

LEARNING STRATEGIES IN MEXICAN EFL HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to identify which English Learning Strategies are mostly used by EFL undergraduate students from the third semester of the BA in ELT at the National University of Chiapas (UNACH), who have successfully passed the Cambridge-ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) examination. This study consisted of two measurements: a structured interview, and Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (version 7.0). The proposed methodology was a mixed-method approach under the small-scale dimension category (McDonough J. & McDonough S. 2005). The findings indicated that all six strategy categories in the current research were used in the high and medium range of strategy use. The most used strategies among six categories of English Learning Strategies were Metacognitive, followed by social, cognitive, affective, and compensation strategies. Memory strategies were the most infrequently used categories. Low range of strategy use was not found in any of the six categories of language strategy in the current research. Language proficiency levels had no significant effects on the overall strategy use, the six categories of strategy, and individual strategy use items. The present study also found that gender did not affect the overall strategy usage of the third semester undergraduate learners of the BA in ELT at the University of Chiapas (UNACH), the six categories of strategy, and individual strategy use. In conclusion, based in the findings this research provides English teachers with validated information on the overall Language Learning strategies currently used by the third semester students under investigation and provides recommendations for possible future research.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of this study by describing the background, rationale, purpose and research questions as well as an outline of the research project.

1.1 Background

The aim of this research was to identify the learning strategies that seem to have helped the students of the 3rd semester of the *BA in ELT* at the *UNACH* to pass the Cambridge-ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) examination. In order to continue their studies, third semester BA students have to pass the Cambridge ESOL PET exam, the problem with this is that a large proportion of the students regularly fail the exam, despite attending exam preparation classes and doing BA content subjects in English.

For the *UNACH*, and for any institution, it is important to discover if the students use specific study techniques and strategies to be prepared to present these examinations. In the Cambridge ESOL PET examination Handbook, it can be seen that the students need to develop the four skills to a specific proficiency level, in order to pass the exam. For this research, it is important to know how successful students are developing their skills and what they are doing that less successful students are not. In Brooks,

Markovitz, Minehane and Wicking's (2008) article, the role of the teacher as a factor for student achievement is emphasized and they invite teachers to answer the following question: "Are teachers aware of their teacher's behavior and attitude and are they also aware of the teaching practices, techniques and strategies they are using when preparing the students?" This is a factor that may affect the student's success when presenting examinations and could be the focus of another research.

1.2 Rationale

It is important to mention that as an entrance requirement students at the *UNACH* have to succeed the institutional TOEFL examination of at least 350 points, and by the end of the third semester, the students would have to pass the Cambridge ESOL PET examination in order to continue with their studies; finally, on the ninth semester, the students have to successfully pass the First Certificate in English (FCE) as a graduating requirement. This research was carried out taking into account 15 students (15 out of 32) that constituted 100% of the universe of those 3rd semester students who passed the PET exam. This area of study is important because the curriculum of the BA in ELT has recently been re-designed as a result of a previous study, aiming to identify areas for improvement. One of the weaknesses was the students' low level of English at the end of the program. For this reason and in order to get better results in English level, English lessons were doubled, instead of five hours per week of English classes, they now have ten

hours; there is also a new textbook ; the BA program was extended from eight to nine semesters longer, and the (TOEFL, PET, FCE) were also implemented.

1.3. Purpose and research questions

The possible importance of this research is that if the language learning strategies that the successful students use when learning English are identified, we as English teachers could try to help learners, since first semester, to develop those strategies in order to get better results overall and a major amount of students would probably pass the PET exam.

The research questions to be answered through this study are the following:

- What English language activities did the 3rd semester BA in ELT students carry out, besides taking their English classes, which may have helped them to pass the PET exam?
- What specific learning/language learning strategies did successful students implement?
- How many hours of extra work, on average, did successful students do to improve their English and pass the PET exam?
- Do the students who achieve higher scores on the institutional TOEFL exam automatically pass the PET exam or do other factors seem to influence the results?

1.4 Outline of the Research Project

The proposed methodology was a mixed-method approach under the small-scale dimension category, according to McDonough J. & McDonough S. (2005). A mixed-method approach to research is one that involves gathering both numerical information (e.g. from instruments) as well as text information (e.g. from interviews) so that the final database represents both quantitative and qualitative information (Creswell, 2003, p.20). This will be a piece of primary research type because the primary source of information will be the group of third semester students that have just taken the PET examination (Brown 1988). This approach is appropriate for this study because the research will be carried out in an institutional context, with a small group of participants. Though the numerical information may be interesting, the number of participants is quite small, so the numerical data will be enriched with qualitative data. The instruments that were used to collect the data were a structured interview, which would provide the text information and the Oxford Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (1990), which would provide the numeric information. One of the reasons for the selection of this approach is that through the literature review I was able to realize that this instrument has been very useful for many researchers in different countries. Some examples of this are the following: Oxford's (1990) SILL was administered to 348 students of twenty one different countries: Japanese (63%), Korean (21%), Taiwanese (18%), and European (9%); Griffiths (2003) conducted a study in a private language school in New Zealand; Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) conducted a research among Korean, Japanese and Chinese students, among many other researchers.

Many of the strategies reported in the SILL are unconscious actions taken by the learners, so when the students face the questionnaire they analyze themselves and think about the actions taken when learning English and decide if they have used these strategies or not. Finally, according to Cohen, L., Manion, L. , & Morrison, K. (2001) data derived from questionnaires tend to be more reliable, due to the fact that they allow participants to remain anonymous and therefore encourage greater honesty, this is another reason why SILL was used.

In this study, the independent variables were proficiency level (score on the institutional TOEFL exam), gender, extra hours of study, activities besides the English class to practice the language. Whereas the dependent variables were the mean scores of the entire SILL items and the mean scores of the following six categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Background

In order to make explicit the ways in which concepts like language, learning and strategy were applied in my own research, a research that focused on the learning strategies that seem to have helped the 15 students succeed the Cambridge (PET) examination. Before starting the Literature Review these concepts will be defined in order to understand their apparent relationship with successful English Language Learning.

2.1.1 Defining Language

According to the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1993); “Language is the system of human communication which consist of the structured arrangement of sounds (or their written representation) into larger units, e.g. Morphemes, words, sentences, utterances.”

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary (2013), “Language is the system of conventional spoken or written symbols used by people in a shared culture to communicate with each other”. A language both reflects and affects a culture's way of thinking, and changes in a culture influence the development of its language. Related languages become more differentiated when their speakers are isolated from each other.

Merriam Webster definition states that all languages begin as speech, and many go on to develop writing systems. People use their resources differently for communication but seem to be equally flexible structurally. The principal resources in language are word order, word form, syntactic structure, and, in a speech, intonation. Different languages keep indicators of number, person, gender, tense, mood, and other categories separate from the root word or attach them to it. The innate human capacity to learn a language disappears with age, and languages learned after about age 10 are usually not spoken as well as those learned earlier. These two definitions of “language” provide a clear idea that language is necessary for communication. Communication in our mother tongue or in a different language. Learning English has become very important, because it is now a language to communicate among people from different countries (Lingua Franca). A major concept underlying my research is “language”, because in my context, what the students need is to learn a foreign *language*. In order to learn a foreign language, it may be required to use learning strategies to be successful.

2.1.2 Defining Learning

Learning is the process of acquiring modifications to existing knowledge, skills, habits, or tendencies through experience, practice, or exercise (Merriam Webster dictionary, 2013). A definition provided by the Institute of Education. University of London. 2002: no. 17 states that:

“Learning is a reflective activity which enables the learner to draw upon previous experience to understand and evaluate the present, so as to shape future action and formulate new knowledge.”

There are some features highlighted by this definition, learning is:

- An active process in which the learner relates new experience to existing meaning, and may thus accommodate and assimilate new ideas.
- Past, present and future are connected, although a linear connection is not necessarily assumed: un-learning and re-learning may be implied.
- The process is influenced by the use to which learning is to be put: how the learning informs action in future situations is vital.

The main objective teachers have in the classroom, is to provide activities that help students in their learning process, but for the present research it is even more relevant to identify what students do to help themselves in their learning process.

2.1.3 Defining Strategy

The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1993), defines “strategy” as the procedure used in learning, thinking, etc. which serves as a way of reaching a goal. In language learning, learning strategies and communication strategies are those conscious or unconscious processes which language learners make use of in learning and using a language.

In the present research the word “strategy” is the clue, because the main objective is to identify any specific actions, attitudes, in fact, any specific strategies that successful students use to pass the PET exam.

2.2. Defining Language Learning Strategies

Although many definitions of Language Learning Strategies exist in the literature, the most influential ones from 1990 to the present time are, perhaps, the following:

“learning strategies are viewed 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.” Cohen (1990:5)

Cohen’s definition highlights that students make a conscious selection of those strategies and through the development of this research it will be important to identify if the participants are, in fact, conscious about the strategies they use to learn successfully.

O’Malley and Chamot (1990:1) states that “language learning strategies are the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to comprehend, learn or retain new information.”

O’Malley and Chamot’s definition provided a clearer idea of the path that the following research has to follow. The purpose of the research is to try to identify those special thoughts or behaviors that the students use to comprehend this new language.

Oxford (1990:8) says that “learning strategies are the specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situation. Oxford’s (1990) definition leads to the reflection that, for some reason, some students make learning easier, faster, enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and some others do not, and this helped to further focus this research on the use of learning strategies.

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:212) state that “we turn now to the implications of research on learning strategies, *those unconscious and conscious activities undertaken by learners*

that promote learning.” When a student starts reading about learning strategies, there is a usual self-analysis and a discovery that many actions taken when learning English were learning strategies, without being aware of it. This agrees with Larsen-Freeman and Long’s (1991) definition that consider learning strategies as those unconscious and conscious activities undertaken by learners that promote learning.

Cohen (1998:4) suggests that:

“Language learning and language use strategies can be defined as those processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning or the use of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about that language.”

All the definitions described above have helped me to highlight and clarify the purpose of the present research: to *identify the strategies* that the successful students select in their language learning process, in a conscious and unconscious way. Perhaps through the questionnaire the students will make conscious some unconscious actions taken when learning English. It may help students realized the different strategies they can develop to improve their learning and may help them in their future as English teachers, providing opportunities to their students to develop those strategies and become successful learners.

2.2.1 Language as a Cognitive Skill

According to O’Malley and Chamot (1995), Second Language acquisition is understood as a complex cognitive skill. The theoretical framework in which it is discussed is based on a comprehensive model of cognitive skill learning that has several advantages. The one that concerns this study is the *pedagogical* one, and refers to the development and use of learning strategies in second language instruction.

Anderson (1983, 1985) using a production system notation describes cognitive skill acquisition as a “three stage” process. This framework helps to identify and test the applicability of specific learning strategies in the skill acquisition process. Anderson’s description helped initiate the present research, because it was needed to find an appropriate way in which to identify the learning strategies the students seemed to be applying when learning English. Anderson (*ibid.*) distinguishes between *what we know* and *what we know how to do*, and classifies these as follows: “static” information in memory (what we know about); “dynamic” information in memory (what we know how to do); “declarative knowledge” all the things we know about and “procedural knowledge” the things we know how to do. Declarative knowledge is maintained in long-term memory in terms of meaning; some examples of this are: definitions of words, facts, such as Paris is the capital city of France, and rules, like adding and “s” in the verbs when using the third person of the singular. This kind of knowledge may be acquired quickly. To learn a Second Language we need both “declarative and procedural knowledge” because it is necessary to memorize vocabulary, facts, definition of words, use of grammar rules.

Anderson (1980) refers to the term cognitive skill as the ability to perform various mental procedures. Examples of Procedural knowledge are: language acquisition, the ability to understand and generate language, apply the knowledge of rules to solve problems. This kind of knowledge is acquired gradually and requires lots of practice. Anderson (1983, 1985) further describes three stages of skill acquisition: the cognitive, associative, and autonomous, to explain how one proceeds from declarative knowledge to the automatic procedural stage. The cognitive stage involves conscious activity, one can memorize vocabulary and the rules for grammar, the learners are instructed how doing the task, observe someone else and study it themselves. During the associative stage the declarative knowledge is turned into its procedural form, but still remember the grammar rules, better performance, although errors may still occur. At the autonomous stage performance

becomes increasingly fine-tuned, the skill becomes virtually automatic and errors tend to disappear. One is able to comprehend and produce utterances with little difficulty.

O'Malley and Chamot (1995) conclude that second language acquisition can only be mastered after a relatively long period of practice. Anderson, O'Malley and Chamot's statements about language as a cognitive skill provided a path to follow in the development of the interview designed for the present research. It was necessary to know if they practice regularly their English and in which ways. Questions like the following, were developed:

- Did you attend a special course to get prepared for the PET exam?
- Did you attend to the Self Access Center to practice for you PET exam?
- Were you a member of the Chat Club at the Self Access Center?
- How long have you been studying English?

2.2.2 Learning Strategies as a Cognitive Skill

Within the framework of Anderson's cognitive theory (Anderson 1993) if one's purpose is to facilitate learning and teaching, there are advantages to isolating component mental processes that can be imparted to learners as ways to make learning more effective. If learning strategies themselves are learning skills, the processes by which strategies are stored and retrieved for future use must be identified in order to use them when necessary. Weinstein and Mayer (1986) state that the goal of learning strategies is to facilitate learning and are intentional on the part of the learner, is to "affect the learner's motivational or affective state, or the way in which the learner selects, acquires, organizes, or integrate new knowledge."(p. 315).

Learning Strategies may include: focusing on selected aspects of new information, analyzing and monitoring information during the encoding process, evaluating the learning, the strategies may have an affective or conceptual basis, and may influence the learning of simple tasks, such as learning vocabulary or complex tasks as language comprehension or

language production. As Tarone (1981) notes, learning strategies are attempts to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language. The motivation for the use of the strategy is the desire to learn the target language. Weinstein, Mayer and Tarone's statements brought to light some important factors that affect the use of language strategies, namely: the students' motivation and affective stage. So, besides unconscious and conscious decisions taken by students when learning a second language, motivation and affective stage also play an important role in the selection of the strategies.

2.2.3 Learning Strategies as Cognitive Processes

As O'Malley and Chamot (1995) state, Learning Strategies are complex procedures that individuals apply to tasks which may be acquired through cognitive, associative, and autonomous stages of learning. The strategies must be conscious in early stages of learning and later be performed automatically. Rabinowits and Chi (1987) suggest that the strategies must be conscious in order to be strategic, and no longer should be called strategy when they occur automatically.

Strategies as cognitive processes are divided into: Metacognitive and Cognitive, and these will be explained in detail in the following section. Planning is a key metacognitive strategy for second language acquisition. Planning may be influenced by goals or by input features that seem most useful for planning a task. Attention and monitoring are also metacognitive processes described in Anderson's theory (1983). Some strategy like cognitive processes are imagery, organization, inferencing, elaboration, deduction, and transfer.

Learning Strategies as Cognitive processes were very influential in the selection of the instrument for the present research, knowing that there are different classification systems a decision must be taken, which system to use in order to identify the learning strategies that the successful students apply when learning English. The following section, describes

the different classification systems developed by different authors.

2.3 Main Language Learning Strategies Classification Systems

Many studies have been carried out in the field of Language Learning Strategies. Oxford (1994) states that the L2 learner is not just a cognitive and metacognitive machine, but rather a whole person. She points out that there are about a dozen classification systems that she attempts to classify as follows:

1. Systems related to successful language learners (Rubin, 1975)
2. Systems based on psychological functions (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990)
3. Linguistically based systems dealing with guessing, language monitoring, formal and functional practice (Byalystock, 1981) or with communication strategies like paraphrasing and borrowing (Tarone, 1983)
4. Systems related to separate language skills (Cohen, 1990)
5. Systems based on different styles or types of learners (Sutter, 1989)

Although researchers tended to make lists of strategies and other features presumed to be essential for all "good" L2 learners, there is more agreement with Rubin's (1975) because his system related to successful language learners seems to match the aims of this research: to identify what makes a successful language learner. Rubin suggested that good L2 learners are willing and accurate guessers; have a strong drive to communicate; are often uninhibited; are willing to make mistakes; focus on form by looking for patterns and analyzing; take advantage of all practice opportunities; monitor their speech as well as that of others; and pay attention to meaning. Rubin (1981), O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford's (1990) strategy classification system will be described, which helped to develop the data collection instruments.

2.3.1 Rubin's (1981) Strategy Classification System

Rubin (1981) provided a more organized list of learning strategies that include six categories of direct strategies and two categories of indirect strategies. Each category comprises some more specific strategies, making a total of sixty six (48 direct and 18 indirect). To see Rubin's Strategy Classification System go to Appendix A.

2.3.2 O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) Strategy Classification System

O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) Strategy System is based on the cognitive theory of learning. They adopted Anderson's ACT model (Adaptive Control of Thought). The O'Malley *et al* study identifies three strategy types: metacognitive, cognitive and social affective strategies. "Metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring the learning task, and evaluating how well has one learned"; cognitive strategies involve "interacting with the material to be learned, manipulating the material mentally or physically, or applying a specific technique to a learning task," the "social and affective strategies involve interacting with another person to assist learning or using affective control to assist a language task" (O'Malley and Chamot's, 1990:137-139). The three types of strategies and their subcategories are listed in O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) Strategy Classification System (see Appendix C)

2.3.3 Oxford's (1990) Strategy Classification System

After revising the different classification systems used by other researchers, it seems to me that Oxford (1990) has developed the most widely used Strategy Classification System, and this is reflected in her Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL).

This classification includes two major categories of strategies, namely, 35 *direct* strategies that directly involved the target language and 27 *indirect* strategies that support and manage language learning involving directly the target language. This Strategy Inventory for Language Learning is the one I finally selected for my research because I could see through my readings of other researchers' work, that the results seem to be quite precise and helpful for the respective research contexts, and in my own research it could provide a solid guide to help learners in our context to develop learning strategies and lower the frequency of failure in the PET examination. However, it is important to first specify that Oxford's Strategy Classification System (see Appendix B) is the basis of the present research.

Examples of direct strategies would be:

1. Memory strategies. These help learners store and retrieve new information.
2. Cognitive strategies. These enable learners to understand and produce new language.
3. Compensation strategies. Allow learners to use the language despite their language gaps in knowledge.

On the other hand, examples of indirect strategies would include:

1. Metacognitive strategies. Help learners to coordinate their own learning process.
2. Affective strategies. Help learners to regulate emotions, motivations and attitudes.
3. Social strategies. Help students learn through interaction with others.

2.4. The influence of proficiency, age, culture, gender and motivation in EFL strategy use.

In recent years, the amount of research on the effect of different factors on the use of language learning strategies by second/foreign language learners has increased considerably. After the identification and classification of Language Learners Strategies, researchers focused on the identification of learners' use of specific LLS and the factors affecting that use. Those factors included the level of proficiency, age, gender, culture, and motivation. Although those factors affect directly the use and selection of language learning strategies, each one could be a topic of research indeed, and this research will focus more on the strategies rather than the factors that affect students' selection of strategies.

Something that concerns every language teacher is why some learners can be successful language learners while others are not. The latest studies have paid more attention to language learners themselves in the sense that to some extent learners' individual differences may influence the success of language learning. Dörnyei (2005) described these studies of influencing individual differences in language learning strategies as "the most fruitful research direction in the area of learning strategies" (p. 171). Ellis (1994) highlighted variables considered as important determinants of learning strategies and put it as, "Individual learner differences together with various situational factors (the target language being studied, the nature of the instruction, and the specific tasks learners are asked to perform) determine the learner's choice of learning strategies" (p. 529).

The following studies have focused on the main factors affecting the different use of strategies, like: language proficiency, gender, culture, motivation and, age. I consider it important to include these variables because according to previous research they also affect the Learning Strategy Use.

2.4.1 Language Proficiency and Language Learning Strategy Use

Researchers like Chamot, 1987; Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford, 1990; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Politzer, 1983; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985; Rubin 1975, 1981; among others, have been investigating the relationship between language learning strategy use and language proficiency. In second and foreign language learning, proficiency is evidence of success. Green and Oxford (1995) conducted research into the impact of language proficiency on strategy use and concluded that proficient learners used a greater use of strategy. On the other hand, Park (1997) focused on the influence of strategy use on language proficiency and reported that a higher use of strategy affected language proficiency. Bremner (1999) identified this as the reciprocal relation between proficiency and strategy use. Bremner stated, “The notion that strategy use and proficiency are both causes and outcome of each other, locked in a mutual relationship, complicates the pictures” (p. 495).

Farhady (1982) stated, “language proficiency is not a one-dimensional phenomenon and learners are not homogenous in their proficiency in various language skills” (p. 46). Canale and Swain (1980) interpret language proficiency by assessing four communicative competences: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Language learning strategies are closely related to proficiency due to the success of strategy training or language learning being measured through proficiency. McDonough (1999) said, “The relationship between strategy use and proficiency is very complicated; Issues such as the frequency and quality of strategy use do not accept a simple linear relationship to achievement in a second language” (p. 13).

Green and Oxford (1995) investigated the relationship between strategy use and second language proficiency of 374 university students of Puerto Rico. The findings showed that successful learners employed a greater use of language strategy than less successful learners. “Students who were better in their language performance generally reported higher levels of overall strategy use and frequent use of a number of strategic categories”

(p. 265). Proficient language learners not only employed a greater variety of strategies but also frequently used strategies in combination with other strategies as well (Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford, 1990). Proficient learners used metacognitive strategies more frequently than other strategies.

Recently, Su (2005) surveyed 419 vocational college students in Taiwan by using the Chinese version of Oxford's (1990) SILL. The statistical analysis showed a significant difference in strategy use by self-assessed English language proficiency, confirming that there was a linear correlation between English learning strategies and self-rating proficiency levels. The results showed that proficient learners persistently used more metacognitive strategies and that there was a positive relationship between strategy use and English language proficiency, and proficient students used more cognitive strategies than less proficient students. Park (1997) investigated language learning strategy use of Korean students. A Korean version of Oxford's (1990) SILL was administered to 332 Korean university students. To measure the English proficiency of these university students, the TOEFL paper-based test scores were used. The total paper-based test score was reported on a scale that ranged from 310 to 677. Park reported a linear correlation between English learning strategies and levels of proficiency. Those who showed high proficiency, evidenced by their TOEFL test scores, frequently used more social and cognitive strategies. All the studies described above suggested that there is a close relationship between proficiency and strategy use. Thus, in the first part of my research I will try to find out some information about the student's study habits and their score in the TOEFL examination, to be able to discover if the students with higher scores on the TOEFL exam for entry are the same students who pass the PET examination at the end of semester three.

In the second part of my research, Oxford's SILL will be applied, to identify the learning strategies that successful students seem to use.

2.4.2 Gender and Language Learning Strategy Use

Extensive empirical studies developed in different countries have been conducted examining the relationship between gender and language learning strategies. Some of the results of these studies show evidence that female learners are superior to males in verbal abilities (Bacon & Fiemann, 1990); female students showed more positive attitudes, and a higher degree of motivation toward second or foreign language learning than male students (Bacon & Finnemann, 1990; Ehrman & Oxford, 1990; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Reid, 1987; Sung & Padilla, 1998); Politzer (1983) found that female learners utilized social learning strategies more than male learners. This finding according to Politzer was apparently due to the fact that female learners in second language learning interact more with others in the foreign language both inside and outside of the classroom. Ehrman and Oxford (1995) conducted research into strategy uses and concluded that female students showed a greater number of strategy uses and a higher amount of integrative motivation. In their latest study, Ehrman and Oxford found females consistently adopted the following strategies: general study strategies, functional practice strategies, strategies for searching for communication meaning, and self-management strategies more frequently than their male counterparts. Parallel with this research, Oxford and Nyikos (1989) investigated the strategic use of 1,200 undergraduate students, and they concluded that female learners used formal practice strategies, general study strategies, and conversational input elicitation strategies more often than males.

Bacon and Finnemann (1990) investigated the impact of gender on learner beliefs and in their finding, female learners reported a higher level of motivation and a greater use of strategy in language learning than male students. Their research also showed that female learners employed compensation strategies most compared to all other strategies. Females showed a greater use of synthetic strategy clustering, along with a higher level of interacting socially while male learners preferred to use decoding and analytic strategies. In the research developed by Green and Oxford (1995), they investigated the differences in language learning strategies among 374 Hispanic male and female students at the University of Puerto Rico. They reported that female learners employed fourteen strategies while males adopted only one strategy. In addition, frequent strategies used by female students were based on memory, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. They stated, "Gender difference trends in strategy use are quite pronounced within and across cultures and this means that women and men are using different approaches to language learning. This could be related to underlying learning styles, motivations, and attitudes" (p. 291).

In contrast, other studies showed that males had a greater use of certain strategies than females. Tran's (1988) study of immigrant Vietnamese, aged from 40 to 92, in the USA, revealed that males made greater use of metacognitive strategies to learn and to improve their English language skills. Nyikos (1990) revealed that males made greater use of social strategies. He suggested that such strategies were the result of the socialization of males and females and that such differences should be considered when the use of strategies was promoted in language learning.

After going through all the evidence presented by many authors, gender was included as a variable in this research, because females seem to use more language learning strategies than males and I would like to find out if more males or females pass the PET examination at the *Escuela de Lenguas* at the *UNACH* and identify the language learning strategies they use in order to teach learning strategies to the students since they enter to the university.

2.4.3 Culture and Language Learning Strategy Use.

Many researchers, like Brooks (1968), Oxford and Ehrman (1995), Bedell and Oxford (1996), among others, agreed that culture is an important factor that seems to affect the use of language learning strategies. Their studies involve students from many countries but I will focus on the evidences they presented in their studies with Hispanic learners to compare their results more closely with my own research results. According to Oxford (1990), one of the influential factors determining language learners' strategies is the learner's cultural background. Recently, a great deal of research has supported the view that cultural factors contribute to the different uses of language learning strategies and also their relation to different ethnic groups. Oxford and Ehrman (1995) viewed cultural background as a key factor in the study of second or foreign learning strategy, because they consider that cultural factors can shape the learner's beliefs, perceptions, values, and motivations in language learning.

As defined by Bedell and Oxford (1996: 47), culture is

“How and why one thinks, learns, worships, fights, and relaxes. It provides all human life from the cradle to the grave. Language interacts closely with the culture; one's native language is both a reflection of and an influence on one's culture.”

Learning behaviors, then, can be shaped differently depending on cultural differences.

Therefore, strategy use will also probably be selected differently based on culture. Cultural values have a great impact on determining the language learner's individual preferences, it seems. Every learner builds up his or her version of learning habits or skills, according to his or her cultural learning situations. Oxford, Hollaway, and Horton-Murillo (1992, p. 441) emphasize that: "Although culture is not the single determinant, and although many other influences intervene, culture often does play a significant role in the learning styles [and strategies]... adopted by many participants in the culture."

In an early study investigating the differences among language learners, Reid (1987) assumed that ESL and EFL learners have different learning style preference. Reid investigated the learning style preference of 1,388 students whose native languages were Arabic, Spanish, Japanese, Malay, Chinese, Korean, Thai, Indonesian, English, and others, at an intensive English language program in the United States. The statistical analysis indicated that ESL students reported strongly preferred kinesthetic and tactile learning styles, Spanish speakers used kinesthetic and tactile learning styles for language learning. The Hispanic learners preferred more auditory styles of Learning. Examining ethnic groups and the strategies of language learning, Politzer (1983) reported that Hispanic students used social strategies more frequently. In a later study by McGroartry (1987), statistical analyses showed that Hispanic students focused on oral proficiency and auditory comprehension more than any other group. They concluded, "Cultural background has a great deal to do with the types of language learning behavior likely to be used by students" (p. 119) and it is important to remember that the research findings are not universal.

This cultural influence in Language Learning Strategy Use can be related to the development of this research, because students at the UNACH come from different cultural backgrounds and this may have affected the use of the strategies and their failure or success in their learning, although cultural background could be the focus of further research.

2.4.4 Motivation and Language Learning Strategy use

Although this research will not focus specifically on motivation, because this enormous area could be a topic of research itself, it is important to go through some research done in the field of motivation. This concept is the engine that moves our will. If students are not motivated to learn, they will not learn. Students of the BA in ELT at UNACH are motivated to learn because, as Gardner (1985) states, instrumental motivation includes a more functional reason for learning the target language, such as a job promotion, or a language requirement. In this case, it is a language requirement, it is a requirement to pass the PET examination to be promoted to the next semester. The students' motivation is to pass the exam in order to go on to the next semester, but this becomes anxiety-producing, due to the high amount of students that fail the examination.

2.4.5 Age and Second language Strategy Use

Another factor that some researchers have found that affect the use of specific language strategies, is the age of the students. Although this research will not be focused on this factor, it might be interesting for the reader to know some of the findings.

Few studies have been found to investigate the use of LLSs by different age groups. This is justified by the fact that research is forced by time limits and is confined to homogeneous samples (e.g. Young children, secondary school, university students or adults). A study of young children developed by Wong-Fillmore, (1979) showed that cognitive and social strategies were very important.

Chesterfield and Chesterfield (1985) conducted a study on bilingual learners and found that children developed receptive strategies (repetition and memorization) first. Then they developed strategies which allowed them to start and maintain interactions (e.g. Attention getting and asking for clarification). Finally, they developed strategies for the identification and monitoring of grammatical errors. Purdie and Oliver (1999) surveyed 58 Australian primary school children learning English and found that metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used and that social strategies ranked next in importance. O'Malley *et al* (1985a, 1985b) studied secondary school students and found that cognitive strategies were generally used and that metacognitive strategies were reported by some more advanced learners. Kaylani (1996) investigated 255 high school EFL students in Jordan and found that the frequency of use of metacognitive strategies were significantly higher for the more proficient learners. Ramirez (1986) after identifying successful strategies employed by 105 learners of French at three levels of study (grade 8, grade 9-10 and grade 10-11) in two high schools in New York concluded that successful learning behaviors were dependent on the task, and that years of study influenced LLS use. The study also showed that certain strategies were employed more than others at different levels of study. White (1993) studied the LLS use by specific age groups of learners of French and Japanese in New Zealand and found that learners aged over thirty used metacognitive self-management strategies more than those who were younger. Studies such as those mentioned above provide evidence that age does have an effect on LLS use.

Throughout this literature review, it has been stated that Language Learning Strategies are cognitive skills that students develop at different levels of proficiency; it seems that these strategies can be developed or learnt and may define the failure or success of the students learning. Many factors, such as proficiency, culture, gender, motivation and age, can affect the development and use of learning strategies in EFL.

The purpose of the present research carried out at the School of Languages at the UNACH is to identify the Language Learning Strategies that the successful students use or have developed through their student's life, and for that purpose Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was chosen because through the literature review I realized that it has been adopted for various language learning researchers and approximately 10,000 language learners have been involved in its research (Oxford, 1996). Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) states that the SILL appears to be the only language learning strategy instrument that has been extensively checked for reliability and validated in multiple ways" (p. 4). For the reasons mentioned above I consider that this instrument is the one that best suits my research purposes.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to investigate what English Learning Strategies are frequently used by successful EFL university students, at a Mexican University. The key Research Question which the present study attempted to answer is:

“What are the learning strategies that seem to have helped the students of the 3rd semester of the BA in ELT at the UNACH to pass the Cambridge-ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) examination?”

Data were collected and interpreted through the design and implementation of two types of data collection tools: a structured interview and the Oxford’s Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). These were administered to 3rd semester students, who have already passed the PET exam and would hopefully help to provide answers to answer the following four sub-questions:

- What English language activities did the 3rd semester BA in ELT students carry out, besides taking their English classes, which may have helped them to pass the PET exam?

- What specific learning/language learning strategies did successful students implement?
- How many hours of extra work, on average, did successful students do to improve their English and pass the PET exam?
- Do the students who achieve higher scores on the TOEFL exam automatically pass the PET exam or do other factors seem to influence the results?

3.2 Design of the study

This study was designed to investigate which learning strategies are used by the students from 3rd semester of the BA in ELT at the UNACH that have passed Cambridge-ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) examination. This study involved the collection of two distinct data sets: background information about individual students and their learning activities derived from a structured interview (see Appendix D) and the questionnaire based on Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (version 7.0) (see Appendix E). The methodology for this research was a mixed-method approach under the small-scale dimension category, according to McDonough J. & McDonough S. (2005), the mixed-method approach to research is one that involves gathering both numeric information (e.g., on instruments) as well as text information (e.g., on interviews) so that the final database represents both quantitative and qualitative information (Creswell, 2003, p. 20) and the small-scale dimension describes a research that has been done by the teacher as seen in McDonough J. & McDonough S. (2005). This was a piece of primary research

because the primary source of information is the group of third semester students that have just taken and passed the PET examination (Brown 1988).

This study was an insider research because one of the researchers has a direct connection with the research setting (Robson 2002). The interviewees were this researcher's students. According to Robson, there are advantages and disadvantages in insider research, some of the advantages are that interviewees may feel more comfortable and freer to talk openly if familiar with the researcher (Tierney 1994). From an anti-positivist perspective therefore, insider research has the potential to increase validity due to the added richness, honesty, fidelity and authenticity of the information acquired and some of the disadvantages are that the concept of validity becomes increasingly problematic because of the researcher's involvement with the subject of study. Positivists may argue that, because of this involvement, the researcher is no longer objective and their results may be distorted. This close relation with the students was an advantage because they are aware of the problem the school is facing due to the large amount of students that fail the PET exam and they want to help find a solution to the problem so they were willing to do the interview and the questionnaire.

The rationale of using the SILL was that it appears to be a useful language learning strategy questionnaire. It has been adopted for various language learning researchers and approximately 10,000 language learners have been involved in its research (Oxford, 1996). Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) noted, "According to research reports and articles published in the English language within the last 10-15 years, the SILL appears to be the

only language learning strategy instrument that has been extensively checked for reliability and validated in multiple ways” (p. 4). The statements in SILL are not only easy for subjects to respond, but they are also an efficient measurement of varied strategy use. It also measures the relationship between strategy use and other factors. For these reasons stated above the Oxford’s Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was chosen as the instrument to identify the language learning strategies used by the university students. This is the most widely used strategy classification systems and the one that fits best the research purposes.

In this study, the qualitative approach was used to analyze the data collected through the structured interview. The information provided by the interview was: proficiency level of the students (score on the institutional TOEFL exam), gender, extra hours of study, activities besides the English class to practice the language. Whereas the entire SILL items and the scores of the following six categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies will be analyzed through a quantitative approach.

3.3 Participants

All participants of this research were non-native speakers of English. Of the 15 students surveyed, 8 were male and 7 females. All participants were students of the 3rd. Semester of the BA in ELT program that had successfully passed the PET examination. Many of the participants have begun their study of the English language at the middle school level and

had studied English for six or seven years. While some participants already had had experience in an English-speaking country, others had not. It is important to notice the differences among the English level of the students that passed the PET examination, both profiles of students were in the group that successfully passed.

3.4 Design and implementation of data collection tools

The interview was designed by the researcher and it was comprised of closed and open-ended questions which asked about each participant's score in the TOEFL exam when they first started their BA in ELT, if they had taken English courses before attempting to present the TOEFL exam, if they had taken English courses besides their university English class for BA students, if they had attended a special course to prepare for the PET exam, if they had attended the Self Access Center to practice for their PET exam, if they were members of the Chat Club at the Self Access Center, if they usually practiced English outside the classroom.

The main instrument used in this research was Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The SILL was administered and scored by the researcher. The survey was composed of fifty multiple choice items, and to assess the results, a five point Likert-scale (1 - low for 5 - high) was used. The scale and its meanings were: 1) never or almost never true of me, 2) usually not true of me, 3) somewhat true of me, 4) usually true of me, and 5) always or almost always true of me. The 50-item SILL questionnaire was composed of two main groups: direct and indirect strategies, which are subdivided into 6 groups. Six subgroups of SILL include 1) memory, 2) cognitive, 3) compensation, 4)

metacognitive, 5) affective, and 6) social strategies. Oxford's (1990). Taxonomy of language strategies is included in Appendix F.

3.5 Data Collection

Prior to the initiation of the survey, the researchers contacted the director of the *Escuela de Lenguas Tapachula at the Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas* and explained the specific purpose of this research. After gaining his permission to conduct this study, the researchers visited the participants in their classroom. The researcher gave them detailed information about the survey and also gained their permission to administer the survey, they all accepted to participate because since they were in the first semester they heard that many students failed the PET examination so they were willing to participate in order to help solve this problem. The survey packets were given to the participants which contained a cover letter, an informed consent letter (see Appendix G), an interview (see Appendix D), the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (see Appendix E). The participants were given detailed instructions on how to answer the survey. They read the consent form, which stated that the survey was strictly voluntary. The confidentiality of the survey responses was made clear, and all students were notified when they were visited in their classroom, that their teachers would not have access to their responses.

The researcher provided some direction on how to respond the interview, subjects were asked to fill in the blanks with their personal information and the students were interviewed one by one. For the SILL, students were instructed to circle a response number ranging

from one to five. It took the subjects approximately fifty minutes to complete the SILL and took two days to finish the interviews. Each interview took around 20 minutes, they were carried out in English, and the students went to the researchers' offices to answer it. The participants were honest because there might be a solution for the failing problem.

3.6. Summary

This study was aimed at investigating EFL learners' use of learning strategies.

The investigation was focused on identifying the language learning strategies used by the 3rd semester students that successfully passed the PET examination.

The research method employed in this study was a mixed-method approach under the small-scale dimension (McDonough J. & McDonough S. 2005). This approach was appropriate for my study because the research was carried out in my own institutional context. This was a piece of primary research because the primary source of information was the group of 3rd semester that just presented the PET examination (Brown 1988). The fifteen students that passed the PET examination all participated. Of the 15 students surveyed, 8 were male and 7 were female. The survey designed for this study was a 50-item instrument based on Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language learning (SILL) and the interview open - ended questions.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to investigate what English Learning Strategies were frequently used by successful EFL university students at a Mexican University. The key Research Question which the present study tried to answer is “What are the learning strategies that seem to have helped the students of the 3rd semester of the BA in ELT at the UNACH to pass the Cambridge-ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) examination?”

The four research questions the current study contained are:

- What did the 3rd semester BA in ELT students do, besides taking their English classes, to be successful in the PET exam?
- What specific strategies did successful students implement?
- How many hours of extra work did the students do to improve their English and pass the PET exam?
- Do the students with higher scores in TOEFL exam automatically pass the PET exam or do other factors influence results?

4.2 Data Analysis

In this study, the qualitative approach was used to analyze the data collected through the structured interview. The information provided by the interview was: proficiency level of the students (score on the institutional TOEFL exam), gender, extra hours of study, activities besides the English class to practice the language. Whereas the entire SILL items and the scores of the following six categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies were analyzed through a quantitative approach the Oxford's (1990) SILL was analyzed through a quantitative approach in frequencies and percent to get the analysis of overall strategy use, strategy use in six categories, and the most and the least frequently used strategy items. Fifteen students participated in this study: 8 male students and 7 female students.

4.2.1. Analysis of the interview

To analyze the interview the results of each question will be presented including some comments based in talk had with the interviewee.

Question 1. Did you take English courses before attempting to present the TOEFL exam?

The majority of the participants did not attend to English courses before presenting the TOEFL exam. Among the three participants that reported attending English courses one studied three basic levels at the Harmon Hall Institute and two studied 4 levels at the English Language Department at the UNACH.

Mexican students receive English classes since junior high school, approximately 3 hours a week. It means that from this point of their lives they have already received around 700

hours of English study, they have some background knowledge of the English language when they first enter the university.

Question 2. During the first three semesters of the BA in ELT, did you take English courses besides your English class?

The majority of the participants reported that they did not attend to special courses during the first three semesters. Some of the participants indicated that they studied English besides their English class, among them some students reported on having studied four English levels at the Harmon Hall Institute and some students studied the nine levels of English at the English Language Department at the *UNACH* and one student reported on attending to a Summer course.

Students at the *UNACH* attend six or seven hours to school every day, some of them work to help with their expenses and mentioned that this is the reason why they don't have time to take other courses.

Question 3. Did you attend to a special course to be prepared for the PET exam?

The majority of the participants attended to a special course to be prepared for the PET exam, just few students had not attended to a special course and it was interesting to notice that among the four participants that did not attend to a special course, one got the lowest punctuation in the TOEFL exam and the others got a much better score, also the one that got the highest score is included in this group.

It seems that all the students are aware of the necessity to be prepared for the Cambridge PET exam, and they try to find the way to do it according to their possibilities.

Question 4. Did you attend to the Self Access Center to practice for your PET exam?

The majority of the participants did not attend to the self-access although it provides with activities to develop the four skills.

The learners at the *UNACH* are invited to visit the Self Access Center and to get involved with the activities it provides. The Self Access Center has a special section with activities designed to practice for the PET exam. It has been difficult to get the learners visit the Center.

Question 5. Were you a member of the Chat Club at the Self Access Center?

The Chat Club provides with relevant practice to develop the listening and speaking skills. Among the two participants that attended the Chat Club, one of them reported to attend once a week and the other said that just sometimes.

The chat Club is a very good opportunity for the students to develop the listening and speaking skills, practicing English with a native speaker. There are everyday sessions in the morning and in the afternoon. I consider that the learners should take advantage of this opportunity to improve their English.

Question 6. Do you practice your English outside the classroom?

All the participants expressed listening to songs and watching movies and videos in English, some participants reported to look for readings in English and, some others said that they work as a tourist guide to practice their English. All the learners seem to express their necessity to practice their English and look for opportunities to do it. Because we are in a non English speaking country the opportunities are not much but they make an effort.

Question 7. If you have been practicing one or more of the activities mentioned above how many hours do you consider you practice your English, besides your English class, every day?

The majority of the learners concluded that they spend between two or three hours every day to improve their English. Their focus at this stage of their studies is to pass the Cambridge PET exam and as they could see the problem their partners had in previous semesters, they are trying to practice outside and inside the school as much as they can. Being the economic problem a factor that affect their decision they had opted for cheaper ways to practice English, it is listening to songs, watching videos, watching movies and reading in English. Just quite a few can afford to go to private institutes or paying special courses.

The information gotten through the interview helped answer three out of four research sub-questions:

1. What did the 3rd semester BA in ELT students do, besides taking their English classes, to be successful in the PET exam?

The majority of the participants indicated that they studied English besides their English class, some studied at the Harmon Hall Institute, some others studied the nine levels of English at the English Language Department at the UNACH and a student attended to a Summer course. The majority of the participants attended to a special course to be prepared for the PET examination; only a few students attended to the Self-access center and the Chat Club; the majority reported practicing English outside the classroom, reading,

listening to songs and watching movies and videos in English, some other reported to be working as a tourist guide to practice their English.

2. How many hours of extra work did the students do to improve their English and pass the PET exam?

There are several answers to this question, the majority of the participants spent between one and two hours of extra work to improve their English and pass the PET exam. One student reported on spending 4 hours, he takes English classes, he attended to the self Access Center and also participates in the Chat Club sessions and on the other hand there is a participant that accepted to spend only half an hour every day.

3. Do the students with higher scores on the TOEFL exam automatically pass the exam or do other factors influence results?

The scores on the TOEFL exam go from 598 points the highest to 370 the lowest. The difference among the lowest and the highest score is 228 points. Although the difference in the scores is so big all these participants successfully pass the PET examination. This difference doesn't seem to make any difference in the success of these students when presenting the PET examination.

And through the SILL the fourth research sub-question was answered:

4. What specific learning/language learning strategies did successful students implement?

The study reported that Metacognitive strategies were used most frequently whereas Memory strategies were used less frequently among Mexican university learners. High and medium ranges of strategy use were found for each of the six strategy categories in the

current study. This indicated that EFL Mexican university learners adopted an overall use of all six categories of strategies. These will be explained in detail in the following section.

4.2.2 Use of Overall Strategies and Six Categories of Strategies by the learners of third semester of the BA in ELT at the National University of Chiapas (UNACH), that have already passed the PET examination.

This data collected shows that there are almost equal numbers of male and female students as seen in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Distribution of Participants by Gender

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Female	7	47%
Male	8	53%

Note. The percentages (%) have been rounded to the nearest tenths.

As seen in Table 4.2 according to the results of the SILL 40% of the participants spent 2 hours every day studying English besides their English class and, 40% of the participants study English only one hour every day. It was notorious that only 7% study 4 hours every day, 7% spend 3 hours and 7% of the participants study only 30 minutes every day.

Table 4.2
Distribution of Participants by Length of time usually spent studying English besides their English class.

Length of time of study	Frequency	Percent (%)
30 min.	1	7%
1 hour	6	40%
2 hours	6	40%
3 hours	1	7%
4 hours	1	7%

Note. The percentages (%) have been rounded to the nearest tenths.

In order to answer the research question: “What are the learning strategies that seem to have helped the students of the 3rd semester of the BA in ELT at the UNACH to pass the Cambridge-ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) examination?”, participants’ responded to the Oxford’s (1990) SILL. The 50-item SILL questionnaire is composed of two main groups: direct and indirect strategies, which are subdivided into 6 groups, they include 1) memory, 2) cognitive, 3) compensation, 4) metacognitive, 5) affective, and 6) social strategies. The criteria of the mean scores were adopted from Oxford (1990) in order to better understand the overall strategy use and strategy use in six categories.

Table 4.3 shows us the Criteria of Mean Scores to Understand the Language learning Strategy use. If the mean score in a strategy use is between 4.5 to 5, it means that this strategy is always or almost always used, if the means scores is between 3.5 to 4.4 it means that the strategy is usually used, if the mean score is between 2.5 to 3.4, it means that the strategy is sometimes used, if the mean score is between 1.5 to 2.4 it means that the strategy is generally not used and if the mean score of the strategy is between 1.0 to 1.4 it means that the strategy is never or almost never used.

Table 4.3
Oxford's (1990) Criteria of Mean Scores to Understand the Language Learning Strategy Use

Use	Criteria	Mean scores
High	Always or almost always used	4.5 to 5.0
	Usually used	3.5 to 4.4
Medium	Sometimes used	2.5 to 3.4
Low	Generally not used	1.5 to 2.4
	Never or almost never used	1.0 to 1.4

Table 4.4 illustrates the results of the SILL in relation to the overall strategy use and according to Oxford's (1990) Criteria of Mean Scores to Understand Language Learning Strategy Use. The findings say that among the six categories of strategy use, Metacognitive, Social and Cognitive strategies are usually used. Affective, Compensation and Social strategies are sometimes used. The mean scores demonstrate that Metacognitive strategies are the most preferred among the students.

Table 4.4 *Six Categories of Strategy Use of English Language*

Rank	Strategy Category	Mean (M) scores	Use
1	Metacognitive Strategies	3.93	high
2	Social Strategies	3.70	high
3	Cognitive Strategies	3.55	high
4	Affective Strategies	3.31	medium
5	Compensation Strategies	3.25	medium
6	Memory Strategies	2.78	medium

(M) =media

The survey was composed of fifty multiple choice items, and to assess the results, a five point Likert-scale (1 - low for 5 - high) was used. The scale and its meanings were: 1) never or almost never true of me, 2) usually not true of me, 3) somewhat true of me, 4) usually true of me, and 5) always or almost always true of me.

As a means to interpret language strategy usage, according to Green and Oxford's (1995) suggestion, the most preferred strategies in each category were interpreted as follows: (a) if more than 50% of the participants responded with 4 or 5 for the strategy use, it would be concluded that it was a frequent use in the overall strategy use; (b) if more than 20% to 49% of the participants responded with 4 or 5 for the strategy use, it would show a moderate use in the overall strategy use; (c) if fewer than 20% of the participants responded with 4 or 5, it would be an infrequent use in the overall strategy use.

Table 4.5 shows that the most preferred Metacognitive strategies among the eight included in this category are: a), To try to find as many ways as I can use my English, and b) To look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English. It means that the participants try to find opportunities to speak in the target language and try to read in English as much as possible. Strategies 1-6 are under the category of frequent use because more than the 50% of the participants responded 4 and 5 for the strategy use. Strategies 7 and 8 are under the category of moderate use because less than 49% of the participants responded 4 and 5 for the strategy use. And the strategy that was less frequently used is: a) I look for people I can talk to in English.

Table 4.5 Use of the *Eight Metacognitive Strategies*

Strategy	Use	Percent (%)
1) I try to find as many ways as I can use my English.....	frequent use	87 %
2) I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	frequent use	87 %
3) I try to find out how to be a better learner of English....	frequent use	80 %
4) I have clear goals for improving my English skills.....	frequent use	80%
5) I pay attention when someone is speaking English.....	frequent use	60%
6) I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.....	frequent use	53%
7) I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.....	moderate use	47%
8) I look for people I can talk to in English.....	moderate use	30%

Note: The percentages (%) have been rounded to the nearest tenths.

Table 4.6 explains the relation among the six Social strategies, it can be seen that the first three strategies got the higher score: a) I practice English with others; b) I try to learn about the culture of English speakers and c) If I don't understand something in English, I ask another person to slow down or say it again. These three strategies are in the category of frequent use because 73% of the participants responded 4 or 5 to the strategy use. The less frequently used was: I ask for help from English speakers and I ask questions in English.

Table 4.6 Use of the six Social strategies

Strategy	Use	Percent(%)
1) I practice English with other students.....	frequent use	73%
2) I try to learn about the culture of English speakers	frequent use	73%
3) If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.....	frequent use	73%
4) I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.....	frequent use	53%
5) I ask for help from English speakers.....	frequent use	53%
6) I ask questions in English.....	frequent use	53%

Note: The percentages (%) have been rounded to the nearest tenths.

Table 4.7 evidence the most preferred Cognitive strategy among the fourteen included in this category: a) I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or to go to movies spoken in English. This answer goes according to what the students reported as activities they do to practice their English, they mentioned watching TV and movies in English. Strategies 1- 7 are under the category of frequent use because more than the 50% of the participants responded 4 and 5 for the strategy use. Strategies 8 and 13 are under the category of moderate use because less than 49% of the participants responded 4 and 5 for the strategy use, and strategy 14 is under the category of infrequent because less than 20% responded 4 or 5 for the strategy. And the strategy that is less frequent is: a) I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.

4.7 Use of the Fourteen Cognitive Strategies

Strategy	Use	Percent (%)
1) I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or to go to movies spoken in English	frequent use	93%
2) I use the English words I know in different ways.....	frequent use	80%
3) I read for pleasure in English.....	frequent use	73%
4) I start conversations in English.....	frequent use	67%
5) I practice the sounds of English.....	frequent use	60%
6) I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.....	frequent use	60%
7) I try to talk like native English speakers	frequent use	60%
8) I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English...	moderate use	53%
9) I try not to translate word-for-word.....	moderate use	53%
10) I first skim an English passage (read over the passage Quickly) then go back and read carefully.....	moderate use	53%
11) I look for words I n my own language that are similar to new words in English.....	moderate use	47%
12) I try to find patterns in English.....	moderate use	47%
13) I say or write new English words several times.....	moderate use	53%
14) I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English	infrequent use	13%

Note: The percentages (%) have been rounded to the nearest tenths.

Table 4.8 illustrates the most preferred Affective strategies among the six included in this category: a) I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English. Strategies 1- 4 are under the category of frequent use because more than the 50% of the participants responded 4 and 5 for the strategy use. Strategies 5 and 6 are under the category of moderate use because less than 49% of the participants responded 4 and 5 for the strategy use. And the less frequent strategies used are two: a) I try to relax whenever I felt afraid of using English and b) I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.

4.8 Use of the six Affective Strategies

Strategy	Use	Percent (%)
1) I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.....	frequent use	80%
2) I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.....	frequent use	60%
3) I write my own feelings in a language learning diary....	frequent use	60%
4) I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.....	frequent use	53%
5) I try to relax whenever I felt afraid of using English.....	moderate use	40%
6) I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.....	moderate use	40%

Note: The percentages (%) have been rounded to the nearest tenths.

Table 4.9 shows the most preferred Compensation strategy among the six included in this category: a) I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English. Strategy 1 is under the category of frequent use because more than the 50% of the participants responded 4 and 5 for the strategy use. Strategies 2 to 6 are under the category of moderate use

because less than 49% of the participants responded 4 and 5 for the strategy use. As it is evident the use of these strategies is less frequent.

4.9 Use of the six Compensation Strategies

Strategy	Use	Percent (%)
1) I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.....	frequent use	70%
2) I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.....	moderate use	47%
3) When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.....	moderate use	40%
4) If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.....	moderate use	40%
5) To understand unfamiliar English words, I make Guesses.....	moderate use	33%
6) I read English without looking up every new word.....	moderate use	33%

Note: The percentages (%) have been rounded to the nearest tenths.

Table 4.10 evidence the most preferred Memory strategy among the nine included in this category: a) I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them and I physically act out new English words. Strategies 1 and 2 are under the category of frequent use because more than the 50% of the participants responded 4 and 5 for the strategy use. Strategies 3 to 6 are under the category of moderate use because less than 49% of the participants responded 4 and 5 for the strategy use, and strategy 7 to 9 are under the category of infrequent because less than 20% responded 4 or 5 for the strategy. There are three infrequent strategies in this category: a) I review English lessons often, b) I use flashcards to remember new English words and c) I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.

4.10 Use of nine Memory Strategies

Strategy	Use	Percent (%)
1) I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.....	frequent use	67%
2) I physically act out new English words.....	frequent use	67%
3) I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.....	moderate use	47%
4) I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.....	moderate use	47%
5) I use rhymes to remember new English words.....	moderate use	40%
6) I remember new English words or phrase by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a screen sign.....	moderate use	40%
7) I review English lessons often.....	infrequent use	20%
8) I use flashcards to remember new English words.....	infrequent use	13%
9) I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.....	infrequent use	0%

Note: The percentages (%) have been rounded to the nearest tenths.

Table 4.11 shows the differences in the use of the overall strategies between male and female. According to Oxford's (1990) Criteria of Mean Scores to Understand to Language Learning Strategy Use, metacognitive, social, cognitive strategies belong to the rank of high use, it can be said that they are "usually used". Affective and social strategies in both cases (male and female) are in the rank of "medium use", it means sometimes used. There are not big differences among males and females use of strategies, only in the case of compensation strategies that the media for males is 2.90 and for females 3.50. It means that males sometimes use this strategies and females usually use them.

Table 4.11 Differences among male and female participants in their use of the Six Categories of Strategy Use of English Language

Strategy Category	(M) Male	(M) Female
Metacognitive Strategies	3.70	3,90
Social Strategies	3.80	3.50
Cognitive Strategies	3.50	3.50
Affective Strategies	3.20	3.10
Compensation Strategies	2.90	3.50
Memory Strategies	3.13	3.12

Note: (M) =media

Table 4.12 illustrates the strategies used by the students that got the highest and the lowest score on the institutional TOEFL exam. It was surprising to me the differences in the use of the strategies among these two participants, but at the same time this results explain me why both participants successfully passed the PET examination. The student with the higher score had better English than the participant with the lowest score, when they first enter the university, but this participant developed and adopted more English learning strategies during the first three semesters and successfully got the requisite to continue his studies. It can be seen in Table 4.12 that the media in all the categories is higher in the participant with the lowest score in the TOEFL exam.

Table 4.12 Differences among the participants with the highest and the lowest score on the TOEFL exam, in their use of the Six Categories of Strategy Use of English Language

Strategy Category	(M) Highest score 598	(M) Lowest score 370
Metacognitive Strategies	3.50	4.10
Social Strategies	3.00	5.00
Cognitive Strategies	3.20	4.00
Affective Strategies	2.50	3.10
Compensation Strategies	3.00	3.30
Memory Strategies	3.10	3.60

Note: (M) =media

It was interesting to notice that among the six categories of strategies there are some individual strategies that are most frequently used. The strategies that got the category of high frequency use, belong to the Cognitive, Metacognitive, Compensation, Social and Memory. Table 4.13 shows the ten most preferred strategies among the six categories.

Table 4.13 shows the ten most frequently used strategies according with the results of the SILL.

Strategy	Category	Percent
1. If I can think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing	Cognitive	93%
2. I pay attention when someone is speaking English	Metacognitive	87%
3. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	Metacognitive	80%
4. I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or to go to movies spoken in English.	Cognitive	80%
5. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English	Metacognitive	80%
6. I read for pleasure in English.	Cognitive	73%
7. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	Compensation	73%
8. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	Social	73%
9. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them	Memory	67%
10. I remember new English words or phrase by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a screen sign.	Memory	67%

Note: The percentages (%) have been rounded to the nearest tenths.

4.3 Discussion

As it was said the purpose of this research was to investigate what English learning Strategies are frequently used by successful EFL university students, at a Mexican University. The key Research Question which the present study attempted to answer is:

“What are the learning strategies that seem to have helped the students of the 3rd semester of the BA in ELT at the UNACH to pass the Cambridge-ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) examination?”

Data were collected and interpreted through the design and implementation of two types of data collection tools: a structured interview and the Oxford’s Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). These were administered to 3rd semester students, who have already passed the PET exam and they provided with the information necessary to answer the following four sub-questions:

1. What English language activities did the 3rd semester BA in ELT students carry out, besides taking their English classes, which may have helped them to pass the PET exam?
2. What specific learning/language learning strategies did successful students implement?
3. How many hours of extra work, on average, did successful students do to improve their English and pass the PET exam?
4. Do the students who achieve higher scores on the TOEFL exam automatically pass the PET exam or do other factors seem to influence the results?

4.3.1 Brief Description of Participants

To examine these four research questions, a structured interview and Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning were administered to the 15 students surveyed, 8 were male and 7 females. The participants were the 15 students among 32, of the 3rd Semester of the BA in ELT program that had successfully passed the PET examination. Many of the participants have begun their study of the English language at the middle school level and had studied English for six or seven years. While some participants already had had experience in an English-speaking country, others had not. The differences among the English level of the students that passed the PET examination were notorious, let's remember that as a requisite to enter BA in ELT participants need to present the institutional TOEFL exam with at least 350 points, while one of the participants got 580 points in his TOEFL examination another participant got only 370, both profiles of students were in the group that successfully passed the examination.

4.3.2 Summary of Research Findings

The structured interview was very helpful to provide the information required to answer the four research sub-questions, the answers were clear and gave us an idea of the actions taken by the participants, before getting to the BA in ELT and during the first three semesters, that seem to have helped them to be successful when presenting the second requisite to continue studying, the PET examination.

When the participants were asked about what they did besides taking their English classes, to be successful in the PET exam, the 47 % of the participants indicated that they studied

English besides their English class, among them 13% studied at the Harmon Hall Institute, 20% studied the nine levels of English at the English Language Department at the UNACH and 7% attended to a summer course. The 73% of the participants attended to a special course to be prepared for the PET examination; 27% attended to the Self-access center to practice for the PET examination; 13% attended to the Chat Club; the 87% reported practicing English outside the classroom. The amount of 13 participants reported to listen to songs and watch movies and videos in English, 6 participants reported to look for readings in English and, 4 participants work as a tourist guide to practice their English.

When the participants were asked about how many hours of extra work they did to improve their English and pass the PET exam, the answers were several: 7% of the participants spent 4 hours, 7% spent 3 hours, 40% 2 hours, 40% one hour and 7% 30 min. The majority of the participants spent between one and two hours of extra work to improve their English and pass the PET exam.

In order to answer the question: if the students with higher scores on the TOEFL exam automatically pass the PET exam or if other factors influence results. Their score on that exam were asked and almost all the participants reported of having a different score. It seems that the difference in the results of the TOEFL exam is not affecting the success in the PET examination. The scores run from 370 the lowest to 598 the highest.

To answer the research question: “What are the learning strategies that seem to have helped the students of the 3rd semester of the BA in ELT at the UNACH to pass the Cambridge-ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) examination?”, participants’ responded to the Oxford’s (1990) SILL. The 50-item SILL questionnaire is composed of two main groups: direct and indirect strategies, which are subdivided into 6 groups, they include 1) memory, 2) cognitive, 3) compensation, 4) metacognitive, 5) affective, and 6) social

strategies. Oxford's (1990) criteria of the mean scores were adopted in order to better understand the overall strategy use and the strategy use in six categories. The findings reported that the ranking order of the six categories strategy use of English Language is: Metacognitive, Social, and Cognitive strategies are usually used. Affective, Compensation and Social strategies are sometimes used. The mean scores demonstrate that Metacognitive strategies are the most preferred strategies among the students.

As a means to interpret the fifty multiple choice items on Oxford's (1990) SILL survey, Green and Oxford's (1995) criteria was used. The strategies were described according to the rank order of participant's preferences: 1) Metacognitive Strategies, 2) Social Strategies, 3), Cognitive Strategies, 4) Affective Strategies, 5) Compensation Strategies, 6) Memory Strategies. It is important to remember that according to Oxford's (1990) Criteria of Mean Scores the first three groups of strategy belong to the "high use" category and the last three to the "moderate use" category.

The Metacognitive strategies are in first place in the ranking order and belong to the "high frequent use" category. The most preferred Metacognitive strategies among the eight included in this category are: a) To try to find as many ways as I can use my English and b) To look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English. This selection goes according to what the participants answer in the interview about the activities to practice their English. The 87% of the participants reported practicing English outside the classroom, the 87% reported listening to songs and watching movies and videos in English, 40% of the participants reported looking for readings in English. The last frequent strategy used in this category is: a) I look for people I can talk to in English.

Social strategies are in the second place in the ranking order and belong to the “high frequent use” category. The findings in relation to the six Social strategies included in the survey show that three strategies got the highest score: a) I practice English with others, b) I try to learn about the culture of English speakers and c) If I don’t understand something in English, I ask another person to slow down or say it again. The responses also confirm what the participants said about the activities they do to practice their English. They expressed to practice their English with others. Besides that, the curricula of the BA in ELT at the UNACH includes subjects in which the students learn about the culture of different English speaking countries. The less frequently Social strategy used was: a) I ask for help from English speakers and I ask questions in English.

The Cognitive strategies are in the third place in the ranking order and also belong to the “high frequent use” category. The most preferred Cognitive strategy among the fourteen included in this category is: a) I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or to go to movies spoken in English. This answer supports what the students reported as activities they do to practice their English, 87% of the participants mentioned watching TV and movies in English. And the strategy that is less frequent used among the participants is: a) I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.

The fourth place in the ranking score belongs to the Affective strategies, they belong to the “moderate use” category. The most preferred Affective strategy among the six included in this category is: a) I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English. And the less frequent are two: a) I try to relax whenever I felt afraid of using English, and b) I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.

The Compensation strategies are in the fifth place of the ranking order and belong to the “moderate use” category. The most preferred Compensation strategy among the six included in this category is: a) I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English. The strategies that are less frequently used in this category are: a) To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses, and b) I read English without looking up every new word. As it is evident the Compensation strategies are not very popular among the participants, I consider important help the learners develop more Compensation strategies.

Memory strategies are in the last place in the ranking order and also belong to the “moderate use” category. The most preferred Memory strategies among the nine included in this category, are: a) I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them, and b) I physically act out new English words.

There are three infrequent strategies in this category: a) I review English lessons often, b) I use flashcards to remember new English words and c) I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.

The results in the six groups of strategies report that three groups of strategies are being used in a high frequency and the other three are being used in a moderate frequency, it means that the students that successfully passed the PET examination are using learning strategies in a high or moderate frequency use.

The results about the differences in the use of the overall strategies between male and female are very interesting because it seems that gender is not affecting the use of the strategies in the group of the participants that passed the PET examination. There is not a big difference in the use of strategies, among male and female, Metacognitive, social, and cognitive strategies belong to the rank of high use, the scores in the media for male and

female are: Metacognitive Strategies 3.70 (male) 3.90 (female); Social Strategies 3.80 (male) 3.50 (female); Cognitive Strategies have the same score in both 3.50 (male) 3.50 (female).

Affective, compensation and memory strategies in both cases (male and female) are in the rank of medium use, it means that these strategies are sometimes used. There are not big differences among males and females use of strategies, only in the case of compensation strategies that the media for males is 2.90 and for females 3.50. It means that females usually use the strategies and males sometimes use them. The scores in the media for male and female are: Affective Strategies 3.20 (male), 3.10 (female); Compensation Strategies 2.90 (male), 3.50 (female); and Memory Strategies 3.13 (male) 3.12 (female).

The findings about the English learning strategies used by the students that got the highest and the lowest score on the institutional TOEFL exam are an invitation for future research. It was surprising to find differences in the use of the strategies among these two profiles of participants, but at the same time the results gave an idea of why both participants successfully passed the PET examination. It seems that when they first enter the university the student with the highest score had a better English level than the participant that got the lowest score, but the participant with the lowest score in TOEFL exam seems to have developed and adopted more English learning strategies during the first three semesters and this is probably why he successfully passed the PET examination. The differences among these two participants are being identified according to the media score of the frequency of use in each group of strategies. According to the results: a) Metacognitive strategies: the highest score in the TOEFL exam (3.50) and the lowest (4.10); Social strategies highest score in the TOEFL exam (3) the lowest (5); Cognitive strategies: highest score in the

TOEFL exam (3.20) and the lowest (4), Affective strategies, the highest score in the TOEFL exam (2.50) and the lowest (3.10); Compensation strategies, the highest score in the TOEFL exam (3) and the lowest (3.30); and Memory strategies, the highest score in the TOEFL exam (3.10) and the lowest (3.60).

It was interesting to notice that among the six categories of strategies there are some individual strategies that are most frequently used. The strategies that got the category of high frequency use, belong to the Cognitive, Metacognitive, Compensation, Social and Memory category. In the ranking order the first place is for a Cognitive strategy: a) If I can think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing. The 93% of the participants reported using this strategy. The second place is for a Metacognitive strategy: a) I pay attention when someone is speaking English, 87% of the participants reported using this strategy. The next three strategies, third, fourth and fifth place, were reported as used by the 80% of the participants and are: a) I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.(Metacognitive); b) I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or to go to movies spoken in English. (Cognitive); c) I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English. (Metacognitive). The next three strategies, sixth, seventh and eighth place, were reported as used by the 73% of the participants and are: a) I read for pleasure in English (Cognitive); b) I have clear goals for improving my English skills. (Compensation); c) I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.(Social). The last two strategies, ninth and tenth place, were reported as used for the 67% of the participants and are: a) I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them. (Memory); and b) I remember new English words or phrase by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a screen sign.(Memory).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of the study

This chapter concludes this study by summarizing the research, giving recommendations for school EFL teachers as well as suggestions for future research. The purpose of this research was to investigate what English learning Strategies are frequently used by successful EFL university students, at a Mexican University. The key Research Question which the present study attempted to answer is: “What are the learning strategies that seem to have helped the students of the 3rd semester of the BA in ELT at the UNACH to pass the Cambridge-ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) examination?” and the four sub-questions are: a) What English language activities did the 3rd semester BA in ELT students carry out, besides taking their English classes, which may have helped them to pass the PET exam?; b) What specific learning/language learning strategies did successful students implement?; c) How many hours of extra work, on average, did successful students do to improve their English and pass the PET exam?; and d) Do the students who achieve higher scores on the TOEFL exam automatically pass the PET exam or do other factors seem to influence the results?

To answer the research question the four sub-questions, a structured interview and Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning were administered to the 15 students, 8 were male and 7 females. All participants were students of the 3rd semester of the BA in ELT program that had successfully passed the PET examination. The differences among the English level of the students that passed the PET examination were notorious, while one of the participants got 580 points in his TOEFL examination another participant got only 370, both profiles of students were in the group that successfully passed.

The purpose of the interview was to identify the different factors that could be affecting the failure or success when presenting the English examinations, it means, activities students do besides their English class, the amount of time they spent studying by themselves, if they had been taking English lessons outside the school, if the students were attending to the Self Access Centre or the Chat Club, to be prepared for the PET examination, and through the answers of the interview it was possible to answer the four Research sub-questions.

In order to answer the question of What did the 3rd semester BA in ELT students do, besides taking their English classes, to be successful in the PET exam? The participants indicated that they studied English besides their English class, some participants studied the 4 basic English levels at the Harmon Hall Institute, some others studied the nine levels of English at the English Language Department at the UNACH and one participant attended to a Summer course. The majority of the participants attended to a special course to be prepared for the PET examination; few participants attended to the Self-access Center and to the Chat Club; the majority reported practicing English outside the classroom. Almost all

the participants reported to listen to songs and watch movies and videos in English, many participants reported to look for readings in English and, few work as a tourist guide to practice their English.

Another important factor that could be affecting the failure or success when presenting English examinations can be the time the students spend studying by themselves, that is why the following question was asked: How many hours of extra work did the students do to improve their English and pass the PET exam? . The majority of the participants spent between one and two hours every day to improve their English and pass the PET exam.

It is important to remember that as entrance requirement students at the UNACH have to present the institutional TOEFL examination of at least 350 points. The score in this examination provides an idea of the English level the students have when they first entered. That is why the following question was asked: Do the students with higher scores on the TOEFL exam automatically pass the exam or do other factors influence results? The scores gotten by the students run from 370 the lowest to 598 the highest. Almost all the participants got a different score. It seems that the difference in the results of the TOEFL exam is not affecting the success in the PET examination.

In order to answer the research question: is “What are the learning strategies that seem to have helped the students of the 3rd semester of the BA in ELT at the UNACH to pass the Cambridge-ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) examination?”, participants’ responded to the Oxford’s (1990) SILL. The 50-item SILL questionnaire is composed of two main groups: direct and indirect strategies, which are subdivided into 6 groups, they include 1)

memory, 2) cognitive, 3) compensation, 4) metacognitive, 5) affective, and 6) social strategies. The criteria of the mean scores were adopted from Oxford (1990).

Based on the findings of the present study the answer to the research question “What are the learning strategies that seem to have helped the students of the 3rd semester of the BA in ELT at the UNACH to pass the Cambridge-ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) examination?”, is that *Metacognitive strategies* are the most preferred among the students and the most preferred strategies in each category are:

Metacognitive strategies: a) To try to find as many ways as I can use my English, and b) To look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English

Social strategies: a) I practice English with others, b) I try to learn about the culture of English speakers, and c) If I don't understand something in English, I ask other person to slow down or say it again.

Cognitive strategy: a) I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or to go to movies spoken in English.

Affective strategies: a) I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.

Compensation strategies: a) I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.

Memory strategies: a) I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them and I physically act out new English words

There are not many differences in the use of the overall strategies between male and female, only in the case of *Compensation strategies* that the media for males is 2.90 and for females 3.50.

Another important finding was the strategies used by the students that got the highest and the lowest score on the institutional TOEFL exam. The participant with the lowest score on the institutional TOEFL exam demonstrate to use more English learning strategies than the student with the highest score. It might be that this participant developed and adopted more English learning strategies during the first three semesters and successfully got the requisite to continue his studies.

It was interesting to notice that among the six categories of strategies there are some individual strategies that are most frequently used. The strategies that got the category of high frequency use, belong to the Cognitive, Metacognitive, Compensation, Social and Memory.

5.2 Recommendation for Further Studies

The study presents the following recommendations for further research:

1. The current research was conducted at a university in Tapachula, Chiapas México.

Including more universities from other cities would allow the findings to be generalized to a wider context in Mexico.

2. The surveys were administered only to university students in Tapachula, Chiapas.

Including other school levels ranging from elementary to university learners would make it possible to compare strategy uses at all school levels and to find an effective and efficient strategy instruction for each school level as well.

3. The current study investigated the language learning strategies that this specific group of university students used. However, factors based upon each individual such as learning

styles, cultural backgrounds, learning motivation, learning beliefs, also might determine the use of their language learning strategy. These affective factors should be considered when conducting a future study on learners' strategy use.

4. This study was based on analyzing data on the learners' learning strategy use as mix method research through the use of Oxford's (1990) SILL along with a structured interview. More studies need to be conducted such as interviews, observations, journals, in order to get more comprehensive and detailed results of the research on language learning strategy use.

5.3. Conclusion

This study investigated the strategy usage of 15 university students, that successfully passed pass the Cambridge-ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) examination the PET through administering a structured interview and the demographic questionnaire and Oxford's (1990) SILL. The findings indicated that Mexican university students used a medium range of strategies.

Metacognitive strategies were used most frequently whereas Memory strategies were used less frequently among Mexican university learners. High and medium ranges of strategy use were found for each of the six strategy categories in the current study. This indicated that EFL Mexican university learners adopted an overall use of all six categories of strategies. The findings of this study support those of the earlier SILL research (Bremner, 1999; Oh, 1992; Ok, 2003; Park, 2005; Wharton, 2000).

The strategies in a high range use were: a) If I can think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.(Cognitive); This result indicated that BA in ELT Mexican students in their desire to higher on the PET examination continue to pay more attention to learning vocabulary and knowing the meaning and sounds of vocabulary words., b) I pay attention when someone is speaking English. (Metacognitive); c) I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English. (Metacognitive); d) I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or to go to movies spoken in English (Cognitive);.e) I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English (Metacognitive); f) I read for pleasure in English (Cognitive); g) I have clear goals for improving my English skills (Compensation); h) I try to learn about the culture of English speakers. (Social); i) I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them (Memory); j) I remember new English words or phrase by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a screen sign. (Memory).

The present research found that gender did not affect the overall strategy usage of the university learners, the six categories of strategy, and individual strategy use. It can be concluded that the difference in gender does not have a significant effect on language learning strategies. The strategies used by male and female learners in Tapachula, Chiapas.Mexico, at the university level were similar, and the variable of gender was not the crucial element in affecting the language learning strategies as once thought. The English language has been important to Mexican learners, both male and female. Due to the importance of its impact on their career, both male and female students place a heavy emphasis on not only learning, but also using a variety of strategies to improve upon their

English. The findings from this research do not represent a fixed or a stereotypical strategy utilized by Mexican university students. Hence, English educators should refer to the findings of this research when planning English curriculum and implement the teaching of English Language Learning strategies as an important factor to have successful learning.

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APPENDIX A

Rubin's (1981) Strategy Classification System

Direct strategies	1. Clarification/verification. These are strategies that learners use to clarify or verify their understanding of the new language. E.g., asking for an example; putting words in sentences to check understanding; asking for a translation, repetition, meaning, the difference between two words/phrases; looking up words in a dictionary.
	2. Monitoring. Strategies in which learners notice errors (linguistic and communicative) observed how a message is received and interpreted by the addressee, and then decide what to do about it. E.g., correcting errors in own/other's pronunciation, vocabulary, spelling, etc.
	3. Memorization. Strategies that focus on the storage and retrieval of language, e.g., taking notes; pronouncing out loud, finding some sort of association (semantic, visual, auditory, kinesthetic)
	4. Guessing/inductive inferencing. Strategies that use previously obtained linguistic or conceptual knowledge, e.g., Using clues such as key words in the sentence, syntactic structure, context of discourse, topic of discourse, etc.
	5. Deductive reasoning. A problem-solving strategy in which the learner looks for and uses general rules in approaching the foreign or second language, e.g., finding the meaning of words by breaking it down into its parts, grouping words according to similarity of endings, inferring vocabulary by analogy.
	6. Practice. Strategies that contribute to the storage and retrieval of language while focusing on accuracy of usage, e.g., drilling oneself on words in different forms.
Indirect Strategies	Indirect Strategies may be subdivided into the following sub-categories: 1. Creating opportunities for practice. Strategies used by learners to generate conversations or be exposed to the target language, e.g., -Listening to the radio and initiating conversation with fellow student/teacher/native speaker.
	2. Production tricks. Strategies related to communication focus, probably related to motivation and opportunity for exposure, e.g., -Using cognate whether right or wrong.

APPENDIX B

Oxford's (1990) Strategy Classification System

Direct strategies	I. Memory Strategies	A. Creating mental linkages B. Applying images and sound C. Reviewing well D. Employing action
	II. Cognitive Strategies	A. Practicing B. Receiving and sending messages C. Analyzing and reasoning D. Creating the structure of input and output
	III. Compensation Strategies	A. Guessing intelligently B. Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing
Indirect strategies	I. Metacognitive Strategies	A. Centering your learning B. Arranging and planning your learning C. Evaluating your learning
	II. Affective Strategies	A. Lowering your anxiety B. Encouraging yourself C. Taking your emotional temperature
	III. Social Strategies	A. Asking questions B. Cooperating with others C. Empathizing with others

APPENDIX C

O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) Strategy Classification System

Metacognitive strategies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Advance organizers b) Directed attention c) Selective attention d) Self-management e) Advance preparation f) Self-monitoring g) Delay in production h) Self-evaluation i) Self-reinforcement
Cognitive strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Repetition; b) Resourcing; c) Directed physical response; d) Translation; e) Grouping; f) Note-taking; g) Deduction; h) Recombination; i) Imagery; j) Auditory representation; k) Key word; l) Contextualization; m) Elaboration; n) Transfer; o) Inferencing; p) Questions for clarification.
Social mediation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Cooperation. Working with one or more peers to obtain feedback, pool information, or model language activity.

APPENDIX D**INTERVIEW**

This interview has been designed to identify some of the characteristics that the students of third semester of the BA in ELT have.

1. What was your score on the TOEFL exam when you first enter to the BA in ELT? _____

2. Did you take English courses before attempting to present the TOEFL exam?

YES

NO

3. If YES, which ones

4. During the first three semesters of the BA in ELT, did you take English courses besides your English class?

YES

NO

5. If YES, which ones?

6. Did you attend to a special course to be prepared for the PET exam?

YES

NO

7. Did you attend to the Self Access Center to practice for your PET exam?

YES

NO

8. Were you a member of the Chat Club at the Self Access Center?

YES

NO

9. If YES, How often did you attend to the sessions?

10. Do you practice your English outside the classroom?

YES

NO

11. If YES, How do you practice it?

12. If you have been practicing one or more of the activities mentioned above how many hours do you consider you practice your English, besides your English class, every day?

APPENDIX E

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Version 7.0)

Gender _____

Scores of PET _____

Time usually spent on English study each day _____

Directions

This form of the STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING (SILL) is for students of English as a second or foreign language. You will find statements about learning English.

Please read each statement. Next to each statement, select the response (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) that tells **HOW TRUE OF YOU THE STATEMENT IS**.

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

Answer in terms of how well the statement describes you. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements.

Circle your answers next to each statement. Work as quickly as you can without being careless. This usually takes about 20-30 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, let the teacher know immediately.

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Statements

Part A

1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.
1 2 3 4 5
2. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them
1 2 3 4 5
3. I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.
1 2 3 4 5

4. I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.

1 2 3 4 5

5. I use rhymes to remember new English words.

1 2 3 4 5

6. I use flashcards to remember new English words

1 2 3 4 5

7. I physically act out new English words.

1 2 3 4 5

8. I review English lessons often.

1 2 3 4 5

9. I remember new English words or phrase by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a screen sign.

1 2 3 4 5

Part B

10. I say or write new English words several times.

1 2 3 4 5

11. I try to talk like native English speakers.

1 2 3 4 5

12. I practice the sounds of English.

1 2 3 4 5

13. I use the English words I know in different ways.

1 2 3 4 5

14. I start conversations in English.

1 2 3 4 5

15. I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or to go to movies spoken in English.

1 2 3 4 5

16. I read for pleasure in English.

1 2 3 4 5

17. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.

1 2 3 4 5

18. I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.

1 2 3 4 5

19. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.

1 2 3 4 5

20. I try to find patterns in English.

1 2 3 4 5

21. I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I

understand.

1 2 3 4 5

22. I try not to translate word-for-word.

1 2 3 4 5

23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.

1 2 3 4 5

Part C

24. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.

1 2 3 4 5

25. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.

1 2 3 4 5

26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.

1 2 3 4 5

27. I read English without looking up every new word.

1 2 3 4 5

28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.

1 2 3 4 5

29. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.

1 2 3 4 5

Part D

30. I try to find as many ways as I can use my English.

1

2 3 4 5

31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.

1 2 3 4 5

32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.

1 2 3 4 5

33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.

1 2 3 4 5

34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.

1 2 3 4 5

35. I look for people I can talk to in English.

1 2 3 4 5

36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.

1 2 3 4 5

37. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.

1 2 3 4 5

38. I think about my progress in learning English.

1 2 3 4 5

Part E

39. I try to relax whenever I felt afraid of using English.

1 2 3 4 5

40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.

1 2 3 4 5

41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English

1 2 3 4 5

42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.

1 2 3 4 5

43. I write my own feelings in a language learning diary.

1 2 3 4 5

44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.

1 2 3 4 5

Part F

45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.

1 2 3 4 5

46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.

1 2 3 4 5

47. I practice English with other students.

1 2 3 4 5

48. I ask for help from English speakers

1 2 3 4 5

49. I ask questions in English.

1 2 3 4 5

50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.

1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX F Taxonomy of Language Strategies

STRATEGY	DEFINITION	QUESTION ITEM
Memory strategies (9 items)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creating mental linkage: grouping, associating/elaborating, and placing words in a context. 2. Applying images and sounds: using imagery, semantic mapping, using keywords, and representing sounds in memory. 3. Reviewing well: structure sounds in memory 4. Employing action: using physical response or sensation and using mechanical techniques. 	Question Item #9 "I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign"
Cognitive strategies (14 items)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Practicing: repeating, formally practicing with sounds and writing systems, recognizing and using formulas and patterns, recombining, and practicing naturalistically. 2. Receiving and sending messages: getting the idea quickly and using resources for receiving and sending messages. 3. Analyzing and reasoning: reasoning deductively, analyzing expressions, analyzing contrastively across languages, translating and transferring. 4. Creating structures for input and output: taking notes, summarizing and highlighting. 	Question Item # 21 "I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand"
Compensation strategies (6 items)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Guessing intelligently-using linguistic clues and using other cues. 2. Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing: over-switching to the mother tongue, getting help, using mime or gesture, avoiding communication partially or totally, selecting the topic, adjusting or approximating the message, coning words, and using a circumlocution or synonym. 	Question Item # 26 "I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English"
Metacognitive strategies (9 items)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Centering your learning: over-viewing and linking with already known material, paying attention, and delay speech production to focus on listening. 2. Arranging and planning your learning: finding out about language learning, organizing, setting goals and objectives, identifying the purpose of a language task, planning for a language task, and seeking practice opportunities. 3. Evaluating your learning: self-monitoring and self-evaluating. 	Question Item 38 "I think about my progress in learning English"
Affective strategies (6 items)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lowering your anxiety: using progressive relaxation, deep breathing or meditation, using music, and using laughter. 2. Encouraging yourself: making positive statements, taking risks wisely, and reviewing yourself. 3. Taking your emotional temperature: listening to your body, using checklist, writing a language learning diary, and discussing your feelings with some else. 	Question Item # 10 "I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistakes"
Social strategies (6 items)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Asking questions: asking for clarification or verification and asking for correction. 2. Cooperating with others: cooperating with others and cooperating with proficient users of the new language. 3. Empathizing with others: developing cultural understanding and becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings. 	Question Item # 45 "If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again"