it is necessary for students to apply some strategies and skills. According to Johnston & Byrd (1983); Paris, Lipson & Wixson (1983); van Dijk & Kintsch (cited in Carrell et al, 1998) strategies refer to actions readers select and control to achieve desired goals and objectives. It means that strategies are used deliberately in order to produce or influence the goal Wellman (cited in Carrell, et al, 1998). Thus, the use of strategies occurs when readers need to accomplish a specific task.

Similarly, Carrell, et al. (1998) as cited in Paris et al. (1991, p. 611) asserts:

“Skills refer to information-processing techniques that are automatic, whether at the level of recognizing grapheme-phoneme correspondence or summarizing a story. Skills are applied to a text unconsciously for many reasons including expertise, repeated practice, and compliance with directions, luck, and naive use. In contrast, as stated above strategies are actions selected deliberately to achieve particular goals. An emerging skill can become a strategy when it is used intentionally. Likewise, a strategy can “go underground” (cf. Vygotsky, 1978) and become a skill. Indeed strategies are more efficient and developmentally advanced when they become generated and applied automatically as skills. Thus, strategies are “skills under consideration” (see Paris, Lipson & Wixson, 1983).

To continue with the reading strategy concept, Carrell, et al. (1998) say “reading strategies are of interest not only for what they reveal about the ways readers manage interactions with written text, but also for how the use of strategies is related to effective reading comprehension.” On the other hand, Anderson, cited in Carrell, et al. (1998) discovered that, “relationships between strategies and comprehension are not simple and straightforward, which means that the use of certain reading strategies does not always lead to successful reading comprehension, while the use of other strategies does not always result in unsuccessful reading comprehension.” According to Carrell, et al. (1998) Anderson results suggested that “there are no simple correlations or one-to-one relationships between particular strategies and successful or unsuccessful reading comprehension.” This indicates that reading comprehension depends on the student’s ability to choose the appropriate strategy or skill to fulfil the task. Anderson cited in Carrel et al. (1998) concludes from his data: “successful second language reading comprehension is not simply a matter of knowing what strategy to use, but the reader must also know how to use it successfully and [to] orchestrate its use with other strategies. It is not sufficient to know about strategies, but a reader must also be able to apply them strategically” (1991: 19) Some of the strategies suggested by Grellet (1981) include the following:

- › **Previewing:** reviewing titles, section headings, and photo captions to get a sense of the structure and content of a reading selection.
- › **Predicting:** using knowledge of the subject matter to make predictions about content and vocabulary and check comprehension; using knowledge of the text type and purpose to make predictions about discourse structure; using knowledge about the author to make predictions about writing style, vocabulary, and content.
- › **Skimming and scanning:** using a quick survey of the text to get the main idea, identify text structure, confirm or question predictions.
- › **Guessing from context:** using prior knowledge of the subject and the ideas in the text as clues to the meanings of unknown words, instead of stopping to look them up.

- › **Paraphrasing:** stopping at the end of a section to check comprehension by restating the information and ideas in the text.

Some other aspects in reading comprehension have to do with the readers' condition towards reading. According to Goodman and Smith cited in Van Duzer (1999) psycholinguistics considers that readers make use of sound-letter correspondence and syntactic knowledge, but they also receive support from their experiential background knowledge (schemata) to predict the meaning of the text and then corroborate their predictions. Van Duzer also suggests that readers may be influenced by the literacy practices in their culture. She cited Rance-Roney (1997) who states that readers approach reading in English differently from the way they approach it in their native language.

As it was stated above, students use various tools to achieve a good performance in reading activities, mainly their background knowledge. There are also some conditions good or fluent readers use. Van Duzer (1999) noted reading as an active and complex process of comprehending written language including many different skills. She provides a list of characteristics fluent readers have:

#### **Fluent readers**

- › read with a purpose (to get information or for pleasure) and understand the purpose of different texts (e.g., ads to encourage buying, editorials to present and influence opinions, recipes to give instructions);
- › read quickly, automatically recognizing letters and words, maintaining a flow that allows them to make connections and inferences that make the text understandable;
- › use a variety of strategies, depending on the text, to read efficiently (e.g., varying reading speed, predicting what will happen next, previewing heading and illustrations);
- › interact with the text, making use of background knowledge as well as the information on the printed page; evaluate the text critically, determining whether they agree or disagree with the author; expect to understand the text and get meaning from it; and usually read silently.

## Use of authentic material

Guarriento and Morley (2001) suggest that the use of authentic material in the language classroom is valuable in the learning process.

An authentic text is one 'created to fulfil some social purposes in the language community in which it was produced' (Little *et al.* 1988, p. 27). It means that, as Little suggested, exposing students to this language community allows them to create an effective competence in the target language. This according to Guarriento and Morley (2001) can be a way of maintaining or increasing student's motivation for learning, since it gives the learner the feeling that he or she is dealing with real language. The use of authentic material, as suggested, offers the students from upper levels the possibility to develop their skills and to increase the quantity and range of acquired language.

(Guarriento and Morle cited on Ellis 1990, p. 195) consider that 'authenticity' lies not only in the 'genuineness' of text, but in what kind of tasks teachers can apply with it in order to foster learners proficiency in the target language, since input itself is not enough to do so. Thus, creating activities in which students can provide their own ideas toward the text, may help students to develop critical thinking and critic others ideas.

In the above matter, there are four broad schools of thought regarding task authenticity: 1) *Authenticity through a Genuine Purpose* (Willis, 1996, p.18). He argues students have the chance to interact naturally, in 'real time', to achieve a particular communicative goal. 2) *Real World Targets* Long and Crookes (1992) say that pedagogic task must relate to 'real world' target tasks. 3) *Authenticity through Classroom Interaction* (Breen 1995, p. 67) supports all the materials and situations around the learners which offer 'sufficient authentic potential for communications'. 4) *Authenticity through Engagement* which Widdowson (1995) believes that the success of the authentic material depends on students' interest in it.



## 4. Methodology

The study was implemented on ten students in the age group of 13 to 16 years of ten chosen, 2 of them were in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 8 were in 10<sup>th</sup> grade at La Salle School in Monteria. These participants were selected because of their good academic performance in English classes. These students are also good students in other areas and subjects. They have a positive attitude towards school and are devoted learners.

In this study, two reading activities using authentic texts were given to the subjects. These activities consisted of three different kinds of tasks. Firstly, they had to answer a reading comprehension task based on the article and their own experiences. Secondly, they needed to provide synonyms to different words from the text. They were allowed one hour to accomplish the task and were not permitted to use dictionaries. While doing the activities, an observation form was completed to see the students' attitude and behaviour. Once they finished the two activities they were interviewed to identify which strategies they used to complete the task. Then, the activities were checked to see how well the students did and in which task they performed better. Finally, in order to collect more data that allowed us to clarify some of the findings, an interview was carried out with the students' teacher in order to see how well they performed in English.

## 5. Findings

In order to identify the categories in this study we analysed the interviews with the students, the teacher, the activities themselves and the notes from field observation. After analysing the data three categories emerged. The first one was called **previous knowledge**. It had to do with all the information students had about the text they read. The second one had to do with the **students' attitude in the English classes**. Here they all agreed that concentration in classes helped them a great deal. Finally, **reading strategies** as a category was basic for our study. In regards to this last category, they used different strategies that were identified in the data collected. Various theoretical studies about reading strategies confirmed our findings.

## Previous Knowledge

In the data gathered, we were able to notice that one of the strategies the students applied in the activities had to do with their previous knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, personal experience and information they acquired from other sources.

To the question how they obtained the meaning of the words in the vocabulary part they said in general:

"We identified the meaning of the word straight from the sentences and found a synonym that fitted there."

But some others said:

"...we read all around the word to identify the meaning... and because we knew the other words we could get it."

They also stated that they saw the words previously in other contexts and texts. This gave them the opportunity to provide a synonym or just explain the meaning in English. We also noticed that when answering the questions many of them took into account grammar, thus their answers were quite correct. Even though some answers did not correspond grammatically, they were meaningfully correct. In activity 1 (see appendix 1) in part B the question was:

- What was Jim Richardson doing in Kakamega?

The student's answer was:

- He was have to taking photos an experiment in biotechnology for that month's article on genetically engineered foods.

In activity 2 (see appendix 2) one of the questions was:

- *What did the Wrights want to know about Inca site?*

The student's answer was:

- How did the Inca get their water?

In activity 2 question 5 was:

- If you were a tourist in Machu Picchu, what would you like to know about it?

The student's answer was:

- I would like to know about they're culture, they're people.

*Students used grammar incorrectly such as the use of tenses and adjective pronouns. One of the examples shows that they answered a question with another question as we usually do in Spanish.*

In activity 1 (see appendix 1) in part D, the participants had to construct sentences using the words in part C.

One of the students wrote:

- I'll try to stuck my shoes because I broke my shoes.

Other students wrote:

- *A baby doesn't must pop the toys into the mouth.*
- *All the garbage was pop into the can, the green one.*

*As we can realize they tried to communicate the meaning of the words not taking into consideration if they were properly used.*

Question in which they were asked about their own opinions, they said:

- *"This was quite easy because we just had to write what we know about the topic."*

Here they tried to explain to us that there were many things they could say since they did a great deal of exercises like these in English classes. It is interesting too when they say that they had heard or read about the topics like this in Spanish and in other contexts. Here we may conclude that good students may say or write in English about what they know based upon their cultural background. In this concern, the English teacher plays a very important role when using authentic texts in which students can understand that English is not just a subject, but also a way of communication. When this fact was asked in the interview the students answered in this way:

- *“We are willing to do the activities because we know that dealing with it, we are able to learn and use words and expressions to communicate in our daily life.”*

### **Students’ Attitude in the English Classes**

In this category we found that positive attitude is quite helpful for students in the English classes. When we asked them about their attitude in the classes, most of them said that they paid close attention to what the teacher did in the class. To every detail they said and most importantly they participated a lot in the class activities. One of the students stated:

- *“Sometimes, classes turn boring, but we try to keep focusing in the activity.”*

They stated that when students do that it is not necessary for them to study hard at home but they just need to review and remember the topic covered in class.

Some of the students reported the following:

- *“I’m responsible in my classes. I always pay attention in the class, my parents don’t force me to study because they know I’m very responsible”.*
- *“At home I don’t study that much, I think that when being in the class it is basic to pay close attention to it. If students do that, they*

*just go home to review what they did in the classes and immediately they remember it. But if you don't pay attention when evaluations come, other students have to study hard and sometimes they don't know what they are doing".*

- *"If you don't pay attention in classes, what you should have learned in five or six months, you are not going to learn it in just two hours."*

They also said that in this way they saved time, thus they were able to do different things like listening to music, surfing the Internet and reading books in English.

The students mentioned the fact that their parents do not oblige them to study because students' parents know that they are responsible students. On the other hand, one of the students said that his father and mother demand a lot of study from him. However, he feels satisfied with this demanding attitude from his parents, because it has helped him a lot in his studies, especially English.

- *"My father asks me to read in English all the time, sometimes I feel compelled to do it, but some others I think it has helped me a lot".*

In the interview to the teacher he said that these students were disciplined, finished their tasks on time and more importantly they were interested in the English classes. In terms of class procedure, he said that he did many reading activities. He sometimes asked the students to bring in articles from the Internet, like news, headlines and other materials to share in class. He noted that when students brought in that kind of material their attitude was different in the classes. They participated more and felt more confident in front of the class. He also stated that the participants of this research liked to be the first in every activity.

In this category, we could corroborate what Widdowson says about the success of authentic material which he suggests that it depends on students' interest to it.

## The Use of Reading Strategies

It was clear when analysing the data that the participants of this study used certain reading strategies. It is important to say that they were not aware that they were doing so. They said in the interview that they did what they usually do when reading in Spanish. We were able to compare these strategies to some theories about reading. We found that the participants used strategies like scanning and skimming and other ones that are called studying strategies.

Bearing in mind the information collected, most of the students applied skimming and scanning. Some of them stated,

- *“I read the text to know what the question was about, then I analysed word by word trying to get the idea to answer the question.”*
- *“I first read the question and tried to understand it and then I went to the text looking for similarities with the question.”*

As stated above, once the student identified key words, he scanned for it in the text and skimmed in the paragraph to obtain the answer.

In the third part of the two reading activities where the students had to grasp the meaning of the given words from the context of the text, inference was the most used strategy. Some students said in the interview:

- *“I identified the word from context and then looked for a meaning that could replace it.”*
- *“I identify the words in their context and try to find them some synonyms.”*

In another part of the activities students applied skimming to get the main idea from the text as some students stated:

- *“I interpreted the text as a whole, the basic ideas, and took the main ones from each part (paragraph) and then come out with the gist of it.”*

- *“I read the text carefully and take the main idea from each paragraph.”*

In the observation stage, we noticed that they spent some time reading the question and referring to texts more than once. When checking the activities, we realized that some of words were underlined, which means that they focused on those specific words to solve the task.

## 6. Conclusions

In this study, the data revealed that good students use several strategies to complete a reading task. To begin with, they take advantage of their previous knowledge to become familiar with the text they are dealing with. Thus, it becomes easier for them to complete both comprehension and vocabulary questions. Secondly, they pay so much attention to the teacher’s explanations in class that they do not need to study that much at home. It means that when dealing with new activities, reading a text does not demand too much effort from them to do it.

We may also conclude that the use of authentic material in reading activities affects the students positively, because it gives them the opportunity to interact with real language. It also widens the students’ ideas and vocabulary towards a known subject. We also determined that this kind of material is not difficult for these students.

Finally, the use of strategies also plays an important role in accomplishing reading tasks. It is important to say that they were not aware of what strategies they used, which means that this students devote too much time in their native language to reading activities.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1

### Reading Comprehension Activity 1

#### A. Read the following article.

**KENYA**

## Daredevil Gastronomy

*When in Kakamega, eat as the Kakamegans do*

Photographer **Jim Richardson** says he's "always shied away from adventurous eating" while in the field. But visiting the western Kenya town of Kakamega while photographing an experiment in biotechnology for this month's article on genetically engineered foods, he was persuaded by a market vendor to try a local seasonal delicacy: white ants, or termites (left).

"They're eaten either fried or straight alive," Jim says. He opted for the straight alive version. "You reach in, grab a handful of about seven or eight at a time, and pop them into your mouth." No, they don't taste like chicken, he adds. In fact, they don't taste like much at all. "They don't have a lot of flavor, but they have a certain textural quality," he notes. "The lingering aftereffect is of white lacy wings stuck in your teeth."

Jim says he began work on the assignment "totally information-challenged," knowing little about the biotech wars. He came away from it fearing not the effect genetically engineered foods would have on human health but their potential dangers to the environment.

Taken from National Geographic magazine 2002.

#### B. After reading the article, answer the following questions:

1. What was Jim Richardson doing in Kakamega?
2. What was he persuaded by in Kakamega?
3. What is the reading about?
4. Have you ever eaten something unusual? What?
5. Suggest another title for the article.

#### C. Write the meaning of the following words or expressions from the article in English:

1. Shied away \_\_\_\_\_
2. Pop into \_\_\_\_\_
3. Persuaded \_\_\_\_\_
4. Stuck \_\_\_\_\_
5. Opted \_\_\_\_\_

**D. Write sentences using the words/expressions from part C.**

1. Shied away: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Pop into: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Persuaded: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Stuck: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Opted: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2

### Reading Comprehension Activity 2

#### A. Read the following article.

## How Did Machu Picchu Work?

*Studying the infrastructure of an Inca site*

When Ruth Wright, a Colorado lawyer, first visited Machu Picchu with her daughters in 1974, she was, like most visitors, “blown away” by the legendary Inca site. But when she returned home, she was puzzled: How did the Inca get a water supply so high up on an Andean mountain?

After two decades spent seeking a permit that would allow them to investigate, Wright and her husband, Kenneth, a civil engineer (above), finally began to study the site’s infrastructure in 1994. They examined the layout of the buildings and how the fountains were designed. They also analyzed the types of roofs used and what crops the residents grew on the terraces. They ended up with the most detailed map ever made of Machu Picchu, where 16 fountains once

flowed, and gave invaluable assistance to our own cartographers in producing the supplement map in this issue.

“Basically, we’ve studied city planning there,” Ruth says. Ken adds: “We’ve studied hydrology, engineering, how it endured for 500 years without turning into a pile of rubble. The Inca created a functioning community without a written language, iron and steel, or the wheel.” The Wrights surveyed the site again and again, turning up information in some cases only after hacking away forest vegetation that had buried foundations, walls, and a trail.

So how did the Inca get their water? They built a canal to channel water from the natural spring on the mountain, the result of fractures in the underlying granite along the Machu Picchu fault.

Taken from National Geographic magazine 2001.



**B. After reading the article, answer the following questions:**

1. What did the Wrights do to study the infrastructure of Machu Picchu?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What did the Wrights do to have the map of the infrastructure?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What did the Wrights want to know about Inca site?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What is the principal idea of the article?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. If you were a tourist in Machu Picchu, what would you like to know about it?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Finally, how did the Incas get their water?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**C. Explain the meaning of the following expressions/words from the article:**

1. Blown away \_\_\_\_\_
2. Was puzzled \_\_\_\_\_
3. Layouts \_\_\_\_\_
4. Endured \_\_\_\_\_
5. Hacking away \_\_\_\_\_

**D. Fill in the blank spaces with the following words or expressions: Blown away, puzzled, layouts, endured, hacking away.**

1. The engineers should investigate the \_\_\_\_\_ of the construction.
2. The tourist was \_\_\_\_\_ looking at the Taj-Majal.
3. The farmers were \_\_\_\_\_ the forest to find the way.
4. Sometimes I am \_\_\_\_\_ about how some inventions work.
5. I didn't know how that old house \_\_\_\_\_ over time.





**Part II:  
Vocabulary Acquisition  
Articles**





## CHAPTER 6

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

Kelly Angulo Petro  
Cindy Angulo Jimenez

### **Abstract**

This was a descriptive research that aimed at determining the influence of vocabulary learning strategies used by 6<sup>th</sup> 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 ° 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 a las dimensiones descubriendo y consolidando (según la taxonomía de Schmitt, 1997), así como determinar de 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 significadas 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 hablar con hablantes nativos de inglés, descuidando con ello estrategias de vocabulario para reforzar la adquisición del lenguaje.

## Palabras claves

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, 6<sup>th</sup> 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 from 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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

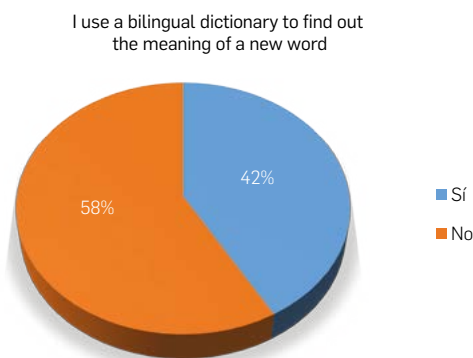
This section presents the results according to Schmitt's taxonomy and the instruments applied.

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

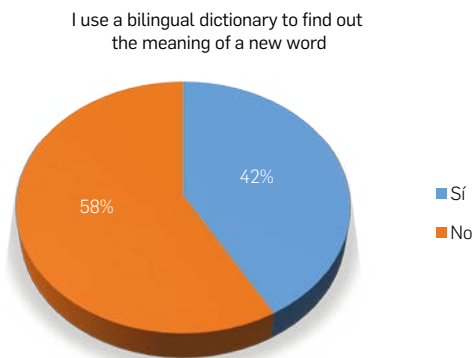
#### Discovery dimension

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



**Graphic 2.** Determination Strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire



Based on the following question and answer from the teacher's interview it could be determined that:

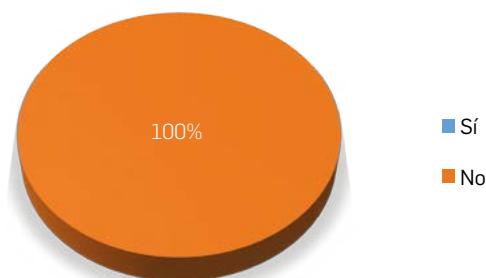
**Question:** What kind of dictionary do your students use, monolingual or bilingual? And Why?

**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 6<sup>th</sup> 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).

**Graphic 3.** Social Strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy) from the questionnaire

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-

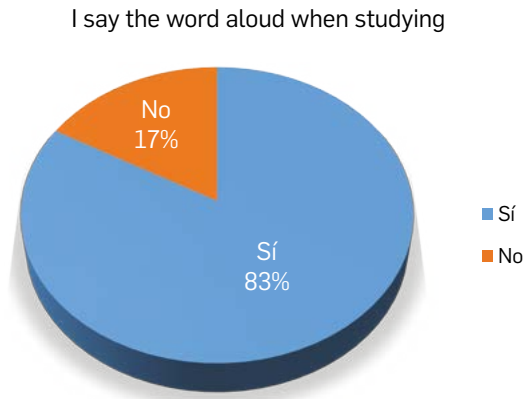
cerning word practice (both spelling and meaning) through sentence constructions as a manner to contextualized words study. An instance of these findings is the following:

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

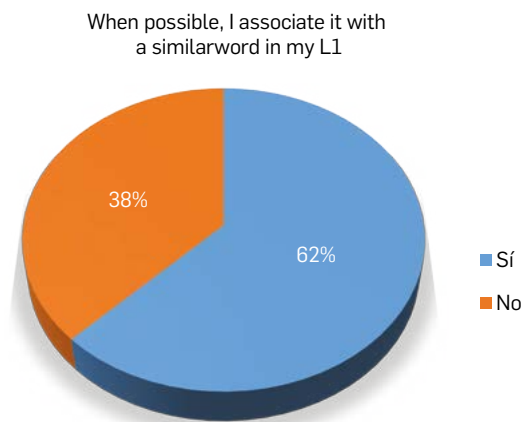
**Answer:** “I write the new vocabulary on the board and students repeat them several times in order that they get the pronunciation of the word and finally I write some sentences for them to grasp their meaning,” (Interview with the teacher from 6<sup>th</sup> grade- see appendix #3)

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).

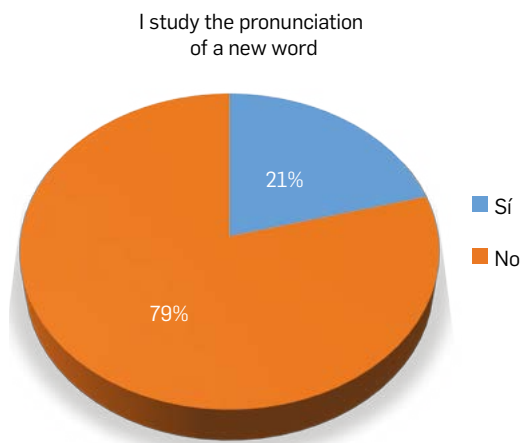
**Graphic 4.** Memory strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire



Graphic 5. Memory strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire



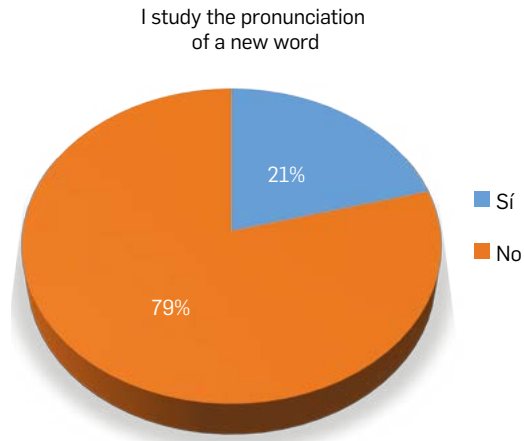
Graphic 6. Memory strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire



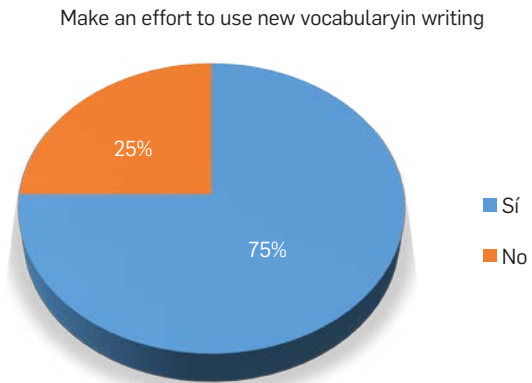
### Cognitive strategy

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.

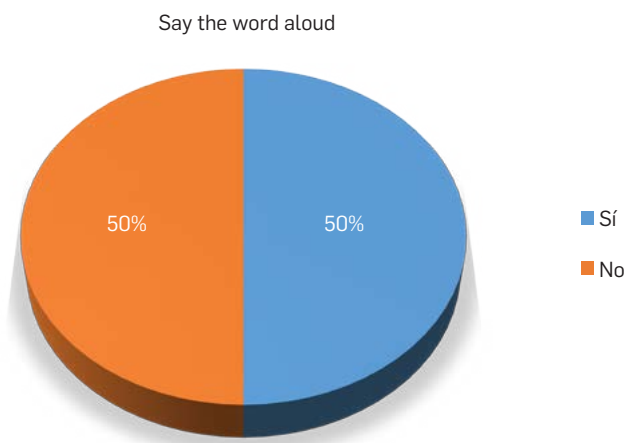
**Graphic 6.** Cognitive Strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire



**Graphic 7.** Cognitive Strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire



**Graphic 8.** Cognitive Strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire



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:

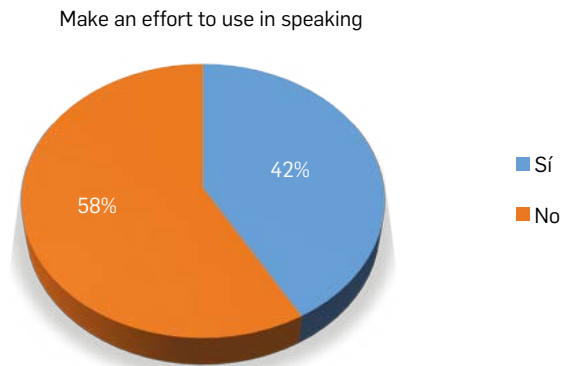
**Question:** How do you learn new words in English?

**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 6<sup>th</sup> grade- see appendix #2).

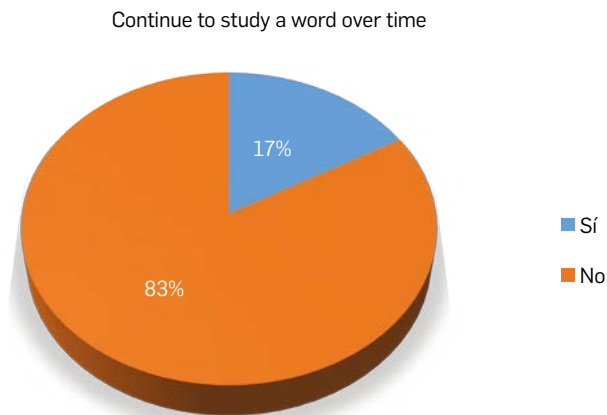
It could be noticed from the **Metacognitive strategy** outcomes that the highest percentage refers to English language media (the use of a tape recorder). (42%) confirming why students understood what the teacher said, taking into account that there exists a pronunciation

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



**Graphic 10.** Metacognitive strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire

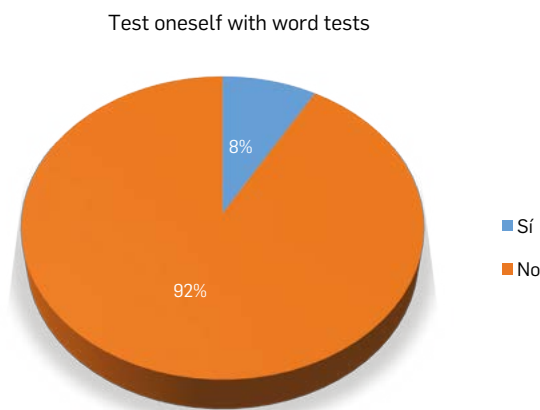




**Graphic 11.** Metacognitive strategy Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy from the questionnaire



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



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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 though 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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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## CHAPTER 7

# Flashcards: Building Up New Words

Hernando Alfredo Guerrero Soto  
Paola Patricia Sánchez Vergara

### Abstract

This project is focused on how the use of flashcards build up vocabulary in fifth graders at a public institution in Monteria making the teaching process easier and thus, creating a better learning environment. The use of flashcards in the classroom makes instructions meaningful for learners. Flashcards help learners to reach their objectives by providing emphasis in a different way. They can multiply the learners' understanding of the topic presented in class, they can increase learner's motivation towards the classes, foster them to participate more actively during the development of the classes. Flashcards can be used to present the topic, reinforce it, clarify points, evaluate and create a communicative class with more interest to every learner.

This project was implemented using qualitative and quantitative research methods. At the moment of collecting data, the research group used instruments such as classroom observations and interviews which after being analysed, showed that vocabulary acquisition was not the main issue to be learnt during English class or the techniques for doing it were not meaningful for the learners.

After collecting all data and applying the technique based on flashcards, a questionnaire was administered which was helpful to concluded that flashcards enabled learners to acquire new vocabulary and promoted their active participation and motivation since they were a meaningful technique that facilitated the learning of a second language.

## Key words

Vocabulary learning, vocabulary learning techniques, flashcards, motivation, participation and performance

## Resumen

El aprendizaje de vocabulario es un aspecto importante para desarrollar un proceso significativo del aprendizaje del idioma inglés; este requiere más prácticas intensas y más tiempo ya que este permite desarrollar las otras habilidades. Aprender palabras nuevas en un segundo idioma, en este caso “Inglés” se ha convertido en una de las prioridades principales para los niños, jóvenes y adultos alrededor del mundo debido a su uso en áreas tales como ciencia, tecnología, negocios, comunicación y otros aun cuando ellos tienen diferentes razones para aprender; ellos todos aprenden vocabulario nuevo usando diferentes métodos y enfoques aplicados por profesores o facilitadores dentro del salón de clases. Un método efectivo es el uso de imágenes para enseñar vocabulario ayudando a los profesores a mejorar su proceso de enseñanza y facilitar la adquisición de un segundo idioma permitiendo a los estudiantes ser exitosos al momento de adquirir palabras nuevas y usarlas con otras personas.

Este proyecto está enfocado en como el uso de imágenes construye a incrementar el nivel de vocabulario en estudiantes de quinto grado en una institución educativa de Montería haciendo el proceso de enseñanza más fácil y así crear un ambiente de aprendizaje mejor. El uso de imágenes en el salón de clases hace que las instrucciones sean más significativas para los estudiantes. Las imágenes les ayudan a los estudiantes a alcanzar sus objetivos proveyendo énfasis de una forma diferente. Las imágenes pueden multiplicar en los estudiantes el nivel de entendimiento del tema presentado en clase, ellos pueden incrementar su motivación hacia las clases, promoverlos a participar más activamente durante el desarrollo de las clases. Las imágenes pueden ser usadas para presentar el tema, reforzarlo, clarificar puntos no bien entendidos, evaluar y crear una clase comunicativa con mayor interés por parte de cada estudiante.

Esta investigación presenta los resultados de una investigación cualitativa y cuantitativa en la cual al momento de recoger datos, se utilizó los siguientes instrumentos: observaciones de aula, y entrevistas que luego de ser analizados, demostró que la adquisición de vocabulario no era un aspecto fundamental durante la clase de inglés o las técnicas para hacerlo



no resultaban significativas para los estudiantes. De igual forma, después de recoger todos los datos y de la aplicación de la estrategia, se realizó un cuestionario a los estudiantes el cual dejó ver que imágenes permiten a los estudiantes adquirir nuevo vocabulario y promueven su participación activa y motivación, ya que esta técnica fue más significativa y por lo tanto facilitó el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua.

### **Palabras clave**

Aprendizaje del vocabulario, técnicas de aprendizaje del vocabulario, imágenes, motivación, participación y rendimiento.

## 1. Introduction

English is considered as one of the most important spoken language around the world due to its importance in the economic, political, social and educational field. Once you learn English as a foreign language, you modify your conceptions of the world and its reality through the continuous interaction with other people in which language works as a means to exchange experiences, information, and knowledge. Thanks to English, you can be exposed to a new way of thinking, feeling and acting, you can be involved in a total commitment to use the language almost all the time, you can build relationships, become member of a learning community in order to share opinions about any topic in common.

Learning English improves your quality of life and brings a lot of benefits such as better working opportunities, ability to communicate with foreigners, you can help other people to learn the language, instructions, guidance, you can learn any other languages, you can be competitive in the market, get confident, get a better social recognition in the society, travel to an English speaking country, meet and interact with native speakers, learn about new cultures, be capable of understanding movies, music, articles in newspapers, magazines, internet and understand the instructions of electronic devices to be used in a correct way.

In Colombia, the National Government has established in the article 23<sup>rd</sup> of the General Law of Education that “Every school must teach English language as a fundamental subject and it has created the National Bilingual Program which has as main goal to develop English communicative skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) in primary and secondary level”. That is the reason, teaching English as a foreign language has been growing with great interest among schools, technical institutions and universities. Therefore, they have adapted their curriculums and teaching programs in order for learners to have success on developing English skills and abilities which let them communicate and maintain social relationships with others in this target language “English”.

Vocabulary learning is a continuous process in which learners are exposed to the knowledge of new words. Learners are constantly in an

environment where they modify their conceptions of reality in which language works as a mean to exchange learners' and teachers' experiences, information, knowledge and values. Learning new words in a second language, in this case “English” has become one of the main priorities for children, young people and adults around the world due to its use in areas such as science, technology, business, communication and others even when they have different reasons to learn. They all learn new vocabulary by using different methods and approaches applied for teachers or facilitators inside the classroom. One of these methods and approaches is the use of flashcards to teach vocabulary which helps teachers to improve their teaching process and facilitate second language acquisition, allowing learners to be successful at the moment of acquiring new words and use them with other people.

This paper is focused on how the use of flashcards build up vocabulary in fifth graders at a public institution in Monteria making the teaching process easier and thus creating a better learning environment. The use of flashcards in the classroom makes instructions meaningful for learners. Flashcards help learners to reach their objectives by providing emphasis in a different way. Flashcards can multiply the learner's level of understanding of the topic presented in class, they can increase learner's motivation towards the classes, foster them to participate more actively during the development of the classes and they can be used to present the topic, reinforce it, clarify points, evaluate and create a communicative class with more interest to every learner.

In this paper, you can find information related to the statement of the problem, the significance of the problem, the research questions, the general and specific objectives to be reached through this research paper, the theoretical framework and literature review that support this paper, the methodology applied, the results and discussion got during the application of the instruments, conclusions and pedagogical implications.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

In Colombia, learning English has become an important part of the educational field. That is the reason, why every boy and girl has to attain a certain level of communicative English skills when they graduate

from high schools. However, in primary, learners face some problems to get this personal improvement such as lack of well trained teachers and enough time to teach this subject “English”. In terms of staff, there is one teacher to teach all subjects and some of them do not have any knowledge about English or how to teach it; besides, there are some cases where primary teachers leave English subject out of curriculum or teach it by using approaches and methods that are not appropriate or meaningful for learners’ ages. Another issue is the lack of time, English is taught just 2 hours per week but sometimes the teachers use this time to teach other subjects instead of English.

The above mentioned situation is clearly reflected in Monteria’s schools. It was identified by the research group after some observations carried out in a fifth grade public institution in the city. The research group could observe that learners are learning vocabulary by translating meaning or rewriting words. They do not practice pronouncing the words that they transcribe from the board and they do not use those words in any communicative activity. As a consequence of this aspect, learners are starting their secondary level of education without enough English vocabulary which is so hard because this particular school teaches English 6 hours a week in the secondary level. In other words, when learners of this school start 6<sup>th</sup> grade they are learning English from scratch and it is one of the reason why the research group chose this problem to deal with.

## **1.2 Significance of the Problem**

Learning a second language is relevant for people who want to have a better quality of life. That is the reason why the educational institutions are in charge of giving an integral education in order to create competitiveness, security, social improvement, and the most important thing, labour opportunities. According to this above information, the research group claimed the significance of building up vocabulary in learners who are starting their educational process (primary level) since it is necessary to develop all the aspects that a second language requires in order to get a significant communicative process. To reach this goal the research group put forward a strategy based on the use of flashcards to build up fifth graders’ vocabulary. It allowed the teacher to create several activities inside the classroom in a pleasant environment

in which the language was useful and meaningful, also developed the learner's communicative skills. Apart from that, this research project is looking for answering the following research questions:

### **1.3 Research Questions**

To what extent could flashcards impact fifth graders' vocabulary learning?

What effects do flashcards have on fifth graders' vocabulary learning in the English language classroom?

Taking into account the research questions, this research paper has established the following general and specific objectives:

### **1.4 Objectives**

#### **1.4.1 General Objective**

To build up learners' vocabulary by using flash cards to improve English learning process in secondary level in a public institution in Monteria.

#### **1.4.2 Specific Objectives**

- › To use colourful flashcards to foster learners' vocabulary acquisition.
- › To increase learner's motivation through the use of flashcard to teach vocabulary.

To raise learner's performance and participation to acquire new vocabulary through the use of flashcards.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Teaching a foreign language is a complex task for any teacher because the teaching process requires having a high theoretical and practical vision about abilities, methodology and strategies which help to build up vocabulary acquisition. In this section, there is the literature review and

the theory related to second language acquisition in children, aspects to develop a second language, vocabulary acquisition in children and vocabulary teaching techniques mainly visual aids.

## 2.1 Literature review

In a previous study related to this paper, “*The Research behind the Importance of Teaching Vocabulary*”, Several researchers and vocabulary experts agree vocabulary learning is really a special case of reading comprehension. There are very strong reasons for implementing a systematic and principled approach to teaching and subsequent learning of vocabulary as a corner-stone for developing comprehension. (Blachowicz and Ogle, 2001; Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998, Nagy and Anderson, 1984, McKeown, et al., 1983). In addition, by implementing a systematic and principled approach to teaching and learning vocabulary, in this case the use of flashcards, learners see vocabulary as a very important element in language learning and reading (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan, 2002, Bormuth, 1969, Davis 1968).

Most researchers and vocabulary experts believe that the best methodology employs both direct and indirect teaching and provides opportunities for both receptive and productive learning to occur. In direct vocabulary instruction, learners do many specific exercises and activities that focus their attention directly on certain words in the lists, learning word parts, and vocabulary games. (Vacca, Vacca and Gove, 2000; Allen, 1999; Marzano and Marzano, 1988). Flashcards can multiply the learner’s level of understanding of the topic presented in class, they can increase learner’s motivation towards the classes, foster them to participate more actively during the development of the classes.

One important thing to keep in mind is that the effort given to the learning of new words can be wasted if it is not followed up with later interactions with the words through what are often called indirect instructional techniques such as practice with the use of context for guessing the meaning of unknown words; paraphrasing, using word parts, dictionary use, and mnemonic techniques. Guided practice with these strategies encourages learners to use the strategies effectively and leads to permanent knowledge and establishment of vocabulary. (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan, 2002; Beck, Perfetti, and Mckeown,

1982; Crist, 1981; Eeds and Cockrum, 1985; Nation, 1990; Stahl, 1983). One effective method to get the aforementioned is the use of flashcards to teach vocabulary because they help teachers to improve their teaching process and facilitate second language acquisition, allow learners to be successful at the moment of acquiring new words and use them with other people. The use of flashcards in the classroom makes instructions meaningful for learners, they can increase learner's motivation towards the classes, foster them to participate more actively during the development of the classes.

Mentioning another study carried out in the U.S. "*Studies Find Vocabulary Instruction Lacking*" to support this research paper, Susan B. Neuman, a professor in educational studies at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and Tanya S. Wright, an assistant professor of teacher education at Michigan State University in East Lansing, analyzed observations of 55 kindergarten teachers' instruction in a variety of school districts. They found limited instruction in vocabulary in most settings, but low-income children were least likely to be taught the kind of sophisticated, academic words that will help them succeed in school. "Vocabulary is a deceptively simple literacy skill that researchers and educators agree is critical to students' academic success, but which has proved frustratingly difficult to address," *Education Week Report*. Ms. Neuman said. 'Generally, children come into school with vocabulary at one point and leave with vocabulary at the same point.... We're not teaching very many words, and we're not teaching in a way that children will retain the words.' This research paper is focused on how the use of flashcards build up vocabulary in fifth graders at a public institution in Monteria by doing the teaching process easier and thus, creating a better learning environment.

"By age 3, when many children enter early preschool, youngsters from well-to-do families have a working vocabulary of 1,116 words, compared to 749 words for children in working-class families and 525 words for children on welfare, according to a seminal 2003 longitudinal study by Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, authors of the 1995 book "*Meaningful differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*". Much of the vocabulary instruction Neuman and Wright observed came in isolated "teachable moments," such as pointing out the meaning of words in books read aloud. They noted that he

number of words to which children were exposed varied widely. The researchers also found little effort to reinforce the learning and place words in a broader context, all of which is necessary for children to integrate new words into their vocabulary. For instance, “A student hears the word ‘transportation’ in a book about trains,” another expert — Rebecca Silverman, an assistant professor in special education at the University of Maryland — tells Ed Week. “If the teacher doesn’t explain it in a general context the student might not get the full sense of the word, and might think it’s just related to trains.” Flashcards can be used to present the topic, reinforce it, clarify points, evaluate and create a communicative class with more interest to every learner.

## 2.2 Second Language Acquisition in Children

Second language acquisition refers to the subconscious or conscious processes by which a language other than the mother tongue is learnt in a natural or tutored setting. It covers the development of phonology, lexis, grammar, and pragmatic knowledge (Ellis, R. 1985:6). Language acquisition can occur in different stages but childhood is the best stage to develop it since at this age children are beginning to come into contact with social, cultural, educational, recreational environments which enable them to provide knowledge and abilities in order to create their own ideology of the world. In line with this thought, language acquisition is part of the overall development of the children physically, socially, and cognitively. Cole and Cole claim that there is strong evidence that children may never acquire a language if they have not been exposed to a language before they reach the age of 6 or 7 years old (1993, p.42). Second language acquisition occurs after children learn how to use their first language in an original and unique way. For this reason, if children are introduced to a second language they have more opportunities to become truly proficient in both languages since in childhood a child learns some language components such as phonology, semantics and syntax and if these components are taught in both languages children can develop a high level of pronunciation in their mother tongue and second language.



## 2.3 Aspects to Develop a Second Language

Cohen (1998, p.36) states, there are several factors which play an important role when applying learning strategies and when a foreign language is being taught. It will be suitable to analyse the factors that may influence when you choose the adequate learning strategies taking into account the students' needs such as cultural background, gender, age and stage, motivation, and learning styles.

- › **Cultural background:** Students usually memorize in any way that seems to be more relevant and interesting among them with respect to a foreign language.
- › **Gender:** Here, girls show greater overall strategy in the practice of a particular strategy than boys.
- › **Age and stage:** Students of different ages and stages of foreign language learning use different strategies depending on their level.
- › **Motivation:** When there are more motivated students in the classroom tend to use more strategies than when there are less motivated students.
- › **Learning styles:** It often determines the choice of second language learning strategies. For instance, analytic-style, students prefer strategies such as contrastive analysis, words and phrases. While global-style, students use strategies to find meaning and to converse without knowing all the words.

## 2.4. Vocabulary learning

Vocabulary learning is an important aspect to develop a significant learning process; it requires more intense practice and time since it enables to develop the other skills. According to Pikulski & Templeton “Perhaps the greatest tools we can give students for succeeding, not only in their education but more generally in life, is a large, rich vocabulary and the skills for using those words”. (2004, p.1) It shows that the amount of words that a learner knows about any language which he or she is learning, it is what let her/him be successful at the moment of communicating with others because of the length of vocabulary used in everyday communication, it is what makes that interaction richer and more significant. Locke states, “The acquisition of word meanings take much longer than the acquisition of the spoken form of the

words, and children use words in their speech long before they have a full understanding of them (Quoted in Cameron, 2001, p.73). That is to say, vocabulary is an essential component in communication so it is what learners have to study more often in order to reach fluency and accuracy at the moment of using the language orally or written.

Cameron expresses, “children need to meet words again and again in new contexts that help increase what they know about words” (2001, p. 81). It shows that learners need to use words many times, in many different contexts in order to get a better understanding of the words and learn to use them correctly because in English or any language, words can change their meaning according to the setting or context in which they are being used. Besides, learning vocabulary is a crucial component since it allows learners to understand and communicate with others. Wilkins wrote that “. . . while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” (Quoted in Clement, 2013, p. 2). It shows that knowing about grammar rules is not enough if people do not have the words to use them correctly, because in real settings the most important thing is the message (what) to be communicated and not the grammar rules to communicate it (how).

In regard with this, there are two well - known ways to learn vocabulary: direct and indirect. The first one refers to those types of activities in which information about the meaning of words is made directly available to students... such as looking up words in a dictionary (Beck & McKeown, in Cooper, 1993, p.195). Besides, direct instructions can promote a better reading comprehension if words are taught in a real context taking into account the learners’ prior knowledge (Cooper, 1993, p. 198). That is to say, through direct instructions learners can learn difficult words which represent complex concepts that are not part of the students’ everyday experiences and direct instruction of vocabulary relevant to a given text leads to a better reading comprehension. The second one refers to the capacity to learn words by hearing, seeing and using them in many different contexts. For example, through conversations with adults, being read to, and reading extensively on their own (Beck & McKeown cited in Cooper, 1993, p.195). It means, when learners want to learn vocabulary the best way to do it is by coming into contact with activities that require the use

of different and new words which are being used in a communicative way during the daily life and taking into account their real meanings.

In the same line, Schmitt proposed two approaches to vocabulary acquisition: explicit and incidental learning. Explicit learning focuses attention directly on the information to be learned, which gives the greatest chance for its acquisition. But it is also time-consuming, and for all but the most diligent student, it would be too laborious to learn an adequately sized lexicon. Incidental learning can occur when one is using language for communicative purposes, and so gives a double benefit for time expended. But it is slower and more gradual, lacking the focused attention of explicit learning (2000, p.100).

In addition to this, some authors have discussed about the importance of vocabulary learning strategies and proposed some taxonomies or classification. Schmitt (1997) reclassified Oxford's strategies (determination, social, and memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies) in two main categories: **1.** discovery strategies: are individual strategies that learners used to learn a word and **2.** consolidation strategies: are strategies that allow learners to memorize, practice and retain the word after it has been introduced Visnaja, (2008). Nation (2001) classified vocabulary learning strategies in Planning, choosing what to focus on and when to focus on it; Sources finding information about words in different sources, using context or parallels in L1 and L2 and Processes establishing knowledge (Visnaja, 2008).

## 2.5 Vocabulary Teaching Techniques

Learning words is a hard task that can take a long or short time since its development depends on several external and internal factors that every person must overcome in order to be successful in second language learning process. Gairns and Redman (1986, p.54) suggest the following types of vocabulary teaching techniques:

- › **Visual techniques:** They lend themselves well to presenting concrete items of vocabulary-nouns; many are also helpful in conveying meanings of verbs and adjectives. They help students associate presented material in a meaningful way and incorporate it into their system of language values. Among visual techniques

are flashcards, photographs and pictures, wall charts, blackboard drawings, word pictures, incongruous visuals, mime, and gesture.

- › **Verbal explanation:** this is used to ensure that students understand or to illustrate the meaning. For this, teachers often use more than one situation or context to check that learners have grasped the concept.
- › **Use of dictionaries:** Using a dictionary is another technique of finding out meanings of unfamiliar words and expressions. Students can make use of a variety of dictionaries: bilingual, monolingual, pictorial, thesauri, and the likes. As French Allen (1983, p. 11) perceives them, dictionaries are “passports to independence,” and using them is one of the student-centered learning activities.

## 2.6 Flashcards

A flashcard represents a particular vocabulary item that you want to introduce which can be an object, an animal, an adjective, a character, a place, an action, etc. Later on, they can be used to practice vocabulary; they will be useful for vocabulary review and consolidation, as it is important to reinforce words pupils have learned. According to Oxford and Crookall (1990)

Flashcards are among the most widely used vocabulary learning technique... The flashcard technique involves at least three components: writing down (copying) the L2 word on the front of a card, writing the word's L1 meaning on the back, and then using the card to become familiar with the new word and its meaning... With creativity and thought on the part of the learner, flashcards can indeed be employed to provide greater context.

In regard with their type, Bowen (1991) divided flash cards into: *Picture flash cards* are teacher's accompanying guide. The picture collections are built up and used by number of teachers. Picture flashcards are most suitable for representation of a single concept, such as an object or an action. *Word flash cards* are on which words have been printed can be held up rapidly, or 'flashed' by teacher before the class. They are easy for the teacher and the students to handle and use at the appropriate moment. Work cards can include visuals as well as texts. Magazine pictures, drawings, maps and diagrams can be important parts of

work cards at all levels, used for variety purposes. According to their size, David A. Hill (1990) classified them into three ‘key’ categories: “Large (20x30 cm): useful for whole-class work” “Medium (10x15 cm): useful for group-work” and “Small (5x5 cm): useful for games and other group-work activities”.

According to Wright (1990) “Pictures are not just an aspect or method but through their representation of places, object and people they are an essential part of the overall experiences... they contribute to: interest and motivation, a sense of the context of the language and a specific references point or stimulus”. It means that pictures in flashcards are an excellent tool to present words for learners since they create a mental representation of words which facilitate vocabulary knowledge and help learners to remember words at the moment of using them with communicative purpose because the use of pictures at the moment of introducing the language help learners to assimilate meaning faster (Wright, 1990).

### 3. Methodology

This section will be focused on research design, the context and population and the instruments applied to collect data such as observations, interviews and questionnaires.

#### 3.1 Research Design

Vocabulary learning is an important aspect to develop a significant English learning process, it requires more intense practice and time since it enables to develop the others skills. Due to this fact, the research group designed a proposal in which flashcards were the most effective and interest way to build up vocabulary. This proposal is defined clearly as a qualitative and quantitative research. According to Seliger and Schohamy (1989) “qualitative research is concerned with providing descriptions of phenomena that occur naturally, without the intervention of an experiment or an artificially contrived treatment”. While “quantitative research is explaining phenomena by collecting numeral data that are analysed using mathematical based methods”

Following the authors' words, this research is qualitative and quantitative because the research group worked with human beings with the purpose of getting linguistic and numerical results like thoughts, ideas, and feelings about a specific fact and those results are interpreted by using mathematical methods or statistics. In this case, mixed-methods research is used as a flexible approach, where qualitative or quantitative components predominate, and have equal status.

### **3.2 The Context and Population**

This research paper took place in a public school in Monteria which is located on the east of the city in a low socio-economic neighbourhoods where most of the learners live. The participants were ten fifth grader students whose average age was nine years old. In this research, five girls and five boys were chosen at random from a group of thirty-eight learners. It consisted on choosing two learners from each row (five rows) in the classroom since the research group considered it is important to work with learners of different performance levels. In regard with the learners' vocabulary level, most of the time they learn English language by using their mother tongue or the translation method.

### **3.3 Data Sources and Data Collection Procedures**

To accomplish this research we used three different data collection techniques such as: four class observations, two open-ended informal Interviews; one for the teacher and one for the learners, one questionnaire for the participants. The instruments were chosen taking into account the qualitative-descriptive nature of this research paper.

#### **3.3.1 Classroom Observations**

In second language acquisition research, observations are most often used to collect data on how learners use language in a variety of settings, to study language learning and teaching processes in the classroom, and to study teachers' and students' behaviour (Seliger and Schohamy, 1989).

In the same line, the research group chose this instrument because it helped to obtain useful information at the moment of having a real

contact with the observed group. Besides, there were children's and teachers' attitudes and feelings perceived and not seen by the observers (the research group) which were useful to understand better the necessities and preferences that the teacher and children had towards English language.

In regard to the use of this instrument, the research group accomplished four observations at the beginning of this proposal in order to know the current learners' vocabulary proficiency. During these observations, a checklist was used which helped the observers to check whether a specific behaviour is present or absent (Seliger and Schohamy, 1989). This instrument had as objective: to identify the English teacher and learners' behaviour inside the classroom in regard to vocabulary acquisition. It was also divided into two parts; the first part was focused on learners' roles, behaviour and performances while the second part was focused on teacher' roles, methodology, strategies and approach. (See annex A)

### **3.3.2 Interviews**

According to Seliger and Schohamy (1989):

Interviews are used to collect data on covert variables such as attitudes and motivation for learning the second language... for obtaining information about learners' language proficiency... for obtaining information about strategies which language learners used in the process of producing and acquiring language in a variety of contexts.

The research group decided to use this type of instrument since it was the best way to understand what the learners wanted and needed in relation to the English language and to collect information that could not be observed such as motivation and background.

Two interviews were conducted; one for the learners and the other for the teacher. The former one had as objective: To identify learners' preferences at the moment of learning new English words. It was applied to ten children who were chosen by simple random sampling from a group of thirty-eight. The latter one was applied to the teacher in order to know about the methodology used in class and to teach

new words, and his thoughts about the implementation of flashcards in vocabulary acquisition. (See annex B and C)

### 3.3.3 Questionnaire

According to Nunan (1992), “the questionnaire is a relatively popular means of collecting data. It enables the research to collect data in field settings, and the data themselves are more amenable to quantification than discourse data”. The questionnaire was applied to the learners in order to realize the impact about the use of flashcards to foster vocabulary acquisition. (See annex D).

This project was applied following the line of a qualitative and quantitative research since this type of research has as purpose to describe and measure a phenomenon in the educational field. The topics taught during this project, were the ones that the learners chose in the interview; these were professions, places and clothes. To develop these topics two sessions of two hours for each topic was necessary. (See annex E). In the first section, a topic related to profession was taken up. The learners did activities like puzzles, drawings and matching. In the second section, the learners learnt about places and they did activities like using their imagination to say what places they can find in a city, linking professions with work places in an oral way and play a game called “find my word place” Finally, in the last two sections, the topic clothes was dealt with. During these two sections the learners did two listening activities and like assessment, they could practice the three topics together since they received a flashcard and they had to say some sentences using the following structures. She/he is a \_\_\_\_\_, she/he works in \_\_\_\_\_, she/he is wearing a \_\_\_\_\_.

In regard to the flashcards, they were taken from two web sites and printed. They were classified into medium and large ones. The large ones were used to present the new words about the topics chosen by participants in this project. The medium ones were used to do the activities related to matching, puzzle and the game. It is important to mention that the main idea was to let learners interact in a communicative way by using the flashcards to teach them new words.



## 4. Results and Discussions

After applying this proposal the research group wanted to analyse the collected results along this paper. At the same time, discuss them in a critical way in order to know whether or not the use of flashcards contributed to the learners' vocabulary acquisition.

“Data analysis refers to sifting, organizing, summarizing, and synthesizing the data so as to arrive at the results and conclusions of the research. Thus, data analysis becomes the product of all the considerations involved in the design and planning of the research”. (Seliger and Schohamy, 1989). In other words, data analysis is valuable to the extent that there is a valid relationship between it and the components of research such as the research problem, the research design, the data collected, and finally the data analysis technique.

For collecting and analysing data were necessary the implementation of some instruments taking into account the qualitative-quantitative nature of this research such as observations, interviews and questionnaires which were applied to the teacher and ten fourth graders.

At the beginning, an interview was applied to ten fifth graders in order to recognize what and how they would like to learn vocabulary. In this interview, the children had six topics to choose (greetings, animals, fruits and vegetables, places, professions, clothes) and they could choose at least 3 of them. It showed that children wanted to learn about professions, places and clothes. Furthermore, this interview let children to choose the way how they preferred to learn the topics mentioned above. In relation to the two highest results were that children would like to see flashcards and to learn about the topics. (See annex C)

The results were interpreted in terms of some categories such as: vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and performance and participation.

### 4.1 Vocabulary Acquisition

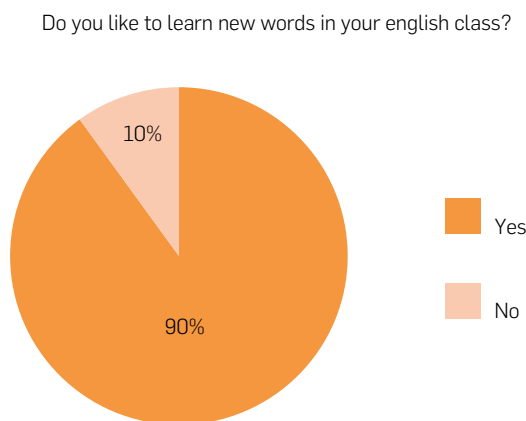
In the observation done at the beginning of this project, it could be noticed that the learners' vocabulary level was low since the methodology applied by the teacher was not the best. First, the class was taught

in Spanish so the learners were not in an English learning environment. Second, the resources used by the teacher were not the most appropriate since he only used the board and the marker. And third, the pedagogical strategies applied inside the class were just limited to translate from Spanish to English and vice versa.

In the interview applied to the teachers, it could be noticed that his pedagogical strategies related to vocabulary teaching are based on translation method. He also understands that learning new words is relevant to develop a good communication process in English and it could be reflected in the following answer. “Well, I try to teach the words to my students with the purpose they can recognize them and use them in class” (See transcription A, question N° 8). Regarding to the resources, he thinks that flashcards could facilitate the process and the students could feel more interested to learn since they could see different pictures to associate the image and the word in classes.

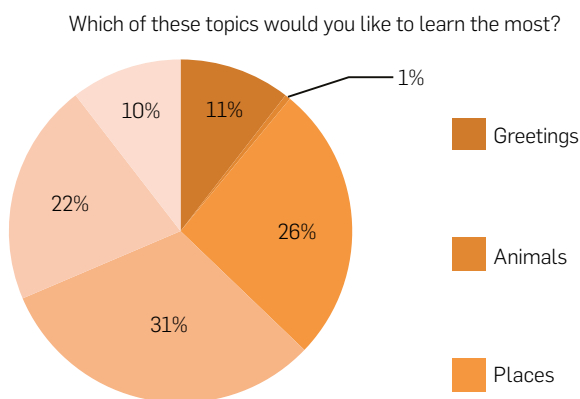
In the interview applied to the sample group at the beginning. They answered that they would like new words in English, 90% of them responded “yes” and only the 10% of them responded “no” (See graph N° 1).

Graph 1



Keeping in mind this fact, the learners had the opportunity to choose from a list of six topics what words they wanted to learn and how they would like to learn vocabulary. It helped the research group to know what kind of topics children would like to learn at the moment of learning vocabulary, and taking into account the three highest percentages, these were adapted to the flashcards. The interview showed that 26% of children wanted to learn about places, 21% about clothes, and 31% about professions. (See graph N° 2).

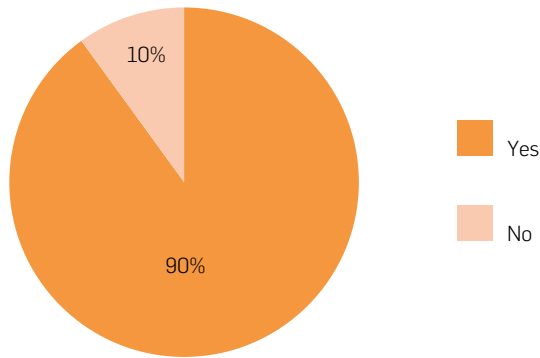
Graph 2



In regard with the flashcards, 90% of learners chose them as means to learn new words and only 10% of them did not agreed with the use of flashcards to learn new English vocabulary. (See graph N° 3 ). This interview also asked the learners about the features (size and colour) of flashcards and taking into account their answers, the research group adapted them. The three highest percentages showed that the 60% of learners preferred colourful flashcards; 30% wanted flash cards to be large in size while 10 % preferred them to be medium. (See graph N° 4).

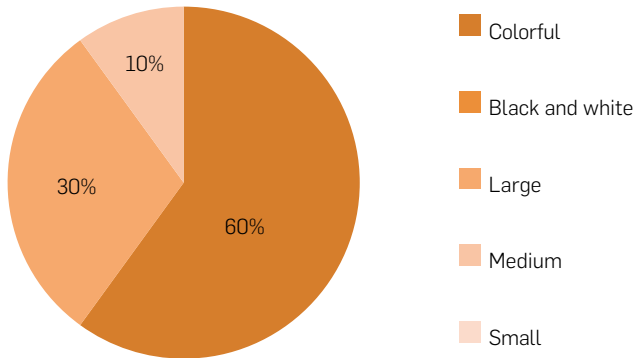
Graph 3

Would you like to learn new words through flashcards? Why?



Graph 4

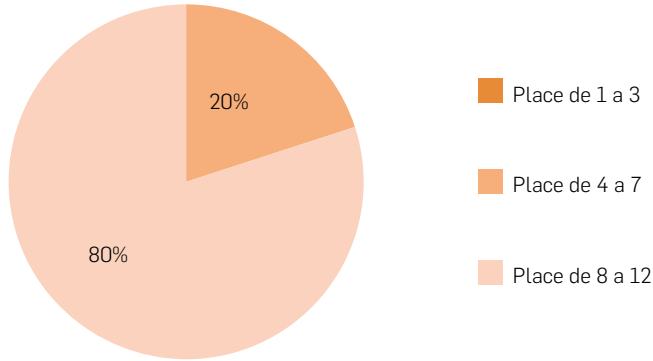
How would you like the flashcards?



At the end, a questionnaire was administered to the children after the flashcards, to notice to what extent the use of flashcards helped to acquire new vocabulary. The research group observed that 80% of children acquired between eight to twelve words of places while 20% of them learned between four to seven words. (See graph N° 5).

Graph 5

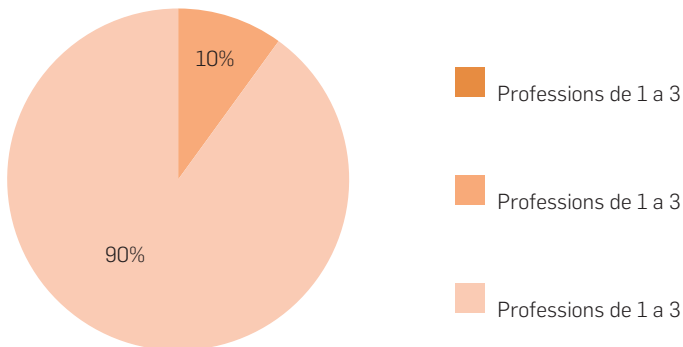
How many words did you learn in English class of each topic?



90% of children acquired between eight to twelve words related to professions while 10% of them learned between four to seven words. Finally, 10% of children learned between four to seven words related to clothes while the 90% of them acquired between eight to twelve words. (See graphs N° 6 and 7).

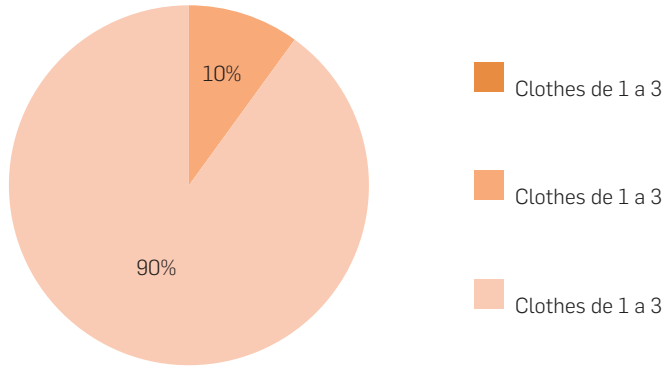
Graph 6

How many words did you learn in English class of each topic?



Graph 7

How many words did you learn in English class of each topic?



Summing up, flashcards were a useful strategy to promote vocabulary acquisition because they helped to break up the monotony of the English classes, and they were involved with new words which were used in a natural and significant way. The flashcards let learners to communicate among them in an oral way by using different images presented in class. The latter though is supported by Oxford and Crookall who state that “Flashcards are among the most widely used vocabulary learning technique... The flashcard technique involves at least three components: writing down (copying) the L2 word on the front of a card, writing the word’s L1 meaning on the back, and then using the card to become familiar with the new word and its meaning” (1990, p. 12). Also Gairns and Redman (1986, p. 54) claims that “visual techniques as flashcards lend themselves well to presenting concrete items of vocabulary-nouns; many are also helpful in conveying meanings of verbs and adjectives. They help students associate presented material in a meaningful way and incorporate it into their system of language values”.

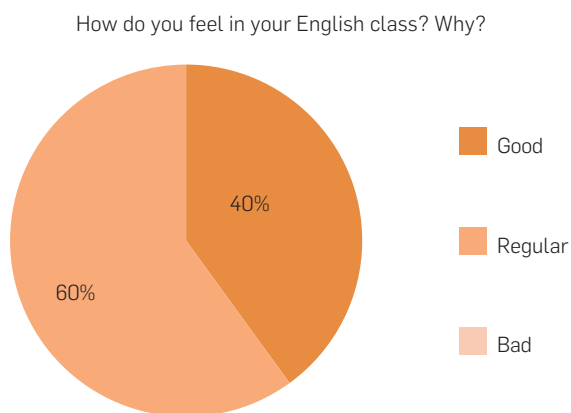
#### 4.2 Motivation

In regard with this category, the research group noticed different children’s attitude towards English classes since flashcards were a useful tool at the moment of teaching vocabulary taking into account that they were adapted to the children’s context, preferences, age, and level of proficiency.

In the observation done at the beginning of this project, it could be noticed that the learners' motivation was not right. The learners got bored during the English class easily because they had to do the same over and over again. The only activity that they did in class was writing down from the board to their notebook. So, the learners' attitude was passive without any interest towards the subject. In the same time, the interview applied to the teacher showed that he believes that flashcards can help to increase motivation and interest in the English class because learners can associate words and pictures.

In the interview applied to the learners, 60% of them answered that they felt regular in the English class (See graph N° 8). It was noticed from the students' attitude towards the class: "la clase es aburrida" "es aburrida por q nosotros solo copiamos de tablero" "la clase es mala" and "las palabras son difíciles de aprender"

Graph 8



During the application of this strategy the learners were motivated and active giving spontaneous answers in specific moments of the class. Also, they were sharing with their partners and increased their relationship among them. After finishing each class with the flashcards, the research group encouraged the children with expressions like: "friend's good job"; "excellent girls"; "well-done" in order to foster them to work in class. (See photo gallery). Moreover, the research group

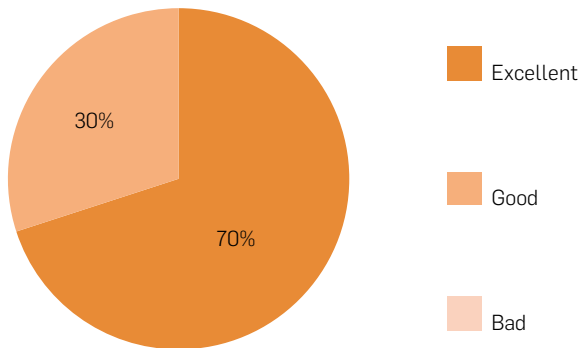
realized that children’s motivation increased due to the fact that they used vocabulary in an easier and natural way and they answered with enthusiasm to the different activities proposed.

In the questionnaire applied to the learners at the end, the research group checked that learners liked to use flashcards because they considered it was enjoyable and easier while they were acquiring the new words. (See Graph N° 9). They had the opportunity to see colourful flashcards which helped them to understand and learn the topics. Besides, this proposal was successful because children had the chance to work with other materials which contributed to enrich their vocabulary acquisition.

In this line and supporting all those evidences, it could be found in Wright’ theory that states that “Pictures are not just an aspect or method but through their representation of places, object and people they are an essential part of the overall experiences” ... they contribute to: interest and motivation, a sense of the context of the language and a specific references points or stimulus” (1990, p. 2).

Graph 9

How did you feel when the teacher used flashcards to teach you English words?



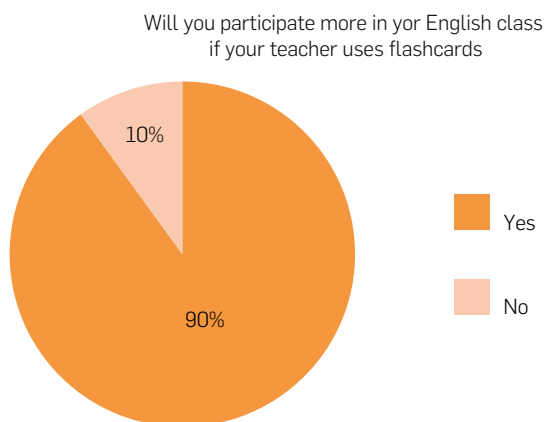
### 4.3 Performance and Participation

The observations showed that the learners did not interact among them or with the teacher. Also, it was noticed that the teacher did not foster



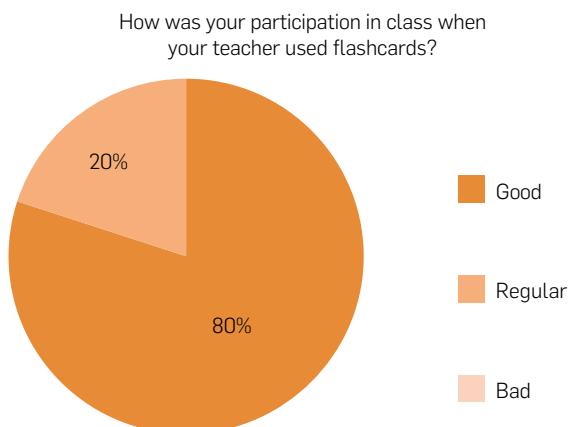
the learners' participation in class and as a result their performance was quite low and did not develop communicative skills at all. While in the interview applied to the learners, it showed that the 90% of learners would participate more in class if the teacher uses flashcards as a new resource. (See graph N°10).

Graph 10



The questionnaire applied to learners, revealed that they increased their participation by 80% (See graph N° 11) as they were more involved in the learning process in contrast to the traditional way in which they said they felt bored because they only rewrote words from the board.

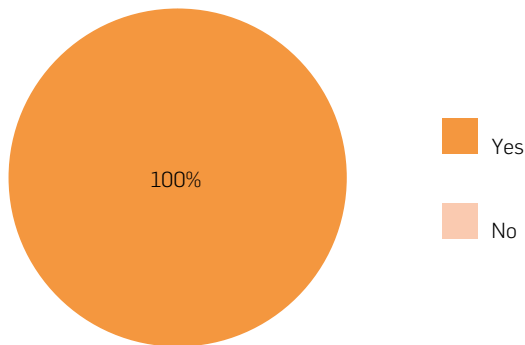
Graph 11



Moreover, 100% of them would like to continue using flashcards because it is a different technique for learning vocabulary in a non-traditional way. (See Graph N° 12). All children agreed with this point because flashcards gave them the opportunity to change the way how they were learning English subject.

Graph 12

Would you like continue learning words with flashcards to increase your participation in class? Why?



Summing up, the research group noticed that the use of flashcards provided the class a space where children felt comfortable and confident at the moment of participating in front of their partners and they had the opportunity of interacting in class and learning in new words in a didactic way. According to Fiorito (2005), people learn languages when they have opportunities to understand and work with language in a context that they comprehend and find interesting.

## 5. Conclusions

After finishing this study the research group drew some conclusions:

Flashcards were a useful strategy to acquire vocabulary because they could provide an environment where children could experiment a different use of the English language. Besides, Flashcards were an enjoyable and significant tool to know the children's attitudes and behaviours in a particular context and to realize that if the teacher

changes the classroom atmosphere and methodology he/she can obtain better results from the children.

The use of visual aid was relevant at the moment of applying this study because it was an innovative way to encourage children's relationship because they needed and wanted to learn in English class. Furthermore, this relationship among children facilitated the learning process of those new words taught along this proposal and to achieve the aim of this research paper.

Children's performance and participation increased at the moment of applying each one of the topics through the use of flashcards, they were learning in a pleasant and different way where they were the most important and active participants.

## 6. Pedagogical Implications

The research group would like to propose some recommendations for further research. Some of the most important recommendations are the following:

Teachers have to be aware about the responsibility of working with children since it is necessary to keep in mind some aspects such as likes, preferences, age, cultural background, level of proficiency.

Vocabulary acquisition is one of the main issues that teachers have to think of when they are teaching a foreign language since it provides learners the tools to develop any skills and in order to reach this goal teachers have to know about which vocabulary strategies or techniques are more useful and meaningful for their classroom.

At the moment of creating flashcards or using any visual techniques, it is important to know which topics children would like to learn for getting good result in the final assessment and design colourful flashcards that can catch children's attention during the classes.

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## CHAPTER 8

# Vocabulary Building to improve Reading Comprehension through the Use of Lexical Approach, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

Cinthia Romero Delgado  
Jesús Guillermo González Arbeláez

### 1. Introduction

While the relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension appears to be established, instructional methods to effectively increase students' word knowledge and comprehension are not. Researchers suggest that “early elementary students' word knowledge is a determinant of reading comprehension both in early elementary school and throughout their schooling” (Juel and Deffes cited in Hensen, 2009).

Scientific research on vocabulary instruction reveals that most vocabulary is acquired incidentally through indirect exposure to words. Students can acquire vocabulary incidentally by engaging in rich oral-language experiences at home and at school, listening to books, reading aloud to them, and reading widely on their own are some of the options suggested. (Cunningham et al cited in Diamond & Gutlohn, 2006) stated that extensive reading gives students repeated or multiple

exposures to words and is also one of the means by which students see vocabulary in rich contexts.

According to the diagnostic stage many children from fourth grade often present difficulties in reading comprehension. They are usually able to interpret words accurately but are unable to get understanding from what they read. Many of the children who are part of the school population and are part of the present study struggle with reading comprehension, it could be said that their vocabulary bank is limited and this has a direct impact on their ability to understand what they read. In that sense vocabulary building becomes a target for successful reading comprehension. It seems for children to get meaning from what they read they need both, a great many words in their vocabulary and the ability to use various strategies to establish the meanings of new words.

Vocabulary plays a fundamental role in the reading process, and contributes greatly to a reader's comprehension. A reader cannot understand a text without knowing what most of the words mean. Students learn the meanings of words indirectly, through everyday experiences with oral and written language and through carefully designed instruction. Taking into account this instruction the teacher must find different strategies for students to be successful at vocabulary learning, therefore the use of the lexical approach as a useful tool to accomplish this task. The lexical approach makes a distinction between vocabulary traditionally understood as a stock of individual words with fixed meaning and lexis, which includes not only single words but also the word combinations that we store in our mental lexicons. Lexical approach advocates that language consists of meaningful chunks that, when combined produce continuous coherent text and only a minority of spoken sentences are entirely novel creations.

For Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) lexical phrases as they call them, do represent a major change with profound theoretical and practical implications. This idea shows a total reversal of the traditional structural trend. Structuralism maintained that the learner should have control over the grammatical system of a language and in this case he would be able to use correct sentences. Now, it seems reasonable that an essential part of language acquisition is the ability to produce lexical phrases as unanalysed wholes or 'chunks' and these chunks, will, ultimately,



become the basis for the learner to perceive patterns, word-structure and those other features of language formally thought of as ‘grammar’ (rules of language) and therefore improve on reading comprehension skills as well.

Within the years teachers have explored new strategies to provide learners with the appropriate tools to make the learning process successful and thus satisfy their needs. However, since the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), teaching and studying has become more varied, especially when dealing with vocabulary. According to Young (2003), and Melor Md Yunus (2007), the use of technology as a tool to develop different language skills has received great attention, so that teachers are frequently exposed to new materials. Furthermore, these can be seen as valuable tool to improve teaching and learning vocabulary, not only for students but also for teachers.

Taking all this into account, the purpose of this research is to lay out how vocabulary building can improve reading comprehension using the lexical approach and the ICT on fourth graders. The investigation involved explicit teaching to a small group and attempted to give further evidence that the teaching of vocabulary through the lexical approach and ICT can prepare students to read and have success in understanding what they read.

### **1.1 Research Question**

Based on the purpose of this study, we stated the following research question and objectives:

### **1.2 Main Question**

How can vocabulary building improve reading comprehension through the use of the Lexical Approach and ICT’s?

### **1.3 Sub question**

In what way student’s perspective towards language learning process can be affected?

### 1.4 General Objectives:

- › To identify and study the depth of children vocabulary knowledge and how well do they understand the words in the lexicon.
- › To measure the effectiveness of the lexical approach to improve vocabulary building as a way to progress reading comprehension on fourth graders.

### 1.5 Specific Objectives:

- › To develop strategies for students to discern meanings of new unfamiliar words encountered in reading.
- › To measure vocabulary development to determine students' overall level of mastery on specific words.
- › To raise students awareness on the importance of positive attitude in learning and the appropriate use of the resources.

## 2. Literature Review

As many researchers have noted, vocabulary knowledge of word meanings is a powerful predictor of reading comprehension. Reading is a highly elaborate procedure and thus it is of great importance to help students to learn the vocabulary so they can be active readers and improve their comprehension.

One of the theories underlining vocabulary building is through *Morphemes: (prefixes, suffixes, and root words)*. This will greatly enhance and build the vocabulary and reading comprehension of all students, especially struggling readers. Studies have shown that a set of 20 prefixes and 14 roots, and knowing how to use them, will unlock the meaning of over 100,000 words (Wilde, 2006).

Many students do not realize that they can use their knowledge to divide words into parts to get meaning; it is important to ensure that students develop their ability to analyze the structure of multisyllabic words. Teaching morphemes to students increases vocabulary and reading comprehension. “In one study, third graders who were

given training on the nine most common prefixes and a strategy for decomposing words into roots and suffixes outperformed a control group on several measures of word meanings” (White *et al* cited in Wilde, 2006).

On the other hand, there are some theories that outline that vocabulary building can be achieved through *Lexical Sets*. Some researchers call them ‘lexical phrases’ or ‘lexical items’, others prefer the term ‘multi-word chunks’ or just ‘chunks’ of language. Whatever the term, they are an important feature both in language use and language acquisition and offer advantages for language teaching and learning. Most learners associate ‘vocabulary’ with ‘words’, and “there is a tendency among learners to translate any professional text word-for-word, i.e. they usually try to simplify most lexical phrases to separate words” (Kavaliauskienė and Janulevičienė, 2006). Therefore, the role of teachers is to raise students’ awareness of the existence of lexical items.

According to Channel (1981) teaching vocabulary through lexical sets “makes the meaning of words clearer by seeing how they relate to and are different from other words in the set”. Others such as Michael Lewis (1997) challenged the standard view of dividing language teaching into grammar and vocabulary by arguing that language consists of lexical items. These lexical items are divided into four categories: *poliwords*, *collocations*, *fixed expressions* and *semi-fixed expressions*. The first one considered to be essential vocabulary for learners to memorize; the second, how words usually occurs with each other; and the third and fourth considered to be the most important type of lexical phrases. From this perspective, Lewis’s ideas seem appropriate and effective for the purposes of the study.

## 2.1 Theoretical Framework

The goal of this section is to look at the effects of vocabulary enrichment and building to improve reading ability of English language learners. First, some aspects about the lexical approach to vocabulary building will be discussed and then how critical is vocabulary knowledge to successful reading comprehension and finally the use of ICT in language teaching and learning.

### 2.1.1 The Lexical Approach to Vocabulary Building

Research emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge is a vital part of all content learning, but it is too often ignored. (Gough et al cited in Smith, 2002) “Emphasize the importance of vocabulary in comprehension but at the same time considered it largely ignored”. That is why; one of the most important responsibilities of every teacher is to help students develop a strong working vocabulary. To develop student’s vocabulary it is necessary that teachers encourage curiosity for any unfamiliar word that followed by a set of strategies that will help students to get some understanding of what they read including vocabulary instruction as an integral component of reading instruction. According to Nagy and Herman (1987) “Researchers conclude that teachers can have the biggest impact on vocabulary by increasing the amount of incidental word learning”.

### 2.1.2 Vocabulary Building

Vocabulary building is especially important in the process of reading comprehension. According to Anderson and Nagy, (1992) “a strong relationship exists between knowledge of word meaning and ability to comprehend passages containing those words”. It is usual that many students struggle with reading comprehension. The main reason for that is that they are not familiarized with the vocabulary terms used in specific texts; “the vocabulary bank is limited and this has a direct impact on their ability to understand what is read” (Biemiller, 2003).

(Sheehan cited in Hensen, 2009) states that vocabulary is “the ability to understand and use words to acquire and convey meaning” and according to (Bromley cited in Hensen, 2009), vocabulary development “is both an outcome of comprehension and a precursor to it, with word meanings making up as much as 70-80% of comprehension” In that sense, vocabulary building consists of many different kinds of knowing. Children need to have an interest in words, their meanings and their power. To achieve this interest, students need to learn lexical sets for words they already know, and to clarify and refine the meanings of these familiar words. When learning new words they must build a set of meanings for the word to become a part of their vocabulary bank rather than a single word learnt for a particular text.

### 2.1.3 The Lexical Approach

The lexical approach to second language teaching has received interest in recent years as an alternative one to grammar-based approaches. The lexical approach puts emphasis on developing the learner's competency in lexis, or word and word-combinations. It focuses on the idea that an important part of language mastery is the ability to comprehend and produce lexical phrases as unanalysed wholes, or "chunks" and that these chunks become the raw data by which learners perceive patterns of language traditionally thought of as grammar (Lewis, 1993).

According to this, Instruction focuses on relatively fixed expressions that occur frequently in spoken language, rather than on traditionally created sentences. Particularly, lexical phrases were seen as a productive resource for learners, helping in the production, comprehension and necessary analytical reflection on the forms and meanings of the target language (Lewis, 1997).

The key principle of the lexical approach is that "language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar." In other words, lexis is central in creating meaning; grammar plays a secondary role in managing meaning. When this principle is accepted, the logical implication for teachers is that we should spend more time helping learners develop their stock of phrases, and less time on grammatical structures. Michael Lewis presents this taxonomy of Lexical items:

- › words (e.g., book, pen)
- › polywords (e.g., by the way, upside down)
- › collocations, or word partnerships (e.g., community service, absolutely convinced)
- › Institutionalized utterances (e.g., I'll get it; We'll see; If I were you . . .; Would you like a cup of coffee?)
- › sentence frames and heads (e.g., That is not as . . . as you think; The fact/suggestion/problem/danger was . . .) and even text frames (e.g., In this paper we explore . . .; Firstly . . .; Secondly . . .; Finally . . .)

According to this, Lewis states that "instead of words, we consciously try to think of collocations, and present this in expressions, rather than

trying to break things into ever smaller pieces; there is a conscious effort to see things in larger, more holistic ways” (1997).

The basic aims of teaching lexis are not only to cover a certain number of words on a word list, but we have to use more different teaching techniques that can help more in realizing this global concept of what it means to know a lexical item, in giving the learner some teaching opportunities to use the items learnt and finally in helping learner to use effective written storage systems. Michael Lewis suggested that teachers need to help students become aware of the lexical structures that commonly occur in the language. The idea is that if students become aware of some of the many lexical structures, they will have a lot more information about how to combine individual words to build coherent structures like phrases, expressions and whole sentences, which should ultimately emulate those used by native speakers.

#### **2.1.4 Vocabulary Knowledge for Reading Comprehension**

Many educators believe “that there is a close relationship between vocabulary knowledge and comprehension and therefore, one of the most important reasons for providing students with explicit instruction to “build” vocabulary”. Stanovich (1986). In that sense vocabulary building becomes a target for successful reading comprehension. Students need to really know the words they are learning so that they can use the context to understand words` meanings and thus they are far more likely to maximize the understanding of a text, furthermore they can improve other aspects of learning. (Manzo et al cited in Hensen, 2009) stated that “word learning can improve the *capacity* to “learn” and a rich vocabulary increases comprehension and, therefore, most all learning”.

Other researcher also stated that “Children with larger vocabularies find reading easier, read more widely, and do better in school” Lubliner and Smetana (2005). That is to say, students with large vocabularies are able to articulate responses to questions and ask better than their classmates with limited vocabularies, “they are able to extract meaning from a text and connect what they read to prior knowledge, even more they are able to use their knowledge to make meaning of unknown words from the context of the text”. (Osborn, Heibert and Elfrieda, 2004).

Moreover, others stress how students can be negatively affected by poor reading comprehension. “Factors that may inhibit comprehension of these texts, such as a lack of vocabulary, can be expected to have increasingly detrimental effects on achievement”. (Jenkins et al cited in Hensen, 2009). Thus, if learners understand words they will comprehend the contents and therefore do better at language learning and why not better at school and all subjects in general.

Although students can benefit from teachers who include vocabulary building in their lessons; any effective “*method*” determined yet and selecting the best one to do it can be a difficult task. This vocabulary instruction varies a lot Hensen (2009); we might think each teacher makes the choice by taking into account the context and conditions she/he is dealing with. Many of them know that they need to improve their teaching especially to students who find reading difficult (Bromley cited in Hensen, 2009). (Lubliner and Smetana cited in Hensen, 2009) describe this difficulty in their work, “The ultimate challenge of a vocabulary intervention is not merely to teach a set of words or skills, but to positively affect reading comprehension”.

### 2.1.5 Ict in Language Teaching And Learning

The use of information and communications technology (ICT) in education is a relatively new phenomenon. Nowadays, the use of technology as a tool to develop the different language skills has received great attention, according to Dudenney, et al (2000), some technology devices such as television, tape recorders, video recorders and computers have been used in language teaching since 1960’s. However, the effectiveness of them depends on the motive why and how it is applied and integrated. There are many reasons why the use of technology may be favourable for the language learning process. According to Padurean and Margan (2009) “It offers an authentic learning environment. Skills can easily be integrated in the teaching/ learning process; reading, writing, speaking, listening can be combined in task- based learning”.

The integration of ICT in teaching and learning has some significant benefits. It has the capability to control presentation, increase variety and creativity, provide feedback on learning activity, and it can also

adapt easily with any materials. When presenting a new word, students should be given interesting materials to attract attention. Unlike books and dictionaries which have fixed presentation, computers can combine visual with listening materials, texts with graphics and pictures even movies. For the lower level learners, these learning activities are interesting and challenging. Instead of reading and memorizing, students can directly get involved into the activities.

ICT is known to be the best source to any conventional classroom, especially when used properly and could be a plus to the foreign language to increase the vocabulary use in the classroom. Lanni (2005) points out that these resources let teachers to make everything noticeable as well as more comprehensible, helps in analysing and organizing information, therefore allowing students to get in touch with different types of media, texts, styles, and registers, which in turn improves vocabulary and language understanding. It has been increasingly argued that computer technologies can support learning in a number of ways. Many features of the computer are considered to improve vocabulary development and reading comprehension: multimedia is one of them. Multimedia refers to computer-based systems that use various types of content, such as text, audio, video, graphics, animation, and interactivity. The key concepts of multimedia are thus 'computer-based' and 'interactive'.

One example of the effect of multimedia glosses for vocabulary development were carried out by Chun and Plass (1996) who presented the positive results of three studies with students in their second year of German language. They used a multimedia application offering various types of annotations (picture, text, video). The goals of this study included the exploration of incidental vocabulary learning, and the examination of the effectiveness of multimedia annotations on vocabulary acquisition. The results of this case study supported previous research on the effectiveness of different types of annotations, according to which visual imagery was found to help in learning and retention of new foreign words. Moreover, visual multimedia advance organizers were found to help not only recalling new words, but also act as facilitators of reading comprehension, which stresses the close relationship between vocabulary and reading (Chun and Plass, 1996).



## 3. 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, the research phases and the data collection techniques.

### 3.1 Type of Study

This research has some characteristics that classify it as a qualitative research. This type of study involves “an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories” (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). In this sense, this study attempted to help students improve in their language learning process and identify how they might affect their process by observing, analysing their behaviour in the class .

This study can also be defined as a case study which is a type of qualitative research that allow the researchers to explain a situation, to provide a basis to apply solutions to situations, to explore, or to describe an object or phenomenon. This type of study provided our research with the necessary information and events which could offer and facilitate the researchers a clearer understanding of the children experiences in the language learning process.

### 3.2 Setting and Population

This research was conducted a public school located in the Caribbean region of Colombia which was designed to offer better education for under-served students. This study will improve the level of English through the teaching of vocabulary in order to enhance reading comprehension. The sample group of the research comprised of an intervention group of 25 students and a target group of 3 aged 8 to 10 years old.

### 3.4 Research Phases

The study was carried out through three main phases divided into six sessions (two hours each). The Diagnostic phase, the Intervention phase and the Data Analysis phase.

### 3.4.1 Diagnostic phase

This phase was the first session and was meant to observe students and diagnose their learning environment, language learning level and attitude towards the English class and the methodology being used. In this phase students answered an introductory questionnaire to check their prior knowledge on ICT.

### 3.4.2 Intervention phase

This phase consisted of five sessions and planned for the intervention group to participate in a series of 5 teaching sessions which targeted the teaching of vocabulary chunks using the lexical approach and ICT resources to improve reading.

### 3.4.3 Data Analysis phase

In this phase all the information gathered was triangulated and analysed. As part of it students answered the final questionnaire meant to check how the investigation and the use of the lexical approach and ICT have impacted and improved their language learning process.

## 3.5 The Data Collection Procedures

### 3.5.1 Observation

This data collection procedure is one of the most important in the study because it offers precise information about the individuals within the research and gives the possibility to check whether the data gathered is reliable or not. According to Alder (1994), “Observation is a fundamental and highly important method in all qualitative inquiry, It is used to discover complex interactions in natural social settings”.

The observation was supported by other methods such as note taking for further analysis. It comprised all the six sessions of the research.

### 3.5.2 Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a means of eliciting the feelings, beliefs, experiences, perceptions, or attitudes of some sample of individuals. The questionnaire is most frequently a very concise, pre-planned set of questions designed to yield specific information to meet a particular need for research information about a pertinent topic.

In this case, a questionnaire allows the researchers to get some information about students' opinions, attitudes and feelings towards the process held during the research. It also serves as a mean to go into the depths of reality of the situation and discover subjects' meanings and understandings.

Along the research all the students will answered two questionnaires; the first one at the beginning of the research, in the diagnostic phase and the second one at the end; in the data analysis phase.

### 3.5.3 Diary

Diaries can help provide access to people's interpretations of their world, create a complete record of actions and words, develop realistic pictures and provide sensitive descriptions of an individual's daily life Nicholl (2006). As it can be inferred this data collection procedure may allow us to know students' thoughts and feelings about different aspects which are involved in the teaching-learning process along the study.

For this study students reflected on their diaries along the five intervention sessions, starting from the second one, taking into account their experience in the diagnostic phase.

## 4. Data Analysis

The research group collected data for about one month and a half and findings from the triangulation of the information found in the different data sources and data collection techniques were analysed. The following were the categories found.

- › Vocabulary improvement
- › Positive attitude towards the subject
- › Reading comprehension progress

## 4.1 Vocabulary Improvement

Through the use of different types of data collection procedures and instruments such as class observations, questionnaires, diary, and other sources such as the lesson plans; we realized that students learnt to use the vocabulary chunks they were thought and this influenced the way they performed in the vocabulary exercises and further reading exercises.

Students showed to have managed the chunks to put into practice the target vocabulary. The use of the chunks allowed language management to be possible in terms of the avoidance of translation and positive perception about written exercises which contributed to the first reading comprehension steps.

These will be described as follows:

### 4.1.1 Student's tendency to translation was significantly reduced

Data suggest that students understood that it is possible to learn vocabulary chunks and get deeper understanding by no means of translation. As a way to identify students' tendency to translation, we decided to work the sessions totally in English. All kinds of complains came from them expressing little understanding on the topic. Therefore, as a strategy the teacher switched the languages, for this time the results were superior. As it is shown in their reflection of the sessions:

**Subject 1:** “La clase estuvo bien, porque me enseñaron varias cosas y me divertí mucho aprendiendo directamente en inglés”.

**Subject 2:** “Pues la actividad me pareció chévere, porque aprendí el vocabulario e hice las actividades en inglés”.

**Subject 3:** “Me gustó mucho, me pareció muy, muy divertida y chéverísima, lo mejor aprendí inglés bien y aprendí cosas nuevas”.

Taking into account their perceptions it may be said that students seemed to understand that use of L1 must not be totally rejected but the appropriately used as a strategy to facilitate the memorization of new vocabulary pieces and lead to L2 understanding of new words meanings. It also served for themselves and the teacher to check and validate L2 learning and understanding. According to Schmitt (as cited in Liu, 2008) “Intralingual strategies are “pedagogically correct” because they are consistent with principles of communicative language teaching or comprehensible input”.

In addition, it seems that it provides a sense of challenge for their learning process as they are induced to face a different approach to learning and different resources which lead them to develop other kind of strategies to learn. Students seem to recognize that working this way may help them learn better and improve on their continuous and future language learning experience.

#### 4.1.2 Positive perception of written exercises

In language teaching it is common to use writing exercises for practicing vocabulary. This is done as a way for them to make connections among what it is learnt and explore different situations to integrate them into their learning process. From the information gathered we found that student’s view of written exercises was monotonous and boring. The fact of practicing and learning this vocabulary chunks using ICT’s provided them with a transformation of the opinion they held about this type of exercises by offering them a varied bunch of enjoyable and challenging activities; with the same purpose but with different ways to overcome them. The following were some of their perceptions:

**Student 1:** “Entendí todos los ejercicios, porque me gustaron todos los actividades de la página, las hice todas aprendí y me gusta el inglés”.

**Subject 2:** “Me gustó mucho, aunque al principio se me dificultó un poquito, me gustaron todas las actividades, sobre todo las de completar y unir y las entendí mucho”.

**Subject 3:** “Me pareció chévere, estaba un poco difícil, pero resolví los puntos de completar y aprendí un poquito más de inglés”.

Referring to the methodology used (the approach and ICT's use) when working on written exercises, they wrote:

**Student 1:** “Me gusto porque creo que como nos enseñaron el vocabulario es más divertido y más fácil para hacer los ejercicios en internet”.

**Student 2:** “Todo fue muy chévere creo que usar el internet y las páginas para hacer estos ejercicios, nos ayuda a aprender más...”

**Student 3:** “A mí me pareció que las clases de ustedes fueron increíbles.. muy bonito como nos enseñaron el vocabulario y las páginas de internet son muy chéveres... me gusta hacerlas usando el internet”.

Up to this point, students see the value of using this approach and the materials as an interactive way of practicing and have fun learning English using some tools and a new methodology they seem to enjoy. In addition to this, it seems that it made them reflect on how internet can be used in different ways. Furthermore, by working on this kind of exercises, they were unconsciously making attempts to reading comprehension, as they had to give meaningful use to the vocabulary chunks offering multiple opportunities to use new words in reading, writing and soon discussions. Nagy (as cited in Kinsella, Stump, Feldman, 2010).

#### 4.2 Positive Attitude toward the Subject

Findings about students' motivation toward the Methodology used in the sessions showed that they favour the use of the lexical approach and ICTs as they considered them very appealing to their language learning process.

Since the beginning of the research it was noticed that students have some inhibitions toward language learning process. It seems that previous experiences have risen on them negative aspects that were influencing their attitude towards language learning experience.

Once they were lead through the sessions, a change in their attitudes was noticed. Data suggests that they found the resources and methodology used appealing to carry out their performance in the classes. Internet

provides an easy and fast access to current and authentic materials, which is motivating for the language learners. Jonassen et al (1999). Students' responses to the teacher's invitations to participate were continuous. It seems that the teaching methodology and materials were attractive and suitable to their needs; helping them to practice not only the written use of the language, but also practice speaking, reading and pronunciation, without the fear of making mistakes. This is evidenced below:

**Student 1:** “Las actividades me parecieron bien, me gustaron las encontré fáciles, resolví todo... usar el computador me pareció divertido. Y ahora me gusta mucho eso del inglés”.

**Student 2:** “Me gustaron las clases, tomé todos los apuntes y practiqué con todos los ejercicios. Mi materia favorita ahora es inglés, gracias por las clases”.

**Student 3:** “Muy divertido todo porque uno aprende cosas en inglés... era muy fácil. Quiero seguir asistiendo a las clases”.

As it has been shown, students seem to have a better attitude towards English learning not only vocabulary but also developing other skills, such as speaking and pronunciation and learning in general. Moreover, it gave them a great deal of confidence to become active participants in the language learning process.

### 4.3 Reading Comprehension Progress

Data suggests that students improved on reading comprehension of short text through the use of specific vocabulary previously learnt. Learners worked on different activities to practice the vocabulary. Later, they worked on comprehension sentences, in which they used the vocabulary within the specific context studied. Finally, they worked on the final reading. The following are some of the reflections students did on the reading exercise:

**Student 1:** “A mí me gusto la lectura porque aprendí un poquito más de inglés. La resolví porque había cosas que ya yo sabía porque las he practicado en las clases, así que pude hacer los ejercicios”.

**Student 2:** “Pues la lectura me pareció chévere, no estuvo tan difícil, la respondí enseguida. Las preguntas al principio un poco complicadas, pero tuve que buscar varias palabras que ya me sabía y la pude resolver”.

**Student 3:** “La lectura me pareció chévere, me gustó mucho, la encontré medio difícil... al final encontré unas palabras que ya me sabía y la entendí”.

It seems that they could develop some techniques to go over a reading. According to the data collected students ability to look for main ideas and specific information strongly improved. Apparently in order to cover the readings they used all the resources they had, they re-read the text as many times as they needed to understand the questions and figure out the answers. They took into account the pieces of vocabulary chunks they learnt by making references to the videos, the different activities and the way they felt during the activities. These are some of their explanations on how they understood the reading and then answer the questions:

**Student 1:** “A mí me gusto la lectura, resolví la actividad y las preguntas viendo el vocabulario y las palabras en la lectura, pero no todas porque algunas si las recordaba bien”.

**Student 2:** “Me pareció medio difícil porque a la primera no sabía cómo hacer y después si supe. Lo hice por medio de que leí varias veces el cuento y las hice”.

**Student 3:** “Me sentí bien haciéndola, la encontré un poquito difícil porque no entendía algunas, pero las resolví viendo en la lectura otra vez y luego las respondí”.

Taking into account all the information taken from their diaries it seems that they learnt to use a series of techniques to cover a reading; these can be described as skimming and scanning techniques. The process of Skimming is used to look only for the general and main ideas and Scanning is used to look only for a specific fact or specific information without reading everything (Beale, 2004). Thus, they read according to the purpose and got the information they needed quickly without wasting time.



Data also suggest that students could succeed in the reading by making use of their prior knowledge on the topic. It seems that they were encouraged to relate to what they read in the text to what they already know and learnt during the sessions in which the vocabulary building process was emphasized.

## 5. Conclusions

As it can be seen through this study, one of the best ways to improve reading comprehension is to improve vocabulary. Vocabulary building in chunks is not just an instrument to reading comprehension but an opportunity to help students to know more about how language works and thus understand the “how” better within the context given. Therefore, taking into account the information gotten from the data collection stage, the research team came to the following conclusions:

Firstly, it is evident that the methodology used to learn and practice the vocabulary influences the way students cover and understand a piece of reading. Students who do not have a large vocabulary or effective word learning strategies often struggle to comprehend what they read. The more exposure students have the more possibilities to encounter words in a range of context they will know and understand. It is of great importance that children realize that words are used in many contexts. Children must then reach beyond the concrete word and activate their schema of the context in which the word is used to understand the meaning.

Secondly, the use of ICT’s resources teaching and learning has produced positive effects in the class. Students seem to be motivated by learning through this medium. The use of these kind of materials gave students visual and mental stimulation and provides immediate responses and practice for the child to learn a skill. Struggling readers interface with the computer and practice a skill without embarrassing situations in the classroom. Interaction with a multi-sensory format provides motivation and a positive attitude toward reading and learning (Case & Truscott, 1999; Forcier, 1999).

Finally, it may be said that the use of the approach with young children can serve as a tool to improve their vocabulary building and reading comprehension process as they learn the expressions and not smaller pieces of language exploring the environment in which words occur.

## 5. Pedagogical Implications

After doing this study, it was clearly found that students can be helped to develop strategies to improve on their vocabulary, reading and learning process in general. Also, it was found that this way of teaching and learning can contribute to accomplishing their process in a good way. Finally, it was possible to guide learners to reflect on how they are usually taught and explore new ways of make this process as enjoyable and meaningful as possible. For this reason, this study shows the following pedagogical implications:

1. The school should use the lexical approach on children since it can help them to memorize the vocabulary studied, and later use it in meaningful ways in which they can make sense of it. This, with the use of ICT's can improve their learning as they are extremely exposed to visual activities and new ways of learning, which they can directly manipulate. This tends to be of great joy for them to learn easily and successfully.
2. By using this type of methodology, students would reduce the pressure of studying grammar. As it is no main focus on grammar structures, the vocabulary chunks can serve as a way to activate this unconscious learning and allows opportunities to practice. Grammar is to be explored rather than explained. This may also enhance students learning because it would allow them to reflect on how language works.
3. The school should take into account the use of the materials used for learning because it can contribute to cooperative and collaborative learning. By using the ICT resources students can work together to produce common products. To accomplish these goals they need each other and thus work together to carry out the tasks. Furthermore, they can improve on the two aspects, the one of learning English and the one of ICT resources management.

4. By using this methodology students would feel more confident and motivated to learn and participate in the process. The use of vocabulary by collocations, fixed and semi-fixed expressions would allow them to have great management of the language and the ICT materials would allow them to put them into practice in many different real and authentic ways. This multimedia concept stimulates the learner with sight, sound, and action while integrating skills necessary for language development. Forcier (as cited in Boling et. al., 2002).
5. Finally, the use of this methodology would need students to move from dependent direct instruction to more independent learning, receiving more individualized instruction at their appropriate reading level. Thus, giving the teacher the possibility to change the traditional role to that of being a facilitator.

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## CHAPTER 9

# Vocabulary Learning Strategies In The Process Of Acquiring Vocabulary

Zaily del Toro

### Abstract

A beginner's group of bilingual children from a public school were tested. The group consisted of 36 students both boys and girls and their average age was twelve years. The main objective of this study was to observe the most common strategies used by the children to learn new vocabularies in English.

Participants involved in this research applied different instruments to obtain information, such as; survey, interviews, and class observation, which provided with enough data to be analyzed. Results indicated that most of the students used strategies to learn vocabulary even though they were not aware about this process. It could be observed that most of the time they used repetition method (oral or written) at the moment of learning a word. An important finding obtained from this research was that most of the students presented difficulties in the process of learning a word. Also a vast majority of them do not know how to use a dictionary.

A very important tool in the process of acquiring vocabulary is making students aware of the use of different strategies to learn vocabulary, which are useful to get a varied and rich vocabulary in order to have successful results in the foreign language learning process.

### Key Words

Basic vocabulary, learning, context, strategy, memorization

## Resumen

Un grupo de niños principiantes bilingües de una escuela pública fueron experimentados. En el grupo había 36 estudiantes; niños y niñas, cuyo promedio de edad era 12 años. El principal objetivo de este estudio era observar las estrategias más comunes utilizada por los estudiantes para aprender una palabra nueva en inglés.

Los participantes involucrados en esta investigación aplicaron diferentes instrumentos para obtener la información, tales como; encuestas, entrevistas y observaciones de clases. Las cuales arrojaron suficiente información para ser analizada. Los resultados indicaron que la mayoría de los estudiantes usaron estrategias para aprender vocabulario, aunque no sean consiente acerca de este proceso. Pudo observarse que ellos la mayoría del tiempo usaban repeticiones (orales o escritas) al momento de aprender una palabra. Un hallazgo muy importante obtenido de esta investigación fue descubrir que la mayoría de los estudiantes presentaron dificultades en el proceso de aprendizaje de una palabra, de hecho, una gran cantidad representativa de ellos no saben utilizar el diccionario.

Una herramienta muy importante en el proceso de adquisición de vocabulario, es darle a conocer a los estudiantes, diferentes estrategias para aprender vocabulario, las cuales son útiles para obtener un vocabulario rico y variado para tener éxitos en los resultados en el proceso del aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera.

## Palabras Clave

Vocabulario básico, aprendizaje, vocabulario, contexto, estrategia, memorización.



## 1. Introduction

Through the years, English has become a fundamental tool for people around the world. It is a language spoken in many countries and also the language of business, science, technology, economy and communication. As a logical consequence, learning English is necessary to be in contact with people around the world.

For this reason the Colombian Government has decided to implement new ways of facilitating English learning as a foreign language in all schools, and as a compulsory subject from grade one up to high school. This is also mentioned in the general law of Education. (Law 115/1994).

Taking this into account, the main purpose of this research is to observe strategies or ways to learn vocabulary used by students. Doing a short study with students of 5<sup>th</sup> grade from the Institución Educativa Mercedes Abrego, a school located in the south of Montería. This research has taken into account some theoretical consideration derived from different aspects related to literature, methodology and strategies to learn vocabulary. Moreover, the researcher took into account important authors such as Schmitt, McCarthy and Gairns who provide deep knowledge about vocabulary learning and give a wide variety of strategies to be used in standard classes.

Considering students low English level and the difficulties that they usually present to learn and remember the vocabulary taught inside the classroom, the researcher decided to carry out a research project in order to help learners to solve their situation and improve their weaknesses. The researcher chose students of fifth grade - group one. The reason for choosing this group was that these students belonged to beginners group and this was a great opportunity to propose them ways to learn vocabulary in order to be successful learners from the very beginning.

In designing this research, one of its objectives is to improve students' basic vocabulary learning through the implementation of different strategies to learn and remember new words. These are many wonderful tools to enrich the vocabulary in an easy and effective way.

The content of this project has been organized in eight steps as follows:

In the first step, the description of the problem will be presented, which mentions the students' real situation; their weaknesses and difficulties in the process of learning English.

The second step, presents the research question, which emphasizes on the most important concern of the project.

The third step shows the objectives that pretend to give answer to the research question.

In the fourth step, the **theoretical framework** will be presented. This contains theory about vocabulary learning and principles about some vocabulary learning strategies, such as repetition, dictionary use, visual aids, etc.

The fifth step exposes the methodology taken into account in this project, and contains information about the development of this research. It also describes what techniques and instruments were applied, the data collection procedures, analysis of the data and categories. This step specifies detailed information about the whole research.

The sixth step explains the results obtained through the application of the instruments and the interpretation of this information. The results were presented in a descriptive way and divided into categories.

The seventh step presents the discussion and the implication of the results and suggests possible answer towards the research question.

Finally, the conclusion which determines what the research has found and gives some comments and advises for next investigations.

### 1.1 Description of the Problem

To the south of Monteria near the mountains is a public school, which has all grades; from primary to high school. For this research the researcher selected 5<sup>th</sup> grade that has 36 students, both boys and girls with an average age of twelve years. All of them come from low income

families with economic and family problems. Students in this group are very affective and have a good relation with the teacher. They are very enthusiastic, dynamic and enjoy working in groups.

They are just starting English and have 3 hours of English classes per week. They do not have the necessary resources and the appropriate guidance to study English at home as a result their English level is low.

Even though, they are motivated and interested to learn English it has been noticed that students from this group have presented some difficulties to learn vocabulary. They usually forget the vocabulary taught and the instructions given inside the classroom, such as, pronunciation, way of writing and the application in real context. Most of the time students have problems to remember common words meaning.

It happens frequently, when the teacher introduces a new topic and it is evident in every day oral activities and written evaluations. It could be because most of the students do not know the effective strategies to learn vocabulary and sometimes they do not follow an appropriate method to practice vocabulary.

Hence, it is important to reinforce the vocabulary already taught in class and emphasis on the vocabulary application inside the classroom and students' real lives.

These problems also affect the speed to develop the curriculum.

### **1.1.1 Research Question**

What vocabulary learning strategies do students from 5<sup>th</sup> grade in a public school use to learn English?

#### **1.1.1.1 Objectives**

#### **1.1.1.2 General Objective**

To describe vocabulary learning strategies used by students from 5<sup>th</sup> grade in a public school to learn English.

### 1.1.1.3 Specific Objectives

- › To identify different vocabulary learning strategies used by students.
- › To develop several activities to observe what vocabularies learning strategies students apply.
- › To carry out the analysis of different vocabulary learning strategies in order to identify students preferences.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Vocabulary Learning

First, it seems that many learners use strategies for learning vocabulary, especially when compared to more integrated tasks. (Chamot cited by Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997) found that School ESL learners reported more strategies used for vocabulary learning than for any other language learning activity including listening comprehension, oral presentations, and social communication. In this case practicing several strategies is very important in order to obtain a wider knowledge of the L2, to develop other activities such as conversations, dialogues, role playing, etc.

(Horwitz cited by Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997) found that a substantial number of ESL students completing the questionnaire ranging between 25 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that the most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary. In this research, it was found that students affirmed the same idea: they think it is very important to learn vocabulary rather other competences.

(Ahmed cited in Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997) described different types of learners and found that most took notes on vocabulary, or wrote notes in margin of their books. This means that there are many learners interested in knowing how to remember words that can be important for them.

## 2.2 Vocabulary Learning Strategies

As Ahmed mentioned before there are different kinds of learners according to their learning style and different vocabulary learning strategies. In the same way, Medane (cited by McCarthy, 1990 p. 124) studied a wide range of strategies, including what students did to memorize words, how they use dictionaries, how they use the teacher as informant, how they practice using new words and how they took notes. His subjects used both bilingual and monolingual dictionary. In line with this students use different strategies to memorize new words, taking into account their preferences and the ability to handle each one. It means that they probably will use the ones that are meaningful and easy for them.

Studies such as Schmitt and McCarthy (1997) have shown that language learning strategies are not inherently ‘good’, but depend on the context in which they are used, their combination with other strategies, frequency of use, and the learners’ proficiency level. In this sense the ability to recognize different strategies of learning vocabulary is very useful in order to take into account advantages or disadvantages and the efficacy of each one, to be applied according to the context, the level and the purpose of students.

## 2.3 Examples of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

### 2.3.1 Visual Techniques

#### 2.3.1.1 Visuals Aids

These include flashcards, pictures, photographs, drawings, graphics, posters, wall charts and realia. Gairns and Redman (1986, p. 73) express, “they are extensively used for conveying meaning and are particularly useful for teaching concrete items of vocabulary such as food or furniture”. This strategy can help teachers to illustrate the vocabulary that is going to be taught. This strategy facilitates the learning process; the learner can see the object that he/she is learning. It is a useful tool especially in beginner’s classes.

### **2.3.1.2 Mime and gestures**

According to Gairns and Redman, this strategy is useful to illustrate the situation. It means that teacher can act, dramatize and do gestures to reinforce the knowledge; it can motivate and involve students in the class, because it invites them to participate using senses. This strategy provides with real support about a concept.

### **2.3.2 Verbal Techniques**

#### **2.3.2.1 Repetition (oral or written)**

Gairns and Redman Suggest (1983, p. 74) “this is most helpful when items become more abstract”. It includes repetition; writing or saying a word several times helps students consolidate the concept on their minds. It is also suitable for self-correction. Moreover, it helps students to keep long-term-memory.

### **2.3.3 Translation**

It is a common strategy used by teachers, maybe to be sure that students understand the correct word meaning without spending a lot of time, but using this strategy can bring some problems as Gairn and Redman (1986, p.75) explain, “ A more real danger with translation is that students continue to use the mother tongue as a framework ...”. Then, students continue learning a language through the mother tongue equivalent.

### **2.3.4 Students-centered learning**

#### **2.3.4.1 Asking others**

Another way to discover a new meaning of a word is asking the teacher or a classmate for information. According to Gairns and Redman, this is good strategy, not only because of the teachers’ knowledge of the language, but also because of his central attention in students’ needs. In this sense this strategy is an excellent tool taking into account affective learning which is related to student’s expectations, needs and wants.

#### **2.3.4.2 Using a dictionary**

The dictionary is a wonderful tool to acquire vocabulary and unknown words. Considering Gairns and Redman who have expressed that dictionary training should be an important part of any syllabus because learners' dictionary is a useful tool. In this line, dictionaries are perfect: students only have to choose the correct or appropriate meaning of the word according to the context.

#### **2.3.5 Note-taking**

Writing the new vocabulary is an important part of language learning for many students. McCarthy (1990 p. 127). Mentions that “the very act of writing a word down often helps to fix it in the memory even if only with regard to its spelling”. According to this, it is easy for students to remember words that they have written before. It is important to mention that notebooks are the most common tool to write students new words. Learners always use notebooks to study at home.

#### **2.3.6 Guessing and inferring meaning**

It is one of the most common strategies used to learn vocabulary. McCarthy (1990 p. 125) states that “inferring involve creating a schema for the unknown word(s) based on world knowledge and previous experience, both of the world and texts. In line with this students need to guess the meaning or use their previous knowledge and make relation according to the meaning. (Brutten cited in McCarthy 1990, p. 126) suggests “teachers are very good at predicting the words learners will have difficulties with”. One possible reason in this case for this problem could be the lack of vocabulary. It is difficult for students predict the meaning of a word if they do not have enough knowledge about the rest.

### **3. Methodology**

The methodology selected for this study was Ethnography. (Watson-Gegeo cited in Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999, p.570) defines it as “the study of people behavior in naturally occurring, ongoing settings, with a focus on the cultural interpretation of behavior”. In this sense

this methodology for this study is considered useful to describe student's behavior in front of the vocabulary learning strategy, which could help me to identify possible ways or strategies that students usually use to learn words and through this I could understand or interpret how the vocabulary learning process is developed by students.

According to this, (Watson cited in Rmanahan & Atkinson, 1999) also affirms that "the first principle is that ethnographic research, while it inevitably studies the lived experience of individuals and their personal reflections on it, focuses on the behavior of groups". This point is in line with the objective of this research because it could help to investigate and observe how a group of students performance to learn vocabulary.

Besides, this methodology is easy to handle and suitable when applying the instruments to collect the information. (Prior cited in Rmanahan & Atkinson, 1999), affirms that "the flexibility of ethnographic work, and the possibility of using it in serious 'multi-methods' approaches to collect more kinds of data; classroom observation, professor and students interviews, questionnaires, written documents, (including students texts and curricular materials), writings process logs, and audiotaped classroom sessions".

Moreover, this methodology could be the best according to the time that is very short to make a complex research.

It is important to mention that this methodology is appropriate for this study because it describes students' academic behavior. Based on this, it is important to take into account details about student - teacher interaction when learning inside the classroom, which is in agreement with this research due to students' academic behavior and interaction were fundamental aspects observed during the class observation.

In this research different instruments were used, such as survey, interviews and class observation. All instruments were applied to students from 5<sup>th</sup> grade Institucion Educativa Mercedes Abrego. These instruments were designed in Spanish to ensure that students understood all issues easily, because the researcher wanted to ask participants and obtain true and real answers from them. Nevertheless, before applying the instruments a pilot test was done in order to test the questionnaire.



The survey applied has a main objective to obtain information about what strategies students usually use to learn vocabulary taught in class. It was applied because the researcher wanted to know what exactly students do in order to learn vocabulary, in terms of methodology. Thirty five students filled in the questionnaire. It contains 11 questions, using multiple choice and open ended questions.(See Appendix A).

It was necessary to apply students interview in order to recognize what strategies are used by students individually and because the researcher wanted to know their opinion and attitude towards learning vocabulary. It contains 13 opened questions. (See appendix C).

The class observations were done in order to observe concrete aspects and details about students' behavior in front of new set of words taking into account mainly two aspects: interaction and students' academic participation. In this activity a format was used to fill notes about students' performance. (See appendix B).

The information used in this research came from the application of one survey, five individual interviews and three class observations in total. Once the information was gathered, the researcher continued analyzing the information, which was developed in the following steps:

First, information was analyzed based on students' answers. (See appendix L), then the class observation was analyzed and the most important aspects were included in a chart and finally the interview comments were grouped in a table (See appendix G). The considerations took into account in this process was analyzed and interpreted according to the theory mentioned on the theoretical framework.

Then the results were presented in a descriptive way and divided into categories as follows:

- › Ask the teacher
- › Dictionary Use
- › Note-taking
- › Visual aids
- › Repetition

Due to the quality of the information, which was relevant and pertinent it was considered to include two emergent categories that surged during the analysis of the data, which are:

- › Attitude towards English subject
- › Group work.

## 4. Results

The information obtained by analyzing student's answers in the survey, the interviews, and the class observation applied by the researcher in 5<sup>th</sup> grade from Institución Educativa Mercedes Abrego is presented in the followings categories:

### 4.1 Prior Categories

#### 4.1.1 Ask the teacher

Taking into account students answers and researcher considerations, it could be said that one of the strategies that students used more is asking the teacher; they feel confident when teacher gives the meaning of a word. In the class observation, it was noticed that they frequently asked for teacher's help instead of asking a classmate. (See appendix D. A4).

In the survey, it can be also observed, taking into account students answers; a high percentage of students prefer the teacher to give the meaning and its translation when teaching a new word (See appendix LL. Question 4).

#### 4.1.2 Dictionary use

Regarding with results found through instruments, it can be affirmed that the vast majority of the students use this strategy to get the meaning of words. (See Appendix LL. Question 3 and Appendix N. Q 8). They expressed that dictionary is excellent because using it they had the opportunity to find the words that they do not know. They also mentioned that the use of the dictionary is very important because it provides with both meaning in English and Spanish (See Appendix K. T18).

During the class observation the bilingual dictionary use was very frequent. While working in groups, most of the students looked for unknown words in the dictionary then they compared with other students' findings. (See Appendix D A4, Appendix E A5 and Appendix F A4).

Through the classes observation it could be noticed that students have difficulties using the dictionary; some of them do not know how to look for words, others do not know what word is appropriate according to the context and some others waste too much time looking for one word. It means that teachers should try to do more activities using dictionary in class and give clear explanations about how to use the dictionary in order to improve these weaknesses.

### **4.1.3 Note- taking**

Through the class observation it could be noticed that all of them write in their notebooks. Participants of this research have mentioned that it is easy for them remembering words that they have written before in their notebook (See Appendix H.T6). They always use notebooks to study the new words at home (See Appendices G,H,I,K. T22). The researcher also observed that some students write unknown words in strategic places in their notebooks while the teacher is explaining the class.

It is important to highlight that in these classes' students only have the opportunity to use the guide book, notebook and the dictionary. In fact, there are some students that only use their notebooks because their parents or people with whom they live do not have enough economic resources to buy a book or a dictionary. In this sense the notebook plays a crucial role. In some cases is the unique tool that students use to study English at home. For that reason sometimes students do not achieve successful results in the English subject. Nevertheless, some of them look motivated and interested and keep well organized notebooks.

### **4.1.4 Visual Aids**

Considering students answers another strategy used by them is visual aids, or through the use of visual material such as poster, graphics, pictures, etc. In this case observing and making drawings. During

class observation, it was noticed that students enjoyed the class when teacher used posters to show the vocabulary; they looked excited and motivated to participate in the class and doing the drawings in their notebooks. (See appendix E. A3).

According to the survey result, some students use drawings to memorize words while the others use repetition activities. (See appendix LL Q2).

Some students have expressed that they would like the teacher to continue teaching the class using drawings. (See appendices G-H T24).

It is important to mention that this methodology is appropriate and useful taking into account the age of this group because this strategy is effective and important to teach vocabulary especially in beginners' classes.

#### **4.1.5 Repetitions**

Regarding with the findings obtained from the instruments this strategy is the most commonly used by students. Most of the students affirmed that they frequently made verbal and written repetition in order to learn a word. (See Appendix I T6-12 and Appendix G T6).

Some of them also expressed that for learning words they followed teacher instructions; first they pay attention, then they repeat with the teacher (See appendix G T12).

Analyzing the survey results, repetition is also the strategy that students use more when learning a word (See Appendix L Q1-2). It could be observed that most of the time they repeat the words orally and some others repeat the written form.

It means that they use different kinds of repetition for getting the knowledge (oral or written).

## 4.2 Emergent Categories

### 4.2.1 Attitude towards English subject

With regard to the attitude towards English subject which is very positive. Majority of students expressed that they liked English a lot because they think that English can help them to go ahead in the knowledge. Moreover, it is important and necessary for going abroad and for their future. They also said that English is very interesting; it means that they are aware of the necessity to learn a foreign language for being able to face new ways of life. (See Appendices G, H, I, J. T2)

In the classes' observation, researcher could state the active students' participation in class. They were participating and looked interested doing the activities assigned. (See appendix D, E, F. A1)

### 4.2.2 Group work

Through the class observation, it could be noticed that students enjoyed working in small groups. Evidence of this is that students were seriously concentrated in the activities and shared ideas among themselves. (See appendix D. A7, appendix E. A5 and appendix F.A3). They were expectant about classmate's answers: listening what the others said to solve the activities in a good way together.

It can be observed in the survey results that most of the students prefer working in groups and some others like working in pairs. (See appendix P. Q11). It means that a representative part of the class like working with someone else.

In the interviews some students expressed that they like working in groups because they can learn from their classmates, but few of them said that they do not like working in groups because they always had to work too much, others talked and they did not anything to help. (See appendix H.T14.)

## 5. Discussion

Throughout the history teachers have tried to find the effective ways to acquire vocabulary and facilitate this activity to students. It is a hard work because many aspects can affect in this process, for instance, students' learning style, students' attitude and the resources available for students.

Applying vocabulary learning strategies inside the classrooms could not only be a useful tool to learn vocabulary, but also for improving students' English level taking into account students interests, expectations, needs and their real life.

The results obtained in this research are in agreement with the theory expressed previously in the theoretical background; Students apply different ways of learning vocabulary daily in common activities related to their necessities and real situations. It is supported by their own declarations and it is evidenced by their behavior. During the application of different instruments, it was noticed that:

In this particular case students frequently use some strategies, such as ask teacher, use dictionary, take notes, repetition and visual aids. They enjoy when teacher uses graphics or pictures and they feel comfortable and confident when teacher writes the words translation on the board. Moreover, they are happy working in small groups or in pairs.

The most common strategies used by the students are repetition and use of dictionary. Most of the students use these strategies when studying vocabulary at home. Students expressed that they always use oral or written activity to learn new words they also have affirmed that dictionary facilitates the process of finding words that they did not know. It is important to mention that most of the students' family has economic problems and there are some students that do not have dictionaries and they do not have the appropriate guidance at home to study English.

Perhaps, all of them keep a notebook that is a good instrument used to write down the new words to study. So, it is evident that they also use the strategy of taking notes. Some of them said that they remember words easily when they already have written it before.

The strategy that students hardly ever use is inferring meaning. Maybe, because they do not have enough vocabulary to guess the others around and because most of the time they are afraid of making mistakes when giving meaning to words that they do not know.

## 6. Conclusions

It can be concluded that the application of different vocabulary learning strategies is a functional tool for acquiring basic vocabulary in a foreign language because it facilitates students learning process.

After applying different activities to find out students development, it could be observed and analyzed that all students use different strategies to learn vocabulary according to their preferences and real situation. Each one handles the methodology that is easy and effective for them. But they are unconscious about that; it means that they are not aware that they are following a specific methodology.

It is important to mention that even the students, who have lots of limitations, have a good attitude towards the English subject. They always participated actively in class and looked encouraged and motivated developing activities, sharing comments and ideas among them while they are working.

While applying this research, it was also noticed that some students have difficulties using the dictionary or spent too much time looking for words and maybe for this reasons students have poor vocabulary.

Regarding the research hypothesis stated in this research, it could be said that the strategies to learn vocabulary frequently used by most of students from 5<sup>th</sup> grade, evident in this study are repetition, ask the teacher, dictionary use, note taking, and visual aids. This relevant information will be used in order to help students to improve their weaknesses and become a successful English learner.

The author of this research wants to suggest to future researchers to increase learners' motivation to use different learning vocabulary strategies, including this in the syllabus it means to make students aware

about the importance and the utility of applying several methodology to acquire vocabulary.

Another important fact that should be taken into account is the implementation of materials to teach vocabulary inside the classroom such as dictionaries, books, television internet, especially in official schools.

To conclude, vocabulary learning strategies offers a wide variety of way to teach/learn vocabulary and it is a wonderful instrument to develop inside the class because it can help teachers to guide and encourage students to discover and remember new words.





# Appendix

## Appendix A

### Instruments

#### Survey

**Objetivo:** obtener información de los estudiantes del grado 5° de la Institución Educativa Mercedes Abrego a cerca de las estrategias que utilizan para aprender vocabulario, analizarlas y sacar ventajas sobre esto.

- › Marca con una X la respuesta que mejor describe lo que generalmente haces.
- › Si marcas otras debes escribir cuál.

#### 1. Cuándo aprendes una nueva palabra en inglés tú...

La repites oralmente \_\_\_ La escribes varias veces \_\_\_ buscas palabras parecidas \_\_\_

Otras: \_\_\_Cuál: \_\_\_\_\_

Ninguna \_\_\_.

#### 2. Para memorizar palabras tú...

Las dices varias veces \_\_\_ Haces planas \_\_\_ haces el dibujo \_\_\_

Otras: \_\_\_Cuál: \_\_\_\_\_

Ninguna \_\_\_.

#### 3. Cuando quieres saber que significa una palabra, tú...

Buscas en el diccionario \_\_\_ le preguntas a la profesora \_\_\_

Le preguntas a un compañero \_\_\_

Otras: \_\_\_Cuál: \_\_\_\_\_

Ninguna \_\_\_.

4. ¿Cómo te gusta que la profesora te enseñe nuevas palabras?
- Escribiendo lo que significa \_\_\_ haciendo el dibujo \_\_\_ utilizándola en oraciones \_\_\_ Otras: \_\_\_ Cuál: \_\_\_\_\_  
Ninguna \_\_\_.
5. ¿Con qué frecuencia ves películas en inglés?
- Siempre \_\_\_ Algunas veces \_\_\_ Nunca \_\_\_.
6. ¿En qué otro lugar diferente al salón de clases te gusta ver Inglés?
- En televisión \_\_\_ En avisos \_\_\_ En revistas \_\_\_  
Otras: \_\_\_ Cuál: \_\_\_\_\_  
Ninguna \_\_\_.
7. Cuando aprendes una palabra nueva en inglés, tú..
- La relacionas con otra en Español \_\_\_ La relacionas con otra parecida en inglés \_\_\_ La explicas con tus propias palabras
- Otras: \_\_\_ Cuál: \_\_\_\_\_  
Ninguna \_\_\_.
8. Para saber el significado de una palabra tú...
- Usas el diccionario \_\_\_ La relacionas con otra conocida \_\_\_  
Adivinas su significado \_\_\_  
Otras: \_\_\_ Cuál: \_\_\_\_\_  
Ninguna \_\_\_.
9. ¿Con qué frecuencia utilizas el vocabulario aprendido en clases?
- Siempre \_\_\_ Algunas veces \_\_\_ Nunca \_\_\_

10. ¿Con quiénes utilizas el vocabulario aprendido?

Con tu profesora \_\_\_ Con tus compañeros \_\_\_

Con amigos \_\_\_ Con familiares \_\_\_

Otras: \_\_\_Cuál: \_\_\_\_\_

Ninguna \_\_\_.

11. ¿Cómo te gusta trabajar en clases?

Solo \_\_\_ en pareja \_\_\_ en pequeños grupos \_\_\_

Otra \_\_\_Cuál \_\_\_\_\_

Ninguna \_\_\_.

## Appendix B:

Class Observation

Format for field-notes

<b>Student's academic participation</b>	<b>Student's interaction</b>

## Appendix C:

### Student's interview

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

### Questions

1. ¿Te gusta aprender palabras nuevas en inglés? ¿Por qué?
2. ¿Repasas el vocabulario aprendido en clase?
3. Cuando tienes evaluaciones, ¿Cómo haces para aprenderte el vocabulario?
4. ¿Consideras que el vocabulario aprendido en clase se relaciona con tu vida diaria? ¿Por qué?
5. ¿En qué lugar de tu casa estudias vocabulario? ¿Por qué?
6. ¿Cómo haces para aprenderte las palabras que te enseña la profesora en clase?
7. ¿Cómo te gusta trabajar en clase? Solo, en pareja o en pequeños grupos. ¿Por qué?
8. Cuando no sabes el significado de una palabra, ¿Qué haces para averiguarlo?
9. ¿Qué parece el uso del diccionario?
10. ¿Usas el diccionario con frecuencia? ¿Por qué?
11. ¿Qué materiales utilizas para aprender vocabulario?
12. ¿Cómo te gustaría que la profesora te enseñara vocabulario?
13. ¿Qué recursos te gustaría utilizar para aprender vocabulario.

## Appendix D:

### Class observation # 1

<b>A</b>	<b>Observation description</b>	<b>Category</b>
<b>1</b>	They participate actively in the class when teacher asked them for the topic that she taught previously. They were	Attitude towards
<b>2</b>	encourage to answer, many of them arose their hands to participate in the class.	English subject
<b>3</b>	Some of them committed mistakes at pronouncing words	
<b>4</b>	but in general they remember the vocabulary taught.	Ask the teacher
<b>5</b>	They worked in small groups; most of them time they talked in Spanish and asked to the teacher for the meaning words in Spanish.	
<b>6</b>	When they were working most of them used the bilingual dictionary and some others use booklets with pictures and words in English.	Dictionary use
	Besides, they used their notebooks and the guide book.	Material used in class
<b>7</b>	While this happened students shared their opinions, comments, asked questions to classmates or to the teacher.	Note-taking
	When they finished to work in groups they come back to	Group work
<b>8</b>	their first position, Teacher made question about the activity in general. For example: How do you feel the exercise? What was difficult for you? Etc. They expressed that everything was great because they have the opportunity to share ideas with classmates and to learn more from them.	Dictionary use
	One of them explained that for he the most difficult thing was chose the correct meaning. He said "there are too many, and I do not know what is the correct".	Group work
	Then she asked some students to go to board and write the meaning of some words.	
	The first one was wrong, and then passed another who corrects the mistake, later somebody else continued until finish the exercise.	
	Finally teacher gave them the feedback for the activity.	
	They never use English to interact with classmates or to ask the teacher.	

A: aspect

## Appendix E:

### Class observation # 2

A	Observation description	Category
1	Teacher started the class doing some mimics and students have to guess what teacher is trying to do they were encourage to participate and repeating after the teacher pronunciation.	Attitude towards English subject
2	They look exited while teacher was doing mimics. When teacher asked what she was doing, most of them gave their answers (in Spanish).	
3	Then teacher used some pictures to illustrate the vocabulary and wrote the vocabulary on the board. Students immediately opened their notebooks and copy the vocabulary. Most of them made the drawings on their notebooks.	Visual aids
4	They were happy doing this activity. Then the teacher mentioned the vocabulary aloud and students had to repeat after teacher pronunciation.	
5	Next time teacher asked them to pronounce the words alone, it's means without teacher guidance. Students worked in small groups of four people; they used the dictionary to look for the meaning of some expressions, asked the teacher to help them.	Dictionary use Ask the teacher
6	After that they worked in pairs, they were exited.	
7	In the activity they had to cut pictures and paste them according to the time.	Group work
	They talked among them and made comments about the organization and the sequence of the pictures, they use their dictionary to look for the expressions that they did not know. Some others used the guide book to look for information according to the activity and most of them, wrote on their notebooks their findings.	Dictionary use Note-taking
	It was noticed that many students have problems using the dictionary in fact there were some students that did not how to use it.	

A: aspect

## Appendix F:

### Class observation # 3

<b>A</b>	<b>Observation description</b>	<b>Category</b>
<b>1</b>	First of all, it could be noticed that students were expectants about how the class was to be developed; they show interest in the topics, maybe because of some posters that teacher brought.	Attitude towards English subject
<b>3</b>	Students were concentrated on the class and they also followed the instruction in a good way .Besides they asked for help to the teacher to solve the activities. It could be observe that students felt comfortable at working in groups, because they had the opportunity to share ideas among their classmates, doing the activities together, this activity seemed to attractive for them; for example, the activities	Ask the teacher Group work
<b>4</b>	in which they have to draw, to cut figures, to stick were fantastic for them while they are practicing the vocabulary taught.	Visual aids
<b>5</b>	Because of their faces, it could be noticed that they enjoy making these activities; but during this process, it could be observe that they were worried about how to find the correct meaning of the word. At building a sentence using the new vocabulary, they started to translate word by word, writing first in Spanish, and looking for unknown words in the dictionary; later they built the sentence literally. After that, they were asked to say the sentence orally, but they proceeded to ask to the teacher to correct the sentence to avoid mistakes.	Attitude towards English subject
	Furthermore, they felt highly motivated by the use of colorful pictures in the different activities carried out. It drew student's attention and helped them to get involve in the explanation of the activities. Teacher's explanations were clear to students who seemed to understand the instructions to develop the task. Evidence of this is that most of them provided correct answers.	Dictionary use  Visual aids

A: aspect



## Appendix G:

### Interview # 1

<b>T</b>	<b>S/T</b>	<b>Preguntas/respuestas</b>	<b>Category</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Te gustaría aprender palabras nuevas en inglés? ¿Por qué?	
<b>2</b>	<b>S1</b>	Si me gustaría porque avanzo más en mis conocimientos y porque me gusta el inglés	Attitude towards English subject
<b>3</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Repasas el vocabulario aprendido en clase?	
<b>4</b>	<b>S1</b>	Si, lo estudio el mismo día.	
<b>5</b>	<b>T</b>	Cuándo tienes evaluaciones, ¿cómo haces para aprenderte el vocabulario?	
<b>6</b>	<b>S1</b>	Leo y leo hasta que me lo grabo y después la escribo.	Repetition
<b>7</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Consideras que el vocabulario aprendido en clase se relaciona con tu vida diaria?	
<b>8</b>	<b>S1</b>	Si claro, las veo en mi vida diaria como por ejemplo hoy vimos los adjetivos, entonces, a si yo veo en la calle niños fat, small, short, tall.	
<b>9</b>	<b>T</b>	En qué lugar de tu casa estudias vocabulario?	
<b>10</b>	<b>S1</b>	En la sala, apago el televisor y me concentro más.	
<b>11</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Cómo haces para aprenderte las palabras que la profesora te enseña?	
<b>12</b>	<b>S1</b>	Presto atención y la repito con ella	Repetition
<b>13</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Cómo te gusta trabajar en clases; sola, en pareja o en pequeños grupos?	
<b>14</b>	<b>S1</b>	En grupos, porque así aprendemos más; si yo no sé alguna pregunta la otra persona la puede contestar.	Group work
<b>15</b>	<b>T</b>	Cuándo no sabes el significado de una de una palabra, ¿cómo haces para averiguarlo?	
<b>16</b>	<b>S1</b>	La busco en el diccionario o en cuaderno	Dictionary use
<b>17</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Qué te parece el uso del diccionario?	
<b>18</b>	<b>S1</b>	Bueno, porque ahí uno encuentra palabras que uno no entiende el significado	
<b>19</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Usas el diccionario con frecuencia? ¿Por qué?	
<b>20</b>	<b>S1</b>	Si lo uso con frecuencia, porque no se el significado de muchas palabras.	Dictionary use

<b>T</b>	<b>S/T</b>	<b>Preguntas/respuestas</b>	<b>Category</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Qué materiales utilizas para aprender vocabulario?	
<b>22</b>	<b>S1</b>	El cuaderno	Note-taking
<b>23</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Cómo te gustaría que la profesora te enseñara vocabulario?	
<b>24</b>	<b>S1</b>	Repitiéndola, con dibujos y escribiendo la traducción	R/VS/N-T
<b>25</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Qué recursos te gustaría utilizar para aprender vocabulario?	
<b>26</b>	<b>S1</b>	El libro, el diccionario y cartillas en inglés	Dicynary use

Attitude towards English subject: 1 Visual aids: 1

Repetition: 3 Dictionary use: 3

Group work:1 Note-Taking :2 **T: turn**

## Appendix H:

### Interview # 2

<b>T</b>	<b>S/T</b>	<b>Preguntas/respuestas</b>	<b>Category</b>
1	T	¿Te gustaría aprender palabras nuevas en inglés? ¿Por qué?	
2	S2	Si, por que lo necesito para cuando esté grande y puedo trabajar	Attitude towards English subject
3	T	¿Repasas el vocabulario aprendido en clase?	
4	S2	Si, por que aprendo mucho , para ser una buena profesional	Attitude towards English subject
5	T	Cuándo tienes evaluaciones, ¿cómo haces para aprenderte el vocabulario?	
6	S2	La escribo varias veces. Porque es más fácil recordarlas cuando las escribo.	Repetition Note-taking
7	T	¿Consideras que el vocabulario aprendido en clase se relaciona con tu vida diaria?	
8	S2	Sí, porque esas palabras en inglés las veo en mi casa en objetos reales	
9	T	En qué lugar de tu casa estudias vocabulario?	
10	S2	En la sala	
11	T	¿Cómo haces para aprenderte las palabras que la profesora te enseña?	
12	S2	Las leo y después las escribo	Repetition
13	T	¿Cómo te gusta trabajar en clases; sola, en pareja o en pequeños grupos?	
14	S2	Sola, porque cuando estamos en grupos o en pareja me a mi solamente pensar.	
15	T	Cuándo no sabes el significado de una de una palabra, ¿cómo haces para averiguarlo?	
16	S2	Busco el diccionario	Dictionary use
17	T	¿Qué te parece el uso del diccionario?	
18	S2	Bien porque me enseña palabras que no entiendo	
19	T	¿Usas el diccionario con frecuencia? ¿Por qué?	
20	S2	Si mucho porque me enseña muchos significados	
21	T	¿Qué materiales utilizas para aprender vocabulario?	

<b>T</b>	<b>S/T</b>	<b>Preguntas/respuestas</b>	<b>Category</b>
<b>22</b>	<b>S2</b>	Los libros, los diccionarios, los cuadernos, las libretas	Du /N-t
<b>23</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Cómo te gustaría que la profesora te enseñara vocabulario?	
<b>24</b>	<b>S2</b>	Con gestos y textos	
<b>25</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Qué recursos te gustaría utilizar para aprender vocabulario?	
<b>26</b>	<b>S2</b>	Libros y el diccionario	Dictionary use

Expectations: 2

Repetition: 2

Dictionary use: 3

Note-takings: 2 **T: turn**

Attitude towards English subject: 2

## Appendix I:

### Interview # 3

<b>T</b>	<b>S/T</b>	<b>Preguntas/respuestas</b>	<b>Category</b>
1	T	¿Te gustaría aprender palabras nuevas en inglés? ¿Por qué?	
2	S3	Sí, porque así aprendo más y puedo aprender más vocabulario	Attitude towards English subject
3	T	¿Repasas el vocabulario aprendido en clase?	
4	S3	Si, para que cuando me pregunten saber y no pasar la pena	
5	T	Cuándo tienes evaluaciones, ¿cómo haces para aprenderte el vocabulario?	
6	S3	La escribo en un papel varias veces y después me la voy preguntando	Repetition
7	T	¿Consideras que el vocabulario aprendido en clase se relaciona con tu vida diaria?	
8	S3	Si por que la seño nos enseña cosas como la ropa, la comida y esas cosas uno siempre las ve.	
9	T	En qué lugar de tu casa estudias vocabulario?	
10	S3	En la sala	
11	T	¿Cómo haces para aprenderte las palabras que la profesora te enseña?	
12	S3	Las repito varias veces, luego me las pregunto a mí misma.	Repetition
13	T	¿Cómo te gusta trabajar en clases; sola, en pareja o en pequeños grupos?	
14	S3	En pequeños grupos, porque así podemos aprender de lo que dicen los compañeros	Group work
15	T	Cuándo no sabes el significado de una de una palabra, ¿cómo haces para averiguarlo?	
16	S3	Le pregunto a un compañero o la busco en el diccionario	Dictionary use
17	T	¿Qué te parece el uso del diccionario?	
18	S3	Me parece perfecto, porque una palabra que nosotros no sabemos, es decir es desconocida la podemos buscar allí.	
19	T	¿Usas el diccionario con frecuencia? ¿Por qué?	
20	S3	Sí, porque la seño nos pone a buscar palabras y si todavía no las sabemos nos toca buscar en el diccionario.	Dictionary use

<b>T</b>	<b>S/T</b>	<b>Preguntas/respuestas</b>	<b>Category</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Qué materiales utilizas para aprender vocabulario?	
<b>22</b>	<b>S3</b>	El libro, el diccionario y las palabras que copiamos en el cuaderno.	Dictionary use/ Note-taking
<b>23</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Cómo te gustaría que la profesora te enseñara vocabulario?	
<b>24</b>	<b>S3</b>	Con el libro, explicándonos el significado y haciendo dibujo	Visual aids
<b>25</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Qué recursos te gustaría utilizar para aprender vocabulario?	
<b>26</b>	<b>S3</b>	El dictionary	Dictionary use

Repetition: 2 Dictionary use: 4

Group work: 1 Note-taking: 1 **T: turn**

Visual aids: 1 Attitude towards English subject: 1

## Appendix J:

### Interview # 4

<b>T</b>	<b>S/T</b>	<b>Preguntas/respuestas</b>	<b>Category</b>
1	T	¿Te gustaría aprender palabras nuevas en inglés? ¿Por qué?	
2	S4	Si, por que se más sobre todo lo que estoy aprendiendo ahora y porque si algún día uno va otros países ya se mas o menos inglés y no paso la pena.	Attitude towards English subject
3	T	¿Repasas el vocabulario aprendido en clase?	
4	S4	Sí, porque aprendo más y puedo conocer más de otras culturas.	
5	T	Cuándo tienes evaluaciones, ¿cómo haces para aprenderte el vocabulario?	
6	S4	Estudio mucho y práctico, es decir leo las palabras, luego las repito, las deletreo y en una hoja aparte las escribo y después mi mama me las califica.	Repetition
7	T	¿Consideras que el vocabulario aprendido en clase se relaciona con tu vida diaria?	
8	S4	Si se relaciona, porque son cosas que yo conozco.	
9	T	En qué lugar de tu casa estudias vocabulario?	
10	S4	En el cuarto o en el computador.	
11	T	¿Cómo haces para aprenderte las palabras que la profesora te enseña?	
12	S4	Deletreándolas y después la repito varias veces.	Repetition
13	T	¿Cómo te gusta trabajar en clases; sola, en pareja o en pequeños grupos?	
14	S4	Sola, porque hay otros compañeros que no saben y entonces se van a copiar de uno.	
15	T	Cuándo no sabes el significado de una de una palabra, ¿cómo haces para averiguarlo?	
16	S4	La busco en el diccionario o le pregunto a la profesora	Dictionary use/Ask teacher
17	T	¿Qué te parece el uso del diccionario?	
18	S4	Excelente, porque uno allí, busca las palabras que uno no entiende.	
19	T	¿Usas el diccionario con frecuencia? ¿Por qué?	

<b>T</b>	<b>S/T</b>	<b>Preguntas/respuestas</b>	<b>Category</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>S4</b>	Si, cuando necesito saber el significado de una palabra que no conozco.	Dictionary use
<b>21</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Qué materiales utilizas para aprender vocabulario?	
<b>22</b>	<b>S4</b>	El diccionario de inglés y mi libro.	
<b>23</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Cómo te gustaría que la profesora te enseñara vocabulario?	
<b>24</b>	<b>S4</b>	Escribiendo la traducción y usando mimicas	Note-taking
<b>25</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Qué recursos te gustaría utilizar para aprender vocabulario?	
<b>26</b>	<b>S4</b>	Bueno los que actualmente uso el libro y el diccionario.	Dictionary use

Repetition: 2 Dictionary use: 3 Note-taking: 1 Ask the teacher: 1 Attitude towards English subject: 1 **T: turn**



## Appendix K:

### Interview # 5

<b>T</b>	<b>S/T</b>	<b>Preguntas/respuestas</b>	<b>Category</b>
1	T	¿Te gustaría aprender palabras nuevas en inglés? ¿Por qué?	
2	S5	Si, por que me permite ampliar mi conocimiento.	
3	T	¿Repasas el vocabulario aprendido en clase?	
4	S5	Si, para que cuando la profesora me pregunte yo pueda contestarle.	
5	T	Cuándo tienes evaluaciones, ¿cómo haces para aprenderte el vocabulario?	
6	S5	Bueno, yo primero repaso todo, luego cojo una hoja y un lápiz y empiezo a escribir varias veces las palabras que me quiero aprender, después me hago una evaluación.	Repetition
7	T	¿Consideras que el vocabulario aprendido en clase se relaciona con tu vida diaria?	
8	S5	Sí, porque las cosas que aprendo en inglés las veo a mi alrededor.	
9	T	En qué lugar de tu casa estudias vocabulario?	
10	S5	En el patio, aunque hace un poquito de ruido hace mucha brisa; sino estudió en el cuarto.	
11	T	¿Cómo haces para aprenderte las palabras que la profesora te enseña?	
12	S5	Analizándolas y comprendiéndolas. Leo del cuaderno y la repito oralmente.	Repetition
13	T	¿Cómo te gusta trabajar en clases; sola, en pareja o en pequeños grupos?	
14	S5	Sola, porque algunas personas se ponen a molestar y no trabajan nada.	
15	T	Cuándo no sabes el significado de una de una palabra, ¿cómo haces para averiguarlo?	
16	S5	Busco el diccionario	Dictionary use
17	T	¿Qué te parece el uso del diccionario?	
18	S5	Bueno porque le dice en inglés lo que significa en español y si la quiero en inglés otra vez, también está.	Dictionary use
19	T	¿Usas el diccionario con frecuencia? ¿Por qué?	
20	S5	Sí, porque la profesora siempre nos deja actividades donde tenemos que utilizar el diccionario	Dictionary use

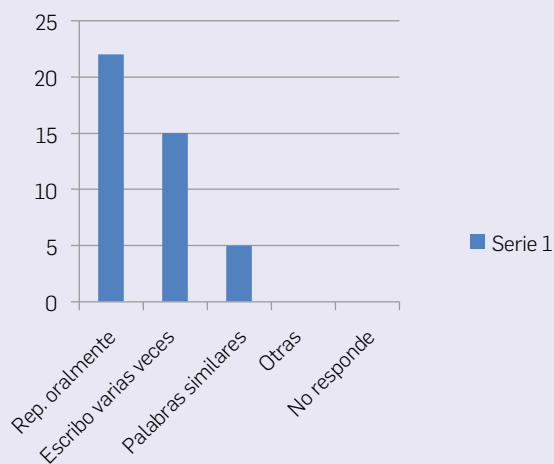
<b>T</b>	<b>S/T</b>	<b>Preguntas/respuestas</b>	<b>Category</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Qué materiales utilizas para aprender vocabulario?	
<b>22</b>	<b>S5</b>	El cuaderno, la explicación de la seño, el diccionario	N-t/Du
<b>23</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Cómo te gustaría que la profesora te enseñara vocabulario?	
<b>24</b>	<b>S5</b>	Diciéndole la traducción, normalmente	
<b>25</b>	<b>T</b>	¿Qué recursos te gustaría utilizar para aprender vocabulario?	
<b>26</b>	<b>S5</b>	El libro, el cuaderno, revistas, diccionario.	N-t/Du

Repetition: 3 Dictionary use: 5 Note-taking: 2**T: turn**

## Appendix L:

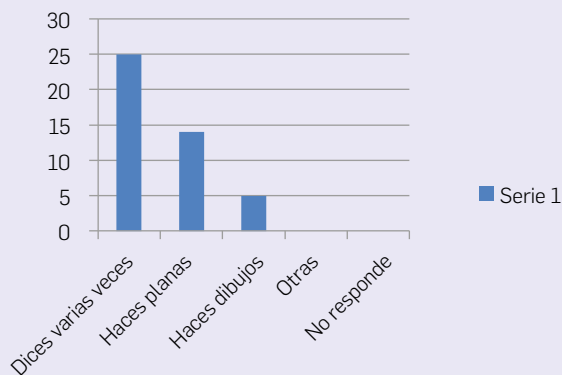
### Survey

#### 1. Cuando aprendes una nueva palabra tu...



**Most of the students use oral or written repetition to learn words.**

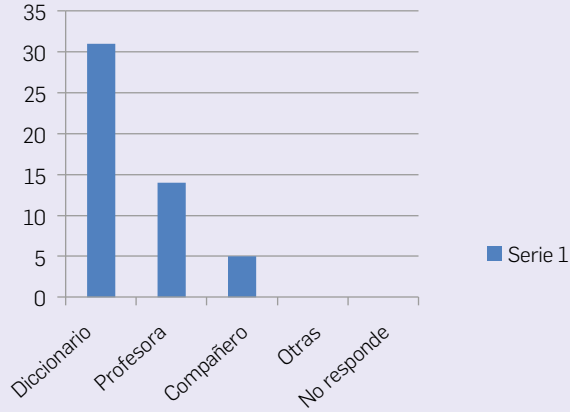
#### 2. Para memorizar palabras tú...



**Most of them use oral repetition to memorize words.**

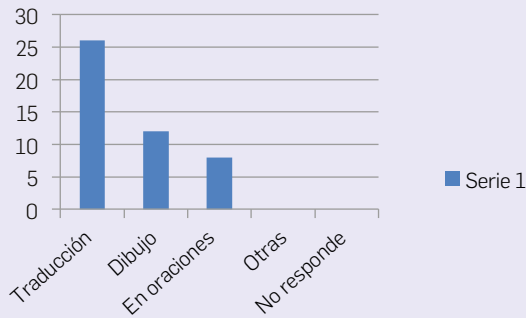
## Appendix LL:

3. Cuando quieres saber que significa una palabra tu...



**Most of them use the dictionary to know words meaning.**

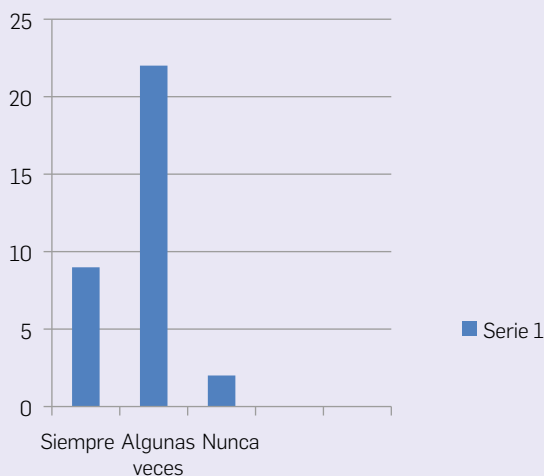
4. Cómo te gusta que la profesora te enseñe nuevas palabras?



**A great quantity of students feels comfortable and confident when teacher give words translation.**

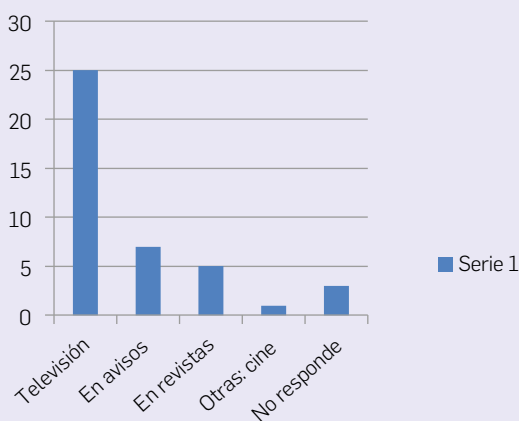
## Appendix M:

5. Con qué frecuencia ves películas en inglés?



**The vast majority of the students sometimes watch English film.**

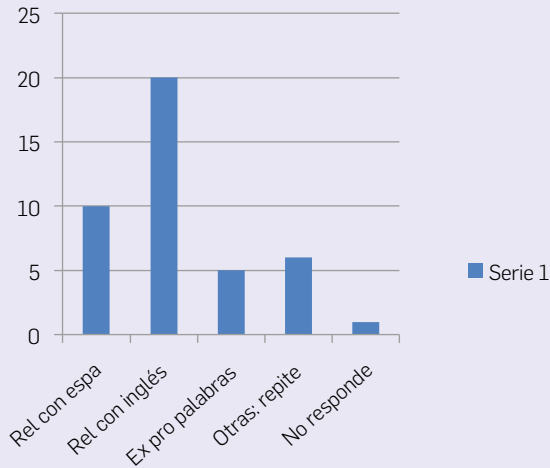
6. En que otro lugar diferente al salón de clases te gusta ver inglés?



**The most common situation that students use to observe English apart from the classroom is watching television.**

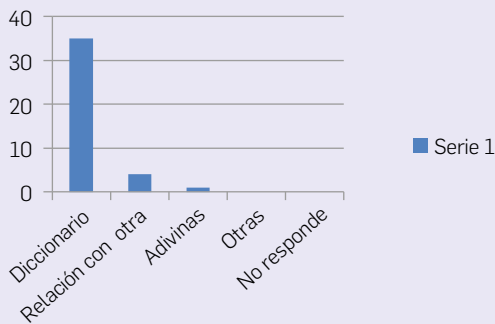
## Appendix N:

7. Cuándo aprendes una palabra nueva en inglés, tú...



**When learning a Word most of them make relation with another in English. Even though repetition option does not appear, some students wrote it as the strategy that they usually use.**

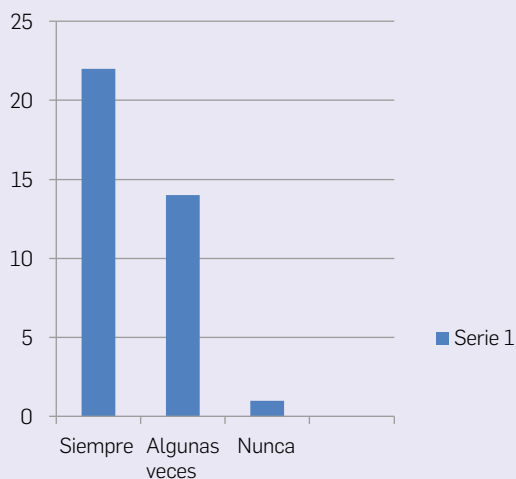
8. Para saber el significado de una palabra, tu...



**The vast majority use the dictionary find the meaning words.**

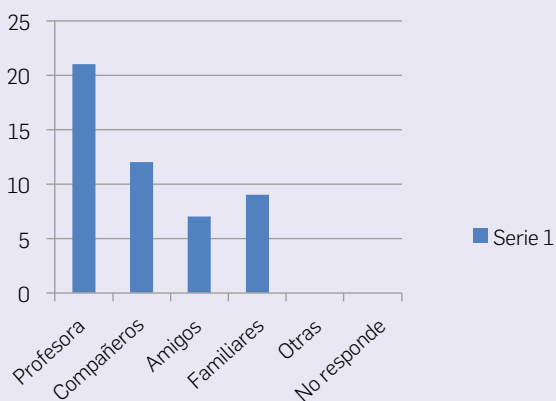
## Appendix O:

9. Con qué frecuencia utilizas el vocabulario aprendido en clase?



**Most of the students always use the vocabulary learnt in classes.**

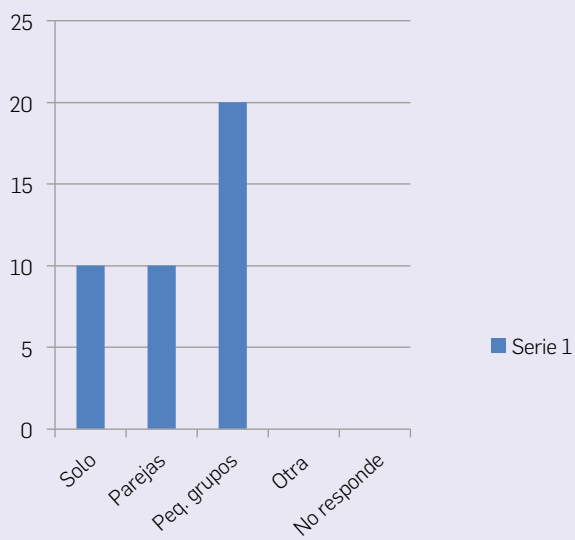
10. Con quiénes utilizas el vocabulario aprendido?



**A big amount of students use the vocabulary learnt in class with the teacher.**

## Appendix P:

### 11. Cómo te gusta trabajar en clases?





## CHAPTER 10

# Vocabulary Learning Strategies 10th Grade Students Use To Interact Orally In Class

Boris Piñeres Yanes  
Sirley Martínez Montes

### Resumen

Durante el proceso de aprendizaje los estudiantes son expuestos a una serie de actividades las cuales promueven el recordar los conocimientos previos. Cuando se aprende una lengua extranjera, estos conocimientos se refieren al uso de palabras “correctas”, estructuras completas o significados precisos, de igual manera están muy relacionados con la adquisición de vocabulario y el papel que este tiene al integrar las diferentes habilidades en clase.

Esta investigación está asociada con el uso que los estudiantes hacen de estrategias específicas para aprender vocabulario y como ellas están ligadas a la interacción oral en clase. Segler (*et al* 2002) definen las estrategias de vocabulario como una subdivisión de las estrategias de aprendizaje de una lengua, las que se pueden aplicar a una gran variedad de actividades comunicativas, que van desde las más independientes (vocabulario, pronunciación y gramática) hasta las más integradoras como la comunicación oral y comprensión lectora.

En consecuencia, el uso de las estrategias de vocabulario está directamente relacionado con una interacción oral exitosa en clase, ya que alguna de ellas, le permiten al estudiante sobrellevar su deficiencia de vocabulario al momento de hablar con otros.

El presente trabajo investigativo, está organizado en (nueve) 9 secciones, de las cuales las más importantes ó relevantes son: la descripción del problema, donde se describe el contexto y la situación problemática. Otra sección importante es el marco teórico el cual provee las teorías

necesarias para apoyar nuestra investigación y muestra algunos estudios previos llevados a cabo por diferentes autores en este campo.

De igual manera, se explica la metodología empleada, las técnicas y los instrumentos pertenecientes a este. Además, se presenta una descripción paso a paso de cómo estas técnicas e instrumentos fueron aplicadas, con el fin de guiar al lector para que entienda el proceso de recolección y análisis de datos y las categorías emergentes a partir de este.

Finalmente, en las secciones de resultados y discusión se establecen con el objetivo de interpretar los hallazgos obtenidos y posibles implicaciones que estos tienen dentro de las prácticas académicas en la escuela.

## Palabras clave

Vocabulario, aprendizaje, estrategias, interacción oral.

## Abstract

During the learning process students are exposed to a series of activities which promote recalling of previous knowledge. When learning a foreign language this knowledge could deal with the use of 'correct' words, complete patterns or special meanings, this is closely related to vocabulary acquisition and the role it has when integrating different skills in the class.

This research study is associated with students' use of specific strategies to learn vocabulary and how they are linked to oral interaction in class, Segler *et al* (2002) define vocabulary learning strategies as a subclass of language learning strategies, which are applicable to a wide variety of language learning task, ranging from the more isolated (e.g. vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar) to integrative tasks like oral communication and reading comprehension.

Subsequently, the use of vocabulary learning strategies is directly related to a successful oral interaction in class, since some of them allow the students to cope with their vocabulary's lacks at the moment of speaking with others.

The present research study is organized in nine sections and among these, the most relevant ones are; the description of the problem where the context is described and the problematic situation is stated. Another important section is the theoretical framework which provides some necessary theories that support our research and presents some previous studies carried out by different authors in this field.

Likewise, the methodology employed is explained and the techniques and instruments belonging to it. Besides, a step by step description of how the techniques and instruments were applied is explained to guide the readers to understand the data collection and analysis process, and what categories evolved from them.

Finally, the results and discussion sections are intended to interpret the findings obtained from the data, and the possible influence they have inside academic practices in the school.

### **Key words**

Vocabulary, Learning. Strategies, Oral interaction.

## 1. Description of the Problem

Campo Alegre school is a public institution located in the rural area of Lorica (Córdoba). It is almost 22 kilometers away from the urban area. This school offers Pre-school, primary and high-school levels. The region where the school is situated is mainly agricultural, and its main products are “yam” and “plantain”. These products have their own festivals which are kind of cultural sharing where people pay tribute to their traditions.

This institution is formally organized and has a pleasant atmosphere. The school lacks classrooms, library, labs, sports areas and teachers’ room. A total number of 957 students attend school from nearby villages and they commute by donkey, motorcycle, bike and on foot. Most of them are from low income families with many social and familiar problems.

Referring to the teachers who work in Campo Alegre School, it is noticed that all of them are graduated in education, but some of them do not have job stability. However they do their best despite the situation.

Tenth grade students with an average age of fifteen years were chosen for this study. Although some of them present difficulties during the language learning process, most of them are cooperative and dynamic and seem to be students with a great ability to interact.

Learning vocabulary has become a very demanding matter for students in this institution. It is observed that students present difficulties to retrieve many words they have already studied when trying to communicate. Furthermore, it seems to be hard for them to recognize the function of the different words and how to use them when they are taking part in an oral exchange. Besides, it is noticed that they can only produce oral communication without hesitating when they first write down and then perform or participate in the proposed activities.

The above mentioned aspect is revealed in the majority of the classroom activities which involve students’ use of oral communication. For instance, performing a conversation or a dialogue, interviewing somebody, reporting about a reading, giving opinion or simply answering teacher’s questions in the class.

## 2. Research Questions

- › Which Vocabulary learning strategies do 10<sup>th</sup> grade students at a public rural school from Lorica use to interact orally in class?
- › Which strategies students use are successful to produce oral interaction?
- › Which strategies are not successful to produce oral interaction?

## 3. Objectives

### 3.1 General Objective

- › To identify vocabulary learning strategies 10<sup>th</sup> grade students at a public rural school from Lorica use to interact orally in class.

### 3.2 Especific Objectives

- › To classify successful and not successful learning strategies students use to produce oral interaction in class.
- › To evaluate vocabulary learning strategies 10<sup>th</sup> grade students use in oral interaction.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

According to Read (2000) our everyday concept of vocabulary is dominated by the dictionary. We tend to think of it as an inventory of individual words with their associated meanings. This view is shared by many second language learners, who see the task of vocabulary learning as a matter memorizing long list of L2 words. However, when we look more closely at vocabulary in the light of current developments in language teaching, Read suggested that it is necessary to address a number of questions that have the effect of progressively broadening the scope of what we need to assess. Such questions could be; what is a word? What about larger lexical items? What does it mean to know a lexical item? Answering these questions we can have other opinions about what vocabulary is.

## 4.1 Learning Strategies

‘Language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviour, 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 new language; Strategies are tools for self-directed involvement necessary for developing communicative ability’ (Oxford, 1990). In terms of communicative ability development, students usually make use of different strategies to achieve their communicative goals. It is possible to suggest that most of these strategies are related to vocabulary acquisition, conceiving vocabulary as a basic tool that gives self-confidence to students in participating in oral exchanges.

## 4.2 Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS)

Many researchers especially linguistics and language teachers have been interested in vocabulary learning strategies for a long time, it is maybe because of the need to have specific answers on how students can improve their ability to use the language, not only reading and writing but listening and speaking too.

With regard to VLS, Schmitt (2002) says, it seems that many learners use strategies for learning vocabulary especially when compared to language tasks that integrate several linguistic skills (e.g., oral presentations that involve composing the speech content, producing comprehensible pronunciation, fielding questions, etc.).

Schmitt (quoted in Coady, 1997 chapter 7, p. 217) provides a very useful overview of the rise in importance of strategy used in second language learning, noting that it grew out of an interest in the learners’ active role in the learning process, There are numerous VLS classification; however Schmitt and McCarthy (1997) propose a group that reflects the differences among vocabulary learning process:

- › Determination Strategies (DET) this can be done through guessing from one’s structural knowledge of a language, from an L1 cognate, guessing from context, or using reference material.
- › Social strategies (SOC) use interaction with other people to improve language learning.

- › Memory strategies (MEM) (traditionally known as mnemonics) involve relating the word to be retained with some previously learned knowledge, using some form of imagery, or grouping.
- › Cognitive strategies (COG) exhibit the common function of manipulation or transformation of the target language by the learner. (Oxford, 1990, p. 43).
- › Metacognitive strategies (MET) involve a conscious overview of learning process and making decisions about planning, monitoring, or evaluating the best way to study. It also includes which words are worth studying and which are not, as well as persevering with the words one chooses to learn (Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997, p. 7)

In this study, the research group expects the students to use the above mentioned strategies specially the social strategies because these promote the interaction in the classroom among students and teachers.

Coady (1997) says that there have been a number of attempts to develop taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies, usually as part of a piece of research into learners' strategy use. Gu and Johson (quoted in Coady, 1997, p. 217)

'developed a substantial list divided into: beliefs about vocabulary learning, metacognitive regulation, guessing strategies, dictionary strategies, note taking strategies, memory strategies (rehearsal), memory strategies (encoding) and activation strategies'.

Besides, Coady proposes a taxonomy which tries to separate aspects of vocabulary knowledge (what is involved in knowing a word) from sources of vocabulary knowledge and learning processes.

Despite variety of taxonomies suggested by different authors, it is decided to select Schmitt's one, because it specifies some processes observed in class, such as the use of dictionary, ask the teacher or ask a classmate, etc.

### 4.3 Features of Communication Activities that Encourage Vocabulary Learning

As Nation & Newton (2001) say there are different features to be considered to develop communication activities that encourage vocabulary learning:

The first one deals with the face to face nature of communication in group activities that can help the students to set their speech to suitable level for the particular listeners and to adjust it when listeners indicate a lack of understanding. Second, the meaningful context these kinds of activities generate. Third, the repetition of new items during the course of the activity, fourth, having encountered new items, learners are likely to be required to use them productively in the activity. (Long & Porter quoted in Nation & Newton 200, p. 244) consider that a group-based peer interaction typically provides a learning environment in which learners can make errors and express misunderstanding without the adverse effects of exposing their weakness to the whole class or to the teacher (Nation & Newton, 2001, p. 244).

To sum up Nation expresses the following:

There are some psycholinguistic and pedagogic reasons for integrating communication activities for improving learners' vocabulary knowledge. But whether and to what extent a learners' vocabulary knowledge will be extended through these activities is dependent on certain features of the activities themselves (Nation, T. & Newton, J. 2001, p. 244).

### 4.4 Oral Interaction

The final aim of any foreign language learning process is to develop on the learners abilities to communicate. However, it is thought as one most difficult aspect, because it requires some previous knowledge and current practice, which assure learners to be able to interact in the target language. Bygate (1987) considers that:



'One of the basic problems in foreign language teaching is to prepare learners to be able to use the language. How this preparation is done and how successful it is, depends very much on how we as teachers understand our aims. For instance, it is obvious that in order to be able to speak a foreign language it is necessary to know a certain amount of grammar and vocabulary. By giving learners 'speaking practice' and 'oral exams' we recognize that there is a difference between knowledge about a language and skill in using it. A fundamental difference is that while both can be understood and memorized, only a skill can be imitated and practiced' (Bygate, 1987, p. 3).

According to Bygate, there are two basic ways in which something we do can be seen as a skill. First there are motor-perceptive skills, but in addition to this there are also interaction skills.

- › Motor-perceptive skill: they involve perceiving, recalling, and articulating in correct order sounds and structures of the language. It is the context-free kind of skill. Some authors discussed about it because it did not solve some learning problems, an important one is that of ensuring a satisfactory transition from supervised learning in the classroom to real life use of the skill. This transition is often called 'transfer of skills'. As Wilkins points out, if all language produced in the classroom is determined by the teacher, we are protecting the learner from the additional burden of having to make his own choices. (Bygate, 1987, p. 5).

The point is that in addition to the motor-perceptive skills there are other skills to be developed, which as Wilkins (quoted in Bygate, 1987, p. 6) says, are those of controlling one's own language production and having to make choices. This kind of skill is called 'interaction skill'. This is the skill of using knowledge and basic motor-perceptive skills to achieve communication.

- › The aspects stated above are relevant in our research because they make a difference in whether a piece of communication is carefully prepared or whether it is composed in the spur of the moment. This can affect the student's choice of words and their style. They can help to identify ways in which learners effectively use knowledge for reciprocal interaction under normal processing conditions.

It is considered that in spoken interaction, speaker and listener do not merely have to be good processors of the spoken word that also have to be able to produce coherent language in the difficult circumstances of spoken communication. It is also useful if they are good communicators, that is, good at saying what they want to say in a way which the listener finds understandable

## 5. Methodology

The methodology chosen for this research study is phenomenography which is a qualitative research methodology that investigates the qualitatively different ways in which people experience something or think about something (Marton, 1986). So, in this study, it attempts to describe the phenomenon of students' use of vocabulary learning strategies when interacting orally in class. Besides, this kind of method allows researchers to describe a group behaviour without conditioning it, giving the opportunity to analyse the data from a less subjective viewpoint. Then the focus of the phenomenon description depends on actor's experiences and in the "ways of seeing something" as experienced and described by the researcher (Bowden, 2005). Likewise, Marton (1994) suggests that as phenomenography is an empirical research, the researcher (interviewer) is not studying his or her awareness and reflection, but that of the subjects (interviewed)

Phenomenography method aims to interpret the information based on reactions and opinions in a group, in order to identify the needed information. As Van Lier (quoted in Ellis, 1997, p. 18) points out 'where confirmatory research seeks causes, interpretative research looks for reasons'. According to this, phenomenography method lets the researchers to access people's experience during social practice without intervention and permits the data to be reported with validity and reliability.

The main results of phenomenography research are categories of description of the various conceptions of the phenomenon. Enlwestle (1897) exposes that it involves identifying the conceptions and looking for their underlying meanings and the relationship between them.

## 5.1 Data Collection Techniques

Qualitative research depends on a variety of techniques for gathering data. The use of multiple data collection techniques contribute to the true worthiness of the data. Bearing in mind the question emerging from this study, the most suitable data collection techniques are; Observations because they allow members of the group to reflect on their interaction in class activities giving the possibility to give a feedback by themselves.

Another technique is in depth interviews, since they provide a more comfortable atmosphere for students to talk freely about the reactions and viewpoints they assume when facing oral interactions in class activities.

Likewise, it could be relevant to apply the focus group technique as, students could provide information about their vocabulary learning strategies and choices in oral activities inside class.

Observations were developed in four sessions making use of two instruments: Field- notes format and video-recordings. The first instrument was selected in order to keep an individual register of the participants' use of vocabulary learning strategies. The second instrument allowed us to make a feedback on subjects' vocabulary learning strategies choices during the activities in real time.

The in depth interview was applied following the observation stage and held in a different place outside the school in order to create a better atmosphere and to assure the quality of the audio recordings. The aim of this instrument was to go deeper into participants' opinions, conceptions and beliefs about their teacher, the subject matter and oral participation in class.

Regarding the focus group, it was carried out after designing and organizing the list of topics based on the observation from the video-recordings. The chosen place for developing this technique was a pleasant site outside the school, with the purpose of providing a confident environment for the selected participants to talk. The exercise was directed towards self-evaluating the choices made by students during the oral class activities.

After applying these techniques and instruments, we continued with the analysis of the data collected, with the aim to address questions raised at the beginning of this research study. From this information emerged two new categories, different from the priori ones.

## 5.2 Categories

### 5.2.1 Priori categories

The priori categories on which this study is based on Schmitt's taxonomy about vocabulary learning strategies (VLS), which is considered to be one of the most completed effort to create a real taxonomy in this field. However, some sub-strategies were not taken into consideration according to the study's aim. They are described below:

<b>CATEGORIES</b>	<b>SUBCATEGORIES</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>
Social strategies (SOC)	Ask the teacher Ask the classmate	Use interaction with others to improve language learning.
Memory strategies (MEM)	Word sound spelling Key word method Physical action Use of cognates Paraphrasing word meaning	Relate new material with the existing knowledge.
Cognitive strategies (COG)	Verbal/written repetition Note taking	Exhibit the common function of manipulation or transformation of the target language by the learner.
Metacognitive strategies (MET)	Test yourself Skip/pass a new word	Strategies involve a conscious overview of the learning process and making decisions about planning, monitoring or evaluating the best way to study.
Determination strategies (DET)	Consult the dictionary Use of word lists	To face the discovery of a new word's meaning without recourse to another's person expertise.

Adapted from (Schmitt, N. 1997. Vocabulary learning strategies. In N.Schmitt & M. McCarthy (Eds.), Vocabulary: Description, acquisition, and pedagogy. (p. 199-227).

### 5.2.2 Emergent categories

As it was mentioned above in this study, two new categories were discovered, which helped to clarify some of students choices. They are:

CATEGORIES	DEFINITION
Students' activities likes	The tendencies that students have in regarding to the different kind of classroom activities, and in which they feel more willing to participate
Students' conception about the teacher	Students' own concept about the teacher, and ways, he or she influences their participation in class.

## 6. Results

Regarding to question number 1 (Which vocabulary learning strategies tenth grade students at a public rural school in Lorica use to interact orally in class?), it was found, throughout the field format observation, (see appendix 1) that the selected participants tend to use some specific strategies when carrying out oral activities in class as it is shown in the following table.

In the table, it could be said that student number 3 made use of a greater range of vocabulary learning strategies, besides, it was noticed that the most used strategies were determination (consult the dictionary activity 1 and 2), social (ask teacher and ask classmate activity 1 and 2), memory (use of cognates activity 1, 2 and 3) and cognitive (verbal/written repetition activity 1, 2 and 3). In the contrast, it is important to mention that student number 5 did not show any evidence of using vocabulary learning strategies because he/she demonstrated to be unwilling to participate in any of the three observed activities.

Concerning to the same question, the in-depth interview also revealed that students use the above mentioned strategies when communicating orally in class. For example questions 2, 6 and 7 showed meta-cognitive strategies use (see appendix 3), question 5 and 6 indicated that the participants applied memory strategies such as study word sound and spelling, key word method and use of cognates. Likewise, some questions gave clues about the development of oral skills (question 7),

ACTIVITY	Determination strategies		Social strategies		Memory strategies						Cognitive strategies		Meta-cognitive strategies	
	Consult the Dictionary	Use Word list	ask teacher	Ask classmate	Word Sound spelling	Key word method	Physical action	Use cognates	Paraphrase word meaning	Verbal-written repetition	Note taking	Test yourself	Skip/pass new word	
<b>1</b>	S1 S3		S3	S2		S3			S3	S3	S1 S2 S3 S4	S1 S2 S3		
<b>2</b>	S1 S2 S3 S4		S1 S2 S3 S4	S1 S2 S3			S1 S2 S3			S1 S2 S3				
<b>3</b>					S1 S2 S3 S4		S3	S3		S1 S3		S1		

and some others questions like 4, 8 and 9 helped to discover new categories (students' activity likes and teacher's influence).

Examples of these emergent categories are presented to clarify the obtained information;

› **Students' activity likes**

- Question number 4: ¿te gusta participar en la clase de Inglés? ¿en qué forma lo haces?
- Student number 4: “muy poco si no sé me da miedo, te quedas callada. Salir al tablero”.
- Student number 3: “si me encanta, me doy cuenta cuán importante es, y como lo manejo. En las actividades como frases, diálogos, preguntas en Inglés, otras en donde se necesita expresarse”
- Student number 5: No casi, en actividades escritas y en el tablero”. (See appendix 2 and 3).

The answers show that the participants have differences in their activity's likes. However it is noticed that students 4 and 5 tend to prefer written activities rather than oral ones.

› **Students' conception about the teacher:**

- Question number 8: ¿Qué opinión tienes de tu profesor de Inglés?
- Student number 2: “explica, sabe lo que dice, dinámico, busca la forma para que entiendan”
- Student number 4: “enseña, que pone todo para que aprendamos, a pesar de que es inglés no la hace aburrida”
- Student number 3: “en mi opinión le gusta enseñar en forma divertida, es muy dinámico”.

In general, it can be said that the students possess a good opinion and conception about their teacher and his/her teaching practices, so it is seemed to be an important element promoting class participation.

The application of the in-depth interview also allowed us to corroborate the students' use of some vocabulary strategies that are held as prior categories. We have taken some examples to illustrate the findings.

› **Meta-cognitive strategies: (test yourself)**

- Question number 2: ¡Teniendo en cuenta ese tiempo! ¿Cómo crees que es tu manejo de vocabulario para usarlo en las actividades orales que se te proponen en clase?
- Student number 3: bueno necesito mucha ayuda, pero no tengo muchas dificultades y pienso que es bueno.
- Student number 1: es bueno, no tan excelente, lo que no entiendo le pregunta a el teacher.
- Student number 2: regular, más o menos, las palabras que están el texto o en la historia.

In terms of this category, it could be stated that although students do not make use of technical vocabulary to express their own knowledge about their use and control over vocabulary in oral activities, it is possible to see that they can evaluate their level about vocabulary's manage.

› **Meta-cognitive strategies: (skip/pass a new word)**

- Question number 7: ¿Cómo haces para hacerte entender?
- Student number 4: corregir lo que dije mal, busco y la corrijo para decirla bien, si no la dejo así.
- Student number 3: utilizo palabras más cotidianas, que se utilicen más en mí entorno y de manera más breve.

Throughout these answers, we can interpret that the subjects are conscious to avoid the use of some words that they think are difficult for the listener, so they change them for other common words.

› **Memory strategies: (study word sound and spelling)**

- Question number 5: ¿Cómo te sientes cuando tienes que participar en una actividad oral?
- Student number 3: principalmente nerviosa, pero estoy segura de lo que voy a decir y participo.



In regard with this category, only one of the participants showed awareness of its use, but in a very vague way. Nevertheless, it is significant for us because it consolidated the information gathered during the observation process.

› In the same vein, **Memory strategies: (keyword method and use of cognates)**

- Question number 6: ¿cómo te sientes cuando al participar en una actividad oral no logras que te entiendan lo que quieres decir?
- Student number 1: me siento aterrada, pongo vocabulario más entendible, más básicos.
- Student number 3: que todo ha sido un fracaso, necesito más práctica y especificar lo que voy a decir.
- Student number 2: nerviosa, con rabia porque creo que no me prestan atención, que no estas explicando bien, no encuentro la palabra que quiero expresar.

Here it was found that participants seek to look for options in vocabulary when they are involved in any oral exchange, like trying to use meaningful words or cognates in order to be understood by the listener.

› **Social strategies: (ask teacher)**

- Question number 7: ¿Cómo haces para hacerte entender?
- Student number 2: “le pido ayuda al profesor”.

Referring to social strategies, specially ask teacher, it can be seen that it is a consistent category that is commonly used by the participants. However, it is also perceived that only few of them are aware of it. Moreover, it is observed that participant number 2 is the one who tends to use it more.

› **Interaction Skills**

- Question number 7: ¿Cómo haces para hacerte entender?
- Student number 4: “corregir lo que dije mal, busco y la corrijo para decirla bien, Si no se la dejo así”.

- Student number 3: “utilizo palabras más cotidianas, que se utilicen más en mi entorno, y de manera más breve.

In this priori category, it was detected that the participants have the notion of what is wrong and try to correct themselves in order to develop a successful performance in class activities. (See appendix 2 and 3).

## 7. Discussion

This research study explored the tenth grade students’ use of vocabulary learning strategies to interact orally in class. The participants were observed during different class activities, later on they were interviewed to determine their beliefs and conceptions about English learning. They also participated in a focus group interview, in which they were asked about their reasons of some vocabulary choices in class activities.

The obtained results show us that the participants apply a great variety of vocabulary learning strategies in order to cope with the difficulties that appear during an oral exchange in class. It could be said that not all of them were successful, for example, determination strategies specially list of words which do not promote real interaction, since it needs to interrupt the communication while looking for the required word to be understood.

On the other hand, there are some strategies which seem to enrich the oral interaction, because they help the students to adjust his/her vocabulary to be successful in his/her communication. For instance, social strategies (ask teacher and ask a classmate) seem to be a first hand source when the students want to continue with their oral exchange, as they allow a reciprocal feedback in the same time they are talking.

## Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, social strategies (ask teacher & ask a classmate) seem to be the most favoured strategies to enrich oral interaction, because they help the students to adjust their vocabulary in the different activities to be successful in their communication.

On the contrary, determination strategies, especially list of words appear to be not successful in helping participants to interact orally in class activities, since it is needed to interrupt the communication while they looking for the required word to continue the interchange and being understood.

Finally, two new categories emerged from the application of the instruments, students' activities likes which demonstrates that learners are still afraid of interacting orally in the classroom because of their lack of vocabulary, and that they prefer written activities rather than oral ones. Another emergent category is students' conception about the teacher, which consolidated that social strategies are predominant in our context. In case of promoting students' class participation, the conception students possess about their teacher could be an important factor that can give them self-confidence or not to participate more in class.

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## CHAPTER 11

# Differences in the Types of Vocabulary Used among students of Three Grades of a Bilingual School

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### Resumen

Se espera que los estudiantes de una segunda lengua incrementen la variedad de palabras usadas tanto cuando hablan como cuando escriben. Sin embargo, muchos de ellos llegan al punto en donde no muestran un progreso y aún se ve que hay un retroceso en cuanto a la cantidad de vocabulario usado. Este estudio trata acerca de la variedad de vocabulario que tienen los estudiantes de diferentes grados de la sección bilingüe de un colegio y se enfoca en identificarlo, describirlo y compararlo en diferentes tareas escritas. La investigación distingue algunas categorías que agrupan los patrones de vocabulario mostrados como cognados, colocaciones y el uso de palabras específicas para nominar objetos, evidenciadas en textos de diferente naturaleza. La metodología usada en este estudio es la etnografía ya que el objeto principal es descriptivo y contrastivo.

### Palabras clave

Desarrollo de vocabulario, escritura, cognatos, colocación, palabras específicas.

## **Abstract**

Students of a second language are expected to increase the variety of words they use both when they speak and write. However, many of them get to a point where they do not progress and even regress in the amount of vocabulary used. This study deals with the variety of vocabulary students use in different grades of the bilingual section of a school and points out to identify, describe and compare the vocabulary used in different writing tasks. The research distinguishes some categories that group together vocabulary patterns such as cognates, collocation words, and usage of specific words to nominate objects, evidenced in texts of different nature. The methodology used in this study is ethnography since its goal is mainly descriptive and contrastive.

## **Key Words**

Vocabulary Development – Writing – Cognates - Collocation – Specific Words

# 1. Introduction

As students of English evolve in their language use, they are expected to use more vocabulary in both speaking and writing. However, it is just in writing that students are more dependent on a varied lexicon because they need to convey clear messages, implying organization and elaboration, with no other tools than words. Texts which are poor detail sometimes are neither clear nor motivating to read. In addition, the wrong selection of words can also confuse the reader.

This study deals with the type of vocabulary students use in three different grades in the bilingual section of a school. Its main aim is to identify the general characteristics existing in every grade studied and to establish categories to find out patterns of distinction to verify whether there is a clear progress or not. We cover here then collocation words, cognates and words that are used unequivocally.

The school where the research was carried out is located in the south of Cordoba. There are about 1400 students and 110 teachers. The school is a private institution owned by a multinational company that provides their employees' children basic education. Therefore most of the students are mine workers' children and very few are children from the community whose parents do not work in the mine.

The school is semi-bilingual since groups of students are divided into two sections known as regular and bilingual. The regular section has an English five-hours per week intensity and the other subjects are taught in Spanish. It has three groups of about 25 students in each grade. On the other hand, the bilingual section covers up to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. It has an English eight-hours per week intensity in the first three years. And from grade, 4 to 8. They have English five-hours per week intensity. Other subjects such as Math, Geometry and Science are taught in English in all the grades of the section. Social Studies is taught in English from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. The other subjects are taught in Spanish. Each grade has about 25 students and there is only one group per grade. One teacher is in charge of all the subjects taught in English from 1 to 4. And from 5<sup>th</sup> onwards different teachers guide the students in each of the subjects.

The students at the school take standardized exams that evaluate their performance. One is the Secondary Level English Proficiency Test (SLEP) taken by 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students and another is the Michigan English Language Institute College English Test (Melicet) taken by 11<sup>th</sup> grade students. The average results achieved by the students have placed them in a high-intermediate level. In the ICFES exam, the school has been ranked as “Muy Superior” for over four years, showing a consistent performance.

The total number of students in the bilingual section is 185 and their characteristics are: most of them come from a middle -social level and have followed all their studies in the same school. Students start 1<sup>st</sup> grade when they are about 7 years old and graduate when they are 18. There are more girls than boys. Students that are part of the bilingual section have an average academic performance better than the ones in the non-bilingual section.

The teachers are non-native English speakers but have a high-intermediate level as evidenced by a standardized test they have to take every two years. All English teachers in the bilingual section come from Bogota since it is perceived that the level of graduates in Universities located in Bogota is more competent and most of them have lived in a country where English is spoken as the first language. Teachers use the same methodology and program as well as the same book series to teach (Scott Foresman – Reading) in the first 6 grades. In the last two grades of the section, i.e. 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, students follow the New Cutting Edge Intermediate book.

The phenomenon already mentioned in the first paragraph is a general concern mainly because regardless of the great quantity of vocabulary students are exposed to, they do not use it in writing. They have their own list of words which is rather limited and which becomes an obstacle when communicating their thoughts. Sometimes the texts do not demonstrate good language proficiency. This issue was addressed by Smith (2003b) who, through his research, indicated that to perform well in writing students need to possess a rich vocabulary.

Learning outcomes are affected because the strategies to cope with lack of vocabulary are different in speaking and in writing. Hence the observable disparity in the vocabulary usage that students have



both when they write and when they speak. There is no one to one relationship. What they communicate orally seems to be richer and more complete than what they communicate in writing. It is therefore difficult to evaluate what students really know when they write texts.

This paper presents the description of the problem, the questions that are intended to be answered in order to identify evidence of the issue we dealt with, the objectives we set once we identified the problem, a theoretical framework, the explanation on the methodology used, the results, a discussion and a brief conclusion. At the end the format of the activities used to collect the information along with some examples of the original texts written by the students, and charts with the words employed divided into categories are attached.

## 2. Description of the Problem

Students achieve a certain level of proficiency and seem to stop or even regress, especially as they get to higher grades. Students feel limited to use English in writing and find it difficult to express their thoughts. This phenomenon is perceived every time they hand in writing tasks such as story reviews, description of events, personal experience narrations, summaries, and so forth. There is hardly any evidence of word usage different from the basic acquired in the lower grades. This can take the reader to misunderstand the message.

Both teacher and students are involved in the problem. Teachers do not promote or use strategies to help students acquire the vocabulary through constant repetition or through systematic exercises that make students implement new vocabulary. On the other hand, students do not challenge themselves to learn new words and to increase the number of words they usually use.

This fact has been noticeable in the written texts students do with very few exceptions. Only a minority of students, who are engaged in their learning, challenge themselves to use new words that they listen to in songs, learn from TV programs or read in the captions of the movies. The tendency is to overuse the same words regardless of the type of text to be written.

## 2.1 Research Questions

- › What differences are there in the type of vocabulary used between different grades of the bilingual section of a private school in writing tasks?
- › What differences are there in the type of vocabulary used between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students of the bilingual section of a private school in writing tasks?
- › What differences are there in the type of vocabulary used between 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students of the bilingual section of a private school in writing tasks?

## 2.2 Research Objectives

- › To identify the differences in the type of vocabulary used between different grades of the bilingual section of a private school in writing tasks.
- › To describe the vocabulary used in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades of the bilingual section of a private school in writing tasks.
- › To compare the vocabulary used in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades of the bilingual section of a private school in writing tasks.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Baker *et al.* (1995) acknowledged the importance of vocabulary achievement. They stated “Not only do students need a rich body of word knowledge to succeed in basic skill areas, they also need a specialized vocabulary to learn content area material” (p. 35).

Research has proven that the beginning of vocabulary learning must be early if children are going to perform successfully in school. (Miller cited in Liberman & Liberman, 1990) suggested that students learn an amazing number of words during their early school years, as many as approximately 3,000 per year on an average, or 8 words per day. However, the number of words students learn varies greatly. As some students are learning eight or more words per day, other students are learning only one or two.

Coomber, Peet, and Smith (1988) proposed a classification of levels of vocabulary proficiency that a student must work through. They describe these levels as:

- › Listening vocabulary: composed of words whose meanings we recognize when we hear them.
- › Reading vocabulary: composed of words whose meanings we recognize when we encounter them in our reading.
- › Writing vocabulary: composed of words we know well enough that we could use them in our writing.
- › Speaking vocabulary: composed of words we use in our speaking.

Students who have mastered a vocabulary word at one level may not have mastered the word at a different level. In fact, “reading vocabularies are usually largest, followed by listening vocabularies, given that speech is less formal than writing, we normally encounter more complex words in what we read than in what we hear.”

We can conclude that acquiring “Writing vocabulary” becomes one of the most difficult issues in language learning because of the degree of formality implied in writing and the need of elaboration. As a result, students must master the ability to understand new words first through listening, and second through reading before they can learn to use vocabulary in writing.

Baker *et al.* (1995) found considerable differences between students in the number of words known. This vocabulary discrepancy tends to increase significantly all over school. Numerous reasons may contribute to the different rates of vocabulary growth. Biological factors that may partially account for differential rates of vocabulary growth include general language deficits and memory problems. Also, a strong connection has been found between environmental indicators such as socioeconomic status and vocabulary knowledge, indicating that home factors may contribute substantially to students’ vocabulary knowledge. In a straight line teaching word meanings does not effectively reduce the breach between students with poor versus rich vocabulary because of the magnitude of the disparity.

An explanation on the reasons why students display differences in the vocabulary they use when they speak and when they write appears in feature 19 in 'Towards a language-based theory of learning' by (Halliday, 1993):

In the first years of schooling these two factors come together: children have to struggle with the written medium, and they have to monitor their own learning process. The result is that when they have to present their knowledge in written form, they typically regress in semiotic age by anything up to 3 years. A teacher may get a class of 7-year-olds, in preparation for a writing task, talking on some topic with a high level of fluency and common-sense understanding; yet, when they come to write about the topic, their text is in the language of a child of 3 years. For example: *I am a dinosaur. I was hatched out of an egg. Today I was hungry. I ate some leaves.*<sup>1</sup>

A writing vocabulary requires a student to have a long-term memory for new words. This requires that the student becomes "actively involved in the words they are learning". Coomber *et al.* (1988) have pinpointed three different methods of elaborative practice: distinctiveness, decision-making, and generation of material. Distinctiveness involves remembering a word because it is dramatic in some fashion. Decision-making is related to the moment we make the choice of either learning or using a word. A student will remember the definition of a word better if he or she makes the decision to remember it himself or herself. Generation of material is related to producing something with what is learned.

On another research conducted by Smith (2003a) on vocabulary development, it was concluded that the vocabulary used by the learner in their writing texts entails the highest level of cognitive development. This is an evidence of the great advantage students would take if they learn and use new vocabulary with an elaboration for writing. In this work, there is a description of the distinction between different levels of vocabulary and it is explained that students exhibit a better vocabulary understanding and usage when they speak or when they read than when they have to write. It also explains the conditions under which vocabulary is learnt

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1 Halliday, 1993, p. 110

and used in writing. A main requirement is the active participation of the learner to incorporate the words within his/her lexicon.

Some characteristics of writing that involve the use of vocabulary consider the rate at which this process develops being it a slower process than speaking. Thinking about a word and whether to choose it or not, increases the effort. On the other hand, “Writing is learnt as a second-order symbolic system, with symbols standing for other symbols; hence the learner has to recognize two sets of abstract entities, and also the abstract relation between them”<sup>2</sup>.

The types of tasks students usually perform at school in low and medium grades can be classified under the following categories: narrative, informational, critical and argumentative. Good vocabulary usage is required to achieve written communication in any of the tasks mentioned. This along with a clear understanding of a situation mapped in the mind and the ability to express ideas organized on paper, make the difference between a text with coherence and cohesion difficult to understand.

Elaboration in writing depends on the ability to provide specific details and information to develop a text. The more specific, concrete and relevant the information provided by the writer is, the more complete mental image the reader is going to have. The lack of detail will give more trouble for the reader to picture what the writer states.

### 3. Vocabulary Categories

In order to study vocabulary differences in groups that share characteristics in common, we have decided to take into account the following categories:

#### Cognates

Taking into account that the population studied is Spanish native speaker and that according to Green (2004) those bilingual students, whose

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2 Ibid. p. 109.

first language is a Romance-rooted language like Spanish, use words that are similar in both, the native and the target language. When it comes to vocabulary acquisition in English, we can deduce that these students can often call on their knowledge of cognates in their native language to determine the meanings of the words in their second language. The number of cognates a student is exposed to tends to increase with the grades as they encounter increasing numbers of words with Latinate roots, especially in subjects such as Science and Math.

### **Collocation**

Words are neither produced nor understood in isolation. They are usually grouped in a way that is not elucidated by means of rules. Thornbury (2004) highlights the good use of collocation words as the most characteristic feature of a high level student. Students who possess a wide range of common collocates have a greater amount of available language that makes their production be more natural and effective. Non-native English speakers have difficulty internalizing expressions that when thought in their native language do not seem to be different.

### **Specific Words**

A more clear understanding of an idea expressed in either oral or written form is achieved when words activate a very specific reference in the reader or the listener's mind. Specificity in the use of words helps to convey more clear and accurate messages as there is a narrower gap for misunderstandings. It avoids overgeneralization because what is written or said refers to just one item. The importance of naming the things by their precise labels, call them actions, characteristics, objects, etc., gives the feeling of language appropriacy as it is also perceived when someone masters the grammar or the sounds of a language.

## **4. Methodology**

Since the main purpose of this study is descriptive and comparative and there is no intention or plan to intervene or be part of the study, the most suitable methodology to use is ethnography. It will allow the

description of the most common patterns of vocabulary usage in three different groups of participants, and then compare these patterns to identify the distinctions.

The data we deal with to do the research implies that the participants have to do different types of writing tasks which they are used to doing in their English classes as homework or classwork. This array of activities along with the time allotted follows what Purcell-Gates, V (1995) suggested as a way to give validity and reliability to the study since it provides a wider view on the characteristics of the students' texts. That is why rather than considering as data the products written about only one theme in just one day, the students are asked to write a variety of texts in different days.

A characteristic of this methodology that is important to examine is the fact that the subjective perceptions and the belief systems of the researchers need to be taken into account. This is because "objectivity" is impossible, given that there are no external "truths" or objective reality to be discovered. Thus this research focuses on the meanings and interpretations of the answers provided by the data given by the population.

Ethnography involves, based on Nunan (1992):

"The study of the culture/characteristics of a group in real-world rather than laboratory settings. The researcher makes no attempt to isolate or manipulate the phenomena under investigation, and insights and generalisations emerge from close contact with the data rather than from a theory of language learning and use."<sup>3</sup>

Some of the characteristics of this study that went in line with the characteristics of the methodology are:

- › The population was to be studied in an everyday context rather than under experimental conditions.
- › Data was to be gathered only from observation of the most common vocabulary patterns revealed in prepared written exercises.

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3 Nunan, D, 1992, p. 55

- › The focus was a group with one characteristic in common: they all belong to the bilingual section of a school.
- › The analysis of the data will involve interpretation of the vocabulary used and will take the form of verbal description and explanation.

The major procedure of ethnographic work is the detailed analysis of gathered data. For this study, based on the information collected in five different writing exercises, the stages followed were the ones proposed by Erickson and Schultz (1981) for analysis of recorded data, but certain changes were implemented to make them more suitable for this work:

- › Stage 1. Global viewing: considering the most notorious characteristics of the vocabulary used in each one of the grades studied.
- › Stage 2. Choice of specific features: grouping or classifying the types of vocabulary used.
- › Stage 3. Specification of differences: By using the classification in last stage, the differences are established between the vocabulary used in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades and the ones used in 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.
- › Stage 4. Detailed description of such differences.
- › Stage 5. Establishing how generalizable the differences analysed are.<sup>4</sup>

To have evidence of what vocabulary students use when they write, we considered that the best way was to ask them to do some tasks where they would be indicated to use English to describe a picture, to narrate a personal experience, to describe a routine, to narrate what happens in a cartoon and to illustrate a process. (See Appendix A).

The exercises were applied to five students in the three grades: 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup>, all of them being part of the bilingual section of the school. The exercises were to be done by the same population chosen randomly. Each activity was to be developed on a different day to prevent boredom. A way to validate the data collection in a triangulation methodology was by having the chosen population perform the five tasks (to make sure that all the tasks would be done in the grade) within the same group. The same task would be done in the other two grades.

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4 (Summarised and adapted from: Erickson and Shultz 1981, p.153-7, in van Lier, 1988, p. 65)



Once the texts were written by the students, the texts were analysed to identify the most evident common patterns. At first, some categories such as words used in Spanish or words that were too general to label one item were thought to be highly frequent. However, after reading the whole group of texts, those words were not representative as they had been used by only very few students from different groups in diverse tasks. On the other hand, in spite of having words that were not similar within the same grades, it was possible to group the vocabulary in three different categories: cognates, collocation words and specific words. (See Appendix B).

## 7. Results

The words classified under the heading cognates demonstrate that students appeal to this type of vocabulary very often. In all tasks there was a predominance to use words that are similar in English and in Spanish with no significant variation in meaning. The choice of words was properly done and is more diverse when we compare 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders.

Regarding the type of task, we found that when students narrate that is when students were asked to talk about a personal experience when they felt really scared; there was a constant increase in the variety of cognates used in all the grades. On the contrary, the difference was not significant when the task to do involved the description of a picture or of a routine which implied a more constricted creation and flexibility for word usage.

The most frequent words used are those very related to the task. This is why words such as *hospital*, *computer*, *ambulance*, *doctor*, and *medicine* appear in all texts where students had to describe a picture. And when students gave an account of the actions they do on a regular weekday, words such as *finish*, *bus*, *class*, and *arrive* prevail though not in all texts. It is worth mentioning that in spite of having a very close type of task such as it is the story created based on a cartoon, very few words are commonly used in the different grades. (See Appendix C).

A basic usage of collocation words can be seen in the lowest grade when the students used conventional chunks of words in the different

tasks. It is clear that for students at the lowest level of English, the use of these words is very limited and repetitive. There are more examples of collocation words in the higher level and their use is more accurate in tasks where students are narrating their daily routine and describing an experience they lived. In less controlled tasks, the use of collocation words is very broad and hardly any of these clusters is repeated. More demanding expressions found in the texts include groups of words such as: *make fun of*, *on purpose*, *back and forth*, and *don't mind*. (See Appendix C).

The collocation category is the one that presents also the most number of misuses in the task where students described their routine. There isn't a general established pattern in the proper management of even very frequent expressions and mistakes such as *wash my teeth*, and *see TV* are evident. (See Appendix C).

There is a growth in the students' appropriacy of collocation words as they reach a higher level of language proficiency. Contrasting the passages written in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade against those of 5<sup>th</sup> grade, the breach is not as notorious as it is when contrasting 5<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade texts.

In the way students use specific words to represent a particular item, progress in the students' vocabulary usage is observed as a variety of words appearing in the five tasks is identified. The richer lexicon appears in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. However, there is not a great range of words used within the same tasks. The activity where a fewer multiplicity of words is used is the description of the routine.

A number of misused words appear in this category and deviate from what the real meaning of the word is. That is the case of *wand* used as walking stick or walking cane, *kick* used for *hit* and *earth* used as land or soil. (See Appendix C).

## 8. Discussion

In general terms, there is more word usage and more elaboration in 8<sup>th</sup> grade than in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and there is no great difference between 5<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Besides, the tasks that suggest a controlled text given that

they include a picture, or ask for a specific process are accomplished with a narrower range of words.

We recognize the development of vocabulary that is used to name specifically a great variety of items, especially in the activity that requires a more open use of the second language. When we analysed the grammatical function of the words used in the category specific words, we find more multiplicity in the words needed to describe, i.e. adjectives, used by the students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, while in the lower grades the tendency is to use words that name objects, i.e. nouns. It is possible that the vocabulary acquired in the higher grades respond to the need to be descriptive.

At the same time, we observed an appropriacy of vocabulary referred to actions and objects to which students are more exposed to with more frequency. This limits the possibility of a more varied use but at the same time more accurate of words that students listen and read in their classes and that allow the inclusion of specific details.

In regard to cognates, the information collected proved what Green (2004) suggested and that was already mentioned in the theoretical framework (p. 12). As the students advance in their academic years, they receive more input of words with Latinate roots, and there is a more frequent use of cognates in their written production. This can imply that students benefit in this aspect from being instructed in the second language in subjects such as science, math and geometry until they reach 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

We consider that the vocabulary acquisition in English will improve as the grounds of first language vocabulary grow richer. The knowledge of the first language brings students a wide variety of words similar in the two languages. This allows the association and recognition of cognates. In the tasks done by the students, we identify a significant number of words that are not part of what students receive in their academic subjects so it can be understood that cognates are also learnt as a consequence of an improvement in the native language vocabulary.

There is no clear pattern in the variety of mistakes made when students used cognates. This might point out that only in few cases students

challenge themselves to use words they do not feel sure about even when the word is completely known in the native language. This is the case of the words *transornate* and *support*. The first used to indicate the result of a strong emotion and the second to mean tolerance. (See Appendix C). This can be evidence of what Coomber *et al* (1988) mentioned as decision making, referred on page 11. However the decision to choose the word and use it was not correct.

As non-native speakers of English, not only should we accumulate more English words in isolation but also learn the usage of chunks of words. According to the data gathered, the less exposed the students have been to the second language, i.e. in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, the more they omit the use of collocation words. At this stage there seems to be a more controlled use of words in isolation and the ways they are usually grouped together doesn't seem to be regarded. This makes texts be less natural and some words appear to be inserted inappropriately in the sentences. In the higher level the usage of collocation words is wider and the texts look more fluent.

The errors in collocation are the most frequent in the majority of the tasks. We believe this phenomenon is a consequence of the interference of the first language in the second language use. In spite of the usage of some words along with others in groups is evidenced in all grades, it is less frequent in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. This fact can be proof that in the lower grades the students tend to use the meaning of each word to construct a text while in the higher grades, due to a constant practice, and to the amount of time students are exposed to models of the second language, the words are used in groups in a more natural way. This verifies what Thornbury (2004) highlights as the most predominant feature of a high level student.<sup>5</sup>

As students reach higher levels, they elaborate their written texts more suitably. There is a better usage of terms either as understood in isolation and also when produced in groups. There is also the strategy to appeal to the first language in order to supply words in the second language and this is done to a great extent. The vocabulary differences

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5 Mentioned on page 12.

between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade are very slight and there are even cases when the texts reveal regression. The progress is not clear and there is not a relevant multiplicity of vocabulary displayed especially when students have to use specific words. The use of cognates does not imply the advance expected in two years and the use of collocation words does not imply a significant variation. The differences between 5<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade in vocabulary usage are more evident, particularly in cognates, and in the specific words used to name an array of items. The texts are more elaborated and there is more meaningful ideas expressed in writing. There is also a more accurate usage of collocation words which gives the readers the feeling of having a more authentic text.

## 9. Conclusions

What was proposed in this study was achieved in terms of identifying differences in the vocabulary usage of students of three grades of the bilingual section of the school. Some general categories as well as the most frequent were also observed. By having students do a range of tasks it was possible also to find correspondences between the task and the words used so the tasks involving a free narration require a more flexible frame and are accomplished with a wider range of words. On the other hand, tasks that set some boundaries like the description of a picture, the description of a routine or a process, by nature call for a narrower selection of vocabulary.

It is expected that students keep a line of progress as they evolve in their second language learning. Nonetheless, the difference was not clearly seen between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade, besides there was evidence of regression. It was not the same when 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade were contrasted. There, we perceived a more standard development in all the categories and in the proposed tasks.

To a certain point, we can also say that the aim of this study has to be complemented by having more data from other types of tasks at a more demanding level that involve argumentation and also more open options to write about. We also recommend having a further study that contrasts the vocabulary, students use against the vocabulary they have been exposed to.

We think that teachers should pay more attention to the kind of vocabulary their students are using because in spite of the result of this study, we think that students who have been exposed to the second language for long time must be able to use the language in a more elaborated way, and not overusing words that are acquired at an early stage.

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# Appendix

**Research: Vocabulary differences in writing between the grades of a bilingual section of a school.**

INSTRUMENT: TESTS

Researchers: Elizabeth Roa & William Medina

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ GRADE: \_\_\_\_\_

## Description of a picture

Look carefully at the picture and describe as much as you see is happening.



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Lists of words used presented in categories

**Category: Cognates**

Activity: Description of a picture

Properly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
Ambulance	adults	Ambulance
bus	ambulance	computer
common	color	doctor
computer	computer	hospital
describe	doctor	medicine
doctor	fracture	organized
hospital	hospital	part
hotel	image	pediatrics
inject	medicine	receptionist
medicine	normal	secretary
	pass	type
	receive	uniform
	secretary	
	serve	

Wrongly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
	mark	
	police	mark

Activity: Composition on routine

Properly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> Grade</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> Grade</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> Grade</b>
arrive	activities	activities
bus	arrive	arrive
class	bus	bus
computer	car	class
education	class	difficult
finish	closet	enter
invite	computer	finish
other	finish	important
prefer	mango	moment
secret	mine	orchestra
social	opportunity	organize
study	organize	pajamas
vacation	uniform	possible
visit		practice
vocabulary		routine
		usual
		vitamins

Wrongly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
		Actualize

Activity: Narrative

Properly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
anesthesia	baby	appreciate
cinema	calm	ceramic
continue	car	class
doctor	comedy	experience
enter	curve	family
hospital	direction	future
idea	experience	group
image	horrible	incomplete
presents	imagine	melody
	moment	members
	nervous	moment
	pass	monument
	police	movement
	terrible	music
		phobia
		piano
		precise
		situation
		surprise
		taxi
		terrified
		tunnel
		unfortunately
		visit

Wrongly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
security	brave	act
terrific	function	support
vigilant	transtornate	

Activity: Cartoon  
Properly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
air	club	advise
complete	continue	anxious
difference	decide	attention
enemy	furious	celebrate
fantastic	microphone	competition
finish	narrate	congregate
furious	stomach	continue
stomach		desperate
		direction
		distract
		excellent
		excited
		final
		ignore
		impulse
		insist
		interesting
		moment
		participant
		prepare
		prevent
		problem
		rude
		serious

Wrongly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
preparatory	animator	magnific
public		public
support		

Activity: Process  
Properly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
affect	atmosphere	accumulate
air	condensate	air
continue	continuous	ascend
cycle	evaporate	condensation
disappear	form	condense
evaporate	occur	contact
gas	transform	create
normal		lagoon
ocean		deposit
original		liquid
pass		form
		humidity
		ocean
		precipitation
		process
		radiation
		reaction
		temperature
		vapor

Wrongly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
	precipitate	consist
		precipitate

**Category: Collocation**

Activity: Description of a picture

Properly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
look sick	feel better	feel better
take care	look sick	take a picture
wear blue pants	take a picture	wait for
	wait for	walk across the room
	walk across the room	
	wear blue pants	

Wrongly used

3 <sup>RD</sup> GRADE	5 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	8 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE
		walk though

Activity: Composition on routine

Properly used

3 <sup>RD</sup> GRADE	5 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	8 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE
arrive home do homework eat breakfast/lunch/ dinner fall asleep stay up late take a shower wake up watch TV	come back do homework eat my breakfast/lunch get ready have fun pick me up put on my clothes take a shower wake up watch TV	arrive home brush my teeth do homework eat breakfast/lunch fall asleep get dressed get ready go home have dinner leave my house pack my bag play the piano take a nap take a rest take me home wake up watch TV

Wrongly used

3 <sup>RD</sup> GRADE	5 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	8 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE
arrive to my house go out school make homework put my clothes see TV take a bath wash my teeth wash myself wear my clothes (for <i>put on</i> ) what I make on Fridays	arrive to my house see TV take a sleep take breakfast wait to (for <i>wait for</i> ) wash my teeth	arrive to dress up make homework take breakfast/lunch



Activity: Narrative  
Properly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
have a dream see a movie wake up	get shocked go back last year lose control passing by	all around fall over get in a taxi in danger of lose a tooth pass through to be through

Wrongly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>

Activity: Cartoon  
Properly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
don't care about something go bowling to be ready for	to get mad	back and forth don't mind have fun knock down make fun of make silence on purpose pay attention to take something seriously to get close to

Wrongly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
lose the air		breath on his neck make an excellent play

Activity: Process  
Properly used

3 <sup>RD</sup> GRADE	5 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	8 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE
take long time to be over	to be full of so on	make contact with start over take place

Wrongly used

3 <sup>RD</sup> GRADE	5 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	8 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE
to get dry		

**Category: Specific words**

Activity: Description of a picture  
Properly used

3 <sup>RD</sup> GRADE	5 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	8 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE
burn	bathroom	alone
clock	chair	bored
girl	children	broken foot
hands	clock	clock
head to	cry	dish
left	cup	doll
needle	dark	elbow
newspaper	door	fat
night	hold	foot
nurse	left	girl
picture	newspaper	hips
play	plate	indoors
policeman	police officer	injure
stick	policeman	knee
teddy bear	pony tail	mad
toy	search	newspaper
wait	show	policeman
window	sick	proper
woman	stick	refuse
	t-shirt	spoon
	teddy bear	syrup
	window	teddy bear
	worker	ugly
		van
		waiting room

Wrongly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
	check nursery wand	a playing ambulance a policeman handing a boy check out nursery

Activity: Composition on routine

Properly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
enjoy rest sleep study room	aunt chat country cousin earring farm pool strawberry teeth	avoid busy couple early juice rest rice share soap opera soup weekend while

Wrongly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>

Activity: Narrative  
Properly used

3 <sup>RD</sup> GRADE	5 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	8 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE
alone	calm	afraid
cake	cow	amaze
cast	crash	avenue
cookie	creek	awesome
cry	forget	change
fear	nightmare	cheerful
laugh	pants	cover
mall	relax	dark
needle	road	drown
nightmare	sounds	face
noise	tail	hit
path	voice	huge
scary	wet	ill
slip down	worry	journey
thief		lonely
witch		mess
worry		push
		ride
		sad
		seem
		shout
		strong
		suddenly
		surprise
		tooth
		worry

Wrongly used

3 <sup>RD</sup> GRADE	5 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	8 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE
Steal		

Activity: Cartoon  
Properly used

3 <sup>RD</sup> GRADE	5 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	8 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE
angry	ask	announcer
bother	championship	annoy
disturb	crowd	bald man
faint	floor	believe
find	hair	belly
heavy	hat	bowling alley
hit	hard	chest
jail	hit	damage
pain	laugh	down
pay	loud	game
shout	mad	hand
sing	player	host
start	push	humiliate
throw	quiet	neck
tired	star	pain
try	throw	strong
whistle	wrong	tournament
		twice
		way
		win

Wrongly used

3 <sup>RD</sup> GRADE	5 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	8 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE
	field	
	kick	

Activity: Process  
Properly used

3 <sup>RD</sup> GRADE	5 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	8 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE
cloud	cloud	discharge
dangerous	drop	drop
develop	fall	heat
flood	lake	lake
land	rain	pond
rain	river	rise
rainbow	sky	river
river	source	season
sea	start	snow
shine	surface	source
storm	water	stage
water		sun beam
		warm

Wrongly used

<b>3<sup>RD</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>	<b>8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE</b>
	earth	earth

Participant: Juan David Tordecilla                      GRADE: 3ºD

Description of a picture  
Look carefully at the picture and describe as much as you see is happening.



I can see that there are 2 girls playing with some toys, I can see that there is a woman in a computer and a police man taking a girl. There is an ambulance out the window and a man with something in his hand a I can see that they are in a hospital and back to the door there is a woman taking care of a boy, and I see a man with a newspaper and a girl playing with an airplane. There is a boy sitting in a chair and is kind of burned, and a big clock.

RESEARCH: Vocabulary differences in writing between the grades of a bilingual section of a school.

INSTRUMENT: TESTS

Researchers: Elizabeth Roa &amp; William Medina

Participant: Liuba Bolano EstradaGRADE: 5<sup>th</sup>D

## Composition

Write about your daily routine on a regular weekday.

My daily routine on a regular weekday is: First my mother wake up my brother and me to go to school, because if I can I will sleep all the day. Then I take a shower and put on my cloth (uniform) and I start to eat my breakfast. When I finish to eat I wash my teeth and before I put my earrings and I organize my hair.

Then my father take out the car and we come to the school.

Before of the day of school I go to my house. When I arrive I start to eat the lunch and I rest until 3:00 pm. At 3:00pm I start to do homework and when I finish I chat with my friends and sometimes I know other people from other countries or other cities of Colombia. At 8:00pm I see the XS factor and when it finish I see "Pura Sangre" until it finish (9:30pm) then I go to sleep.



RESEARCH: Vocabulary differences in writing between the grades of a bilingual section of a school.

INSTRUMENT: TESTS

Researchers: Elizabeth Roa & William Medina

Participant: Laura María Fuentes Semco

GRADE: 80

Cartoon

Write a story based on what happens in the following cartoon.

<http://www.comics.com/comics/ferdand/index.html>



In a bowling tournament, when one of the participants was preparing to start the game and throw the ball, the announcer started making fun of the participant, which the participant didn't like, he felt humiliated, so when he was going to throw the ball, he took the ball back and forth, and when he took the ball to the back he hit the announcer in his stomach on purpose. The announcer fell on the floor because the hit was really strong, but the participant didn't mind.

RESEARCH: Vocabulary differences in writing between the grades of a bilingual section of a school.

INSTRUMENT: TESTS

Researchers: Elizabeth Roa & William Medina

Participant: Paula escobar

GRADE: 8D

Description of a process  
Describe the water cycle.

This process start when sun's  
beams make contact with  
the water and the high  
temperature makes it boil.

The water evaporates and that

humidity goes up and condense in the clouds.

when the clouds are full of that evaporated

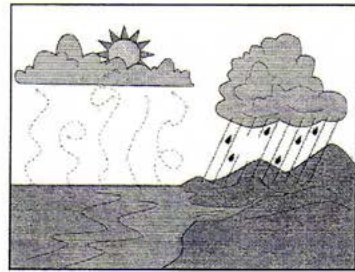
water precipitation occurs. that water that once was

in rivers, lake or oceans comes again to the

earth in drops of water.

Some times the clouds discharge that condense

water when make contact with mountains,





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## SU OPINIÓN



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As educators we have a target goal and that is to promote students' success and nurture their desire to learn in a respectful and constructive environment. One of our greatest tasks is to implement effective methods and strategies that aid us to achieve our instruction goals in our classrooms related to vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Pikulski and Templeton (sf) say that it is impossible to exaggerate the power of words; they have changed and they will continue varying the course of history. Vocabulary is a great tool we can give students to succeed not only in education but also in their lives. Our language skills are essential to function in today's complex social and economic worlds.

Furthermore, vocabulary could be reflected more specifically in high levels of reading achievement. Besides, the report of the National Reading panel in 2000 concluded that its relevance has been world-wide recognized in the development of reading skills. Many researchers have noted the relationship between the growth in reading power and the growth in word knowledge.

This book comprises research articles related to reading comprehension and lexicon. They were conducted by students of the English Teaching Diploma at Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana in Monteria, Cordoba, (Colombia).

We hope they can support teachers by offering different ways to develop vocabulary and reading skills in their learners.

