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THE USE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND THE RELATIONSHIP
WITH AGE AND ACHIEVEMENT IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Program of
Greensboro College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

by
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ABSTRACT

Language learning strategies have been proven to be important tools to help students become self-directed and independent learners and therefore control and improve their language learning. Given the small amount of information about the influence of age on the use of language learning strategies (LLS) among young learners, this research analyzes the differences in the use of language learning strategies between teenagers aged 11-12 and 13-14 and how this differences affected achievement. A causal comparative model was used to compare LLS used by the two age groups. The Young Learners Language Strategy Use Survey (Oxford, Cohen), and students' journal were used to collect information about the strategies used by 25 eighth graders and 37 sixth graders. The Young Learners Language Strategy Survey was administered at the beginning of the research while the students' journal was kept by students for a period of two weeks.

Findings of this study indicated that eighth graders are more likely to use a larger number and broader variety of strategies than the sixth graders. Sixth graders tend to report more observable strategies and strategies; on the other hand, eighth graders are more likely to report more non observable strategies and more cognitively complex strategies. At the same time there were students from both age groups that failed to report strategies which may suggest that they are still unable to verbalize or recall their mental processes for learning.

DEDICATION

I would like to thank my family. Without their love, constant support, patience and inspiration I would have been unable to complete this thesis, which I dedicate to them.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Students' learning is the main objective of every instructional practice. Lately, there has been a focus on learning and the role of the student in that learning. More emphasis is being given to how the students can affect and manage their own learning. Self-regulation, learning autonomy and independent learning are some concepts that give an active role to students. Learning strategies are important tools to achieve the goals of a more independent learner and of student engagement in their own learning because they require a certain level of conscious decision about when and what strategies to use for certain types of tasks. Language learning strategies have proven to influence learning in a positive way if used appropriately and with the appropriate tasks (Grenfell & Macaro, 2007, p.13). In this sense, foreign language learners need to have a wide array of choices regarding strategies.

However, students are not usually aware that they can control their own learning and many times are still dependent on teachers' decisions. Taking into account that every person is unique, each student's own process or way of learning is also unique. Students' choices of the strategies that work better for them must be a conscious process. Stern, cited by Grenfell and Macaro (2007, p. 12) and by O'Malley and Chamot (1995, p. 2), suggests that learning strategies can be taught to less successful learners (p. 12). According to Allen (2002) some students know some strategies but are not motivated to use them (para. 57). If students can see the advantages of using strategies and how using them affect their learning in a positive way, they will be more motivated to use strategies. Paris, Wasik, and Turner assert, "Understanding why the strategy was important

helped children to identify main ideas and make them feel capable of completing the task” (as cited in Allen, 2002, p. 57). Allen (2002) also states, “Students’ understandings of when and how to apply the strategy is perhaps the most important aspect of strategy instruction” (p. 57).

There are many factors (in the learner and the learning context) that may affect the learning outcome as well as the use of language learning strategies (Takeuchi et al. in Language Learner Strategies (Cohen & Macaro), p.69; Griffiths, 2008, p. 94). Language learners use different types of language learning strategies depending on different variables such as age, gender, level of proficiency, personality culture, and others. The focus of this research is on the effect of the variable age on the use of language learning strategies. Most of the studies about the use of language learning strategies have been conducted with high school students and college or university students. Little research has been carried out regarding the use of language learning strategies by younger learners. As a result, the present research study attempts to provide information about a population that has not been studied in much detail, teenagers whose ages range among eleven and fourteen years old.

Context of the Problem

As a foreign language learner myself, I did not have the opportunity to be introduced to learning strategies as a young learner. When I was pursuing higher education, I had the opportunity to explore more learning tools and I chose the ones that better fit my way of learning in a more conscious manner. As I started to teach, I realized that younger students were not conscious about the strategies they were using. This

reality is true in my home country, Peru, as well as in the United States, specifically in Sullivan Middle School in Rock Hill.

Sullivan Middle School is located in Rock Hill, South Carolina and it has a population of 738 students. It was an International Baccalaureate (IB) applicant school for two years and was accepted as an authorized IB school in 2008. Changes have been made to adopt the IB philosophy, and the school is still in the process of implementing changes according to the IB requirements. The International Baccalaureate program includes five areas of interaction, central themes through which all subject areas can make connections with the real world. They are big ideas or concepts that serve as axes for learning in all subjects. Areas of Interaction are the lenses through which Middle Years Program-International Baccalaureate (MYP-IB) helps teachers plan to make interdisciplinary connections as well as helps students understand the bigger picture of what they are learning. In a strong MYP-IB school, students understand that content area knowledge can be applied to health and social aspects; environments; communities; human ingenuity; or learning how to learn (approaches to learning) (C. Mclean, personal communication, December 31, 2009).

When I started teaching Spanish as a foreign language in a middle school that offers the Middle Years Program of the International Baccalaureate (IB), I realized that the program gives emphasis to the development of critical thinking skills, strategies to learn, and reflection about one's own learning through one area of interaction called approaches to learning. The central idea of this area of interaction is empowering students about "learning how to learn", which includes helping students to develop skills

to learn and take responsibility for their own learning and be more independent and aware of the decisions they make regarding the way they learn.

The Problem

Sullivan Middle School was accepted as a participant IB school in 2008. For this reason the school has started to implement the areas of interaction in all subjects. A large number of students at Sullivan Middle School are not fully conscious of the different options or tools there are available to enhance their learning, in general, and their foreign language learning, more specifically. Some teachers are putting more emphasis than others on an area of interaction called approaches to learning. Approaches to learning (ATL) is, in my opinion, the core of what teachers "should" be doing. It is teaching students to how to think critically and ethically, organize themselves to understand/learn as well as how to communicate that understanding. Taught explicitly and well, students are prepared to learn in any context (C. McLean, personal communication, December 31, 2009). McLean suggested that students need to be prepared and taught explicitly the approaches to learning in order to be able to learn in any situation. Ruby Payne, in her book about poverty, says that impoverished learners do not have the academic organizational skills that more successful students do, for example, knowing how prepare to read or take notes. ATL instruction would really help level the playing field (C. McLean, personal communication, December 31, 2009). McLean, instructional coach at Sullivan Middle School, suggested that not all teachers at Sullivan Middle school put emphasis on approaches to learning. Moreover, she suggested that students are not equipped with the approaches to learning skills.

There were two main concerns that lead me to carry out this study. The first concern was that younger students, due to their age, would need more support to develop the different skills or strategies, and the second concern was that older students still were not making conscious choices of the strategies they use. Therefore, I decided to carry out a causal comparative research project to analyze the relationships among age, the use of language learning strategies, and achievement.

Comparisons will be made between sixth grade students and eight grade students on their use of language learning strategies. Based on the results of this research, students will be given explicit instruction in learning strategies.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The present thesis argues that the use of language learning strategies will vary according to the age of the learners. This thesis tries to find the relationship between the use of language learning strategies, the learner's age, and the learners' achievement through the following research question:

What is the relationship between the use of language learning strategies, student's age, and students' achievement?

The following hypotheses have been established according to the research question:

- Younger students use fewer language learning strategies and they use them in isolation.
- Older students use more language learning strategies and they use them in combination.

- Students who use language learning strategies have a higher level of achievement.

Operational Definitions

This study will adopt the following terminology:

- Language learning strategies: actions, thoughts, or processes that language learners use to enhance learning or communication as determined by the Young Learners Language Strategy Use Survey. Actions, thoughts, or processes that the language learner is able to report consciously in their language learning strategy journal.
- Age: years of life since birth until the moment in which the data collection starts.
- Achievement: Grades obtained by the students in class activities. These activities include the skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing.

Significance of the Study

Language learning strategies comprise a relatively new research field. The first article on language learning strategies was published in 1975 by Joan Rubins. In that article Rubins presents some techniques and approaches that good language learners use in order to be successful in their learning (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007, p.11; Griffiths, 2008, p.83). With fewer than 40 years of research, the field is still building and accumulating knowledge. As a result, there is still not a consensus among experts about various issues and terms used in the LLS field.

Several studies have been conducted about LLS and the different variables that affect their use, such as gender, culture, achievement, motivation, personality types,

environment, age, and more. Among all the studies, there have been findings that prove the influence of certain variables over LLS use and also the degree of influence.

One of the variables that influences the use of LLS is age. Unfortunately, according to Takeuchi, Griffiths, and Coyle (2007) and Tragant and Vitori (2006), there have been few studies that examine the relationship between age and LLS use. Moreover, there have been several studies that examine the LLS used by students in high school and students pursuing higher education or adult learners. However few studies have been done that examine the use of LLS by younger learners such as elementary and middle school students. The present research study attempts to fill in the gap in this field of study by targeting age groups that have not been studied extensively.

Considering that LLS training should be guided by the specific needs of the students, it is important to achieve an understanding about the strength of the influence of certain variables on LLS use (Takeuchi, Griffiths, & Coyle, 2007, p. 70). The present study intends to determine how strongly the age variable influences the use of LLS in sixth and eighth grade students whose ages range between eleven to thirteen and thirteen to fifteen respectively. This research will only focus on the language learning strategies used by students who are learning Spanish as a foreign language; it will not include students who are native Spanish speakers or who have Spanish speaker parents or caregivers. The results of this study will be the foundation to provide training on LLS.

Dembo and Eaton (2000) and Oxford (1990) state that identifying the learning strategies students already use is important in order for future training to be effective. This reality is noteworthy not only because students need to be made aware of their own learning strategies and how they influence their own learning, but also because the

teacher needs to know what to base his/her strategy training on. Thus, it is important to determine the use of LLS by younger learners in order to plan a strategy training that takes into account experiences and skills they already have. In this way students will be able to manage their own ways of learning, take steps to improve their approach to learning, and feel comfortable and successful about it. In doing so, students will become independent learners and will be able to use this new approach to learning in any learning situation.

The results of this research will aid other researchers in studying the relationship among LLS, age and achievement. The knowledge gained from this study will affect society in a positive way because it will be used to make decisions about LLS training. Further, the findings of this study could also be used to make changes in the school district's curricula by including LLS training in them. Inspiring and empowering students to take control over their own learning are powerful tools that can affect a person's life-long learning and success.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter the relevant literature will be discussed under three headings:

- Language Learning Strategies: Definition, Classification, and Implications
- Language Learning Strategies and Age
- Language Learning Strategies and Achievement

Language Learning Strategies: Definitions, Classification, and Implications

This section will first introduce the definitions of language learning strategies that many authors in the field use to refer to LLS. Then the LLS classification according to various authors will be presented. Finally, some implications of LLS for learning will be discussed.

As previously stated, there is no total consensus about what is implied by LLS. There are varied points of view in issues such as the level of consciousness, the extent of attention, explicitness regarding action, the degree of goal orientations, strategy size, amount of strategy clustering, strategy selection and effectiveness, the purpose of the LLS, and other concepts related to LLS such as autonomous language learning, self-regulation, self-management, independent language learning and others (Cohen, 2007).

The following definitions from different authors I present here may demonstrate that there is still not a consensus about the definitions of LLS. Rubin's definition of LLS cited by Griffiths (2008) is "the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge" (p.83). Oxford (1990) proposed that "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”, in contrast to a more commonly used and technical definition of strategies as “operations employed by the learner to aid acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information (p. 8). Oxford suggested that her definition considers the exciting and rich side of using LLS. O’Malley and Chamot (1994) defined learning strategies as “thoughts or activities that assist in enhancing learning outcomes” (p. 60). O’Malley and Chamot (1995) also referred to learning strategies as “the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information” (p. 1). In the first definition, they make it clear that the strategies will affect learning in a positive way, while the second definition seems broader in the sense that it includes terms other than learning. This may seem to indicate that learning is not the only objective.

Cohen (1998) defined second language learner strategy as “those processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in actions taken to enhance the learning or use of second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about the language” (p. 264). It is noteworthy to point out that this definition refers to language learner strategies which include strategies for both learning and using the foreign language. Cohen (2009) defined language learning strategies as the “conscious or semi-conscious thoughts and behaviors used by learners with the explicit goal of improving their knowledge and understanding of a target language” (p. 164).

Griffiths (2008), based on the 30 years debate about definition and terminology issues, suggested that language learning strategies are “activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning”(p. 87). The author

argues that this is a wide definition in that it considers activities as mental or physical activities and the act of consciously choosing can be made on a continuum from automatic to planned decision. At the same time Griffiths argues that this definition is not too wide as to include other terms such skills, learning styles or communication strategies.

As one can observe from the definitions above LLS have been described as actions, thoughts, activities, and processes. The discussion about the definition of language learning strategies (and other issues regarding language learning strategies) is far from over. On the contrary, controversy about the definition of LLS and factors that influence their use still exists. However, despite the controversies, Griffiths' (2008) attempt to draw on the areas of consensus to develop a definition that encompass them all is laudable. All the discussion and controversy about LLS has lead to the evolution of the field; however, there are still areas that have not reached a consensus, as is the case of the role of different factors (age, gender, ethnicity, etc) in the use of language learning strategies.

Language learning strategies have also been classified according to different perspectives. In this section four of those perspectives are discussed, those proposed by Rubins (as cited by O'Malley & Chamot, 1995; and Grenfell & Macaro, 2007); Oxford (1990); O'Malley and Chamot (1995); and Cohen (2009). In one method of classification, Rubins divided the LLS into two big categories: strategies that directly affect learning such as clarification/verification, monitoring, memorization, and practice among others; and strategies that indirectly affect learning such as creating practice opportunities and production tricks.

Another system, and one of the most exhaustive classifications, is the one proposed by Oxford (1990) who arranges the LLS into two big classes and six groups. The first major class is the direct strategies composed of three strategy groups: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. The second major group is the indirect strategies composed of three strategy groups as well: social strategies, affective strategies, and metacognitive strategies. Oxford (1990) further subdivides the six strategy groups into 19 strategy sets with a total of 62 strategies. She specifies that the six groups of strategies support each other and that different individual strategies may overlap in the strategy groups.

The following is a brief overview of the six different strategy groups according to Oxford (1990). Memory strategies are used to organize information for storage and retrieving when necessary for communication purposes. Cognitive strategies are responsible for the comprehension and production of the language. Compensation strategies are used when there is a lack of knowledge for communication. Metacognitive strategies are used to control their own learning. Affective strategies are used to control emotions, motivation, and attitudes. Social strategies are used to interact with others in the target language. Under each strategy group a subset of specific strategies are listed in Oxford (1990, p. 19).

A third classification system, drawing on cognitive psychology, is proposed by O'Malley and Chamot (1994, 1995). It consists of three categories of strategies: metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies. Metacognitive strategies are "higher order executive skills that may entail planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of a learning activity" These strategies can be applied to a variety of tasks. (p.

44). “Cognitive strategies operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning” These strategies can be used in specific tasks (p. 44). Social/affective strategies “represent a broad grouping that involves either interaction with another person or ideational control over affect” They can also be applicable to a variety of tasks (p. 45).

Finally, Cohen (2009) presents two groups of language learner strategies. He asserts that a language learner may employ language learning strategies and language use strategies. Since the focus of this research is on language learning strategies, I will only refer only to this first group. Cohen (2009) suggests another way to classify the language learning strategies “according to the skill area to which they relate” (p.166) naming listening, reading, speaking, and writing as well as vocabulary, and grammar strategies. He also adds the strategic use of translation as one of the areas that learners rely on.

As one can see, the previous classifications arise from different approaches to the LLS. Rubins and Oxford have a similar approach classifying them into direct and indirect strategies. Oxford, however, took her classification beyond Rubins’ approach by proposing other sub-categories and a more detailed set of strategies for every subcategory. O’Malley and Chamot’s (1995) classification draws on cognitive psychology and is based on research in cognitive psychology, theoretical analysis and interviews with novices and experts on psychological tasks. (p. 45). Researchers agree that in the strategies classification, some strategies overlap each other in that some strategies can be used or found in two or more different categories or subcategories therefore serving different purposes (O’Malley & Chamot, 1995, p. 45; Oxford, 1990, p. 17). Oxford (1990) expresses a word of caution regarding the classification of language

learning strategies by pointing out that “... *any* current understanding of language learning strategies is necessarily in its infancy, and *any* existing system of strategies is only a proposal to be tested through practical classroom use and through research” (p. 16).

While the definition and classification of language learning strategies are central to understanding the research, the implications of using language learning strategies are essential for language learners and educators alike. First, all students use some type of learning strategies; it is the level of efficacy that make the difference among learners. As Cohen (1998) states, “Without question, learners do not come to language learning with an empty slate. They have a full repertoire of cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies; it just may be that their repertoire is not being utilized to its full potential” (p. 266). By the same token, Tragant and Victori (2006) quoting Yamamori et al. assert “strategies are not ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in an absolute sense, and successful learners are not characterized by their use of special strategies that others do not use” (210). Furthermore, Cohen (1998) suggests that choosing an effective strategy depends on many factors. “No single strategy will be appropriate for all learners or for all tasks, and individual learners can and should apply the various strategies in different ways, according to their personal language learning needs” (pp. 266-267). This probably explains why some students try to use some strategies and they do not work as they would like them to work. They are probably not using them according to their needs or for the correct task. Besides, some strategies work better with certain tasks and in combination with others.

The learners' success depends on their knowledge of when and what strategy to use for specific tasks. This knowledge can be acquired by training and the process of trial and error on the part of the students about what strategies work for them for certain tasks. Therefore, it is important for students and teachers to be aware about the strategies students use. Based on that, teachers could help students by providing strategy training. O'Malley and Chamot (1995) stated "We would like to see more individuals to adopt the view that teachers can encourage and assist students in using effective strategies for learning and can extend and challenge the student's mastery of a language by introducing academic language embedded in substantive content" (p. x).

The purposes of learning strategies are multiple, such as to enhance learning outcomes, make learning more enjoyable, to solve specific problems, or to perform specific tasks. Language learning strategies allow learners to manipulate information according to their needs, thus allowing students to be more self-directed and knowledgeable of their own way of learning and ultimately more self-regulated learners. Consequently, the gains of strategy training are multiple. In support of LLS, Oxford (1990) asserted that "Strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. Appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence" (p. 1).

Regarding LLS in foreign language learning, O'Malley and Chamot (1994), in a study with students of Spanish and Russian, reported that "Foreign language students show similar patterns of metacognitive and cognitive strategy use as compared to those reported by ESL students" (p. 126). In the same study, O'Malley Chamot (1994), report

that beginning level students reported less use of strategies as compared to intermediate/advanced students (p.127). However, in a study carried out with ESL and EFL Japanese students, Riley and Harsch (1999) reported that the Japanese ESL and EFL students used different types of strategies. The researchers argued that the differences in the environments could have been responsible for the differences in the use of LLS (Takeuchi, Griffiths, & Coyle, 2007, p. 76).

The discussion about the amount of strategy clustering is of special importance in this study because one of the hypotheses states that older students use strategies in combination. Cohen (2007) states that there was general consensus that depending on the task the use of LLS could be as a single action or in sequence of actions. Additionally, there was relative consensus that for strategies to be more successful they have to be used in clusters or chains. Cohen (2007) also pointed out that some strategies work well used individually depending on the task. In any case, the nature of the task determines whether a strategy works better individually or in combination with others. Regarding effectiveness, many researchers agree that the effectiveness of a strategy depends on the learner him/herself, the nature of the task, and the learning environment (Cohen, 2007, p. 37).

Researchers disagree, for example, about the level of consciousness required; many agree that a component of metacognition in the use of learning strategies has to be present which means that the learners have to be aware of the strategies they are using. Dissenters, however, counter that at some point the use of a strategy becomes automatic and thus it is not conscious any more (Cohen, 2007).

Language Learning Strategies and Age

In this section the relationship between LLS and age will be discussed. Beginning with why this relationship is complicated to determine. Next, differences between varied age groups and their use of LLS will be analyzed.

Several researchers explain that the use language learning strategies is influenced by many different factors such as motivation, learning styles, age, gender, nationality/ethnicity, stage of learning, task requirement, proficiency level, and purpose for learning the language (Oxford,1990; Graham, 1997). Not only it is influenced by different factors, but these factors also interact among each other making this field of research a complex one. Tragant and Victori (2006) stated, “The absence of a systematic association between learner strategies and proficiency levels and, more generally language achievement, has recently led certain authors to claim that effective use of language learning strategies depends on a complex and dynamic interplay of a range of factors (pp. 209-210).

The relationship between age and the use of LLS has been hard to determine because most of the studies about LLS have been carried out with high school and college students. O’Malley and Chamot (1995), Takeuchi, Griffiths and Coyle (2007), and Tragant and Victori (2006) stated that the reason why it has not been possible to establish the relationship between age and the use LLS is because most studies have been undertaken with adults.

There have been some studies undertaken with younger learners that give us some insights on this age range and that demonstrate differences in the employment of language learning strategies among different age groups. However, these differences are

not clear and straight forward. Chesterfield and Chesterfield (1985) cited by Tragant and Victori (2006) suggested that there is a natural developmental sequence in the use of LLS. Tragant and Victori (2006) analyzed Chesterfield and Chesterfield's work and explained that their study is valuable not only because of the suggestion of a developmental sequence in the use of language strategies but also because this sequence appeared to be independent of the level of proficiency .

Graham (1997) asserted that age influences the use of language learning strategies. She reports some findings from a research study, carried out by Grenfell and Harris, in London schools in 1994 and 1995, in which differences in the use of strategies were found between students in years 7 and 9 of high school. However, Graham (1997) suggested that there is ambiguity in the development of the use of learning strategy in relationship with the learner's age and that the study yielded results that were complex to analyze and to generalize.

Accordingly, Riazi (2007) concludes that there is a difference in the use of learning strategies according to the level (freshmen students against seniors) of the students. The author suggests that higher-level students might have internalized the strategies so they tend not to report their use. In contrast, Tragant and Victori (2006), based on their study, suggested that "learners tend to undergo developmental changes in strategy use as they increase in age, regardless of their level of proficiency or learning stage. These changes, however, are not systematic for all learning strategy types, nor do they always show a linear association with age" (p. 231).

Tragant and Victori (2006) go beyond the differences in the use of LLS and propose a new topic of analysis that goes deeper into these differences, the developmental

patterns of the use of LLS. They stated that “few studies have attempted to analyze the degree to which such strategies form a systematic part of the learners’ development, and hence the extent to which this variation can be attributed to differences in the learners’ age” (p. 210). They analyzed studies concerning LLS and achievement at various levels of proficiency, the studies with students of school age; however, Tragant and Victori (2006) asserted that “the question as to just how these differences between students of different ages relate to their use of strategies is not addressed in these studies; nor do they trace the developmental pattern of strategic use across learners of different age groups (p. 211)”.

According to The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (1999), middle school students not only go through physical and emotional changes, but their cognitive structure also changes. Piaget proposes a theory of cognitive development in which a person goes through different stages: the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational stages. According to Piaget’s theory of cognitive development students in middle school go from the concrete operations stage to the formal operations stage. Dembo and Eaton (2000), citing Keating, assert that “children’s thinking changes dramatically as they go through adolescence, particularly their ability to use more advanced information processing skills and learning strategies” (p. 477).

Students in middle school definitely increase their thinking and processing information skills gradually. O’Malley and Chamot (1995), citing Brown et al., stated that:

older children are consistently revealed as active and strategic learners who gradually acquire a repertoire of strategies as they mature. Strategies in younger

children begin as task-specific activities and later may emerge into a broad repertoire of more flexible and generalizable skills. Although young children or developmentally delayed children may not use strategies spontaneously, they may, under direct instruction, employ strategies with specific tasks and as a consequence improve their memory performance. (p. 105)

Similarly, Cummins and Swain, cited by Muñoz (2006), argued that “older learners acquire cognitive/academic L2 skills more rapidly than younger learners because these are related to the development of literacy skills in L1 and L2. In particular, older learners show higher mastery of L2 syntax, morphology and other literacy-related skills, such as vocabulary and reading comprehension” (p. 11). Tragant and Victori (2006) referring to the strategies used by older students pointed out that “These strategies tend to be more sophisticated in terms of their cognitive demands, requiring students to take a more active part and to call on their creative and analytical skills, most of which are not amenable to observation” (p. 230).

When analyzing the differences between older and younger learners in their study, Tragant and Victori (2006) found that “with increasing age, students make greater use of more cognitively demanding strategies, such as analyzing, classifying, studying and using mnemotechniques, all of which require a higher degree of elaboration on the part of the learner than simply memorization strategies.”...“On the other hand, younger learners seem to be more dependent on the use of external sources, such as reference materials and friends or relatives who can provide clarification, or on working together” (p. 223).

Tragant and Victori (2006) based on a cross-sectional research undertaken by other researchers suggested that “for some strategies there would seem to be a

developmental trend across learners of different ages” (p. 212). They asserted that the results of a study carried out by Chesterfield and Chesterfield are significant because they suggest that there is a natural order in the development of learning strategies as well as because these patterns were found to be systematic regardless of the subjects’ level of proficiency (p. 212). Based on the results of their study, Tragant and Victori (2006) discovered that there is a development, over time, not only in the number of strategies but also in the nature of the strategies used:

...what comes out most clearly from the present analysis is the fact that for a considerable number of learners there was an observable progress in their reported strategy use, either in the numbers, or in the nature, of strategies reported or both. As these learners grew older they were able to report more strategies, showing therefore, at the same time, an increase in metacognitive awareness.

Similarly, a good proportion of the learners reported a wider range of behaviors over time, including more sophisticated strategies. (p. 231)

Regarding age and strategy training, O’Malley and Chamot (1995) asserted that even though most of the research on learning strategies has been conducted among adolescents and adult learners, there have been studies that show that children have been taught learning strategies to improve their reading comprehension, problem-solving in mathematics, and vocabulary learning.

Similarly, Bransford and Brown (2003), assert that children can be taught different metacognitive strategies to manage and enhance their own learning. They also suggest that strategies are not generic across all subject matters.

It is important to point out that young learners do come with previous knowledge about strategies; in fact young learners develop their own strategies without specific instruction. Bransford and Brown (2003) explain

It was previously thought that young children lacked the strategic competence and knowledge about learning (metacognition) to learn intentionally, but the last 30 years have witnessed a great deal of research that reveals hitherto unrecognized strategic and metacognitive competence in the young. (p. 96)

Overall, the relationship between age and use of language learning strategies has been difficult to determine, first of all because of the small amount of research conducted with young learners. Later on more research has been undertaken and results show that there might be a developmental sequence in the deployment of language learning strategies. It has been suggested that more research is needed to determine to what extent cognitive development affects use of the language learning strategies.

Language Learning Strategies and Achievement

Since the beginning of the research about learning strategies, the main objective was to identify what most successful learners do so that less successful learners could learn from that. Several studies have demonstrated that students who have a high level of achievement are those who use more learning strategies and in combination while students with low level of achievement use fewer learning strategies or do not know how their own learning is achieved, making it difficult for them to transfer some of the strategies to other tasks or to combine them successfully. According to Takeuchi, Griffiths and Coyle (2007), "... what determines learning outcomes is not the frequency

with which strategies are used, but the flexibility of strategy use in a specific context” (p. 75).

O’Malley and Chamot (1995) assert that studies prove that the performance in learning tasks has been enhanced by training students to use language learning strategies. They also suggest that metacognitive strategies help make the transfer of some cognitive strategies to other tasks; therefore, they suggest that both types of strategies should be paired in order to increase the benefits of learning strategy use. Similarly, Lessard-Clouston (1997) found that some strategies were used by successful learners as well as by unsuccessful learners with different results. He suggests that what makes the difference would be the use of metacognitive strategies. Likewise, Rockwell (2007) suggests that one characteristic that students with poor performance share is the lack of declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge about learning strategies. Along the same lines, Bransford and Brown (2003) argue the importance of the incorporation of metacognitive strategies in the curriculum in schools, because of their positive influence on student achievement and independent learning.

Takeuchi, Griffiths and Coyle (2007) assert that studies show that the difference in achievement is due to the combined use of various language learning strategies. Grenfell and Macaro (2007) explain that many studies examining learning strategies at higher levels of education show that those language learners were able to combine strategies effectively because they had developed metacognition.

Despite the results of many studies, showing a positive correlation between the use of language learning strategies and achievement, there have been many other studies that show no important correlation between the two. According to Takeuchi, Griffiths and

Coyle (2007) it is not clear why some studies show a strong relationship between the use of language learning strategies and proficiency and others do not. The authors suggest that other variables might have had more influence on the level of proficiency; they also suggest that the weakness of the instrument itself might have been to blame.

As has been shown on this section, many researchers have emphasized the importance of metacognitive learning strategies in the success or achievement of learning. However, other studies have shown that other types of strategies such as cognitive and social/affective were responsible for the achievement level (Takeuchi, Griffiths and Coyle, 2007).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This is an associational research study, using the causal-comparative research method. It was intended to identify the differences in the use of language learning strategies according to the student age and how these differences affected student achievement. This study was carried out with Spanish students at Sullivan Middle School.

Group	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
I	C1	O
	6 th grade students achievement	Use of LLS
II	C2	O
	8 th grade students achievement	Use of LLS

Population and Sample

The total school population at Sullivan Middle School for the 2009-2010 school year was 738 students distributed in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. The distribution was as follows: 31.7% in sixth grade, 36.7% in seventh grade, and 31.6% in eighth grade. The population was made up of students whose ages ranged from 11 to 16 years old with a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds, mostly African-American, Caucasian, Hispanic, and Asian. The percentual distributions was as follows: 34.7% African American students, 47.4% Caucasian students, 12.7% Hispanic students, 2.9% Asian students, and

2.3% other ethnicities. The population was composed of male and female students from different socio-economic backgrounds, with 49% male and 51% female. The total population was 467 students from sixth and eighth grade, 234 students in sixth grade, and 233 students in eighth grade.

The school year was divided into two semesters; every semester, language teachers get different groups to teach because foreign language is a semester class. For this reason, the sample consisted of students who were assigned to the researcher; therefore, it was a convenience sample made up of 37 students in sixth grade and 25 students in eighth grade. All the participants in this study came from sixth and eighth grades. Their ages ranged from eleven to twelve, and thirteen to fifteen respectively. The sixth grade sample was made up of 8 eleven year-old students and 29 twelve year-old students who came from a diversity of elementary schools. The gender make up was 21 male students and 16 female students. Most students in the sample had studied Spanish as a foreign language. Some of them had had Spanish for one year, others had studied it for two years, and another group had had it for three years. Very few students had not had any foreign language learning experience before. The eighth grade sample was made up of 5 thirteen year-old students and 20 fourteen year-old students. The gender make up was 13 male students and 12 female students. Eighth grade students, on the other hand, had studied Spanish either for five, four, three, or two years.

Instrumentation

Multiple instruments were used to identify the language learning strategies used by learners and their relationship with age and achievement. That allowed for more detailed and reliable data. I collected data using the following instruments:

- A questionnaire for demographic information
- The Young Learners Language Strategy Use Survey
- Grade records
- Students' language learning strategy journal.

The questionnaire asked for information about students' age, gender, ethnicity, years of previous language learning experience. It was given to the students at the beginning of the research period (see Appendix A).

The Young Learners Language Strategy Use Survey was designed by two of the most knowledgeable researchers in the field, Andrew Cohen and Rebecca Oxford, in 2002. The strategies in this survey are organized into six different types of strategies, namely listening, vocabulary, speaking, reading, writing, and translation strategies. The survey, administered at the beginning of the research process by the researcher, consists of seventy-five statements describing actions that people can take to learn languages. Students responded by marking with a plus, a check and a minus according to how well the sentences described what they do to learn Spanish (see Appendix B).

The grade records were obtained through a series of classroom activities (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary) students completed to assess their learning. Since the samples were from sixth and eighth grade, the complexity of the content varied from one sample to another. Special care was taken to organize the procedures in a similar way when students completed the activities, so that the only component that varied was the content.

A language learning strategy journal (see Appendix C) was kept by students for a period of two weeks. Instructions were clearly given and the researcher allowed 5

minutes prior to the end of class for students to write about the language learning strategies they used in class or during the day. In their journals, students had to answer as many of the following questions as applicable according to the lesson:

- Did you use any method to learn pronunciation? Which ones?
- Did you use any method for understanding when you listened to Spanish? Which ones?
- Did you use any method to help you speak in Spanish? Which ones?
- Did you use any method to help you read in Spanish? Which ones?
- Did you use any method that helped you write in Spanish? Which ones?
- Did you use any method that helped you remember the meaning of Spanish words? Which ones?

Strategies are not a fixed range of activities that students perform; rather, strategies change according to the tasks that are presented to students. Therefore, it was necessary to gather the data about strategy use while presenting students with different types of tasks.

Procedures

The school year is divided into two semesters and Spanish is a semester class. The research was implemented during the second semester of the 2009-2010 academic year. Since the study had sixth grade student participants who did not have any previous experience with foreign language learning, it was necessary to have them experience learning a foreign language to give them the opportunity to explore the use of language learning strategies while learning. The data collection was done in three phases.

In the first phase, students completed the Young Learners Language Strategy Use Survey at the beginning of the fifth week of the second semester of the 2009-2010 academic year. The survey was completed during a class period; the researcher gave clear instructions and answered questions students had regarding the survey. Students also completed the questionnaire for demographic information during a class period after instructions were given.

In the second phase, students were asked to keep a journal for a period of two weeks with detailed information about the strategies they used to learn or develop language skills and vocabulary. The researcher allowed five minutes before the end of every class period so that students could reflect upon the language learning strategies used to learn Spanish.

The third phase of the research was carried out simultaneously with the second phase. During this phase, students participated in activities for every language skill and grades were given for each activity. Grades from this phase were used in order to find the relationship between the use of language learning strategies and achievement. Activities included listening, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary. The procedures for every activity were the same for both sample groups. Activities were obtained from the text book students regularly use, the extra material that comes with the text book (including reading materials, audio materials, and videos), adaptations made to those materials, and visual material created by the researcher. Additionally, for the speaking activities visual, written, or oral prompts were given to students.

After the data was gathered, it was analyzed to identify the relationship between age and the use of language learning strategies, differences in the use of language

learning strategies between the two age groups, the types of language learning strategies that were predominately used in every age group and their frequency of use, and the difference in strategy clustering between the two age groups. Data was also analyzed to find the relationship between the use of language learning strategies and achievement obtained in the different activities. The relationship was analyzed in two areas: 1) the number of strategies used by students and achievement and 2) strategy clustering used by students and achievement.

Internal Validity

Some of the difficulties that could threaten the validity of this study are as follows:

- As mentioned in the review of literature there are many factors that can influence the Language Learning Strategy use such as gender, motivation, culture, level of proficiency, etc. Not much could be done to control these other factors since the sample was a sample of convenience.
- One internal validity risk is that the lack of previous foreign language experience by some sixth graders might have affected their Language Learning Strategy choice.
- The students' difference in level of proficiency may affect the use of Language Learning Strategies. Some sixth graders had only months of language instruction while some eighth graders had 4 to 6 years of language learning experience.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF DATA

This chapter, will describe the findings of the analyses of data and discuss the implications of those findings from the instruments used in this research: students' journals, a survey, and the grades record.

Students' Journals

Students' answers in the journals were organized based on the classification proposed by Oxford. Statements students made were placed on a specific strategy type. Tally points were given for every time a student reported using a specific strategy. Sometimes students' statements were not specific or clear enough so the researcher considered the type of activity carried out in class to classify the strategy used into a specific strategy.

The most reported strategy in sixth grade is "paying attention"; many students said that they focused and concentrated. Another most used strategy is "using resources for receiving and sending messages"; many students said that they used the book, what was written on the board and their notes. They also reported strategies such as: "getting help", "ask questions", "using external clues" (voice, body language), and "taking notes". This suggests that sixth grade students rely more on external sources. Even though "paying attention" is a metacognitive strategy, as described by students, it mainly focused on paying attention to the teacher's input.

Sixth grade students reported more observable behaviors and when they reported non observable behaviors their description is broad. They used words such as think,

study, and practice without many details. They reported using strategies such as using imagery (the pictures shown to them by the teacher in the flipcharts), formally practicing with sounds and writing system (“I read words out loud to myself”, “I say the new expressions over to myself”, writing words over and over). When reporting what they did to learn, many students reported class activities instead of what they did to learn. This seems to suggest that sixth grade students are aware of what they physically do to learn; however, they are less aware of their mental learning processes.

Less used strategies include reasoning deductively, analyzing expressions, analyzing contrastively across languages, translating, guessing using context clues, planning for a language task, self monitoring, recognizing and using formulas, grouping words and relaxation. There are a few sixth grade students who do report in detail the LLS they use. This indicates that some sixth grade students may be aware of the mental learning processes they go through; however the number of students that are aware seems to be limited.

Some eighth grade students reported using LLS some days and some days they do not report using strategies. Similar to the sixth grade students, eighth grade students also reported class activities instead of what they did to learn. This may suggest that students are not completely aware of what they do to learn or that they do not know how to verbalize their internal learning processes.

Some eighth grade students reported using a variety of strategies and they reported more non-observable behaviors such as: using key words when listening, placing new words into a context, recognizing and using formulas and patterns, selecting topics, ignoring words that they don’t know, planning for a language task, self-monitoring,

putting one's own language out of one's mind, listening to classmates to improve listening or correcting mistakes. This indicates that eighth grade students are more likely to be aware of the internal mental processes when they learn and that they use more cognitively complex strategies.

As observed in Table 4.1, sixth grade students used a total of 26 strategy types while the eighth grade students used a total of 36 strategy types. This suggests that older students use a wider range of strategies.

Table 4.1. Strategies reported by 6th and 8th graders in their language learning journals.

Strategy types	6 th graders	8 th graders
Grouping words	2	2
Placing new words into a context		4
Using imagery	26	5
Semantic mapping		3
Using key words	1	14
Representing sounds in memory and in written form	2	
Reviewing	1	4
Using mechanical techniques (writing words over and over)	3	1
Repeating	18	11
Formally practicing with sounds and writing system	19	3
Recognizing and using formulas and patterns	2	4
Using resources for receiving and sending messages (dictionary, book, notes)	62	19

Reasoning deductively	5	3
Analyzing expressions	9	4
Analyzing contrastively	8	3
Translating	22	8
Transferring		1
Taking notes	25	5
Using linguistic clues	4	10
Using other clues	8	9
Switching to the mother tongue		4
Getting help	17	3
Ignore words that I don't know		1
Adjusting or approximating the message		2
Coining words		1
Over viewing and linking with already known material	36	27
Paying attention/Concentrating	79	23
Planning for a language task	2	1
Self-monitoring	3	2
Using relaxation	2	
Using laughter		1
Taking risks wisely		5
Asking for verification or clarification	9	10
Developing cultural understanding		1

I put my language out of my mind		2
Listen to classmates for examples	5	3
Listen to classmates to improve listening or to correct mistakes		5
Memorizing	6	1
I take my time		1
Total counts	376	206

Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey

The Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey has a total of 76 statements and is divided into six groups of strategies: listening, vocabulary, speaking, reading, writing and translation strategies. Every statement in the survey describes a strategy that might or might not be used by students. The analysis and discussion of the findings in this section will be presented according to these 6 groups. Possible students' answers to the statements in the survey are: "plus" if the statement was like them, "check" if the statement was somewhat like them, and "minus" if the statement was not like them. Students' answers are shown in tables in terms of percentages.

Table 4.2 shows students' answers to the statements about what they do to listen more (1-5). Fifteen percent of sixth grade students answered that they listen to radio in the language while 8th grade students don't listen to radio in the language at all. Twenty-one percent of sixth grade students reported watching TV in the language or go to movies that use the language against 4% of eighth grade students. Forty-two percent of sixth graders reported listening to the language if they are in a restaurant or see movies in the

language against 32% of eighth graders who reported doing that. There is no significant difference in statement #5. These results seem to suggest that sixth graders tend to create more opportunities for listening in the target language than the eighth graders.

In the students' answers to statements about what they do to understand sounds (6-9), 70% of sixth graders reported that they find sounds in the target language that are like sounds in English, while 76% eighth graders reported using the same strategy. By the same token, 60% of sixth graders reported that they try to remember unfamiliar sounds they hear against 56% of eighth graders. Thirty-nine percent of sixth graders reported that they ask the person to repeat the new sound against 52 % of eighth graders. Thirty-nine percent of sixth graders reported that they listen to the rise and fall of sounds while only 28 % of eighth graders reported doing so. These results suggest that more sixth graders use strategies to try to understand sounds. Understanding individual sounds of a language is not as important as understanding main ideas, which may explain why eighth grade students don't use these strategies much.

In the students' answers to statements about what they do to understand what they hear and what they do if they still do not understand what someone says (10-18), a higher percentage of eighth graders seems to use strategies aimed at understanding what they hear. Statements 12, 14, 17, and 18 show a significant difference between sixth and eighth grade students in the use of strategies. This may indicate that eighth graders are more likely to use strategies when they come across listening comprehension issues.

Table 4.3 shows students' answers to the statements about vocabulary strategies, specifically about what they do to memorize new words (19-26); it shows that more sixth grade students use strategies to memorize vocabulary. This may suggest that eighth grade

students are less likely to use the strategies in the survey, but it may also suggest that they might use other strategies not mentioned in the survey.

Table 4.2. Percentage distribution of students' answers to statements 1-18 in the Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey. Listening Strategies

8th Grade						6th Grade					
Question #	Plus	Check	Minus	No Answer	Total	Plus	Check	Minus	No answer	Total	
1	0	0	100	0	100	3	12	85	0	100	
2	0	4	96	0	100	9	12	79	0	100	
3	0	4	96	0	100	6	15	79	0	100	
4	12	20	68	0	100	21	21	58	0	100	
5	44	28	28	0	100	46	27	27	0	100	
6	32	44	24	0	100	34	36	30	0	100	
7	16	40	44	0	100	21	39	40	0	100	
8	28	24	48	0	100	15	24	61	0	100	
9	4	24	72	0	100	21	18	61	0	100	
10	40	32	28	0	100	33	33	33	0	100	
11	36	36	28	0	100	42	30	27	0	100	
12	52	28	20	0	100	33	33	33	0	100	
13	36	28	36	0	100	27	45	27	0	100	
14	32	40	28	0	100	18	36	45	0	100	
15	40	28	32	0	100	33	42	24	0	100	
16	32	36	32	0	100	36	45	18	0	100	
17	32	28	40	0	100	18	30	52	0	100	
18	44	24	28	4	100	30	27	42	0	100	
Total	480	468	848	4		444	525	820			

Table 4.3. Percentage distribution of students' answers to statements 19-26 in the Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey. Vocabulary Strategies

8th Grade						6th Grade					
Question #	Plus	Check	Minus	No Answer	Total	Plus	Check	Minus	No answer	Total	
19	8	12	80	0	100	9	27	61	3	100	
20	20	44	36	0	100	12	30	55	3	100	
21	12	20	68	0	100	9	24	64	3	100	
22	20	24	56	0	100	33	18	45	3	100	
23	0	32	68	0	100	18	21	58	3	100	
24	8	8	84	0	100	9	30	58	3	100	
25	20	36	44	0	100	36	18	42	3	100	
26	12	24	64	0	100	33	42	21	3	100	

Total	100	200	500			159	210	404		
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In Table 4.4, students' answers about speaking strategies show that strategies 28, 32, and 33 are used very similarly by both sixth and eighth graders. On the other hand, more sixth graders appear to use strategies 27, 29, 30, 31, 35, 36, 37, 38, and 39. This suggests that sixth graders are more likely to use strategies to practice speaking and to overcome the lack of vocabulary when they talk.

Table 4.4. Percentage distribution of students' answers to statements 27-39 in the Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey. Speaking Strategies

8th Grade						6th Grade				
Question #	Plus	Check	Minus	No Answer	Total	Plus	Check	Minus	No answer	Total
27	16	24	60	0	100	36	42	18	3	100
28	16	44	40	0	100	24	33	39	3	100
29	24	16	60	0	100	27	36	33	3	100
30	24	4	72	0	100	36	27	33	3	100
31	16	24	60	0	100	27	45	24	3	100
32	20	40	40	0	100	12	40	45	3	100
33	32	36	32	0	100	42	22	33	3	100
34	20	28	52	0	100	18	21	58	3	100
35	36	28	36	0	100	36	39	21	3	100
36	20	28	52	0	100	18	36	42	3	100
37	24	32	44	0	100	30	42	24	3	100
38	16	16	68	0	100	18	39	39	3	100
39	20	44	36	0	100	27	45	24	3	100
Total	284	364	652			351	467	433	39	

Table 4.5 shows students' answers to the statements about what they do to read more, understand what they read, and what they do when they do not understand what they read (40-55). Sixth and eighth graders are not very likely to use strategies to read more or to create opportunities for extra reading practice. Sixth and eighth graders are similarly likely to use the strategies in the survey to understand what they read. However, eighth graders are less likely to underline a part of the text that seems important and mark

the reading in different colors to help themselves understand. Apparently eighth graders do not display many observable strategies. However, sixth graders have a higher percentage in the use of reading strategies.

Table 4.6 presents students' answers to the statements about what they do to write more, what they do to write better, and what they do if they cannot think of a word or phrase they want to write (56-71). There are some inconsistencies in the students' answers; for example, question 56 says "if the alphabet is different I practice writing it". Spanish and English use the same alphabet with just one extra letter in Spanish. Table 4.6 shows that 15 % sixth graders and 8% eighth graders use this strategy. This may suggest that students are either not being truthful or that some statements are confusing to them.

Table 4.5. Percentage distribution of students' answers to statements 40-55 in the Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey. Reading Strategies

8th Grade						6th Grade				
Question #	Plus	Check	Minus	No Answer	Total	Plus	Check	Minus	No answer	Total
40	4	4	88	4	100	9	33	58	0	100
41	8	4	84	4	100	18	27	55	0	100
42	4	20	72	4	100	15	36	48	0	100
43	20	24	52	4	100	15	45	39	0	100
44	20	32	44	4	100	18	42	39	0	100
45	24	36	36	4	100	33	27	39	0	100
46	24	36	36	4	100	33	33	33	0	100
47	32	40	24	4	100	39	42	18	0	100
48	28	44	24	4	100	33	42	24	0	100
49	4	20	72	4	100	33	21	45	0	100
50	8	40	48	4	100	12	42	45	0	100
51	4	8	84	4	100	21	30	48	0	100
52	4	0	92	4	100	12	33	55	0	100
53	16	40	40	4	100	9	45	45	0	100
54	32	32	32	4	100	30	39	30	0	100
55	12	28	52	8	100	36	39	24	0	100
Total	244	408	880	68		366	576	645		

Statements 62, 64, 67, 70, and 71 show a relevant difference in the use of such strategies by sixth and eighth graders. Questions 62, 64, and 67 refer to strategies that rely on outside resources. Statements 70 and 71 refer very simple strategies that don't demand higher thinking skills. Once more, sixth graders are more likely to use strategies for writing than the eighth graders.

Table 4.6. Percentage distribution of students' answers to statements 56-71 in the Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey. Writing Strategies

8th Grade						6th Grade				
Question #	Plus	Check	Minus	No Answer	Total	Plus	Check	Minus	No answer	Total
56	8	12	72	8	100	15	39	45	0	100
57	32	32	32	4	100	30	33	36	0	100
58	12	12	72	4	100	21	24	55	0	100
59	4	4	88	4	100	9	15	76	0	100
60	16	24	56	4	100	12	30	58	0	100
61	16	44	36	4	100	24	36	36	3	100
62	20	16	60	4	100	39	36	24	0	100
63	44	32	20	4	100	42	33	24	0	100
64	28	20	48	4	100	27	52	21	0	100
65	16	32	48	4	100	15	45	39	0	100
66	4	36	56	4	100	15	36	48	0	100
67	8	24	64	4	100	24	42	33	0	100
68	24	48	24	4	100	30	36	27	6	100
69	20	24	52	4	100	30	33	33	3	100
70	12	24	60	4	100	33	24	39	3	100
71	8	12	76	4	100	24	27	45	3	100
Total	272	396	864	68		390	541	639	18	

Table 4.7 presents students' answers to the statements about what they do when they translate and what they do to think in the new language. The most significant differences are in statements 72 and 75, sixth graders are more likely to use these strategies, both of which are complex. For statements 73, 74, and 76 both, sixth and eighth graders are similarly likely to use them.

Overall, results from the Survey show scattered data from which it is difficult to draw significant conclusions. More sixth graders seem to use the strategies in the survey than eighth graders. This might be because there are other strategies that eighth graders use that are not included in the survey. Sixth graders seem to get high scores when the strategies are more observable but also when they are more complex.

Table 4.7. Percentage distribution of students' answers to statements 72-76 in the Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey. Translation Strategies

8th Grade						6th Grade					
Question #	Plus	Check	Minus	No Answer	Total	Plus	Check	Minus	No answer	Total	
72	20	24	52	4	100	27	36	33	3	100	
73	20	48	28	4	100	36	36	24	3	100	
74	32	36	28	4	100	33	42	21	3	100	
75	4	24	68	4	100	18	30	48	3	100	
76	20	36	40	4	100	21	39	36	3	100	
Total	96	168	216	20		135	183	162	15		

Grades records/ Achievement

In this section, data about the relationship between the use of language learning strategies and grades will be analyzed.

Among sixth graders, 16.2 % failed the Spanish class, while only 4% of eighth graders failed Spanish class. Results from the Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey show that sixth graders are more likely to use strategies than eighth graders. However, statements in the students' journals show that eighth grade students use a wider variety of strategies and these are more complex and require higher order thinking skills.

Table 4.8 shows the number of strategies individual students reported using in the students' journals and their final grades for the semester. Numbers are scattered but overall it can be observed that eighth graders are more likely to use a greater number of

strategies, as can be observed in Table 4.9. It also shows that eighth graders are less likely to use fewer strategies than the sixth graders. It is important to note that the differences are not significant.

Table 4.8. Number of strategies used by sixth and eighth graders and their final grades.

6th Grade

Student	# Strategies used	Final grade
1	9	99
2	5	67
3	5	87
4	5	93
5	4	56
6	1	84
7	9	95
8	0	66
9	2	68
10	9	94
11	8	93
12	2	79
13	9	98
14	8	96
15	12	98
16	4	93
17	5	79
18	6	91
19	6	94
20	9	98
21	8	93
22	8	92
23	6	94
24	7	88
25	6	97
26	0	79
27	4	83
28	8	91
29	6	86
30	2	62
31	0	76

8th Grade

Student	# Strategies used	Final grade
1	3	96
2	6	78
3	0	72
4	12	97
5	4	94
6	5	67
7	8	98
8	8	93
9	10	92
10	6	89
11	10	87
12	6	79
13	3	87
14	3	83
15	3	85
16	3	94
17	4	83
18	6	97
19	4	79
20	4	97
21	12	98
22	6	82
23	11	93
24	3	83
25	5	96

32	5	88
33	3	97
34	6	99
35	3	95
36	2	97
37	3	69

In order to analyze the data to find the correlation between grades and strategy use, grades and number of strategies used were codified as shown in Table 4.10. The grades and the number of strategies beside them denote a strong correlation. If the number of strategies and the grades were one level up or down it denoted a medium correlation; similarly, if the number of strategies were two levels up or down it denoted a weak correlation. On the other hand, if there was a three or four level difference then there was no correlation.

In order to analyze the data to find the correlation between grades and strategy use, grades and number of strategies used were codified as shown in Table 4.10. The grades and the number of strategies beside them denote a strong correlation. If the number of strategies and the grades were one level up or down it denoted a medium correlation; similarly, if the number of strategies were two levels up or down it denoted a weak correlation. On the other hand, if there was a three or four level difference then there was no correlation.

Table 4.9. Percentage of number of strategies used by sixth and eighth graders.

Range	6th Grade	8th Grade
0-3	30	28
4-8	54	52
9-12	16	20
Total	100	100

Table 4.10. Strong correlation distribution

Grades	# of strategies used
100-93 (A)	12,11,10,9
92-86 (B)	8,7
85- 78(C)	6,5
77-70 (D)	4,3
69- 0 (F)	2,1,0

Table 4.11 shows that a correlation very likely exists between the number of strategies used by the students and their grades in both sixth and eighth grade students. It shows 70% and 68% correlation in sixth and eighth grades respectively. Students who used more strategies tended to get high grades while students who used fewer strategies were more likely to get lower grades. However, there were some students who used few strategies but got high grades; this could be due to their not being aware of the strategies they use, therefore could not report them. Another reason is that some strategies might have been used so much and become automatic, so students don't recognize them as strategies any longer.

Table 4.11. Percentage of correlation between number of strategies used by sixth and eighth graders and their grades.

	6th Grade	8th Grade
Strong correlation	38	24
Medium correlation	32	44
Weak correlation	19	16
no correlation	11	16
Total	100	100

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to examine the relationship between age, LLS use and achievement. Little information is known about the degree to which age influences the use of LLS in young learners. The results obtained confirm what had already been stated by various researchers in the field, that the relationship is hard to establish. Results from the students' journals and the Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey are in a way ambiguous and not conclusive. The Survey's results suggest, however, that more sixth graders are likely to use the strategies in the survey than eighth graders.

Results from the students' journals suggest that sixth grade students are more likely to use observable strategies and strategies that rely on external sources. Eighth grade students are more likely to have a broader variety of strategies than sixth grade students, report more non observable behaviors and use more cognitively complex strategies. More eighth graders are likely to use a larger number of strategies than the sixth graders. Both sixth and eighth grade students reported class activities instead of strategies which might indicate that at these ages some students are still not able to verbalize or recall their mental processes.

According to the results from the grades and the students' journals, a correlation seems to exist between the number of strategies used by students and their grades. Students who use a higher number of strategies get higher grades.

Some limitations of the present study should be noted. First, the unequal number of students in each grade might have influenced the percentages of the data. Second, the survey was too lengthy and some of statements were not clear enough to be completed in

one class period and on their own, especially for sixth graders. Had it been completed on two different days and with explanation for each single statement, answers could have varied. Third, the students' journals period did not allow for more reliable data to be gathered, as it was only two weeks. Had the students written in their journals for a longer period of time, more information would have been gathered and that data could have been more significant than that of the survey.

Future research needs to focus on the level of complexity of strategies used by young learners of different ages. A research study that focuses on a wider age difference could show more significant variation. It would be very interesting to understand the level of strategy awareness students have and why some sixth and eighth graders fail to report the use strategies.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaire for Demographic Information

Language Learning Strategy Use Questionnaire

The following questionnaire is intended to gather general information about the participants. All information will be kept confidential.

Please provide the information requested and put an X in the appropriate space.

Name: _____ **Age:** _____

Ethnicity: African -American _____ Asian _____ Caucasian _____

Hispanic/Latino _____ Other _____

Gender: Male _____ Female: _____

- Is this the first time you have taken a Spanish class? _____

If not, how long have you been learning Spanish? _____

- Have you studied any other foreign language? _____

If yes, how long did you study it? _____

Appendix B: The Young Learners Language Strategy Use Survey

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Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey

Andrew D. Cohen & Rebecca L. Oxford (2002)

Instructions: Below are a series of statements about language learning. In the line in front of each statement: Mark a plus (+) if the statement really describes you. Mark a check (✓) if the statement is somewhat like you. Write a minus (-) if the statement isn't like you.

Listening Strategies

What I do to listen more:

- ___ 1. I listen to the radio in the language.
- ___ 2. I watch TV shows in the language.
- ___ 3. I go to movies that use the language.
- ___ 4. I listen to the language if I am in a restaurant or see movies in the language.
- ___ 5. If I hear people speaking the language, I listen.

Add anything else you do to listen more:

What I do to understand sounds:

- ___ 6. I find sounds in the language that are like sounds in English.
- ___ 7. I try to remember unfamiliar sounds I hear.
- ___ 8. I ask the person to repeat the new sound.
- ___ 9. I listen to the rise and fall of sounds (the music of the language).

Add anything else you do to understand sounds:

What I do to understand what I hear:

- ___ 10. I listen for the important words.
- ___ 11. I listen for what seems interesting.
- ___ 12. I listen for words that are repeated.

Add anything else you do to understand the meaning:

What I do if I still don't understand what someone says:

- ___ 13. I ask the person to repeat.
- ___ 14. I ask the person to slow down.
- ___ 15. I ask a question.
- ___ 16. I guess the meaning from the person's tone (such as angry or happy).
- ___ 17. I guess the meaning from how the person moves or stands.
- ___ 18. I guess the meaning from what I heard before.

Add anything else you do to if you still don't understand what someone says:

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Vocabulary Strategies

What I do to memorize new words:

- ___19. I group the words by type (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives).
- ___20. I match the sound of the new word with the sound of a word I know.
- ___21. I use rhymes to remember new words.
- ___22. I make a picture of new words in my mind.
- ___23. I write the new word in a sentence.
- ___24. I write the new word on a card.
- ___25. I go over new words several times at first.
- ___26. Later I go to remind myself about words I learned earlier.

Add anything else you do to memorize new words:

Speaking Strategies

What I do to practice speaking:

- ___27. I make the sounds of the language until I can say them well.
- ___28. I imitate the way native speakers talk.
- ___29. I say new expressions over to myself.
- ___30. I practice using new grammar forms when I talk.

Add anything else you do to practice speaking:

What I do to talk with other people:

- ___31. I start conversations.
- ___32. I change the subject if I don't have the words I need.
- ___33. I plan what I am going to say.
- ___34. I ask the other person to correct me when I talk.

Add anything else you do to talk with other people:

When I can't think of a word or phrase I want to say:

- ___35. I ask the person to help me.
- ___36. I try to say it a different way.
- ___37. I use words from my own language.
- ___38. I use words from my own language but say them with sounds from the new language.
- ___39. I move my hands or body so the person will understand me.

Add anything else you do when you can't think of a word or phrase you want to say:

Reading Strategies

What I do to read more:

- ___40. I read a lot in the language.
- ___41. I read for fun in the language.
- ___42. I find things to read that interest me.
- ___43. I look for things to read that are not too hard.

Add anything else you do to read more:

What I do to understand what I read:

- ___44. I skim over a reading to get the main idea.
- ___45. I look for important facts.
- ___46. I read things more than once.
- ___47. I look at the pictures and what is under the pictures.
- ___48. I look at the headings.
- ___49. I think about what will come next in the reading.
- ___50. I stop to think about what I just read.
- ___51. I underline parts that seem important.
- ___52. I mark the reading in different colors to help me understand.
- ___53. I check to see how much I understood.

Add anything else you do to understand what you read:

What I do when I don't understand what I read:

- ___54. I guess the meaning by using clues from other parts of the passage.
- ___55. I use a dictionary to find the meaning.

Add anything else you do when you don't understand what you read:

Writing Strategies

What I do to write more:

- ___56. If the alphabet is different, I practice writing it.
- ___57. I take class notes in the language.
- ___58. I write other notes in the language.
- ___59. I write letters to other people in the language.
- ___60. I write papers in the language.

Add anything else you do to write more:

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What I do to write better:

- ___61. I plan what I am going to write.
- ___62. I use a dictionary or glossary.
- ___63. I read what I wrote to see if it is good.
- ___64. I ask someone to correct my writing.
- ___65. I rewrite what I wrote to make it better.
- ___66. I use the spell checker on the computer.
- ___67. I use the grammar checker on the computer.

Add anything else you do to write better:

What I do if I cannot think of a word or phrase I want to write:

- ___68. I ask someone for the word or phrase I need.
- ___69. I try to say it a different way.
- ___70. I use words from my own language.
- ___71. I use words from my own language but add new endings to those words.

Add anything else you do when you can't think of a word or phrase you want to write:

Translation Strategies

What I do when I translate:

- ___72. I plan what I want to say or write in my language and then translate it into the new language.
- ___73. I translate when reading to make sure I understand it.
- ___74. While I am listening to someone, I translate parts of what they say into my own language to help remember it.

Add anything else you do when you translate:

What I do to think in the new language:

- ___75. I put my language out of my mind.
- ___76. I try to understand without translating.

Add anything else you do to think in the new language:

If you have time, read the survey again. Find strategies that interest you. Ask the teacher about them.

Appendix C: Samples of Students' Language Learning Strategy Journal

March 22, 2010

Today in class we learned some new vocabulary. To help me understand I asked questions. I also listened to other peoples questions and repeated the words in my mind. I also put a picture of the word in my mind.

March 23, 2010

Today I watched a video to help learn the vocabulary. I paid attention and used context clues to help understand what they were saying.

March. 25, 2010

Today I paid attention, and asked questions when I did not help with our listening exercise.

March. 26, 2010

Today in class to help me learn I paid attention, I listened to words I knew, I wrote down the answers, and I asked questions.

March 22

I read the words more than once.

March 23

I listened for words I know and I used context clues

March 24

I listened for words I know.

March 25

I listened for words I knew

March 30

I tried to plan at what I would say,

I tried to map things out in my head.

April 1

I looked for cognates and read everything more than once.

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