Individual strategies for different learners

Marta Abuelo de Paz
Especialitat d’Anglès
Mentor: Lucía Negredo
Advisor: Carmen Pérez-Vidal
1st June 2012
# Table of contents

i. Table of contents...........................................................................................................2  
ii. List of tables..................................................................................................................3  
iii. List of figures..................................................................................................................4  
iv. Abstract.........................................................................................................................5  
v. Acknowledgements........................................................................................................6  
1. Presentation....................................................................................................................7  
2. Theoretical and legal framework....................................................................................10  
   2.1 About learners strategies: defining LLS.................................................................10  
   2.2 Classification of LLS: O’Malley’s and Oxford’s taxonomies.................................12  
   2.3 Individual variables and learners strategies ...........................................................14  
3. Methodology...................................................................................................................16  
   3.1 Participants.................................................................................................................16  
   3.2 Instrument...................................................................................................................17  
   3.3. Procedure..................................................................................................................18  
   3.4 Data analysis.............................................................................................................19  
4. Development....................................................................................................................20  
   4.1. Question1: Is there any group of strategies which students use more frequently than others?...................................................22  
   4.2. Which are the most frequently used strategies?.....................................................27  
   4.3. Which are the least frequently used strategies?.....................................................28  
   4.4. Is there a relation between individual differences and strategy choice?............29  
   4.5. Do students use more or less strategies depending on the task they have to complete?.......................................................31  
5. Conclusions.....................................................................................................................33  
6. Bibliography..................................................................................................................35  
7. Annexes........................................................................................................................36  
   7.1 Annex 1.....................................................................................................................36  
   7.2 Annex 2.....................................................................................................................40  
   7.3 Annex 3.....................................................................................................................43  
   7.4 Annex 4.....................................................................................................................44
List of tables

Table 1 Number of students from each country.................................14
Table 2 Number of students who speak each language in three
different contexts .............................................................17
Table 3 Number of years that the students have been learning English.....17
Table 4 Descriptives for every group of strategies............................22
Table 5 Percentages of frequency for each individual item from part A.....23
Table 6 Percentages of frequency for each individual item from part B ......24
Table 7 Percentages of frequency for each individual item from part C.....24
Table 8 Percentages of frequency for each individual item from part D ......25
Table 9 Percentages of frequency for each individual item from part E.....26
Table 10 Percentages of frequency for each individual item from part F.....26
Table 11 Strategies which are more frequently used by learners ..............27
Table 12 Strategies which are least frequently used by learners..............28
Table 13 Descriptives of strategies used in writing, listening and
collaborative tasks..............................................................32
List of figures

Figure 1 O’Malley and Chamot (1990) classification of learners’ strategies……………………………………………………………………………..13
Figure 2 Oxford’s (1990) classification of strategies………………….14
Figure 3 Mean score for every group of strategies and the overall mean score ...............................................................22
Abstract

This paper makes an insight to the different theories related to the field of language learner strategy use. The first part is an introduction to the paper and the presentation of the research questions on which the paper is based. The second part consists of a review of the literature on this matter; a field of study full of different theories and lack of consensus in basic issues. The third part presents the methodology employed in order to collect data to answer the research questions. The fourth part develops the research done; and finally the fifth part contains the conclusions that have been reached.

The paper has different aims. The first one, is trying to put the different theories about strategies together and show the difficulties which theorists and researchers have faced in defining, identifying and classifying strategies. The second aim, was to go over the group of strategies that is more frequently used by English as a foreign language learners. The third and fourth aims are to find out which concrete strategies are more frequently used and least frequently used by the students. The fifth aim was to determine whether strategies are related to individual differences or not. Finally, the last aim was to see if there is any difference in strategy use among different tasks, and in this case we compare the use of strategies in listening, writing and collaborative work.
Acknowledgements

I want to thank my mentor Lucía for helping me grow as a teacher. I also want to thank my advisor, Carmen, for being so confident with me when I thought I was not able to do something. To my group of students from the practicum for being so helpful and teaching me some of the best lessons. Thanks to my family and boyfriend for helping me every time I needed them, and being always available to listen to me. To my friends María, Andrea, Karina, Ángela, Marta, Aina, Cèlia and Dani for always being next to me and cheering me up on the hardest moments. Thank you.
1. Presentation

During the last few decades there has been a move towards the importance of language learners' ways of learning. Literature in this field has been developed in relation to first and second language learning, but being the latter the most researched. The emergence of studies about strategies, changed the course of the investigation in second language acquisition by focusing not only on the teaching practice but also on how students learn (Cohen 1998). Research on this area has undergone different stages, but no consensus on many basic concepts has caused difficulties in establishing the basis of this field of study. In the 1960's, some researchers started to think that there was a need to make direct studies about how learners learn. It was in the mid seventies, when researchers (Rubin, 1975; Naiman et al., 1978/1996; Stern, 1975) introduced the concept of the “good language learner” and the effectiveness of strategies that these learners used. Researchers began to study good language learners in order to understand better, and more directly, the process of learning. Why were there some people who were able to learn better than others?

During the 1970's, the field of learners strategies was basically concentrated on “good language learners” (Rubin 1975; Naiman et al. 1978) and identifying the strategies that contribute to learning. After doing some studies, research demonstrated that students use strategies and that these could be identified and classified. Those studies were basically based on interviews with “good” language learners. Then in the 1980's, studies focused on learners' autonomy; and finally in the 1990's studies focused on giving basis to this new discipline (Wenden, 1986; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Cohen, 1998).

As said before, literature on this field contains many conflicting views, starting by the problematic of describing some basic terms. Many are the theorists and researchers that have tried to provide a definition, categorization and classification of language learners’ strategies. Currently, the understanding of the devices has widened, thanks to the continuing efforts to define terms. Nevertheless, more conflicting problems have arisen as well: the role of consciousness when referring to those processes which are strategies, the criteria for classifying language learning and language use strategies, a broadening of the concept on strategic competences and personality related variables (Cohen, 1998).

Two of the most important definitions discussed in this paper are done by O'Malley et al. (1985) and Oxford (1989). On the one hand, O'Malley et al. (1985), defines strategies as “special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information”, putting emphasis on the cognitive aspects of strategy. On the other hand, Oxford (1989) talks about “behaviours or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable”. The taxonomies proposed by O'Malley et al. and Oxford are further developed in the paper.
Another important definition, and one of the most recent and comprehensive, is done by Weinstein et al., and define strategies as follows: “learning strategies include any thoughts, behaviours, beliefs, or emotions that facilitate the acquisition, understanding or later transfer of new knowledge and skills” (Weinstein et al., 2000) However, this definition has also been criticized by other theorists, such as Dörney and Skehan (2003). From their point of view, the term strategy is very ambiguous, and in order to subdue this problem, the use of this term should be abandoned and focus on the construct of self-regulation.

Griffiths (2008), tries to put together all the features that emerged from theorists and researchers in order to provide a new definition of strategies. She first discusses six of these features and finally proposes a definition that tries to solve the problems faced in the literature of this field. The first feature makes reference to the term “do” used by Rubin in her definition of strategies and on the term “actions” proposed by Oxford in her definition. Griffiths proposes the use of “activity” as it includes both physical and mental processes. The second one, is related to consciousness. Griffith makes a discussion about the different views about this term and its implications. The third feature, refers to strategic choice. The fourth feature, develops around which is the goal of language learners. The fifth feature, is related to learners self-regulation of learning. Finally, the sixth feature, claims that the goal of LLS is facilitating learning. After having a look at these six features, Griffiths provides a new definition of strategies as “activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own learning” (Griffiths, 2008: 87).

The objective of this paper is to describe what language learner strategies are and see how students use them. As has been presented, this field of study has many conflicting views. However, we try to put together the different theories and provide a review of the literature in this field. This will help us understand what strategies are and how they are used. The questions we try to answer focus on the frequency of strategy use and on individual differences.

In order to do this paper, some research had to be done. This research has been carried out with a group of students of third of ESO from a high school. The results have served to analyse which groups of strategies students use more frequently in general, and to see the specific strategies they use. In order to do the research three instruments have been used: a background information questionnaire, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, 1989), and a strategy questionnaire focused on writing, listening and collaborative tasks.

The paper is divided as follows: section two, the legal and theoretical framework on LLS; section three, the methodology used to do the questionnaires; section four a discussion of the results and finally the conclusions.

I wanted to write about strategies as I am very interested in understanding the way students learn in order to be able to help them when I become a teacher. From my experience, students often feel they do not know how to approach some activities or exams and constantly ask how they can do it. There are
many tips a teacher can give, and even schools where students are explicitly taught strategies. I would like to understand what each strategy is and see how frequently they are used in order to have a wider view of the topic.
2. Theoretical and Legal Framework

2.1. About learners strategies: defining LLS

The study of language learner strategies supposed a change in perspective in the field of language learning. In the 1970's theorists and researchers started to develop theories in relation to the strategies that “good language learners” used (eg. Naiman et al., 1978/1996; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975). In the 1980's, the focus was on learner autonomy; and in the 1990's studies focused on establishing the bases of this new discipline (Wenden, 1986; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Cohen, 1998). Since then, theorists have proposed numerous classifications of strategies, investigated the factors affecting their choice and use, the effectiveness of training programs and redefined the tools and analytical procedures used to carry on research.

Nevertheless, after so many years of research, there are still problems in finding a consensus about fundamental issues such as the definition of strategies and their distinctive characteristics. It exists a great variety of labels that theorists and researchers use in order to refer to LLS; replacing the term strategy by other words or phrases such as learning behaviours, tactics, techniques or tricks (cf. Ellis, 2008; Griffiths, 2008; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). What is more, the notion of strategy has also been interpreted in different ways. Tarone (1980) draw a distinction between production strategies, communication strategies and learning strategies; Stern (1983) distinguished between strategies and techniques; and Selinger (1984) talked about strategies and tactics. The use of different terms has created a lack of consensus and that makes it difficult to define LLS.

In relation to the definition of LLS, Oxford proposed one of the earliest conceptualizations, describing them as “behaviours or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable” (Oxford, 1989). Since this taxonomy contained mental processes, she replaced the expression “behaviour and actions” for “steps taken by the learner”. Another definition, is given by O'Malley and Chamot, characterizing LLS as “special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information” (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Such definition, put emphasis on the cognitive aspects of strategy.

Cohen also tried to define LLS by characterizing them as “learning processes which are consciously selected by the learner. The element of choice is important here because this is what gives a strategy its special character. These are also moves which the learner is at least partially aware of, even if full attention is not being given to them” [Cohen, 1995 cited in Cohen 1998:4]. What is more, Cohen also made a reflection on the different problematic issues that make it difficult to define, characterize and classify strategic devises: (i) the distinction between the term strategy and other terms, (ii) the role of consciousness when referring to those processes which are strategies, (iii) the criteria for classifying language learning and language use strategies, (iv) a broadening of the concept of strategic competences and (v) the linking of
learning strategies to learning styles and personality-related variables. (Cohen, 1998).

As mentioned before, the first problem dealt with the distinction between the terms: strategy, substrategies, techniques and tactics. Different theorists include different terms as to refer to the different cognitive or metacognitive processes. Cohen (1998) suggests that it would be easier to refer to all these simply as strategies and, at the same time, being aware that it exists a continuum from the broadest categories to the most specific ones. The second problem refers to the lack of consensus to consider strategies as conscious or unconscious. For Schmidt (1994), if learners are not able to identify strategies associated to certain behaviour, then this behaviour can be referred to as a process, not a strategy. Ellis (2004) defends that if a strategy becomes very automathized, so that learners are no longer conscious of using them, then they can not be described; hence lose their significance as strategies. The third problem, the criteria for classifying language learning and language use strategies, refers to the fact that there are different criteria used in order to classify language learning strategies. These different criteria, cause mismatches among the different taxonomies. The fourth problem, is the broadening of the concept of strategic competences. The term strategic competence has been widened from its original meaning. Originally, the term put emphasis on compensatory strategies, but theorists then conceived the term of strategic competence as “a set of metacognitive components, or strategies, which can be thought of as higher order executive processes that provide a cognitive management function in language use” (Bachman and Palmer, 1996 cited in Cohen 1998:14). And finally, the fifth problem is the relation between strategies, learners styles and other variables. As Brown (1991) pointed out, learning strategies do not operate on their own, they are connected to the learner learning style and other variables related to personality.

Two of the most recent and comprehensive definitions of LLS are those by Oxford and Weinstein et al.. Oxford, refers to language learners strategies as “specifications, behaviours, steps or techniques that students use to improve their own progress in developing skills in a second or foreign language. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval or use of the new language.” (Oxford, 1999). On the other hand, Weinstein et al., maintain that “learning strategies include any thoughts, behaviours, beliefs, or emotions that facilitate the acquisition, understanding or later transfer of new knowledge and skills.” (Weinstein et al., 2000). However, these definitions have received criticism. The main point being that the concept of strategy in itself is ambiguous. The critique made by Dörney and Skehan (2003) points out the fact that learning strategies cannot be cognitive, affective and behavioural, or contribute to the acquisition of knowledge and skills as well as reorganization of existing linguistic representation. For Dörney and Skehan (2003) and Dörney (2005), in order to subdue the problem of ambiguity of the term strategy, what needs to be done is abandoning the concept of strategy and focus on the construct of self-regulation. This concept, refers to the degree to which individuals are active participants of their own learning and includes factors such as cognition, metacognition, motivation, and behavioural and environmental variables used by learners to promote their own learning (Dörney, 2005 in Griffiths, 2008: 85).
But while researchers as Dörney and Skehan propose and abandonment of the term strategy, some other researchers point out the importance of finding a consensus in the definition of this term. Griffith, tries to put together the different features that emerge from theorists in order to provide a viable definition of language learning strategy. The first feature, is Rubin's (1975) definition of LLS saying that “language learner strategies are what students do”. This implies an active approach. On the other hand, the term action proposed by Oxford (1990) does not take into consideration the mental processes that take part in the use of strategies. But, the term activity can include both mental and physical behaviours. The second feature, makes reference to consciousness, which has been argued to be a basic characteristic of LLS. Wenden (1991) argued that strategies may be developed automatically; however, this does not mean that they are not conscious. For Cohen (1998), learners must be at least partially conscious of them. The third feature, refers to strategic choice. It will depend on contextual and individual factors and the nature of the learning goal. The fourth feature, makes reference to something that some theorists and researchers agree, that strategic behaviour implies goal-oriented, purposeful activity on the part of the learner. In that case, the goal of language learners’ strategies is to learn a language. The fifth feature, calls for the learners use of strategies to regulate or control their learning. Finally, the sixth feature, claims that the goal of LLS is the facilitation of learning (Weinstein and Mayer, 1986). Putting together these six features, Griffiths comes up with a definition of the LLS as “Activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own learning”( Griffiths, 2008 : 87)

2.2. Classification of LLS: O’Malley et al. and Oxford's taxonomies

A part from the difficulties to define strategies, theorists have also faced another challenge: conducting theory-driven taxonomies of LLS that could be used as a point of reference. Many different categorizations have been done, and in this paper, two of the most important ones are described.

On the one hand, there is the classification offered by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and on the other hand Rebecca Oxford's (1989) proposal.

To start with, O'Malley et al. (1985, 1990) proposed three different categories.

- **Metacognitive strategies**, which imply planning for learning, thinking about the learning process, monitoring the production and comprehension and finally evaluating the learning after the activity.

- **Cognitive strategies**, operate directly on the incoming information. Weinstein and Meyers (1986) proposed that these strategies can be included into three groupings: rehearsal, organization and elaboration processes.

- **Social/Affective strategies**, involve either interaction with another person or control over affect.
O'Malley and Chamot (1990) compare this classification to that by Rubin (1981) and Naiman et al. (1978), in that their classification is based in cognitive psychology while Rubin and Naiman et al. classification emerges from interviews with good language learners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic strategy classification</th>
<th>Representative strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive Strategies</td>
<td>Selective attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive strategies</td>
<td>Rehearsal organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summarizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deducing imagery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transfer elaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social / Affective strategies</td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questioning for clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-talk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1: O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classification of learners’ strategies*

On the other hand, Rebecca Oxford, proposes a classification which starts by dividing strategies into two classes, direct and indirect and then subdividing them into six groups (memory, cognitive and compensation, under the direct class; metacognitive, affective and social under the indirect class), and finally establishing 19 sets. The taxonomy proposed by Oxford (1990:17) is shown in figure 2.

The **direct strategies** have a direct relation with the target language and require mental processes. Within the direct strategies there are three different groups. **Memory strategies**, used for remembering and retrieving new information; **cognitive strategies** used for understanding and producing; and finally, **compensation strategies** which deal with using the language despite knowledge gaps. The **indirect strategies**, are used for the general management of learning. Within the indirect strategies there is also a sub classification of three groups. The **metacognitive strategies**, used to coordinate the mental processes, **affective strategies** which regulate emotions, and finally **social strategies** for learning with others. Oxford considers that both direct and indirect strategies support each other (Oxford, 1990: 14). She compares them to a theatre play, in which direct strategies are the Performer and Indirect
strategies are the Director. Both the performer and the director work with each other in order to produce the best outcome (Oxford, 1999:15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Language Learning strategies</th>
<th>Indirect Language Learner Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Memory Strategies</td>
<td>I. Metacognitive Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creating mental linkages</td>
<td>• Centering your learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Applying images and sounds</td>
<td>• Arranging and planning your learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Employing actions</td>
<td>• Evaluating your learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. Cognitive strategies</th>
<th>II. Affective Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Practicing</td>
<td>• Lowering your anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Receiving and sending messages</td>
<td>• Encouraging yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analysing and reasoning</td>
<td>• Taking your emotional temperature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creating strucutre for input and output</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III. Compensation Strategies</th>
<th>III. Social Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Guessing intelligently</td>
<td>• Asking questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing</td>
<td>• Cooperating with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Empathizing with others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2: Oxford’s (1989) classification of strategies*

2.3. Individual variables and learners strategies

An important part in the field of study of language learners’ strategies makes reference to individual differences. It is a fact that each individual is different; hence the relation between individual differences and learning is an issue that must be developed in this paper.

There are many researchers who have proposed a classification of different variables that affect learning. Some of the most important names are Lightbown and Spada (1993), McLaren and Madrid (1996) or Oxford and Ehrman (1993).
There are different taxonomies developed, but most of them coincide in the classifications. The role of individual differences within strategy use is further explained in section 4.

The research questions proposed are as follow: Question 1. Is there any group of strategies which students use more frequently than others?, Question 2. Which are the most frequently used strategies?, Question 3. Which are the least frequently used strategies?, Question 4. Is there a relation between individual differences and strategy choice?, Question 5. Do students use strategies in the same frequency in different tasks?
3. Methodology

3.1 Participants:

In order to do this study, a group of 23 students from around 15 years old, who are studying third of ESO at a high school near Barcelona are used as a sample. As can be seen in table 3, they come from 7 different countries and speak at least 6 different languages.

Country | Number of students
---|---
Spain | 11
Perú | 2
Bolívia | 2
Colombia | 3
Republica Dominicana | 1
Ecuador | 3
Pakistan | 1

Table 1. Number of students from each country

The following table shows the number of students who speak each different language in three different contexts: at home, at school and other contexts such as on the street, shops, with friends, etc. As can be seen, the two most spoken languages in the three contexts are Catalan and Spanish. However, there are big differences among them depending on the context. The only place where students use both Catalan and Spanish in a similar frequency is at school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LANGUAGES</th>
<th>SPOKEN AT HOME</th>
<th>AT SCHOOL</th>
<th>SPOKEN OTHER CONTEXTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catalan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In relation to their prior learning experience with English, some of the students started studying English at younger ages than others, and some of them receive classes outside school hours. From all the students in the class, only one of them has an individual plan for the English lessons. The following table shows the number of years that the students have been learning English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years studying English</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 7 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34,78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to 10 years</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>65,21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, the students’ level of English is not very low. However, some students have a higher level, but from my point of view there is no relation between their level and the country they come from.

3.2 Instrument:

For the elaboration of this paper I used three questionnaires: the SILL questionnaire (Oxford, 1989), a background information questionnaire, and a questionnaire about strategies used in writing, listening and collaborative tasks.

- The SILL “The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning” (see annex 1) is an instrument used to measure language learners strategies designed by Rebecca Oxford in 1990. This questionnaire is formed by 61 questions with multiple answers options which range from “never or almost never true of me” to “always or almost always true of me”. The test is divided into six parts. The three first parts measure the use of direct strategies of memory, cognition and compensation; and the other three parts measure the use of indirect strategies classified as metacognitive, affective and social. Oxford (1990) describes each part as:
A. Remembering more effectively
B. Using mental processes
C. Compensating for missing knowledge
D. Organizing and evaluating knowledge
E. Managing emotions
F. Learning with others.

However, even if it has been the most frequently used instrument to measure language learners strategies it is not very precise as students have to complete the questionnaire by remembering what they do when studying a language.

- Background information questionnaire (see annex 2), is used as a complement to provide further information about the students' characteristics. It is described by Oxford to be useful as a complement to the SILL as it helps teachers and students understand better their results.

- Questionnaire about strategies used in writing, listening and collaborative tasks (see annex 3) This questionnaire is used to have a look at the results students have in writing and listening tasks and compare them to their frequency of strategies.

3.3 Procedure:

The questionnaires are given to the students at the beginning of May during two of their English lessons. The SILL and background information questionnaires are given in a day in which the group is divided, and the strategy questionnaire for writing, listening and collaborative task is given another day in the same week. The students are first given the background information questionnaire in which they provide information about their procedure, age, gender, the number of years they have been studying English at school and have to answer questions related to the languages they know and speak. At the end of the questionnaire, they have to complete a table in which they value from 1 to 5 (being 1 “not much” and 5 “a lot”) their ability to read, write, speak and understand English. They do this first questionnaire in 15 minutes and individually.

After doing this background information questionnaire, students are given the SILL together with an answer sheet. First everybody reads the instructions so that all of them know what they have to do, and then individually complete the questionnaire. They write the answers on a separate answer sheet. It takes the students to do it 20 minutes. As there is no time to do the third one, students do the last questionnaire in the following English lesson. This third and last questionnaire is more centred into the writing and listening ability, and on collaborative task. It takes 15 minutes to do this last questionnaire.
Finally, the teachers are sent a questionnaire about the methodology they use when dealing with speaking, writing, listening and reading and about strategies.

3.4 Data analysis:

In order to calculate the results from the first questionnaire, the SILL, we followed the worksheet for scoring the SILL by Oxford (1989). First, we calculated the sum for each part, then divided it for the number of statements for each part in order to provide the average for each sum. At the end, to calculate the overall average, all the sums were added up and divided by 61, the number of items on the SILL. This had to give us an overall average which should be within the range of 1.0 and 5.0. In this questionnaire participated a group of 22 students in their third year of ESO.

To report the frequency of use of learning strategies, Oxford’s (1989) key is used. It also has a scale range of 1.0 to 5.0.

- High Use = 3.5 to 4.4 (Usually used), 4.5 to 5.0 (Always or almost always used)
- Medium Use = 2.5 to 3.4 (Sometimes used)
- Low Use = 1.0 to 1.4 (Never or almost never used), 1.5 to 2.4 (generally not used)

To calculate results from the second questionnaire, which focused on the strategies used in writing, listening and collaborative tasks, the same procedure as in the SILL was followed. In this way, we could examine the frequency in which students make use of strategies for writing, listening and when working in groups. This sample is of 17 students, given the fact that they did this questionnaire in a different day and some students were missing.

Finally, the background information questionnaire has been used to know more about the students’ background and to help understand better the results from the questionnaires.
4. Development

In order to achieve the aim of this paper, a post-test study has been analysed. This study provides data to reach the answers to the questions that have been suggested.

To do the data collection, we used a group of students from the high school where I did the practicum. These students are now in their third year of ESO, which means that they are all adolescents. It is a homogeneous group. There is only one student with an individual plan. As follows, there is an analysis of the students’ profile. They are still developing in the fourth areas that intervene in the personal development: biological, cognitive, social and emotional.

The first area, biological, refers to the changes that happen during puberty. Adolescents suffer from different fast changes during some years that may influence them. They grow physically, they suffer from hormonal changes, they become sexually active and there are transformations happening in their brains. Their personal image acquires high importance and influences their interpersonal relations. In the case of the students from the sample, they are from 14 to 17 years old, so they are now suffering these changes. From the 24 students in the class, 12 are boys and 12 are girls. The students also come from different countries, where physical appearance is seen in different ways. However, these students are very respectful with each other’s culture.

The second area, cognitive, refers to changes in the mental processes of the adolescent. In the reading from the “Guia d’Estudi” from the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, the Piagetian approach is developed. Adolescence is described as a process which involves a move from “concrete thinking” to “formal thinking”. During this process, the adolescent learns to identify the importance of ideas, makes connections and schemes. When they achieve the “formal thinking”, they have more capacity to reason, reach hypo-deductive thinking and are able to interrelate concepts. Piaget explains that there are three moments in the process of adaptation: **assimilation**, incorporation of new experiences; **accommodation**, modification of mental schemes; and **adaptation**, which is the result from the assimilation and accommodation moments. For Piaget, learning becomes a process of equilibration: from cognitive conflicts and contradictions to solving the conflicts and finding a balance. Each individual suffers these changes in a different way, and the environment is a key point in this process.

In the case of the students from the sample, they come from different backgrounds and environments that have influenced, and are now influencing, their cognitive development. There are also students who are older than others, which means they can be cognitively different as well. This can be reflected in their behaviour in class in relation to their classmates or with the teacher. In this case, the teachers are the ones who have to provide scaffolding in order to make students reach their potential developmental zone in order to make students progress.

The third area, emotional, makes reference to the emotional development that allows students establish relations with themselves and the rest of the group.
This development is called *emotional maturation* and includes the learning of self-control of emotions and feelings, development of the capacity to express their feelings and emotions and an intensification of empathy. The emotional growth of the adolescent moves towards two horizons: internal, analysing one self’s emotions; and external, establishing new relations.

Within the third area, identity and self-esteem are also important to consider. On the one hand, identity refers to the integration of the different aspects of the individual: physical, emotional, cognitive and social. Adolescence is described as a period of high intensity in relation to building an identity. This process is highly marked by the relation that the adolescent has with the meaningful people from their environment. James Marcia (1987) proposes two variables which allow a better understanding of the process of construction of an identity. The first variable, *crisis*, refers to the capacity that the adolescent has to make questions to him or herself, the capacity to explore new alternatives, and questioning the values and social conducts that has accepted from childhood without any critique. The second variable, *compromise*, refers to the real implication in decisions, efforts, work, and the accomplishment of responsibilities. On the other hand, self-esteem, which reflects the ideas and opinions about one self, is also important. The self-esteem, is highly influenced by the environment as well, and is expressed through the levels of confidence, learning and social success.

The fourth and last area, social, refers to the relations of the individuals with the environment. Bronfenbrenne (1979) established that the environment of an individual is formed by independent structures: microsystems, mesosystems, macrosystems and exosystems. The Microsystems are the smallest nucleus in which the adolescent develops a specific role. These Microsystems are for example the family or the classmates. In the case of the students from the sample, they constitute a very cohesive group in which each of them has a role which is respected and accepted by the classmates.

As we are focusing on the learning of languages, we must also have a look at the basic competences that play a key role. To start with, the communicative competence is the most important one. This competence, allows the development of the rest of competences, hence it is very important that teachers work on this thoroughly. Another important competence is called learning to learn. This one guides the actions and development of the other competences and is related to autonomous learning. The educational project from the centre also takes into account the basic competences and establishes that the school has to work to provide the students the tools to achieve the development of the basic competences. This is going to help the students to grow personally and mentally.

Now that we have described the different areas of development that affect to the students from the sample, and we have spoken about the basic competences, we try to answer the research questions that have been suggested before.
4.1. Question 1: Is there any group of strategies which students use more frequently than others?

The literature on this field of study, reports that students use strategies to learn a second language. Some researchers such as Rubin or Naiman et al., considered that “good” students are the ones who use more strategies. However, we would like to know if success in learning is related to the frequency with which strategies are used.

According to the results from the SILL questionnaire, the high school students participating in this study had a mean score of 2.8 of overall strategy use on the 5 point scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies groups</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part A-Memory</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part B-Cognitive</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part C-Compensation</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part D-Metacognitive</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part E-Affective</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part F-Social</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall average</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Descriptives for every group of strategies

From the entire sample, the mean score for each part falls in the range of medium strategy use. However, the means are not identical. Strategies in the compensation category are the most frequently used with a mean of 3.4. The mean use of strategies in the metacognitive group is of 3.1. This category is followed by cognitive strategies with a mean of 2.9. The mean scores for memory and social strategies are the same, 2.6. Finally, affective strategies are reported to be the least frequently used with a mean of 2.5.
There is not much difference in the mean scores of strategy use among the six categories but as has been seen, the results are different. As follows, there is an analysis of each grouping.

If we have a look more in detail to the results, an analysis of the times students tend to use each option can be done. For each group of strategies, there is a brief description of what are they and the analysis of results. First, we start by analysing the results for the direct strategies (involve mental processing of language) and then the results for the indirect strategies (used for the general management of learning).

The first group are the memory strategies. These strategies are used for remembering and retrieving new information. As has been analysed before, this group of strategies has a mean score of 2.6, which means that the students in this sample use strategies with a medium frequency. If we look at the times students choose each option, Option 5 (Always or almost always used) has a mean percentage of 9.34%, while option 2 (generally not used) has a mean percentage of 27.86%. This means that few students use memory strategies always; they rather use them in a low frequency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PART A Memory</th>
<th>option 1</th>
<th>option2</th>
<th>option3</th>
<th>option4</th>
<th>option5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>45.45%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
<td>52.38%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.36%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>31.82%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
<td>38.10%</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>54.55%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>71.43%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>40.91%</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.10%</strong></td>
<td><strong>27.86%</strong></td>
<td><strong>25.32%</strong></td>
<td><strong>16.37%</strong></td>
<td><strong>9.34%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5. Percentages of frequency for each individual item from part A*

These results indicate that students are not normally familiarized with memory techniques. Students may need to be taught techniques to memorize things such as vocabulary or grammar rules, and this might help them retrieve new information.

The second group are cognitive strategies. These strategies are used for understanding and producing. This group of strategies has a mean score of 2.9. Option 3 (sometimes used) has a mean percentage of 27.79%. Option 5 (Always or almost always used) has a mean percentage of 13.35%. This results...
show that few students use cognitive strategies always; they use them sometimes. However, the results are higher than memory strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PART B</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Option 1</th>
<th>Option2</th>
<th>Option3</th>
<th>Option 4</th>
<th>Option5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>4,76%</td>
<td>28,57%</td>
<td>33,33%</td>
<td>23,81%</td>
<td>9,52%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td>27,27%</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td>4,55%</td>
<td>31,82%</td>
<td>31,82%</td>
<td>31,82%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td>27,27%</td>
<td>36,36%</td>
<td>31,82%</td>
<td>4,55%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>9,09%</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td>40,91%</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>27,27%</td>
<td>40,91%</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>22,73%</td>
<td>9,09%</td>
<td>31,82%</td>
<td>9,09%</td>
<td>27,27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>19,05%</td>
<td>14,29%</td>
<td>19,05%</td>
<td>23,81%</td>
<td>23,81%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>47,62%</td>
<td>28,57%</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td>23,81%</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>27,27%</td>
<td>36,36%</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td>4,55%</td>
<td>27,27%</td>
<td>40,91%</td>
<td>27,27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>4,55%</td>
<td>22,73%</td>
<td>27,27%</td>
<td>36,36%</td>
<td>9,09%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td>40,91%</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>19,05%</td>
<td>14,29%</td>
<td>47,62%</td>
<td>4,76%</td>
<td>14,29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td>50,00%</td>
<td>22,73%</td>
<td>22,73%</td>
<td>4,55%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>42,86%</td>
<td>9,52%</td>
<td>23,81%</td>
<td>23,81%</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>9,09%</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>27,27%</td>
<td>27,27%</td>
<td>22,73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>9,09%</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>31,82%</td>
<td>27,27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>9,52%</td>
<td>38,10%</td>
<td>33,33%</td>
<td>14,29%</td>
<td>4,76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>20,00%</td>
<td>35,00%</td>
<td>35,00%</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td>10,00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14,51%</td>
<td>21,60%</td>
<td>27,79%</td>
<td>22,76%</td>
<td>13,35%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Percentages of frequency for each individual item from part B

These results indicate that students should be more familiarized with the use of mind maps, mnemonics, visualisation or underlying new words. These strategies can be taught in class, and could be included in the lessons as part of explicit strategy training.

The third group are compensation strategies. These strategies, deal with using language despite linguistic gaps. This group has a mean score of 3.4 which is the highest score in relation to the other groups. This means that compensation strategies are the ones that students tend to use more. In this case, option 5 was chosen 28,90% of the times, and option 2 was chosen 9,92% of the times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PART C</th>
<th>Compensation</th>
<th>Option 1</th>
<th>Option2</th>
<th>Option3</th>
<th>Option 4</th>
<th>Option5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>9,09%</td>
<td>22,73%</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>31,82%</td>
<td>22,73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>9,52%</td>
<td>4,76%</td>
<td>19,05%</td>
<td>42,86%</td>
<td>23,81%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>9,52%</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td>23,81%</td>
<td>28,57%</td>
<td>38,10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>9,09%</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>40,91%</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>22,73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>31,82%</td>
<td>22,73%</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>4,76%</td>
<td>4,76%</td>
<td>19,05%</td>
<td>19,05%</td>
<td>52,38%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to deal with this group of strategies, what can be done in class are miming activities or trying to define terms (crosswords are a good activity that could be done). However, as this group of strategies is the one with a highest mean score, this may indicate that the students from the sample know how to deal with their linguistic gaps.

The forth group are the metacognitive strategies. These strategies are used to coordinate mental processes. This group of strategies has a mean score of 3.1, so they are the second more frequently used strategies in this sample. In the case of metacognitive strategies, option 3 (sometimes use) has been the answer 29% of the times. The second option which most students have answered is option 4 with a 24%. This means that students use metaconitive strategies with medium frequency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PART D</th>
<th>Metacognitive</th>
<th>Option 1</th>
<th>Option2</th>
<th>Option3</th>
<th>Option4</th>
<th>Option5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>9,09%</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td>36,36%</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>22,73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td>4,55%</td>
<td>36,36%</td>
<td>36,36%</td>
<td>22,73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td>4,55%</td>
<td>31,82%</td>
<td>45,45%</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>14,29%</td>
<td>19,05%</td>
<td>23,81%</td>
<td>38,10%</td>
<td>4,76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>22,73%</td>
<td>54,55%</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>9,09%</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>19,05%</td>
<td>47,62%</td>
<td>19,05%</td>
<td>14,29%</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>0,00%</td>
<td>4,55%</td>
<td>27,27%</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>54,55%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>22,73%</td>
<td>45,45%</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>4,55%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>13,64%</td>
<td>18,18%</td>
<td>27,27%</td>
<td>31,82%</td>
<td>9,09%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10,27%</td>
<td>21,55%</td>
<td>29,00%</td>
<td>24,00%</td>
<td>15,18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results show that students are aware of their learning process. In order to improve the results, however, teachers could provide more ideas for their students to be more reflexive on their learning process. One suggestion is to make students do a portfolio, assessment for learning or scaffolding. As one of the most important competences is learning to learn, special attention must be driven to these strategies. They can be taught in an English lesson and then be transferred to other subjects.

The fifth group are the affective strategies. These strategies are the ones which regulate the emotions. This group of strategies has a mean score of 2.5, which is the lowest score in relation to the rest of strategies. In this case, students chose option 1, 31,87% of the times; whereas option 5 was only chosen 13,05% of the times. In general, affective strategies are used with medium frequency.
The fact that this group of strategies has the lowest mean score may indicate that these students need to develop affective strategies. The suggestion here is that students could be encouraged to develop more autonomous learning, they could also learn to identify aims themselves or, very important from my point of view, could make more pair and group work.

Finally, the sixth group are social strategies. This group relates the learner with other learners or people. This group of strategies has a mean score of 2.6, so these strategies are the secondly least used in relation to the rest of groups. In this case, option 3 (sometimes used) has been answered 27,27% of the times. The results show that, in general, students use this group of strategies in a medium frequency.

This group could be related to the group of affective strategies. Pair and group work activities could be also fostered in order to help students develop these groups of strategies.

To sum up, students do not use all the strategies with the same frequency. The results from this sample show that the group of strategies most frequently used are the ones in the compensation group (mean score of 3.9). The strategies in this group include two strategy sets: a) guessing intelligently and b) overcoming limitations in speaking and writing. These two sets, at the same time include eight strategies: using linguistic clues, using other clues (guessing intelligently), switching to the mother tongue, getting help, using mime or gesture, avoiding communication partially or totally, selecting the topic, adjusting or approximating the message, coining words and using a circumlocution or synonym.
The group that follows is the metacognition group (mean score of 3.1). This one includes three sets of strategies. These sets are a) centring your attention, b) arranging and planning your learning, and c) evaluating your learning. At the same time, these sets include between two and six strategies.

The groups that got the same mean score, 2.6, are the memory and social groups. The former, includes four sets of strategies. These are: a) creating mental linkages, b) applying images and sounds, c) reviewing well, and d) employing action. Each set includes between one and four different strategies. The latter, includes three sets, a) asking questions, b) cooperating with others, and c) empathizing with others. In this case, every set contains two strategies.

To finish, the group of strategies which is least frequently used are the Affective strategies. This group includes three strategy sets which at the same time include between three and four different strategies. These sets are: a) lowering your anxiety, b) encouraging yourself, and c) taking your emotional temperature.

The suggestions made in order to help students develop further the strategies are activities such as mind maps, miming, underlying words from texts, pair and group work, creation of portfolios, mnemonics techniques or activities such as crosswords. These suggestions are based on the strategies from each group, and can be explicitly taught in class. Teaching strategies could be part of the teaching plans. Some schools already try to teach techniques that students can use in order to improve their results. In some cases, the strategies can be transferred to other subjects, so teachers could work together to draw a teaching plan that includes strategy training.

To follow on with the study on frequency of use of the different groups of strategies, we suggest the following research question: Why do students use some groups of strategies more frequently than others?

4.2. Question2: Which are the most frequently used strategies?

From all the six different groups of strategies, we have seen that the most frequently used is the group of compensation strategies. However, which are the concrete strategies that are generally more used by learners?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Option 1 (Never or almost never)</th>
<th>Option 5 (Always or almost always)</th>
<th>Strategy group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47- I always look for a nice place to study: a quiet room, with no noises, a good temperature</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>54.55%</td>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40- If I can’t think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>52.38%</td>
<td>Compensation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
56-When I don’t understand something I ask the other person to repeat or speak more slowly.
37- If I don’t understand a word I ask it to the person who I am talking to.
17- I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully
61-I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>Option 1 (Never or almost never)</th>
<th>Option 5 (Always or almost always)</th>
<th>STRATEGY GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>54. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.</td>
<td>90,91%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>Affective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English</td>
<td>71,43%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>Memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60. I look for people I can talk to in English</td>
<td>59,09%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English</td>
<td>47,62%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>Affective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I try to think in English</td>
<td>47,62%</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11. Strategies which are more frequently used by learners

From what we see in this table, some strategies are used more frequently than others. In the case of strategy number 47 “I always look for a nice place to study: a quiet room, with no noises, a good temperature”, 54,55% of the students chose option 5 (Always or almost always true of me), in front of the 0% of students who chose option 1 (never or almost never true of me).

If the think carefully about these strategies, we realise that they are normally explicitly taught in class. Teachers normally tell students to ask when they do not understand something, they are told to skim texts first to understand the general meaning, and they are also told to look for synonyms when they do not know how to say something or are recommended to find nice places to study. For this reason, maybe it is not surprising to find out that these are the most frequently used strategies.

4.3. Question 3: Which are the least frequently used strategies?

It is clear, then, that as well as some strategies are used with a high frequency, some others are never or almost never used by students.
As seen in the table, the strategies which are least frequently used are from the three groups which have a lowest mean score. It is surprising to see that in this case, none of the students reported using any of these strategies always. In the case of item 54, a 90.91 percent of the answers were option 1 (Never or almost never true of me), and only a few also chose option 2 (usually not true of me) and option 3 (somewhat true of me).

In my opinion, the results are not surprising. Adolescents are not used to write about their feelings about language, and they are not asked to do it either. These strategies are not normally taught in the classes so this might be the reason why they are some of the least frequently used.

4.4 Question4: Is there a relation between individual differences and strategy choice?

Research on language learner strategies has focused on defining, identifying and classifying strategies that language learners use. Another important line of inquiry is the variation of strategy use as a result of individual and contextual differences.

Dieter Wolff (2011) speaks about individual differences and how they affect the process of learning, by providing variable results among learners of a language. Talking about researchers on this field, Wolff says that “they have shown that these differences influence the results of second language learning processes and lead to different linguistic abilities and skills in the foreign language”. (D.Wolff, 2011: 3). The different taxonomies that have been developed in relation to individual differences are very similar, showing that there is a bit more of consensus in relation to individual differences compared to the lack of consensus about strategies. Some of the classifications are that from Ellis (1994) who draws a distinction of seven categories: beliefs about language learning, affective state, age, aptitude, learning style, motivation and personality. Another important classification has been done by Oxford and Ehrman (1993) who distinguish nine important factors: aptitude, motivation, anxiety, self-esteem, tolerance to ambiguity, risk-taking, language learning styles, age and gender.

As many studies have shown, there is a direct relation between individual differences and learning. Among those variables, the ones that are going to be discussed are: cognitive styles, motivation, anxiety, self concept and self-esteem, and finally age.
Cognitive styles refer to the reactions that students have in front of a stimulus, the cognitive processing of information and the way students confront reality. One of the most researched styles is called field dependent/field independent. This style affects information processing and is also related to interpersonal and social behaviour. Field dependent means synthetic processing, high implication in interpersonal relations; whereas field independent implies analytical processing, isolation of elements and autonomy is preferred rather than interpersonal relations. Oxford and Ehrman (1993), divide styles into four dimensions: analytic vs global, sensory preferences, intuitive vs. sensory, and orientation to closure. Students’ cognitive styles are an important issue to take into account when developing the materials for teaching as they have to adapt to the students. We must also make reference to the theory of the multiple intelligences drawn by Gadner (1993), who stated that there are eight different intelligences which have a relation with the individual’s development.

In relation to motivation, studies have tried to answer two related questions: what is that serves as an incentive to learn? How is this reflected in elements such as degree of acceptance or rejection of tasks, and the tendency to persevere in the realisation of these tasks? (Miras, M & Onrubias, J; 2004:30). In the reading “Factors implicats en l’aprenentatge escolar”, there is a description of one of the dimensions proposed by Weiner (1990) that is related to the concept of motivation. This dimension refers to the goals of the learners. The achievement motivation is the most important for learning and for educational success. It has two basic components: the need for achievement and the fear of failure. Miras and Onrubias (2004) state that if any of these components is too high, this results in insufficient achievement motivation. In relation to the student from the sample, most of them are highly motivated to learn English as they reported during my practicum. They all show a very respectful behaviour towards the English language and culture and they also showed a lot of interest for the tasks done in class.

Another important variable, anxiety, has proved to highly influence students’ performance in the resolution of problems. Literature on this variable, states that moderate levels of anxiety are better in relation to learning and high levels of anxiety are not good for learning. In relation to the students from the sample, and having a look at the result from the SILL questionnaire, they have reported not having high levels of anxiety. Item number 50 from the SILL “I am anxious when studying English but I try to relax” has shown that only a 5% of the students feel like this always or almost always; as opposed to the 30% who reported never almost never feeling like this. Item number 53 “I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English” also shows that this group of students has low levels of anxieties as 47,62% of the students reported that this item was never or almost never true for them, and 0% of the students reported feeling anxiety.

In relation to self-concept, it embraces the representation of the different dimensions of an individual. Some of the most important factors implied are appearance, physical abilities, interpersonal relations, cognitive abilities, emotional stability, creativity and honesty. Theorists have established a distinction between self-concept and self-esteem. They also state that both are
constructed during each individual's life. The construction of both is influenced by the way people treat each individual.

Finally, the variable of age, has also been a discussed issue amongst theorists and researchers. “Age is often mentioned as an influence on language learning success” (Scarcella and Oxford 1992 cited in Oxford and Ehrman 1993: 198). The discussion comes when debating about the premise “the younger the better”. Some theorists give arguments in favour of learning a foreign language at young ages. The first assertion is based on the cognitive-nativist argument that language learning is an innate ability that dissipates with age (Comsky 1972). The second proposition refers to the neurological argument that states that one’s neural plasticity decreases with age, and this affects the language learning ability (Lenneberg 1967). On the other hand, there are opposing arguments which focus on the idea that older learners are able to attain higher levels of foreign language acquisition than younger learners. Oxford and Scarcella (1992) argue that “older learners have an advantage in terms of rate of acquisition of syntax and morphology; however ultimate fluency and native-like pronunciation in a new language are acquired better among those who start learning it as children” (Oxford and Ehrman, 1993 : 199). In relation to the students from the sample, most of them started learning English when they were 7 years old (no matter which country they come from).

4.5. Question5: Do students use more or less strategies depending on the task they have to complete?

Another question we had in mind is if learners use strategies with the same frequency in different tasks. The questionnaire made reference to the strategies used when writing listening and collaborative tasks. We did not have a look at reading and speaking because of time constraints. For this questionnaire, students’ answers to the tests were based on their experience with a writing assignment they had previously done in class during my practicum. This writing assignment included looking for information, working in groups (collaborative task) and finally writing a magazine.

The following table shows the mean scores for each kind of task. The results show that students use more strategies when doing a listening task, followed by collaborative tasks and the lowest mean score is for writing.
From this sample, the mean score for the writing and collaborative parts fall in the range of medium strategy use. The listening part has a mean of 3.7 which means that it ranges within the high strategy use. The writing part has a mean of 3.2, and the collaborative task a mean of 3.3.

When the students were asked about their abilities for writing, listening, speaking and writing, students showed that they were better at listening and reading than writing or speaking. This indicates that understanding English is not as difficult as producing for them.

We might suggest then, that teachers could focus on developing the speaking and writing skills through the help of strategy training programs. This could help the students to improve their production and hence to improve their performance in a foreign language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>3,2</td>
<td>2,6</td>
<td>4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>3,7</td>
<td>3,1</td>
<td>4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative tasks</td>
<td>3,3</td>
<td>2,4</td>
<td>4,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall average</td>
<td>3,4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4,5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13. Descriptives of strategies used in writing, listening and collaborative tasks.
5. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to review the literature related to the field of language learners’ strategies in order to understand what they are and see how students use them. However, as has been discussed, finding a definition and classification of language learners strategies for foreign language learning, is a difficult matter. Theorists and researchers have tried to provide complete definitions and taxonomies. Nevertheless, a lack of consensus in relation to some basic elements has caused problems when trying to find a good definition. The theories that have been followed in this paper are developed by Oxford (1989), O’Malley and Chamot (1990), and Weinstein et al (2000). Dörney and Skehan (2003) also provided definitions and claimed for the abandonment of the word strategy to replace it for the construct of self-regulation. Given the lack of consensus, other theorists have put together the different views and tried to provide a more comprehensible analysis of strategies. Griffith (2008) discusses the different features that emerge form the discussions amongst theorists, and finally proposes a new definition that embraces all the problematic views.

After reviewing the literature on this field of study, the taxonomy that has been followed is the proposed by Rebeca Oxford. In order to collect the data to approach the different questions suggested, we have used the Strategy Inventory for Language Learners (SILL). This inventory has been used in many research projects to measure the frequency of use of learning strategies. However, this inventory has been criticized for not being a totally trustful tool given that students have to answer the questions by thinking on what they normally do, but not actually engaging in a task and then reporting. Nevertheless, we have used this questionnaire as we thought it was the one which could provide us more information about the students’ use of language learning strategies. To complement the SILL, a background information questionnaire has been done as well, which provided us information about the students’ linguistic background.

The questions that have been approached made reference to the frequency of strategy use and the relation between individual differences and strategy choice. The conclusions about each question are as follow.

The first one, referred to the frequency with which students use the six different groups of strategies. The data came from a group of students from third year of ESO from a high school near Barcelona. It has been found, that there are some differences in the mean scores. The group of strategies which obtained the highest score was the compensation group, with a mean of 3.9. The group of strategies that follow are the metacognitive with a mean of 3.1. The next group are the cognitive strategies with a mean of 2.9. The social and memory group of strategies had the same mean score, 2.6 and the group of affective strategies got the lowest mean, 2.5. It is clear, then that compensation strategies are preferred for the students. Some suggestions have been made about the kind of activities that teachers could do in class in order to develop further the different groups of strategies. These activities, can help the students improve their performance in the learning of languages and can be transferred to other subjects.
The second and third questions were related to the strategies which are most and least used. The most used strategy was “I always look for a nice place to study: a quiet room, with no noises, a good temperature”, which is part of the metacognitive group of strategies. The strategy which is used with less frequency is “I write down my feelings in a language learning diary” which is part of the affective group of strategies. From what has been said, the strategies that are more frequently used are normally taught in class while dealing with different tasks; whereas the strategies which are least used are no normally worked in class.

The fourth question, tried to relate individual differences and language learners strategies. We have had a look at some of the variables that affect language learning and how they relate to the students from the sample. However, from the literature that has been developed on this field of study, there are no conclusions as to which is the effect that individual differences have on learning strategies choice.

The fifth and final question, tried to see if there are any differences in strategy use depending on the task the students are required to do. The results showed that when doing a listening, students use more strategies than when working on a writing task or in collaborative work. However, the mean scores are very similar, with an overall average of 3.4 which indicates that they make medium use of strategies when engaged in these three types of tasks. The suggestion made here, is that teachers could focus more on developing strategies that could help students produce output in the foreign language. In order to do that, teachers can draw teaching plans together with the rest of the teachers.

To sum up, all learners of a foreign language make use of language learning strategies. Some strategies are more used than others, and this may be the result of the way teachers deal with the activities done in class. Strategy training has been another key point in the field of language learning strategies, and could be contemplated as an option to improve learners’ performance. However, what is clear is that no matter if students get good or bad results, or if they are aware of using them or not, strategies are part of their learning process.
6. Bibliography


7. Annexes

Annex 1. SILL questionnaire

En los apartados (A-F) que se incluyen a continuación, están recogidas las diversas estrategias que pueden utilizarse en el aprendizaje de un nuevo idioma. Léelas cuidadosamente y valórelas de 1 a 5, según el siguiente baremo:

1. No lo hago nunca o casi nunca
2. Generalmente no lo hago (= menos de la mitad de las veces)
3. Lo hago a veces (= más o menos la mitad de las veces)
4. Lo hago a menudo (= más de la mitad de las veces)
5. Lo hago siempre o casi siempre

Elige la puntuación que corresponde a lo que tú haces realmente y no a lo que piensas que deberías hacer o a lo que hacen los demás. Ten presente que todas las actuaciones mencionadas son aceptables, que no hay unas correctas y otras equivocadas, que todas son estrategias que podemos o no utilizar al aprender una lengua. Si tu resultado indica que tú te sirves de un número limitado de estrategias, la lectura de este documento te proporcionará, sin duda, algunas ideas para mejorar tu aprendizaje.
APARTADO A

1. Creo asociaciones entre la palabra nueva y lo que ya sé
2. Coloco la palabra nueva en una oración de modo que pueda recordarla
3. Hago frecuentes repasos
4. Coloco la palabra nueva en un grupo junto con otras palabras que de alguna manera son similares (vestimenta, colores)
5. Asocio el sonido de la palabra nueva con el sonido de una palabra familiar
6. Uso rimas para recordarla
7. Recuerdo la palabra haciéndome una clara imagen mental de ella o haciendo un dibujo
8. Visualizo mentalmente cómo se escribe la palabra
9. Intento recordar lo que aprendí hace mucho tiempo
10. Uso combinaciones de sonidos e imágenes para recordar la palabra
11. Hago una lista de todas las palabras que conozco que tienen alguna relación con la nueva y dibujo líneas para mostrar las interrelaciones
12. Recuerdo en qué parte de la página está ubicada la palabra nueva, o dónde la vi oí por primera vez
13. Uso fichas en las que pongo la palabra nueva en un lado, y la definición (u otra información), en el otro
14. Repito o escribo muchas veces la palabra

APARTADO B

15. Practico las nuevas expresiones con frecuencia, diciéndolas o escribiéndolas
16. Intento imitar la manera de hablar de los nativos
17. Leo un diálogo o una historia varias veces, hasta llegar a entenderlo
18. Vuelvo a mirar lo que escribo para mejorar mi expresión escrita.
19. Practico los sonidos que son difíciles para mí
20. Utilizo las palabras familiares en nuevas frases
21. Busco ocasiones para hablar Inglés
22. Miro la tele, escucho la radio...
23. Intento pensar en Inglés
24. Escribo notas, cartas, mensajes en Inglés
25. Al leer, miro por encima todo el texto para ver de qué trata y luego vuelvo a leerlo más despacio
26. Uso el diccionario como ayuda para entender lo que leo
27. En clase, tomo notas en Inglés
28. Hago resúmenes de lo que aprendo
29. Utilizo la lengua en situaciones nuevas, aplicando las reglas que ya conozco
30. Para entender el significado de una palabra nueva, la divido en partes que entiendo
31. Busco semejanzas y diferencias entre el Inglés y mi lengua materna
32. Trato de entender lo que leo, sin traducirlo palabra por palabra a mi propio idioma
33. Soy prudente, no transfiero automáticamente palabras o conceptos de mi propio idioma al Inglés
34. Desarrollo mis propias explicaciones sobre el funcionamiento de la lengua, y las reviso cuando dispongo de nuevas informaciones

APARTADO C

35. Trato de entender lo que leo, sin traducirlo palabra por palabra a mi propio idioma
36. Cuando hablo, si no encuentro la palabra que necesito, hago gestos para explicar lo que quiero decir
37. Cuando no conozco la palabra que necesito, pregunto a mi interlocutor cómo puedo decir lo que quiero expresar
38. Al leer, no me detengo en cada palabra desconocida
39. Al hablar con una persona, intento hacer suposiciones sobre lo que va a decir
40. Si no puedo encontrar la palabra que necesito, utilizo una palabra parecida o describo la idea

APARTADO D

41. Busco ocasiones para utilizar mis conocimientos de Inglés
42. Me fijo en los errores que cometo e intento no volver a cometerlos
43. Estoy siempre atento cuando alguien habla Inglés
44. Hago esfuerzos para mejorar mi manera de aprender: leo libros y discuto mis opiniones sobre el aprendizaje con otras personas
45. Dedico todo el tiempo que puedo al estudio del Inglés
46. Busco personas con quienes pueda hablar Inglés
47. Busco las mejores condiciones para estudiar: un lugar tranquilo, sin ruido, con temperatura agradable
48. Me fijo objetivos claros y definidos que me ayudan a determinar cómo quiero avanzar en el conocimiento de la lengua
Reflexiono sobre los progresos que hago en mi aprendizaje, compruebo lo que sé y lo que no sé

**APARTADO E**

50. Siento una cierta ansiedad al utilizar el Inglés, pero intento relajarme
51. Tengo miedo a cometer errores al hablar, pero me esfuerzo igualmente en hacerlo
52. Cuando mis resultados son buenos me felicito o me concedo algún premio
53. Suelo observar si estoy ansioso al estudiar Inglés
54. Tengo un diario donde apunto cómo me siento al estudiar Inglés
55. Discuto con mis compañeros nuestros estados de ánimo
56. Cuando no entiendo algo, pido a la otra persona que hable más despacio o que repita

**APARTADO F**

57. Pido que me corrijan si cometo errores al hablar
58. Repaso con mis compañeros lo que he aprendido
59. Hago preguntas en Inglés durante la clase
60. Hablo Inglés con mis compañeros
61. Tengo interés por la cultura Inglesa
Annex 2. Questionnaire 2

Aquest és un qüestionari per a obtenir informació sobre les vostres estratègies en quant a les tasques d’escriptura, comprensió aural i de treball en grup.

En el full a part escriu les teves respostes (1, 2, 3, 4 o 5) que indiquen quant de veritables són per a tu les següents afirmacions.

1. Mai o gairebé mai és així
2. Normalment no
3. D’alguna manera si
4. Normalment si
5. Sempre o gairebé sempre és així

**MAI O GAIREBÉ MAI ÉS AIXÍ** vol dir que l’afirmació estranyament es compleix en el teu cas.

**NORMALMENT NO** vol dir que l’afirmació és certa menys de la meitat de cops.

**D’ALGUNA MANERA SI** vol dir que l’afirmació és certa per a tu la meitat de cops.

**NORMALMENT SI** vol dir que l’afirmació és certa més de la meitat de cops.

**SEMPRE O GAIREBÉ SEMPRE ÉS AIXÍ** vol dir que l’afirmació és certa per a tu la majoria de vegades.

Contesta les preguntes segons com les afirmacions us descriuen a vosaltres. No com hauria de ser, ni com altres persones fan. No hi ha respostes correctes ni incorrectes. Recorda d’escriure les respostes en el full a part. Moltes gràcies per la teva participació.
1. Mai o gairebé mai és així
2. Normalment no
3. D’alguna manera sí
4. Normalment sí
5. Sempre o gairebé sempre és així

**Writing**

**Pre tasca**

A. Faig una pluja d’idees.
B. Faig un esquema amb les meves idees.
C. Busco informació relacionada amb el tema.
D. Classifico la informació que faré servir en paràgrafs.

**Durant la tasca**

E. Faig servir diccionaris de paper.
F. Faig servir diccionaris d’Internet.
G. Faig un borrador.
H. Demano ajuda al algú (professor, company de classe, familiar, amics…).

**Després de la tasca**

I. Repasso el que he escrit per si hi ha faltes d’ortografia.
J. Repasso el que he escrit per comprovar que tingui coherència.
K. Repasso la cohesió del text.
L. Prenc nota dels errors que he fet per a no tornar-los a fer.
Pàgina 3

1. Mai o gairebé mai és així
2. Normalment no
3. D’alguna manera sí
4. Normalment sí
5. Sempre o gairebé sempre és així

**Listening**

**Pre-tasca**

M. Llegeixo les preguntes primer per entendre el tema.
N. Intento endevinar quin tipus de resposta necessito (una paraula, una frase, una data, un nom…).
O. Pregunto el vocabulari que no entenc.

**Durant la tasca**

P. El primer cop que sona el reproductor només escolto.
Q. Prenc apunts de paraules que no he entés per a preguntar-les.
R. Intento respondre les preguntes que em són més clares.

**Post tasca**

S. Repasso les respostes per comprovar que tenen sentit.
T. Pregunto el vocabulari que no he entés.
U. Si tinc alguna resposta incorrecte intento aclarar el per què preguntant al professor.

**Treball en equip**

V. Quan treballo en equip m’agrada ser qui organitza.
W. El treball en equip em fa sentir més segur/a.
X. Utilitzo l’Anglès quan treballo amb companys.
Y. Procuro escoltar les propostes dels companys i acceptar-les.
Z. M’esforço en treballar bé amb els companys.
Annex 3. Background information questionnaire

El propòsit d’aquest qüestionari és tenir informació sobre el vostre orígen i experiència amb les llengües. Gràcies per ajudar-me.

Edat: _____________

Sexe: Home / Dona

Procedència: ___________________________________________________________

Quants anys fa que vius a Catalunya? ________________________________

Llengües:

Materna i paterna: ___________________________________________________

A casa: _____________________________________________________________

A l’escola: __________________________________________________________

Al carrer: ___________________________________________________________

Edat en què vas començar a estar exposat o exposada a l’Anglès?

A l’escola: __________________________________________________________

En altres contextos: __________________________________________________

Total d’anys que portes aprenent Anglès: ______________________________

Altres llengües no maternes: ___________________________________________

Específica de l’1 al 5 (sent 1 la nota més baixa i 5 la més alta) la teva habilitat en escriure, entendre, parlar i llegir en Anglès:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Habilitat</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Escriure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parlar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entendre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llegir</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 4. Teacher’s questionnaire

This questionnaire is to obtain information about how teachers approach strategies in relation to different language skills. Please write your answer under each question. Thanks a lot for your participation, I really appreciate it.

1. Which methodology do you use in relation to writing tasks?

2. Which methodology do you use in relation to listening tasks?

3. Which methodology do you use in relation to speaking tasks?

4. Which methodology do you use in relation to reading tasks?

5. Do you teach strategies to your students?

6. What do you think about strategy instruction?