EFL Learners' Preferences in the Implementation of Direct Learning Strategies in Learning Grammar

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Resumen

El objetivo del presente estudio fue identificar las estrategias de aprendizaje directas empleadas por los estudiantes de segundo año matriculados en el curso Gramática II, de la Universidad de Costa Rica en el Recinto de Golfito para aprender la gramática del idioma inglés. Por otra parte, la percepción de los estudiantes hacia la importancia de este componente del lenguaje así como las prácticas de enseñanza, los principios y percepciones del profesor a cargo del curso se analizaron con el propósito de comprender el entorno en el que el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje se lleva a cabo en cursos de esta naturaleza. Para obtener la información necesaria, diversos métodos de recolección de datos tales como observaciones no participativas, cuestionarios y una lista de comprobación fueron implementados. Los resultados demostraron que los estudiantes aplican los tres tipos de estrategias directas; a saber, estrategias de memoria, cognitivas, y de compensación. No obstante, se demostró que las estrategias cognitivas y de compensación se utilizan con más frecuencia que las estrategias de memoria. Es de suma importancia mencionar que este estudio contribuyó, en gran medida, a que el docente encargado del curso de gramática y sus estudiantes tuvieran una idea más amplia acerca de la pertinencia de la aplicación de las estrategias directas de aprendizaje. Se espera que bajo la luz de los resultados, tanto instructores como alumnos, mejoren y adopten nuevas tácticas para la enseñanza y aprendizaje de la gramática en miras de un desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa en el idioma meta más efectivo.

Palabras claves: aprendizaje de lengua extranjera, gramática, el papel de estudiante y del instructor, estrategias directas de aprendizaje

Abstract

The purpose of the following research is to report on a study which aimed at identifying the direct strategies employed by second-year foreign language learners enrolled in the course Grammar II at Universidad de Costa Rica, Golfito Site to learn grammar. Moreover, the students' perceptions toward current grammar teaching practices as well as the professor's grammar teaching principles and beliefs were analyzed for the purpose of better understanding the environment in which the learning process was taking place. In order to obtain the data of interest, different qualitative instruments such as non-participant

observations, questionnaires and a checklist were used. In the first place, this research has greatly contributed to the identification of many students' beliefs about grammar teaching and the learning process in general. Additionally, the results demonstrated that students implement the three kinds of direct strategies; namely, memory, cognitive, and compensation, but at different levels of frequency. In fact, they use cognitive and compensation strategies more often than memory strategies. It is also relevant to mention that this study may provide teachers and students with valuable insights about the implementation of direct learning strategies in learning grammar. As a final point, it is expected that in the light of the findings discussed in this paper, both instructors and students can adopt new tactics to facilitate the teaching and learning process and develop students' communicative competence in a more effective way.

Key words: foreign language learning, grammar, students' and teachers' role, direct learning strategies

1. Introduction

The purpose of learning a language is to use it effectively in real-life situations. That is why learners must be exposed to different learning processes that contribute to the development of the linguistic skills. Nevertheless, focus should also be paid to the language components that play a key role in learning the target language. Such is the case of grammar. Teaching grammatical structures and making students use them in a communicative fashion is a hard task, though. In some cases, instructors separate this essential component from the rest of the linguistic skills; that is, they make pupils learn the rules without providing them with tasks that allow students to use those structures effectively. Therefore, finding out the best way not only to learn but also to use simple as well as complex grammatical structures is one of the main goals teachers as well as students should devote attention to.

Instructors as well as pupils have to participate actively in the process of learning. However, teachers have been regarded as the ones who have the responsibility to make students learn the language. It is true that the professor has to provide learners with different resources to make the process more meaningful and useful, but there are tools students can implement to help themselves learn the language easily. Such is the case of the learning strategies proposed by Oxford. She developed a set of strategies based on empirical research to help language learners learn English without difficulty. These strategies are "steps taken by students to enhance their own learning" (Oxford 1). These learning strategies are "especially important for language learners because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence" (1). By means of learning strategies, learners "encourage greater overall self-direction,...which is particularly important for language learners because they will not always have the teacher around to guide them as they use the language outside the classroom" (10).

In view of the important role learning strategies play when assisting students in developing language learning, this study was intended to explore the impact that direct learning strategies exerted on facilitating second-year students' grammar learning process.

This study was based on a case study which was carried out with a group enrolled in the course Grammar II of the English Major at Universidad de Costa Rica, Golfito Site. With the main purpose of providing a whole picture of the kind of learning implemented to learn grammar in that specific setting, the investigators went deeper into the instructor's teaching grammar beliefs and principles as well as his practices in the classroom. In addition, the researcher deeply analyzed the students' role and their perceptions toward the current grammar teaching instruction they were being provided with.

Research Questions

- What are the instructor's teaching beliefs and principles and the students' perceptions towards grammar and grammar instruction?

- What is the role the English professor plays in encouraging students to implement direct learning strategies to use grammar communicatively?

- What kind of direct learning strategies do pupils implement to learn and use grammar?

- What recommendations can be provided as a way to improve grammar teaching and the learning process?

2.   Literature Review

2.1.   The role of grammar in the learning process

The purpose of teaching grammar either in an ESL or EFL context has been for decades a major issue for students and teachers alike. Al-Mekhlafi and Ramani claim that "researchers have debated whether grammar should be taught in the classroom, and students, for their part, have generally looked upon grammar instruction as a necessary evil at best, and an avoidable burden at worst" (69). That is, teachers have different perceptions about how it should be taught, and pupils consider it, although difficult, a necessary component for language learning to be successful.

According to Ellis, grammar teaching "involves any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it" (84). This means that teaching grammar does not necessarily mean just teaching the rules, but integrating different processes to make students capable of incorporating these rules when communicating. Therefore, not only tasks or classroom activities are mandatory. Providing students with tools out of class for learning and practicing a language becomes even more significant.

Even though there are strong arguments about particular ways of how grammar should be taught, there is no one single or clear approach to follow in the teaching and learning process. However, since the ultimate goal of learning a second language is to use it properly,

language professors must look for effective methods that allow pupils to directly interact with the target language or to ease the process of learning. As Oxford explains, the ultimate goal should be the promotion of communicative competence, and one tactic students can employ in order to achieve this is through the implementation of direct learning strategies.

2.2. Teacher's beliefs and role in the process of teaching grammar

The role the English professor plays when teaching grammar is crucial since he or she is the one who builds the students' knowledge through his or her teaching practices. In many circumstances it becomes difficult for language instructors to look for the most suitable teaching practices to help learners grasp the target language. Shavelson and Stern say that "what teachers do in the classroom is governed by what they believe and these beliefs often serve to act as a filter through which instructional judgments and decisions are made" (Abdullah 171).

Nowadays, there are some grammar teachers that perceive grammar as a set of rules to be learned in order to be reported in a paper-and-pencil test. What most language professors do, as stated by Al-Mekhlafi and Ramani, is to develop students' declarative knowledge, which is related to the knowledge about grammar itself, while leaving apart procedural knowledge, that is "the ability to use that grammar in actual communication" (78). They explain that this perhaps happens because instructors are asked to follow the institutions policies in which it is established that grammar has to be taught inductively (pattern drills, rule memorization). However, the teacher has the possibility to enhance the students' understanding and use of grammatical structures by identifying the most suitable ways of learning. Oxford explains that instructors can "identify learning strategies, conduct training on learning strategies, and help learners become more independent" (10). She suggests that when the instructor takes this role, "learners take more responsibility, more learning occurs, and both teachers and learners feel more successful" (11).

2.3. Learning Strategies

Learning strategies are "operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information" which "make learning easier, faster, and more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 8). The main goal of learning strategies, as stated by this expert, is to attain communicative competence[1] since they help pupils "participate actively in authentic communication" (8).

Oxford summarizes the benefits of learning strategies; she explains that such strategies are problem-oriented, are specific actions taken by the learner, involve many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive, support learning both directly and indirectly, are often conscious, can be taught, and are flexible (9). Also, the role the language instructor plays changes from teacher-fronted to more learner-centered classes.

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[1] Speakers' capability to speak a language with linguistic proficiency and to use language appropriately in different social contexts" (qtd. in Wong and Barrea-Marlys 62).

There are direct and indirect learning strategies. The former refers to the ones that "directly involve the target language" while indirect strategies "support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language" (Oxford 37-135). However, for the purpose of this research, direct strategies such as memory, cognitive, and compensation were the ones considered in order to explore the extent to which second-year-language learners employ them in order to facilitate the learning of grammar.

2.3.1. Direct Learning Strategies

Direct strategies require "mental processing of the language" (Oxford 37). They are divided into memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Each of them includes different processes and different activities are suggested.

2.3.2. Memory Strategies

Memory strategies have a specific function; they assist learners in storing and retrieving new information.

Creating mental linkages

Grouping: Classifying or reclassifying material into meaningful units.

Associating/elaborating: Relating new language information to concepts already in memory.

Placing new words into a context: Placing a word or phrase in a meaningful sentence, conversation, or story in order to remember it.

Applying images and sounds

Using imagery: Relating new language information to concepts in memory by means of meaningful visual imagery.

Semantic mapping: Making an arrangement of words into a picture, which has a key concept at the center or at the top, and related words and concepts linked with the key concept by means of lines or arrows.

Using key words: Remembering a new word by suing auditory and visual links.

Representing sounds in memory: Remembering new language information according to its sound.

Reviewing well

Structured reviewing: Reviewing in carefully space intervals.

Employing action

Using physical response: Physically acting out a new expression or meaningfully relating a new expression to a physical feeling or sensation.

Using mechanical techniques: Using creative but tangible techniques, especially involving moving or changing something which is concrete, in order to remember new target language information.

2.3.3. Cognitive Strategies

These strategies "enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means" (Oxford 37). That is, learners manipulate or transform the language.

Practicing

Repeating: Saying or doing something over and over.

Formally practicing with sounds and writing systems: Practicing sounds in a variety of ways, but not yet in naturalistic communicative practice.

Recognizing and using formulas and patterns: Being aware of using routine formulas.

Recombining: Combining known elements in new ways to produce a longer sequence.

Practicing naturalistically: Practicing the new language in natural, realistic settings.

Receiving and sending information

Getting the idea quickly: Using skimming to determine the main ideas or scanning to find specific details of interest.

Using resources for receiving and sending messages: Using print and non-print resources to understand incoming messages or produce outgoing messages.

Analyzing and reasoning

Reasoning deductively: Using general rules and applying them to new target language situations.

Analyzing expressions: Determining the meaning of a new expression by breaking it down into parts.

Analyzing contrastively: Comparing elements of the new language with elements of one's own language to determine similarities and differences.

Translating: Converting a target language expression into the native language or vice versa.

Transferring: Directly applying knowledge of words, concepts, or structures from one language to another in order to understand or produce an expression in the new language.

Creating structure for input and output

Taking notes: Writing down the main ideas or specific points.

Summarizing: Making a summary or abstract of a longer passage.

Highlighting: Using a variety of emphasis techniques to focus on important information in a passage.

2.3.4. Compensation Strategies

Compensation strategies "allow learners to use the language despite their often large gaps in knowledge" (Oxford 37). These strategies "are intended to make up for an inadequate repertoire of grammar, and especially, of vocabulary" (47).

Guessing Intelligently

Using linguistic clues: Seeking and using language-based clues in order to guess the meaning of what is heard or read in the target language.

Using other clues: Seeking and using clues that are not language-based in order to guess the meaning of what is heard or read in the target language.

Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing

Switching to the mother tongue: Using the mother tongue for an expression without translating it.

Getting help: Asking someone for help by hesitating or explicitly asking for the person to provide the missing expression in the target language.

Using mime or gesture: Using physical motion.

Avoiding communication partially or totally: Avoiding communication when difficulties are anticipated.

Selecting the topic: Choosing the topic of conversation in order to direct the conversation to one's own interests and make sure the topic is one in which the learner has sufficient vocabulary and grammar to converse.

Adjusting the message: Altering the message by omitting some items of information, making ideas simpler or less precise.

Coining words: Making up new words to communicate the desired idea.

Using a synonym: Getting the meaning across by describing the concepts or using a word that means the same thing.

It is relevant to explain that for each of the previous strategies described, there is a variety of activities and exercises students can implement when learning a language.

3. Main Body

3.1. The instructor's grammar teaching beliefs and principles

Language instructors play a significant role in the process of learning. Their beliefs and teaching principles toward grammar instruction, specifically, influence their teaching practice. Shavelson and Stern have explained, that "what teachers do in the classroom is governed by what they believe" (qtd. in Abdullah). In order to test that theory, the professor in charge of the Grammar II course was asked different questions regarding his perceptions and principles toward grammar instruction in order to be tested with his current grammar teaching practices observed during the non-participant observations.

Regarding the teaching methodology, the professor explained that students must be provided with "teaching by doing" since "theory should lead to practice so that students may be able to internalize and spontaneously use the target language." When this instructor was asked if his teaching philosophy matched with how he was taught, he made clear that not exactly because "after years of teaching experience, every professor develops his own eclectic method." This teacher considers that grammar "ought to be taught thoroughly because it constitutes the core of the language; it is the base upon which students build both oral and written communication." He also explained that he plays the role of a "guide to the students to discover the intricacies of the language by themselves." He made clear that "it is around pupils that the class should center upon because they are the basic element teachers work it." This participant also explained that the best way to teach grammar to students "is through the Communicative Approach." He pointed out that his students use grammar communicatively "when they interact with each other and try to correct their own mistakes; the same occurs when they work in groups." Therefore, he was asked about the activities that he implemented to teach grammar. He replied that he applies "different techniques such as individual, group, or pair work suited to the necessities of a particular group." He also mentioned that "peer correction is a very useful technique because students analyze and try to correct their own mistakes, and it also fosters oral communication." He was asked if his students were provided with communicative tasks in order to foster grammar understanding; he said that they are when they interact with each other and try to correct their own mistakes; the same occurs when they work in groups; oral communication is fostered as well.

According to the information described above, it can be concluded that this professor implements activities for pupils to develop communicative competence. However,

throughout the observations, none of these processes or procedures could be observed. First, the instructor said that the best way for students to be taught is through the communicative approach, but all the teaching and learning practices he carried out during the four observations were totally grammar-centered in which the professor was the provider of knowledge and the students were just passive receivers. Moreover, he explained that his role is of a guide while the students' role is of active participant. Nonetheless, it could be proved that he implemented activities and exercises in which learners had to write sentences in isolation and complete fill-in-the-blanks exercises. Students were also asked about the kind of activities the professor implemented during the lessons in order to triangulate the information. This information is represented in the following graph.

Fig. 1. Are the activities implemented in class grammar-based?
*Source: Students questionnaire*
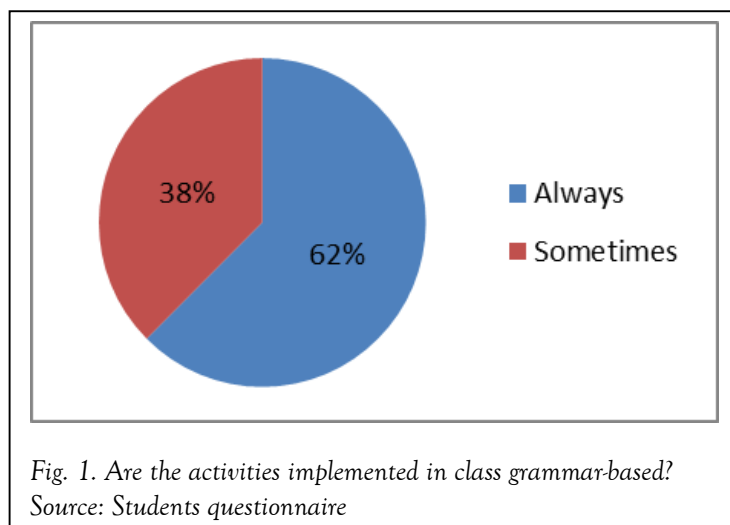
The previous graph shows that 62% of the students say that the teacher always implemented grammar-based exercises while 38% state that he did it only sometimes. However, when pupils were asked about the activities that the professor applied during the lessons, they chose grammar-based exercises only. This information is shown in the following graph.

As it is shown, most of the learners chose grammar-based exercises. For instance, the eight students chose such activities as formulation of questions and sentences, fill in the blanks, and completion of paragraphs with grammatical structures. Information gap activities and writing paragraphs were also implemented. However, during the period of observations, none of these two activities were implemented. Moreover, when the students were asked if the activities used by the English professor were enough to learn and use the language appropriately, all of them explained that they were not. They mentioned:

"No, because the classes are so repetitive and the professor just focuses on one kind of practice."

"No, I believe that for this course the teachers should implement such activities as writing short paragraphs even though the course is about grammar."

"In my opinion, they are not enough since the abilities are not studied as a whole. It is necessary to include all of them, not only grammar."

Fig. 2. Which activities are implemented by the professor during the grammar lessons?
Source: Students' questionnaire
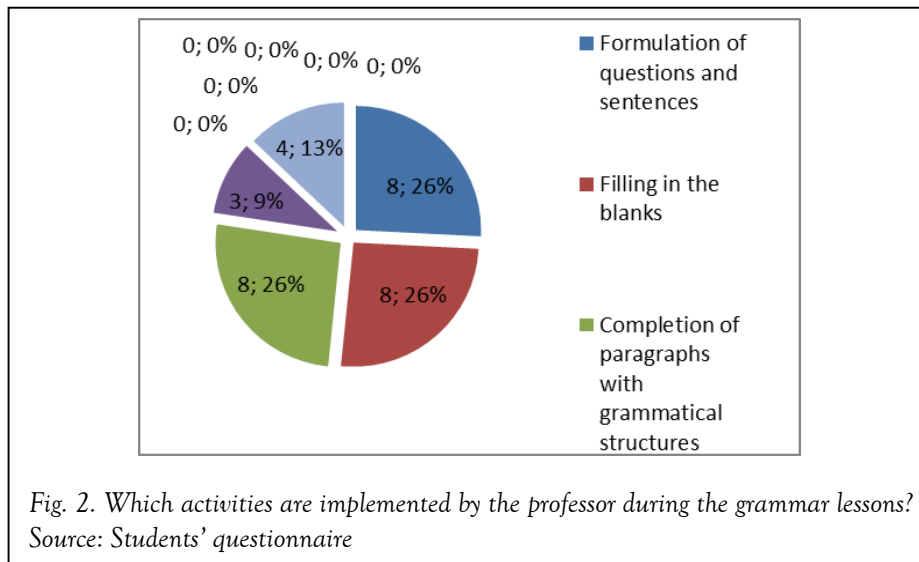
In order to verify what the professor said about his communicative teaching practices and what the researcher observed during the observations, pupils were also asked if there was opportunity in the classroom to put into practice, in a communicative fashion, the grammatical structures studied. The following figure represents the students' responses.

Fig. 3. Is there opportunity in the classroom to put into practice, grammatical structures?
Source: Students' questionnaire
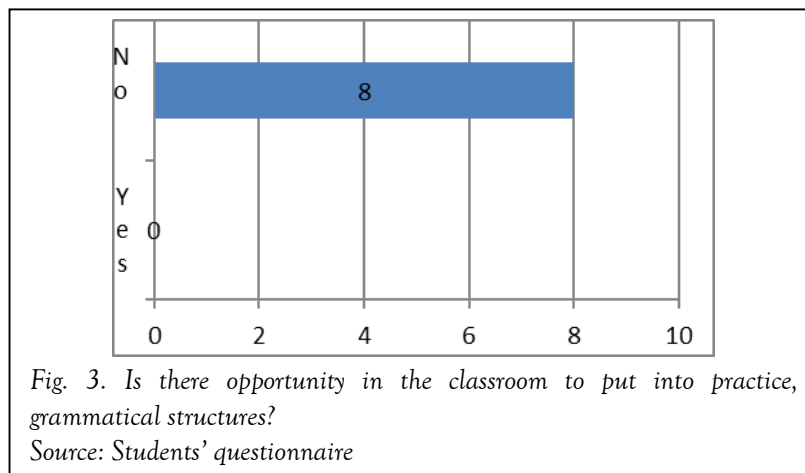
The previous graph shows that the 100% of the students said that there is no opportunity to practice the structures they are exposed to; that is, the activities implemented do not resemble real-life situations. Students were asked why, and the following was what they answered:

"In the grammar class that does not happen; it is the only thing that is missing since the professor explains the rules very well. However, it is important that he provides a more interactive environment."

"Sincerely, I do not remember if the teacher uses activities that resemble real life."

"In the grammar course II those kinds of activities do not exist; there is only emphasis on short practices like writing sentences."

"What the professor does is to ask us to write sentences based on real-life situations."

This portrays that the English professor did not use communicative activities, and that he just provided students with grammar-based activities.

3.2. The students' perceptions toward grammar and grammar instruction

The population chosen for the study believed that grammar plays a key role when learning English. Therefore, they were asked in which ways they considered it influences the process. Students gave similar opinions. For example, they mentioned:

"With a good grammar command, one can dominate the other areas."

"It helps us to form logical structures."

"Grammar is the only way to learn how to say things correctly when writing and speaking."

"Grammar is so important; without grammar, there is no effective communication."

"I considered that grammar is the basis of language because it is the guide that tells the student how to speak and how to write correctly."

Principally, what students consider is that without a formal instruction of grammar, no one can speak the language accurately and effectively. After pupils gave their opinions about what grammar meant for them and the importance it has when learning English, they were asked about their beliefs and perceptions toward the grammar instruction. The following table contains the answers they provided.

Table 1 shows that what students like the most about the grammar lessons is the way the professor explains. The majority of the students said that the professor explains clearly and that it facilitates the comprehension of the grammatical rules studied. On the other hand, they clarified that what they do not like is the amount of contents they are exposed to, the quantity of grammar practices, the similar classes they are immersed in, and the amount of time spent to complete grammar exercises; some explained that it is so little. Therefore, it is concluded that that the professor provides the learners with clear explanations of the grammatical structures, but he just provides pupils with similar activities in which the learners have to use the patterns in a non-communicative fashion like formulation of questions and sentences, fill.in-the-blanks exercises, practice on the whiteboard, correction of sentences, identifications of logical order of sentences.

Table 1	
What students like about the grammar classes	What students do not like about the grammar lessons
The teacher explains very well, and it is easy to understand.	Classes are always the same and that makes them tiring.
To learn the grammatical structures because they are essential for using the language.	When the professor explains a topic, we have to develop the exercises quickly with no interactive activities.
The kind of grammar exercises because in that way I can realize that I have learned.	There are a lot of topics and little practice and the topics cannot be studied deeply.
	We have to learn a lot of details, a lot of information.
Source: Students' questionnaire	

To make clear if students were aware of the necessity to improve the grammar lessons, they were asked if they considered necessary the implementation of communicative activities, such as being exposed to real-life situations. The graph below clearly represents their answers.

Fig. 4. Do you consider necessary to be exposed to classroom tasks that resemble real life?
Source: Students' questionnaire
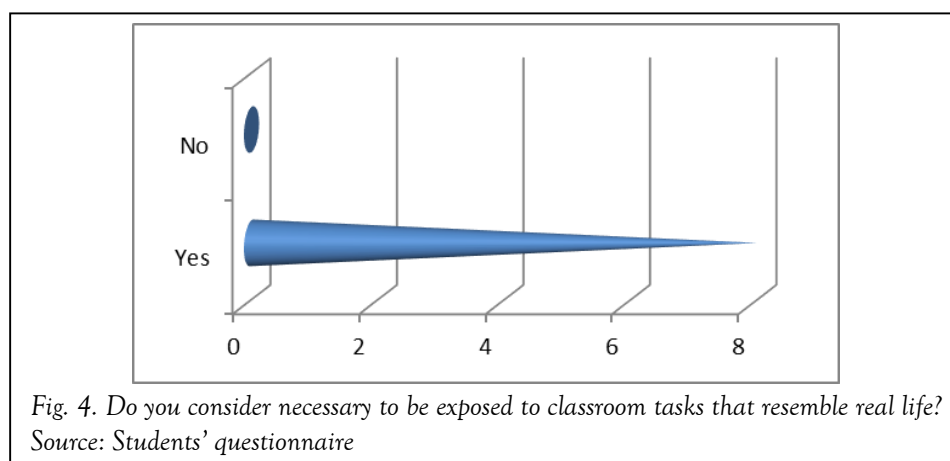
It is noticed that 100% percent of the students consider that being provided with activities that allow them to use the language communicatively is pertinent. In order to support their answers, they explained that it is important to be provided with such activities since:

"We learn more because the language is being used as in real life."

"We get more familiar with the language."

"Most of the activities must be related to real life because in that way we will be ready to face different real job situations."

3.3. Direct learning strategies implemented to learn grammar

Before asking the subjects which direct learning strategies they implement to learn and use grammar effectively, they were asked if grammar was difficult for them, and what was the most difficult part. All the students said grammar is difficult, and that among the factors that make grammar hard for them is the amount of information they have to study, and sometimes they have to work quite fast in order to study all the contents established in the course program. During the observations, the researchers could notice that the professor explained the topics very fast. He started to explain the use of an auxiliary, for example, and then asked the pupils to write sentences using that structure. Then, he started with another auxiliary and did exactly the same without giving students time to ask or use the pattern in a different exercise.

3.3.1. Memory strategies

These strategies help learners to cope with the difficulty of remembering such elements of a language as vocabulary. There is an interesting phrase Oxford uses to describe these strategies. She says that students have to take care of their memory, and their memory will take care of them (39). In order to get data regarding memory strategies, the researcher provided the subjects with a checklist in which they had to choose the kind of activities they employed. The checklist was classified into the categories and activities in which memory strategies are divided.

Fig. 5. Students' preferred memory strategies
*Source: Students' checklist*
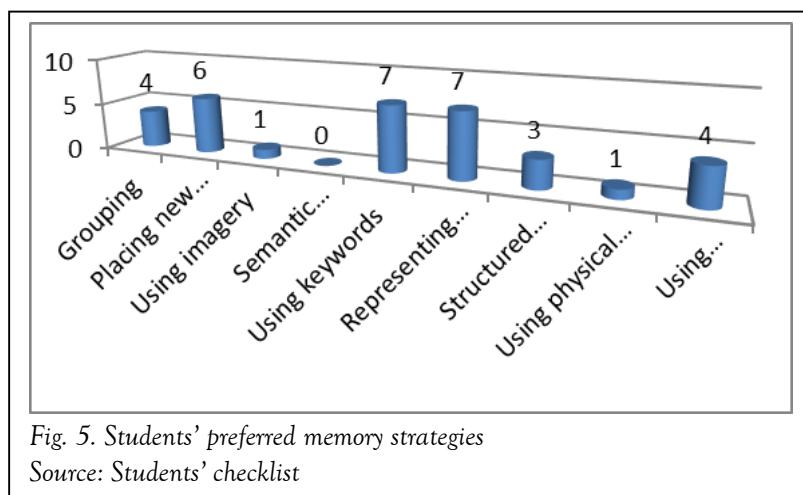
The previous exhibit represents the activities that students chose as the ones they use to learn grammar. Grouping, placing new words in context, using imagery, using keywords, representing sounds in memory, structured reviewing, using physical response, and using mechanical techniques were the one implemented by the students. The only one that is not used by learners is semantic mapping. Only four students out of eight chose grouping. An example of such a strategy is classifying language material into meaningful units. Then, six students out of eight selected the strategy of placing new words into context; they place a word in a meaningful sentence in order to remember it. Only one student chose that he uses imagery as a way to facilitate learning. In this strategy what students basically do is to relate

words to mental images to easily remember those words. Seven students out of eight said that they use keywords; that is, they associate the sounds of native words to the sounds of the foreign words to remember them more easily. In the same way, seven students said that they implement representing sounds in memory. In this case what learners commonly do is to remember new language information according to its sounds. The graph also shows that three students apply structured reviewing; in this kind of strategy what they do is to review in carefully spaced intervals; that is, they go over the information at first close together and then more widely spaced apart. The two final memory strategies that the subjects implement are using physical response and using mechanical techniques. In the former only one student chose that one and in the latter, four out of eight selected it as a way to assist their learning of grammar. As a result of this information, it is concluded that learners implement more such strategies as placing new words into context, using keywords, and representing sounds in memory.

3.3.2. Cognitive strategies

The main feature of cognitive strategies is the manipulation or transformation of the target language by the learner (Oxford 43). The following graph shows the kind of cognitive strategies pupils use to enhance the learning of English.

Fig 6. Cognitive strategies students use the most
*Source: Students' checklist*
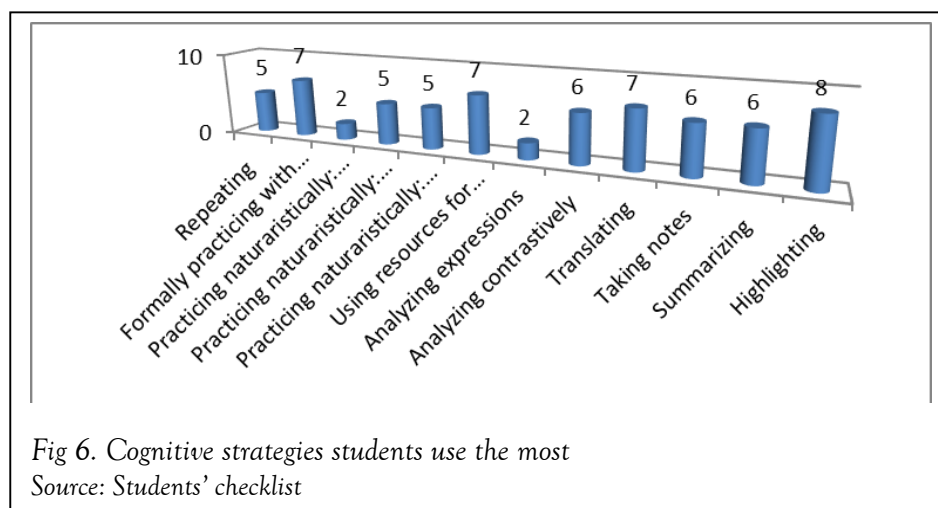
The previous graph depicts that five students out of eight implemented repeating. In the case of formally practicing with sounds, seven students stated that they implement this strategy. In practicing naturalistically, students implement different activities such as speaking with native speakers, listening to music, and testing. In the case of texting in English, five students chose it. When using resources for receiving information such as reading magazines, list of verbs, and using dictionaries, grammar books, and newspaper, seven students out of eight selected these. In the case of analyzing contrastively, six students agreed on its use; what students do in this case is to compare English to Spanish to remember them easily. The graph represents that the majority of the learners, seven exactly, chose translating as one strategy they commonly implement. Then, six students out of the eight

chose taking notes and summarizing as some cognitive strategies they apply. Finally, all of the subjects use highlighting as a strategy to help them grasp grammar in an easier manner.

The information clearly shows that most of the students implement cognitive strategies to facilitate their learning process as opposed to memory strategies. That is, more than half of the subjects selected cognitive strategies. On the contrary, in memory strategies there were pupils that did not choose some strategies like semantic mapping. Moreover, few students chose such memory strategies as using imagery and using physical response.

3.3.3. Compensation strategies

These strategies "enable learners to use the new language for either comprehension or production despite limitations in knowledge" (Oxford 47). They are intended to "make up for an inadequate repertoire of grammar, and, especially, of vocabulary" (47).

Fig. 7. Preferred compensations strategies employed by language learners
Source: Students' checklist
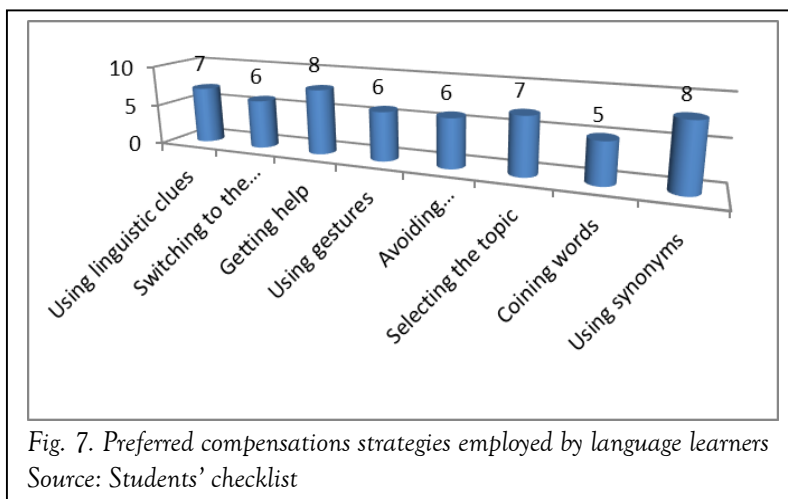
The previous chart clearly portrays the type of compensation strategies students implement. In the case of using linguistic clues, such as guessing the meaning of words through context, seven students out of eight chose it. Six students expressed that they switch to Spanish when they do not know how to say a word or phrase in the target language. Moreover, all of the students said that they look for help when they do not know how to say something. In the case of using gestures and avoiding communication when they do not know the topic of discussion, six students expressed that they implement this. Seven learners said that they select the topic which they know better in order to avoid making mistakes. Moreover, students used to coin words; that is, making up new words to communicate the desired idea. Five pupils out of seven chose this. And finally, all of the students expressed that they use synonyms when they do not know a word in the target language.

It is interpreted that the majority of the participants implement compensation strategies since these kinds of strategies help students overcome knowledge limitations; the subjects try to compensate the lack of knowledge.

3.4. The role of the English professor in the implementation of direct learning strategies

In order to identify the participation the language instructor has when encouraging students to implement learning strategies to learn grammar, he was provided with a checklist that included the three kinds of direct strategies. He was also asked if grammar was difficult for his students and why, and what the most difficult for his students regarding grammar was. First, he said that his students find grammar difficult since they have difficulties internalizing and using the structures of the target language in an automatic way. He explained that the most difficult for them is the exceptions to the rules because they are very numerous. He basically used formulas and taught grammar inductively and deductively.

Table 2 Memory Strategies		
Memory Strategies	**Yes**	**No**
Acting out words to facilitate learning.		x
Rewriting rules and words or structures to facilitate learning.	x	
Relating words to mental images to facilitate learning.		x
Associating the sounds of native words to the sounds of the foreign words.		x
Classifying language material into meaningful units.	x	
Placing a word in a meaningful sentence in order to remember it.	x	
Making an arrangement of words into a picture, which has key concepts.	x	
Reviewing in carefully spaced intervals.		x
Source: Teacher's checklist		

Table 3 Cognitive strategies		
Cognitive Strategies	**Yes**	**No**
Listening to music.		x
Saying or doing something over and over.	x	
Practicing sounds in a variety of ways.	x	
Reading magazines, list of verbs, using dictionary, grammar books, and newspaper.	x	
Speaking with native speakers.		x
Texting in English.	x	
Comparing English words to Spanish words to remember them.	x	
Translating words.		x
Writing down what the professor explains.	x	
Summarizing rules or information of the course book.	x	
Highlighting important information to remember it easily.	x	
Analyzing the parts of a word or sentence to understand its meaning.	x	
Source: Teacher's checklist		

It is concluded that the language professor implements more cognitive strategies than memory or compensation. The instructor prefers that pupils manipulate and transform the language in order to learn grammar better. Yalcin and Yalcin explain that language leaning strategies, "while non-observable, consciously or unconsciously used in cases, give language teachers valuable clues about how their students assess the situation, plan, appropriate skills so as to understand, learn, or remember new input presented in the classroom" (155). That means that professors have the responsibility of helping students find the ways to improve their language learning process to become more effective language users.

Table 4 Compensation Strategies		
Compensation Strategies	Yes	No
Guessing the meaning of words through context.	x	
Using Spanish when you do not know how to say that in the target language.		x
Asking for help when you do not know how to say something.	x	
Using body gestures to explain what you what to express.	x	
Avoiding saying something when you do not how to say it in English.		x
Choosing the topic of discussion in which you have more knowledge.		x
Making up new words to communicate the desired idea such as *paper holder* for *notebook*.		x
Getting the meaning across by describing the concept or using a word that means the same.	x	
Source: Teacher's checklist		

3.5. Recommendations for improving the teaching and learning of grammar

As Savage, Gretchen, and Donna explain, grammar is regarded as a "necessary "master" skill that enables competence to develop in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing" (2). That is, this language component is essential for any language learner to really understand and use a language properly. According to Larsen-Freeman, "grammar knowledge is important, but only insofar as it enables students to communicate "accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately" (cited in Savage, Gretchen, and Donna 2). Therefore, it is quite advisable that the language instructor becomes aware of the multiple ways he can implement to allow pupils to really accomplish the ultimate goal of learning a second language, which is speaking it communicatively.

Different approaches as well as methods have emerged as a way to contribute to helping language learners to learn and use the grammatical structures in factual communication. However, it is quite important to keep in mind that the kind of approach and methodology chosen have to be based on the kind of learners language instructors work with because, in that way, they can make sure they are attaining learners' immediate needs and interests. For instance, in the case of this specific study, it was shown that the participant students consider that being provided with grammar-based exercises do not allow them to develop competence

in language use. They are aware of the fact that being exposed to communicative or real-life situations certainly helps them to improve their oral skill, and thus, communicate effectively. All of them expressed that this kind of exposure is quite essential because in that way they can get familiar with situations they might face outside the classroom. For these kinds of students, communicative activities are the ones that satisfy their needs.

When teachers become aware of the necessities of the population they have, it is highly advised to look for ways in which they can assist learners more meaningfully. When students are not in the classroom, they have to cope with the language difficulties by themselves. That is why it is recommended that teachers train students in using strategies to enhance the learning process. The promotion of learning strategies does influence positively the learning process; therefore, defined action plans that encourage the implementation of such strategies is an excellent option to empower pupils during the process of learning.

4. Conclusions

After carrying out a thorough analysis of the information gathered, the investigator arrived at the following conclusions:

Even though the program of the Course II designed for second-year English students sets the parameters for the language professor to implement an eclectic approach to teaching, and activities in which students use in context what they learn, both were not fully implemented by the instructor observed since he did not employ an eclectic approach. The teacher just used the same methodology (teacher-based lessons) during all the lessons observed even though he made clear in the questionnaire that he implemented a communicative approach. The professor did not provide students with communicative activities as it was shown in the students' responses, which portrayed that the professor just applied such activities as formulating sentences and questions, filling in the blanks, or completing paragraph with the underlined structure. This can be contrasted with the observations carried out. The professor just followed the same approach to teaching; that is, a traditional approach in which grammatical structures were taught in isolation.

It was also found that students find grammar quite useful for them to develop competence in language use. They made clear that without this language component, they cannot speak or read the language accurately. The language learners generally said that grammar is the basis to develop the ability to speak the target language. However, they claimed that without effective learning and communicative tasks, effective learning cannot take place. They considered that being exposed to tasks that resemble factual events is quite important because, in that way, they can be trained to succeed in language use outside the classroom.

Another conclusion from this study is that students find grammar difficult because they have to learn a lot of contents in a short period of time. Students commented that each topic is studied fast and that little practice is given, which makes the process of learning the

grammar difficult. Therefore, in order to find what students did in order to bridge that gap, they were asked about the kind of learning strategies they implement. Regarding memory strategies, the most useful tactics were placing new words into context, using keywords, and representing sounds in memory. Second, referring to cognitive strategies, most of the strategies proposed by Oxford were applied by the language learners. That is, the majority of the pupils chose repeating, formally practicing with sounds, practicing naturalistically, using resources for receiving information, analyzing contrastively, translating, taking notes, summarizing, and highlighting as the preferred ones. Finally, regarding compensation learning strategies, the students agreed on implementing such strategies as using linguistic clues, switching to the mother tongue, getting help, using gestures, avoiding communication, selecting the topic, coining words, and using synonyms.

However, among the three different direct strategies; namely, memory, cognitive, and compensation, the two latter are the ones that are used the most by the learners as opposed to memory strategies. And among all the direct strategies that pupils use to enhance the learning of grammar, highlighting (cognitive), and getting help and using synonyms (compensation) are the preferred strategies chosen by the students. Nevertheless, from all the information obtained, it can be concluded that, even though students find grammar difficult, and state that they employ different learning strategies to improve the acquisition of the language, this could not be supported with what they actually did in the classroom. During all the observations, students just played the role of passive receivers of information. They did not ask any questions or comment on the topic; they did not employ any strategies. The only strategy that was implemented was that of taking notes.

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