

Reading Comprehension Learning Strategies

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**Abstract**

This research reports on a study of reading comprehension learning strategies used by 40 students from the fifth level of the Language Center of the University of Nariño. The aims of the study were to survey the frequency of reading comprehension direct learning strategies use and to determine how it is influenced by the learners' proficiency level. In addition to this, it also aims to identify what reading comprehension indirect learning strategies were being used among learners. Analysis showed that significant differences were to be found in the use of reading comprehension learning strategies among learners of fifth level. As well as, an inappropriate use of the reading comprehension indirect learning strategies by learners was recognized. Findings from this study could help teachers identify appropriate strategies to facilitate reading comprehension by learners of the Language Center of the University of Nariño.

### **Resumen**

Esta investigación describe un estudio sobre las estrategias de aprendizaje que asisten la habilidad de lectura usadas por 40 estudiantes del quinto nivel del centro de Idiomas de la Universidad de Nariño. El objetivo del estudio es investigar la frecuencia de uso de las estrategias de aprendizaje directas que asisten la habilidad de la lectura y determinar cómo son influenciadas por el nivel de competencia de los participantes. Asimismo, ésta investigación se enfoca en identificar qué estrategias indirectas de aprendizaje son usadas por ellos. El análisis demuestra que existen diferencias significativas en el uso de dichas estrategias entre los estudiantes del quinto nivel. De la misma forma, se reconoció un uso inapropiado de las estrategias indirectas que asisten la lectura. Los hallazgos, resultado del presente estudio pueden ayudar a los profesores a identificar las estrategias adecuadas para facilitar la comprensión de la lectura de los estudiantes de los niveles de Inglés que el centro de Idiomas de la Universidad de Nariño.

Chapter I: A Survey on the Reading Comprehension Learning Strategies Applied within the Fifth Level Students of the Language Center of the University of Nariño

In the first chapter of this research study a problematic situation related to the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language will be presented according to the features of a descriptive research. Therefore, a description of the problem, the problem statement, an evaluation of the problem, its significance, the objectives, delimitations and limitations will be explained hereby.

### **Description of the Problem**

When coping with the teaching and learning process of a foreign language, many external and internal factors influence the success or failure of this process: motivation, age, physical conditions, resources, learner's aptitudes and attitudes, teacher's role, psychological factors and so forth. Throughout the past decades a new premise regarding language learning strategies has been outlined as an effective resource in the languages field because of the consistent and constant use of these strategies: every single learner of a new language is, consciously or unconsciously, a user of different strategies in every step of the language learning no matter the method, motivation or skill the learner focuses on (Oxford, 1991).

As far as the effectiveness of the language learning is concerned, the sense of success could be expressed in terms of sufficient confidence in the real use of the target language, a sense which is many times difficult to achieve.

When asked to identify the major source of difficulty, most non-native English-speaking students mentioned vocabulary, as well as idiomatic and appropriate use of English. This was followed by problems in speaking and fluency, pronunciation and reading. Grammar featured

to a far lesser extent and so did writing skills, whereas reading skills and cultural knowledge were not even mentioned. (Medgyes, 2001, p.434).

This is probably why reading seems to be among the four skills attained to language learning, the most realistic and easy, stress-free, available skill used inside and outside the language classroom.

Another factor influencing the effectiveness of the language learning is, precisely, the different features that characterize an effective learner. According to Wesche, quoted by Dickinson (1987), successful learners are those who use their exposure time in the L2 actively, and who seek to extend this out of the classroom, who actively rehearse new material, who exploit its rich associational possibilities both through conscious association-making and meaningful practice in the L2, and who seek knowledge about the target language. Furthermore, the author argues that at least one difference between good language learners and the rest is that good learners have developed effective language learning strategies (Dickinson, 1987).

In conclusion, the use of learning strategies is attached to the development of the communicative competence as the final goal in the learning process. Facing the globally accepted new trends in the teaching of a foreign language, both teachers and students should be aware of the importance of learning strategies and the benefits of becoming autonomous learners as Oxford (2001, p.23-24) asserts: “all language learning strategies are related to the features of control, goal-directness autonomy and self-efficacy. Learning strategies help students become more autonomous and autonomy requires conscious control of one’s own learning process”.

### **Problem Statement**

What reading comprehension learning strategies are used by 40 students of the Fifth Level in the Language Center at the University of Nariño?

### **Evaluation of the Problem**

From the era of the grammar-translation method, reading has generally held an important place in foreign/second language study and teaching. These days, we see reading in a different light: as communication, as a mental process, as the reader's active participation in the creation of meaning, as a manipulation of strategies, as a receptive rather than a passive skill. Reading is a primary means of language acquisition. For Krashen (1981), in Lightbown & Spada, comprehensible input is vital for language acquisition, and reading is an inimitable source of such input.

Nonetheless, some problems may arise due to the fact that the Language Center students are learning a foreign language, which means a certain level of difficulty in terms of vocabulary understanding or the reading's cultural barriers, an issue concerning the origin of the reading itself. When a student faces a reading, generally this process starts first with the task underlying it, the purpose of the reading, whether it is done for personal enjoyment or for a grade achievement (Barnett, 1989). On the other hand, reading is seen as the most suitable and available of all four language skills, used in almost every step of the foreign language teaching, in every level, for different ages, with a pedagogical approach or purpose, from authentic sources of information such as newspapers, magazines, books, brochures, ads, etc.

This availability allows students to cope with the responsibility of reading by themselves, at a personal pace, and in specific and appropriate places of their choice. In the real discovery of a new reading, the goal is that students read in the target language with "moderate ease and with enjoyment for recreational and for vocational purposes" as Coleman (1929, pp. 70 – 78) in Bastidas stated, then students should focus on the use of some strategies in order to obtain a

better understanding of the topic and vocabulary, a process that affects not only their personal enrichment but also enlarges their language scope.

### **Significance**

Reading is a vital part of the learning of a foreign language or any type of learning.

Concerning the estimated conditions in which this skill is carried out, there is little doubt about the influence of some factors as the motivation, level, age, aptitude and attitude (Barnett, 1989; Collins, 1994; Krashen, 1983) towards the reading a student has, also the access to the different sources of information, the frequency in which this activity occurs, the support given by the teachers in the progression of the task, the amount of comprehensible input a student is able to manage, and so on.

This research paper attempted firstly, to explain how important learning strategies are in the comprehension of a reading text for students, this is, their level of knowledge and understanding of the target language. It is likely to think that students from the Language Center of the University of Nariño, as any other student of a foreign language, use consciously or unconsciously some strategies when reading. Some decades ago, many ESL researchers have begun to recognize the importance of the strategies ESL students use while reading.

A list of empirical investigations has been conducted on reading strategies and their relationships to successful and unsuccessful second language reading (Block, 1986; Hosenfeld, 1977; Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1995; Knight, Pardon, & Waxman, 1985). Mi-jeong (1994), lately explains that research in second language reading has also demonstrated that strategy use is different in more and less proficient readers, and that more proficient readers use different types of strategies, and they use them in different ways. Therefore, this research study will secondly, intend to consider the description of the strategies used, the frequency students use the

strategies, and the way these strategies could be applied in a foreign language learning lesson plan or curricula, so they could be learned and applied during the language sessions or classes. And thirdly, this research paper provided some teaching recommendations in order to pick out the best strategies regarding reading comprehension and students' learning styles.

### **Objectives**

#### **General Objective**

To identify whether any strategies are being implemented by learners of the fifth level of the Language Center at the University of Nariño to cope with reading comprehension.

#### **Specific Objectives**

To provide a brief overview of the possible current learning strategies used by learners of the fifth level at the Language Center.

To describe which learning strategies dealing with the improvement of reading comprehension are the most used among students.

To apply research findings in order to suggest ways in which learning strategies can be implemented and learned in an EFL classroom through possible recommendations.

### **Delimitations**

#### **Definition of terms**

Because of the importance and the high frequency in which the following terms will be used throughout this research study a brief definition is given.

**Reading comprehension.** At the most basic level, reading is the recognition of words (Leipzig, 2001). From simple recognition of the individual letters and how these letters form a particular word to what each word means not just on an individual level, but as part of a text. In

English, as in many other languages, different combinations of the same letters can be used to form different words with completely different meanings (Tennant, 2010).

**Learning strategies.** According to Stern, quoted by (Hismanoglu, 2000), “the concept of learning strategy is dependent on the assumption that learners consciously engage in activities to achieve certain goals and learning strategies can be regarded as broadly conceived intentional directions and learning techniques”. Hismanoglu continues explaining that:

All language learners use language learning strategies either consciously or unconsciously when processing new information and performing tasks in the language classroom. Since language classroom is like a problem-solving environment in which language learners are likely to face new input and difficult tasks given by their instructors, learners' attempts to find the quickest or easiest way to do what is required, that is, using language learning strategies is inescapable. (Hismanoglu, 2000).

**Communicative Competence.** First, according to Hymes, (1972) communicative competence refers to “what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community”. In Hymes’ view, a person who develops communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for using feasible and appropriate language in relation to the situational context. On the other hand, a more recent analysis of communicative competence is found in Canale and Swain, (1998), for whom four dimensions of communicative competence are identified: grammatical competence or accuracy, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. Finally, as Oxford (1991) states, communicative competence is “the competence or ability to communicate. It concerns both spoken or written language and all four language skills”.

**EFL setting.** Harmer, (2007) states that there is a distinction between the terms EFL and ESL. EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings concern students learning English in order to use it with any other English speakers of the world. It refers to the English taught and learned in the countries the speakers are from, whereas ESL (English as a Second Language) refers to the students who actually live in an English-speaking community and are learning the language of that community. On this topic, Brown, (2007) claims that foreign language contexts are those in which students use the target language only inside the classroom. There are few opportunities to use the target language in different contexts outside the classroom such as language clubs, special media opportunities, books, or on occasional tourism.

### **Geographical Description**

This research study will be carried out at the University of Nariño which is placed in the city of San Juan de Pasto. The university facilities are in very good condition and equipped with the sufficient technological devices for the teaching of a foreign language such as TV sets, VCR/DVD devices, a language resource center, and English labs available for both teachers and students.

### **Limitations**

Further implications as a subjective point of view or answer, unreliability depending on the answers given by the respondents who represent people of different ages, and misunderstanding of some of the questions might be, among others, factors that impede the complete and objective development of the questionnaire that will be used during the research process, leading to a limitation on the true and real meaning of the provided answer.

## Chapter II: Review of Literature

**Theoretical Framework****What is Reading?**

According to Leipzig (2001), reading is a multifaceted process involving word recognition, comprehension, fluency, and motivation. Reading is making meaning from print. It requires to identify the words in print – a process called word recognition, to construct an understanding from them – a process called comprehension and to coordinate identifying words and making meaning so that reading is automatic and accurate – an achievement called fluency. Reading in its fullest sense involves switching from word recognition and comprehension in a fluent manner. Leipzig also mentions that there are some steps to follow that guarantee the successful process of reading. First, to develop word recognition, students need to learn how to break apart and manipulate the sounds in words (called phonemic awareness). For example, **feet** has three sounds: /f/, /e/, and /t/.

Certain letters are used to represent certain sounds (called the alphabetic principle). For example, *s* and *h* make the /sh/ sound. Also, students need to know how to apply their knowledge of letter-sound relationships to sound out words that are new to them (called decoding). For example, sssssppooooon – spoon!. How to analyze words and spelling patterns in order to become more efficient at reading words (called word study). For example, *Bookworm* has two words I know: *book* and *worm*. And, finally, to expand the number of words they can identify automatically, (called their sight vocabulary). For example: Oh, I know that word – *the*!

Second, to develop comprehension, students need to develop background knowledge about many topics. For example, This book is about zoos – that's where lots of animals live; extensive oral and print vocabularies, for example: Look at my trucks – I have a tractor, and a fire engine,

and a bulldozer; understandings about how the English language works, for example: We say she *went* home, not she *goed* home. Understanding about how print works, for example: reading goes from left to right. Knowledge of various kinds of texts, for example: I bet they live happily ever after; various purposes for reading, for example: I want to know what lady bugs eat; strategies for constructing meaning from text, and for problem solving when meaning breaks down, for example: This isn't making sense. Let me go back and reread it.

Third, to develop fluency, students need to develop a high level of accuracy in word recognition, maintain a rate of reading brisk enough to facilitate comprehension, use phrasing and expression so that oral reading sounds like speech, and transform deliberate strategies for word recognition and comprehension into automatic skills. But if reading is not pleasurable or fulfilling, students will not choose to read, and they will not get the practice they need to become fluent readers. Therefore, reading also means developing and maintaining the motivation to read. Reading is an active process of constructing meaning where the key word is active.

Finally, to develop and maintain the motivation to read, students need to appreciate the pleasures of reading, to view reading as a social act to be shared with others, to see reading as an opportunity to explore their interests, to read widely for a variety of purposes, from enjoyment to gathering information and, to become comfortable with a variety of different written forms and genres.

### **Types and characteristics of written language**

Brown (2007), categorizes the types of written language, the sources of readings, as follows:

Non-fiction: reports, editorials, essays and articles, reference (dictionaries, encyclopedias)	Fiction: novels, short stories, jokes, drama, poetry
	Letters: personal, business

Greeting cards	Labels
Diaries, journals	Signs
Memos	Recipes
Messages	Bill (and other financial statements)
Announcements	Maps
Newspapers	Manuals
Academic writing: short answer test responses, reports, essays, papers, theses and books	Menus Schedules Advertisements
Forms, applications	Invitations
Questionnaires	Directories
Directions	Comic strips, cartoons

There are some characteristics that easily distinguish the types of written language from the types of spoken language such as the permanence and endurance of the written word, a helpful trait that can be checked the times necessary for a reader to remember the text. The pace a reader has when facing a text determines the knowledge of the written word, a feature that enhances the “rate of delivery”, meaning the acceptance of the different levels of understanding a reader shows. The interpretation a reader makes of a text in terms of distance provides it with an unrealistic set of differences of what the reader actually reads and the time, nature or context in which the text was written. Another important factor when reading is the use of punctuation within a text. This leads to a certain type of ambiguity in which the reader has to “infer and interpret”, this is “read between the lines” or the action of understanding what the author of a specific text meant when writing. The length of the written word allows writers to extend the

number of words when describing the situation or a “scene” in particular leading the reader to a more complex joint of words and sentences when decoding the text. The latter feature deals with the vocabulary a writer uses during the process of describing the particular “scene”. For most readers, the decoding, knowledge and understanding of the vocabulary used in the text is, probably, the most difficult step when reading, although it is easier to do it reading from the context, not from the word itself; and the formality or the conventions a text follows is the final trait of the written word. In this case, the reader has to be attached to and familiar with the social conventions in order to understand the meaning of the written word (Brown, 2007).

### **Reading Models**

During the 1970s, many researchers started to develop different categorizations now called *models* in terms of the way a person reads. These models are represented as follows:

**Bottom-up model.** According to Brown (2007), readers need to identify a number of different linguistic signals, for example, letters, morphemes, syllables, words, phrases, grammatical cues, discourse markers, etc. to develop the mechanisms of data-processing, this is, to put an order for these signals when reading. Therefore, as Barnett (1989) declares, the reader first constructs meaning from the letters, words, phrases, and sentences found and then processes the text in a series of discrete stages in a linear fashion. The incoming data from the text must be received before the higher-level mental stages of understanding transform and recode the data. Following an information-processing approach to comprehension, bottom-up models analyze reading as a process in which small chunks of text are absorbed, analyzed, and gradually added to the next chunks until they become meaningful. Ur (2008), also gives a short explanation when it comes to bottom-up processes as the use of decoding or understanding words, phrases and sentences in the text.

**Top-down model.** In this model the reader uses general knowledge of the world of particular text components to make intelligent guesses about what might come next in the text. The reader samples only enough of the text to confirm or reject these guesses (Barnett, 1989). This “guessing game”, as Brown (2007, p.302-306), quotes, is the action of inferring the meaning of a text, a line, a phrase, and the action of making decisions when reading about what is useful or goes to the memory storage and what does not. Goodman (1968, p.5, 9-30), in Barnett, argues that this process enters into the psycholinguistic area in order to define reading as "an interaction between reader and written language, through which the reader attempts to reconstruct a message from the writer". In the top-down model, readers use their knowledge of syntax and semantics to reduce their dependence on the print and phonics of the text. Also, Goodman specifies four processes in reading: predicting, sampling, confirming, and correcting. First, readers make predictions about the grammatical structure in a text, using their knowledge of the language and supplying semantic concepts to get meaning from the structure. Then, they sample the print to confirm their predictions.

They neither see nor need to see every letter or word. The more highly developed the readers' sense of syntax and meaning, the more selective the readers can be in sampling. After sampling, they confirm their guesses or, alternatively, correct themselves if what they see does not make sense or if the graphic input predicted is not there. As Goodman (1969, p. 98), writes, "in all this it is meaning which makes the system go" but the model does allow the reader to move from print to sound to meaning when necessary.

**Interactive model.** The interactive model of reading responds to the question of how vocabulary skills relate to comprehension, this is, when reading comprehension also depends on the printed text. For second language researchers as Rumelhart (1977), reading is a perceptual

and yet a cognitive process. Rumelhart also demonstrates the influence of syntactic, semantic, lexical, and orthographic information on the reader's perception of print. For example, to explain the guiding power of semantic knowledge over word perception, Rumelhart summarizes experimentation that reveals that a subject can decide more quickly if a letter string spells a word when a pair of words is semantically related, as in bread-butter or doctor-nurse, than if they are unrelated, as in bread-doctor or nurse-butter. Thus, still following an information processing perspective, Rumelhart's model emphasizes many different types and directions of processing, depending on text context and available information sources.

According to Rumelhart (1977), the reader looks at the words and spelling that are registered in a visual information store (VIS). The feature extraction device pulls out the critical features of these words (with the successful reader sampling only enough of the text to continue) and moves them into the pattern synthesizer. The pattern synthesizer is where all the reader's previous knowledge about the language spelling patterns, syntax, vocabulary, semantics, and context come together to interpret what has been read.

But beyond the knowledge of the system in which a reader faces a reading, there is also a knowledge in which a reader uses different strategies in order to adjust, understand and comprehend a reading, the so-called *language learning strategies* which will be depicted as follows.

### **Language learning strategies**

The term language learning strategy has been fairly defined by many researchers. According to Oxford (1990, p.1), learning strategies are “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations”. Oxford, also points out that foreign or second language strategies are

“behaviors, steps or techniques students use, often consciously, to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing and using the L2”. On the other hand, Wenden & Rubin (1987), quoted by Hismanoglu, define learning strategies as “any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information”. Whereas O’Malley and Chamot (1990, p.1), briefly define them as “the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information”. Again, Oxford (1990), determines the importance of language learning strategies for the successful learning of a foreign language because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. The development of communicative competence requires realistic interaction among learners using meaningful contextualized language. Learning strategies help learners participate actively in such authentic communication, and such strategies operate in both general and specific ways to encourage the development of communicative competence. Lastly, Oxford, Carter and Nunan (2001), state that research shows that greater strategy use is often related to higher levels of language proficiency (Cohen 1996; O’Malley and Chamot 1990; Oxford and Ehrman 1995; Oxford 1996).

Specifically, and as Barnett (1989) explains, a learning strategy refers to the mental operations involved when readers purposefully approach a text to make sense of what they read. These may be either conscious techniques controlled by the reader or unconscious processes applied automatically.

**Reading strategies.** According to Mi-jeong (1998), reading strategies indicate how readers conceive a task, what textual cues they attend to, how they make sense of what they read, and what they do when they do not understand (Block, 1986, cited in Mi-jeong). They range from simple fix-up strategies such as simply rereading difficult segments and guessing the meaning of

an unknown word from context, to more comprehensive strategies such as summarizing and relating what is being read to the reader's background knowledge (Janzen, 1996, cited in Mi-jeong).

Mi-jeong (1998), continues describing the diverse amount of research related to reading strategies. He mentions that those research studies have found that good readers are better at monitoring their comprehension than poor readers, that they are more aware of the strategies they use than are poor readers, and that they use strategies more flexibly and efficiently (Garner 1987; Pressley Beard El-Dinary & Brown 1992). For example, good readers distinguish between important information and details as they read and are able to use clues in the text to anticipate information and/or relate new information to information already stated. They are also able to notice inconsistencies in a text and employ strategies to make these inconsistencies understandable (Baker & Brown 1984; Garner 1980).

Block (1986, cited in Barnett) observes the strategies of six ESL and three native-English-speaking university-level students facing a reading. She categorizes their strategies as general (comprehension-gathering and comprehension-monitoring) and local (attempts to understand specific linguistic units). The categorization is explained below:

***General strategies.***

- anticipate content
- recognize text structure
- integrate information
- question information in the text
- interpret the text
- use general knowledge and associations

- comment on behavior or processes
- monitor comprehension
- correct behavior
- react to the text

*Local strategies.*

- paraphrase
- reread
- question meaning of a clause or sentence
- question meaning of a word
- solve vocabulary problem

Block (1986), also extrapolates from research on writing to define two different modes in readers' strategies: extensive (when readers focus on understanding the author's ideas) and reflexive (when readers relate ideas in the text to themselves, affectively and personally). This concept of modes is helpful in understanding how individual readers see themselves in relation to a text.

Furthermore, a chart provided by Beale, Keene and Tovani (1998), sums up six strategies for successful readers: make connections, visualize, ask questions, infer, determine importance, and synthesize. These strategies suggest the questions a reader must ask when reading and comprehending a text. Table 1 depicts the strategies in detail:

Table 1

Reading Comprehension Strategies.

# Reading Comprehension Strategies

<p><b>Make Connections</b></p> <p>What connections do I make as I read?</p> <p>Good readers notice pieces of text that relate to or remind them of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their lives, past experiences, and prior knowledge</li> <li>• Other books, articles, movies, songs, or pieces of writing</li> <li>• Events, people, or issues</li> </ul> <p>Tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That reminds me of...</li> <li>• This made me think of...</li> <li>• I read another book that...</li> <li>• This is different from...</li> <li>• I remember when...</li> </ul>	<p><b>Visualize</b></p> <p>Good readers create pictures in their minds while they read.</p> <p>While reading, note places where you get a clear picture in your mind that helps you understand the text:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can picture...</li> <li>• I can see the...</li> <li>• I can visualize...</li> <li>• The movie in my head shows...</li> </ul> <p>Use your senses to connect the characters, events, and ideas to clarify the picture in your head.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can taste/hear/smell the...</li> <li>• I can feel the...</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ask Questions</b></p> <p>Good readers ask questions before, during, and after reading to better understand the author and the meaning of the text.</p> <p>Ask questions of the author, yourself, and the text:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the author trying to say?</li> <li>• What is the message of this piece?</li> <li>• Do I know something about this topic?</li> <li>• What do I think I will learn from this text?</li> <li>• How could this be explained to someone else?</li> <li>• What predictions do I have about this reading?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Infer</b></p> <p>How do I read between the lines?</p> <p>When the answers are "right there," good readers draw conclusions based on background knowledge and clues in the text.</p> <p>Ask yourself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I wonder why...</li> <li>• I wonder how...</li> <li>• I wonder if...</li> </ul> <p>Find information from the text that might be clues to the answers and use these with your background knowledge for possible answers.</p>	<p><b>Determine Importance</b></p> <p>What's the big idea? So what?</p> <p>Good readers look for things that help them identify big ideas and why they are important.</p> <p>Look at text features for clues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Titles and headings</li> <li>• Bold print</li> <li>• Pictures and captions</li> <li>• Graphs and charts</li> <li>• Chapter objectives and questions</li> </ul> <p>Tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The big idea is...</li> <li>• Most important information is...</li> <li>• So far I've learned...</li> <li>• The author is saying...</li> <li>• This idea is similar to...</li> </ul>	<p><b>Synthesize</b></p> <p>How do I use what I've read to create my own ideas?</p> <p>Good readers combine new information from their reading with existing knowledge in order to form new ideas or interpretations.</p> <p>Synthesis is creating a single understanding from a variety of sources.</p> <p>Tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare and contrast what I'm reading with what I already know or other sources of information.</li> <li>• Think of new ways to use this information.</li> <li>• Can connections I make across this text help me to create new generalizations or new perspectives?</li> </ul>

From Beale, Keene and Tovani.

Brown (2007), compiles ten different strategies related to bottom-up and top down procedures when teaching reading, as shown below:

- Identify the purpose in reading
- Use graphemic rules and patterns to aid in bottom-up decoding
- Use efficient silent reading techniques for relatively rapid comprehension
- Skim the text for main ideas
- Scan the text for specific information
- Use semantic mapping or clustering guess when you are not certain
- Analyze vocabulary
- Distinguish between literal and implied meanings
- Capitalize on discourse markers to process relationships

Finally, Oxford (1990), categorizes two different types of learning strategies: direct and indirect. The former deals with the strategies involving the target language and the latter deals with the strategies involving the language learning itself.

For direct strategies, Oxford divides the strategies into three groups: memory strategies which have a highly specific function when helping students to store and retrieve new information for example, grouping or using imagery; cognitive strategies which enable students to understand and produce new language by many different means, for example, summarizing or reasoning deductively; and compensation strategies which allow learners to use the language despite their often large gaps in knowledge, for example, guessing or using synonyms.

Memory strategies encompass four sets: creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing well and employing action. Memory strategies reflect very simple principle, such as arranging things in order, making association, and reviewing. These principles all

involve meaning. For the purpose of learning a new language, the arrangement and association must be personally meaningful to the learner and the material to be reviewed must have significance. Two kinds of strategies are useful for making mental linkages: grouping, associating/elaborating.

**Grouping.** Grouping involves classifying or reclassifying what is heard or read into meaningful groups, thus reducing the number of unrelated elements. It sometimes involves labeling the groups, as well.

**Associating/elaborating.** It involves associating new language information with familiar concepts already in memory. Naturally, these associations are likely to strengthen comprehension, as well as making the material easier to remember.

There are four strategies in order to apply images and sounds: using imagery, semantic mapping, using key words and representing sounds in memory.

**Using imagery.** A great way to remember what has been heard in the new language is to create a mental image of it. The imagery used to remember expression does not have to be necessary mental, drawings for instance can make mental images.

**Semantic Mapping.** This strategy involves arranging concepts and relationships on paper to create a semantic map. A diagram in which the key concepts are highlighted and are linked with related concepts via arrows or lines. This strategy is valuable for improving both memory and comprehension of new expressions.

**Using keywords.** This strategy has two steps. First, identify a familiar word in one's own language or another language that sounds like the new word. Second, generate a visual image of the new word and the familiar one interacting in some way.

Cognitive strategies encompass four subgroups: practicing; receiving and sending messages; analyzing and reasoning; and, creating structure for input and output. In the practicing strategies we find a strategy related to reading comprehension.

***Formally practicing writing systems.*** This strategy centers on learning new writing systems necessary for using the target language. Within receiving and sending messages subgroup there is a strategy: Getting the idea quickly.

*Getting the idea quickly.* This strategy helps students in exactly what they need or want to understand, and it also allows them to disregard the rest or use it as background information only. Two techniques constituting this strategy are skimming and scanning. *Skimming* involves searching for the main ideas the speaker wants to get across. *Scanning* has the main purpose of searching for specific details of interest to the learner. There are two strategies related to reading skill in Analyzing and reasoning; analyzing expressions and analyzing contrastively.

***Analyzing expressions.*** In order to understand a reading in the new language, it is often helpful to break down a new word, phrase, sentence or even paragraph into its component parts. This strategy is known as analyzing expressions.

***Analyzing contrastively.*** This strategy is fairly easy, one that most learners use naturally. It involves analyzing elements (sounds, words, syntax) of the new language to determine likeness and differences in comparison with one's native language. It is very commonly used at the early stages of language learning to understand the meaning of what is been read.

Creating structure for input and output is another set of strategies such as *taking notes*, *summarizing* and *highlighting*, which are helpful for students to sort and organize the target language information that comes their way as well as to demonstrate their understanding tangibly.

***Taking notes.*** It is a valuable strategy for reading skill, although students are rarely taught to use it well. The focus of this strategy should be on understanding and it can be used at the early stages of learning. One advantage of using this strategy is that it helps learners to organize what they read while they are reading it, thus increasing the original understanding and the ability to integrate new information with the old one.

***Summarizing.*** This is another strategy that helps students structure new input and show what they understand. Summarizing is useful to make a condensed and shorter version of the original text. At the early stages of language learning, summarizing can be as just giving a title to what has been read.

***Highlighting.*** This strategy emphasizes the major points in a dramatic way, through color, capital letters, initial capitals, big writing, and bold writing stars, boxes, circles, and so forth. Finally, the compensation strategies that encompass: using linguistic clues and using other clues, and which help learners to overcome knowledge limitation of the listening skill.

***Using linguistic clues.*** Previously gained knowledge of the target language, the learner's own language, or some other language can provide linguistic clues to the meaning of what is read. Suffixes, prefixes and word order are useful linguistic clues for guessing meanings.

***Using other clues.*** In addition to clues coming purely from knowledge of language, there are some others that come from other sources and in sometimes they have nothing to do with the language, for instance titles or nicknames which help students guess the meaning of what they read.

**Indirect Strategies for reading comprehension.** The indirect strategies are divided into metacognitive, affective and social. Metacognitive strategies allow students to control their own cognition, to coordinate the learning process by using functions such as centering, arranging,

planning, and evaluating; affective strategies which help to regulate emotions, motivations, and attitudes; and social strategies which help students through interaction with others.

*Metacognitive strategies.* According to Vandergrift (1996), Metacognitive Strategies allow learners to control their own cognition, it means, it provides a way to learners to coordinate the learning process by using functions such as planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

*Planning.* This set of four strategies help learners organize and plan what learners do.

*Advanced Organization.* Learners decide what the objectives of a specific reading task are and why is it important to attend to this.

*Selective Attention.* Learners pay attention to details in the reading task.

*Self-management.* Learners have to manage their own motivation for a reading task.

*Direct Attention.* Learners must pay attention to the main points in a reading task to get a general understanding of what is said.

*Monitoring.* It means when learners monitor their own performance while reading, including assessing areas of uncertainty. It includes:

*Comprehension Monitoring.* Learners check their understanding of ideas, through asking confirmation questions.

*Task Monitoring.* Learners check their completion of the task.

*Evaluation.* Learners' check how well they have understood, and whether an initial problem posed has been solved. It includes:

*Performance evaluation.* Learners judge how well they did on the task.

*Problem identification.* Learners decide on what problems they still have with the text or task.

**Affective strategies.** Oxford (1993), includes into the indirect strategies the factor of effectiveness which refers to emotions, attitudes, motivations and values. It is impossible to overstate the importance of the affective factors influencing language learning. Language learners can gain control over these factors through effective strategies. Oxford divides this set into three strategies: *lowering your anxiety*, *encouraging yourself*, and *taking your emotional temperature*. Lowering your anxiety encompasses three different subgroups: Using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation.

*Using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation.* It refers to using the technique of alternately tensing and relaxing all the major muscle groups in the body, as well as the technique of breathing deeply or meditating by focusing on a mental image or sound in order to relax.

*Using laughter.* Using laughter to relax by watching a funny movie, reading a humorous book, listening to jokes, and so on.

*Encouraging yourself.* It is a set of three strategies that is often forgotten by language learners, mainly those who expect encouragement from other people and do not realize they can provided on their own.

*Making positive statements.* It refers to saying or writing positive statements to oneself in order to feel more confident in learning the new language.

*Taking risks wisely.* It refers to pushing oneself to take risks in a language learning situations.

*Rewarding yourself.* It refers to giving oneself a valuable reward for a particularly good performance in the new language.

*Taking your emotional temperature.* It is a set of four strategies with the aim of helping learners to assess their feelings, motivations and attitudes and, in many cases, to relate them to language tasks. This set includes:

*Listening to your body.* It refers to being able to pay attention to the signals given by the body; these signals can reflect stress, tension, worry, fear as well as happiness, interest, calmness and pleasure.

*Using a checklist.* It refers to using a checklist in order to discover feelings, attitudes and motivations concerning language learning.

*Writing a language learning diary.* It refers to writing a log to keep track of events and feelings in the process of language learning.

*Discussing your feelings with someone else.* It refers to talking to someone in order to discover and get across feelings about language learning.

***Social strategies.*** Language is a form of social behavior; it is communication among people, interaction that needs appropriate social strategies to develop this process. It includes three important strategies:

*Asking questions.* It helps learners get closer to the intended meaning and thus aids their understanding. It also helps learners to encourage their conversation partners to provide larger quantities of input in the target language and indicates interest and involvement. It involves production skills and also shows that a question was understood. It concerns clarification or verification, correction, and informal social settings.

*Asking for clarification or verification.* It means, asking the speaker to repeat, paraphrase, explain, slow down, or give examples: asking if a specific utterance is correct or if a rule fits a particular case; paraphrasing or repeating to get feedback on whether something is correct or not.

*Asking for correction.* This strategy most often occurs in conversation but may also be applied to writing.

*Cooperating with others.* It implies the absence of competition and the presence of group spirit. It involves a cooperative task structure or a cooperative reward structure, and mutual support. Cooperative strategies have many benefits such as stronger language learning motivation, students' satisfaction, more feedback about errors, and greater use of different language functions.

*Cooperating with peers.* These strategies can involve a regular learning pattern or a temporary pair or small group. This strategy frequently involves controlling impulses toward competitiveness and rivalry.

*Cooperating with proficient users of the new language.* Working with native speakers or other proficient users of the new language, usually outside of the language classroom. This strategy involves particular attention to the conversational roles each person takes.

*Empathizing with others.* It is essential to have a successful communication in any language, and learners can develop it through cultural understanding and becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings. Empathy can be developed more easily when language learners use these two strategies:

Developing cultural understanding: trying to empathize with another person through learning about the culture, and trying to understand the other person's relation to that culture.

Becoming aware of other's thoughts and feelings: observing the behaviors of others as a possible expression of their thoughts and feelings; and when appropriate, asking about other's thoughts and feelings.

Understanding the information that words and sentences are communicating – called comprehension – is another important part of reading. Comprehension is actually the main goal of learning to read. There are many ways to improve comprehension:

- Building vocabulary can help the reader recognize more words and better understand the overall meaning of the text.
- Understanding the structure of a text – or how it is organized – helps readers know what to expect and where, so they can better comprehend what they are reading.
- Teachers can give students strategies or guidelines for understanding different types of texts, such as a newspaper, a fiction book, or a menu.
- Such strategies teach students to ask and answer questions about what they are reading, summarize paragraphs and stories they read, and draw conclusions about the information.
- Teaching students to think about what they are reading is an important way for them to use their skills to understand science, history, social studies, math, and many other subjects they will study throughout their education (Tennant, 2010).

### Chapter III: Description of Methodological Aspects

#### **Methodological Aspects**

In this chapter, the methodological aspects regarding a descriptive study will be taken into account in order to describe the process in which the questionnaire, the population surveyed and the results of these two components will be analyzed.

Therefore, the chapter contains the design, participants, setting, sample, procedure, data collection techniques, procedure of collected data analysis, the validation criteria, the interpretation of the information obtained, and some ethical issues that will be explained hereby.

## **Design**

This research was based on a qualitative method because it deals with the development of a process. This is, the way of interpreting the different events that happen in a usual environment. The objective of this research is to identify whether any strategies are being implemented inside and outside the classroom by learners of the fifth level of the Language Center at the University of Nariño to cope with reading comprehension. The design of this study contained the features required to carry out a descriptive quantitative research.

Also this research study intended to describe the possible current learning strategies used in the fifth level in the Language Center, to describe which learning strategies dealing with the improvement of reading comprehension are the most used among students, and to apply research findings in order to suggest ways in which learning strategies can be implemented and learned in an EFL classroom through possible recommendations.

Therefore, in order to collect a detailed description of the use of reading strategies in the EFL classroom, the data was gathered by questionnaires and interviews. The authors intended to describe a problematic situation using these data gathering instruments to obtain relevant, sufficient and objective information from the population selected for this research study.

## **Participants, Setting and Sample**

**Participants.** This research study was carried out with a group of forty (40) young adult learners of English as a foreign language who currently belong to the fifth level of the Language Center of the University of Nariño. The students also belong to a similar socio-economical status and their ages range from 18 to 25 years old.

**Setting.** This research paper was carried out at the Language Center of the University of Nariño in Pasto, a city located in the southwest part of Colombia. The University has sufficient elements for teaching English as a foreign language at the Language Center.

**Sample.** The sample of the study consisted of forty (40) young adult language learners of the fifth level from the Language Center from the University of Nariño.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

To carry out this research, the researchers took into account the following instruments in order to collect data:

- **Open and Close Questionnaires :** To collect information, it was useful to gather all the information provided by learners of the fifth level through sixteen questions regarding Oxford's reading comprehension direct and indirect learning strategies, as well as local strategies by Block (1986), Beale Keene and Tovani (1998) and Brown (2007) .
- **Recorded Interview:** Researchers used an interview as a second instrument in order to obtain information from the interviewed students and relate it with the authors mentioned above.

### **Description of the Procedure**

To begin, the researchers applied a survey with the consent of the students in order to identify which direct learning strategies regarding reading comprehension are used by the fifth level students from the Language Center. Besides, a journalist's voice recorder will be used to record the students' answers in the interview; those answers were transcribed further in order to have a written document about the answers.

After the process of collecting the data through the recording device, the transcription of the students' answers, the researchers continued with the analysis and interpretation of the gathered data to finally give some conclusions and recommendations on the use of reading strategies.

### **Validation Criteria**

In order to analyze our present work, an objective tool was necessary to be used with the fifth level students from the Language Center. This was meant to investigate the learners' knowledge about the use and application of reading comprehension learning strategies. In doing so, we aimed at bridging the gap between theory and practice. Students were asked to complete a questionnaire on Reading Comprehension Strategies constructed by the researchers. The Close questionnaire consisted of 16 statements regarding the students' use and knowledge of strategies both, in class and at home. The system proposed here is by no means innovative, but rather brings together features of several previous successful studies of this type.

The questionnaire used a simple yes/no question format which allowed researchers to compile all the required information correctly due to its practicality and accuracy. Besides, it was not so difficult in order for the students to provide their information. The other questionnaire was an Open Questionnaire which allowed us to know whether the students use the Reading Comprehension Strategies and how they use them. Researchers gathered the information and analyzed it, in order to assign data an appropriate meaning taking into account that the answers given by the respondents who represent people of different ages, and misunderstanding of some of the questions might be, among others, factors that impede the complete and objective development of the questionnaire that will be used during the research process, leading to a limitation on the true and real meaning of the provided answers. The results of these questionnaires were the starting point to select a sample of people to carry out a recorded

interview in order to deepen in our research, by focusing on the different strategies of reading comprehension that were the complement and served as support of the previous questionnaires.

### **Ethical Issues**

To develop this research, there were some aspects to take into consideration such as the permission to carry out an investigation at the targeted institution, the students' identity that was, of course, changed giving the names of the participants a different designation as a number or a letter, and finally, it was observed that the moral, values, and dignity of the participants were not harmed at all through the research process.

In this chapter, the researchers have showed some significant features about the method such as the design, the participants, the setting, the sample, the procedure, the validation criteria, and the techniques used to gather the data. In the following section, the data gathered through surveys and recorded interviews are analyzed.

## Chapter IV: Results of the Study

### **Results**

Subsequent to the chapter on methodological aspects, the fourth chapter of the project is presented in order to provide readers with all the information about the analysis and outcomes of the research with the aid of the two instruments of collection of data.

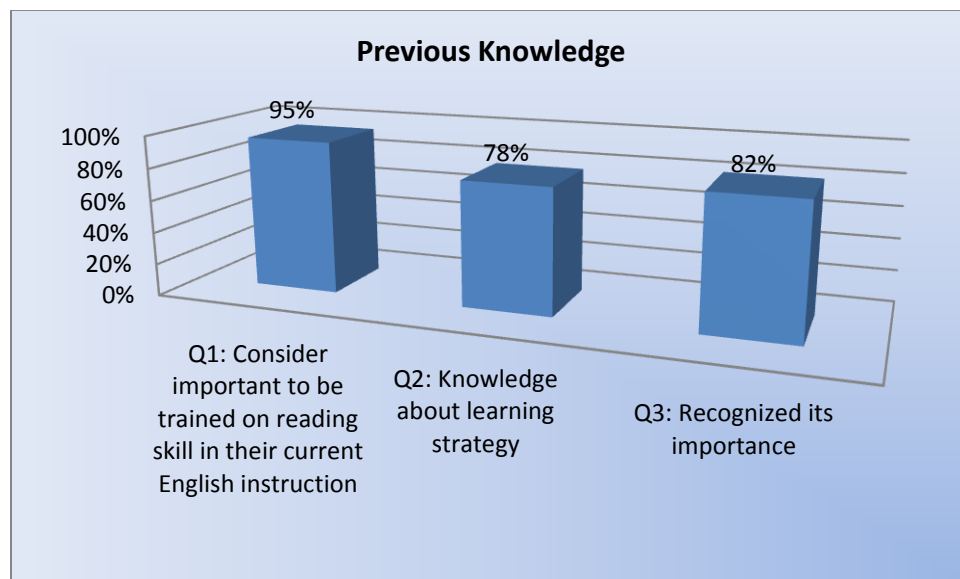
### **Analysis and Interpretation of the Results**

Questionnaires (a questionnaire with open items and a questionnaire with closed items) were intended to help us find out the required information about the knowledge that students had about learning strategies as well as what direct and indirect reading comprehension learning strategies were known and which ones were the most used by the learners within the classroom.

**Reading comprehension direct learning strategies.** First we analyzed the results of the questionnaires above mentioned, and the recorded interview that was based on six questions (see annexes) whose answers provided by the students were sorted in groups regarding their frequency about the previous knowledge that the fifth level students from the Language Center had about Oxford's reading comprehension direct learning strategies.

Then, the researchers developed another questionnaire; this time an open questionnaire in order to regard reading comprehension indirect learning strategies.

As much direct and indirect learning strategies cannot work in isolation because they support each other, the management of the language can be controlled through their interaction (Oxford, 1991).

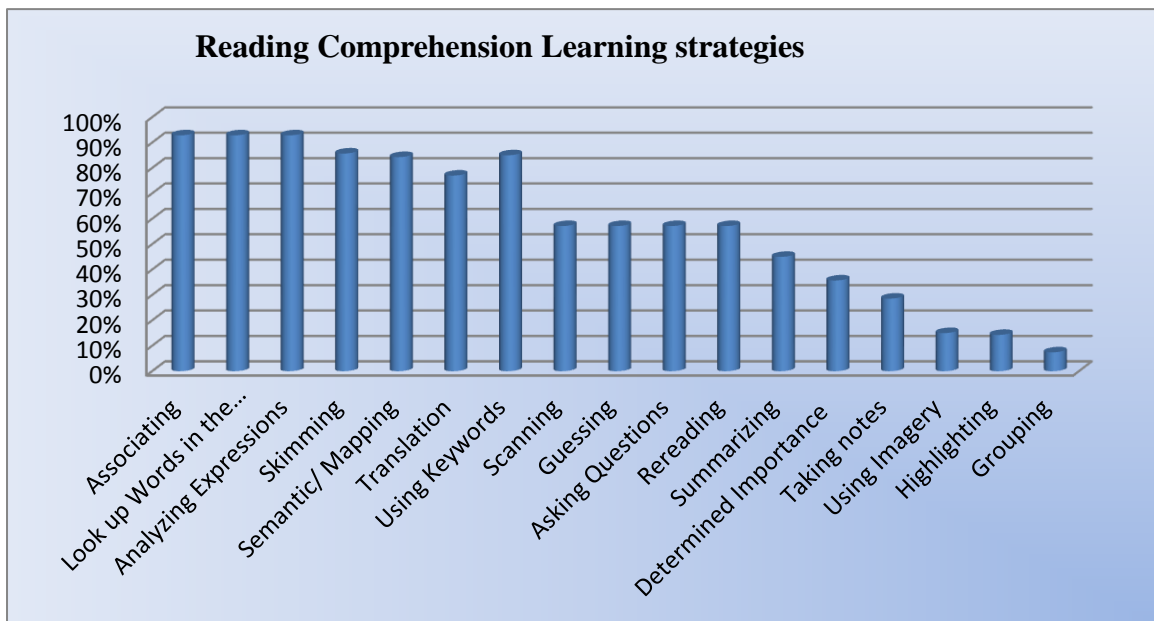


**Figure 1. Previous Knowledge**

As figure 1 shows, based on the answers given by the students for questions 1 to 3, the researchers found that a percentage of 95 of the participants consider important to be trained on reading skills in their current English instruction; the 78% of the students stated that they know what a learning strategy is, and the 82% of the learners recognized its importance.

Regarding the questions 4 to 16 that deal with Oxford’s reading comprehension direct learning strategies, the researchers found the following percentages for each strategy: Grouping (42%), Associating/elaborating (90%), Analyzing expressions (85%), Semantic/ mapping (83%), Skimming (83%), Using keywords (83%), Scanning (72%), Summarizing (45%), Determined Importance (37%), Taking notes (32%), Using imagery (15%). The results have shown that students have a preference for using the association of the new language information with familiar concepts that they already know (Associating/elaborating). On the other hand, the least used reading comprehension learning strategy is *Using Imagery*, it means that they hardly ever create images about what they read or they prefer to use another reading comprehension learning strategy.

Figure 2 shows the preference profile of the types of reading comprehension learning strategy used by the forty students from fifth level from the Language Center of the University of Nariño.



**Figure 2. Reading Comprehension Learning Strategies**

As can be seen in figure 2, the fifth level students from the Language Center use strategies of Association and Analyzing expressions more than all the other types of strategies.

As researchers mentioned above, one of the instruments of collecting data was an interview which consisted of six questions whose answers provided by the participants were classified in groups regarding their frequency about the previous knowledge that the fifth level students from the Language Center of the University of Nariño had about Oxford's reading comprehension direct learning strategies.

After all this process of analysis and interpretation of data we can in effect set up the following categories:

*Associating, Looking up words in the dictionary and Analyzing Expressions.* According to the two instruments of data collection the learners showed a preference for Associating, Looking up words in the dictionary, and Analyzing Expressions Strategies. We can infer this from answers such as:

- Yes, It's good. It's good to associate the reading with my previous knowledge, with my background because I can understand much better, I can find similarities and I think this is gonna help me to understand the context, the words, and the things that I have to do.
- Yes, of course! Usually I try like to make a connection of the reading with my experience or with the things that I know, with my own knowledge and in that way it could be better and easier to understand the text but if not then I just try to understand the whole context and associate it with the text itself.
- First when I read, I read all the text but I underline the unknown words. Then I read again after searching the words in the dictionary for a better comprehension
- I using scanning because before reading a text I do a scan the text and I check the text, the reading, the words, and underline the unknown words and look for the meaning.

Those learners are making a good use of this strategy which we can relate with Oxford when she states that Associating and Elaborating allow students to strengthen comprehension and makes material easier to remember (1991). Strategies are executive processes that regulate and manage learning, which may be linked in order to make sense, what makes it personal and significant, whereas, looking up words in the dictionary is beneficial for memory, for language learning and for concentration. It also enhances independent learning and is one of the conscious learning strategies in foreign language learning. On the other hand, analysis of expressions is a useful process that helps learners to discover the meaning and enrich vocabulary.

*Skimming, Semantic mapping and Using keywords.* According to the information taken from one of the questionnaires and the interviews to the participants, there are three reading comprehension learning strategies that share the second position, Semantic mapping, using keywords and Skimming. The researchers can assume this based on all the answers given by the interviewed participants. Next, some answers to support the findings:

- I look for the main ideas and I underline them. I look for the words I don't know and I try to remember what I learn. I also make diagrams or charts if my teacher asks for that.
- Well, before reading I like to first.. I like to underline the new vocabulary, so I can translate and understand much better the meaning. Also, I like to. While I'm reading I like to underline the main ideas, the most important things that I consider, and also the things I don't understand.
- I underline the main ideas, I look for the words related to the text I am reading. I like to look for main words because they help to understand a book or a reading.

Consistent with the above information, Skimming involves the readers searching the main ideas they want to get across, in addition to this, for English learners at this stage preview

questions provide many clues to come up with the answers. As a pre-reading technique, skimming helps to connect the text with any prior knowledge of the reader. Skimming also helps the reader to access the story schema so as to provide a referential context for the reading. In other words, skimming helps the reader to learn in advance what the gist of the reading passage is, while reminding the reader of any background information and knowledge of how the writing is organized that will assist the reader in understanding the text. Used as a pre-reading technique, skimming helps to prepare the reader for scanning (reading at 50% comprehension) or further in-depth reading. As an end in itself, skimming is a very practical and useful skill. As a speed reading technique, it saves time and allows the reader to get the flavor of a reading passage without all of the details. Skimming also permits broader reading if time is a factor (Pennington, 2009).

The uses of the two other strategies improve memory; even the results showed that students incorporate them as a complement for the development of other strategies (e.g., taking notes). Those previous reading comprehension learning strategies can be used as the basis to create a good note-taking format and start to practice a particular associational linkage. In addition to this, students can start to interact with words, ideas and sounds.

***Scanning, Guessing, Asking Questions and Rereading.*** Scanning, Guessing and Rereading are in the third place according to the answers given by the students of fifth level of English from the Language Center of the University of Nariño. The researchers can infer this from answers such as:

- First at all, when I have a reading I use to check all the vocabulary that I need for example, unknown words and I try to first understand what they mean. After that, I try like a general scanning of the whole reading and then I try to get the main ideas. I try to

understand what's the main point, and also I get out the characters , main characters, second characters if the reading have them, and also try to make a second review of the reading so I get a whole understanding of it.

- If I cannot understand a text in English I read again and again and I look for the words I don't know in the dictionary.
- I read very quickly and I look for the answers of the questions that my teacher gave me. I also underline the main ideas and I write the characters and important words and dates in my notebook.
- I try to guess the meaning of these words through the context or I look for their meaning in the dictionary.

According to the above responses it can be assumed that the interviewed students are making a good use of this strategy. Scanning allows the reader to gather information in an efficient way. It also encourages the reader to research in a purposeful way and at the same time to avoid distractions. Scanning allows the reader to efficiently gather information, which may be scattered throughout a long piece of writing.

The guessing strategy involves generalizable skills of interpreting surrounding text, predicting, and testing predictions while reading which enhance reading skills as a whole (Liu and Nation, cited in David Lycus, 1985). Furthermore, guessing has been advocated instead of dictionary use because stopping to use a dictionary interrupts the flow of reading (Brown, 2007). Successful readers ask questions and seek answers when they read. Asking questions helps readers monitor their comprehension and stay engaged and interested in what they are reading. Rereading gives the reader another chance to make sense out of a text that could be challenging. Rereading a passage of a text is useful to check for understanding.

*Summarizing.* Summarizing takes the fourth position although this should be among the first places since it is one of the strategies that requires greater consideration of knowledge and thought; however, at earlier stages of language learning it can be as simple as just giving a title to what has been heard, or playing with the correct order of images of a story (Oxford 1991). This can be implied taking into account most of the similar responses got from the learners, for instance:

- If I understood a text in English it is supposed that I already have like an idea in my mind of the point of the reading. After that, I make like a summary so I can like to point out whatever I learned or I understood of the whole reading so that helps me to do an extra activity or something like that.
- I write a summary and also I like to remember everything in the reading, such as names of people, numbers ,etc
- I write what I understood like a summary. I also remember what I learned of the reading

Taking into account the previous answers, Summarizing requires students to determine what is important in what they are reading and to put it into their own words. Instruction in summarizing helps students in different ways such as: Identifying or generating main ideas, connecting the main or central ideas, eliminating unnecessary information, and remembering what they read. The use of the summarizing strategy improves memory. Making a habit of summarizing what you read is a useful tool to improve reading comprehension, and also a valuable critical-thinking exercise.

Summarizing a reading assignment increases recall and condenses an author's ideas down to a few sentences. Scanning reinforces learners' personal interest in order to get ideas efficiently.

***Determined Importance.*** Students from the Language Center use the Determined Importance strategy in a fifth place. The researchers can infer this position taking into account the following answers given by interviewed students:

- Before a reading I analyze the drawings and also the title. Then I read the texts and I highlight and underline the main ideas. I underline the difficult words and then I look them in the dictionary. I look for the answers of the questions that the teacher gave me and I answer them.
- I review the title and also the pictures of the pages. I see if there are difficult words and I look for them. I underline the main ideas and take notes of the interesting parts.

According to the information cited above, the Determined Importance Strategy helps learners to get bigger ideas and themes, to use text features and clues to help them figure out the important information. As well as understanding: italicized words, pictures, graphs, key words and headings. Also, proficient readers are able to determine what is most important in a text.

They differentiate key ideas and information from details, so that they are not overwhelmed by a mass of facts. Instead, they target main themes and salient details. Most students benefit from instructional activities that help them decide what is most worthy of attention and what is background information.

***Taking notes.*** The Taking Notes strategy is in the sixth place as reported by the answers to the questionnaires applied to the students of the fifth level of English of the Language Center of the University of Nariño, who gave answers like the following ones:

- Before reading a text in English I try to first examine the title of the text and then to underline the words I don't know. After the reading I underline the main ideas and I take notes in my notebook about the most important things.

- I review the title and also the pictures of the pages. I see if there are difficult words and I look for them. I underline the main ideas and take notes of the interesting parts.
- I underline the main ideas. I look for the words related to the text. I like to look for main words because they help to understand a book or a reading. I write notes about what I read.

From the answers given by the participants, the researchers can indicate that Note- Taking needs a physical means to transform learners' representations into objective elements (words, sentences, paragraphs), and also, act as a sequence of the previous ones because it relates the product of the input with understanding. Because of this, it seems to be one of the most difficult reading learning strategies for the learners because it could be inferred from the application of these questionnaires not only if students knew this reading comprehension learning strategy but also it allowed the researchers to realize that learners do not make correct use of it. Taking note strategy seems to be one of the most useful reading comprehension learning strategies according to the interviewed students because of its difficult usage.

***Using Imagery and Highlighting.*** The strategies that stand in the seventh place of use by the fifth level students from the Language Center are Using Imagery and Highlighting. This can be concluded based on all the answers given by the students. The following answers support the position assigned to this strategies:

- Before a reading I analyze the drawings and also the title. Then I read the texts and I highlight and underline the main ideas. I underline the difficult words and then I look them in the dictionary. I look for the answers of the questions that the teacher gave me and I answer them.

- I read the text very fast and then I look for the words I don't understand. I underline the most important ideas and I try to imagine in my head what is happening in the reading. I look for the answers of the reading and then I write a summary.
- If I don't understand what I'm reading I read again and again and look for the words I don't understand. I use a marker to highlight the most important things and I ask to the teacher for help.

In line with the answers given by the participants, the Highlighting Strategy is used to help students organize what they have read by selecting what is important. This strategy teaches students to highlight only the key words, phrases, vocabulary, and ideas that are central to understanding the reading. Besides, Highlighting helps learners to reread a text which at the same time helps learners to improve their comprehension. When highlighting, readers isolate the important part of the text. That helps to mark the text in student's mind, helping them to remember it in an easier way (Jones, 2006).

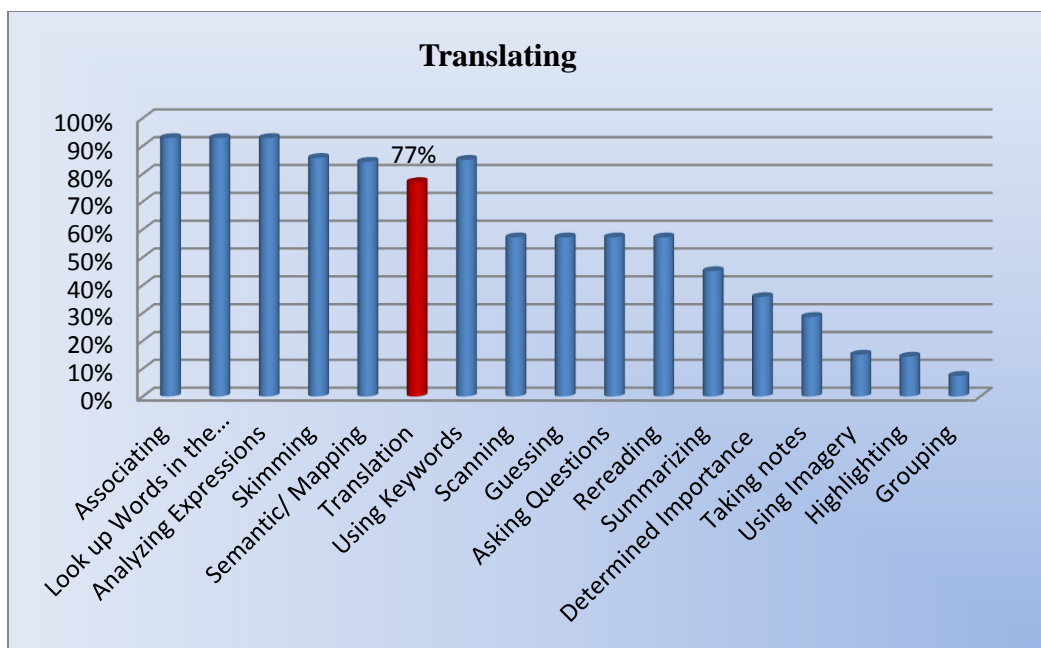
While readers employ Using Imagery Strategy, they create mental images, they engage in text in ways that make it personal and memorable to them. Anchored in prior knowledge, images come from emotions and all five senses, enhancing understanding and immersing the reader in rich details (Keene and Simmerman, 1997). Visual representations of a text allow a reader to see the information again. A graphic representation allows readers to see relationships, make abstract ideas concrete, understand organization, and also connect ideas.

**Grouping.** Grouping was placed in the last position by the students of fifth level of the Language Center of the University of Nariño. Maybe it is understandable that this strategy is in the last place since it requires independent and good use of other reading comprehension learning strategies such as Taking notes, using mechanical techniques and associating and elaborating.

The researchers deduce this from the responses provided by the students. The following is an example:

- I try to see what is their meaning understanding the context and I look for them in the dictionary and I also like to classify the information that I read.

According to the above answers, the Grouping Strategy encourages students to improve their vocabulary and categorization skills and learn to organize concepts. Categorizing listed words, through grouping and labeling, helps students organize new concepts in relation to previously learned concepts (Lenski, Wham & Johns, 1999).



**Figure 3. Translating**

**Translating.** As a surprising fact the researchers found that 77% of the students used Translating as their main tool to understand a text. We can infer this from the following responses:

- Well, before reading I like to first.. I like to underline the new vocabulary, so I can translate and understand much better the meaning. Also, I like to.. While I'm reading I

like to underline the main ideas, the most important things that I consider, and also the things I don't understand.

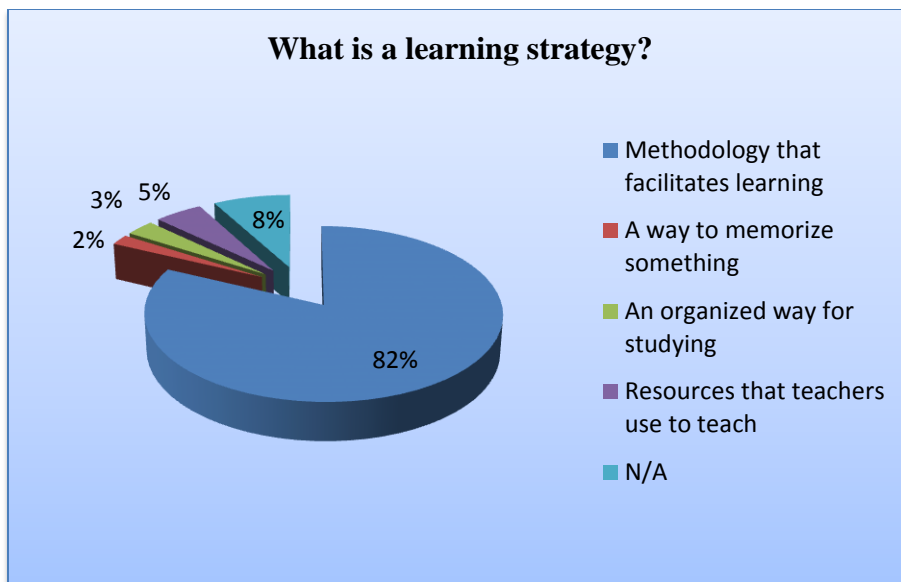
- When I don't understand a reading I try to translate or I ask to the teacher. But I also look for the words I don't know in the dictionary.
- I translate or I ask to my teacher
- I ask to my teacher or I try to translate the reading

Consistent with the above answers given by the sample and according to Rainer Schulte:

Reading is a continuous process of translation, and the way the translator looks at every word and investigates its rhythmic power and its semantic possibilities reaffirms that the act of reading, seen through the translator's eyes, is dynamic and not static. (Rainer Schulte, 2009).

The writer creates the text and the reader as translator is involved in a constant process of re-creating the text.

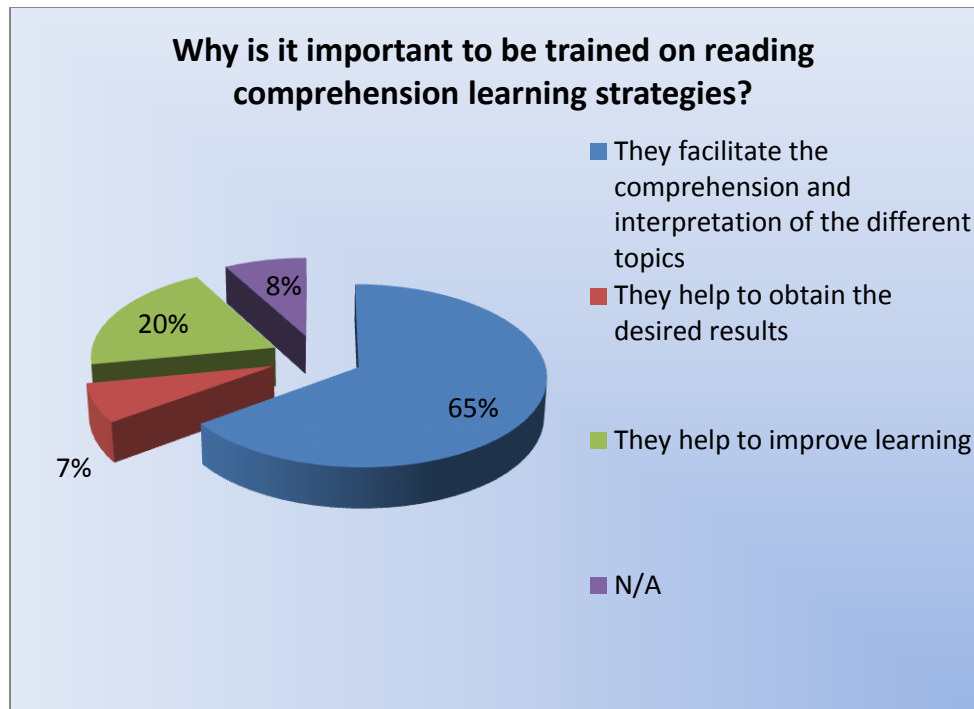
**Categories for Reading comprehension indirect learning strategies.** According to the answers provided by the students, the researchers took the most representative ones; they reflect the tendency that the participants pointed out. After all this process of analysis and interpretation of data, we can in effect set up the following percentages:



**Figure 4. What is a learning strategy?**

Based on the results given by the students from figure 1 the researchers found that a percentage of 82% of the participants surveyed stated that a learning strategy is a methodology that facilitates language learning; the 2% of the students consider that it is a way to memorize something, and the 8% of the students do not know or do not answer the question.

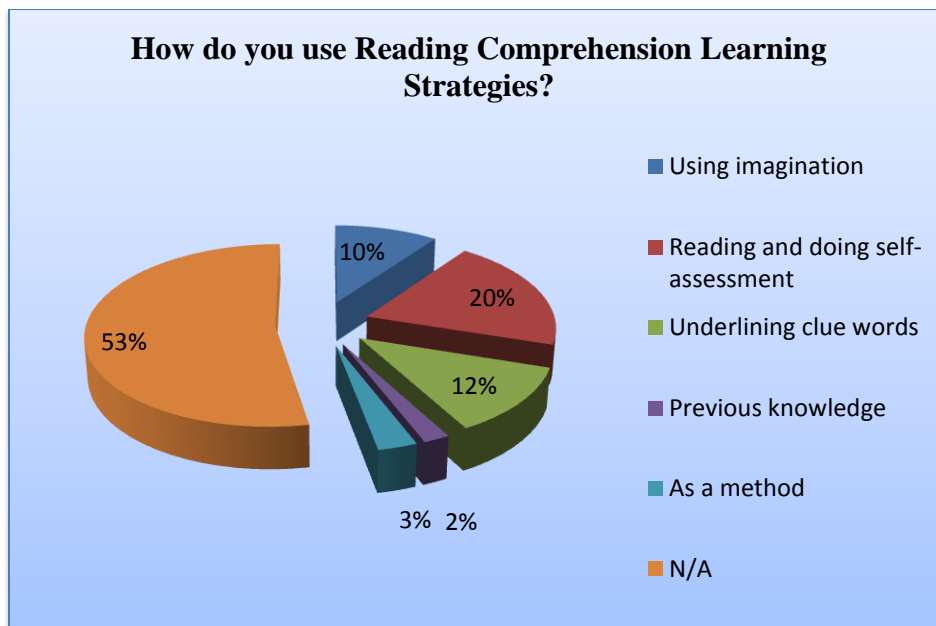
*A set of individual activities.* We can infer that most of the students from the fifth level of English of the University of Nariño know what a learning strategy is while a good number of them consider that a learning strategy is just a way to memorize something. Nevertheless few people do not know with certainty what a learning strategy is.



**Figure 5. Why is it important to be trained on reading comprehension learning strategies?**

Regarding question number 2: “Why is it important to be trained on reading comprehension learning strategies?”, 65% of participants consider important to be trained on Reading Comprehension learning Strategies because they facilitate the comprehension and interpretation of the different topics; 20% of the learners stated that they help them to improve their learning; and 8% of the students do not know or do not answer the question.

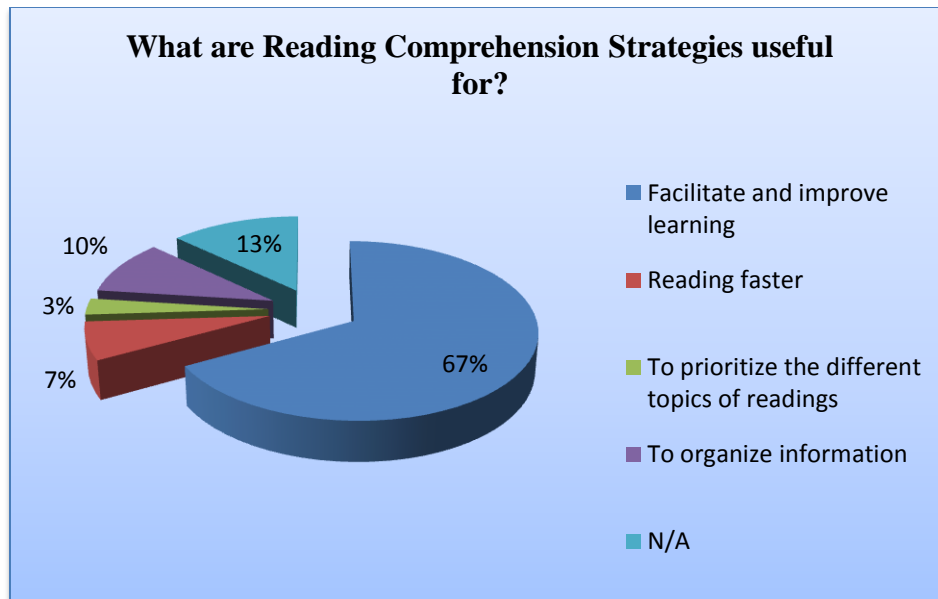
*Using and conveying knowledge.* As can be seen from figure 2, most of the students argue that it is important to promote the use of the reading learning strategies as a tool that help them to have an effective and an efficient reading. A considerable number of the students said that the reading learning strategies help them to improve their learning, while a few people from the surveyed group do not really know the importance of being trained on reading learning strategies.



**Figure 6. How do you use Reading Comprehension Learning Strategies?**

Taking into account figure number 3, a percentage of 53% of the participants do not know or do not answer the question asked; 20% consider that they read and self-assess themselves in order to understand in a better way the different topics; and 12% of the learners underline key words.

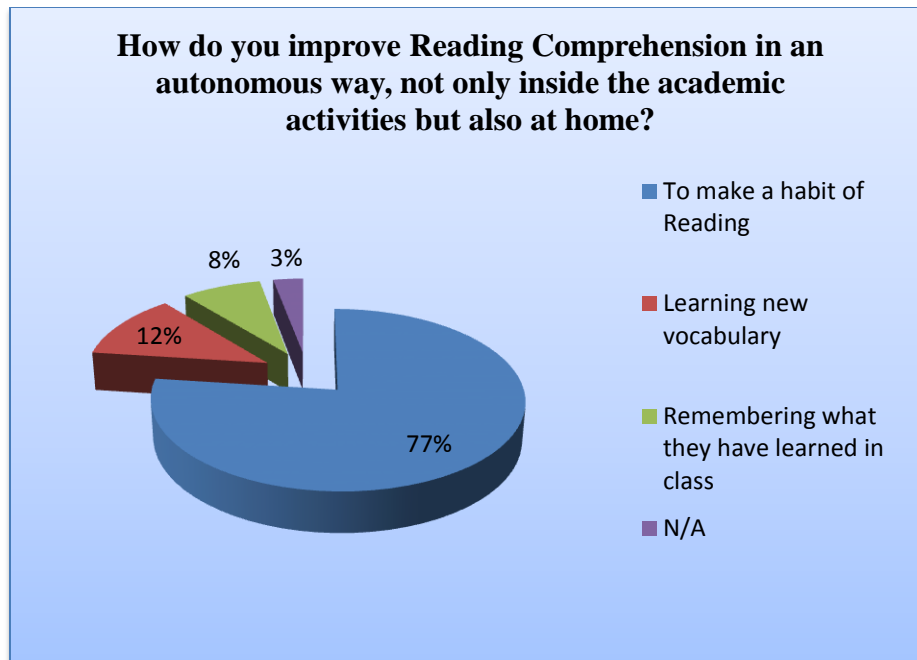
*Planning for a language task.* We found that most of the students who were surveyed do not know how to use the reading comprehension learning strategies, as well as a good number of them think that for a better understanding they need to read and later check what they have got from the reading. On the other hand a few learners just look for key words.



**Figure 7. What are Reading Comprehension Strategies useful for?**

Based on figure 4, the 67% of the students said that the Comprehension reading Strategies are useful to facilitate and improve the learning; the 7 % of the survey group think that they can use them in order to read faster; the 13% of the learners do not know or do not answer.

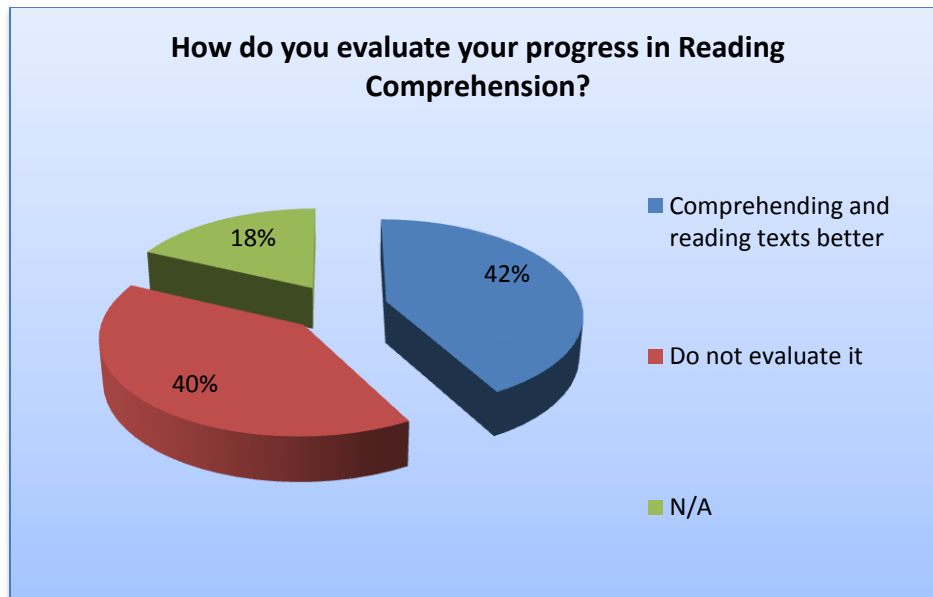
*Reading comprehension learning strategies as support of language proficiency.* We can infer from the figure above that the majority of the students stated that Comprehension Reading Learning Strategies are useful tools that enhance and make learning easier. On the other hand a few people think that the Reading Comprehension learning strategies help them to speed up the process of reading. Nevertheless a significant number of people do not know what they are useful for.



**Figure 8. How do you improve Reading Comprehension in an autonomous way, not only inside the academic activities but also at home?**

According to figure 5, 77% of the students that were surveyed said that they improve their reading skills through reading at home; 12% of the learners stated that they enhance their reading by learning new vocabulary; 8% of the students consider that it is important to remember what they have learnt in class; and 3% do not know or do not answer.

*The use of authentic material.* A great number of the students consider that they better their reading skills by getting into the habit of reading different kinds of texts outside the classroom such as: texts taken from internet or texts given by their teachers. Less than a half of the surveyed people stated that the best way to make a better reading is learning new vocabulary. A minimum number of students do not know or do not answer.



**Figure 9. How do you evaluate your progress in Reading Comprehension?**

Among the respondents, 42% of the participants said that they evaluate their progress in Reading Comprehension by comprehending and reading texts better every time; the researchers found that 40% of the participants do not evaluate their progress in any way, and 18% of the learners do not know or do not answer.

*Self- assessment.* We can infer that most of the students from the fifth level of English of the University of Nariño consider that they evaluate their progress if they can better read and understand the whole text, while a good number of them think that it is not important to evaluate it. Nevertheless less than a half of the participants do not know with certainty how they can evaluate their progress in reading comprehension.

Taking into account the given percentages of the Questionnaires and the interview we can infer that most of the students from the fifth level of English of the University of Nariño think that to be trained on reading comprehension skill is important for their L2 instruction, as well as a good number of them accept the importance that learning strategies have in their learning process. Nevertheless less than half of the participants do not know with certainty what a

learning strategy is. In addition, the results collected not only allowed us to know whether learners had previous knowledge about learning strategies and their first answers regarding their relevance, but also the selection of people who were the ideal applicants for the next step of the research which was the interview.

To conclude this section of the results, taking into account the instruments of data gathering (questionnaires and the interview), we can say that there is one reading comprehension learning strategy that is commonly used: *associating/ elaborating*. On the other hand, strategies such as Using Imagery, Highlighting and Grouping are the less used.

## Chapter V: Conclusions and Pedagogical Recommendations

### Conclusions

After the data analysis and the interpretation, the fifth chapter with conclusions and pedagogical implications is presented in order to provide students with different learning strategies to improve and cope with reading comprehension. It might help them to enhance both classroom learning development and ease the learning conditions through the use of learning tools.

After analyzing the data, the following conclusions can be drawn: Reading comprehension is perhaps one of the most critical skills a student can master.

Reading comprehension is one of the pillars of the act of reading. When a person reads a text he engages in a complex array of cognitive processes. He is simultaneously using his awareness and understanding of phonemes (individual sound “pieces” in language), phonics (connection between letters and sounds and the relationship between sounds, letters and words) and ability to comprehend or construct meaning from the text. This last component of the act of reading is reading comprehension. It cannot occur independently by from the other

two elements of the process. At the same time, it is the most difficult and most important of the three. (Joelle Brummitt-Yale, 2008)

After analyzing the data, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Reading comprehension is an intentional, active, interactive process that occurs before, during and after a person reads a particular piece of writing. From the answers given to the questions “Do you find learning strategies useful?” and “why is it important to be trained on reading comprehension learning strategies?” we conclude that reading comprehension is essential in learning a foreign language. Furthermore, reading comprehension levels impact on the capacity for improving other language skills such as writing, listening, speaking, and translating, which emphasize the importance of spending much more time doing it.

In the past, teaching how to read was believed to be of the teachers’ absolute responsibility – especially on Primary School teachers – and that this learning experience took place within contexts that are formal. Nowadays, the understanding of the importance of reading competences goes further than the bare teaching of letters, syllables, words and understanding of a text. The command of these competences in themselves does not make students good readers nor does it ensure that they will continue to read throughout their lives.

Learning how to read also depends on the following: in libraries, the knowledge of the reading material available in bookshops as well as on the Internet; on the ability to place and select the required written material; on the ability to adjust reading to its purposes, obtaining as much information as possible in less time; on the ability to propitiate reading for specific purposes with leisure reading; finally, on the ability to associate what is read to previous experiences and knowledge.

Based on Martins (2008), despite the fact of not being an innate skill, reading is mainly cultural and social, as it results from a development process that depends on multiple external factors that surround the learners.

Taking into account that the reading comprehension includes two levels, not only the theoretical but also the practical level, our research produced some interesting results at a practical level more than the theoretical one, as identified from the data collected the students do not have an explicit instruction about reading comprehension learning strategies at their regular English classes. From our data analysis and interpretation the researchers can also stand out the following facts:

The reading comprehension direct learning strategies called Using Imagery, Highlighting and Grouping were surprisingly reported to be less frequently used. Regarding the level of the students, it is surprising that many students do not make the connections between the visuals and the text. They think about the text and they do not think about looking at the picture to help them elaborate on what they are reading. Or perhaps it is just focusing on one detail, but pictures and making pictures in your head when you are reading helps to facilitate understanding.

Although Underlining and Highlighting are similar strategies, students tend to underline more frequently than to highlight. Researchers realized about this unaccustomed situation through the data. In spite of that it is important to take into account that Highlighting as well as Underlining is a relevant strategy that is useful to improve comprehension since they are automatically rereading the text. Furthermore, when highlighting, readers isolate the important part of the text and that helps them to mark the text in their mind and they will be more likely to remember it. Also when students review the text later on, having important words or expressions highlighted will make it easier to find the significant points (Harley, 2008).

Finally, the least used strategy was grouping. Being consistent with the knowledge of the students the use of words without having to use grammatical structures is one of the most appropriate and nearest way they have to begin to handle the language; it means that the process of simplification is not fully used in order to activate learners' background knowledge that gradually helps them be more active, make inferences and be able to respond to what they read.

From the results mentioned above we found that the students are not being provided, neither inside nor outside the classroom, with the necessary reading comprehension learning strategies that allow them to learn how to read and to enjoy reading, as well as to know how to read and what to read.

On the other hand the researchers encountered that the strategies such as: "Associating/Elaborating", "Looking up words in the dictionary" and "Analyzing expressions" were reported to be the most frequently used by the students of the fifth level of English from the Language Center of the University of Nariño.

When the students make use of "Associating /Elaborating" strategies, they are encouraged to use whatever knowledge is available, because they do not often have enough domain knowledge or directly related knowledge. It meant general knowledge helps learners understand that it is possible to make sense of a text and go beyond the text, without knowing a lot about the topic (McNamara, 2004).

While "Looking up Words in the Dictionary" strategy is being excessively used by learners, principally because many instructors that follow traditional grammar-translation methods have tended to focus on decoding text, many teachers have also encouraged the extensive use of dictionary and that is why they prefer consulting a dictionary more than ignoring the word. Second language instructors often have different assumptions as to the effectiveness of using a

dictionary while reading. However, many studies have shown that second language dictionary use better reading comprehension and could improve the lexical development.

As far as Analyzing Expressions is concerned the researchers found that in order to understand an expression in the second language it is frequently useful to disintegrate new words, phrases, sentences and sometimes paragraphs into their parts. This strategy is of great advantage especially in reading when students who are faced with complicated grammatical structures or very long words have to analyze the new expressions.

As an interesting factor we found that learners are using translation to try to comprehend difficult texts. The controversy on whether translation is an important tool in the foreign language classroom is a current issue many researchers are still investigating. Be that as it may, from many present-day studies, it can be concluded by reasoning that any translation task, including all the different skills, is helpful to learn a foreign language if we use it as a means and not as an end in itself. There are, definitely, advantages as well as disadvantages of using translation while reading in the classroom. A feasible disadvantage could be that, at the beginning, learners try to achieve word for word similarity or equivalence. But, after some training, students learn to use their unconscious translations consciously and they tend to reach flexibility, accuracy and also mental agility (Godayol, Pilar; Newson, Dennis cited in Mallol Macau, Cristina, 2003).

The main advantage is that they are faced with a real life activity which gets together learners' mother tongue –a language they are familiar with and they feel comfortable with- and the foreign language they are learning. Therefore, it can be concluded that using the mother tongue in the foreign language classroom is no longer something wrong, as it was considered a

few years ago, but a benefit for students (Godayol, Pilar; Newson, Dennis cited in Mallol Macau, Cristina, 2003).

Regarding reading comprehension indirect learning strategies, we found through the data that most of the students use metacognitive strategies such as planning for a language task, for instance they like and enjoy to practice reading comprehension by reading magazines or surfing on the internet in English. In a less number, some students use social strategies, such as asking for clarification with proficient users of the new language.

The data make us think that students apply some of the reading comprehension direct and indirect learning strategies because of personal likes or needs; nevertheless, they are not aware of neither their existence nor their importance, that is why they do not use them in a correct way, consequently they are not capable of profiting from all their potential; as well as it happens when they apply self –assessment, they usually do it, but they do not know they do.

It is important to remark that students do not have a clear knowledge about what a learning strategy is, what draws on the confusion with other terms such as methodology, a way to memorize something, an organized way for studying and a technique. Therefore, the researchers found that there is a lack of instruction in order to encourage students to know and use these strategies, because according to what was intended for this stage, it will be known in later levels.

The lack of these learning strategies strip students of important learning tools that make easier and assist the learning process during the whole English course; regarding reading comprehension, these strategies provide multiple choices in order to enhance, facilitate and improve this skill.

### **Pedagogical Recommendations**

Today, learning how to read involves the creation of a book culture from an early age which requires a strong contribution from the family and from pre-school education.

Over the past few decades, research on reading comprehension has remarked the relevance of developing competences in this area both for social purposes and academic uses. Reading is regarded as an irreplaceable tool which allows students to acquire knowledge as well as to go through a whole set of experiences.

Therefore, each institution at a global level should create conditions for students to take pleasure in reading and, at the same time, acquire and develop the necessary competences that let them understand what they read. Taking into account that the role of the teacher is the most important one in this process, they should have a properly training on how to use the reading comprehension learning strategies and how to teach them. Then, it is important for EFL instructors to be familiar with reading strategies and expose their students to the various kinds so that students know how and when utilize them (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999). In addition, they also have the responsibility to present suitable material for reading instruction.

Among these conditions teachers should assist their students to become proficient and independent readers through learning comprehension reading strategies about where, how, and when to use the reading strategies while reading a text. In this way students could solve problems by themselves when reading a text or they do not understand the meaning of the context but reading strategies help them in learning foreign language and reading comprehension. In fact, students will be able to relate newly acquired information to their prior knowledge in context areas which is an essential part of reading comprehension skill (Ben-David, 2002).

Teachers also should know that their students need to be trained on reading comprehension learning strategies. This instruction should be explicit to help students to monitor their reading comprehension. It also facilitates learners' enhancement of their critical thinking and compensates the learners' comprehension deficiency (Koda, 2004). Furthermore Palincsar and Brown (1984), argued that learning reading strategies helps students, especially low-achieving learners, ignore comprehension failure and develop their retention in the context.

In few words, reading comprehension reading strategies are vital as they help students to reach their goals when reading and also to achieve good results (Block, 1986). On the other hand, learners who do not apply any reading strategies usually find difficulties in reading comprehension. That is what the researchers of this study found, that most of the students do not use all learning strategies very frequently or they are not aware they do it, therefore limiting the benefit of well exploited strategies. Students of Fifth level of English of the University of Nariño would profit considerably from training in the use of all learning strategies.

Since many of these strategies would be unknown and perhaps even new to some learners the researchers offer the following recommendations in order to help not only teachers but also students improve their reading comprehension learning abilities. It is important that at earlier stages, EFL learners take advantage of their willingness and ability to improve their learning process by providing specific training in reading skills.

Teachers also should help their students to change their attitudes towards traditional reading approaches by giving them simplified exercises, easier language input, a choice of graded exercises, and choosing texts that are motivating by getting them interested in reading about topics they like as they could have enough background knowledge on at least one of those topics.

At the same time, second language learners should have time to practice what they understood from the reading comprehension learning strategies. For instance, students should identify what they do not understand, generating questions, identifying where difficulties occur, looking forward in the reading for information that might help them to resolve difficulties, having a purpose for reading, and so on.

Teachers will also need to offer their students a great deal of guidance in order to help them experiment with these new reading strategies and decide on the types of strategies that are better for them. The best way to do this is according to Chamot (2005), if students have their own preference of strategy. However, in order to become motivated and selective strategy users, EFL learners should self-monitor their reading strategy. In other words, EFL learners need to consciously know what and when to apply appropriate reading strategy when comprehension fails.

More to the point, it would be supportive for learners if all kind of strategies, including direct and indirect reading comprehension learning strategies are given the same importance in the process of learning, in order to have a general and favorable command of the foreign language and to reinforce the ways that students have to control their own learning process.

Further research is therefore needed to establish if these strategies are in fact used during language learning in the development of the whole English Course. This is especially important in the case of metacognitive and cognitive strategies. It is recommendable to carry out a deeper study about what really happens in the classroom using other procedures such as observations of class and production of different types of activities that allow the collection of new results regarding the needs of the research. In addition, more research is needed to understand students'

selection of strategies within each major group of strategies and also an applied research to improve reading comprehension.

It would be a good idea that EFL teachers start encouraging their students to use the techniques of metacognitive language learning strategies. Teachers should work to guide students to become more strategic thinkers by helping them understand the way they are processing information. Questioning, visualizing, and synthesizing information are all ways that readers can examine their thinking process. Through scaffolding and reciprocal teaching, students are able to practice the skills that lead to these overt acts becoming automatic. (Fountas and Pinnell, 2000).

It is important to know that practicing metacognitive strategies like using authentic reading tasks in class, allow students, improve their skills for centering, learning, arranging and planning for learning, evaluating learning, and with regard to reading skill. Therefore, it is also important to encourage EFL students to transfer metacognitive learning strategies to other learning contexts, it means, practice in the real world to fulfill the coming needs. For instance, it would be essential the intensive and repetitive use of direct strategies that really allow students to utilize them such as skimming and scanning, which are the most relevant when dealing with materials of considerable length. Additionally, in strategies as “Looking up words in the dictionary”, we suggest that encouraging “selective dictionary use” could improve reading comprehension and vocabulary more efficiently.

It is important to encourage students to read about the topic before hand, or discuss it at home with their family, in their own language so this can help students to read for pleasure.

Finally, there is no doubt that reading is a complex process that requires a deeper research. According to Reid and Lienemann (2006), reading is a difficult process which involves the

ability to read real words in isolation or in context with comprehension. Readers should be able to comprehend the context in many different content areas; they need the ability to construct meaning from written language by manipulating, constructing, and translating a text. After all this research we can conclude that learners also must be motivated to pay attention to the management of their own learning to gradually become autonomous learners when experiencing the surrounding world.

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**Appendix**

**Appendix A - questionnaire – Reading Comprehension Direct Learning Strategies**

“A SURVEY OF THE READING COMPREHENSION LEARNING STRATEGIES APPLIED WITHIN THE FIFTH LEVEL STUDENTS OF THE LANGUAGE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NARIÑO”

Human Science School

Linguistics and Languages Department

English and French Program

University of Nariño November 2013

**NAME** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ Please read carefully the questions below, and mark in the “yes or not” charts just **One** answer with an X

No	QUESTIONNAIRE	YES	NO
1.	Do you find training on reading skills in your current English course useful?		
2.	Do you know what a learning strategy is?		
3.	Do you find learning strategies useful?		
4.	Do you group or classify what you read into meaningful groups in order to reduce the number of unrelated elements?		
5.	Do you associate the new language information with familiar concepts that you already know?		
6.	While you read to something, do you create a mental image of it?		
7.	While you read to something, do you use any kinds of arrows, drawings or diagrams on paper to highlight key concepts?		

8.	Do you link new words with images or with words belonging to your native language? Ex. —Nose   (nariz) con —no sé   (negación en español)		
9.	Do you learn new words through rhymes, songs, poetry, either; foreign language or your native language?		
10.	Do you use your body or remember someone else's movements to learn new words?		
11.	Do you use different sections in your notebook in order to classify the words that you know and the words that have been recently read?  Do you search for specific details when you read to something for the first time?		
13.	Do you divide in small parts of language what you read for better understanding?		
14.	Do you usually take notes about what you understand?		
15.	After reading to something, do you summarize what you read?		

**Appendix B - Interview - Reading Comprehension Indirect Learning Strategies**

1. WHAT IS A LEARNING STRATEGY?

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2. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO BE TRAINED ON READING COMPREHENSION LEARNING STRATEGIES?

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3. HOW DO YOU USE READING COMPREHENSION LEARNING STRATEGIES?

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4. WHAT ARE READING COMPREHENSION LEARNING STRATEGIES USEFUL FOR?

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5. HOW DO YOU IMPROVE YOUR READING COMPREHENSION IN AN  
AUTONOMOUS WAY, NOT ONLY INSIDE THE ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES BUT ALSO  
AT HOME?

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6. HOW DO YOU EVALUATE YOUR PROGRESS IN READING COMPREHENSION?

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