



**The University of the West Indies  
St. Augustine Campus  
Faculty of Humanities and Education  
Caribbean Studies Project  
HUMN 3099**

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Title of Thesis:

A STUDY ON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG ADULT LEARNERS WITH  
FOCUS ON LEARNING STRATEGIES.

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## **Abstract**

Retaining information is often considered a complex task for some students which therefore requires more effort to remember information. As a result, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning was used to analyze the types of strategies used by the participants in the questionnaire as well as to gather information regarding which of the strategies were mostly used. Having witnessed that adult's encounter problems when studying a foreign language, the researcher recognized that research was needed in order to gain information on the most effective approaches adults utilized to retain information. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the most popular strategy utilized among the participants between direct and indirect language learning strategies. Furthermore, 15 participants who have been studying Spanish for one year and six months were examined from various language learning centres in Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, the main findings showcased that the participants believe that in order to learn a language efficiently, language learning strategies play an important role to remember information as well as it highlighted that direct strategies were mainly used by the participants to improve their learning process. Therefore, this study can be considered significant as it highlights the techniques used by adults to retain information which can also be useful for teachers to take into account, given that there may be differences with respect to the ways in which children and adults learn.

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## **Acknowledgements**

During the course of this research project, several persons have aided me with the completion of this research paper. As such, I wish to make mention of those who have exceedingly assisted and supported me throughout this endeavour. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Miss Paola Palma who has kindly taken time off of her busy schedule to render her assistance and provide me with helpful guidelines and reviews in completion of this investigative research.

Additionally, I am also thankful for the support of my family and friends who encouraged me daily to continue working and never give up. Lastly, I would like to thank the participants who took part in the questionnaire which successfully allowed me to attain the aim of the thesis.

## **Glossary**

LS- Language Strategy/Strategies

LLS- Language Learning Strategies

SL- Second Language

SILL- Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

## **Introduction**

Language Learning Strategies are considered to be of great importance so that students can remember the information that they are learning for a long time. However, students are frequently unaware of what type of learning strategies they employ when studying any type of academic material. Although they may not know the exact type of learning strategies, they unconsciously utilize what helps them to retain information efficiently and easily repeatedly. Additionally, given that learning Spanish in Trinidad and Tobago has gotten increasingly popular especially among adults, the researcher was motivated to be informed about how adult learners learn a foreign language productively having been away from the classroom setting for some time. Thus, this study seeks to examine the types of language learning strategies adults over the age of 25 apply when studying Spanish as a foreign language.

## **Rationale**

The inspiration in selecting this research topic came from observing that there has been an increase in adults of Trinidad and Tobago dedicating their time after work to study Spanish as a second language. Furthermore, from having personal experience of witnessing a working adult classmate encountering difficulties in studying Spanish held more interest in conducting this research with the aim of finding out how adults approach learning a foreign language in combating the most challenging areas. However, since there is not a variety of existing data with regards to this topic, as a foreign languages student it gave me the motivation to explore untapped data to identify and examine the types of Language Learning Strategies adults utilize in order to improve and become successful in their second language learning endeavor.

## **Research Question**

- 1) How effective is language learning strategies among adult learners?
- 2) What are the most effective language learning strategies utilized by adult learners over the age of 25 when learning Spanish as a foreign language?

## **Aim**

The aim of this study is to identify and analyze the most effective types of Language Learning Strategies employed among adults in Trinidad and Tobago over the age of 25 as a form of aiding

## **Objectives**

1. To determine whether adult learners encounter difficulty when studying Spanish.
2. To examine how they go about learning Spanish regarding the 4 different components including speaking, listening, writing and reading.
3. To examine which types of learning strategies are predominantly used among adult learners.

## **Methodology**

Obtaining information for this research paper, focus was placed on Spanish language programs offered by various language learning centres across Trinidad and Tobago as a source of primary data collection. The participants of this study consisted of 15 adult students over the ages of 25. The responses from the participants were gathered through an online questionnaire. As such, the questionnaire was focused on allowing the participants to express themselves and select from the options available, the most efficient ways of learning a foreign language, in order to retain

information easily. In addition to this, the secondary sources utilized included books, scholarly articles and journals.

To continue, Chapter 1 would entail the Literature Review discussing previous research conducted concerning the topic. Chapter 2 would present the findings as well as a brief analysis of the information from the questionnaire conducted. And Chapter 3 would present the discussion of findings while comparing and contrasting them to the information gathered in the literature review of Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Literature Review**

#### **Language strategies and their importance**

Oftentimes, studying a second language is viewed as a skill and memorizing information is commonly perceived as a challenging task for several students. Thus, each student has a unique and personal learning strategy which are considered “extremely important tools” (O’Malley and Chamot 44) that they utilize to become successful in their academic endeavors. However, in order to attain desired success, this can only be accomplished as long as the student is persistent and goal-oriented which often requires “time management, self-discipline, concentration, memorization, organization, and effort” (Developing Effective Study Habits 2). Moreover, defining the term ‘learning strategies’ differs since it has been distinctively defined by numerous researchers as it is considered a broad topic. However, despite the variety of explanations, it can be noted that they are synonymous and convey the same idea. Firstly, Schumaker & Deshler defines a LS as “the way in which an individual organizes and uses a particular set of skills to learn content or accomplish other tasks effectively and efficiently both in school and non-academic surroundings” (1). Similarly, O’Malley and Chamot also mentioned that LS are “special ways of processing information that enhance comprehension learning or retention of information” (1), while Oxford stated that “they are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning” (1). Whilst these researchers simply expressed that LLS are steps taken as a form of self-improvement, Griffiths argued that the “definitions for language learning is far from straightforward, in the face of the lack of consensus which is a feature of the language learning strategy field, whatever term may be used, and however it may be defined or classified, it is inevitably going to come into conflict with one or other of the competing terms, definitions

and classification systems” (5). Although these controversies exist in defining the term, Oxford further explained that, strategies are neither good nor bad on the grounds that they can always be helpful to the learner once it relates well to the task of the SL, suits the learning style of the individual, the strategies are employed effectively while linking it to other strategies (8). As such, these conditions will correspond to the individual’s learning ability or capacity which will eventually result in making “learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford 8).

### **Types of Language Learning Strategies**

While many researchers have explored the field of LLS to identify the most effective approach to study a SL, the classification of O’Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) are known to be the most popular. According to O’Malley and Chamot’s investigation, there are three strategies which include metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective strategies. Firstly, the metacognitive strategies involve “knowing about learning and controlling learning through planning, monitoring one’s performance and evaluating the outcome of a given task after it has been completed” (Liu 101). Secondly, the cognitive strategies “involve the manipulation or transformation of the material to be learned” (Liu 101). Therefore, these are the specific steps taken when learning, such as taking notes, contextualizing, rehearsing, summarizing and elaborating in order to get a better understanding of what has been taught. And thirdly, social/affective strategies are the interactive methods such as cooperating with peers and asking questions for clarification.

In spite of O'Malley and Chamot's discovery of three effective ways to study a SL, Oxford took his research further the same year of his publication and recognized that there are

six strategies. She evenly sub-divided the strategies into two categories namely direct strategies (memory, cognitive and compensation) and indirect strategies (meta-cognitive, affective and social). Like O'Malley and Chamot, two of Oxford's direct strategies particularly, memory strategies which are used to "create mental linkages to assist students in storing and retrieving information" (Oxford 37) and cognitive strategies which are "essential for practicing that enable learners to understand and produce messages in the target language" (Oxford 43) share some similarities. Although her third direct strategy, compensation, has no clear-cut relation with that of O'Malley and Chamot, it is also viewed as an important factor since it allows students to "guess intelligently unknown vocabulary, through the use of clues despite the lack of knowledge" (Oxford 47). Furthermore, with regards to the indirect strategies, the meta-cognitive strategies of Oxford correspond to O'Malley and Chamot as they both identified that the functions of this category pertains to planning and self-evaluation. On the other hand, the three researchers came upon social/affective strategies throughout their investigation. However, while O'Malley and Chamot grouped them, Oxford separated them since "they deserve significant attention as part of the whole learner" (Hsiao 372). Thus, Oxford explained that affective strategies are methods to control and stabilize emotions while social strategies refer to cooperation with classmates to facilitate interaction.

### **Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)**

Time and again, "critics argue that the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning is not an appropriate measure of strategy use" (Rose 139). However, given that it is currently used by various age groups for several years, Ardasheva and Tretter observed that it is considered to be "the most widely used strategy questionnaire in the world" (476). The SILL is a non-anonymous, self-report questionnaire developed by Oxford in the early 1990's which is



“grounded in Oxford’s six factor Language Learning Strategy taxonomy” (Ardasheva and Tretter 476). Oxford further explained that the questionnaire “is designed to gather information about how a student of foreign language or second language goes about learning that language” (283). As such, it consists of fifty (50) items including sentences such as “I try not to translate word for word”, “I use flashcards to remember new SL words”, “I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using SL” etc, and uses a five (5) point scale where 1= never or almost never true of me, 2= generally not true of me, 3= somewhat true of me, 4= generally true of me, 5= always or almost always true of me (Carmo 225) in which students must select according to their learning style. Given that each item in the SILL represents a particular kind of learning behaviour, the questionnaire is crafted for students to select what they commonly do to learn a language (Oxford 279). As a result, since “there are no wrong or right answers” this will then “help students understand better how they learn a new language and that the information helps them become better learners” (Oxford 278).

### **The Adult Learner**

Non-traditional students commonly known as Adult Learners, are “individuals over the age of twenty-five who have returned to school to earn a degree, an advanced degree or a professional certificate” (Peterson 1). While, there are many assumptions surrounding this group of students with respect to the strategies they employ when learning academic material, in particular a second language, Knowles observed that during the 1920’s with the popularization of adult education, there is a distinction between the way in which adults and children learn since “teachers of adults began experiencing several problems with the pedagogical model” (40). Nonetheless, due to previous years of schooling, the pedagogical model used by teachers to impart productivity in the classroom which include strategies such as assigned readings, drills,

quizzes, rote memorization and examination (Knowles 40), would have aided the students in the development of effective LS to correspond with their learning capability. Hence for this reason, “70% of adult learning is considered self-directed learning” (Corey 1) as they prefer to take full responsibility in “planning, carrying out and evaluating their learning experience” (Corey 2) by utilizing their prior educational experience. However, after spending time away from the school environment, adult learners frequently criticize their age as a hindrance to retain information when studying. Therefore Schleppegrell observed that “adults learn best by integrating new concepts and material into already existing cognitive structures” (3). On the other hand, McGuire observed that some adult learners are considered active learners in which they prefer to engage in the classroom setting where “lessons, assignments, and assessments should mimic real-world experiences” (1) given that they are “goal oriented and engage in a learning experience to create a change in a skill, behavior, current knowledge, or attitude” (McDonough 347) in order to “direct their learning to fulfill particular needs or demands” (Smith and Strong 1). Moreover, McGuire stated that active learning such as group discussions are viewed as most practical for adult learners (1) as it can facilitate participation and cooperation among the students. Schleppegrell also agreed that class activities such as oral repetition and extensive pronunciation will inhibit the older learner's active participation providing them with opportunities to work together with the intention of building their self-confidence and promoting language learning (Schleppegrell 3).

## CHAPTER TWO

### Findings

This chapter presents the responses of the questionnaire based on language learning strategies among adult learners of Spanish courses at different language centres in Trinidad and Tobago. All responses were highly anonymous and the questionnaires were distributed to fifteen (n=15) participants who were willing to participate in the survey.

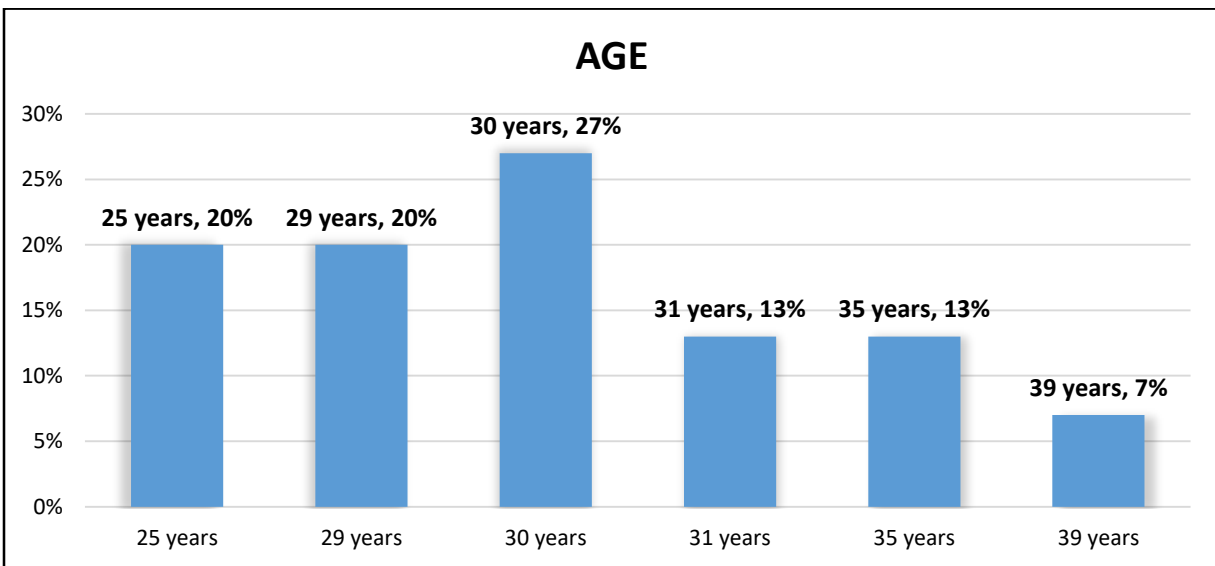


Fig. 1. Displays the ages of participants.

Fig. 1. Showcases that of the 15 participants, 20% were age 25 and 29, 27% were age 30, and 13% were age 31 and 35, while 7% were age 39. From the data collected, it is evident that all the participants were within the ages of what is categorized as “adult learners.”

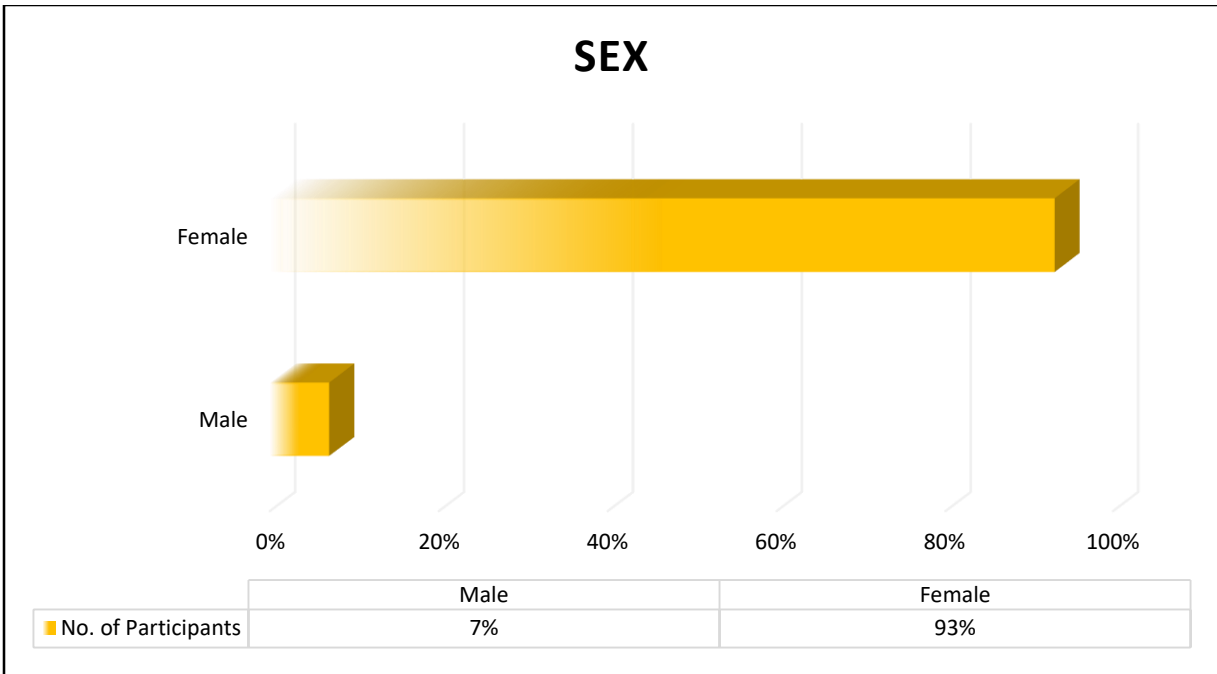


Fig. 2. Shows the comparison of sex of participants.

The figure above (Fig.2) revealed the sex of the participants. Out of the 15 participants who responded to the survey, 93% were females and 7% were males. Given that in previous research conducted by other researchers, they observed that females are more inclined to enter the field of languages (Gardner and Lambert 35). Thus, from this study it is evident that the data collected from the various language centres, there are more female students enrolled in the Spanish course since the number of female participants outweighed the male participants.

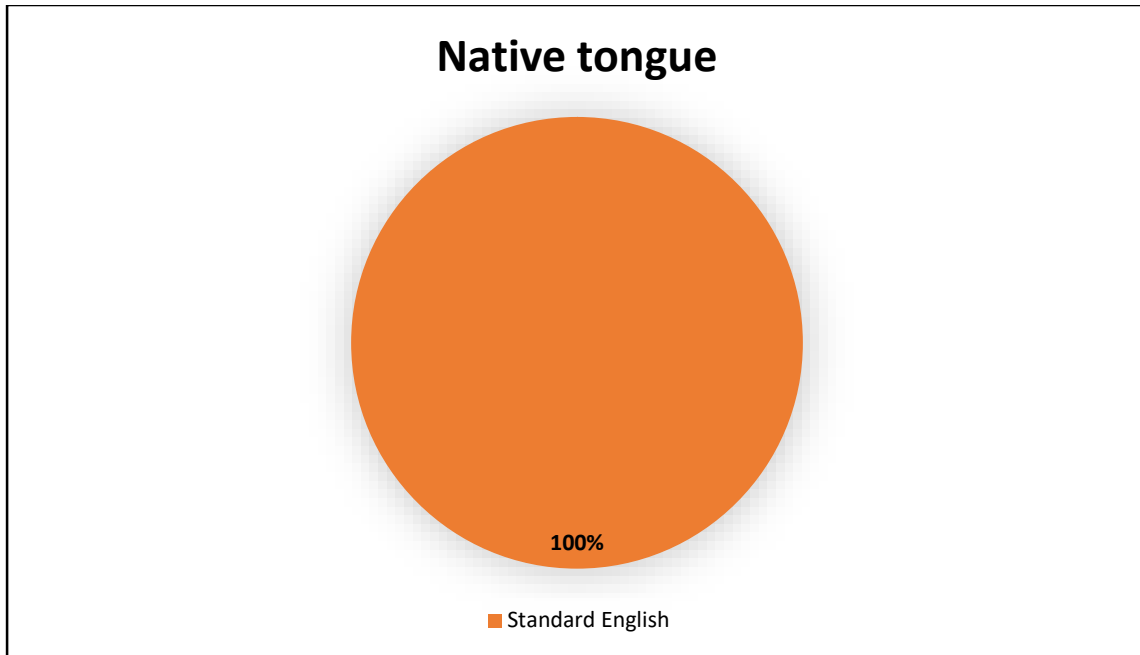


Fig. 3. Displays the native tongue of participants.

Fig. 3. Highlights that all 15 participants indicated that they speak Standard English. However, while all the participants were Trinidad and Tobago nationals, their first language is Trinidadian Standard English given that it is widely spoken throughout the twin island. Therefore, although they refer to their native language as Standard English, Creole is widely used among the nationals (Sen Nag 1).

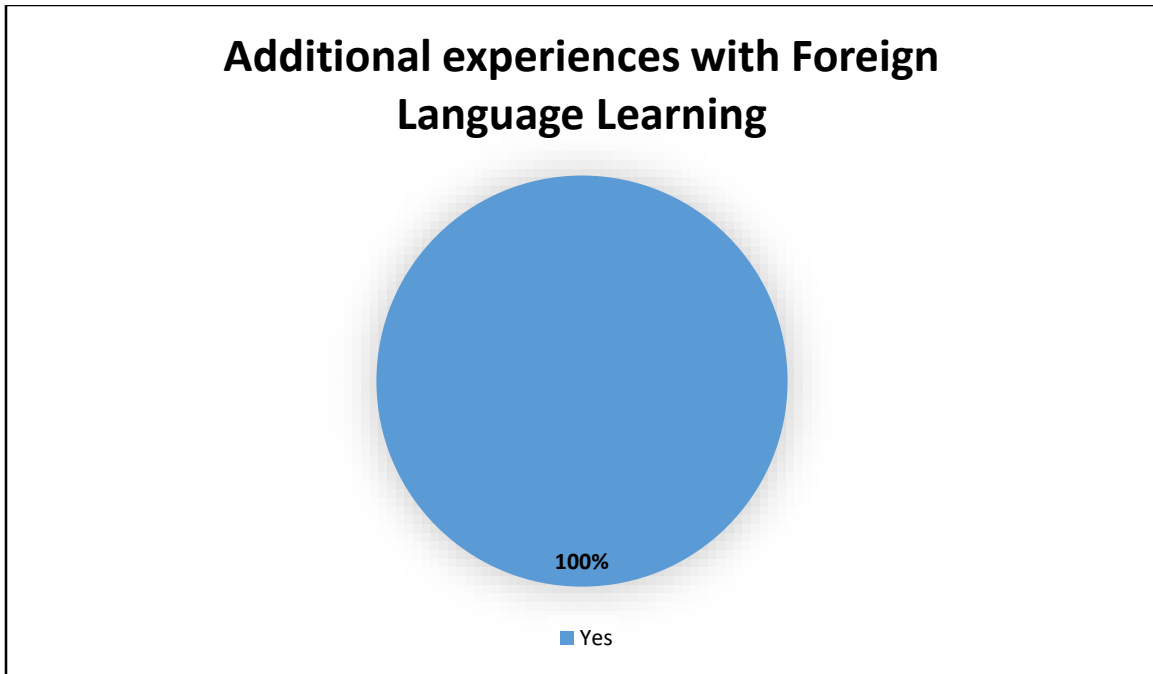


Fig.4. Demonstrates the participants additional exposure to learning other languages.

Fig. 4. Indicates that all 15 participants expressed having additional experience and engaging in learning different foreign languages apart from Spanish.

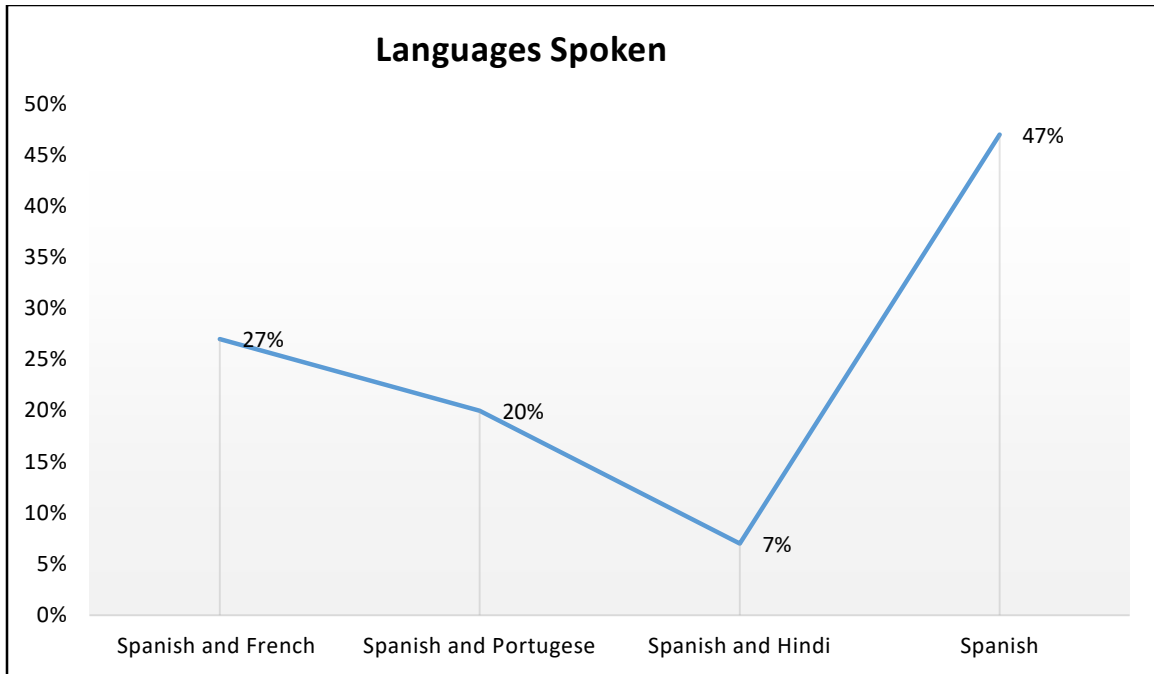


Fig. 5. Presents the languages learnt by participants.

As previously shown, all 15 participants had exposure to learning a foreign language therefore fig. 5. Reveals the additional languages chosen to be studied by participants. As a result, 27% of the participants were exposed to learning both French and Spanish, 20% were exposed to Spanish and Portuguese, 7% to Spanish and Hindi and 47% to Spanish. Thus, from the results it is evident that the most prevalent language selected by participants is Spanish given that all 15 participants have been involved in learning it as a foreign language.

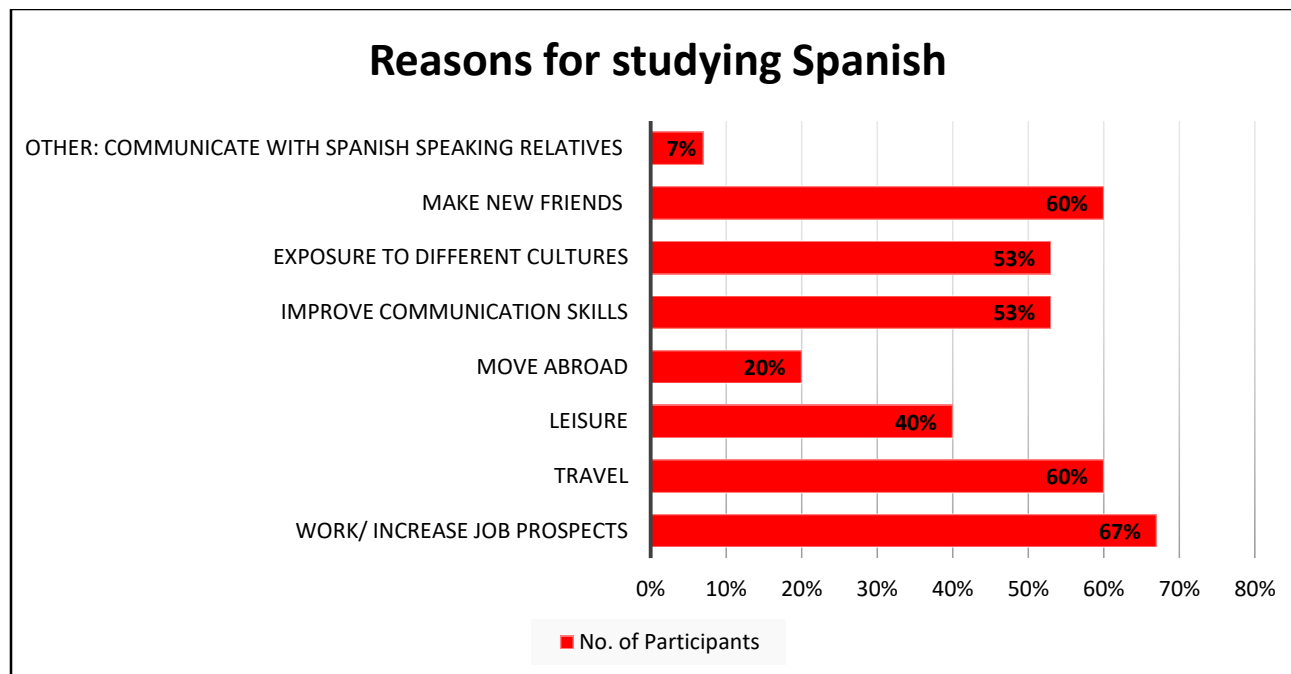


Fig. 6. Highlights the motives for studying Spanish.

Fig. 6. Represents the reasons which affected the participants' decision in partaking in the Spanish course. Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to select more than one option which influenced them. Therefore, from the diagram above it is seen that 67% being the most popular choice by participants stated that they were enrolled in the program for work or to increase job prospects. Moreover, 60% of the participants decided to study Spanish in order to travel, while an additional 60% pursued it to make new friends, 53% stated that it is a form of improving their communication skill and an additional 53% wanted to be exposed to different cultures. Also, 40% selected it as a form of leisure while 20% would like to utilize the language to move abroad. Lastly, only 7% of the participants decided to study the language in order to communicate with their Spanish speaking relatives.





Fig. 7. Shows the length of time participants have been studying.

Fig. 7. Indicates the length of time each participant has been studying Spanish as a foreign language. Therefore, as seen from the diagram above all 15 participants have been studying Spanish for 1 year and 6 months.

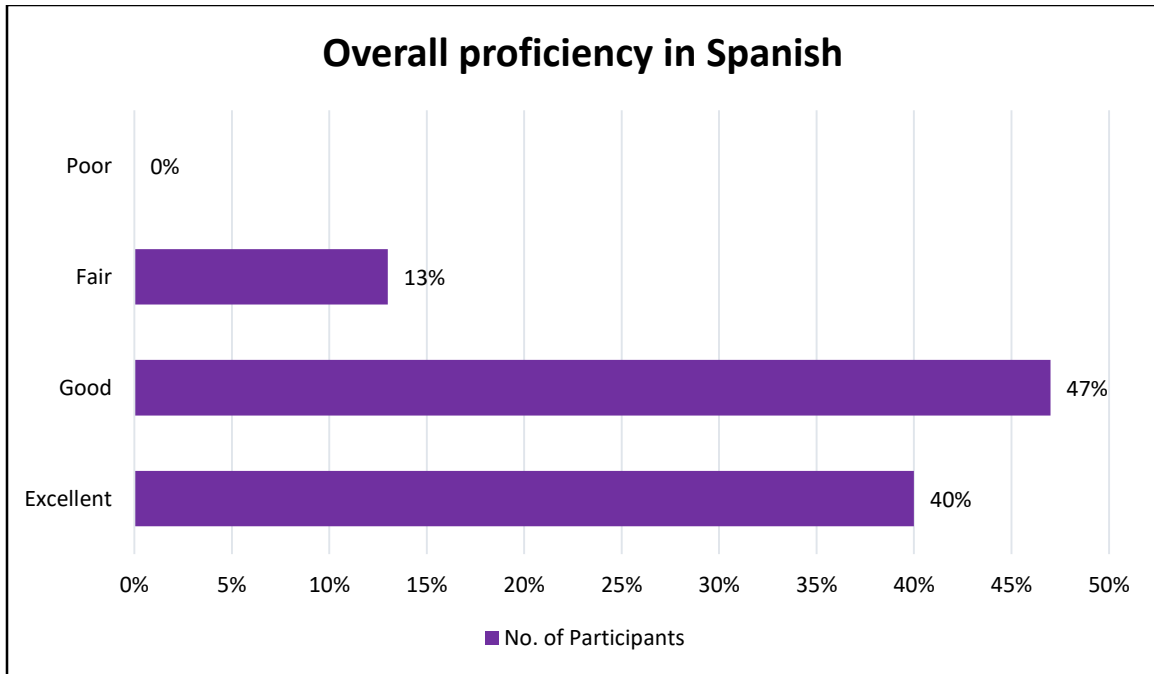


Fig 8. Represents the proficiency of participants.

The diagram above (fig. 8) displays the ways in which each of the participants individually determined their overall proficiency depending on the length of time they have been studying Spanish. From the results, 40% stated that they consider themselves to be excellent in the language while 47% rated themselves as good and 13% said their ability in the language is fair.

**TABLE 1: Do you think learning strategies play an important role when studying foreign languages?**

YES	100%
NO	0%

Table 1 shows the responses from participants about the importance of learning strategies. All 15 participants agreed that learning strategies play an important role when pursuing a foreign language.

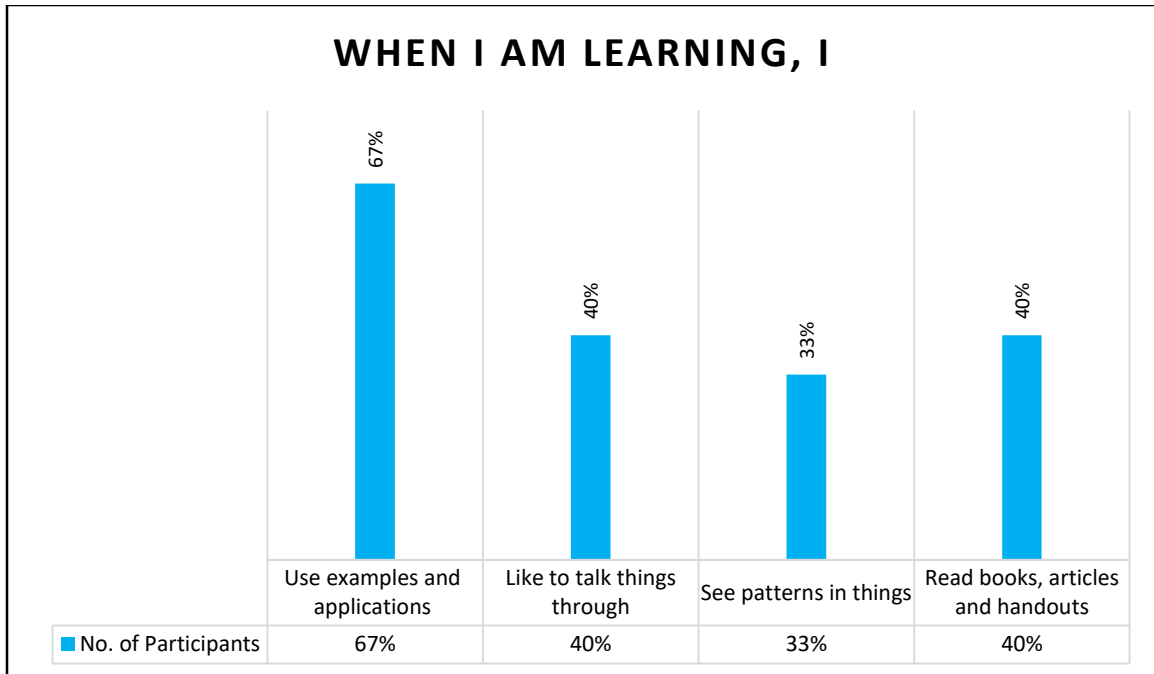


Fig. 9. Presents a generalization of the strategy participants employ.

Several researchers recognized that each individual has their own unique way of learning material which helps them retain information faster (O'Malley and Chamot 44). As such, from the diagram above (fig. 9) it shows that 67% being the majority of participants use examples and application when learning a second language, 40% stated that they prefer to talk things through, while an addition 40% said they read numerous material such as books, articles and hand-outs and 33% look at patterns.

**TABLE 2: When learning a new word, I:**

I put the word in a sentence so I can remember it.	47%
I create associations between new material and what I already know.	40%
I place the new word in a group with other words that are similar in some way (example: words relating to clothing, food, etc.).	20%
I use rhyming to remember it.	0%
I use flashcards with new word on one side and the definition/meaning on the other.	13%

I associate the sound of the word with the sound of a familiar word.	27%
Other: I repeat the word over and over and look for use in real life situations.	7%
Other: Have a notebook filled with vocabulary and I read the words during my spare time.	7%

Table 2 reflects what the participants does in order to remember a new word that they have learnt. From the responses, 47% of the participants put the word in a sentence so that they can remember it, 40% create associations between new material and what they already know, 20% place the new word in a group with other words that are similar in some way, 13% use flashcards with new word on one side and the definition or meaning on the other, 27% associate the sound of the word with the sound of a familiar word and 7% repeat the word over and over and look for use in real life situations, while an additional 7% use a notebook filled with vocabulary that they during their spare time. Lastly, none of the participants use rhyming to remember the words.

**TABLE 3: When studying grammar that you have done in class what do you often do?**

I write summaries or outlines of the structures that we are learning.	27%
I review the structures mentally or out loud.	47%
I translate them to learn.	13%
I write down the structures I would like to learn.	40%
I memorize examples sentences in order to remember some grammar points.	27%
I often make connections to grammatical structures in English.	40%

Table 3 reveals the ways in which participants review the grammar rules that they have studied in class. Majority of the participants being 47% simply review the structures mentally or out loud, 13% prefers to translate them into their native language to learn it, 27% write summaries or outlines of the structures that they are learning while another 27% memorize examples sentences in order to remember some grammar points and lastly 40% write down the structures they would

like to learn and an added 40% of participants often make connections to grammatical structures in English.

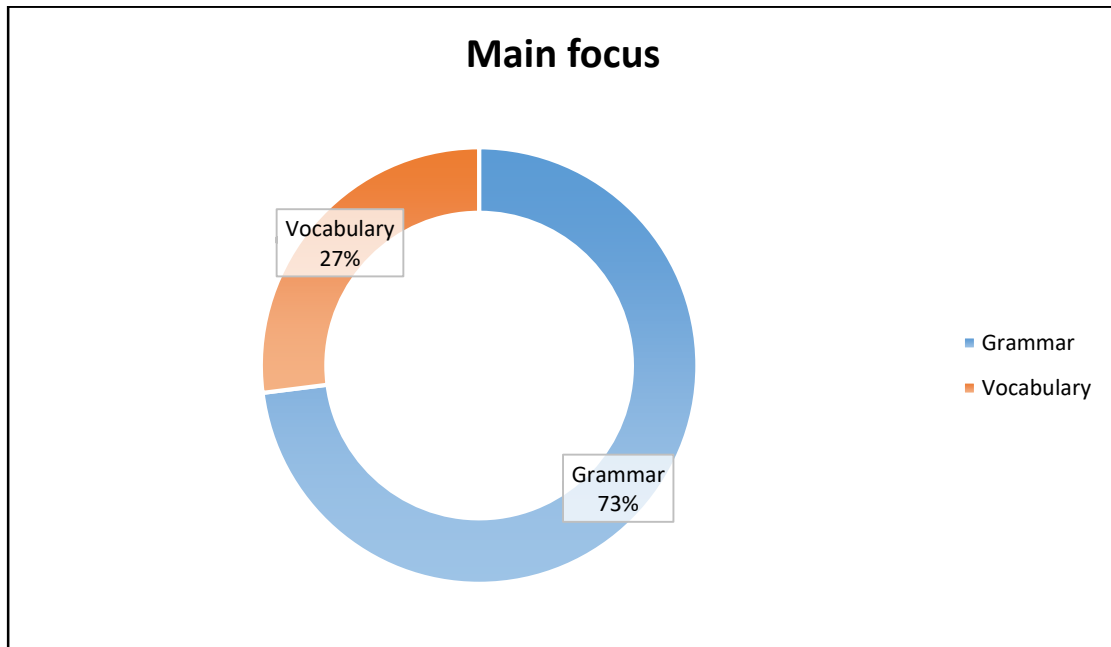


Fig. 10. Highlights the area participants placed more focus.

Fig. 10. Displays the participants focus area when learning a foreign language. Given that each person learns differently, it is also clear that when learning a language not all subjects place focus on the same area for distinct reasons. From the responses, 73% of the participants placed more focus on grammar while 27% placed focus on vocabulary.

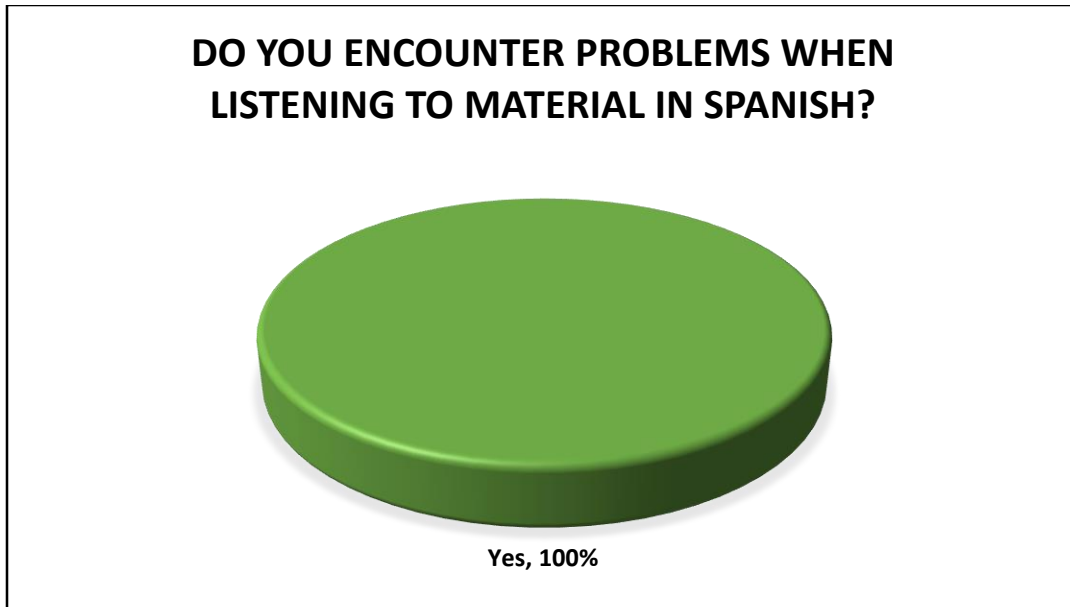


Fig. 11. Issues encountered in the listening activities.

Fig. 11. Discloses whether or not the participants encounter problems with regards to listening to materials in Spanish. All 15 participants stated that they faced issues.

**TABLE 4: Ways of improving listening skills**

Play the track slower.	13%
Listen to Spanish music.	20%
Use captions.	7%
Practice more listening exercises.	40%
Watch movies and videos.	20%

Given that all participants encountered problems when listening to Spanish, table 4 demonstrates the ways in which they improve this difficulty. 13% of the participants indicated that they play the track slower, 20% of the participants stated that they listen to Spanish music while an

additional 20% stated that they watch movies and videos, 7% use captions and 40% practice more listening exercises.

**TABLE 5: When speaking Spanish with peers or natives, what do you usually do before you start to speak and communicate with them?**

Think about what verbs I am going to use.	7%
Practice mentally before speaking.	7%
Think about what I would like to say in English.	33%
Think about what I would plan to say in Spanish.	40%
Do not do anything, just begin to speak in the language.	13%

Table 5 reveals what actions the participants take before speaking in their second language. 7% stated that before speaking they think about which verb they are going to use while an additional 7% practice what they are going to say mentally, 33% thinks about what they would like to say in English in contrast to 40% of the participants who stated that they plan their sentence in Spanish and 13% speaks on the spot as they do not plan anything.

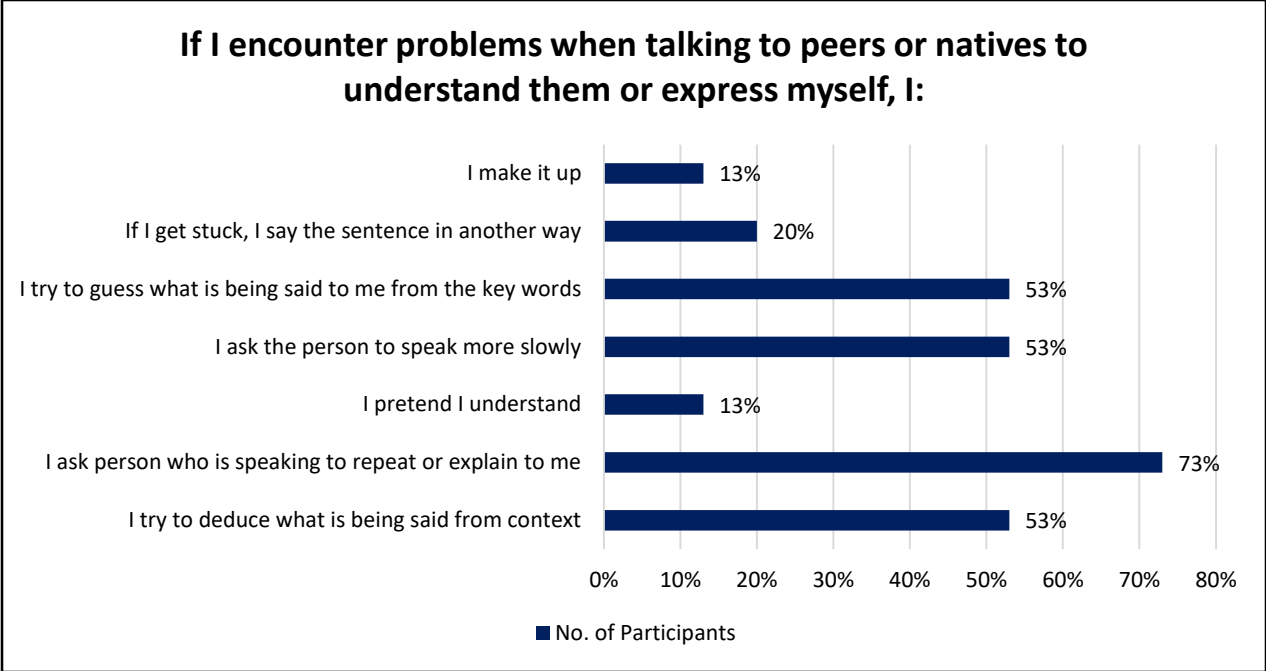


Fig. 12. Displays participants’ reaction upon encountering problems to speak and understand.

Fig. 12. Explains how the participants react when they come across problems with respect to speaking with their peers or natives and understanding them. 13% explained that they make up what they are going to say and an additional 13% pretend to understand what is being said. Moreover, 20% said that they express the sentence in another way, 73% stated that the participants ask the person speaking to repeat or explain what they are saying, and finally asking the person to speak more slowly, trying to guess what is being said from the key words and trying to deduce what is being said from context are the three responses by the participants which were each 53%.



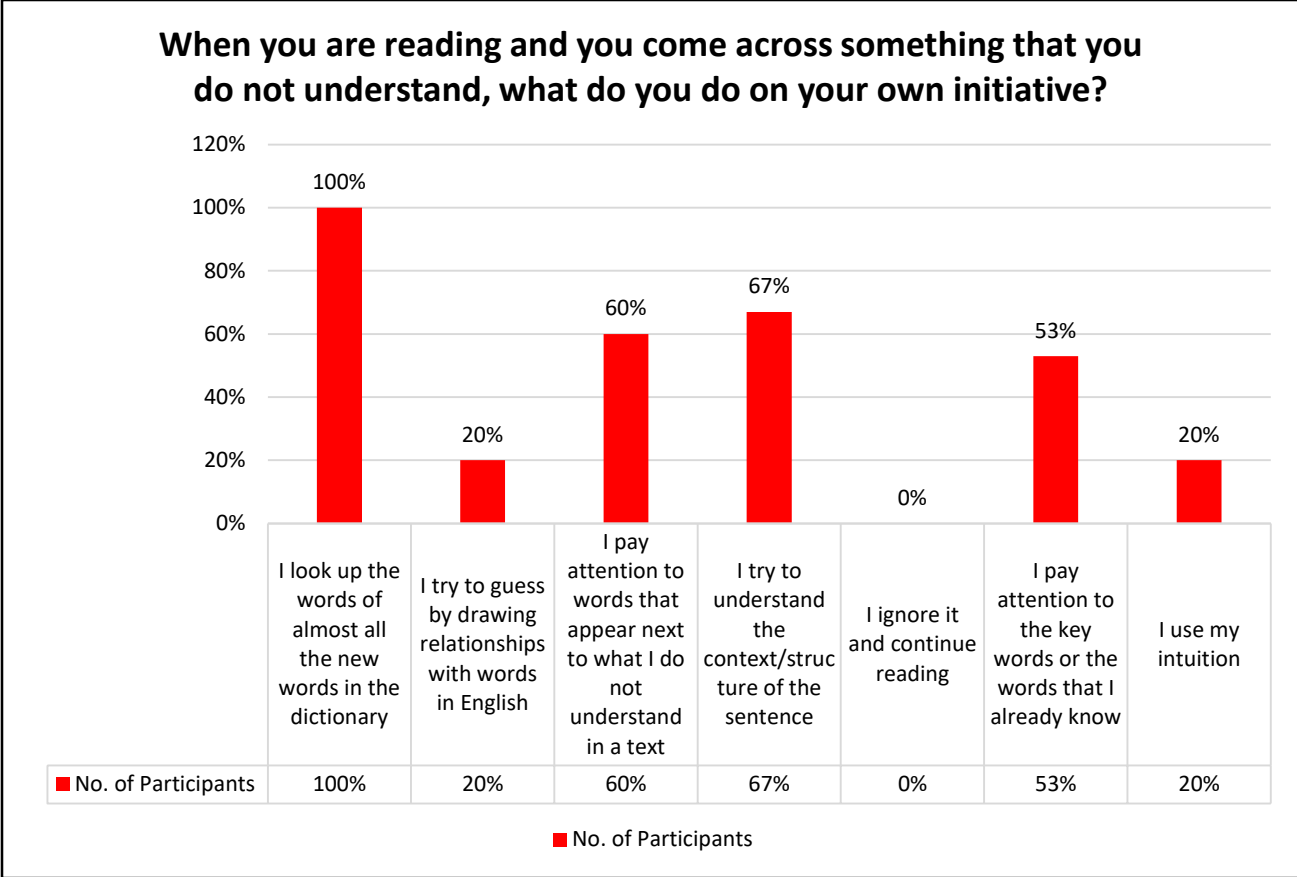


Fig. 13. Highlights the participants’ actions upon encountering issues when reading.

Fig. 13. Shows the manner in which participants respond to problems they come across when reading a text in Spanish. All participants had the option of selecting various responses. As a result on their own initiative, 100% stated that they look up almost all the new words in the dictionary, 20% of the participants try to guess by drawing relationships with English words as well as another 20% said they use their intuition, 60% pay attention to the key words or the words that they already know, 67% try to understand the context or structure of the sentence, 53% pay attention to the key words or the words that they already know and none of the participants chose to ignore it and continue reading.

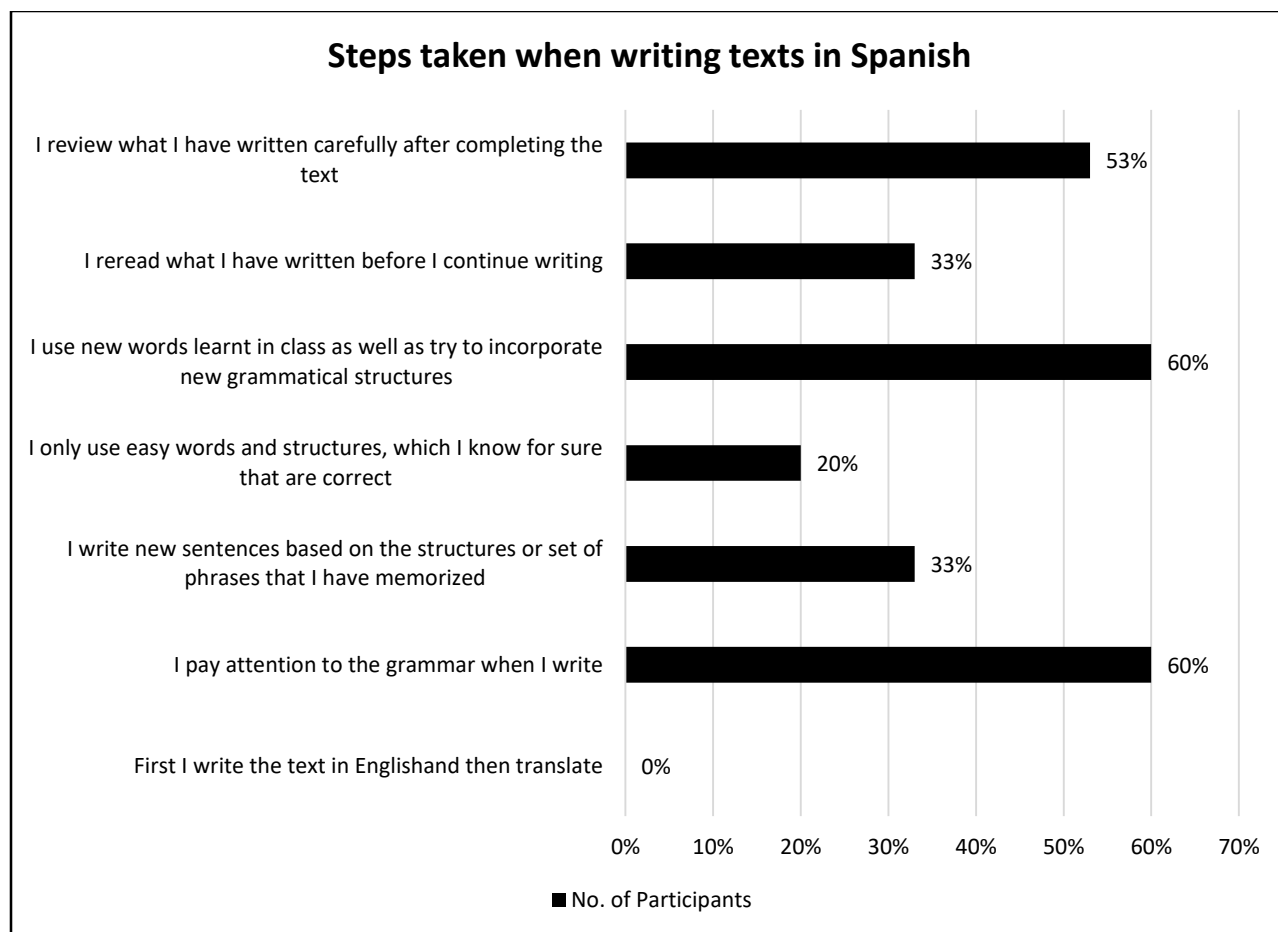


Fig. 14. Explains the steps participants take when writing texts in Spanish.

Fig. 14. Identifies how the participants go about writing in the foreign language. 53% review what they have written carefully after completing the text, 20% only use easy words and structures which they know for sure that are correct, 60% pay attention to the grammar, a further 60% use new words learnt in class as well as try to incorporate new grammatical structures, 33% write new sentences based on the structures or set of phrases that they have memorized while an additional 33% re-read what they have written before they continue writing. Finally, no one chose to write the text in English and then translate.

**TABLE 6: If you want to use words, expressions or grammatical forms that you do not know or do not remember at the moment, what do you do?**

Use an alternative way to express the same idea.	27%
Use a simpler context.	53%
Create words by adding ‘o’, ‘a’, ‘ción’ to the English word.	7%
Research it.	13%

Table 6 highlights what the participants do at the spur of the moment when they cannot remember an important word, expression or grammatical rule while speaking. From the table above, 27% stated that they use an alternative way to express the same idea, 53% use a simpler context to convey the message, and 13% research what they would like to say. Lastly, given that multiple words in English are similar to Spanish words, a minority of 7% follow the pattern that they have noticed by creating words, therefore they add ‘o’, ‘a’, ‘ción’ to the end English word.

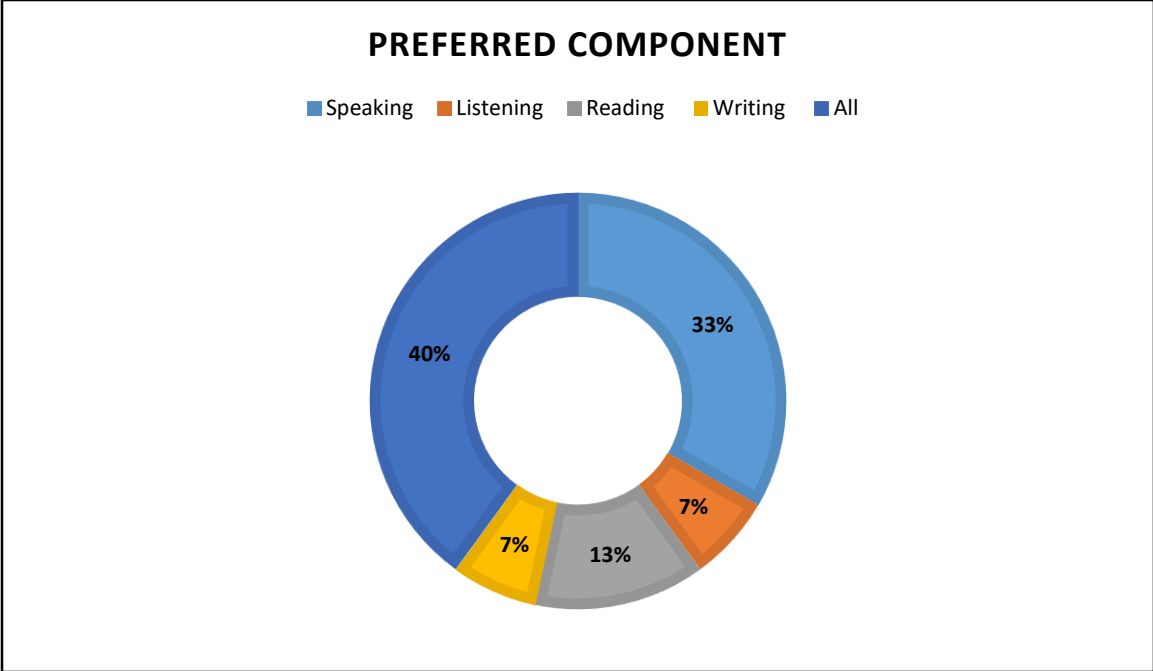


Fig. 15. Reveals the participants preferred component in the Spanish course.

Fig. 15. Demonstrates which component each participant prefers and most relevant to them. Each participant was asked to select the most significant component and give a reason for their answer. As such, from the diagram above, 40% of the participants being the majority, stated that all four components all are essential to mastering a foreign language as an individual cannot focus on one at the expense of another as well as, they are all relevant as they can be beneficial in any given situation. Moreover, 33% of the participants stated that speaking is most relevant to them as a person must be firstly able to get your points across and it is also most relevant since most of our waking lives that involves business and interaction. 13% participants indicated that reading is important because it builds the structure for every other aspect of the language and by seeing the words they can determine the gist of what is being said and learn new vocabulary at the same time. Additionally, 7% of the participants said that listening is important because it allows you to stay focus and pay close attention to the key points in addition to becoming

familiarized with different accents. Lastly, another 7% of the participants stated that writing is relevant since it allows them to take the time to structure a sentence grammatically correct.

In this chapter the findings of the questionnaire conducted were presented and analysed. The following chapter would therefore discuss such findings in order to determine which strategy or combination of strategies are widely utilized by Adult Language Learners.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Discussion**

In the previous chapter, a summary of the data collected was presented highlighting the most significant findings of the study. Nonetheless, in this chapter, the researcher discusses the results from the research conducted in the field of foreign language learning regarding the most prevalent language learning strategies employed by Adult Learners of Spanish language.

Furthermore, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning by Rebecca Oxford was utilized by the researcher as a guide to design the questionnaire in order to explore and provide a better understanding of the manner in which adult Spanish students approach learning.

As formerly mentioned it is commonly known that students, particularly adult students having been absent from the classroom environment for a period of time, experience difficulty remembering information that was taught in class. As such, because of this obstacle this research was structured and aimed at analyzing the methods adult learners utilize to excel in the field given that language learning is considered as a constant learning process in which practice is highly recommended. Moreover, while the study was directed at focusing on adult learners, it is evident that from the responses which were gathered from the participants in the findings, fig. 1 shows that all participants belonged to the category labelled as “adult learners” since each participant was over the age of 25.

Moreover, from the data collected numerous observations were made during the data analysis. Firstly, it is evident that the number of female students predominated over the male students, illustrating that it can be deduced that females are more enthusiastic to pursue a career or study in the field of foreign languages. Thus, this implies that the information and opinions gathered were chiefly based on the perspective of female students. Secondly, all participants

indicated that they have had experiences learning a foreign language apart from Spanish. Thus, those additional languages learnt by 54% of the students included French, Portuguese and Hindi.

Studying a foreign language brings ample opportunities and benefits. Each individual studies it for different purposes which can be seen in fig. 4. Given that all the students were predominantly adults, persons within this age group are frequently considered as “relevancy-oriented, meaning they need to see a reason for learning something and also goal-oriented, needing to see the applicability of the experience in order to also see the value” (Evans 1). Therefore, this statement can be deemed true since the majority of students stated that their purpose for enrolling in the Spanish program was related to their jobs or it would have given them an opportunity to increase their job prospects. Moreover, the remaining choices selected by the students did not pertain to their career but rather as a form of leisure in order to travel, make new friends, be exposed to new cultures as well as for personal self-growth to improve communication skills, move to another country and to converse with Spanish speaking relatives. As a result, in relation to fig. 15, their motives can give an insight to which component they prefer to place more focus. Therefore, given that in the world of work students must be able to master all components (reading, writing, speaking and listening) the majority of students, indicated that they do not have a specific choice since all 4 components are beneficial and relevant in any given situation.

Moreover, while previous researchers such as Oxford established that learning strategies are known as methods used to enhance one’s learning and the processing of information, each student was asked to state whether or not learning strategies play an important role with regards to learning foreign languages. Thus, since learning a language is an active process, all 15 students indicated that learning strategies are highly important in this field of study.

Additionally, while they were able to evaluate their overall proficiency in the language, seven students viewed themselves as being good in the language. From this feedback, all students were seen to be in a good standing with regards to their competence in the language which therefore suggests that they have all utilized different learning strategies from the positive reviews of their self-evaluation.

Given that there are four different components (reading, writing, speaking and listening) with regards to learning Spanish, each component may require that students utilize distinct learning strategies. As such, fig. 9. Provided a general view of the ways in which each student learns Spanish. Upon using the SILL by Oxford to collect the data, the direct strategies were seen to outweigh the indirect strategies. The Direct Strategies utilized by the students were Memory which includes the use of examples and applications as well as looking at patterns. This method suggests that the students created mental linkages in order to remember the material. In addition to this, another direct strategy employed by the students was the cognitive technique which involves a great amount of practice since the students stated that they like to talk through things. And lastly, out of the 15 students, only 6 utilized the indirect strategies which fell under the metacognitive category given that reading books, articles and handouts implies that they take the initiative to arrange and plan their own learning.

Without a doubt, when studying foreign languages encountering new words is highly common while doing any classroom or online activity. For this reason, the ways in which students learn and remember new words play an important role in this field given that the words can be used in any given situation. Although students were given the opportunity to select more than one response, according to the data collected the majority of answers selected had relation regarding memory and cognitive which were under the category of direct strategies. 7 students, used the



cognitive technique since indicated that they put the word in a sentence so that they can remember it. Therefore, this shows that practicing with the new word has a positive impact which allows them to remember it quickly. With respect to the memory strategies, 6 of the students stated that they create associations between new material and what they already know, 3 persons place the new word in a group with other words that are similar in some way which suggests that they created mental linkages and 4 students associate the sound of the word with the sound of a familiar word, which implies that they associate familiar concepts in their memory using sounds in order to remember. Further to this, with regards to the remaining cognitive strategies 2 students use flashcards with new word on one side and the definition/meaning on the other and 1 student has a notebook filled with vocabulary in which they read over the words during their spare time displaying that in order for these 3 students to remember new words, the most effective way is note taking. On the other hand, one person applied the indirect strategy which is metacognitive as part of their way in remembering a new word. As such, they repeat the word over and over and look for use in real life situations. As stated in the literature review, McGuire observed that adult learners prefer to be taught in class whereby the tasks and activities should mimic the real world experiences. However, from this result, it suggests that the student arrange and plan their own learning by seeking opportunities to practice.

According to fig. 10, 11 students focused on grammar and 4 focused on vocabulary. This shows that more students see grammar as “the art of perfecting the use of a language you already know” (Clark 1). However, applying the rules in writing and speech are sometimes difficult for students to remember. Hence the reason why students apply different methods to retain the various grammatical rules.

Memory and cognitive of the direct strategies were widely used when studying grammar. However, memory was seen to be employed by 7 students where they simply indicated that they review the structure mentally or loudly. The second highest responses were chosen by 6 students each which related to the cognitive strategy including writing down the structures they would like to learn as well as making connections to grammatical structures in English. According to Pinola “the art of writing helps you clarify your thoughts, remember things better and reach your goals more surely” (1) which therefore suggests that the former response is highly effective to remember grammatical structures, while the latter showcases that the students analyze contrastively by comparing grammar of the new language and native language in order to find similarities and differences. In addition to this, writing summaries or outlines of the structures being learnt and translating the rules to learn them are considered as cognitive strategies. And lastly, memorizing example sentences in order to remember some grammar points is considered a memory strategy given that the visual imagery allows students to remember the structure and sequence.

Listening is considered an important skill in foreign language learning given that it is “a process of receiving, making meaning from, and answering to spoken and/nonverbal messages” (Gilakjani and Sabouri 124). While listening “remains the most neglected aspect of language teaching” (Gilakjani and Sabouri 123) the results from the research showed that all students face a lot of difficulties in this component of language learning. As such, since it has been established by Corey that adults prefer to take responsibility for their learning, this was evident from the feedback collected from the students. They utilized a mixture of direct strategies including cognitive which involved playing the track slower and practicing more and indirect strategies metacognitive strategies such as listening to Spanish music, watching Spanish movies and

turning on the captions. However, the responses showed that the majority of students utilized the cognitive strategy associated with the direct strategies as they indicated that they practice more listening exercises. Therefore this suggests that the most efficient way in improving this skill is by practicing.

Similar to listening, speaking is also an important skill that allows persons to “communicate thoughts, feelings, experiences, information and opinions and learn to understand themselves and others” (McIntosh 5). While speaking may be a weak area for some students, they were asked by the researcher how they prepare themselves upon speaking the foreign language. The responses showed that the direct strategies surpassed the indirect strategies. As a result, most students indicated that upon speaking, they think about what they would like to say in Spanish before speaking. This recombining cognitive strategy implies that in order for the students to relay the information, they construct meaningful sentences by putting together known elements in the target language. However, while the second highest response also fell under the cognitive category, the students indicated that they formulate the sentence in English mentally before speaking it in Spanish. This demonstrates that they apply and transfer knowledge from their native language to the new language in order to express their idea. Moreover, other direct strategies included practicing as well as using keywords by thinking about the verbs they would like to use to construct their sentence. Lastly, only 2 persons stated that they began speaking on the spot without previous preparation. This conscious decision of taking risks wisely is considered an indirect strategy where the affective strategy was applied.

With respect to fig. 12, oftentimes students encounter difficulties expressing themselves or understanding others. From the data collected, there is a mixture of direct strategies such as compensation where students guess intelligently using clues from the key words, alter the

message in a different or simpler way to express themselves and avoid communication by pretending they understand the speaker. On the other hand, the indirect strategies included affective strategies such as taking risks wisely by making up what they would like to say, social strategies where students ask for clarification in order to understand the information fully. However, from these results, 11 students indicated that they ask the speaker to repeat or explain which is considered a social strategy implying that the students are taking responsibility for their learning by making sure that the message was rightly understood.

Furthermore, reading and writing are “powerful means of communicating and learning, it enables students to extend their knowledge as well as it provides students with a means of accessing ideas, views and experiences of others” (McIntosh 5). Given that new words are likely to appear while reading any material, the researcher put forward the question asking students what they do on their own initiative upon encountering new vocabulary. From the results, the cognitive strategy was seen as the most popular response for this situation since all students stated that they search the words in the dictionary. This was then followed by the second highest response whereby students stated that they try to understand the context of the sentence. This therefore suggests that the memory strategy utilizing keywords would have been taken into account in order to comprehend what was being said. Apart from reading, writing is also an important aspect. Fig 14, demonstrated the ways students go about writing in the foreign language. Using new words learnt in class as well as trying to incorporate new grammatical structures and paying attention to grammar were the 2 most popular responses. 9 students each chose them whereby the former technique is seen as a memory strategy by placing new words into context and the latter is viewed as a metacognitive strategy by paying attention.

Oftentimes, speaking in a foreign language is an unanticipated action where in given situations students are unable to practice. Thus, from table 6 the students indicated what they do when they are unable to express themselves properly. Only direct strategies including compensation and cognitive strategies were applied for this situation. As such the 2 highest results displayed that the students adjust the message in order to deliver the information in a simpler manner to be understood correctly. Additionally, 1 individual coin English words with Spanish endings to resemble Spanish words given that most Spanish words ends with 'o', 'a' and 'ción.' On the other hand, while students were asked to state their action in an unprecedented situation 2 students indicated that they would research what they would like to say. Therefore, this suggests that they would utilize resources to convey the message.

### **Conclusion**

The main findings of this study demonstrated that each participant had distinct reasons for studying the language. The majority of the participants expressed that they learn the language perhaps because it is a requirement for their job or it is used as a form of increasing their job prospects. As such, in order to gain desired success for their motive of enrolling in the Spanish course, the participants showed that utilizing learning strategies when studying a foreign language can be a very instrumental role in retaining information. The data collected was analyzed using the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning by Rebecca Oxford by organizing the results into direct and indirect strategies.

As it has been established that when learning a language, there exists different components such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, each of these components cannot be learnt or perfected using only one stagnant strategy. As such, the majority of students demonstrated that their learning strategies are steered towards the direct strategies which

involved the cognitive, memory and compensation strategies. It was observed that practicing, which is an aspect of the cognitive strategy was widely used by the students upon learning a new word given that when students encounter a new word they write sentences to remember. Similarly, this action was also seen to be useful to improve listening skills. The students stated that doing more listening exercises was seen to be very helpful as it would have allowed them to get accustomed to different accents, speed at which the speaker was speaking, tone and intonation. However, although cognitive strategies were highly useful for improving speech, it consisted of a different aspect within the cognitive strategy which included recombining. Here, it was revealed that when adult students have to speak, beforehand they think mentally in Spanish before saying the sentence which shows that they "construct meaningful sentences by putting together known elements" (Oxford 74).

Moreover, the memory strategy was also seen to be used for different purposes. The aspect of reviewing well which is a category under the memory strategies were extensively used upon studying grammar rules and structures, whereby the students indicated that they remember them while reviewing the structures mentally or loudly. On the other hand, although memory strategies were applied to writing, 6 students utilized a different aspect under memory strategy where the students place new words into context. Further to this, memory was also used when students encountered issues in reading. However, the students used keywords by trying to understand the context of the sentence.

As previously mentioned, memory strategy was applied to writing by 6 students. However, an additional 6 students applied the indirect strategy which involved metacognitive strategies with respect to paying attention. This data demonstrates that writing had a mixture of direct and indirect strategies which students utilized to write in a foreign language.

However, while students use cognitive strategies to prepare what they are going to say, an indirect strategy was observed to be used by the students when they counter problems speaking. The students used the social aspect where asking for clarification helps them to understand the message being delivered. Thus, this shows that while the two actions involve speaking, different strategies were used depending on the situation.

While language learning strategies were seen as an important role in this field, the present study displayed that all participants were able to express and select the most suitable technique which allowed them to retain information in a faster, easier and more enjoyable manner. Additionally, the results showcased the different learning strategies employed by adult learners depending on the components. However, it revealed that a variety of direct strategies were primarily used.

### **Limitations**

The feedback from the sample size only reflected the opinions and perspectives of female students. This is therefore viewed as gender bias, since the number of male students were very limited.

### **Recommendations**

Researchers will need to study whether there is a difference with respect to the ways in which males and females learn since the strategies employed and utilized were from the perspectives of females.

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## Appendix A

- 1) How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What is your sex?    Male     Female
- 3) Are you employed? Yes     No
- 4) What is your native tongue? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Have you had additional experiences with foreign language learning? Yes    No
- 6) What other languages do you speak? \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) Why did you choose to study Spanish? (You can select more than 1)
  - Work/Increase your job prospects
  - Travel
  - Leisure
  - Move abroad
  - Improve communication skills
  - Exposure to different cultures
  - Make new friends
  - Other (list): \_\_\_\_\_

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- 8) How long have you been studying Spanish? \_\_\_\_\_
- 9) How would you rate your overall proficiency in Spanish?
  - Excellent     Good     Fair     Poor
- 10) Do you think learning strategies play an important role when studying foreign languages?
  - Yes     No
- 11) When I am learning I:

- Like to talk things through.
- Use examples and applications.
- See patterns in things.
- Read books, articles and handouts.

12) Select the most appropriate from the list below, when learning a new word:

- I put the word in a sentence so I can remember it.
  - I create associations between new material and what I already know.
  - I place the new word in a group with other words that are similar in some way (for example words relating to clothing, food etc.)
  - I associate the sound of the word with the sound of a familiar word.
  - I use rhyming to remember it.
  - I use flashcards with the new word on one side and the definition/meaning on the other.
  - Other strategies you use (list)\_\_\_\_\_
- 

13) When studying grammar that you have done in class what do you often do?

- I write summaries or outlines of the structures that we are learning.
- I review the structures mentally or out loud.
- I translate them to learn them.
- I write down the structures that I would like to learn.
- I memorize example sentences in order to remember some grammar points.
- I often make connections to grammatical structures in English.

14) Which of the two (2) do you place more focus?

Grammar  New vocabulary

15) Do you encounter problems when listening to material in Spanish? Yes  No

16) If yes, how you improve your listening skills?

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Question #16 and #17 are based on speaking skills

17) When speaking Spanish with peers or natives what do you usually do before you start to speak and communicate with them?

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18) And if you have problems when talking to peers or natives to understand them or express yourself?

- I try to deduce what is being said from the context.
- I ask the person who is speaking to repeat or explain to me.
- I pretend I understand.
- I ask the person to speak more slowly.
- I try to guess what is being said to me from the key words.
- If I get stuck, I say the sentence in another way.
- I make it up
- Others (list) \_\_\_\_\_

19) When you are reading and you come across something that you do not understand, what do you do on your own initiative?

- I try to guess by drawing relationships with words in English.
- I look up the words of almost all new words in the dictionary.
- I pay attention to the words that appear next to what I do not understand in a text.
- I try to understand the context/structure of the sentence.
- I ignore it and continue reading.
- I pay attention to the key words or the words that I already know.
- I use my intuition.

Questions #21 and #22 are based on writing skills.

20) What steps do you usually take when writing texts in Spanish?

- First I write the text in English and then I translate it.
- I pay attention to the grammar when I write.
- I write new sentences based on structures or set phrases that I have memorized.
- I only use easy words and structures, which I know for sure that are correct.
- I use new words learnt in class as well as try to incorporate new grammatical structures.
- I reread what I have written before I continue writing.
- I review what I have written carefully after completing the text.

21) If you want to use words, expressions or grammatical forms that you do not know or do not remember at that moment, what do you do?

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22) Which component in Spanish (speaking, listening, writing, reading) do you think is most relevant/ important to you? Give reasons for the one that you have selected.

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