UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Modern Languages

An alternative approach to strategy instruction: the role of learners' goals and mediation in the development of strategic language learning

by

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ABSTRACT

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AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO STRATEGY INSTRUCTION: THE ROLE OF LEARNERS' GOALS AND MEDIATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC LANGUAGE LEARNING

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The issue of teaching language learning strategies to EFL/ESL learners has been controversial over the past few decades. Whereas empirical studies make pedagogical recommendations and support the idea of directly training students in the use of strategies, overall findings reveal only partial success after strategy teaching or training. Besides, mainstream language learning strategies and strategy instruction research has been underpinned by cognitive theory, leaving aside the social and cultural aspects of learning. In a turn to sociocultural theory, it has been argued that strategies are related to both individual cognitive processes and the mediation of the practices in which learning takes place (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Gao, 2006; Parks & Raymond, 2004). Likewise, learners' language goals seem to have a significant role in how strategic learning progressively develops (Gillette, 1994; Da Silva, 2008).

Grounded on sociocultural theory, this study investigates how strategic learning develops without direct teaching of strategies, but from the mediation of learners' goals and their reflection on classroom activity. In seeking for methodological appropriateness, the present study has combined qualitative research procedures with alternative methods from those utilized intervention studies. This was achieved by the implementation of a goal-oriented portfolio project and a learning journal into a language classroom of a TEFL program at a public university in Mexico. Portfolios and learning journals had a twofold purpose: mediate students' learning and collect data. Eighteen undergraduate students learning English as a foreign language participated in the study. Data gathered from students' written reflections over a fourteen-week period provided with evidence on how mediated and goal-oriented activity facilitates students' strategic learning. Findings suggest that learners can take a more strategic approach to language learning if classroom practices are intentionally changed to this purpose. Moreover, they indicate that the notion of development is essential to the understanding of how learners use strategies. The study itself aims to help language teachers identify application for their own classrooms and to inform future research works framed within the framework of sociocultural theory.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Maria Magdalena Escobar Mendoza

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

An alternative approach to strategy instruction: the role of learner's goals and mediation in the development of strategic language learning

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

EFL	English as a foreign language
ELT	English language teaching
L1	Participant's native language
L2	Participant's foreign language learned at an educational setting
LLS	Language learning strategies
SAC	Self-Access Centre
SBI	Strategy based instruction
SCT	Vygotsky's sociocultural theory
SI	Strategy instruction or training
TELF	Teaching English as a Foreign language
TL	Target language

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In the last four decades, research into language learning strategies has generated a plethora of information about the importance of strategies in language learning and the potential benefits of training learners' in the use of strategies. The existing literature on language learning strategies and strategy instruction, largely relied on cognitivist theories and a positivistic stance, has provided interesting insights about how language learners employ strategies in learning a second or foreign language; however, some important questions about learners' strategic behaviour have remained unanswered. And, the field has yet to successfully prove how the direct teaching of strategies contributes to effective learning (Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Macaro, 2009). Furthermore, mainstream strategy research has isolated 'good language learners' based on the strategies they use regardless the type of classroom activity students are exposed to, students' language learning goals motives shaping their learning (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Gillette; 1994).

This chapter contextualises the present study on strategic language learning and on the role played by learner's goals and tool mediation in the development of strategies. The present chapter also opens the discussion about the need to adopt and alternative approach to strategy instruction. Rather than training language learners on specific type and number of strategies, the present study aims to go one step forward as it suggests that strategic learning can be mediated, and in turn, developed by introducing new learning tasks as part of classroom *activity*. It will begin with an overview of language learning strategies and strategy instruction research. The first section highlights the pitfalls of the LLS and SI field and moves on into the use of sociocultural perspectives to study learners' strategic orientation. The following section will provide with the rationale for undertaking a study on how strategic learning grows and develops from mediated leaning activity in the classroom. Section 1.3 explains the purpose of the study and the research questions guiding this research project. Section 1.4 outlines the structure of the thesis. In the last section, a summary of the chapter is included.

1.2 Background and development of the thesis

After forty years of strategy research, there is a general consensus among scholars that language learning strategies (LLS) are tools for active and self-directed involvement which promote autonomous learning (Oxford, 1990; Cohen, 1998). Moreover, in order to be successful at a language task, learners have to choose from all the strategies available to them in the right combination and at appropriate moment (Grenfell & Macaro, 2007; 2009). Most strategy experts also agree on the idea that strategies are goal-directed actions deployed with a certain level of consciousness by learners (Macaro, 2006, 2009; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford & Cohen, 1992). Cohen (2007) summarizes this view by stating:

> … any given strategy has to have a metacognitive component whereby the learner consciously and intentionally attends selectively to a learning task, analyses the situation and task, plans for a course of action, monitors the execution of the plan, and evaluates the effectiveness of the whole process (p. 32).

However, despite the insights provided by strategy researchers to the date, the field has been criticized for the under-theorization of the strategy construct itself and the lack of methodological appropriateness to study learners' strategic behaviour (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Rees-Miller, 1993). Moreover, as with other areas of SLA research, most LLS studies, reviewed so far, examined strategies from a cognitive/psycholinguistic perspective with a focus on individuals and their functioning. For instance, White, Schramm and Chamot (2007, p. 107) note that strategies have been regarded, to a certain extent, as stable mental processes, only occurring within the mind of learners, which has caused strategy researchers to investigate LLS with little attention to the influence of the sociocultural aspects of learning. Other critics, and even experts, are cognizant that the underlying assumption in the use of LLS depends exclusively on individual learner's cognitive predispositions or personality traits. This can be seen in a collection of studies which have tried to isolate the characteristics of 'good language learners' without considering the role played by the learning setting that accompany the social activity of learning (Jang & Jiménez, 2011; Macaro, 2009; Oxford, 2011). Furthermore, as Parks (2000) highlights, within applied linguistics, one line of research on strategies has given rise to a number of taxonomies and questionnaires intended to classify learners as good or poor in relation to the type of strategies characteristically used. In spite of the contributions made to the field, Parks (ibid., p. 80) argues that "representing

strategies as reified attributes of the individual tends to distort and obscure the complex ways strategies are appropriated or resisted in concrete, socially embedded activity."

By framing strategy research within the cognitive paradigm, it has also been assumed that strategies can be taught and learnt. The idea that language learning can be improved by directly teaching students how to use strategies has been the underlying tenet of much research and writing (Larsen-Freeman, 1991; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). Cohen (1998) asserts that, "The goal of strategy training is to explicitly teach students how, when, and why strategies can be used to facilitates their efforts a learning and using a foreign language." (p.69).

Proponents of strategy based instruction (SBI), or strategy instruction (SI), have devised instructional models and conducted experimental studies to determine the effects of strategy training on language learning (e.g., Cohen, Weaver & Li, 1998; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Thompson & Rubin, 1996), yet the learnability/teachability dimension of strategies has proven to be not so quite successful (See 2.5). For instance, Ress-Miller (1993) underlined that strategy instruction lacked of success for several reasons, including students' age, educational background, life of experience, curriculum demands, varying cognitive styles, and incapability of students and teachers' beliefs. More recently, McDonough (2006) has brought up interesting issues regarding the effectiveness of strategy instruction. He claims that considering research results, strategy instruction is not just 'transplanting' strategies good learners use to poor learners since there is evidence that poor students actually use some strategies but in an unsuccessful way. Another concern is the possibility that by training could actually be limiting poor leaners. He also questions the extent to which learners will be autonomous at the end of training, since there exists a possibility to end with merely 'trained learners', rather than with an autonomous individual after direct instruction.

Furthermore, although learning strategy theory holds the belief that strategies can be taught, empirical works have reported different approaches for the teaching of strategies making it difficult to determine success across studies. First, in some studies a few specific strategies have been taken from fixed strategy taxonomies (e.g. memory strategies and metacognitive strategies), and the effects on strategy training has been measured on a specific L2 language skill (e.g., reading, listening, writing), whereas in other empirical works, learners have been trained on strategies selected based on baseline data. Besides, in

several SI studies, researchers have made in their own decisions on what strategies would be more suitable for a group of learners. It has been assumed that these approaches bring benefits to learners, yet they may reduce the learner's ability to develop their own learning strategies according to their language goals and needs.

In addition, doubts about the effectiveness of SI have been raised due to methodological flaws in previous research, such as small sample sizes, non-random group assignment, exclusion of comparison group, and the lack of valid and reliable research instruments in some of the studies (See 2.4). For instance, different post-instruction outcomes have been measured by researchers, including comprehension, strategy use, and proficiency, among others (Earler & Finkbeiner, 2007; Macaro, Graham & Vanderplank, 2007; Plonsky, 2011), which makes difficult to generalize results. Moreover, the number of factors influencing learner's strategy use has posed a challenge to researchers, who have tried to control them as variables in experimental design studies under a positivistic research tradition.

These issues, if considered, prevent researchers from concluding whether strategy based instruction has, indeed, resulted in better learning in all of the cases. Furthermore, except from Hassan's literature review (Hassan et al., 2005), in which they found reasonably consistent evidence to support the claims on the effectiveness of strategy instruction, other reviews of strategies interventional studies (e.g., Earler & Finkbeiner, 2007; Macaro, 2009; Macaro, Graham & Vanderplank, 2007; McDonough, 1999; Plonsky, 2011) indicate that (1) mixed results have been reported in most of the interventional studies; (2) strategies have positively impacted on some language skills, but not on all of them; (3) there are inconclusive findings on how strategy instruction contributes to learner's active approach to language learning. Overall, this suggest that strategies do not simply result from direct teaching or training.

With regard to the applicability of strategy instruction, although there are influential publications addressing the way strategies can be integrated into the language classroom (e.g., Cohen, 1998; 2011; Oxford, 1990, 2011), the lack of conclusive research evidence and careful descriptions about the instructional methodology used in interventional studies have provided teachers with little direction as to what can be done in the classroom to foster strategy use. Many fundamental questions remained unanswered such as, how to use L1 and L2 when teaching strategies, how explicit the instruction should be, how long

strategy instruction must last, and how trained language teachers need to be in order to teach strategies (Chamot, 2005; McDonough, 2006).

In contrast to the cognitive/psycholinguistic paradigm, sociocultural theoretical perspectives appear to offer more appropriate interpretative tools for the understanding of strategic behaviour, as well as sound ways to foster strategy use and development. The basic tenet of sociocultural theory is that individuals' mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional, and historical settings, in which tools made available through participation in social activity (e.g. language learning in the classroom) mediate human action (Lantolf, 2000; Wertsch, Tulviste & Hagstrom, 1993). In its broad sense, mediation refers to the process by which socially meaningful activities transform impulsive, unmediated, and natural behaviour into higher mental processes through the use of instruments or tools (Minick, 1987). Within this framework, humans are understood to utilize existing, and to create new, cultural artifacts that allow them to regulate, or more fully monitor and control their behaviour (Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015, p. 2).

In line with Vygotskian theoretical perspective, a few researchers have asserted that strategies can be regarded as higher-level cognitive functions which *develop* once they intertwine with sociocultural meditational means in particular social settings (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Gao, 2010; Parks & Raymond, 2004). That is to say, strategies are not unfolding inborn capacities, but elementary functions of individuals, which are subject of development. Consequently, a strategic approach to L2 learning can be *transformed* through mediation of material tools, symbolic tools, or other human beings (Kozulin, 2003; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

From activity theory, a socially constructed need, such as learning a language, becomes an *activity* which individuals engage in as a result of their own *motives* or goals (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In turn, the learner's motives determine the kind of *actions* carried out by the learner to succeed in the language learning process. Derived from this sociocultural view, strategic learning is linked to learner's active participation in social activity (e.g. learning a language) and to the learning setting in which learning takes place (e.g. the classroom) (Gillette, 1994; Parks, 2000; Parks & Raymond, 2004). Therefore, as Donato and McCormick (1994, p. 454) state, "psychological phenomena (e.g. language learning strategies) can be understood only by examining their genesis in a culturally-specific situated activity (e.g., the foreign language classroom).

Despite the small number of strategy studies grounded on sociocultural theoretical perspectives (Behroozizad, Amir & Nambiar 2014; Coyle, 2007; Donato & McCormick, 1994; Gao, 2006; Gillette, 1994; Parks, 2000; Parks & Raymond, 2004; Simeon, 2014), such research I believe, has the potential to provide us with insights about how learners' strategy use can be developed in the language classroom without direct instruction or training, but from culturally-specific mediated *activity* (Donato & McCormick, 1994). Activity, within this theoretical frame, is not merely doing something, it is doing something that is motivated either by a biological need, such as hunger, or a culturally constructed need**,** such as the need to learn a language (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

This type of research is not focused on learners as individuals, but as members of a whole social-institutional context in which *activity* is fundamental to cognitive growth and self-regulation processes. Donato (2000, p. 46) has described this research approach as follows, "This depiction of the learner goes beyond isolated individuals who grapple for higher mental ground separated from the cultural institutions and historical conditions in which they learn." Therefore, the study of strategic learning in the light of sociocultural theoretical perspectives neither attempts to identify and control learners' variables, nor to establish a linkage between strategy use and language achievement. Instead, the underlying assumption in sociocultural-informed strategy research (see 2.5) is that higher forms of thinking, such as strategies, develop in socially situated- mediated activity, by means of mediation tools, and it is subject to change according to learners' motives and goals (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Gillette, 1994).

Although this understanding of strategies may challenge the *status quo*, the extensive literature revision I conducted during the first year of my doctoral studies, shaped my thinking about strategies in L2 learning and set a path for the development of this research project. I have found inspiration for this research project in the study conducted by Donato and McCormick (1994) and Gillete (1994), who were pioneers in utilising a different theoretical perspective to study learners' strategies. A crucial part in this different approach for the study of strategic learning under the paradigm of sociocultural perspectives is, I believe, the need for a more holistic approach in strategy research. An alternative approach to strategy instruction, therefore, involves introducing new forms of mediation to the learning context, or what Donato and McCormick (1994) have called "reconfiguring the

classroom culture". It also requires to bring to a central stage the role played by learners' goals and their motives in trying to successfully learn a language, as well as that of the contextual factors implicated in applied linguistic research.

1.3 Rationale for the study

The present study is justified on the following grounds. Firstly, although there is a considerable corpus of research about language learning strategies (e.g., Anderson, 1991, 2004; Cross, 2009; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2003; Naiman et al., 1978; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; 2000; Vann & Abraham, 1990), most studies have been aligned to a cognitive theoretical paradigm, revealing only *some* aspects of strategic learning, as Gao (2007) has noted, "… the picture remains incomplete" (p. 616). Even strategy experts have urged for enquiry that not only takes into account the contextual aspects of learning (Benson & Gao, 2008; Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Takeuchi, Griffiths & Coyle, 2007; Oxford, 2011), but also adopts a theoretical framework, which helps researchers avoid past issues in defining and exploring strategic behaviour. Nakatani and Go support this view by stating:

> … in order to move forward in theory and research, certain theoretical and methodological refinements would be welcome. First, future researchers ought to take a stance regarding which theoretical framework is going to inform their inquiry and exploit it fully. The main suggestion here would be to avoid engaging in research that simply leads to the establishment of atheoretical and decontextualized taxonomies of strategies, and endeavour of limited value for the development of the field. (2007, p. 24)

Consequently, in order to take LLS research a step further this study is grounded in sociocultural theoretical perspectives. By adopting a different ontological and epistemological stance, this research project investigates strategies as higher mental functions, or more sophisticated mental processes characterized by independent learning and thinking, which develop through mediated learning activity within the language classroom. The findings and implications of this study attempt to contribute at both the theoretical and at the practical level to the field of ELT.

Secondly, what we learnt from previous strategy LLS studies is that both, successful and less successful language learners use strategies. But what is not known is precisely what 'activates' students' strategic learning. This point is acknowledged by Grenfell and Macaro (2007), who have concluded, "… LLS research has overwhelmingly examined the relationship between strategy use and achievement at the level of correlation rather than pursuing the direction of causality." (p. 23) Thus, research on how strategic learning emerges and develops from learners' goal-oriented mediated activity introduced to the language classroom, is important to widen our understanding of what can be done to foster students' strategic L2 learning in typical classroom conditions.

Additionally, teaching strategies to ESL/EFL students has been controversial over the past few decades. One reason for this is that, studies of strategy instruction make up only 10% of their corpus of LLS studies (Manchon et al., 2007). Another reason is that in strategy instruction studies (e.g., Cross, 2009; Graham & Macaro, 2008; Ikeda & Takeuchi, 2003; Lam, 2009; O'Malley et al., 1985; Rubin, 1990), experimental or quasi-experimental in design, researchers have measured learners' frequency of strategy use, taught strategies to learners, administered tests pre- and post-instruction, and examined cause-effect relationship. However, as mentioned before, this approach has presented several shortcomings (See 2.3). Moreover, results have been inconclusive and have provided little guidance on how to apply overall findings to the actual teaching of strategies (Gu, 2010). Instead, if we agree on Gillette's (1994) view that the classroom context is influenced by each person differently and that students come to the language classroom with their own learning experiences and language needs, it is appropriate to employ context-sensitive methodologies which allow the researcher explore alternative forms of intervention including that of explicit mediation (See 3.3). Therefore, here I consider what White, Shramm, and Chamot (2007) have described as a contextual approach to strategy research. According to them, the value of a contextual approach to investigating strategies lies in the view of strategy use as the result of learners' cognitive choices, mediated by their particular sociocultural context. Both, the small number of studies adopting context-sensitive research methods, and the need for research that sheds light on how learners' strategy use can be developed in the language classroom from mediated activity, justify the present study. Rather than coming with generalizations on strategy use and place emphasis on achievement, learners' development of their own strategic actions towards reaching their language goals is central to this study.

Ultimately, there appears to be no information on how strategy use can be activated through mediated classroom activity in Mexico, where this research project was undertaken. A very small collection of studies reporting on strategy instruction in the context of Mexican universities is available (e.g., Dzay, 2007; Macola, 2007; Méndez, 2007). On account of this issue, it is therefore, worth carrying out this research project. Learning conditions across the country are different. Learning English in the peripheral areas of Mexico occurs mainly through the classroom; thus, uncovering information on how a goal oriented portfolio and learning journal implemented in the classrooms can mediate EFL learners' strategic orientation by means of reflective learning and goal-directed *activity* is necessary to contribute to pedagogy in language teaching.

1.4 Purpose of the study and research questions

In response to the situation described above and to the aforementioned gaps in strategy literature it is important to find new ways that enable learners to manage the complexities of learning English as a foreign language, as well as to achieve successful outcome given their personal language learning goals. Rather than trying to equip students with a repertoire of 'effective' strategies and to test the effectiveness of strategy training on student's learning, an alternative approach to strategy instruction involves introducing new learning activities as part in order to engage them in reflection and mediate their learning. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which strategic learning is mediated by learners' goals and mediation tools. The main objective is to illustrate how a portfolio project and a learning journal implemented in a language classroom can mediate EFL learners' strategic orientation by means of reflective learning and goal-directed activity. These aims are formulated in the research question and sub-questions presented below:

Main Research Question: To what extent, and in what ways do students' strategic learning develop by classroom mediated activity?

Sub-question 1: How is learners' strategic learning developed by the mediation of their particular goals?

Sub-question 2: How is learners' strategic learning developed by the mediation of reflective journal writing?

Sub-question 3: What other aspects of the language classroom influence on students' strategic orientation towards their learning?

The main research question in this study attempt to provide an account on how English language learners develop a strategic approach to learning by means of mediation and by trying to achieve their own language goals. The ultimate purpose of the study is not to determine whether, in fact, students use strategies as a result of introducing mediation tools into the course of classroom *activity* since to the date strategy research has revealed that the generality of language learners deploys strategies when learning (refer to Chapter 2). Instead, the notion of development, emphasised in this study and justified by sociocultural theory main tenets, implies that each and every learner approach language learning differently following their cognitive and metacognitive processes. This in turn, might be conditioned to their particular goals or visions emerging in their reflective thinking.

For the purpose of this investigation, 'strategic learning' is conceptualized as higher mental functions involving processes, such as intentional memory, planning, problem solving, learning, self-evaluation of the effectiveness of these process, and reflection (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, Donato, 2000). As for the term 'development' in the above research question, it means how learners gain control over their own mental activity by means of mediation; it describes a process by which higher forms of thinking evolve, rather than an attribute of the learner (Lantolf, 2000; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). Since both the concept of mediation and activity theory inform this study, strategic learning will be analysed at the level of actions carried out by learners in tool-mediated and goal-directed activity (Donato, 2000). That is, the actions motivated by specific objectives, under specific learning conditions, to fulfil specific goals (Donato, 2000; Donato & McCormick, 1994).

It is important to highlight that while to the date, most SCT-L2 research is focused of and how learners develop the ability to use the new language to mediate or control their mental and communicative activity (see Chapter 3). The present study, however, focuses on how specific learning activities, namely, portfolio and journal writing, serve as mediation tools and how students' particular language learning goals play a significant role in developing learning strategies. In other words, the inquiry is mainly concerned with how students develop a more strategic approach to learning and how their particular goals and own reflections on their learning process play a mediating role.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is composed of six themed chapters. The first chapter contextualises the research by providing with the background of the topic being investigated and discusses the need for the current study. The research questions and the purpose of this investigation can be found in the sections of this initial chapter.

Chapter two begins by reviewing research in language learning strategies and looks at the problematic areas of strategy research, such as the conceptualization of the word 'strategy' and the appropriateness of the methods utilised to date. The second section in this chapter discusses the effectiveness and applicability of direct strategy instruction. The chapter ends by reviewing literature strategies informed by a sociocultural perspective on language learning.

Chapter three discusses Vygotsky's sociocultural theory central tenets and highlights their implication for the field of second language teaching and learning by reviewing several empirical studies. The chapter ends with a discussion on how theoretical perspectives can be applied to the understanding and investigation of strategic learning, as well as how they inform the present study.

Chapter four describes the research methodology, the rationale and justifications for choosing research design and methods. Then, the chapter details the study itself by providing with a rich description of the research setting, the criteria applied for the selection of the participants and

research project was undertaken, with an emphasis on the implementation of a new form of practice in the language classroom, including specific classroom activities and learning tasks with an objective to mediate students' learning. Another section of the chapter addresses the stages and methods for data collection in the course of the study. The final sections include data analysis procedures and a summary of the methodology chapter.

Chapter five presents a systematic compilation of the data collected from different sources previously addressed in chapter four. This is followed by analyses of these data.

Chapter six discusses the m of this study. It provides answers to the three research questions and compares the findings of this study with those of previous studies.

Chapter seven present the implications of the current study, address the limitations of this study, provide recommendations for further research and end with concluding statements.

1.6 Summary

Four decades of strategy research has provided us important insights about language learners and their strategic learning, yet the field has focused the source of strategies on individuals and their characteristics, including their ability to learn. Derived from a need to expand this view and from the researcher's interest in strategic learning, the present inquiry aims to investigate how L2 English students' strategic orientation to language learning can be developed from the mediation of learners' own language goals and from reflection on their own learning as it takes place in the language classroom, an area scarcely explored in SLA and LLS research. Besides, the ultimate objective of this research project, as discussed in this chapter, is to contribute in filling a gap in the related literature and inform future research framed within sociocultural theory.

CHAPTER 2: STRATEGIC LEARNING

2.1 Introduction

In this literature review my objective is to examine the central ideas and empirical works on the broad notion of strategic learning. The aim is to show how the field of language learning strategies and strategy instruction has evolved as well as to look at the problematic areas regarding the empirical development of the field. As the chapter develops it highlights the need for a different ontological and epistemological stance for the study of strategic learning. The chapter is organized into three main sections. The first section will describe the historical growth of LLS research and outlines key issues concerning 'strategy' definition, underpinning theory, classification systems of LLs, and research methods employed in the field to date. The second section will analyse strategy instruction from the point of view of its research results and shortcomings at the level of methodology and applicability. The next section will set the stage for Chapter 3 since it reviews the existing literature on language learning strategies framed within the sociocultural paradigm. Finally, the chapter will discuss language learning strategy research in the light of its limitations and future research directions. Overall, this chapter emphasizes the adoption of new theoretical perspectives in strategy research and underlines the need for methodological adjustments in empirical works in strategy research.

2.2 A historical view on language learning strategies research

Research in applied linguistics has shown a considerable interest in determining how individual differences, either biological or psychological attributes, affect language-learning outcomes. Strategy researchers, in particular, have investigated EFL and ESL successful learners, the strategies they use and the factors influencing strategy choice (e.g., Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1996; Griffiths, 2003; Hsiao & Oxford, 2002; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Rubin, 1975), in the hope that this information could be used to help less successful learners.

It was through the seminal works of Rubin (1975), Stern (1975) and Naiman et al., (1978), who tried to isolate strategies used by 'good language learners' (GLL), that SLA researchers shifted their attention from teachers and their methods to the learner and his/her own ability to manage learning. In her seminal work, Rubin (ibid.) observed 'good language learners' and distinguished seven characteristics they displayed. These were, (1) guessing/inferring by using clues; (2) communicating by means of circumlocution, gestures, etc.; (3) managing inhibitions; (4) attending to form; (5) practising; (6) monitoring one's own and the speech of others; and (7) attending meaning. A second list of 'positive' learning strategies was devised by Stern (ibid.), which included a personal learning style, an active approach to learning, technical understanding of how to tackle a language, and self-monitoring, among others. This typology of strategies was not based on empirical investigation, but on Stern's own experience as a teacher (Grenfell & Macaro, 2007). Stern's list was later used as basic scheme in Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern and Todesco's study (1978). Through interviews as main data collection tool, Naiman and his colleagues also investigated what people known to be good at learning languages had in common. The interviews with 34 learners consisted of two parts, a biographical interview and a discussion on strategies that participants would use in a hypothetical learning situation. Based on their findings, Naiman et al., (1978) identified five major strategies: (1) active task approach, (2) realization of language as system, (3) realization of language as means of communication, (4) management of affective demands, and (4) monitoring of L2 performance (p. 30-33). The empirical works of Rubin, Stern, Naiman and his associates provided the emergent LLS field with lists of characteristics and techniques displayed by students who were successful at learning a language. However, early strategy research was mainly based on observation, lacking theoretical framework that could explain strategic behaviour. The pioneers of this field also neglected the fact that students' learning conditions can play a determinant role in the way they use, or do not use, strategies.

A shift from early research suggested that the differences in learners' strategy deployment could be best explained in terms of the cognitive character of the learner and the variables affecting him/her, such as age, gender, motivation, learning style, level of competence, among others. For example, Wenden (1987, 1991) conducted semi-structure interviews following a kind of retrospection technique to investigate learners' strategies. Wenden (1991.) identified four groups of strategies including *cognitive* strategies, *communication* strategies, *global* strategies and *metacognitive* strategies and concluded that ESL learners

had preconceived ideas about which LLS were likely to work best and called it an aptitude to learning. In another study, O'Malley et al., (1985) investigated how strategy use correlated with learner's proficiency level. They reported that high-level students used more strategies and more sophisticated ones than low-level students did.

With a large sample of more than 1200 university students, Oxford and Nyikos (1989) studied the effects of motivation, sex, and language proficiency in learners' choice of strategies. These researchers found that motivated students employed a wider variety of LLS and that females reported more frequent strategy use of conversational input elicitation strategies than men. In general, the findings of these works suggested that language learners cope with the learning process in different ways due to inborn capacities and predispositions to learning. Although new insights were provided about the strategic character of the learner, this strategy research approach provided hardly any information on the way language tasks or specific learning conditions affected learners' decisions on how, where, and when to use language learning strategies.

The works of O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) set a new momentum in strategy research historical development as they claimed that strategies could be classified and that less successful students could be trained to use strategies effectively. According to Oxford (ibid.) the strategy dimension should be made understandable to teachers of second and foreign language learners, so that they could enable students to become better learners. For that purpose, she devised a classification system that comprised direct strategies (*memory strategies*, *cognitive strategies*, and *compensation strategies*) and indirect strategies (*metacognitive strategies*, *affective strategies*, and *social strategies*). Oxford (ibid.) suggested that LLS were not only identifiable, but also measurable. Her taxonomy has been employed extensively in the form of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (*SILL*, Oxford, 1990) to determine the frequency and type of strategies used by learners and its relationship with other variables, such as age, gender, nationality, career orientation, proficiency, and achievement (e.g., Green & Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2003; Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). Despite being widely used, Oxford's comprehensive inventory has been questioned. For instance, LoCastro (1994) points at a certain inconsistency in the classification of strategies. He questions the grouping of memory strategies as separated from cognitive strategies in the *SILL* since memory involves cognitive processing; thus, he asserts, memory and cognitive strategies might be considered as belonging to the same

group. Likewise, Dörnyei (2005) calls our attention to the division including *compensation strategies* which are related to language *use* rather than language *learning*. He further explains that although language use leads to various opportunities for language acquisition, and, in turn, it may lead to the competent employment of communication strategies, which promotes L2 proficiency; these are two different processes in terms of their function and their psycholinguistic representation (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 68).

In an attempt to provide a sound theoretical basis for strategy research, O'Malley and Chamot (ibid.) aligned strategies with the reference processing framework proposed by Anderson (1980, in O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). For these researchers, strategy use involves many conscious decisions at both the cognitive and the metacognitive level, which are very similar to the cognitive processes occurring when individuals learn complex skills. As part of their work, O'Malley and Chamot (ibid.) also devised a taxonomy for the classification of strategic behaviour including three broad categories, (1) *metacognitive strategies*, which deal with planning, monitoring and evaluating cognitive process; (2) *cognitive strategies*, which refer to the actual processing on language in the brain; and (3) *social strategies*, or those means of dealing with affective and social aspects in language learning situations. O'Malley and Chamot (ibid.) advocated the teaching of strategies and developed a model for language learning strategy instruction as well, yet they did not present solid evidence on how strategy instruction contributed to better learning.

In another effort to study how learners used strategies and how they could be trained to do so, Grenfell and Harris (1999) analysed three cases of young French students at different stages in their language learning; from the beginner to advances student. They saw how these students approached their language learning, what their strengths and weaknesses were, and how they differed from each other. Grenfell and Harris' conclusion of their work emphasized that neither proficiency level nor language competence determine the use of strategies; instead, learning style and the nature of the tasks would be significant factors in strategy use. They suggested that a possible direction for a change in learning could be constructed around the notion of autonomy through strategy instruction and that the teacher would be directly implicated in the process. Although the work of these researches is aligned to the cognitive paradigm, as similar works of strategy researchers of the time, an interesting insight from Grenfell & Harris' (1999) work is as follows, "…good modern-

language learning and teaching might be facilitated by a reorientation of practice in the language classroom, but this reorientation needs to originate in shifts in understanding of the process of language learning and consequent teaching, rather than a new methodological trend."(ibid, 148).

The initial interest in the profile of the 'good language learner' has encouraged researchers to investigate learners' strategy use in response to a task, or a series of tasks, as well as to identify the kinds of strategies learners deploy when working on a specific language skill (e.g., reading, writing, speaking). With regard to the type of strategies learners use when carrying out a specific language task, it has been concluded that both good language learners and low-achievers use strategies, but it is metacognition, the orchestrating mechanism for combining strategies effectively, what marks a difference between these two types of learners. That is, metacognition has been found to play a central role in helping good language learners to effectively use LLS (Anderson, 2008; Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999; Graham, 1997; Porte; 1988; Vandergrift, 2002; Vann & Abraham, 1990). A similar process seems to occur when learners employ strategies when coping with a particular skill; findings indicate that cognitive and metacognitive strategies are more helpful in listening and reading process in L2, rather than in other language skills (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Carrel, 1992; Laviosa, 2000; Vandergrift, 1997, 1999).

Despite these research outcomes, Grenfell and Macaro (2007, p. 23) have pointed out, "The question remained as to *why* some learners were able to combine strategies effectively thanks to metacognition." This means that the *motives* or *activating mechanisms* of students' strategic learning remain uncovered. Grenfell & Macaro (2007), have further argued, "…LLS research has overwhelmingly examined the relationship between strategy use and achievement at the level of correlation rather than pursuing the direction of causality" (p. 23). In other words, a great number of studies have attempted to find a 'positive' relation between language learning strategy use and successful language learning, yet results have been inconclusive (e.g., Bialystok, 1981; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2003; O'Malley et al., 1985). Therefore, while a substantial body of research into strategy use exists, little has been done to explore what is beyond the cognitive aspect of LLS or to adopt a different approach for the study of strategic learning. Such a gap in our understanding needs to be filled if the ultimate goal of research is to 'activate' students' strategy use when learning a second or foreign language.

An examination of all of the studies conducted in the field to date would take longer than this section; thus, to summarize strategy research development and its results I quote Macaro (2009), who after systematically revising a great deal of work in language learning strategies has concluded:

> LLS 'movement' came about because the locus of research interest became the learner and because what learners do with their linguistic knowledge is perhaps as important as that knowledge itself. These two factors were a major contribution to the birth of the concept of the good language learner. This learner was conceptualized as being active rather than a passive learner. Soon many researchers were to examine enthusiastically his/her strategic behaviour, attempted to come up with taxonomies of strategies, and advocated that other learners follow his/her example. In retrospect, I believe that his approach was a mistake. (p. 30)

2.3 Research methods for the study of strategies

Different methods have been used in the study of strategies; these include observation, surveys, questionnaires, journals, think-aloud tasks, and note-taking. Either by utilizing one method, or by a combination of two or more, empirical works have attempted to provide with basis for the understanding of a wide range of strategies and their effect on learning (Oxford, 2011; Oxford & Crookall, 1989; Chamot, 2004). Early LLS researchers, for instance, carried out observations in their studies. Learners were observed while performing different language tasks, usually in classrooms settings (e.g., Rubin's 1975, Stern, 1975). Although observation helped pioneers in the field to produce the first strategy lists, this approach has been criticized since it is considered 'not very productive' (Chamot, 2004; Ellis, 1994; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). The main argument against the use of observation in LLS research is that it does not reveal the mental operations occurring when learners use strategies. Griffiths (2013, p. 45), for example, points out that only a few strategies can be observed directly, such as *writing vocabulary in a notebook* or *using a dictionary*. On her part, Oxford (1990) claimed that strategies such as cooperating with others, asking for clarification or verification, are activities that are directly observable; nevertheless, she acknowledges that some language learning strategies take place mentally and cannot be observed.

Other strategy researchers (e.g., Griffiths, 2003; O'Malley et al., 1985; Naiman et al., 1978) have asked learners to explain or to describe how they use strategies in structured, semi-structured and retrospective interviews respectively. Semi-structured interviews consist on broad questions researchers give the learners before or during the interview to help them focus on the strategies they use. In retrospective interviews learners are asked to describe what they were thinking or doing during a recently completed learning task To avoid limitations from retrospective interviews in which learners are asked to describe what they were thinking or doing during a recently completed learning task, in a stimulated recall interview subjects are videotaped while performing a task; the interviewer then plays back the videotape pausing as necessary and asking the learner to describe his or her thoughts at that specific moment during the learning task. (Anderson, 2002; Chamot, 2004; Oxford, 2011). This method is considered more accurate since it is conducted immediately after a learning task and reveals students' actual learning strategies during task performance, reducing the risk of students forgetting of details (Chamot, 2004; 2005; Oxford, 2011). Overall, interviews are regarded as more successful approach to study LLS because it is though they can reveal more about unobservable mental processes. However, according to Chamot (2004), a limitation of this method is that students may forget some of the details of their thought processes or may describe what they perceive as the "right" answer.

Besides interviews, diaries and journals are another way of collecting information on LLS "by means of retrospective reports" (Ellis, 1994). Diaries have been mainly used to reveal learners' affective state and the influence of these on learning. In studies which make use of this data gathering technique, students record their thoughts, feelings, achievements, problems, strategies, and impressions of the language learning process; some researchers have also found helpful to include guidelines as students write on their diaries or journals (Oxford, 2011; Oxford & Crookall, 1989). In spite of its usefulness, a study including diaries or journals as the sole method for collecting data might encounter the limitation of inaccurate descriptions of students' learning strategies, as White, Schramm and Chamot (2007) has pointed out.

Think aloud tasks, which have also been utilised in LLS research, require learners to introspect on the strategies they employ while performing a particular task (Ellis, 1994, p. 534). Studies, which make use of this technique, ask learners to explain or describe how he

or she uses strategies (Oxford and Crookall, 1989). Learners are given a task and asked to describe his or her thoughts while working with on it. The interviewer may prompt with open-ended questions such as, what are you thinking right now? Why did you stop and start over? Recordings of think-aloud interviews are analysed later for evidence of learning strategies (Chamot, 2004; Oxford, 2011). To Chamot (2005), this procedure may be helpful in revealing online processing, rather than metacognitive aspects of planning or evaluating. Ellis (1994) suggests that think aloud tasks can provide more information about learning language skills rather than on using learning strategies. Despite its usefulness, thinks aloud tasks may present some issues as learners' ability to think aloud when performing a task varies. This might cause researchers ending up with strategies uncovered by this method or with learning activities of a rather special group of learners.

Another method employed in LLS research is note –taking. A scheme devised by Allwright (1980, in Oxford & Crookall, 1989), for example, consisted on students taking notes on a grid, describing the strategies they employ; students then rate those strategies in terms of frequency, enjoyment, usefulness and efficiency. Cohen, et al., (1979, as cited in Oxford, 1990), proposed three note-taking techniques for strategy assessment: (1) students are asked to note down their learning difficulties when performing a language task and to use this notes in an interview; (2) students are given a daily grid and note-taking occurs prior to a semi-structured interview; (3) students are asked to take notes on a grid, describing the strategies they employ; then researchers rate those strategies in terms of frequency of use, enjoyment, usefulness, and efficiency.

Finally, survey or questionnaires have been the most common method used by strategy researchers, being the SILL (Oxford, 1990) the most widely used strategy research instrument. Self-reports are considered a systematic and reliable method for identifying student's learning strategies. Surveys can vary from less structured to more structured. Less-structured surveys do not provide much organization for students in terms of the responses elicited, whereas more-structured surveys use standardized categories for all respondents. Typically, less structured surveys contain open-ended questions designed with the purpose of getting the learner to describe his or her language learning strategies in a free and open manner. More-structured surveys usually include multiple-choice questions that can be objectively scored and analysed (Oxford, 1990, 2011; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993).

Generally, surveys and questionnaires have been used to collect and analyse information about a large number of students since it is a standardized measure which also allows researchers to correlate strategy use with other variables. Green and Oxford (1995) claim that reliability is generally high for the *SILL*; nevertheless, as with other research techniques and instruments, limitations of this method include students not remembering the strategies they have used in the past, students claiming to use strategies that in fact they do not use, and students misunderstanding the strategy descriptions in the questionnaires items. It has also been questioned the degree to which students' self-report ratings on Likert scale instruments can be relied on to reflect the actual use of strategies. Moreover, the SILL has been criticized because it is based on a fixed list of strategies and presents respondents with a reduced number of possible answers for strategy use self-report (Dörnyei, 2005, 2007; LoCastro, 2001).

2.4 Major criticism of strategy research

Overall, research on language learning strategies has provided the field of SLA with interesting insights regarding the individual's learning process (Benson & Gao, 2008). However, a number of writers argue that the body of research and related literature have failed to define what a strategy is, have largely relied on taxonomies for the identification of learners' strategy use, and have employed inadequate research methods to investigate learners' strategic activity (Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 1994; Macaro, 2009; McDonough, 1999; Rees-Miller, 1993).

A central dilemma in LLS research has been the concept of strategy itself because researchers have apparently not employed the term in the same way (Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 1994; Wenden, 1991). For instance, Rubin (1975, p. 43) first referred to strategies as "…the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge." Stern (1983, p. 405) has suggested that the terms 'strategy' and 'technique' have different meanings. According to him, 'strategies' describe general tendencies or overall characteristics of student's approach to learning, while the word 'techniques' describes particular forms of learning behaviour, more or less consciously employed by the learner, such as study habits or detailed procedures to cope with specific aspects of language learning (e.g., looking for words in a dictionary). On his part, Ellis (1994) has distinguished tactics from strategies by defining tactics as variable and idiosyncratic learning activities, which learners use to

organize a learning situation, respond to the learning environment, or cope with input and output demands. He argued that 'tactics' are different from 'strategies' due to a consciousness component; thus, what starts out as a conscious 'tactic' may evolve into a subconscious 'strategy'. The different conceptualizations of pioneers in strategy research exposes a lack of clarity about the theoretical foundations of LLS.

With the works of O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) the debate moved from what seemed to be interchangeable terms in early definitions, to the type of cognitive or behavioural activity involved in strategy use. For instance, O' Malley and Chamot (ibid.) defined LLS as "…the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (p. 1). This appeared to be a working conceptualization of strategies, yet Dörnyei (2005) has criticized the use of the words 'thoughts' and 'behaviours' in the same definition as they allude to different theoretical perspectives, behaviourist and cognitivist theories respectively. Oxford (1990) described strategies as "…specific actions taken by the learner to make learning, easier, faster and more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (ibid. p. 8). Yet, she further stated that LLS were "specific plans or steps, either observable (behaviouristic domain), such as taking note or seeking out a conversation partner, or unobservable (cognitive domain), such as mentally analysing a word" (ibid., 81). That means strategies could be allocated in two domains namely behavioural (observable steps) and cognitive (unobservable processes). Likewise, Dörnyei (2005) questioned whether a construct, such as strategy, could involve two aspects, 'cognitive' and 'behavioural' at the same time. The problem with suggesting language learning strategies belong to either a cognitive or a behavioural domain is reflected in the type of methods employed to study them, as it will be further discussed.

In an attempt to reconcile the theoretical inconsistencies in the strategy construct, Cohen (1998, p. 4) states, 'the element of consciousness is what distinguishes strategies form those processes that are not strategic. In the same vein, Chamot (2004) and Macaro (2006) have referred to strategies as 'conscious' activities. Still, Dörnyei (2005) insists on the inability of strategy researchers to establish 'that' which distinguishes certain kind of strategic behaviour from ordinary learning. More recently, it has been claimed that the role of learners' goals plays a crucial role in strategy use (Chamot, 2001; Cohen, 2003; Macaro, 2006, & Oxford, 2011). This means that a given learning activity is considered strategic as

long as it is aimed at a particular learning goal. For instance, Macaro (2006) asserts, "…a key feature of strategy should be explicitness of its goal orientation" (p. 328). This view on strategies adds a different dimension to previous knowledge about LLS since learners' goals vary according to the individual and the situation. It also suggests that strategy use is not a fixed attribute owned by successful students, but it can result from students' personal goals and learning context.

In their comprehensive revision of strategy literature, Cohen and Macaro (2007) concluded that in much published research, strategies are seen either as "general patterns of behaviour combining mental, physical and social activity" or, as "cognitive and metacognitive behaviour" (p. 278). However, the adoption of either one of these two positions towards the concept of strategy, might pose a risk to the strategy researcher who might end up with different operational definitions in their investigation. Resulting from this conflict, some scholars, such as Tseng et al. (2006), Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) have even proposed the adoption of the terms *self-regulatory capacity* and *self-regulation* to replace the construct of language learning strategies. While, the conceptualization of strategy is still a matter of debate, strategy experts are proposing new ways to define strategic behaviour rather than solving the conflict at a theoretical and epistemological level.

The debate on what a strategy is has directly influenced the choice of research methods to study L2 students' strategic learning. It has been argued, for example, that observation does not provide with reliable and sufficient information about the internal processes taking place when learners use strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). In her seminal article, Rubin (1975, p. 45) wrote, "The task of observing strategies is a complicated task because they necessarily involve cognitive process which neither the learner not the teacher may be able to specify." On their part, White, Schramm and Chamot (2007, p. 93) have asserted that strategy use is not a fixed attribute of individuals, but changes according to the task, the learning conditions, and the available time, yet they highlighted the unobservable condition of some strategies since they refer to internal, mental processes, which researchers can only study by means of 'indirect indicators', such as self-reports or think-aloud tasks. Likewise, Oxford (2011) has argued that a major difficulty with observational techniques is that many strategies occur mentally and cannot been seen through ordinary observation.

Another problematic area of the LLS field is the overuse of self-report instruments to determine learners' strategy use. A large number of descriptive studies on language learning strategies have used self-report questionnaires developed from strategy taxonomies to identify frequency of strategy use and to determine its relation with language proficiency and/or success (e.g., *SILL* by Oxford, 1990; *Language Strategy Use Inventory* by Cohen, Oxford, & Chi, 2006; *ELLSI* by Griffiths, 2013). In particular, Oxford's classification system in the form of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (*SILL*, Oxford, ibid.) has been extensively used to determine the frequency and type of strategies deployed by learners (e.g., Green & Oxford, 1995; Parks, 1997; Takeuchi, 1993; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993; Takeuchi & Wakamoto, 2001), as well as to collect baseline data for strategy instruction research projects (e.g., Cohen, Weaver & Li, 1998; Grainger, 2005). However, this instrument presents respondents with a fixed list of strategies and a reduced number of possible answers for strategy use self-report, limiting the scope for the investigation on other aspects involved in students' strategic learning.

The use of taxonomy-based self-report instruments, therefore, means neglecting the fact that students are exposed to different learning conditions and that they all have the same language needs and goals. LoCastro (1994), Benson and Gao (2008) support this view by stating that large and general learner strategy taxonomies are not transferable across sociocultural domains and tend to be context-insensitive, limiting the scope for the investigation on other aspects involved in students' strategic learning. Thus, results and conclusions obtained from self-report instruments might partially revealed the strategic learning orientation of students. Moreover, some strategy researchers (Chamot, 2004, 2005, Cohen & Macaro 2007) have questioned the reliability of questionnaire as learners may not always report truthfully.

On their part, Tseng et al., (2006) have argued that the scales in this type of research methods "are not cumulative and a computing mean scale score is not justifiable psychometrically", as in the *SILL* (Oxford, ibid.). According to these researchers, the type of items in self-report questionnaires ask respondents to generalize their actions across a situation rather than to refer to singular and specific events; therefore, they fail at capturing the quality of learners' strategy use (Tseng et al., 2006, p. 82). Consequently, strategy inventories, in the form of questionnaires, provide researchers with a 'narrow' view of students' strategic learning, leaving other aspects involved in learners' active approach to

learning aside, such as situated learning practices, the nature of the learning tasks, and students' language learning goals. Macaro (2001) describes the limitations of self-report questionnaires by concluding:

> For too long it would appear that the field of language learner strategies has relied largely on 'frequency of reported strategy use' as its benchmark for determining whether strategies are used and even to intuit as to how they are used. We now know that we must collect more data on the quality of strategy use. (p. 279)

2.5 Strategy instruction

In her seminal, article Rubin (1975) suggested that if we knew more about what "good language learners" did, instructors could be able to teach these strategies to poorer students to help them improve their learning efficiency. Since then, the idea that learning can be improved by directly teaching students how to use strategies has been the underlying tenet of much research and writing. According to Rubin et al. (2007), the aim of strategy intervention or teaching language learner strategies is to explore "the extent to which it enables students to become more effective language learners" (p. 154). McDonough (1999) describes strategy instruction development as follows, "The product of strategy investigation, the various lists of strategies that have been identified as useful for learning, have been utilised as content of instruction, with the teaching of strategies under the guise of learner training" (p.1). That means that strategy instruction was born from the categorization of specific behaviours displayed by GLL and the teaching of these 'behaviours' to L2 learners.

Strategy instruction (SI), also known as *learner training* and *strategy-based instruction*, ultimately aims to "empower students by allowing them to take control of the language learning process" (Cohen, 1998, p. 70). It has been defined as a "cognitive approach to teaching that helps students to learn conscious processes and techniques that facilitate the comprehension, acquisition of new skills and concepts" (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 96). SI can take different forms, such as general study skills training, awareness training through lectures and workshops, peer tutoring, video-taped mini courses, and fully integrated training into the language curriculum under the guidance of the teacher (Cohen, 1998; Cohen, Weaver & Li, 1998; Oxford, 1990). And, different frameworks have been devised to train students in the use of strategies as shown in the following table:

Table 1: Harris' (2003) comparison of the stages of four strategy instruction models.

O' Malley and Chamot (1990)	*Oxford (1990)*	*Chamot et al, (1999)*	*Grenfell and Harris (1999)*
Students identify their current learning strategies	Learners do a task without any strategy training. They discuss how they did it and the teacher asks them to reflect on how their strategies may have facilitated their learning.	*Preparation*	*Awareness raising.* Learners do a task "cold" They brainstorm the strategies used. Class shares strategies that work for them.
Teacher explains additional strategies.	Teacher demonstrates other helpful strategies, stressing the potential benefits.	*Presentation*	*Modelling.* Teacher demonstrates new strategies, emphasizes their value and draws up a checklist of strategies for subsequent use
Teacher explains additional strategies	Learners are shown how the strategies can be transferred to other tasks.	*Expansion*	
	Learners are provided with further tasks and asked to make choices about which strategies they will use.		*Action planning*. Learners are guided to select strategies that will help them address their particular difficulties. *Further practice and fading out of reminders to use*
		Evaluation	*Evaluation.* Teacher guides learners to evaluate progress and strategy use and to set themselves new goals.
Teacher assists learners in evaluating their success with the new strategies	Teacher helps learners to understand the success of their strategy use and assess their progress toward more self-directed learning		

In Table 1, Harris (2003) makes a comparison of the stages of four strategy instruction frameworks developed by O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990), Chamot et al., (1999), Grenfell and Harris (1999). According to Harris (2003), the four training schemes differ only in detail, but, generally, they present similar broad stages including: *preparation*, or *awareness raising*; *presentation* or *demonstration* of the new strategies; and *evaluation* on the use of the new strategies. Proponents of strategy instruction claim that by following this sequence of steps teachers can raise learners' awareness about strategies and encourage learners to use them, which would help learners not only to build a repertoire of strategies, but also to discover how and when to apply them in different language learning tasks (e.g., Cohen, 1998; Grenfell & Harris, 1999; Macaro, 2011;

O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Pressley et al., 1992). Moreover, it has been suggested that good strategy instruction is inherently motivating and interesting, which suggests that classrooms in which instruction of effective cognitive strategies is often included will produce students who will have "more skill and will" (Pressley et al., 1992, p. 354).

With regard to empirical work on strategy instruction, McDonough (1995) identified two groups of studies. In one general group, studies have aimed at teaching strategies for overcoming a number of learning problems faced in several aspects of language learning. In the specific group, the studies have explored what has been learned from attempting to teach particular strategies. According to McDonough (ibid.), all of the studies in this early revision attempted to ask the same central questions, can strategies be taught? Do students use the taught strategies? Do students who use the taught strategies perform better (than previously or than other students not so taught) (p. 97).

Rees-Miller (1993), who first criticized SI, claimed that the theoretical model of strategy instruction is based on a number of assumptions that were unsupported by empirical evidence, such as the idea that less successful learners lack a repertoire of strategies, while they in fact used strategies. Also, Rees-Miller (ibid.) questioned the extent to which a methodology for the teaching of LLS was effective since attempts to train learners in the use of strategies had met with mixed success. Overall, she suggested that the effective learning strategies model might not be universal, but particular to learners' cultural background, educational context, and past learning experiences. Accordingly, teachers should approach the implementation of learner training in the classroom with caution since successful learning may be a more complex approach than that of identifying, classifying, and teaching characteristics of good language learners to less successful students.

In his review of SI related literature, McDonough (1999) identified some problematic areas in strategy instruction research, such as the lack of coherent theory of how strategies work, inconclusive results in previous studies, and the need for more 'sensitive research methods'. From a less critical position on strategy instruction than Rees-Miller (1993), McDonough (1999) noted that "teaching strategies is not universally successful, but the latest research is showing that, in certain circumstances and modes, particularly when incorporated into the teacher's normal classroom behaviour, and thus involving teacher training as well as learner training, success is demonstrable" (p. 15). More recently,

however, McDonough (2006) has asserted that considering research results, strategy training is not just 'transplanting' strategies good learners use into poor learners as there is evidence that poor students actually use some strategies but in an unsuccessful way. He has also questioned the extent to which L2 students can be autonomous learners at the end of training because there exists a possibility of ending up with merely 'trained learners', rather than with an autonomous individual after direct instruction.

Not only McDonough (1999, 2006), but also strategy experts have adopted a different position with regard to their initial views on strategy training. For instance, Oxford (1990) initially claimed that her model for strategy training was focused on the teaching of learning strategies themselves, rather than on broader aspects of language learning (p. 203). But, in a more recent publication, Oxford (2008) has emphasized that strategy instruction should be part of broad-scale, culturally *learner development.* This approach, in Oxford's (ibid.) view, involves learners in thinking about themselves as learners, about language, about why they are learning languages, and about how to make the greatest progress in their L2 learning. The scepticism by a few scholars over the effectiveness of strategy instruction and the adoption of new views by some strategy experts (e.g., Cohen and Macaro, 2007; Macaro, 2009; McDonough, 2006; Oxford, 2008, 2011) are the result of inadequacies in SI studies and the hardly conclusive results these have produced. The following section addresses these shortcomings found in strategy instruction literature and their implications of introducing SI to the language classroom.

2.6 The effectiveness of strategy instruction

The interest in learner training has attracted scholars, practitioners, and even strategy sceptics, such as Dörnyei (2005), who has stated, "If we think about it, even if the notion of learning strategy does not exist as a distinctive aspect of learning but only indicates creative and personalized learning behaviours, the training of these 'strategies' would be a highly desirable activity…" (p. 173). Despite this assertion, Dörnyei (ibid.) acknowledges that research evidence on strategy instruction gives "only moderate support" about its effectiveness since most empirical works struggle with methodological problems related to assessment issues and the inherent difficulties of doing classroom research. Dörnyei and other writers in the field (Hassan et al., 2005; Erler & Finkbeiner, 2007; Macaro, Graham & Vanderplank, 2007; Nyikos & Fan, 2007; Plonsky, 2011), have systematically revised

the existing literature on SI and its effects, coming up with similar conclusions about the effectiveness of strategy training.

Traditionally, strategy instruction studies researchers have trained students on a few specific strategies from fixed categories, such as cognitive or metacognitive strategies, for a particular language, such as skill, listening, reading, writing, or oral communication. Although it is believed that this approach has direct effects on learners' strategy use and enhances performance in language skills, researchers have reported less successful results than expected. For example, in one of the first experimental studies of language learning strategies instruction ESL students were trained in only three strategies: selective attention, note taking, and co-operation (O'Malley, et al., 1985). Seventy-five high school students were randomly assigned to one the three teaching groups. Learners in the first group received explicit instruction in all three strategies, metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies. Learners in the second group were taught only cognitive strategies, note taking and co-operation. Students in a control group received no strategy instruction. Strategy instruction was provided with integrated listening, speaking, and vocabulary tasks in 50 minutes' sessions over eight days. Pre-tests and post-test were administered to students in the three groups. The effects of these various types of strategy instruction on speaking were examined by comparing the pre- and post- audiotaped data. And, to measure the effects of strategy training on the listening skill, students were given videotapes and multiple-choice question. Results showed that strategy instruction had a significant positive effect on speaking skill, but no significant difference between the means for the groups in the listening comprehension tests was found. A limitation of the study was that learners dealt only with presentational speaking skills.

Studies conducted into the effects of strategy instruction for listening comprehension have reported only partial improvement in leaners' listening ability. For instance, a study of the impact of strategy instruction in ESL learners' listening comprehension focused on three strategies: predicting, selective attention, and inferring (McGruddy, 1995). Advanced ESL students in the experimental group (N=10) were trained over 14 weeks, and their performance was compared to that of students in the two control groups (N= 10 and 12). Participants were pre- and post-tested using both a standardized and a researcher-designed test; strategy-use questionnaires were also administered to triangulate scores. It was found, however, that students in the experimental group scored better than students in the two

comparison groups only in the non-standardized listening test, with increases in only one strategy: selective attention.

The impact of strategy instruction on language learners' listening comprehension was investigated in an experimental study involving third-year Russian learners at an American university (Thompson & Rubin, 1996). A wide range of cognitive and metacognitive strategies were included in the training (*planning*, *defining goals*, *monitoring*, *evaluating*, *predicting content*, *listening to the known*, *listening for redundancies*, and *listening to tone of voice and intonation*). Students were randomly assigned to an experimental and a control group. Both groups were exposed to the same sequence of materials in 50 minute sessions, three times a week, over two academic years (a total of fifteen hours of strategy instruction), but different lesson plans were designed for the two groups. While students in the control group used the content of video material for speaking and writing activities, students in the experimental group used it for developing listening strategies. The teacher of the experimental group was one of the researchers, with extensive experience in strategy-based instruction; the control group teacher, a different instructor, had no familiarity with SBI. Two pre-tests on listening comprehension (a video comprehension test and audio comprehension test) were given to students. Result showed some improvement in the use of strategies in the comprehension of videotaped materials, but performance in the audio test between the two groups did not show a significant improvement. In addition, no distinction was made between those strategies intended to assist in extracting meaning and those intended for learning a new language.

Less successful results were reported by (Ozeki, 2000), who trained students in the listening strategies they reported to use the least frequently. The study involved 25 female EFL first year college students in Japan, against a comparison group of 20 students. Students in the treatment class received instruction in socio-affective and cognitive strategies focusing on listening comprehensions. The SI component was implemented in 12 ninety-minute classes over a 20-week term. The instructional sequence included a preparation stage in which students were explicitly taught a new strategy and a lesson stage in which students practiced the strategies with listening comprehension tasks. Pre-tests and post-tests scores were compared to assess the effects of the treatment. However, results showed no significant difference between the experimental and control groups' listening scores at post-test.

While some interventional studies have identified and trained learners in those strategies they report to use the least, the choice of strategies to be taught in SI has depended mainly on the researcher's conceptualization of which strategies would be most effective for improving participant's performance in a given skill (Erler & Finkbeiner, 2007). Empirical research in the effects of strategy instruction on reading comprehension, for instance, has mostly involved training in metacognitive strategies and reported more positive outcomes than strategy instruction training studies in listening comprehension and oral skill, yet there are some pitfalls in these studies that need to be considered.

In a study conducted by Raymond (1993), high intermediate learners of French were taught to identify text genre, structure, and content through linguistic text markers. Pre- and post-tests were administered to participants. It was found that the intervention group used strategies more than students in the control group, but the intervention students achieved higher comprehension result on only one of the post-intervention texts. Raymond (1993) suggested that elements such as the interaction of strategy use, text content, reader interest, background knowledge, and reader should be considered when analysing the effect of intervention.

In another study of reading comprehension, Ikeda and Takeuchi (2003) investigated the effects of strategy instruction on lower and higher proficiency level students. Japanese college students were divided into two groups for reading instruction according to their English language proficiency-based and on a cloze test results. Each group of students were further divided into an experimental and a control group. The experimental groups received explicit strategy instruction for 20 minutes in their regular 90-minutes class schedule. The strategies included were making inferences, using selective attention, using imagery, and summarizing. After the eight-week treatment, data was collected from the four groups by using three kinds of reading texts and a strategy inventory. The results showed that strategy instruction was related to an increase in strategy frequency only for high proficiency learners; no increase in the frequency of strategy use was detected in in low-proficiency students. A positive finding was that the effect of strategy instruction was retained for five months after the training finished. Nevertheless, a major limitation of this study was that subjects' reading ability of English was not assessed; thus, how learners' strategy use contributed to effective reading could not be determined (Ikeda & Takeuchi, ibid., p. 58). One more study by Ghazanfari and Sarani (2009) analysed the effect of

strategies on EFL learners' reading comprehension and recall of short stories. The study consisted of two single sessions of treatment: one for the cognitive strategy (summarization) group and one for the metacognitive strategy (question-generation) group. One week after the experiment, students in the two treatment groups were asked reading comprehension questions on the same short stories as those that were used during the experiment. Thus, it could be argued that the positive effects reported were biased since students who received training were more engaged with the reading task than participants in the control, who were not asked to apply any specific strategy.

Even though some empirical works have shown that SI has been positive for L2 learners (see Carrell, 1985; Dörnyei, 1995; Carrier, 2003; Dreyer & Nel, 2003; Graham & Macaro, 2008; Kusiak, 2001; Macaro, 2001; Nakatani, 2005; Vandergrift & Tafaghodatari, 2010; Seo, 2000), the effectiveness of this type of intervention has been questioned due to a number of methodological problems found in literature, such as a small sample sizes, non-random group assignment, exclusion of comparison group, and lack of valid and reliable research instruments. For example, Seo (2000) reported positive findings after training students in cognitive and metacognitive strategies for the listening skill. But, the study involved only 10 university level learners of Japanese. Evidence indicating a positive influence of strategy instruction on how students approach a writing task was also found by Creeswell (2000). The study followed an experimental design; metacognitive strategies were taught to only 7 advanced learners of English though. In a study of metacognitive strategies, it was found that listening comprehension increased significantly as well as vocabulary after strategy training (Kohler, 2002). Participants were 70 low-achieving learners of Spanish, whose performance in these areas were compared to that of students in a non-interventional group. However, the study did not pretested participants. Hence, conclusions were mostly drawn from students' perception on the value of strategy training.

Within the Mexican context, strategy instruction studies were conducted simultaneously at Universidad de Quitana Roo (Dzay, 2007; Macola, 2007; Méndez; 2007). The project involved a small group EFL students enrolled in an ELT undergraduate programme. In one of the studies, 21 intermediate level students received training on strategies (predicting, listening for the main idea, listening to information, and note taking) to develop listening skill (Dzay, 2007). The selection of the strategies to be taught was based on pre- treatment questionnaire and interviews. The new strategies were introduced and practiced every three

days in a special course designed for research purposes only. Learners were asked to keep a reflection diary that included five guideline questions about the training course. Also, three students from the group were asked to complete a retrospection protocol immediately after training sessions. The reported results indicated that students outperformed in the post-listening task and reported positive attitudes regarding strategy use and the training itself. In a similar fashion, the study by Méndez (2007) focused on the teaching of communication strategies to 10 pre-intermediate students. These were: using fillers, circumlocution, asking for repetition, asking for clarification and expressing doubt. Strategy instruction was provided twice a week in two-hour sessions, for over 7 weeks. Data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, communicative tasks, and diary entries. Learners' strategy use in the pre-tasks and post-tasks were rated on scale 1 to 10. The researcher reported that training resulted in more frequent use of communicative strategies and that learners gained more confidence when interacting in the target language. As part of the same project, Macola (2007) analysed the effect of strategy instruction on reading for academic purpose. The 15 intermediate English learners answered a questionnaire on strategy use and were pre-tested before the treatment. During 7 weeks of instruction in predicting, skimming, critical reading, and summarizing, learners were asked to keep a daily-log; the teacher-researcher also wrote observation as to the development of the sessions. According to the researcher, the findings indicated that learners improved in academic reading achievement. However, several methodological limitations in these studies should be noted. Firstly, the questionnaire used to determine previous knowledge and strategy use frequency contained only two direct questions asking learners whether they had received any strategy training before. The other three items in the same instrument asked learners about the kind of tasks and difficulties they had in the language skills. Secondly, students' performance in the pre- and post- tasks were assessed by using a 1 to 10 scale, but researchers did not provide details on the criteria used to design this instrument. A third limitation was that researchers reported learners' improvement in the different skills as a result of direct strategy training based on what students reported in the diaries rather than on statistical analysis of pre- and post- tests.

Finally, in a more recent study Hayati and Shariatifar (2009) found size effects of cognitive strategies for reading comprehension. English learners received two single 60-minute training sessions, one for the cognitive strategy (underlining) and one for the metacognitive strategy (knowledge mapping); learners took a reading comprehension test immediately

after the treatment. The shortcomings of this study were the length of the treatment, which was extremely short. Also, the assessment method seemed biased as the participants were explicitly asked to employ the strategy that they had just learned.

From the sample of studies included in this review, it can be concluded that it is not feasible to assess the overall effectiveness of strategy instruction. The distinctive features empirical works display, such as learning context (country, type of instructional setting), age of the learners, level of L2 proficiency, nature of the reading strategies taught (*cognitive*, *metacognitive*, *socia*l), methodology (true experiment or quasi-experiment), type of assessment instrument (standardized, researcher developed, teacher developed), length of intervention, nature of the intervention in treatment and control groups, and type of materials used in the tasks (authentic, non-authentic), make it difficult not only to generalize across studies, but also to conduct valid and reliable experimental studies. Cohen, Weaver and Li (1998), for example, have concluded that a limitation in their study was that certain controls possible in a laboratory environment were not possible in the classroom. Chamot (2004, p. 116) has also noted that the language classroom does not meet the necessary conditions for experimental research design, and stated, "...it is rarely possible to adequately control for all the variables in any natural setting." Furthermore, findings from systematic reviews of strategy instruction studies indicate that research is, in fact, inconclusive as to whether instruction in strategies really produces a positive effect for learners (see Hassan et al., 2005; Taylor et al., 2006; Erler & Finkbeiner; 2007; Macaro, Graham & Vanderplank; 2007; Nyikos & Fan; 2007; Plonsky, 2011).

2.7 The incorporation of sociocultural perspectives into strategy research

Over the past 40 years, the ways in which strategy research has conceptualized language learning strategies has in turned informed the teaching of strategies. However, the discussion in this chapter suggest that a shift in perspectives seemed to be the next logical step to take in the LLS and SI field. This shift is influenced, firstly, by epistemological shifts in how various intellectual traditions had come to conceptualize human learning, more specifically a shift from behaviourist, to cognitive, to situated, social views of human cognition (Ellis, 2015; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). Secondly, parallel shifts in conceptualizations of language and second language acquisition have taken place, with empirical works incorporating sociocultural perspectives as theoretical framework and using more holistic data collection methods (Lantolf, 2000; Zuengler & Miller 2006).

Thirdly, the dominant positivistic research paradigm has been found to be insufficient for explaining the complexities of learning, and in particular, understanding the nature of strategies.

Positivist research methods typically involve random sampling that is assumed to represent the broader population, data collection, and analysis methods that can be replicated, and attention to issues of validity and reliability in order to control for bias. However, since the early 1900's the positivist epistemological perspective has been criticized for the over-simplified, depersonalized, and decontextualized nature of the underlying assumption of this research (Johnson, 2009; 2006; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). Johnson (2009) point out at the complexity of classroom life, which cannot be captured in neat; the clinical experimental designs, and the generalizations that emerge from this research, which simply whitewash the complex social, historical, cultural, as the main criticisms to positivistic research.

In what has been called 'the socio-cultural turn" in LLS research, or a second development in learning strategy research (Gao, 2006), attempts have been made to study language learning strategies as both cognitive and social processes. The strategy field, which has been largely informed by behaviouristic and cognitivists traditions, has defined strategies as a construct that only resides within the learners' mind (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 1990; Rubin & Wenden, 1987). As a result, strategy use is related to an underlying trait (Gao, 2007; Tseng et al., 2006), with researchers referring to them as learners' relative stable knowledge of language learning strategies which are not subject of transformation or development, but inherent characteristics of learners. In contrast to a positivistic stance, SCT informed strategy research has been grounded in sociocultural theoretical perspectives and has incorporated more context-sensitive methods for data gathering. Although small in number, these empirical works (Coyle, 2007; Donato & McCormick, 1994; Gao 2006; Gillette, 1994; Parks, 2000; Parks & Raymond, 2004; Simeon, 2014) have investigated, the emergence, use, and development of L2 strategies as resulting from the embeddedness in the cultural practices and values of the learning context in which individuals studying a new language are. Besides utilising the core concepts of Vygotsky's theory of mind as explanatory tools, these studies have considered learners' motives and goals, the types of learning tasks learners are engaged with, and the specific social relationships in the language classroom, as determining factors in strategic learning.

In a seminal study, Donato and McCormick (1994) examined the development of language learning strategies using the theoretical principles of Vygotsky's genetic method and activity theory. Through a case study of an intact college class, they explored the role of mediation by the use of a portfolio assessment procedure. Students enrolled in a French conversation course were asked to document and reflect upon their own the spoken language development. Every three weeks throughout a term, students were asked to provide with some kind of evidence of their ability to recognize and use the language functions introduced in the class. Evidence consisted of any tangible product that students placed in their portfolios to demonstrate their knowledge of the language function. Neither the researchers nor the language instructor provided students with guidelines on what to submit. After each submission language instructor responded in writing, commenting on the documents, encouraging strategy use when it was reported, and responding to the content and reflections in students' portfolios, At the end of the term, students were engaged in a meta-reflection activity in which they were asked to analyse their own reflections over time. After analysing portfolios from ten students, four distinct themes on language learning were identified; learners first self-assessed by identifying areas for improvement (self-assessment); second, they set goals (goals); third, they implemented self-selected strategies or specific plans of actions (strategy use); finally, they connected to and reflect upon past performance (evidence). Researchers also found that strategies became more focused, specific, personal and realistic over the term, and students became more frequent users of their own work and participation in the course as a result of mediating reflection. Donato and McCormick (ibid.) concluded that the success of the students identifying, refining, and developing their own strategies was a direct result of an environment that mediated language learning in reflective and systematic ways throughout the use of the student portfolio. They also suggested that the 'culture' of the classroom plays an important role in fostering strategic learning. Donato and McCormick (1994) asserted that a cultural tool of the classroom, such as the portfolio, can mediate students' learning at the same time they are engaged in purposefully socialized practices through dialog with themselves and the teacher.

Gillette's (1994) important case study of three effective and three ineffective language learners, explained the differences in L2 achievement primarily as a function of student goals in the course of instruction. The participants were language learners in a required third-term French course, who were chosen based on two neutral measurements of their

language sills, a cloze test and an oral imitation task, bio-data, class observation, and writing samples. Other instruments employed as part of the selection process were learners' self- ratings and essays describing participants' experiences as language learners. As a part of the study the teacher-researcher asked participants to keep a diary and collected learners' class notes. Learners were observed for a full term, interviewed on their language learning histories, and asked to complete a questionnaire assessing attitude and motivation. Qualitative data from different sources indicated that individuals identified as ineffective language learners by test scores and overall performance had difference reasons for engaging in second language study, which in turn, determined their strategic approaches to language learning. For example, data collected from language learning diaries revealed that students who viewed language study only as a requirement, limited their learning effort to what they perceived as necessary to pass a given course or earn a certain grade, while students who considered languages a valuable in and of themselves made a greater effort to acquire the target language. The same occurred with learners' study habits and learning strategies. One of Gillette's conclusions was that effective language learners, in fact, use positive learning strategies, which are goal-driven, systematic, and intuitively obvious, but apparently, learner's initial motive determines the quality of language study overall and influences the effectiveness of specific strategies. Gillette (ibid., p. 196) suggested that by examining the whole person in a rich natural setting it is possible to elaborate a more complex picture of each students' language learning effort and its relative success or failure. Thus, instead of focusing only on aptitude, attitude, or some other casual variable as in much SLA research, her study views each learner as motivated human being, whose experience, world view, and intentions all influence classroom behaviour. Gillette (ibid. p. 211) also concluded that, in the light of sociocultural theory and the findings, the belief that positive learning strategies constitute the explanation of L2 achievement should be questioned.

In a longitudinal study, Parks and Raymond (2004) reported that the development of new strategies in Chinese students was mediated by the contact with native speakers and the target language. The inquiry investigated how the strategies used by Chinese students enrolled on an MBA course at a Canadian University developed as they moved from sheltered classes into electives in which they studied alongside native-speakers of English. The researchers focused on how the contact with the native-English-speaking Canadian students mediated the Chinese students' strategy use in 3 domains: reading, class lectures,

and team work. Data collection procedures included interviews with students, EAP teachers and MBA professors, class observations and collection of documents such as course outlines and samples of student work. The findings revealed that one of the main changes was in the reading skill. In order to cope with the quantity of reading in the MBA electives, and with the goal of passing the course in mind, students became highly selective in what they read. Participants also developed a variety of strategies for speaking out in participatory lectures and were influenced by re-evaluations of their ability to interact in English. It was found that students developed strategies for coping with the demands of team work including avoidance of groups containing Canadian students and more positive strategies through which they repositioned themselves as competent team members. Parks and Raymond concluded that strategy use emerged as a more complex, socially situated activity, bound up with issues related to personal identity. Based on these findings, Parks and Raymond (2004) suggested that in contrast to previous strategy instruction approaches, greater attention needs to be given to how strategy use, or non-use, is related to individuals' personal goals and how this use may be constrained of facilitated by the particular social context in which the individuals are involved.

Gao (2006) investigated changes in strategy use among Chinese undergraduate and postgraduate students as they moved from a university in located in China to a university in the United Kingdom. In this longitudinal qualitative study, Gao (ibid.) was collected through interviews in which students were asked to describe their approaches to learning English in these settings. The changes Gao observed were first interpreted in terms of factors or psychological differences, but initial data were later revisited from a sociocultural perspective. The focus of this new study was on how strategy use was mediated through discourses, goals, and agents in the learning process in both China and United Kingdom students. One the findings was that in China there is a tendency to favour memorization and that the use of strategies was mediated through discourses, which emphasized the value of English as 'tool' for educational and social advancement. Furthermore, participants were influenced by a strong orientation towards the goal of passing English examinations. However, once students moved to the United Kingdom the influence of these mediating factors diminished. Two reasons for this were that students had achieved opportunities for advancement that English offered them in China, and, another reason was that assessment practices shifted from tests of English to assess a coursework through the medium of English. In the United Kingdom, the researcher

assigned participants to different groups. A group whose use of strategies was considerable reduced and who often felt 'lost' in their learning of English, and a second group who shifted towards greater use of social strategies and sought out opportunities for interacting with English speakers. In this study, Gao (2006) also described how this shift was facilitated by interactions with supportive English speakers.

Inspired in the work of Donato and McCormick (1994), Coyle (2007) investigated the construct of 'the strategic classroom' by analysing the role the social context plays in the development of learners' strategies. Rooted in one specific learning community (a state school in the UK), the study focused on ways of working in a collaborative space, which was meditated by and through technology. In this action research project the researcher collected data from teacher and researcher's field noted, video-recorded lessons, digital compilation of video extracts, audio-recorded and transcribed reflective discussions between teachers and researchers, lesson plans, evaluations and student work. Results indicated that three components of classrooms where the context of learning impacts on the development of strategies are: classroom culture, scaffolding learning, and the creation of learning opportunities. The findings of this study suggest that an alternative way to inquiry strategy development is by analysing both the macro-level, or learning environment, as it enables teachers and learners to be aware of the context-embedded strategies, and the micro-level at which strategies can be conceptualized as "by products" of mediation and social activity in a given learning community.

Another study undertaken by Behroozizad, Amir and Nambiar (2014) in the Iranian learning context investigated the relationship between LLS and teacher's mediating role. Grounded on sociocultural theory and activity theory they explored pedagogical changes made in the classroom. Data was collected through observation field notes, learners' diary, students and teacher interviews. The findings indicated that the participant's activities are mediated to a considerable extent by the opportunities provided through the teacher's scaffolding. Researchers also found that five main factors influencing strategy development and use were seating layout, interaction, motivation, exposure to real-life situations, and the teacher. Researchers concluded that by applying sociocultural principles to the classroom teachers could reconceptualise the classroom and provide learners with opportunities and tools to develop, assess and regulate their learning.

In a more recent study, Simeon (2014) carried out a collaborative Action Research to investigate strategies as embedded within social events and occurring as learners interact with people, objects, and events in one secondary school in the Seychelles. Following Gao's view of strategy use (Gao 2010, 20), Simenon (ibid.) adopted an ethnographic approach, which included classroom observation, interviews with teachers and journal writing, audio recording and field notes. In Phase 1 of the study she focused on current practices in three classes. In Phase 2, Simeon analysed the data and reported back to the participating teachers. Common practices found in the three classrooms were a strong emphasis on teaching content knowledge including grammar and vocabulary knowledge in writing mechanics in general, and very few opportunities to socialize their work and strategies they used to solve their learning problems. Thus, in Phase 3 of the inquiry, the participant teachers and researchers focused on the process approach to writing instruction with the aim of fostering dialogue among teachers and students about writing processes and problem-solving strategies. The analysis of findings of Phase 3 showed that compared with Phase 1, teachers minimized the practice of being merely transmitters of knowledge. Instead, they altered instruction and mediated learners' writing strategies in a number of ways in a dialogic process through classroom instruction, use of collaborative writing tasks, questions and students' L1. Evidence suggests that learners used a number of strategies to mediate their own writing processes; these included using their film knowledge, humour, mother tongue, thinking aloud, teacher and peers to help them create text. A few learners also drew on teaching techniques such as teacher-like scaffolding questions to mediate their own and their peers' learning.

Sociocultural-informed strategy research has not only been inspired by the works of Vygotsky and his colleagues (see Chapter 3), but presented a different application of philosophical concepts such as that of mediation and activity. Although it has been suggested that an approach to sociocultural SLA assumes learning takes place externally in the social interactions that learners participate in (Ellis, 2015), or, as Oxford and Schramm (2007) have asserted, the difference between the cognitivist view and sociocultural perspectives lies in the focus, "individual versus group" (p. 4), Vygotsky-informed strategy research goes beyond group interaction and considers mediation as primary in the development of higher forms of human mental activity, such as problem solving, learning and evaluation. In explaining the epistemological underpinnings of this perspective, Lantolf and Thorne (2006) state, "it is not that social activity influences cognition" as is

argued by many social learning theorists "but that social activity is the process through which human cognition is formed" (Lantolf & Johnson, 2007, p. 878). Moreover, unlike positivist LLS and SI research, which emphasizes the identification of strategy types, variables affecting the choice of strategies, and the teachability and learnability dimension of strategies, the studies reviewed in this section foreground human cognition and learning as a mediated activity rather than an individual phenomenon, which results from the embeddedness in particular sociocultural practices or learning activities. The findings of these inquiries provide with evidence that the social practices in the contexts in which individuals learn a second language are crucial to the ability to engage successfully in strategic processes. All in all, it seems that strategic learning lies in the culture of the social institution, the mediation of cultural artifacts, and the participation of learners in this activity, rather than in individuals' traits (Frawley & Lantolf, 1985).

2.8 Summary

From this revision of related literature, it is evident that while a substantial body of research into strategies exists, a predominant cognitivist view has been adopted by strategy researches. By placing strategic learning within a largely positivistic-cognitive paradigm, it has been assumed that strategies can be taught and learnt, in the same way content knowledge is learnt. With regard to strategy instruction, researchers have claimed to follow an experimental design in which the effectiveness of strategy instruction with a group of language students was measured against a comparable group of students who either received a different type of treatment or no treatment at all. Issues have been raised, however, about the methodological flaws and differences in treatment procedures among strategy instruction studies. The corpus of research on strategy training has reported mixed results, or partial success after interventions, making it difficult to draw clear conclusions on how the teaching of strategies contributes to better learning. A sociocultural turn in strategy research has incorporated the concept of mediation and utilised more holistic research methods, instead. Summarising, this chapter suggests that to fully understand how L2 learners use strategies it is necessary to embrace a different theoretical perspective and challenge the research methods employed to date in LLS and SI. The following chapter outline the core statements of sociocultural theory, in particular, that of mediation; it will also explain to the reader the adopted theoretical framework and its application to this study.

CHAPTER 3: SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY

3.1 Introduction

The position established at the end of the last chapter was that cognitivist theories provide with limited tools for the understanding of strategic learning. The positivistic type of research described in mainstream learning strategies and strategy instruction research also prevent researchers from flesh out the picture *in toto.* Therefore, a more in-depth understanding of sociocultural theory is essential to go further in the investigation of how students can develop a strategic approach to learning without direct instruction or training. This chapter will provide an overview of sociocultural theory of mind and learning, and it will discuss the application of Vygotskian perspectives to the field of SLA research, in particular, to the concept of mediation, which is central to the purpose of this study.

The chapter will begin by offering an introduction to Vygotskian sociocultural theory (1962, 1981, 1987), as a psychological theory of mind. Following this, the construct of mediation in Vygotsky's theory will be outlined, as providing a psychologically and cognitive theoretical basis for this investigation. Alongside the notion of a mediated mind, views on how mediation can be applied to the formal teaching context will be discussed. In this chapter, activity theory will be considered as another analytical framework theory of human behaviour resulting from the integration of socially and culturally constructed forms of mediation into human activity. The next part of this discussion will focus on the research method suggested by Vygotsky, the genetic method, which will also be presented as complementary to sociocultural theory since it focuses on developmental process that concerns this investigation. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of the relevance of sociocultural perspectives to this research. The first part of this discussion suggest that sociocultural theory has the potential to explicate the origins, mechanisms, and nature of language learning strategies. Next, the chapter will end by describing how sociocultural perspectives have informed the present inquiry and their relevance to the research on L2 strategic learning. Finally, drawing on sociocultural theory and activity theory, the two mediated learning activities, namely portfolios and learning journals central to the approach proposed to develop L2 learners' strategies will be described.

3.2 Vygotsky's sociocultural theory

The term *sociocultural* is often used with slightly different meanings and sometimes with very different applications (Johnson, 2009; Lantolf, 2011). In spite of the label 'sociocultural theory is not a theory of the social or of the cultural aspects of human existence, as Lantolf and Thorne (2006) remark, but a theory of mind that recognizes the central role that the social relations and culturally constructed artifacts play in organizing uniquely human forms of thinking (Lantolf 2004; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Sociocultural theory (SCT) has its roots in eighteen – and nineteenth- century German philosophy, particularly the sociological and economics writings of Marx and Engels (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, pp. 1 - 2). Originally conceived of by L. S. Vygotsky, (1987), a Russian psychologist, and later developed by his colleagues Leont'ev (1981), Luria (1982) and Wertsch (1985), this theory argues that cognitive development does not depend solely on internal mechanisms, but on the quality and quantity of external formal forms of social interaction (Johnson, 2009; Lantolf, 2012; Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015). In other words, rather than assuming that that there are universal features of human cognition that can be separated from the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which they emerged and are used, SCT focuses on sociocultural activities as the essential processes through which human cognition is formed. However, recognising that human cognition functions and develops in specific social activities, involves more than the sole idea of people interacting with each other. The kind of social interaction described by Vygotskian scholars is grounded on different epistemological assumptions. As Lantolf and Johnson (2007) indicate, "It is not social activity that influences cognition, as argued by social learning theorists, but 'social activity' is the process through which human cognition is formed" (p. 878).

First, without denying biological maturation that unfolds with time, Vygotsky (1978) distinguished biological forms from sociocultural forms of development, suggesting that all higher-level cognition is inherently social (Johnson, 2009, p. 1). According to Vygotsky (ibid.), at an early age individuals possess lower order, or biologically functions, such as vision, hearing, and involuntary attention. These elementary functions are developed into higher mental capacities, including voluntary attention, intentional memory, planning, logical thought and problem solving, learning, and evaluation of the effectiveness of these process, as individuals interact with the sociocultural environment (Lantolf & Appel, 1994;

Lantolf, 2000). The notion of consciousness in Vygotsky's theory, therefore, comprises the self-regulatory mechanisms that human deploy in solving problems, or what in modern jargon is called metacognition (Frawley & Lantolf, 1983; Lantolf & Appel, 1994). It involves more than awareness of one's cognitive abilities; it is what distinguishes the behaviour of humans from that of other living beings and what links the individual's knowledge to his or her behaviour (Vygotsky, 1978, 1979). Consciousness, or all higher-level cognition is shaped through the integration of symbolic artifacts into thinking (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Second, Vygotsky (1978), reasoned that transformation from external (*interpsychological*) forms of social activity to internal (*intrapsychological*) thinking is not a direct straightforward appropriation of concepts, knowledge, or skills from the outside (Johnson (2009, p. 18). Lantolf (2000) explains that internalisation is in essence "a process through which higher forms of thinking come to be; it assumes that the source of consciousness resides outside of the head and it is fact anchored in social activity" (Lantolf, 2000, p. 13). Johnson and Golombek (2011) also describe Vygotsky's reasoning as follows, "internalization, or the transformation from external to internal does not happen independently or automatically … it takes prolonged and sustained participation in social activities that have a clear purpose (goal-directed activities) within specific social contexts." For Leont've (1981), "the process of internalization is not the transferal activity to a pre-existing internal 'plane of consciousness': it is the process in which the plane is formed" (as cited in Johnson, 2009, p. 18).

Third, Vygotsky's theory (1987) postulates that the relationship between humans and the world is based on a dialectal rather than a dualistic approach (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008). Traditionally, psychology has explained human mind from two different positions which are 'reductive in nature' according to Valsiner and Van der Veer (2000, as cited in Lantolf & Poehner, 2008). On the one hand, behaviourism assumes that all human mental processes are derived from the environment (Skinner, 1974; Thorndike, 1898). From a behavioural stance, it can be assumed that, in the case of the language learner's cognitive processes, these are influenced to a great extent by contextual factors, such as the native language, the target language itself, cultural background, stage of learning, among others. On the other hand, a cognitivist view considers all human mental functions as innately specified in human genes. From this latest view, learner's cognitive processes are

determined by personal traits regarded as 'individual differences' (Ellis, 2015; Dornyei, 2005; Skehan, 2012). Thus, language learning is believed to be affected by internal, biological or psychological attributes, such as age, motivation, language aptitude, to name only a few. In Vygotsky's theory, a dialectal orientation starts from the central idea that there is no mind-body dualism, but one single object (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Lantolf &Thorne, 2006). The dialectal approach proposes a bi-directionality in which natural endowments form the foundation for thinking. In the same way, a person interacts within socioculturally organized activity and artifacts, elementary functions are transformed and come under the control of the person through use of external, self-generated, but culturally rooted meditation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). As explained by Lantolf and Poehner (2008), "thinking is not a reality that exists independently of physical body, but it is instead a mode of existence of the body itself" (p.4). Therefore, human consciousness emerges from the organic unity of our biologically endowed brains and our culturally created symbolic artifacts and activities (Lantolf & Poehner, ibid.). An advantage of the dialectal ideal-material view of artifacts, central to Vygotsky's theory, is that it offers a solution to the long-standing debate in the social sciences on where culture itself should be located, external to the individual, as the products of prior human activity, or internally, as a pool of knowledge and beliefs (Cole, 1996; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006)

Although Vygotsky (1978) did not conceive of pedagogies derived from his proposals (Compernolle & Williams, 2013; Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015), the postulations of sociocultural theory have been used as theoretical framework in SLA empirical works in what has been called 'an alternative approach' to applied linguistic research (Lantolf, 2011, 2012). Those who have incorporated the philosophical and epistemological views of sociocultural theory to the field believe that it provides with valuable interpretative tools to examine language learning (Donato, 2000; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Lantolf & Phoener, 2008; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). Early examples of research into L2 learning include the use of central constructs of this theory, such as mediation, activity, the ZPD, and self-regulation (e.g., Anton, 1999; Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Frawley & Lantolf, 1985; Lantolf & Appel, 1994). More recent studies have taken the philosophical principles of sociocultural theory and activity theory to investigate the role of students' goals, self-identity, self-reflection, inner speech and motives in language learning as a source of mediation (e.g., Da Silva, 2008; Mahn, 2008; Parks, 2000).

The incorporation of sociocultural perspectives into SLA research, however, is been debatable, for two main reasons. One reason is that many scholars consider cognitivists theories constitute a more solid framework for the understating of language acquisition and learning. For example, Mitchell and Myles (1998) have pointed out at the lack of explicative elements in SCT about what language is and how it operates in thinking and communicative aspects. Likewise, Atkinson (2011) stated that social theories have been developed in isolation from each other, drawing on very different epistemological bases. Another reason is the claim that the cognitive and social paradigms are fundamentally two "parallel words", being social aspect of learning often neglected by cognitivist SLA research (Ellis, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2007; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). While the debate is on-going (Ellis, 2015), in Hill's (2006) response to the publication of Zuengler and Miller (2006) on the 'two parallel SLA worlds', he claims that SCT should not be seen as the antithetic conception to the cognitive view. Hill (ibid.) argues that Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and his bidirectional intrapsychological (i.e., cognitive) and interpsychological (i.e., sociocultural) planes might best be described as being between the two poles (i.e., sociocognitive); what is more, the cognitive paradigm should not be regarded as limited, in the sense it excludes social interaction as a necessary condition for language development. These and other arguments on sociocultural perspectives have yet to be resolved.

Certainly, there are differences in how 'social theories' conceptualize language. Ellis (2015), for instance, noted that in some of the theories, the focus is on how learners use and acquire specific linguistic features, whereas other social theories the emphasis is more on the learners' social world and how the relations involved in the process affect opportunities for language learning. Moreover, it has been suggested that much sociocultural informed research has been somewhat limited as it has tended to simply describe the various types of mediation that arise in social interactions with learners without demonstrating that either learning or development (i.e. self-regulation) has taken place (Ellis, 2015, p. 21).

Despite these inconsistencies and limitations in sociocultural informed research, Lantolf, Thorne and Poehner (2015) indicate that the value of sociocultural theory and its sibling approaches, such as cultural-historical activity theory, resides in that it can inform not only research and understanding of human developmental processes, but also praxis-based research, which entails intervening and creating conditions for development, as it the focus

of the present study. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) have provided the following description on what sociocultural theory mainly sustains and that informs the present study:

> The relationship between human mental functioning and the activities of everyday life are both many and highly consequential. Participation in culturally organized practices, life-long involvement in a variety of institutions, and human's ubiquitous use of tools and artifacts (including language) strongly and qualitatively impact cognitive development and functioning. (p. 1)

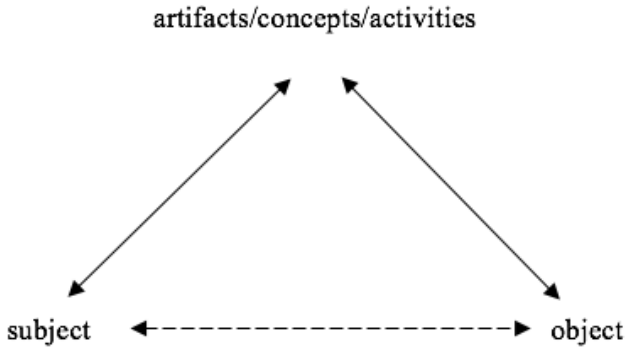
In summary, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of mind is grounded in a dialectal rather than dualistic approach to the relationship between humans and the world. This means Vygotsky theory rejected any attempt to decouple consciousness from behaviour (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Actions and thinking are regarded as singles unit. Sociocultural theory fundamentally argues that cognitive development arises out of the interaction between biologically endowed abilities and culturally organized artifacts (Ellis, 2015; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Appel, 1994). While our biological inheritance equips us with lower mental functions, our higher mental functioning (e.g., memory, attention, problem solving) develops through "interweaving of our cultural and biological inheritances" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 59). This transformative process occurs through mediation. Vygotsky's main interest, therefore, was on how external means and external assistance bring about cognitive changes.

3.3 Mediation

Mediation is the central concept of Vygotsky's theory. For Vygotsky (1978; 1979) higher forms of human mental activity are mediated by culturally constructed auxiliary means or tools (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). That is, the relationship between humans and the world is indirect and, therefore, mediated (Daniels, 2001; Lantolf, 2012; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Lantolf and Thorne (2006) define mediation as "the process through which humans deploy culturally constructed artifacts, concepts, and activities to regulate, or gain control over and transform, the material world on their own and each other's social and mental activity" (p. 79).

The following figure, devised by Lantolf and Thorne (2006), represents the fact that the transformation from the external to internal does not happen independently or automatically, but it is a process through which a person moves from carrying out concrete actions in conjunction with the assistance of material artifacts and other individuals to carrying out actions mentally without any apparent external assistance (Lantolf, 2000).

Figure 1: The mediate nature of human/world relationship.



According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006), Figure 1 portraits the inherent complexities in cognitive development proposed by Vygotsky. As it can be observed, the relationship between people and the world is indirect, or mediated (indicated by the solid arrows) as well as direct (indicated by the dotted arrow). The direct relationship is one that involves such things as involuntary attention (as when we turn unthinkingly toward a sudden noise), involuntary reflect as when we move to avoid being struck by an object hurtling toward us), and involuntary memory (as when we recall highly emotional and personal events in our lives (often in the form of vivid images). The indirect relationship, and that which separates humans from other animals, requires the historically cumulative cultural generation of auxiliary means that are inserted between ourselves and objects (mental or physical) (Lantolf &Thorne, ibid., p. 61-62).

Central to the understating of how mediation occurs there is the construct of ‘tools’. Vygotsky (1987) found special meaning in the notion of tools to explicate how human mind is mediated. The origin of tools can be traced back to Vygotsky’s understanding of tools used in work. As Roebuck (2000) indicate, “To understand the organizational properties of consciousness, Vygotsky turned to the political and social writings of Engels,

who stressed the importance of physical tools in mediating and controlling objects in the physical environment" (p. 81). Vygotsky theorized that while humans sought to adapt to their external world through assimilating the laws of the nature, they also attempt to control and master nature; the need for control lead to the creation and invention of tool, technical as well as mechanical (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 7). For Vygotsky, therefore, "humans do not act directly on the physical world but rely, instead, on tools and labor activity, which allows us to change the world, and with it, the circumstances under which we live in the world" (Lantolf, 2000, p. 1).

In addition, in his theory Vygotsky distinguished between physical tools and psychological tools. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) explain that, "Just as psychical tools imbue the capacity to shape the natural environments, and in so doing change the material circumstances in which we live, so psychological tools imbue with the capacity to organize and gain voluntary control over our biologically specified mental functions." (p. 25). Psychical tools may be outwardly directed at others, as in the case of social communication, while at the same time they may be inwardly directed to regulate and control mental processes such as memory, attention, rational thinking, and learning. The most common example of psychological tools, often referred to as artifacts, include the human cultural constructions: numbers, charts, figure, art and music, and language (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 26).

In Vygotsky's theory, the most natural example of psychological tool is language. As a symbolic tool, or artifact, language activity, including speaking and writing is the primary, though not exclusively, mediational means humans deploy for thinking (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Lantolf and Thorne (ibid., 80) further explain that "language activity is not constructed as the equivalent of thinking, rather it is a means of regulating the thinking process." It does this serving as a planning function, in which speaking anticipates mental and physical action; in so doing it enables the person to construct a mental image of a preferred future, and it inhibits us from acting impulsively; that is, that is non-thoughtfully (Frawley 1997). In other words, planning is critical for self-regulation, and requires forethought and time, more importantly, the use of language. Language is not only used to make sense of experience, but also to share experiences and to make sense of those experiences with others, transforming experiences into cultural knowledge and understanding. So, language is used to regulate social activities and regulate one's cognitive development (Johnson, 2009; Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015).

Mediation by symbolic tools in SLA research has mainly focused on social interactions as the primary means for mediated L2 learning (Ellis, 2015; Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015). Although this type of research, in which language is analysed in order to identify how it serves for mediation purposes in individuals' learning, is beyond the scope of the present study, revising the first empirical works framed within Vygotsky's theory is worth in understanding the 'umbrella term' of mediation and its applications. For example, in L2 research, the seminal study conducted by Frawley and Lantolf (1985), they analysed the narrative story by twenty-one intermediate level ESL students. By comparing the performance of advance speakers with the performance of the intermediate speakers in a difficult narrative task, it was showed that the performance of the intermediated speakers breaks down and subsequently lose control, or self-regulation, over the mediational means provided by their second language and become controlled or regulated by the task set before them. More advance speakers are able to control the mediational afforded by the second language in guiding themselves through the task. These researchers argued that all forms of discourse must be viewed as markers of how speakers relate to the task, rather than markers of their general linguistic competence, and advocated second language research re-evaluate the notion of 'error' in performance. Traditionally, an error in discourse has represented some type of imperfect or incomplete learning resulting from over- generalization, simplification, transference from the native language, or strategy avoidance on the part of the learner. However, discourse analysis under sociocultural perspectives takes into account meta- cognitive functions of individual's performance. Thus, errors may not be errors as such, but may well represent a speakers' attempt to gain control of a task. Frawley and Lantolf (ibid.) also highlighted the importance of strategic activity in developing second language discourse. In this respect, it is the social interaction the origin of the ability to engage successfully in strategic process. The work of Fraley and Lantolf (ibid.) was first to challenge the widely-accepted psycholinguistics explanations on features of language discourse.

Lantolf and Appel (1994) were also pioneers in incorporating Vygotsky's view of language as a psychological tool in SLA research. These researchers set out to investigate how speaking serves to mediate activity of L1 and L2 speakers and readers of English. In their study, fourteen native speakers of English from an American university and fourteen advanced speakers of English as a foreign language from a German university were selected for the study. Researchers asked each of the participants to read an expository text

and recall its content orally since they believed that recall tasks are often marked by high frequency meta-comments, or what can be referred to as private speech, which can be quite relevant to the mediation of recall and comprehension processes. Participants first read and wrote down a whole sentence on what the text was about. After this elicitation task, a three-minutes interview was conducted with the purpose of intervening between reading and recall. Then, subjects were left alone and asked to produce their recall protocols. For the analysis of the tape-recoded protocols, Lantolf and Appel (ibid.) focused on linguistic phenomena that provided insight into how recall and comprehension are mediated in an oral task. Findings showed that both L1 and L2 speakers deploy the same strategies in attempting to recall and understand written texts, but most important, speaking is employed as a mediating device. This study provides with evidence that support performance is dependent crucially on the interaction of the individual and the task rather than on the membership of the individual in some prior category, such as native and non-native speaker or reader. Lantolf and Appel (1994) concluded that understanding textual material when it does happen, is not necessarily a covert process, but it can be externalized as speech. That is, people can construct meaning from a text after the reading process itself has ended. Based on their findings, these researchers suggest that since comprehension, as the construction of meaning, is a mediated activity, a pedagogical approach to reading comprehension should incorporate post-reading activities which go beyond asking student questions about the content of texts. Moreover, Lantolf and Appel (1994) argued that speaking can be considered not only a mediator of subject's attempts to report on what learners understand from a text, but also the process through which they come to comprehend a text.

Another example how language is used as meditational tool in the L2 learning process is the study conducted by Anton (1999). This researcher analysed learner- centred and teacher-centred discourse in interactive exchanges between teacher and learners in the L2 classroom. Data was collected from observations of first-year university French and Italian classes over a term. Having identified emergent themes from the data, Anton (ibid.) found evidence that teachers can activate L2 learners' mental participation in the process of learning by engaging them in the negotiation of meaning, language forms and classroom rules by using various discursive moves. The microanalysis of classroom discourse revealed that when learners are engaged in negotiation, language is used to serve the function of scaffolding and to provide effective assistance as learners' progress in the zone

of proximal development. An interesting contribution of this study was the different theoretical basis and orientation given to learner-centred interaction. Anton (ibid.) claims that leaner-centeredness has been misinterpreted. That is, a common practice is to include more pair and group communicative activities in language lessons as it is a general belief that communicative activities foster a great amount of linguistic production and provides with opportunities for negotiation of meaning during communicative exchanges. Anton (ibid.) advocate that by looking at teacher-learner interaction from a sociocultural perspective expand the views on communicative activities can be expanded and understanding of the language functions reframed.

Summarizing, sociocultural theory central idea of tool mediation, addressed in this section, has been introduced to the field of education; however, its application within the SLA field is relatively new (Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015). Some SLA researchers have utilised the construct of mediation in their empirical works with a focus on the mediational properties of language; however, they have not necessarily approached it from the same perspective (e.g., Anton, 1999; Appel & Lantolf, 1994; Frawley & Lantolf, 1985; Donato & McCormick, 19994; Gibbons, 2003; Ohta, 2001). Other scholars have elaborated views on how the construct of mediation could be used to enhance learning (e.g., Kozulin, 1990; 2003; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

3.4 Mediated learning

From a sociocultural perspective, learning is a mediated activity (Daniels, 2001; Kozulin, et al., 2003). According to Johnson (2009, p. 1), a sociocultural perspective defines human learning as "a dynamic social activity that is situated in physical and social context, as is distributed across persons, tools, and activities." Sociocultural theory main argument is that while human neurobiology is a necessary condition for higher mental process (e.g., strategies), the most important forms of human cognitive activity develop through interaction within social and material environments, including conditions found in instructional setting (e.g., classroom activity) (Engeström, 1987, as cited in Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015). Based on Vygotsky's original views on tool mediation, Johnson has identified three types of tools which humans use to mediate their learning; these are cultural artifacts and activities, concepts, and social relations. Relevant examples might be, respectively, textbooks and the instructional activities they generate, metaphors commonly

associated with learning, such as “effective learning”, and different types of power relationships between students and teachers (Johnson, 2009, p. 18).

One of the most influential works on mediation and learning is the one formulated by Kozulin (1990, 2003). Based on Vygotsky’s work, Kozulin (ibid.) distinguished two forms of mediation that can be applied to actual teaching and learning: 1) human mediation, and 2) symbolic mediation. Human mediation involves the presence of an instructor and that of other learners. A similar view on ‘others’ mediation’ has been hold by Tharp and Gallimore (1988), who identified different forms of teacher mediation, including modelling, contingency, management, feedback, and cognitive structuring. Likewise, Johnson and Golombek (2011) suggest that mediation by other human beings, more specifically teachers, can take the form of different techniques such as demonstration, leading questions, and introducing elements for task’s solution.

Mediation by other human beings, however, is not restricted to the role played by the instructor within the formal learning setting. It has been found that the source of mediation can also be other learners (e.g., Donato, 1994). For example, Donato (1994) focused on mediation in the zone of proximal development and explored the process through which adult foreign language learners mediate each other through collaborative interaction in a classroom setting. To do so, he observed three third-term language students working on an open-ended classroom task and audiotaped their interactions. Donato (ibid.) distinguished between two types of collaborative groups: ‘loosely knit groups’ and ‘collective groups’. Data provided with evidence on how learners in the collective groups were able to construct jointly the scaffold necessary to complete a learning task. Donato (1994) concluded that collective scaffolding may result in linguistic development in the individual learner, but more important he challenged the psycholinguistic view for classroom group work derived from the assumption that negotiating meanings provides the necessary and sufficient conditions for acquisition of a second language. Donato (ibid, 34) argued that by framing the study of L2 interaction within the message model communication the important mechanisms of L2 development remain hidden and the social setting is neglected as an opportunity for ‘input crunching.’ Instead, he suggested to recast the role of learners during social interaction and to expand language tasks beyond simple opportunities to exchange linguistic artifacts to that of the collective acquisition of the language.

The notion of mediated learning brings to the central stage the role played by symbolic intermediaries between the learner and the material to be learned (Kozulin, 2003; Lantolf, 2011). Within the formal school setting, mediation tools include artefacts (such as dictionaries); private speech (itself and internalized form of social interaction); and scientific concepts made available through education (Johnson, 2009). Kozulin (2003) have defined psychological tools as those symbolic artifacts, including signs, symbols, texts, formulae, graphic organizers, that when internalized help individuals master their own natural psychological functions of perceptions, memory attention, etc. (p. 15-16). In the case of learning a second language, "mediation involves the use of 'tools' that help learners perform a task which they cannot perform successfully with their exiting linguistic resources" (Ellis, 2015, p. 214). Drawing on Ohta (2001), Ellis (2015) exemplifies mediating learning of a second language. In Ellis' example, a beginner-level learner is shown a card depicting a man holding an umbrella with rain falling onto the man inside the umbrella and asked to say what is wrong with the picture. The learner lacks the vocabulary to accomplish this task. The learner might use of a 'culturally constructed artefact', such as a bilingual dictionary, to access the necessary L2 vocabulary to mediate her performance of the task. However, this tool is not available. Instead, she performs the task with the help of her teacher. In other words, the mediation takes the form of a social activity (Ellis, ibid., p. 214). In Ohta's (2001) study, the interaction between the student and the teacher was analysed with a focus of how language was used by the teacher and the student itself to mediate the completion of a learning task. According to Ohta (2001), the analysis of the interaction revealed the learner demonstrated independent control only over one of the words she needed to perform the task ('man'), but the teacher helped her to produce two other key words, such as 'raining', which she repeated after the teacher, and 'umbrella', which she was able to say with the help of a prompt for the teacher**.** Ellis (2015, p. 214) notes that "In socio-cultural terms, we can see learning-as a process taking place". That is, in this example mediation by symbolic tools does not necessarily led to immediate learning, or acquisition of the words; the process of mediation involves that this learner is able to perform the task later and produce both words 'raining' and 'umbrella' without assistance from the teacher. That is, learning was mediated as the learner has gained 'voluntary control' over the use of words.

According to Kozulin (2003, p. 25) the 'general transformatory power' of external symbolic tools does not necessarily lead to cognitive changes in all cases. Kozulin (ibid.) states that in order to realize this capacity, the mediators should be appropriated under very special conditions which emphasize their meaning as cognitive tools. This author suggests that, in formal schooling, such an appropriation is apparently dependent on the goal that the teacher has for the tool-mediator offered to the learner. For this reason, Kozulin (ibid.) believes that the acquisition of psychological tools requires a different learning paradigm than the acquisition of empirical content knowledge. This learning paradigm presupposes: (a) a deliberate, rather than spontaneous character of the learning process; (b) systematic acquisition of symbolic tools; and (c) emphasis on the generalized nature of symbolic tools and their applications (Kozulin, 2003, p. 25).

A similar view has been discussed by Lantolf and Poehner (2008) who described two perspectives on mediation based on the works of Vygotsky and Wertsch (2007, namely, implicit mediation and explicit mediation. Implicit mediation, according to them, is relatively transparent and less easily taken as objects of conscious reflection or manipulation. In other words, it is not intentionally introduced into ongoing action (Lantolf & Poehner, ibid., p. 8). It merely refers to the relation between language and thinking as individuals engage in different culturally organized activities and as development takes place. Lantolf and Poehner (2008) suggest that "a more explicit and perhaps more profound, meaning development occurs as a consequence of formal education…" (p. 9). Explicit mediation, therefore, is intentionally and obviously introduced into the course of an activity either by the individual or by someone else (e.g., a teacher). This type of mediation is concerned with individuals functioning in real world activities with other individuals with culturally created tools, such as, paper and pencil, computers, charts, diagrams, etc. (Lantolf & Poehner, ibid., p. 9). The present study has been built upon the notion of explicit mediation since specific culturally made tools, tools used to teach and learn, namely a portfolio and learning journal, were intentionally introduced to the classroom activity in an L2 language course.

In sum, Vygotskyan scholars claim that mediation help us not only to understand the complex questions of how consciousness development occurs, but also to reconsider teaching and learning practices within formal school settings (Donato, 2000; Kozulin, et al., 2003). As suggested by Johnson (2009, p. 4) "When teaching creates learning

opportunities in which individuals can participate in activities that provide then with direct experiences in the use of new psychological tools, such tools have the potential to function as powerful instruments for human learning" (p. 4). From books to learning task, students' learning can be mediated provided that these symbolic mediators are acquired by learners in the course of learning activity and that the teacher and learner set particular goals for the tool-mediator (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Kozulin, 2003).

3.5 Activity Theory

Activity theory, often regarded as an extension of Vygotskian sociocultural theory, is an analytical framework for the understanding of human interaction through the use of tools and artifacts (Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Lantolf, 2000). It is rooted in Vygotsky's understanding of consciousness and rejection of the explanations provided by the introspective psychology as well as the reflexology position on consciousness at the time, but put forth by Leontiev (1978, 1981), and later elaborated by others (Engeström, 1987). Activity theory mainly addresses the implications of Vygotsky's claim that human behaviour results from the integration of socially and culturally constructed forms of mediation into human activity (Lantolf, 2000, p. 7). And, it has helped to interpret human behaviour and cognition as well as to explain developmental process (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Activity theory maintains that all human activity is fundamentally artifact-mediated and goal oriented (Johnson, 2009; Lantolf, 2000). At its core, it is Leontiev' view that activity is not merely doing something, it is doing something that is motivated either by a biological need, such as hunger, or a culturally constructed need, such as learning a language (Leontiev, 1978). According to Wertsch (1985, as cited in Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 17) the fundamental question raised by activity theory is "What is the individual or group doing in a particular setting?" Leontiev (ibid.) proposed that the response to this question must be formulated on three distinct level of analysis: *activity*, *action*, and *operations*. The highest level of analysis within the theory, the level of *activity*, is defined as the social institutionally determined setting of context based on a set of assumptions about the appropriate roles, goals, and means to be used by the participants in that setting (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 17).

Setting, within this framework, does not mean the physical or perceptual context in which individual function; rather, it refers to the sociocultural interpretations of creation that is imposes on the context by the participants (Wertsch, 1985). For example, in analysing playfulness as mediation in communicative language teaching in a Vietnamese classroom, Sullivan (2000) defined the social context not only to the classroom setting and the ways students interact within it, but also to the historical and cultural context of the world outside the classroom. She further explains that in a sociocultural approach to second learning, the starting point is the classroom practices as they are situated in particular cultural environments (Sullivan, ibid., p. 115). In this sense, the definition of 'foreign language learning' or 'good learning', for instance, is socially constructed and, therefore, interpreted differently in each setting.

At the first level of analysis, Lantolf and Appel (1994) describe, that activity is intrinsically linked to the concept of *motive* because without a motive there can be no activity (Leontiev, 1981). Motives specify what is to be "maximized" in a setting and arise out of the system of relations individuals maintain with other individuals and the world. Thus, a motive of labour is productivity and the more of formal schooling is leaning for learning's sake (Wertsch, 1985 as cited in Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 18). Lantolf and Appel (ibid.) note that "activity setting and their accompanying motives are transparent to the participants and are, thus, not readily accessible to conscious reflection" (p. 18). In the case of learning a language, this constitutes the activity; the setting is the language classroom, and it is assumed that, at this level of analysis within this framework, students do not consciously reflect on the activity of learning.

The second level of analysis consist of actions. Of importance at this level of analysis is the fact that activities are always directed towards some *goal.* In other words, "to say that an individual is engaged in a particular activity tell use nothing of the means-end relationship involved; it just tells us that the individual is functioning in a socioculturally defined context" (Wertsch, 1985 as cited in Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 19). Therefore, the level of action is the level of an activity at which the process is subordinated to a concrete goal (Leontiev, 1981). particular characteristic of actions is that any given action can be embedded in a different activity. "For example, the goal of building a wooden table can be realized in an educational, labour, or play activity setting", as described by Lantolf and Appel (1994, p. 19). Another important characteristic of goals is that, once they are

formed, they are not necessarily stable. In other words, goals change since individuals are agents active in creating their world; they can modify, postpone, or even abandon goals altogether (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Appel, 1994).

To fully understand how actions and goals are related in activity theory, Leontiev (1981, p. 60) argues that, while motives "energize", activity and goals impart directionality. The goal of an activity functions as a kind of regulator of the activity, and itself can be segmented into subgoals. Lantolf and Appel's (1994) examples of how goals regulate a given activity include an individual who may have the goal of building a house, but in order to carry this out, he or she must first attain the subgoal of learning how to use the requisite tools. Another example provided by Lantolf and Appel (ibid.) is that of an individual who has the goal of becoming a lawyer, but in order to fulfil this goal, he or she must realize the subgoal of passing the bar exam, which in turn, depends on realizing the subgoal of graduating from law school, which in turn depends on fulfilling the subgoal of obtaining a bachelor's degree. Lantolf and Appel (1994) indicate that in this scheme, "goals are not physical objects but phenomena of 'anticipatory reflection' and, as such, permit one to compare of evaluate intended and actual outcomes of activity before the activity is concretely operationalized" (p. 19). Lantolf (2000) illustrates how goals operate by comparing it to an architect seeing his or her intended construction in the mind's eye long before putting hand to paper of physical structure on the ground or the loom. In terms of learning a language, goals can be different from different individuals, ranging from mastering the language to gain communicative competence. Motives are also diverse (e.g., learning English for academic purposes, learning English for business purposes. Goals can be segmented into subgoals, such as obtaining a certification or completing a series of language courses. A

The final level of analysis of an activity is the operational level. "Operations largely determine the means, physical, or mental, through which an action is carried out; they are bound to the actual circumstances and conditions under which a goal is realized", as explicated by Lantolf and Appel (1994, p. 20) Thus, the same goal can be achieved through different operations (Lantolf, 2000). Operations within this analytical framework are strategies learning deploy learn a language to achieve a specific goal. Two essential features of operations, as indicated by Lantolf and Appel (1994, p. 20), are that operations under which some goal is realized may themselves at some point be a necessary subgoal"

and that they usually become automatized procedures, but once the attain this status, they do not necessarily remain so forever. In this sense, mainstream literature on language learning strategies has deal with the problem of identifying and labelling strategies; this has resulted in the construction of taxonomies in which strategies are allocated under a specific category in one scheme, but under a different category at another. Also, strategies, understood as operations, can become automatized procedures, as learners constantly use them, yet the same learner can stop using a given strategy and integrate new ones.

One potential problem of activity theory, as originally conceived by Leontiev, is that is has no mechanism for higher forms of consciousness to arise from sociocultural practices. However, Vygotsky acknowledged this limitation and established symbolic mediation as the link between sociocultural practice and mental functioning, being this the centre of this theoretical thinking (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Another problem in activity theory is that activity cannot be object of study and simultaneously serve as an explanatory principle of consciousness, unless it has its own unit of analysis as well as its own explanatory framework (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Thus, according to Lantolf and Appel (1994) in order to fully understand a given activity, we must bear in mind that because operations can be converted into goals or subgoals as actions are carried out, it is necessary to loot at actions and operations and their interactions simultaneously. That is, at the surface level all actions learners carry out could be interpreted as strategies. In more practical terms, second language researchers working within activity framework must deal with the assumption that participants and their participation in learning tasks can be controlled since subjects involved in the same tasks are necessarily involved in different activity (Roebuck, 2000). That is, individuals bring to the tasks their unique histories, goals and capacities (Roebuck, ibid. p. 79).

In summary, activity theory maintains that human activity is fundamentally artifact-mediated and goal-oriented. In other words, people do not function individually or independently of others, but they mediate and are mediated by the social relationships they have with others. Likewise, they pursue their goals through the use of culturally constructed physical and symbolic artifacts (Jonson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2011). As stated by Lantolf and Appel (1994), human sociocultural activity that give rise to higher forms of cognition, is comprised of contextual, intentional, and circumstantial dimensions. The motive and goal, are crucial in activity theory, as they constitute a “kind of vector,

determining the direction and amount of effort and individual exerts in carrying out the activity" (Lomov, 1982, as cited in Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 21). Therefore, in Lantolf and Appel's word, "the level of motive answers why something is done the level go goals answers what is done, and the level of operations answers how it is done" (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 21). Rather than exploring learning and development by isolating a single factor and controlling for all others, an activity theoretical perspective attempts to construct a holistic view of human activities within these activities.

3.6 The research method of sociocultural theory

Vygotsky argued that it was necessary to develop a new research methodology to reflect the new theory of mind he developed. The research methodology Vygotsky and his colleagues proposed for the inquiry of the development of higher forms of mental behaviour is referred to as *the genetic method* (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). The genetic method, in practical terms, is an approach to scientific research in which the development of individuals, groups and processes are traced over time (Lantolf, Thorne and Poehner, 2015). Although this methodology is not intended merely as an alternative to other research methodologies, it is in fact, as Lantolf and Thorne (2006) explain, "the necessary consequence of Vygotsky's new way of theorizing humans and human psychological functions as mediated by social practices and cultural artifacts" (p. 25). According to Wertsch (1985, as cited in Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015, p. 208) Vygotsky's research was inspired by three essential principles of Marxist theory: 1) the idea that human consciousness is fundamentally social, rather than merely biological, in origin; 2) that human activity is mediated by material artifacts (e.g. computers, the layout of built environments) and psychological and symbolic tools/signs (e.g. language, literacy, numeracy, concepts); and 3) that units of analysis for understanding human activity and development should be holistic in nature.

The genetic method has its roots in Vygotsky's dialectic approach. For Vygotsky (1978), previous research on human mental functioning assumed a unidirectional relationship between human and nature (Lantolf; 2012; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This means, human behaviour has been explained in terms of individuals' biological make up or the environment in which they live, which means that the directionality flows from the brain to the world. Instead, Vygotsky's proposed that the directionality flows from the world to the brain. Consequently, the understanding of higher mental processes could neither be

achieved by descriptive research alone (*phenotypic*), nor by the use of research models from natural sciences. Although Vygotsky (1978) recognized the importance of traditional research methodologies, such as introspection and reaction-time experiments, for the study of lower, or biologically specified forms of mental functioning, he argued that these approaches were inappropriate for the study of higher, culturally constructed forms of thinking Vygotsky (ibid.) claimed that stimulus-response studies of higher functions can only suggest how they relate to elementary functions and do not capture their historical and sociocultural qualities. Hence, reaction time measures could only provide evidence of quantitative variation in psychological processes (Kozulin, 1990; Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Likewise, Vygotsky believed that those methods which rely on introspection, such as think aloud research, are limited in what they reveal, and he reasoned that if language is implicated in the thinking process itself rather than being simply a means of expressing fully formed thought, the very act of reflecting on a process through taking about it, is likely to affect the process. In Smagonnsky's words (2001), "If thinking becomes rearticulated through the process of speech, then the protocol is not simply representative of meaning. It is, rather, *an agent in the production of meaning"* (p. 240). The goal of the research, therefore, is to trace the development of thinking over time as it is being formed through external mediation.

Moreover, for Vygotsky and his colleagues the nature of the genetic method resides in the fact that human thinking is mediated by what are originally external means (e.g., symbolic artifacts); therefore, mediation cannot be observed in a direct fashion. As Lantolf and Thorne (2006) indicate, "…mediation is often hidden from direct observation as a consequence of internalization giving rise to the 'illusion' of a single line of biological development." (p. 61). Another reason for Vygotsky's genetic method is that human mind should not be regarded as a 'finished product', but as a developmental one. Lantolf and Thorne (ibid., p. 61) explains that, "if approached from the perspective of the finish product, the complex nature of human cognition is difficult, if not impossible, to observe." Vygotsky (1978) observed that if researchers attempt to study mental processes after they have been fully formed, it is not possible to observe anything than the mere reactions to stimuli as it often occurs in laboratory experiments.

All in all, the genetic method provides with a framework for a developmental approach to the study of higher mental abilities. It allows humans to behave as real agents in control of their mental activity and researchers to understand, rather than to predict mental functioning. Lantolf (2011, p. 26) indicates that because sociocultural theory holds that development originates in the integration of biologically endowed abilities with culturally organized artifacts that mediate thinking, research focussed on fully formed "fossilized" (Vygotsky, 1978) processes cannot differentiate behaviour arising from one or another source. As Wertsch (1985) underlined, the fundamental claim in Vygotsky's genetic or developmental analysis is that human mental processes can be understood only by considering how and where they occur in growth.

From the above, it can be argued that the fundamentals of sociocultural theory not only provide with a different understanding on human mind development, but also challenge the methods used to study and explain the fact that the mind is mediated. While most psychological theories follow a particular approach to research either quantitative, qualitative, or a combination of both, being the approach itself more or less independent of the particular theory, within sociocultural theory there is a close relationship between theory and its affiliated approach to research (Johnson, 2009; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Regarding strategy L2 research, positivistic research has sought to identify the strategies used by good language learners and has traditionally focused on what high achievers do that leads them to successfully learn a language as demonstrated in tests scores. Positivistic research methods typically involve random sampling as it is assumed to represent the broader population, as well as data collection analysis methods that can be replicated. Instead, a sociocultural approach to strategy research suggests that we can trace learning by looking at the progressive movement from externally, socially mediated activities to internal mediation controlled by the individual learner. In other words, the research method of sociocultural theory focuses on the process through which a learner's activity is initially mediated by cultural artifacts, but later comes to be controlled by him/herself as he or she appropriates and reconstructs resources to regulate his or her own activities (e.g., Donato & McCormick, 1994; Gao, 2006; Gillette, 1994; Parks, 2000; Parks & Raymond, 2004; Simeon, 2014).

3.7 Theoretical interpretative framework for this study

Traditionally, cognitive learning theories, underground in positivist epistemological perspectives, have defined learning as an internal psychological process isolated in the mind of the learner and largely free from the social and psychological within which it occurs (Jonson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek 2011). As a result, the predominant model of learning is that of acquisition, in which students are perceived as containers that must be filled with knowledge and skills by teachers (Daniels, 2001). In the case of strategy instruction, these theoretical views have informed the training of strategies to L2 language learners (see 2.3 and 2.4). In contrast, for Vygotsky's scholars learning is not the straightforward appropriation of skills or knowledge from the outside in, but the progressive movement from external, socially mediated activity, to internal mediational control by individual learners, which, in turn, transform the self and the activity (Johnson, 2009).

In this this section, I articulate my own theoretical framework for the current study, based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the concept of mediation. First, I consider some fundamentals of Vygotsky's theory of mind to explain language learning strategies from a different perspective from that previously established in mainstream language learning strategy research (see 2.2). Drawing on activity theory and its analytical levels, I go on discussing how goals are paramount in directing students' strategic efforts to language learning. The section ends with a description of two mediated learning activities, namely portfolio and learning journal which are central to the approach proposed to develop L2 learners' strategies. It is important to highlight that in this chapter the portfolio and the learning journal are outlined from their role as tools that are introduced into the course of an English as a foreign language module with the purpose of intentionally mediate students' learning towards more strategic oriented learning. It will be mainly discussed that while the portfolio is goal oriented and is a tool to engage students in the activity of learning a language, the learning journal engages students in reflection and self-regulation processes. Portfolios and learning journals will be addressed in the next chapter as research tools used to collected data to answer the posed questions in this investigation (see 4.3.1 and 4.3.2).

3.7.1 A sociocultural perspective on language learning strategies and strategy instruction

In strategy literature, language learning strategies have been referred to as ‘steps’ or behaviours’ that reside on learners’ minds and are subject to a classification system. Instead, scholars following the line of Vygotsky suggest that learning strategies are higher mental processes, which learners develop by means of mediation and participation in social constructed activities (Frawley & Lantolf, 1985; Donato & McCormick, 1994). As discussed earlier in this chapter, Vygotsky (1978, 1979) distinguished *lower order biologically functions* (e.g., vision, hearing, involuntary attention), from *higher mental functions* including logical memory, voluntary attention, conceptual thought, planning, perception, strategic orientation to problem solving, and evaluation, or what is comprised in the term metacognition (Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Lantolf, 2000; Kozulin, et al., 2003). These are not categories of individuals’ behaviour, but the necessary result of cognitive development through means of mediation by other human beings, language, and cultural artifacts, all of them referred to as mediation tools. For instance, by analysing the mediating function of the language, Frawley and Lantolf (1985), for example, uncovered that strategic activity occurs in developing second language discourse. It is the social interaction the origin of the ability to engage successfully in strategic process. Therefore, they suggest that categorization of strategies into “strategic taxonomies tell us very little about the psycholinguistic processes involved in speaking” (Frawley & Lantolf, 1994, p. 41). Instead, a taxonomy of communication strategies can be “collapsed” into three types of control functions: other-regulation, object-regulation, and self-regulation, being language the symbolic mediator in this scheme.

Besides, sociocultural theory main claim is that the ‘social’ and the ‘cognitive’ are dialectally connected (see 3.2). This means that the dichotomy of ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’, or ‘thoughts’ and ‘behaviour’ are considered as one single unity. According to Ellis (2015), a dialectal unity “disputes the dualism inherent in cognitive SLA claiming that social and cognitive processes are not distinct and separate, but two sides of the same coin” (p. 221). While one of the most discussed issue in LLS literature is the conceptualization and nature of strategies, whether they should be defined as ‘cognitive’ or ‘behavioural’, sociocultural theory appears to offer an explanatory solution in resolving this conflict. A dialectal orientation places emphasis how the unity itself functions to achieve a particular end or goal, such as learning a language.

A key concept in this study is that of mediation. As discussed in previous sections, the fundamental tenet of sociocultural theory is the necessary existence of mediation tools for the process of developing high order mental functions to occur. Strategy research framed within the cognitive paradigm assumes that strategic behaviour can be modified as a result of systematic strategy training. In contrast, Vygotsky saw the transformation of elementary processes into high order ones as possible through the mediating function of culturally constructed artefacts including tools, symbols and more elaborated sign systems (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Appel, 1994, Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). An alternative approach to strategy instruction, therefore, necessarily involves new forms of mediation. Kozulin (2003) asserts that the acquisition of psychological tools requires a different learning paradigm than the acquisition of empirical content knowledge, as in the case of strategy instruction in which students are taught strategies in direct fashion. From a sociocultural perspective, strategies emerged from mediated participation in sociocultural activity. Although the first idea that could come to mind is that of students participating social interactions, as in group work in the learning setting, the notion of mediated cultural activity in this particular study refers to…

In the light of the above, the underlying assumption in sociocultural-informed strategy research (see 2.5) is that higher forms of thinking, such as strategies, develop in socially situated- mediated activity, by means of mediation tools, and it is subject to change according to learners' motives and goals (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Gillette, 1994). The adopted view in this study is that of strategies, as higher mental functions, generated in goal-directed mediated activity. Here, the term strategic learning is used to encompass learners' higher mental functions directed towards meeting a goal to success in language learning. 'Strategic learning', in this new scheme, refers to 'on-going' efforts rather than 'stable mental processes'. A sociocultural approach to strategy research suggests that learners' strategic orientation change according to the motives and goals governing their language learning.

3.7.2 Learners' goals

The main assumption derived from theorizations of language learning and mediation is that only if the learners intend to pursue a particular goals or visions, which usually emerge in their internal conversation or reflective/thinking, a more active approach to learning is activated. Inspired by Vygotsky's concern that the focus of inquiry on human psychological functioning must extend beyond the individual, Leontiev (1978) proposed that the activity, and not the individual, is the most useful unit of analysis. The construct of activity is conceived as containing a subject, an object, actions, and operations. At the highest level, activity is intrinsically linked to motive, the individual's underlying purpose for engaging in the activity. Without a motive, there is no activity (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Wertsch (1985) explains that motives specify what is to be 'maximized' in a setting and arise out of the systems of relations individuals maintain with other individuals and the world. Thus, the motive of schooling, for instance, is learning. At the second level of analysis, activity and motive are further conceptualized as actions and goals respectively. Goals serve to operationalize motives into more specific objectives. Actions refer to the specific mediation means or strategies used to achieve a goal. Finally, at the third level of analysis, actions and goals are analysed into operations and the particular circumstances or material conditions under which they are realised. Whereas actions and goals are associated with conscious goal-directed behaviour, operations relate to the more automated modes of behavioural functioning (Lantolf, 2000; Parks, 2000).

Sociocultural perspectives allow us to analyse strategic learning from activity theory conceptual framework (e.g., Donato & McCormick, 1994; Gillette, 1994; Parks, 2000). Activity theory specifies that explaining the activity of individuals requires uncovering the motive and the interrelationship of this motive with the selection of goal-directed actions and their operational composition. The individual motive determines which actions will be maximized and selected and how they will be operationalized in a particular setting (Donato, 1994, p. 36). Lantolf (2000) claims that the motives and goals of particular activities cannot be determined solely from the level of concrete doing, since the same observable activity can be linked to different goals and motives and different concrete activities can be linked to the same motives and goals. Thus, activities can only be directly observed at the level of conditions or operations. Furthermore, Lantolf (2000) suggests that in any given classroom setting, not only activities can change from one moment to the next, but also different activities might be underway at any given time, despite the fact that

all of the participants display the similar behaviours in a task. The motive and goal constitute is, therefore, paramount in determining the direction and amount of effort and individual exerts in carrying out the activity, such as language learning.

For example, Da Silva (2008) focused on the relationship between a second language student's goal and her attitude and actions toward learning to write argumentative essays in English. Da Silva's study documented the case of an upper-intermediate ESL student, Lavelda, enrolled in a writing course in an English language institute in the US. Data were collected by the teacher-researcher and by a classroom observer in a genuine intact (regular scheduled) ESL elective composition classroom over a period of eight weeks. Data collection methods comprised two questionnaires, teacher-researcher's self-reflection, five classroom observations, pre- and post- test essays, transcripts of five pair-work activities, and two focus group interviews as the ethic procedures considered by the teacher-researcher involved the consent of all of the students enrolled in the course. Relevant to this inquiry, Da Silva's (ibid.) study was epistemologically aligned to the constructivist paradigm, and no single methodological practice was privileged. In other words, the research choice of data collection was determined largely by the context and purpose of the study, and a mixed-method design for data analysis was adopted. While, the qualitative analysis aimed at providing an understanding of the participant's goals and of her attitudes and actions in class, the quantitative analysis was restricted to her pre- and post-test essays to verify her improvement in the course. The results of this study showed that although there were contradictions between the student's positive attitudes and actions in class and her negative feelings towards writing and towards the classroom activities, an improvement in the participant's writing was observed. Utilising the sociocultural framework of activity theory, Da Siva (ibid.) concluded that Lavelda's goal provided insights into how she respondent to the course; by focusing on her life goal, she was able to set aside her dislike for writing and for the classroom activities oriented to learn how to write in English. The findings of this study suggest that understanding student's goals and behaviour can help teachers improve the teacher-learning process by adapting teaching methodology to students' goals.

3.7.3 Portfolios

Portfolios usually comprise a purposefully collection of students' work that demonstrates their efforts, progress, and achievement in language learning (Genesee & Upshur, 1996). Typically, practitioners in EFL have adopted the concept of portfolios and implemented it in their teaching as an alternative form of assessment. Delett et al. (2001) indicate that portfolios provide a portrait of what students know and what they can do, offer a multidimensional perspective of students' progress over time; they are a link between instruction and assessment. From a learner-centred perspective portfolios, it has been suggested that portfolios can "encourage learners to actively participate in every aspect of learning, including setting goal, selecting materials and strategy and assessing outcomes" Lo (2010, p. 78). Besides these benefits, Genesee & Upshur (1996) assert that portfolios make students the agents of reflection and decision making and thus give them control of their own learning. They encourage students to reflect on their own learning, to assess own strengths and weaknesses, and to identify their own goals for learning.

From a sociocultural perspective, portfolios are cultural artifacts, or tools, that serve a mediating function. Cultural artifacts and activities are described by Lantolf and Thorne (2006, p. 62) as "simultaneously material and conceptual (or ideal) aspects of human goal-directed activity that are not only incorporated into the activity, but are constitutive of it". In this study, learning a foreign language is considered a goal-directed activity and portfolios are regarded as the cultural artifacts incorporated into the activity. An example of how a cultural artifact, such as portfolio protocol can mediate activity has been provided by Poehner (2011) who reported of the experiences of a second-grade teacher participating in inquiry-based professional development approach known as Critical Friends Group. The different protocols, questions, and time-frames used to guide the activity of the participating teachers as they collectively engaged in critical examinations of their work functioned both as materials tools that were used to direct teachers' thinking through social interaction in a system fashion, and as conceptual tools in which the kinds of questions used to direct teachers' thinking were initially in the Critical Friends Group protocol facilitator's mind. In this sense, the protocols were not only used in the activities of Critical Friends Group, but they made up the activity. Furthermore, the Critical Friends Group protocols, in this example, can be regarded as symbolic due to their social, historical and cultural value of supporting teacher professional development through reflection on their own teaching. They can also become psychological tools, as in the case of a teacher in

Poehner's (ibid.) focal group who adapted the reflective and evaluative qualities of a particular protocol for her own elementary students in order to engage in peer reviews during writing workshops.

In sociocultural-informed strategy research, the study of Donato and McCormick (1994) was pioneering in utilizing a 'cultural artifact', namely the assessment portfolio, as mediational tool. By asking students enrolled in a French conversation course to document and reflect upon their own the spoken language development, Donato and McCormick (1994) could observe how learners' strategies became more focused, specific, personal and realistic over the term. Donato and McCormick (ibid.) also reported that students became more frequent users of their own work and participation in the course as a result of mediating reflection. These researchers concluded that the success of the students identifying, refining, and developing their own strategies was a direct result of an environment that mediated language learning in reflective and systematic ways throughout the use of the student portfolio.

In the light of the above, a goal oriented portfolio project is central to the alternative strategy approach proposed in the present study. In this study, portfolios are defined as mediation tools that engage students in the activity of learning a language. Moreover, portfolios are goal-oriented as they aim at helping learners focus on their specific objectives, decide the strategic actions to take in order to achieve them, and document evidence of their work (Donato & McCormick, 1994). In the present piece of research portfolios have a two-fold purpose. They are referred to as a cultural artifact that mediates students' learning and as a research method. Portfolios as a method to collect data from participant necessary to answer the research questions will be discussed in section 4.3.1.

3.7.4 Journal writing

Within the EFL context, one activity that is generally considered to be central to language learning is reflection (Richards & Lockhardt, 1996). The assumption derived from sociocultural perspectives and applied to the present study is that mediation is realized through reflection, dialoguing with one-self, and above all, through mediated learning activities in the classroom (Kramsch; 2000; Kozulin, 2003; Mahn, 2008). In Vygotsky' sociocultural theory, speaking and writing activity can function as a meditational artifact to control thinking (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This means that not only through spoken, but

also through written artifacts humans are able to create ideal objects and use them to plan material activity before carrying it out. Moreover, Johnson and Golombek (2011) suggest that the mediational means through which higher forms of thinking emerges may be reflective writing.

Gao (2013) has theorized on the role of reflexive/reflecting thinking in learners' autonomy. The central argument in Gao's view is that language learners' exercise of autonomy, or their capacity to take control of one's own learning, depends on their agency through reflexive/reflective thinking or thinking during action and post-event in the learning process (p. 227). Gao (ibid.) also stresses the importance to perceive learners' autonomy or learners' capacity to control the learning process as socioculturally mediated and context-situated (p.235). He also proposes internal conversation or reflexive/reflective thinking as an important means to examine how contextual and structural conditions mediate language learners' efforts.

One example of how mediation in the form of journals can be introduced into the classroom is Mahn's (2008) study of a first-year ESL university writing class. Mahn (ibid.) addressed the problem of helping ESL writing students express their intended meanings through the L2 by employing dialog journals as a mediating activity between the language and the student's internal systems of meaning. Using Vygotsky's' work and the constructs of verbal thinking, inner speech, and ZPD to establish a theoretical foundation, Mahn (ibid.) analysed the development of the cognitive processes language learners use to write in English. The focus was on examining both the problems that English language learners encounter when writing in English and students' reflections on how journal writing influenced their motivation and confidence in L2 writing. Data on students' perspectives on dialog journals were collected from written reflections, questionnaires, interviews, being dialog journals the centre piece of the approach. In the analysis, Mahn (ibid.) centred on three aspects: 1) how learners made meaning through activity and their journals; 2) how journals influence their attitudes towards writing in English, including their confidence in themselves as writers, their fears and anxiety with writing; and 3) how journals help learners develop conceptual thinking. Three themes emerged from the data collects; these were: confidence, consciousness awareness. and motive. Samples of students' writing revealed metacognitive awareness of students' own thinking and composition processes, suggesting that dialog journals help students overcome fears,

develop fluency through meaningful communication, and gain self-confidence as English writers. Regarding consciousness awareness, it was found that students developed some strategies by writing journals, which were carried over to other types of writing as well. An interesting insight highlighted by Mahn (ibid.) is that in examining student's awareness of and reflections on their own thinking and writing processes, it is important to recognize that a tremendous amount of mental activity that going into the production of language occurs at a subconscious level (p. 129). The use of dialog journals also revealed that journals help motivate students because of the authentic and meaningful communication with another person. While typically students' motive is a course grade, Mahn (ibid.) found that since students did not have to worry about grades in this practice, journals changed students' motives for writing and allowed them to set their goals. The results of the investigation shed a light on issues concerning not only L2 writing but also the application of Vygotsky's theory to classroom practice. First, Mahn (ibid) concluded that dialog journals help English language learners develop their literacy competency, in particular their ability to write fluently as they focus on meaning they want to convey and not on whether a particular grammatical reconstruction is correct. By focusing on what is meaningful to them, students draw on their own life experiences, sociocultural environments and their meaning-making processes as resources for their own writing. Second, journal writing provides learners space and time within their zone of proximal development allowing them explore and develop their own writing.

Based on these assumptions, another mediation tool central to the approach proposed to develop L2 students' strategic learning is the learning journal. In this study, the learning journal is defined as a mediated learning activity purposefully introduced into classroom activity to engage students in reflection and self-regulation process. Journals offer learners the opportunity to reflect on their personal growth and development (Mahn, 2008). It has been suggested that writing things down serve both planning and creative functions (Verity, 2000). Thus, by writing about their learning regularly students could mediate the development of higher functions, such as strategic thinking. As Verity (2008) asserts "journal writing is considered a form of 'private writing', like 'private speech´; therefore, it should be read in terms of the mediating function it serves" (p. 183). For all these reasons, journal writing implemented in the language classroom can provide with insight into students' actual learning approaches derived from classroom activity (Gillette, 1994). That is, from students' participation in social activity, such as learning, it is possible to

understand how the social context and *activity* itself influenced students on adopting a more strategic approach to learning. In this study, journals have a two-fold purpose. They are referred to as tool that mediates L2 students' learning activity and as a research method to collect data to answer the research questions. Journals as a research method utilised in this investigation will be discussed in section 4.3.2.

3.7.5 Reflection, mediation, and strategic learning

More recent works on strategic learning have integrated learning logs, journals, diaries and portfolios as methodological tools to support the development of language learning strategies and foster student's self-regulation processes and autonomy (see Burton & Carroll, 2001; Dantas-Whitney, 2002; Ikeda & Takeuchi, 2006; Leany, 2003; Walker, 2003; Yan, 2003). In general, portfolios and journals are described as a regular record of language learning or learning-related activity which is kept by the learner. They place emphasis on a longitudinal record of the students' experiences, feelings and reactions to learning (Murphy, 2008). Besides the qualities of these methodological tools already described, portfolios and journals, Murphy (2008), highlights that the crucial element is the review of activity in order to learn from the experience and shape the next phase of learning. Critical reflection is also central to cognitive conceptions of learning when planning, goal setting, reviewing, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation are involved (Murphy, 2008, p. 213).

From a sociocultural and constructivist perspective, learning and the development of internal cognitive processes, including critical reflection and self-reflection, derive from the internalisation of meaning during social interaction, or participation in cultural activity, which provides repeated exposure to language use by others by means of mediation (Vygotsky, 1986). Little (2001, p. 32) sees learning as the result of a complex interplay between social and reflective processes where both are equally important for cognitive development and autonomy. According to Murphy, (2008), "reflection on the experience of interaction through a learning portfolio journal can help learners to make explicit what they have 'noticed' through the use of 'selective attention' to items made salient for them via course of other learning resources (p. 213). In Donato and McCormick (1994), reflection is defined as an anchored in concrete evidence of learning experiences that serve as benchmark for thinking about performance, planning, future courses of action, and

monitoring one's accomplishments (p. 457). Gao (2013, p. 235) highlights the role of internal conversation or reflexive/reflective thinking as an important means to examine how contextual and structural conditions mediate language learners' learning efforts as well as how they respond to these external discourses and conditions in their discernment, deliberation, and dedication. A central argument in Gao's work is that language learners' exercise of autonomy, or their capacity to 'take control of one's own learning' depends on their agency through reflexive/reflective thinking or thinking during action and postevent in the learning process. According to him, although concepts as agency (SCT) and metacognition have entirely different disciplinary and epistemological tools, "both draw attention to the critically of the learners' reflexive/reflective thinking in commitment to autonomous learning" (Gao, ibid, p. 229), or on what we can also called a more strategic approach to learning

Furthermore, sociocultural views suggest that contextual and structural conditions appear to be constraining or supportive only if the learners intend to pursue particular goals or visons, which usually emerge in their internal conversations or reflexive/thinking (Archer, 2000). Archer (2000) argues that learners make decisions in the learning process by conducting internal conversation, in which the ultimate goals, concerns, desires, or visions are identified for commitment. Internal conversation, as defined by Archer (2003) is what we would do to:

> [formulate] our thought and then [inspect] and [respond] to these utterances, as subject to object. This process is itself the process of reflexivity; it is how we do all these things like monitoring, self-evaluation and self-commitment. (...) Internal dialogue is the practice through which we' make up our minds' by questioning ourselves, clarifying our beliefs and inclinations, diagnosing our situations, deliberating about our concerns and defining our own projects. (p. 103)

Lastly, the tenets of self-reflection, self-direction, and self-evaluation embedded in the portfolio process promote autonomous learning. As suggested by Lo (2010, p. 78) from a learner-centred perspective portfolios can "encourage learners to actively participate in every aspect of learning, including setting goal, selecting materials and strategy and assessing outcomes." Reflection, therefore, is central to cognitive perceptions of learning where it underpins, higher mental function such as planning, goal-setting, reviewing, self-monitoring and self-evaluation, or what it is called metacognitive strategies (Gillette, 1994; Gao, 2013; Murphy, 2008). Accordingly, writing reflections for a goal-oriented portfolio project and journal writing can engage students in reflection.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has discussed the fundamentals of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, in particular, it has outlined the construct of mediation, which is central to the present study. Activity theory as analytical framework of tool-mediated activity has also been discussed with especial emphasis on the notion of goals, which concern this piece of research. In this chapter I have argued that sociocultural theory and activity theory as a psychological theory of mind, has the potential to explicate the origins, mechanisms, and nature of strategies, and in turn, inform research on how students can be assisted in developing language learning strategies. It was also emphasised that from a sociocultural perspective, higher forms of thinking, such as learning strategies, are fundamentally shaped by the specific social activities in which learners engage. While language and its mediating function have been the focus of SCT-L2 research, a study on how specific learning activities serve as mediation tools in helping students develop their own learning strategies and how students' particular language learning goals influence on their approach to learning, is aligned to the notion of mediation by tools and that of mediation in the form of organized learning activity, in which mediation is intentionally introduced into the course of an activity, such as learning a foreign language.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the justification for the research method selected to investigate strategic learning and the role played by mediation and learners' goals. Considering that this is yet relatively unexplored in mainstream strategy research, the methodology in this study was 'tailored' so as to allow the researcher collect the necessary data to answer the research questions posed. The approach chosen is rather flexible in the sense that I chose research strategies from both constructivist and positivist traditions. Some principles of interventional studies were followed due to the need to implement different mediation tools in an intact language classroom, but data collection and analysis was predominantly qualitative. These research tools had a two-fold purpose; it served as new integrated learning tools and as data collection instruments. Since the main objective of the present study is to inform on alternative approach to strategy instruction, a more appropriate, and context-sensitive, research methodology attempts to produce a description on how learners develop their own strategic efforts to learn the target language.

The chapter will begin with a discussion on the philosophical and epistemological assumptions justifying the methodological decisions in this study. The following section discusses the selection of appropriate methodological tools, namely journals and goal-oriented portfolios. This second section provides with a review of these tools as used in language learning and strategy research. It should be noted that in two section in this chapter address portfolios and journals; in one section I discuss their qualities as both data collection methods and mediation tools, and, in a different section, I detail the use of them in the present study. The chapter will then move on to a description of the study itself. An account of the research setting and participants is included as well the criteria for the selection of the language classroom. Details about the implementation of the methodological tools are provided. The ethical considerations of the study are also part of this broad section. The final section of the chapter briefly describes the type of data analysis utilised in this study.

4.2 Methodological framework

Embracing a different theoretical perspective such as Vygotskian notion of mediation and Activity theory for the study of strategic learning requires the use of a methodological approach that corresponds to the theory informing the study, the philosophical and epistemological assumptions of the researcher, and the ultimate objective of the study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

While most strategy instruction research to the date has been of experimental type, with researchers adopting a positivistic view of research and with only a small number of studies including qualitative methods or mix-methods, strategy experts have urged researchers use more context-sensitive methods, which can reveal more on learners' strategic behaviour (refer to Chapter 2). In this sense, recent SLA and AL researchers have acknowledged the value of qualitative methods and used them alongside quantitative methods in what has been called a post-positivistic approach to research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). This point is supported by Prassad (2015, p. 4), who argues that there is a tendency in using non-quantitative methods of data collection, such as interviews and observation, within conventional positivist assumptions about the nature of social reality and the production of knowledge.

Nonetheless, by defining a piece of research as either quantitative or qualitative, or even post-positivistic, any empirical work might be prevented from using of certain methods and research strategies since they are not typically employed by a given research paradigm or design. While, a positivist orientation assumes that reality exists "out there" and that it is observable, stable, and measurable, a constructivist or qualitative perspective establishes that the purpose of research would not be that of theory testing, setting up an experiment, or measuring anything (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), but that of interpreting reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). According to Brown (2004) labelling the two types of research as separate paradigms displaying characteristics in pairs of opposites is "a disservice" (p. 491). And, he adds, "such a strong and even adversarial distinction between qualitative and quantitative research may be an unnecessarily polarizing and even inaccurate characterization of the relationships among the various types of research in applied linguistics." (Brown, ibid., p. 491). Instead, Brown (2004) suggests these two paradigms be placed at the end of a continuum, which means one research project might be characterized as being in the middle of the data type continuum because it uses both quantitative and

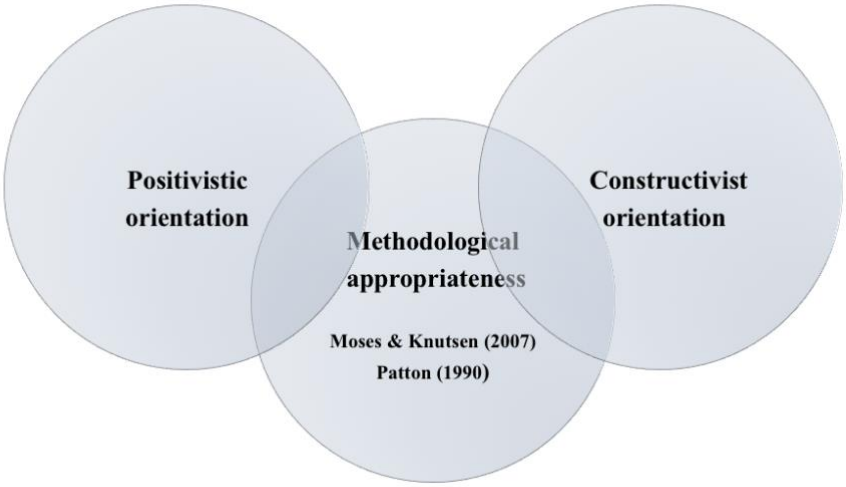
qualitative data in equal proportions. The assumption here is that a research project placed within the continuum of positivism and constructionism might not only adopt methods traditionally labelled as qualitative data or quantitative type, but also adapt research methods that can be appropriate in responding research questions, making the project feasible.

Likewise, Mackey and Gass (2005) refer to the quantitative and qualitative approaches as a "somewhat simplistic as the relationship is best though of a continuum of research types" (p. 2), with a number of variations resulting from the combination of different manners of data collection and data analysis. Another position towards the dichotomous conception over research paradigms is that of Creswell (2007, p. 15), who suggests that paradigms "overlap" in some studies, and that when they do so, they reinforce each other.

A more elaborated view has been provided by Patton (1990, p. 38), who indicates that by adopting either logical-post positivist paradigm, which uses quantitative experimental methods to test hypothetical-deductive generalizations, or by adopting a phenomenological inquiry paradigm, which uses qualitative and naturalistic approaches to inductively understand human experience in context-specific setting, the researcher may be prevented from methodological flexibility and creativity. In Moses and Knutsen's discussion (2007; 2012) about the naturalistic and constructivist debate in social sciences, they conclude, "We think that social science is better served by researchers who can master several methods methodologies, who can self-consciously choose among concepts and theories, and who command many basic principles of reasoning" (p. 8).

In the light of the above, the present study does not privilege any of the research traditions previously discussed. This means, it is not framed within a cause-effect type of study in which certain variables are predicted to explain an outcome, nor is it framed within an approach that seeks to explore a single phenomenon in a purely naturalistic research type (Creswell, 2007). Instead, I have utilised a methodological framework that combines strategies from both paradigms, positivisms and constructivist since the present inquiry has been 'tailored' taking into account features of an interventionist approach and utilised qualitative methods for the generation and analysis of data. Figure 2 portraits the underlying how philosophical and methodological views inform this study.

Figure 2: Philosophical views and methodological appropriateness.



In the present study, mediation tools in the form of a goal-oriented portfolio and a learning journal were implemented in a genuine intact and regular scheduled English class of an undergraduate TEFL program. These tools had two-fold purpose as they served for mediation and data collection (see 4.4.7). As discussed in the previous chapter, the research method of sociocultural theory focuses on the process through which a learner's activity is initially mediated by cultural artifacts, but later comes to be controlled by him/herself as he or she appropriates and reconstructs resources to regulate his or her own activities (see 3.6 and 3.7). Considering this, the purpose of the study explore how mediation tools can work as an alternative approach to develop students' strategic learning rather than to determine whether, in fact, students used strategies as a result of introducing mediation tools into the course of classroom *activity* as, to the date, strategy research has revealed that the generality of language learners deploys strategies when learning (refer to Chapter 2). Consequently, this study in strategic learning is not to be framed within a positivistic research approach in its strict sense, nor within the qualitative paradigm, yet it has followed sensible methodology decisions given the purpose of the inquiry, the questions being investigated, and the resources available (Patton, 1990), which Patton (1990) describes as *methodological appropriateness* explained as follows:

> A paradigm of choices rejects methodological orthodoxy in favour of methodological appropriateness as the primary criterion for judging methodological quality. The paradigm of choices recognizes that different methods are appropriate for different situations. Situational responsiveness means designing a study that is appropriate for a specific research situation. (p. 39)

Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) also support this view by stating, "No study conforms exactly to a standard methodology; each one calls for the researcher to bend the methodology to the uniqueness of the setting or case" (p. 7) Following this line of reasoning, Creswell (2007, 53) contends that features from several approaches may be employed in complex studies. Besides, as Oxford (2011; 2017), White, Schramm and Chamot (2007), Donato and McCormick (1194) and Gillette (1994) have urged strategy researchers reframe interventions and find potential innovations for strategy instruction, the purpose of this study is to report on an alternative approach to the development of EFL students' strategic learning without trying to equip students with a repertoire of 'effective strategies' but from the mediation of learners' goals and mediated learning activity. To this purpose, it was appropriate to implement mediation tools into the classroom as well as to collect qualitative data that could help the researcher give an account of learners' strategic learning.

Typically, for applied linguistic researchers introducing new forms of teaching or learning tasks to the classroom is defined an interventionist approach because it involves deliberated and systematic attempts on the part of the researcher to change the existing practice (Van Lier, 1988). Brumfit and Mitchell (1990) describe interventionist studies as follows:

> Interventionist studies are those in which some aspect of teaching or learning is deliberately changed, so that the effects can be monitored. Thus, new materials may be introduced, new types of learning activity may be devised or used in an environment where they were not previously used, or teachers may be asked to smile more, use the target language exclusively, or participate in small group discussion. The setting is the normal one for teaching and learning, but the research monitors the effect of changes which have been deliberately introduced (p. 12).

According to Brumfit and Mitchell (1990, p. 12), at some points interventionist studies are similar to experimental studies but the latter usually involves a much more formal control of variables. In applied linguistic research, there is also an emphasis on monitoring and measuring the effects of the intervention (Pressley, et al, 2006). Pressley et al., (ibid.) explain that many educational interventions are tested in true experiments, in which students are randomly assigned to receive either an intervention or not (p. 4). Besides, they indicate that such experimentation has been considered an ideal model for establishing whether an educational intervention causes particular educational outcomes (Pressley et al, 2006, p. 4). Moreover, participants were not assigned to either an intervention or control group, nor were they selected in a random-fashion (see 4.4.3). Accordingly, no attempt to control variables or measuring of the effects of the intervention was made. Unlike typical interventionist studies, which report on the achievement differences between those receiving and not receiving an intervention or measure the general outcome of the intervention, this study regards strategic learning as part a developmental process and gives accounts of it.

In terms of the mount of intervention or control that the researcher exerted in this study, Van Lier's (1988) parameters of educational research design control and structure were taken into account. From control perspective, data was gathered from all of the students in the selected class as the researcher did not intervene to change the composition of the class. Also, there was no attempt to control variables, such as previous learning experience or language proficiency of participants. From structure perspective, the participant teacher was provided with specific guidelines on what to do to implement the portfolio project and the journal, but there was a little disruption in the regular classroom activities. Furthermore, Pressley et al, (2006) distinguish focused interventions, usually short-term in duration and aimed at particular competency and outcome (e.g. teaching a strategy for learning vocabulary words), from more complex interventions. Instruction in focused interventions may involve "little more than providing a brief demonstration of the procedures, followed by guided practice" (Pressley, et al., 2006, p. 3). Complex interventions, instead, impact a broad range of outcomes and that is far from universally available, they assert (Pressley, et al, ibid.). The targeted intervention in this study can be best described as a complex type because it required participation from the instructor of the class, it involved the implementation of a portfolio project and a learning journal, and it lasted for an entire university term.

Despite the intervention component in this research project, it predominantly incorporated qualitative research strategies. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) points out, "in qualitative methodology the researcher looks at the setting and people holistically; people, settings, or groups are not reduced to variables, but viewed as a whole" (p. 9). This is evident in the steps I followed regarding the selection of the setting and the participants, which were similar to those steps taken by qualitative researchers. For instance, Gao (2013) states that the contextual resources in a setting, may refer to physical learning settings, cultural artifacts (e.g., English-medium universities), material conditions, among others; it also encompasses social relationships between the learners and the mediating agents such as the teachers, peers, and friends. This wider view on the research setting has been adopted in this investigation (see 4.4.2).

Additionally, Pressley et al, (2006) emphasize on the use of qualitative methods to assess the impact of intervention. These scholars suggest that an advantage of qualitative studies is that they can 'illuminate' a very complex intervention (Pressley, et al., 2006, p. 7). That is, by employing a qualitative approach is possible to know not only if the intervention works, but also how it works. Since the focus of this study is to depict how students develop a strategic approach to learn English as foreign language and the role mediation plays in the process, qualitative data gathering methods (also mediation tools) were used, as well as qualitative strategies for data analysis.

Lastly, sociocultural perspectives underpinning empirical works are linked to qualitative research; it is the utilisation of qualitative methods what according to some scholars distinguish sociocultural-based research from cognitivist-based research (Zuengler & Miller, 2006; Benson & Gao, 2008). Overall, a qualitative approach to research implied that (1) I regarded the language classroom and learners as a whole, without trying to control certain variables or using random sampling strategies; (2) I constantly clarified my research intentions and reformulated my research questions as I was undertaking the study; (3) and I used complex reasoning through inductive logic in the finding of patterns and themes while analysing data (Freeman, 2009; Creswell, 2007).

4.3 Selection of appropriate methodological tools

The first challenge the researcher had to face was framing this piece of research within its own methodological framework, which considers aspects of different paradigms and research designs to conduct a study that set up to implement new forms of mediation in the language classroom as an alternative approach to develop students' strategic learning. The second challenge was selecting appropriate methodological tools for the study of students' strategic learning developed by mediated activity.

This research project is informed by sociocultural theoretical perspectives, which greatly influenced on the methodological decisions of the inquiry. According to Lankshear & Knobel (2004, p. 27) an appropriate research design means that the study will "build on clearly and concisely framed problems and questions and a clear sense of our research purposes", that is, what we hope to achieve through our research. An appropriate research design is also guided by theoretical and conceptual frameworks that help clarify the questions we are concerned with and help us understand how particular concepts and elements of theory might be useful for our own inquiry. And, more importantly, it uses appropriated research methods that provide with the necessary data to answer the research questions (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Moreover, as indicated by Denzin & Lincoln (2000) when no single methodological practice is privileged the choice of data collection is determined by the context and the purpose of the study.

In their revision and discussion of research methods used in strategy research, White, Schramm and Chamot (2007) address the issue that "strategy use is not a fixed attribute of individuals, but changes according to the task, the learning conditions and the available time" (White, Schramm & Chamot, ibid., p. 93). It is for this reason that capturing the dynamic nature of strategy use has been a challenge for strategy researchers. While a great deal of research in strategy use and strategy instruction research has employed quantitative research methods, there are emerging qualitative data collection procedures and context-sensitive research approaches that not only enlarge that methodological toolbox of strategy researchers, but also strengthen researcher's activities (Oxford, 2011; White, Schramm & Chamot, 2007). A more contextual approach for the developing and understanding students' strategic efforts towards learning a foreign language, therefore, is not focused on the identifications and quantification of strategies, but on using research methods that allow the researchers give an account of participant's strategy learning.

Considering these arguments and the research questions in the present study, the methodological tools selected were a portfolio and a learning journal. These qualitative instruments are praised for providing a far more contextual insight into the research area. Portfolios and journals are data collection methods used in educational research (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) as well as in second language learning research (Nunan, 1992; MacKey & Gass, 2005). They are qualitative research methods that can richly depict individuals and groups in authentic sociocultural environments (Oxford, 2011, p. 218). In this section, their uses, features, advantages and disadvantage, both as learning and research tools will be outlined. In section 4.4.8, the framework of how these methodological tools were used in this study will be discussed.

4.3.1 Portfolios

In mainstream strategy research, portfolios have been used as an authentic tool for strategy assessment and strategy assistance, which can raise learner's consciousness or awareness of strategies he or she is using (Oxford, 2011, 2013). Oxford (2013) assert that portfolio is a powerful way to assess L2 performance and strategy use for multiple levels of proficiency and varied culture. The way portfolios have been reported to be used in mainstream language learning strategy research, however, involves asking students to report on the specific strategies used on regular tasks. This is, a more direct research approach to the identification of strategies. For example, Yan (2003) used learner portfolios to integrate strategy instruction into a university freshman English course into English composition courses. She developed a Web-based Learning Portfolio system and incorporated all the learning strategy instruction components in it. Focusing on reading skill, Ikeda and Takeuchi (2006) used a structured portfolio to encourage the practical use of specific reading strategies taught to groups of higher and lower proficiency Japanese learners of English at intermediate level. These researchers asked learners to find their own example of an English passage which appeared suitable for the application of the strategy taught in the previous class. Learners then were asked to read the passage, used the strategy in question and write a retrospective account of how they had used this strategy as well as their thoughts and opinions on using it. Learners completed the portfolio in their first language, Japanese so that they could give an accurate picture of their strategy use. Ikeda and Takeuchi found that higher proficiency learners were able to describe their strategy use in far greater detail in their portfolio entries, showing that they had understood

the purpose of the strategy, how it helped their reading comprehension and when it could be used most effectively. They also showed evidence of using combinations of reading strategies as the course progressed. In contrast, lower proficiency learners showed little evidence of having understood the purpose of the strategy or the ability to deploy it appropriately (Ikeda &Takeuchi, 2006).

In sociocultural-informed strategy research literature (see 2.5), the contribution of Donato and McCormick (1994) is the implementation of portfolio assessment as a methodological tool used not only to collect data from participants but also to make the classroom a context for self-investment, critical analysis and discovery of new strategic orientation. In their study, university French-conversation students were involved in portfolio-based assessment. Every three weeks through the term, students provided tangible evidence, such as recordings, pieces of their writing, and reports, to document their L2 development. Donato and McCormick found that students were empowered with opportunities to create and reflect upon personally-meaningful activities and strategies for learning (Donato & McCormick, ibid., p. 457).

In its broad sense, a portfolio is a purposeful collection of student's work that demonstrate their efforts, progress, and achievements in given areas (Genesee & Upshur, 1994). Applebee and Langer (1992, p. 30) define portfolios as a cumulative collection of the work students have done. Second language portfolios can have a very specific focus, such as writing, or a broad focus that includes examples of all aspects of language development. In second language teaching literature, portfolios are mainly described as an alternative and more authentic form of assessment; its primary purpose is the assessment of student achievement (Peñaflorida, 2002; Raimes, 2002).

Portfolios are valuable as learning and research tools since they provide a continuous record of students' language development. According to Zubizarreta (2008), while assessment portfolios focus on the product, the finished document, learning portfolios focus on both process and the product. Zubizarreta (2009) defines the learning portfolio as a flexible tool that can come in different forms and involves learners in a process of continuous reflection; it is fact, 'deep reflection what is at the heart of the learning portfolio. Genessee and Upshur (ibid) suggest that, "If portfolios are reviewed routinely by teachers and students in conference together, they can provide information about students´ views of their own language learning and the strategies they apply…" (p. 99). The benefits,

as summarized by Delett at al., (2001, p. 559), is that portfolios provide 'a portrait of what students know and what they can do, offer a multidimensional perspective of students' progress over time, encourage students' self- reflection and participation, and link instructional assessment. Genessee and Upshur's list of benefits in using portfolios (1994) are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Benefits of using portfolios.

Portfolios provide: • A continuous, cumulative record of language development. • A holistic view of student learning. • Insights about progress of individual students. • Opportunities for collaborative assessment and goal setting with students. • Opportunities to use metalanguage to talk about language. Portfolios promote: • Student involvement in assessment. • Responsibility for self-assessment. • Interaction with teacher and students about learning. • Student ownership of and responsibility for their own learning.

Empirical works in language learning have shown that portfolios are effective means to integrate pedagogy, learning, and evaluation as well as to promote critical thinking and learner autonomy (Delett et al., 2001). However, this does not happen automatically. For portfolios to be effective learning and assessment tools, teachers should make conscientious efforts and promote the actively and interactively use of them. The teacher plays a similar role of that in a mentor's task to develop the learners' thinking skills and support them in aspects of the process of decision making and learning (Malderez, 2009). Moreover, portfolios must be an integral part of instruction and instruction planning; guidelines for using portfolios should be outlined (Delett et al., 2001; Genesee and Upshur, ibid.). For example, Barnhard, Kavorkian and Delett (1998), produced detailed guidelines to carry out a longitudinal assessment project. They used portfolios as an assessment measure in elementary through higher education foreign language classroom. For Barnhard (et al., 1998), portfolio creation is the responsibility of the learner, with teacher guidance and support; therefore, clear guidelines and criteria for assessment, if it is the case, must be established.

Portfolios can take different forms. For instance, Applebee and Langer (1992) observe that when used to enhance L2 writing, portfolios consist of a traditional ‘writing folder’ in which students keep their work, a loose-leaf notebook in which students keep their drafts and revisions, or a combination folder and big brown envelope where students keep evidence of their work. In the case of second language learners, who are learning a language for a specific purpose or academic needs, the range of work sample in the portfolio can be broaden to reflect their second language goals (Donato & McCormick, 1194; Barnhard et al., 1998; Genesee & Upshur, 1994).

Regarding the content of portfolios, the works kept in them might include samples of writing, lists or books that have been read, book reports, tape-recording of speaking samples, favourite short stories, and so on (Genesee & Upshur, 1994). A characteristic of portfolios is that their content may vary according to the purpose set by instructors or researchers. Some educators suggest that anything the student chooses be kept in the portfolio; others have set more specific instructions on the kinds of works and evidence students must include (e.g., Barnhard, Kavorkian and Delett 1998; Lo, 2010). Genesee and Upshur (ibid.) suggest that the number of pieces in a portfolio should be limited for practical reasons since portfolios that are constantly expanding become difficult to review and asses. How much work when and how often should it be kept in portfolios are necessary criteria to establish when working with portfolios. Students may choose to keep a portfolio of current work and one of completed work- the former would be more up to date and reflect current accomplishments whereas the latter would reflect previous accomplishments and the progress they have made (Genesee & Upshur, 1994; Barnhard, Kavorkian & Delett, 1998). If the number of pieces is to be limited, then it is necessary to review and update the portfolio periodically. In this case, decisions need to be made concerning the number of pieces (or range) to keep and the criteria for inclusion and exclusion. These decisions should be shared by teachers and students so that the students maintain ownership of and responsibility for their portfolios.

Students should have access to their portfolios at all times in order to add or take out pieces. Systematic review and analysis of each student's portfolios should be carried out by teachers on a regular basis- time permitting once every four to six weeks. Systematic review of portfolios is also advisable at the end of significant instructional periods, such as at the end of the term or a major unit and at the end of a grading period. At times, teachers

may want to review the portfolios collaboratively with students is important for a variety of reason, including joint goal setting. Reviewing portfolios without students in useful for monitoring the effectiveness of instructions and for instructional planning (Genesee & Upshur, 1994; Barnhard, Kavorkian & Delett, 1998; Lo, 2010).

4.3.2 Journals

Developed in response of behaviourist psychology, which considered both ineffective and irrelevant to investigate non-observable characteristics of human behaviour (Ellis, 2015; Nunan, 1992), journals, and other introspection methods, emerged as "a process of observing and reflecting on one's thoughts, feelings, motives, reasoning processes, and mental states with a view to determining the way in which these processes and states determine behaviour" (Nunan, 1992, p. 115). Bailey (1990, p. 125) defines the dairy as "a first-person account of a language learning or teaching experience, documented through regular, candid entries in a personal journal and then analysed for recurring patterns of salient event."

Diaries can be kept by learners, by teachers, or by participant observers. They can focus either on teachers and teaching, or on learners and learning, (or on the interaction between teachers and learners, or between teaching and learning (Nunan, 1992, p. 119). For the most part, the verbal report in diaries and journals constitutes retrospective self-report or self-observation since learners generally write their entries after the learning event has taken place (Cohen, 1998). For example, learners can describe what they usually do when they do not understand the teacher's instructions (an example, of self-report) or could describe a specific incident in that day's class session during which they request clarification of the teacher's instructions, or what is could be interpreted as self-observation (Cohen, ibid. p, 41). In general, diaries or journals are important introspective tools in language research. They have been uses in investigations of second language acquisition and other aspects of language learning and use (Griffee, 2013; Mackey & Gass 2005; Nunan, 1992). As a qualitative research methods, second language diaries are used to allow learners to write about their language learning experiences without constrains imposed by specific questions given by researchers in other forms of introspective inquiry (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

The terms diaries and journals are usually interchangeable in literature; however, different forms of students' written learning accounts have been identified. For example, Cohen (1998) distinguishes learning journals from dialog journals. A dialog journal adds an important element to diaries; this is a reader who responds (and, ideally, at length) to the learners' writing (Cohen, ibid. p. 40). Dialog journals often take the form of a notebook with some pages reserved for the student journalist. The teacher responds to students' comments without 'correcting' the language used by the student journalist. Another approach would be not to have any assignments written in the journal, but simply entries by the students when they have something to ask about or comment on. Cohen (ibid.) states that, in theory, the dialog journal is supposed to be an ongoing, written conversation between the students and the reader, usually the teacher in classroom setting, about topics that have been generated by the student. In reality, however, the teacher may make only brief –often one-sentence-comments on what the owner of the journal has written, Cohen (1998, p. 40).

The use of diaries and journals, according to Nunan (1992), have some benefits, including: 1) students can articulate problems they are having with course content and therefore get help; 2) diaries promote autonomous learning, encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning; 3) by exchanging ideas with their teacher, students can gain confidence, make sense of difficult material, and generate original insights. Another practical reason for using diaries is that they can be kept anywhere by anyone. Learners have the option of writing for even several months before giving their diaries to a researcher for analysis. (Cohen, 1998, p. 41) Nevertheless, a disadvantage of using journals as an introspective technique, is whether data obtained accurately reflects the subjects' underlying processes giving rise to behaviour (Nunan, 1992, p. 120). Although the aim of most diary studies is "not to produce rigorous quantitative results which can be generalized to language learners as a whole, diaries have been used to find out what is significant to the learners, a very important area of concern now that much research is turning away from teaching learners and learner variables" (Bailey, 1991). Furthermore, much of the data that are collected in a diary or dialog journal may be inaccessible through other research techniques.

In education research, participant journals are rarely used as self-contained data sets, but are most often used in conjunction with other data collection methods (e.g., observation and field nots, interviews). (Corti, 2001, as cited in Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). There is no set format for participant journals. Some researchers simply supply study participants with notebooks and ask them to write down whatever comes to their mind about the topic or the event. Other choose to structure participants' reflective or anecdotal writing more explicitly by providing participants with a short list of questions to respond to. In terms of the actual journal, it can take the form of a notebook, or can comprise loose leaves within a ring binder (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 255). Gearon and Gindidis (1998) recommend that when asking students to maintain participant journals not to expect them to do so for an extended period of time, to emphasize to all concerned that the journal runs secondary to schoolwork, homework and other commitments, and that the journal should not be completed under duress or become an alienating chose. In short, participating journals should always be voluntary and the timing of entries also needs to be considered carefully.

In strategy research literature, diaries or journals have been used as a way of collecting information on students' learning and use of learning strategies over a period of time (Ellis, 1994; Chamot, 2004; Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 2011). In some cases, the diary is an open-ended instrument in which writers note down anything that comes to mind in reaction to learner strategies; in others, researchers have found helpful to include guidelines as students write on their diaries or journals (White, Schramm, & Chamot, 2007). A

As method to identify students' strategies, Cohen (1998) argues that diaries and dialog journals are learner-generated and usually unstructured. Thus, students' entries may cover a wide range of themes and issues. For example, the entries may include learners' written verbal report of the cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies that they use daily in their language learning. Another disadvantage, according to White, Schramm, and Chamot (2007), is that diaries and reflective journals may not provide fully accurate or complete insights into the learner strategies, yet, they acknowledge, these research tools have another important function of raising students' metacognitive awareness of themselves and or their language learning (Rubin, 2003). Cohen (1998) also points out at two drawbacks to using diaries and journals; these are the volume data produced and the potentially random nature of the entries. If learners write on self-chosen topics, the data are cumbersome to read and may not suggest of support any hypothesis regarding language strategies. In fact,

many learners may not even mention learning strategies at all. To avoid this problem, Cohen (ibid.) suggests some researchers have directed students to write about specific language learning strategies, yet requesting that students write about specific strategies many make them less cooperative than if they are given an outlet for describing concerns they have about their language learning experience in general (Cohen, 1998, p. 42). To avoid this problem, Cohen suggests the use of dialog journals, which may offer an even easier way to concentrate student's writing on learning strategies. If learners provide insufficient information regarding the use of strategies, teachers (as researchers) could, in response to the entries, ask them to provide more detail retrospectively. However, extensive writing on detailed accounts may result in data difficult to use for research purposes. First, the resulting information is likely to be more qualitative than quantitative, and the techniques available for summarizing and analysing qualitative data may not be as applicable (Bailey, 1991) unless these data lend themselves to transformation into quantitative data through content analysis procedures (Oxford, et al., 1996). Second, the typically small number of subjects in diary studies restrict the ability of researchers to generalize the findings to all language learners (Bailey, 1991; Nunan, 1992).

In sociocultural inform strategy research, Gillette's (1994) important case study of three effective and three ineffective language learners, explained the differences in L2 achievement primarily as a function of student goals in the course of instruction. The participants were language learners in a required third-term French course. As a part of the study the teacher-researcher asked participants to keep a diary and collected learners' class notes. Learners were observed for a full term, interviewed on their language learning histories, and asked to complete a questionnaire assessing attitude and motivation. Qualitative data from different sources indicated that individuals identified as ineffective language learners by test scores and overall performance had difference reasons for engaging in second language study, which in turn, determined their strategic approaches to language learning. For example, data collected from language learning diaries revealed that students who viewed language study only as a requirement, limited their learning effort to what they perceived as necessary to pass a given course or earn a certain grade, while students who considered languages a valuable in and of themselves made a greater effort to acquire the target language. The same occurred with learners' study habits and learning strategies. Gillette (1994) concluded that each learner as motivated human being, whose experience, world view, and intentions all influence classroom behaviour.

4.4 The study

4.4.1 Research questions

The purpose of this research project is in the development of strategic learning through the mediation of learners' goals and the mediation of reflective writing on their participation in classroom activity. This resulted in the formulation of the main research questions and sub-questions, which served as guide to the study:

Main Research Question: To what extent, and in what ways do students' strategic learning develop by classroom mediated *activity*?

Sub-question 1: How is learners' strategic learning developed by the mediation of their particular goals?

Sub-question 2: How is learners' strategic learning developed by the mediation of reflective journal writing?

Sub-question 3: What other aspects of the language classroom influence on students' strategic orientation towards their learning?

The main research question and sub-questions attempted to provide an account on how English language learners develop a strategic approach to learning by means of mediation and by trying to achieve their own language goals. To answer them, a goal-oriented portfolio and learning journal were introduced in a genuine intact and regular scheduled English class of the TEFL undergraduate program at a state university in the South of Mexico.

4.4.2 Research setting

The setting of this study was Universidad de Chiapas, in México. IT was originally established in 1974 by the cooperation between the Federal government and the State government. In the same year, three Language Departments were opened in response to the need of English language courses for university students. Since then, French, Italian and German courses have also been offered to the general public.

At present, there are eight campuses distributed across the state. The academic units in most of the campuses include the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Humanities and

Education, the Faculty of Architecture, the Faculty of Business Management, the Faculty of Bio-technology, the Faculty of Agro-Industry and the Faculty of Medicine. Currently, three Language Schools, located in the three most important cities of the state, host the Language Departments and offer the undergraduate program in Teaching English as Foreign Language. For this study, the selected campus was Language School Campus IV given the prestige it has in higher education in the region, as well as the tradition it has in teaching language courses. The participants of this study were undergraduate TEFL students, who pursue a language teaching degree and a full-time career as English teachers. At the time of this study was conducted, 345 students were enrolled and 22 professors were teaching at this program.

The undergraduate Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) program at the Language School of University of Southern Mexico introduces students to contemporary linguistic approaches, such as phonology, morphology, syntax, the study of language learning and language teaching. The general aim of the program is to equip students with a wide range of transferable cognitive, practical and key skills, and a foundation for further study, employment, and lifelong learning. The main objective of this program is to provide students with the necessary English language skills and methodologies for language teaching that enable them to work as English teachers. During the program, students are expected to develop knowledge and understanding of key concept, ideas, theories, evaluation criteria, and research methods used in language teaching.

The scheme of the program is organized in nine terms; each term has a duration of fifteen weeks. The duration of the program is 4.5 years, under which students have to take core courses and compulsory courses. Core courses include Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Psycholinguistics, Language Teaching methods and approaches, Curriculum design, Discourse Analysis, Research methods, Language Testing, and EAP Reading and Writing, among others. These courses are delivered in English and Spanish by Mexican teachers, but most of the readings of the course are in English, taken from specialized literature in the field of ELT and SLA. Besides the career-oriented courses, students in this program take compulsory English from first up to sixth level. The durations of each course are fourteen weeks as marked by the university calendar.

The program entry requirement consists on passing a test which is designed and administered by the university. This test evaluates knowledge and skills acquired in former schooling. Besides this test, students have to meet the English language requirement, which is obtaining a minimum score of 350 points on the Institutional Test of English as Foreign Language (ITP TOEFL), or the equivalent to A1 level from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Learning (CEFR; COE, 2001).

Once in the program, TELF undergraduates are evaluated at the end of their third term of studies to determine their eligibility to remain in, or be exited from the program. The instrument used to measure students' English language proficiency in the four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, is designed by the Academic Coordination of the program. This test resembles the Preliminary English Test (PET) from Cambridge English language assessment. The level of qualification students must achieve is B1 from CEFR (COE, 2001). According to the CEFR (COE, ibid.), level B1 corresponds to independent users of the language, who are fluent enough to communicate with native speakers. Students, therefore, must be able to understand the main points of clear texts about familiar topics in standard language; to cope with most of the situation that might arise on a trip to areas where English is used; to produce short coherent texts; and, to describe experiences, events, wishes and future plans.

For the accreditation of the compulsory English courses, students have to take five partial exams and a final exam. Each of these assessment instruments are designed, administered, and marked by the instructor of the course. In addition, students must complete a total of 30 hours of independent study at the Self-Access Centre of the Language School. There are not assigned activities for students at the SAC, so they are expected to use the resources available in this self-learning space (e.g. a short collection of movies, novels, and magazines, as well as some board games), or to attend the chat club sessions organized by the centre.

Regarding the content of the English courses of the program, despite the objectives and the specifications established by the curriculum, English language lessons are planned based on the content of the course-book, which is also the main instructional material used in this course. In particular, the concern of the initial English courses of the programme is to help students reach a B1 level from CEFR (COE, 2001). To this purpose, the book in use is Objective PET by Cambridge University Press (2010). English courses meet five times a

week (Monday through Friday); each session lasts one hour for, in which instruction is in the target language. Classes are held in classrooms which consist of four rows of desks. Each of these desks has space for two chairs, thus accommodating two students (both facing forwards towards the teacher). There is also a desk at the front of the class for the teacher. Classrooms have a whiteboard and are equipped with television, which functions as monitor to be used in computer projections. There is not sound equipment available in the classroom, so language teachers usually bring their own speakers to the class. Teacher's book and audio material of the course-book are provided by the Academic Coordination of the program.

A considerable proportion of lecturers and language instructors in the TEFL program are graduates of Language School; some of the instructors in the English language courses of the program, though, hold a degree in a different discipline from that of ELT or Modern Languages. While, the majority hold a master in education from institutions located in the state of Chiapas, only three of the lecturers in this program undertook graduated studies within an institution from abroad, mostly on distance mode. With regard to students, the general population of students at Universidad de Chiapas have studied English prior to coming to the university since English is compulsory at High School level in Mexico. They all come from small towns and rural areas closed to the university.

As in many other parts of the world, English is important in Mexico due to the status of global language it has. Although English has been present in the official high school curriculum in Mexico since 1960, it was in 2009 when the Ministry of Education (SEP) launched the Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica (PNIEB) aimed at teaching English in pre-primary school and primary school. With these actions, Mexican students receive English instruction until the end of secondary education (Sayer, 2015). At tertiary level, English is compulsory as a foreign language and it is a requirement for postgraduate candidates in universities along the country. The incorporation of English into the curriculum had several implications, such as a greater demand for courses and teachers. To meet the need of qualified teachers, the undergraduate program in TEFL is offered in Mexican universities since 1980s, (Ramírez-Romero, 2013, 2015). An estimated number of thirty undergraduate programs in ELT and TELF are being offered in Mexican universities to the date (Ramírez-Romero, 2013)

Helping TEFL students to master the language in a period ranging from four to five years, which is the duration of undergraduate ELT/TELF programs in Mexico, has presented a major challenge for both institutions and students. One reason for TELF undergraduates' difficulties in reaching advanced level of English might be the insufficient hours of language instruction they have received before university courses. Although English is a compulsory subject at High School level in Mexico, students usually take a maximum of three hours a week of language instruction (Espinoza, 2007). Another reason for their poor achievement, according to institutional records on the B2 level test, seems to be the little attention given to pedagogical practices that can encourage learners' active approach to learning. This viewpoint is supported by a recent review of an array of studies in the field of ELT in Mexico (Ramírez-Romero, 2013). It has been concluded that English teachers use a limited variety of strategies and teaching techniques in the instruction of English (Ramírez-Romero, 2013; Espinoza, 2007).

A similar situation was found in the context of the University of Southern Mexico. After conducting classroom observation and interviews with teachers and students, it was revealed that a teacher-centred approach prevails in the English language classes of the TEFL program. Activities typically include grammar and vocabulary exercises from the course-book, and there is a small emphasis on the development of language skills. It was also found that learning tasks undertaken in the compulsory English courses of the TEFL program reflect that of a general English language course, with an emphasis on the teaching of grammar (Escobar, 2012). A teacher-centred model is still prevalent in this setting (for example, lecturing about grammatical structures and giving the students gap-fill exercises to fill in). Moreover, any form of teacher feedback on individual work is unusual in this context. The only form of feedback students receive is the form of exams scores (Escobar, opcit.)

4.4.3 Selection of participants

At the time this study was conducted, 346 students were the entire population of the undergraduate TEFL program and a total of 22 instructors were teaching at this program. The participants in this study were one intact group, consisting of 18 students, undertaking English III compulsory course in the TEFL undergraduate program at Language School of Universidad Autonoma de Chiapas.

Considering the qualitative emphasis and the research questions, it was reasonable to focus on a single class or group of students. Rather than obtaining a probabilistic sample size sufficient to serve the purpose of the study, participant selection in this inquiry was decided following the criteria of purposeful and convenience qualitative sampling (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rallis, Gretchen & Rossman, 2009). Merriam (2009) defines purposeful sampling as the selection of participants who met the purpose and states that the goal or purpose of selecting the specific units is to have those that will yield the most relevant and plentiful data, given your topic of study. Purposeful sampling is appropriate when the focus of research is to understand and gain insight about the nature of the phenomenon, which in this investigation was to understand the development of strategic learning as a 'by-product' of mediation. Purposeful sampling also considers unique and essential attributes of the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2009). In this study, it was essential that participants were (a) highly motivated to learn English as L2, (b) had a common language goal, such as passing an institutional exam, and (c) had not been subjects of any strategy training or some form or innovative teaching which differed from regular classroom instruction at the research setting. This was the case of students undertaking English III compulsory course in the TEFL program. Semester after semester, students enrolled in this course struggle with having to pass a required language examination which allows them to continue their preparation as future English teachers, and this has become a priority for both students and English instructions at this institution.

Furthermore, the participants selected for the study had spent a year at Language School receiving instruction of the core subjects in English and making use of the Self-Access Centre. Requiring at least a pre-intermediate language level would ensure that the selected participants could engage in the portfolio project and the journal writing without significant language limitations, which was essential to this study.

In addition, the selection of the participants met the convenience criterion. "Convenience sampling is just as what it is implied by the term," as explained by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). This sampling strategy is based on the availability of respondents, location and time. In this sense, the only state university offering language courses and training which was conveniently geographically located was Universidad de Chiapas. Besides this, Language School could be easily accessed to by the researcher, who was part of this academic community.

Although the students and the instructor who participated in this study and who data were collected from were part of an intact class purposefully selected by the researcher, the process of participant selection involved an initial research group. As Dörnyei (2007) state, "There is a host of things that can go wrong while doing research in the field, particularly if the research site is within an educational institution", and this was the situation in the present study. The initial selection of participants involved an English instructor and the 14 third-semester undergraduates studying the compulsory English III course of the TEFL program during the January-May 2015 term. But, in March 2015, university employees without a full-time position went on a four-week strike, and the situation resulted in several weeks either interrupted or missing sessions, not to mention the high number of students' absences from course sessions.

One of the strengths of a qualitative approach is the flexibility when things go wrong (Dörnyei, 2007). Thus, in trying to capitalize the unexpected events, I decided to ask the participant teacher to continue in the research project for the August-December 2015 semester. In August 2015, she was assigned a new intact group of students. These students were enrolled in the English III compulsory course. Accordingly, data for the present inquiry were collected from 18 participant students, aged between 19 and 22 years old. They had approximately the same level of English, based on their entry language requirement. All of them had studied English for two years in High School and for two terms at Language School. Only one of them had lived and studied in the United States because her family were immigrants in that country. The participant teacher was a female instructor, aged 28, who had a diploma in ELT and hold a Master degree in Education. She learnt English in Mexico and never spent time in an English-speaking country. She also had relatively short experience in language teaching, with only three years as English teacher at University of Southern Mexico. During the time working at Language School, she has been an enthusiastic teacher. Her major desire was to undertake graduate studies in an English-speaking country. This genuine intact and regular scheduled English course of a TEFL program at a Mexican university in the South of Mexico from which data were collected, met five times a week (Monday through Friday), each session lasting one hour. Instruction was provided in the target language by the participant instructor. Although native English speakers help teachers as course assistants for short periods of time, this was not case during the time the present study was carried out.

According to Roebuck (2000), participants are frequently eliminated from experimental research in applied linguistics on the basis of not having followed the task directions. In this study, data were collected from each and every student who were undertaking the English III course, with the exception of two students who officially abandoned the course.

4.4.4 Considering ethics and risks

According to Rallis, Gretchen and Rossman (2009), being an ethical researcher demands vigilance and thoughtfulness throughout the entire research cycle (p. 270). Through all the steps of the research process, I tried to be sensitive to ethical considerations, following the university code of ethics, standards for conduct research, and personal ethics standards (Rallis, Gretchen & Rossman, ibid). Prior conducting the study, I requested authorization for research from the institutions (see Appendix A). Upon receiving verbal approval from the director of the Language School at University of Southern Mexico to begin the research project, the Academic Coordination provided me with the list of English courses available for the January-August 2015 semester. From the list, I identified the prospective participants based on the aforementioned selection criteria (see 4.4.3). In a consented arranged a meeting with the instructors of the English III course to explain the research project, the purpose of the study, and the methods to conduct the study. I made sure that the activities she would be required to implement in her class were clear enough and that she had no enquiries regarding the research activities she would be involved in.

Furthermore, Creswell (2007) asserts that an ethical qualitative study involves more than simply the researcher seeking and obtaining institutional permission to carry out research. It means that the researcher is aware of and addresses in the study all ethical issues which arise from the research process. In particular, Creswell (ibid.) emphasis on reciprocity, as researchers need to review how participants will gain from our studies. Based on this, I met the participant teacher for a second time, asked her to participate in the study, and offered help with marking exams from other courses she was teaching at the time. She agreed on participating in the research project but was concerned about the workload involved in collecting, reading, and commenting on students' portfolios and journal entries. To eased her concerns on the amount of extra work implementing the mediation tools involved in this study, I also offered to help her producing materials for other English language courses she was teaching at both the TEFL program and the Language Department. For the August-December 2015 term, the participant teacher received the same type of help with

her courses. Regarding participant students, once the course was over, a coffee-morning was offered by the researcher to thank them for their participation in the study although the activities they carried were, in practical terms, part of their English III course.

4.4.5 Informed consent

The purpose of the study was disclosed to the participants as stated on the Information Sheet for the participant English instructor (see Appendix B) and an Information Sheet for the participant students (see Appendix C). I met students along with their English instructor on the first session of the semester (08.10.15) to explain the research project, including the purpose and length of the study. I clearly explained to them that data for the study I was undertaking would be collected from their course tasks. Following this, Information Sheets in the Spanish version (see Appendix D) were delivered and sufficient time to read about the research project was allowed to participants. After I had gone through the information sheet with the students and explained to them overall aspects of the research project, I answered the questions they had with regard to the research. I assured participants that although the information for the study would be collected from tasks which were part of their English course, they could discontinue participating in the study at any time. If any of the participant students decided to withdrawn from the research project, the documents he or she had produced for the class would not be used as data for the study and would only be considered as course tasks. The Research Consent Form (see Appendix E) was delivered at the end of the conversation.

The actions described here were carried out in both selected intact classes (see 4.3.3). However, as it was mentioned before, the data analysed and the findings presented in this study consisted of the data collected from the August-December class. Only one student, from the August-December semester, did not consent on participating in the study at the time of my visit in their classroom, but she contacted the researcher later and signed in the consent form voluntarily. The rest of the class agreed and signed in the Research Consent Form in the classroom. This document indicated that participation in the study was voluntary. It also made clear for participants, both students and teacher, that they would not receive any payment for participating in the study and that it would not place them at any risk.

4.4.6 Maintaining confidentiality

Rallis, Gretchen and Rossman (2009) point out that since qualitative research takes place in the field, with real people who live in and work in the setting, they are not anonymous to the researcher, as this is the case in the present study. While maintaining of privacy and confidentiality can be difficult to achieve, qualitative researchers must carefully consider how to treat the identities of the participants. This involves two strategies: protecting their privacy and holding in confidence what they share with you (Rallis et al., ibid).

In the present study, data consisted of reflections written by students as their part of their classroom tasks, so students' names were important for the teacher to give feedback and keep a record of the activities submitted by each of the students. For research purposes, however, I removed their names from every piece of evidence of their participation in the study, and I assigned each participant a pseudonym in order to protect their identities. As for students' learning journals, I suggested the participant teacher to use students' last names and ID numbers for identification. In Mexico, first names are used to address students at all times, so not having first names on journals cover would help in protecting students' information.

During the implementation period, students' portfolios and journals were placed at a locker, with shared access for the participant instructor and the researcher. The participant teacher used this locker to store students' portfolios submissions and learning journals, so she could read and comment on them at the end of the week. As for me, the access to this locker was necessary to keep a record of students' journal entries and check on students' portfolio reflections. However, I was the only person who could access to the files after the study was concluded.

4.4.7 Researcher's role

An essential part of in qualitative research is that the researchers "positions themselves" in the research study (Creswell, 2007). Thus, in this section, I would like to provide some reflections on my role as a researcher in the present piece of research. First, I have worked at the Language School of University of Southern Mexico for 15 years in a variety of roles, such as language teacher, lecturer of undergraduate courses, online-tutor, and academic coordinator of the online TEFL program. Although this was an advantage because I had immediate access to both teachers and students and already had an 'insider' perspective of

the research context, it might have also resulted in some difficulties in taking a more objective 'outsider' view (Richards, 2003). To overcome this limitation, I decided not to be the researcher and the teacher of the study at the same time; in this way, I would not try to exert control over students' strategic learning.

Second, before and during the data collection, I was a decision-maker, a facilitator, and a resource person because I helped the participant teacher every time she needed 'a hand' with her teaching duties from her other assigned courses. I tried not to meet the participant teacher and students in class-time as this could exert some disruption. However, I covered the participant teacher when she was sent to a conference for three days. Although this was not initially planned, it helped to the study as students could continue with their instruction and their journal writing was not interrupted.

Third, by having conducted research before in this setting (Escobar, 2012), I had developed my own lens to make sense of sense of the situation under the study. Those are inevitably reflected in personal, cultural, and professional biases which definitely influenced how I approached each situation while conducting the study. Also, the constant critical eye over the research process and research tools were also of key importance to keep the objectivity required in this research project.

In addition, the fact that the implementation of mediation tools and data collection with a first group of students could not be completed, it provided me with some time to reflect on my relationship with the participant teacher during the time before the end of the January-June semester and the beginning of the August-December semester one. This allowed me to reconsider my position as the researcher of this study finding ways to be more systematic in and less intrusive in the participant's instructor teaching activity.

Overall, besides the research activities I carried out, other activities which were part of my role included, designing a calendar of activities making sure the participant teacher remembered submission dates for the portfolio project, keeping a record of students' journal entries so that the participant teacher could assign a grading mark for their work at the of the course. These actions were helpful in systematically obtain data. After the end of the term, I collected students' portfolios and journals and began with data analysis.

Providing this brief description of my role and duties as a researcher in this study is one of the key ways in which the reader may decide the extent to which the findings of the present inquiry have been affected by my own perceptions and bias. As it has suggested by Hood (2009, p. 72), the role of the qualitative researcher "must be transparent, his biases confronted, his agenda and beliefs explicitly stated, and the precise nature of his interaction with the study's participants meticulously described."

4.5 Data collection

In the following sections I will discuss how the two methodological tools utilised helped the researcher gather necessary and appropriate data to answer the research questions posed in this study. As described early in this chapter, the methodological tools were a portfolio and a learning journal. These tools had a two-fold purpose; they were regarded as mediation tools and as data collection methods. Their mediating function has been discussed in the previous chapter (see 3.7.2 and 3.7.3), the particulars of portfolios and journals as both learning and data collections tools have been outlined in the second section of this chapter. The present section, then provides with a rationale and a description of how these two research methods were integrated in the present study and how data for this study were collected through the implementation of portfolios and journals. As Lankshear and Knobi (2004) explain, qualitative research projects often use texts that have been produced by the students, which are used as part of a study's database to explore educational theory and practice. These texts are either regular part of their school work or generated to the researcher (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). It will be set in the following sections that both criteria apply to the data collection methods used in the present study.

4.5.1 Portfolios as data collection method

The purpose of using a goal-directed and reflective portfolio project as a research tool was to uncover how students' strategic learning relates to their language goals. In this study, the portfolio project is the systematic, longitudinal collection of students work created in response to their own language goals, learning needs, and institutional requirements they must meet. Participants were not asked to explicitly recall strategies when working with their portfolio. Instead, it was expected that by taking part in this learning activity they could organize and control their learning, and in doing so give an account of their strategic actions. The focus of this alternative method to strategy research was on the development

of participants' strategic approach to learning. This goal-oriented portfolio was a creative project that required students to write a reflective account of their goals, decisions, and actions (see Appendix G and H).

In designing the goal oriented portfolio project, I considered aspects addressed on the related literature (see 4.3.1). The learning portfolio is a flexible tool that can come in different forms and involves learners in a process of continuous reflection. In order to engage students in this reflective process, I decided on a structured portfolio protocol for participants to follow (see Appendix G). An entry form and submission form were designed. The aim of the entry form was to help learners think and write about which personal language goals they had and how they could reach them. In the entry form, a prompt was included; students could read in their form 'A language goal I have for the next weeks and how can I reach it', followed by enough space for them to write about their goal and plan to achieve it. The submission form aimed to promote learners' self-reflection and self-evaluation on each entry of their portfolio and on the type of evidence they included. With regard to the type and quality of evidence in portfolio submissions, no criteria were established because the portfolio work did not account for students' final grade. This goal oriented portfolio was a creative project that required students to write a reflective account of their goals, decisions, and actions (Zubizarreta, 2008).

During the process of developing the learning portfolio there is an interplay among three essential elements of reflection, evidence, and mentoring, as discussed in Section 4.3.1 In the present study, the participant teacher was given the task of mentoring students. Thus, guidelines detailing the process to be followed in the classroom to help students reflect on and keep their portfolio work were provided to the teacher (see Appendix H). Furthermore, the teacher was asked to collect students' entries and evidence and write comments on each of students' submission form. A final reflection form for the goal oriented portfolio was devised (see Appendix G). Two questions were included on this form. The first questions asked students to self-evaluate their submission and reflections; the second question tried to engage students in a more reflective exercise about the portfolio project. The overall purpose of the final reflection form was to collect data regarding students' own self-evaluation of their work and perceptions of carrying out this learning task.

4.5.2 Journals as data collection method

A learning journal was used as second research tool. In this study, the learning journal is a spontaneous record of students' experiences, feelings, and reactions to their learning, but also to classroom activity. One reason for using journals another as a research tool in this study was that a sole method for data collection might encounter limitations of inaccurate descriptions of participants' learning. While interviews are typically selected methods utilised in order to gather data from participants' perspective, there is the risk of participant students' responding or to the agenda of the researcher (Griffee, 2013; Dörnyei, 2007; Mackey & Gass, 2005). Instead, data written by participants are records of what research participants believe and think from their 'insider perspective' (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Nunan, 1992).

Furthermore, different technical and philosophical consideration shaped the use of learning journals in the present study. First, journal writing was implemented in the classroom since it can provide with insight into students' actual learning approaches derived from classroom *activity* (Gillette 1994). That is, from students' participation of a social activity, such as learning, it is possible to understand how the social context and *activity* itself influenced students on adopting a more strategic approach to learning. Second, from sociocultural perspectives, journals offer learners the opportunity to reflect on their personal growth and development (Mahn, 2008). It has been suggested that writing things down serve both planning and creative functions (Verity, 2000), which are necessary in strategic learning (see Appendix I).

The learning journal in this study consisted on a notebook in which students were asked to write regular entries about their learning. One of the disadvantages of learning journals is the difficulty some students experience through the lack of familiarity and practice with writing reflectively. To overcome this situation, I provided with guidelines and included ten guiding questions with the purpose of stimulating their reflection and writing (see Appendix I). These questions were included on the first page of students' journals. One thing to consider in using journals with English language learners is whether students have the necessary proficiency level to produce their entries (Mahn, 2008). In this study, the participants, both the instructor and her students agreed to use English in the diary entries. However, participants were allowed to enter any word, phrase or sentence in their native language (Spanish) when necessary. Another aspect of journals to consider is the

responsive relationship between the learner the teacher, so the teacher was asked to read and write short notes in response to students' thoughts. As it is suggested by Mahn (2008), "A statement of praise in the response helps the students gain confidence and shows them that their writing is meaningful" (p. 125). Thus, response for the teacher, even if this was brief, was part of the learning journal activity. The focus of responses where on the communication between students and teacher rather than on mechanics of correctness. The purpose of using journals as data collections methods rather than any other form of qualitative data gathering, such as interviews or observations, was the value of journals in second language learning as an account of second language experience recorded in the first-person (Griffee, 2012; McKay, 2009). Students can report on different facets of the language learning experience which are normally hidden or largely inaccessible to an external observer (McKay, ibid., p. 228).

4.5.3 Implementation of portfolios and journals

After submitting the letter seeking for institutional approval (see Appendix A) and obtaining verbal consent from the director of Language School campus IV to undertake research, the portfolio project and the learning journal were implemented in the language classroom. The course met five times a week (Monday through Friday), each session lasting one hour. The university term last four months, so the study was undertaken from August to December 2015.

During the first session of the English course, the teacher briefly introduced the purpose of the portfolio project, and the fact that it would account for the 30 hours of independent study at the Self-Access Centre of the Language School, which was requirement of the course. Students were advised to use Language School facilities, such as the library, the Computer Lab, and the SAC to work on their personal language goals, but it was made clear that decisions regarding where they would work on their language goals, how they would do it, and which materials or resources they would use were entirely upon students. No assessment criteria were assigned to submissions.

In each session after examination days, the teacher asked students to think about a language goal they wanted to achieve during the course and to talk about the various ways in which they could accomplish their goals. Following this, students were asked to write a short reflection using the entry forms delivered by the teacher. The teacher explained to

students that they would keep their initial reflection and work on reaching their goals over a two-week period of time. Deadlines were set, and students were asked to document evidence of their portfolio work. On submission days, the teacher asked volunteers to talk about whether or not they had accomplished their goals. They were advised to talk and write about the problems and difficulties of the process, too. Then, students were required to write another reflection in their submission entry, attach evidence to their entries, and compile everything in a folder so that their teacher could read and comment on their portfolio work. They got back their portfolios with written comments and suggestions from teacher after each submission. On the session of the English course, students were asked to write a final reflection on their portfolio project using a form designed by the researcher and delivered by the professor. A total of four entries for their goal oriented portfolio and a final reflection were produced by students during the term.

Participants were also asked to complete a journal over a ten-week period. They were required to write at least three entries each week and a minimum of half a page about their learning. During the first session of the term, the teacher introduced the use of learning journals as part of the learning activities of the course. Since journal writing requires a commitment on the part of the participants to write regular entries (Mackey & Gass, 2005), the teacher explained to students that journal writing would account for 10% of their final grade and that the assessment criteria would be based on the required number of entries in their journals at the end of the course. Although a learning log is indicated in the course specifications (see Appendix F), learning logs have never been used in language courses at the TEFL program. Students were encouraged to write their reflections right after each session, but since diaries could be completed according to the participants' own schedules, they would write at any time since their first session of each week (Mondays) until the last session (Friday) when the teacher collected the journals to be kept in their locker. The participant teacher worked on reading and commenting on students' writing on Friday evenings and Monday mornings.

In sum, the data in this study was gathered from August to December 2015. There were 14 weeks in the semester, amounting 64 sessions in total, including examination days. The intervention in this group lasted for 10 weeks. Thus, the data in the present study comes from the pieces of writing produced by 18 participant students in the form of reflections and entries from both their goal oriented portfolios and learning journals over a ten-week

period of time. The data collected using the research tools selected for the purpose of this investigation were of written type. Lanksheara and Knobel (2004, p. 247) state that written data refer to the texts and documents produced to convey information, ideas, thoughts and reflections, memories, visions, procedures, goals, intentions, aspirations, prescriptions and so on, through the medium signs and symbols that other people can read (or view). The purpose and use for texts written by students were to were generating the empirical data set from which results and findings for the study will derive (Lanksheara & Knobel, ibid.).

4.6 Data analysis

The process of data analysis in the present study used qualitative analytic activities, strategies and techniques (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014; Merriam &Tisdell, 2016). A qualitative approach often includes a need to interpret data through the identification and possibly coding of themes, concepts, processes in order to build explanations or enlarge theories (Silver & Lewis, 2014). This is mainly about identifying patterns in data sets. However, while in qualitative research data collection might be accompanied of simultaneously analysis (Merriam, 2009), the data collection period in the present study consisted in participants progressively generating data as part of their participation in classroom activity and their work on portfolios and journals. Once the intervention period ended, the next research activity was to allocate students' portfolios and journals in the researcher office to begin with the analysis.

The data sets consist of the pieces of writing produced by 18 participant students in the form of reflections and entries from both their goal oriented portfolios and learning journals over a ten-week period of time. All of the participants submitted their portfolios entries. The compilation of their work, including evidence on their self-study materials, were kept in a folder and collected at the end of the term. Qualitative data gathered from students' portfolios consisted of a total of 162 texts written by the participants in this study, as each student provided with 9 reflections on their language goals. An example of a participant's portfolio entries has been included in Appendix K, which portraits the type of data gathered from this data collection method. With regard to learning journals, a total of 509 reflective entries were written by participant students over the ten weeks of intervention. Although participants were required to write at least three entries in a week, only 7 students completed the total number of entries required as it can be seen in the students' journal record included in the Appendix section (see Appendix M). However,

five students wrote more than three entries in a week, which was more than the number of entries required. Some students from the group who missed several classes during the term due to health problems could not write their journal entries for a couple of weeks during the intervention period; nevertheless, they kept working on their portfolio projects and made submissions as requested. An example of learning journal writing from one of the participants in this study has been included in appendix L.

Overall, data analysis in this study involved working with the data, organizing them, transcribe them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, and searching for patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). While the next chapter will provide with a detailed description of the analysis and findings of the data collected, a description of the strategies and stages suggested in literature (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and undertaken in the present study as follows:

1. Organize and prepare data for the analysis.

To start with, I scanned and transcribed the reflections from students' goal oriented portfolios and entries from learning journals. This was helpful to have data organized by participant and, most importantly, to have an electronic backup of the data. Also, although texts were written in English, there were several grammar and spelling mistakes in students' writing, making it difficult at times to focus on evidence of their strategic orientation to learning and the role played by their goals and classroom activity; as a language teacher, I was tempted to correct students writing. However, I decided not to correct mistakes in students' writing unless their errors or mistakes would make a piece of information illegible. I also decided to keep the original layout in both students' reflections from the portfolio project and in the journal entries. The data were documented by using text-processing software, Microsoft Word.

2. Read through all the data.

Following qualitative data analysis strategies, this activity involved gaining general sense of the information and reflecting on the overall meaning (Merriam, 2009; Miles, et al., 2014; Saldana, 2016). After organizing and transcribing data, I printed the texts from students' portfolios. I read and reread the transcripts and started making notes on the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Regarding students' journal writing, similar steps were carried out. Once the journal writing of 18 students had been transcribed, I printed the texts so that I could read and begin with the initial stage of the analysis. The main purpose of this stage was to familiarise myself with the data (Robson, et al, 2016).

3. Conduct analysis based on the specific theoretical approach and method.

This involves coding or organizing related segments of data into categories (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Regarding the data generated from students' goal oriented portfolios, I considered notions from sociocultural mediation theory and activity theory for the analysis of the data, while data gathered from students' learning journals were analysed by means of coding and categories aided by a qualitative software.

4. Generate a description of the setting of people and identify themes from the coding. Search for theme connections.

Once I had read for several times the data and identified themes and categories, I tried to find connections between students' portfolios reflections and entries from their learning journals. Some patterns were identified, as explained in the following chapter.

5. Represent the data within a research report.

In this step of the data analysis process, I wrote the first draft of chapter five in this thesis. A final version of the chapter was written after the analysis had been completed.

6. Interpret the larger meaning of data.

This was the final step of the data analysis process. I wrote an interpretation of the findings based on the research questions guiding this investigation. This is presented in chapter six of this thesis.

4.7 Trustworthiness and limitations

According to Lankshear and Knobel (2004, p. 362), during the past three decades, qualitative researchers have increasingly challenged the general concepts and assumptions underlying traditional validity and reliability measures. Most radically, they are questioning the claim that there is some fixed reality of truth that can be 'discovered' by means of investigation and measurement (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lather, 1991; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992: LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). This is in the case of the present study, which makes use of qualitative data to enhance the methodological toolbox used in strategic learning (White, Schramm, and Chamot, 2007). Furthermore, Lankshear and Knobel (2004) point out that qualitative researchers who have argued for a new approach to assessing the quality of research believe that some form of verification of claims and data interpretations in qualitative research is required.

This new criterion to evaluate the quality of a study is trustworthiness. "Trustworthiness is concerned with the 'believability' of a study, and the degree to which a reader has faith in

the study's worth" (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004, p. 363). Rallis and Rossman (2009), indicate trustworthiness of a study as being dependent on whether the study itself meets the standards for methodologically competent practice and ethically sensitive practice. Standards of competent practice include demonstrating that the study has credibility, was conducted rigorously, and has potential usefulness for polity, research, and practice. In this sense trustworthiness depends on the researchers' clearly demonstrating they have collected the data that are sufficient for their research needs (determined in large part by the research questions they have asked). Trustworthiness also require that the study be coherent. This means that the overall logic of the research question(s), theoretical framing, and data collection and analysis designs is explicit, justified and appropriate.

Although it has been suggested that empirical works constructed within its own theoretical and philosophical framework, such as several studies framed within the sociocultural paradigm, are subject of its own standards of quality and verification (Donato, 2000), there are certain aspects in this piece of research that need to be discussed. Firstly, according to Cohen and Manion (1994) exclusively reliance on one method of investigation may bias or distort the researchers' picture of a particular slice of reality. In this study, I decided to use another source of information to gain understanding of the classroom *activity* in which learners participated. Since the focus of the study is on how students develop strategic learning by means of mediation of their goals and reflection of their learning *activity*, journal writing was helpful in both mediating students' learning and providing information to 'complete the picture'. Secondly, unlike strict experimental design in which the validity and reliably are accounted for before the investigation, rigor in this research project derives from the nature of the interaction between the researcher and the participants, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich and, thick description (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All in all, as Patton (1990) state, in a qualitative study, "The validity and reliability of qualitative data depends to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher" (p.1).

However, I must acknowledge certain limitations in the methodology of the present study, though. For instance, Creswell (2007) suggest that the use of recognized approach to research enhances the rigor and sophistication of the research design. Yet, this study does not privilege any method or approach. Furthermore, it has been argued that qualitative analysis is not producing data that permit assured generalized understanding, which

requires a number of replications over a number of contextual variables (Pressley et al, 2006). While this is true about qualitative data and context-based studies, generalizations are population, context, and materials specific (Merriam, 2009). Also, it must be noted that although related literature on qualitative data analysis highlight the importance of analysis concurrent with data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles, Huberman & Saldana 2014), given the nature of the study, data analysis was carried out at the end of the ten-week intervention, which could have affected the interpretation and meaning of the data. Furthermore, the role played by the researcher in analysing data can be considered a weakness of qualitative approaches to research because the results are influenced by the researchers' personal biases and idiosyncrasies, and this, may be the case in this piece of research (Dörnyei; 2007, p. 41).

4.8 Summary

This chapter has described the methodology and research setting of the present study. The philosophical and methodological orientation have relied on both a positivistic orientation and constructivist thinking as the study involved and interventionist approach as well as qualitative data collection and analysis. The methodological appropriateness in this project is a natural consequence of both the sociocultural theory informing the study and the overall outcome of mainstream strategy research. Thus, a rationale for approaching this research considering both a positivistic and qualitative paradigm has been stablished. The portfolio project and the learning journal as data collection methods have been described in this chapter. An overview of the process in the data analysis was also addressed. Finally, this chapter aimed at helping the reader consider issues of trustworthiness and methodology limitations.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the implementation of a portfolio project and a learning journal, introduced in a compulsory English course of a TEFL undergraduate program at a state university in Mexico. The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which strategic learning is mediated by learners' goals and mediation tools.

The chapter begins with the analysis of the data obtained from participants' portfolio submissions and the reflections written by students. This will be followed by the analysis of the data gathered from participants' journals. Overall, the data presented here, within certain limitations, offers insights into the participants' strategic learning development and understanding of how an alternative approach to strategy instruction occurs in a language classroom, and thus answers to the research questions:

Main Research Question: To what extent, and in what ways do students' strategic learning develop by classroom mediated activity?

Sub-question 1: How is learners' strategic learning developed by the mediation of their particular goals?

Sub-question 2: How is learners' strategic learning developed by the mediation of reflective journal writing?

Sub-question 3: What other aspects of the language classroom influence on students' strategic orientation towards their learning?

Qualitative methods of data collection used in a study can yield an enormous amount of information (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Therefore, the sections that follows immerse the reader in the data in order to gain understanding of how tools mediated students' strategic learning and the role played by students' goals in the choice of strategic actions undertaken by the participants in this study. Data collected from students' reflections in their portfolio and journal entries were analysed by means of qualitative analysis in order to provide answers to the questions above. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to describe the process of making sense of the data undertaken, including that of consolidating, reducing and interpreting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

5.2 Portfolios

5.2.1 Introduction

A goal-oriented portfolio project, as described in the methodology chapter (see 4.5.1), was employed to gather data from participant students by making it part of their learning activity. Portfolio data consist of students' written reflections on their language goals and their plans to achieve them compiled in a portfolio project as well as evidence enclosed. A total of 162 texts were collected, transcribed, and analysed as 18 participant students provided with 9 texts each for period of ten weeks. These texts were written in the language classroom every three weeks, when the participant teacher indicated that some time from the session would be devoted to setting language learning goals and to submitting evidence related to achieving a specific language learning goal. Also, students were asked to write a meta-reflection on their submissions and overall work in the portfolio project once the course had come to the end.

The primary aim was to illustrate how is participants' language learning emerge and develop by the mediation of their particular goals. The main assumption derived from theorizations of language learning and mediation (see 3.7.2 and 3.7.5) is that only if the learners intend to pursue a particular goals or visions, which usually emerge in their internal conversation or reflective/thinking, a more active approach to learning is activated, and in turn strategic actions take place. With regard to the evidence participants attached to each portfolio submission, it included world lists, vocabulary index cards, printed exam practice exercises, grammar worksheets, letters, photos of visual materials, discs with recordings, and memory sticks with audio recordings, among others. I decided to keep these materials in participants' portfolios so that I could take a close look of them while finding meaning in the texts. The next section will present the analytic activities carried out with this data set, following the themes will be exemplified so as to provide the reader with a wider view of how the themes interconnect and how results are interpreted.

5.2.2 Analysis of participants' portfolios reflections

Data from gathered from learners' goal oriented portfolios were analysed using a set of analytic techniques aimed at finding recurrent patterns in participants' written reflections; this is one of the most common approach to the analysis of qualitative data often referred as thematic analysis (Silver & Lewins, 2014). Thematic analysis (TA) "is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke,

2006, p. 79). It helps the researcher to reduce data besides being systematic and flexible. Braun and Clarke ‘s (2006) six-phase thematic analysis guide, involving (1) familiarizing yourself with your data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report (p. 30), was used in “making sense of the data from participants’ reflections.

After organising and transcribing data collected from participants’ reflections in their portfolio projects by using a text processing software, Microsoft Word, I prepared 18 sets of data, one set for each student, consisting of the journals entries written for ten weeks (see 4.5.4). Once I had done this, I prepared the data sets for manual, paper and pencil, coding and analysis. I printed the 18 sets of data in double-spaced format on the left half of the page, keeping a wide right hand margin for writing codes and notes (Saldana, 2016) (see Appendix M). For each set of data, I read and reread the transcripts and started making notes on the printed pages (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These notes were first impressions and initial thoughts about both the reflections and the type of evidence in each of the submissions of the portfolio project; they were written in the form of memos at the bottom of the printed pages and “sticky notes”. Then, I highlighted significant ideas and made annotations which were tentative ideas for codes and themes. According to Saldana (2016), coding manually, manipulating data on paper and writing codes in pencil, gives the researcher more controls over and ownership of work, which is not always possible on a computer’s monitor screen.

Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) suggest that researchers start coding with some general themes derived from reading the literature and add more themes and subthemes as they go. Accordingly, rather than seeking for emergent codes, I used *A Sociocultural Perspective on Language Learning Strategies: The Role of Mediation* (Donato & McCormick,1994) as the basis of the coding scheme and then added additional codes based on a close reading of the texts. Bulmer (1979, as cited in Saldana, 2016) notes, that researcher’s general theoretical orientation and the characteristics of the phenome being studies influence the themes researchers are likely to find. Thus, consistent with the epistemological and theoretical paradigm informing the present study, the themes derived from the qualitative data were aligned with theoretical concepts from activity theory (see 3.5).

After the identification of the first codes, a hard-copy printouts of code lists and coded data were kept by side. This was useful to refine the first codes to the point that they could apply to the entire corpus of texts. Operational definitions of each theme were established for the purpose of a second coding of the data sets. *Self-assessment* was operationally defined as new information from the learners concerning some aspect of their learning- Also statements indicating students' own perceptions of their language proficiency. Self-assessments are not referenced to any particular piece of evidence or anchored in actual language learning practice. These statements were frequently marked in the discourse with the modal "can" or "can't" ("I can understand the way people speak English"). *Goals* were defined as statements in the discourse of needs, wants, desired outcomes, and wishes. Goals were identifications of desired outcomes by the student and were revealed in the discourse by "I want," "I desire," "I need to," or "I would like" (e.g. "I want to improve my speaking"). Consistent with activity theory, *strategic actions* were identified as the activities students intended to implement or had implemented in order to reach a language or learning goal. Strategic actions were actions oriented and were marked in the discourse with action verbs in the past, present, or future tense (e.g. "I'll do exercises from a book," "I listened to some podcasts in my cell-phone"). *Evidence* was considered to be any statement linked to a student's submission. Another theme referred to the difficulties participants experienced when carrying out the planned strategic actions. *Challenges* were important indicators of the actual investment of students in the activities. These were statements indicated what students had to face in trying to reach their goals and carrying out the different strategies. They were marked in discourse with adjectives like "difficult", or the phrase "I had difficulties …". Finally, *new goal setting* was defined with statements in the discourse of new needs, new desires, regarding their learning. Also, occasional *evaluative statements* were found in students' reflections (e. g. "I liked this activity"). As a result, keeping in mind that the data were analysed to determine how strategic actions emerged and developed without direct instruction, but from students' needs and motives to achieve a specific language goal, six distinct themes were identified in the data (Table 3). These included (1) self- assessment; (2) goal setting; (3) strategic actions; (4) reference to evidence; (5) challenges of the task; (6) new goal setting; (7) evaluation. All the discourse of reflections represented one of the seven categories.

Table 3: Themes derived from participants' portfolios

Themes	Description
▪ Self-assessment	Concerns about own learning and language proficiency.
▪ Goal setting	Desired outcomes.
▪ Strategic actions	Learning activities planned and/or implemented to to reach a language goal.
▪ Evidence	Statements about the evidence in portfolio submissions.
▪ Challenges	Difficulties in undertaking the task.
▪ New goal setting	Different goals derived from the task.
▪ Evaluation	Evaluative statements about portfolio submissions

5.2.3 Findings from students' reflections and evidence on goal oriented portfolios

Although too often findings are reported in the form of categories and themes, the can also be the forms of organized descriptive accounts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This section presents a close examination of participants' reflexive thinking and the role played by their language goals in developing a more strategic approach to language learning. The themes resulted from the analysis of data, as described in the previous section, serve here for the purpose of depicting how learning goals shaped participants' strategic learning. In order to find answers to the research questions making comparisons as well as interrogating patterns and relationships with data are useful analytic activities (Silver & Lewins, 2014). Accordingly, some representative cases have included in this section (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). In the examples of participants' reflections, the original layout of the texts was kept as similar as possible to the data obtained from students' portfolios.

Strategic learning and development in Group 1

In the analysis of information gathered from goal oriented portfolios, students were distributed into three different groups. A first group consisted of participants whose strategic orientation was present since the first portfolio submission and developed a long

time. This means, they were more focused in each submission and their strategic actions were clearly described. Students in this group provided with more consistent evidence of their language goal tasks. This means that reflections written before and after goal setting were correspondent in terms of planning and actions carried out. Also, the pieces of evidence submitted on how they tried to reach their goals were strongly connected to the reflections written by these participants. Only 6 students, out of the 18 participants in this study, were assigned to this group.

The following texts correspond to the first portfolio submission written by Mariela (pseudonym). A student whose work on the portfolio project, reflections and evidence submitted, were focused and consistent. A clear motive, such as improving on speaking skill or passing up a test was found in Mariela's texts. Self-assessment and challenges of the task were also recurrent themes in her reflections. In her portfolio, this student not only set herself a language goal she wanted to achieve, but also provided with detailed actions that she though would help her to accomplish he language goals, as it is can observed in Example 6.1. In the first portfolio entry form, this participant coherently wrote about her motive to set her language goal, anticipated the limitations she had to develop her speaking skill, and described a strategic plan to do it.

Example 6.1

> MARIELA
> The language goal I want to reach is to improve my speaking. The way I would reach it it's very unusual because I'm not going to practice my speaking by talking with someone, because I don't have anyone to practice it. First, I want to become more confident so I'll search some questions on Internet and I'll record myself answering those questions. After, I'll listen the audio one time to another until find some mistakes on it. I'll check the words or phrases I spoke wrong and I'll do more speaking exercises until I do it right. (Entry form 1, 08/10/15)
>
> The language goal I had was to improve my English speaking, I tried to be more confident in this skill so I decided to record myself asking questions or describing things then I listened my own records and I checked if it was good, and if it was wrong I wrote notes on sheets and I studied the grammar or vocabulary that wasn't well pronounced or used. This activity worked well to me because I'm good at listening and writing but at the moment I try to speak it's difficult. So, right now, I feel a little bit confident about my speaking but I still have many things to do for make my speaking better. (Submission form 1, 08/27/15)

An interesting part of the second reflective text is that after a detailed description about the different strategic actions she carried out to achieve her language goal, she included a self-assessment statement. This suggests that self-regulation processes took place alongside of the activity. On her second portfolio entry form (Example 6.2), Mariela wrote about a new language goal she wanted to reach and provided with a detailed description of the strategic actions she would carry out. Something different from her previous portfolio submission was that a self-assessment statement accompanied her goal setting this time. That is, this student self-evaluated her capacity to understand spoken English, and apparently, based on this evaluation, she set herself a more specific language goal.

Example 6.2

MARIELA

> I want to improve my listening. I can't understand the way the English people speak. So, I will focus in the listening on British accent. So, probably I will search some practice exams on internet, maybe PET Exams and I'll listening the conversations and I will answer the activities of the listening part. I will work on this from Monday to Friday, I mean, weekdays. (Entry form 2, 08/27/15)
>
> My past goal was difficult to me because I barely understand English accent. The first week consisted in practice listening according to a part of PET exam, I thought the people who were speaking in the track, were speaking very fast and there were some words I didn't understand at the moment of choosing the answer. in the second week, I understood almost everything of the speaking but when I chose the answer, it was incorrect. I think I improved my listening, but not too much.
> (Submission form 2, 09/18/15)

In Mariela's reflexive text of the second portfolio submission, the themes self-assessment and challenges were identified. This time, Mariela wrote about the challenges she had to when trying to work towards her goal. Her reflection also shows self-assessment on how she progressed and how she thought her listening skill had improved. It is reasonable to assume that these changes in the reflections point to a more focused approach to strategic learning. Another theme found in Mariela's text was motive. Both the entry text and the submission reflection included her concerns about developing the ability to understand British accent, which is necessary in order to succeed in an exam. In Mariela's third language goal submission the above process was repeated, as it can be seen in the reflections she wrote (Example 6.3). She first set a language goal herself f, and, then, she listed the kind of strategic actions she would carry out. However, this time the reason why she decided to improve her reading skill was the outcome on her last English exam. This

suggests that she had a clear ‘motive’ to work on reading skill. Also, Mariela wrote about the constrains of working on her former language goal, as it is presented next.

Example 6.3

MARIELA
Today I decided to improve my reading because I got confused on the partial exam of this week. So, I will practice reading with some PET practice exams. After finishing the practice exams, I will search unknown words and make a list with their translations. (Entry form 3, 09/18/15)

My language goal was reading comprehension based on PET activities. I worked with many different reading parts and I had difficulties in all the parts. At first, was difficult for me to pay attention to the text and read it carefully. Next, with the practice, I could concentrate more in the activities but I didn’t get a high score. At the end of each activity I wrote the words I didn’t know on the list and then I searched their translation and I wrote them on the list too.
(Submission form 3, 10/17/15)

Consistent with her previous portfolio submission, in the last submission (Example 6.4), Mariela established a language goal, linked it to a motive and listed the strategic actions she would carry out to reach her objective. It is important to note that this time the actions planned were more focused as she included a timetable for he activities. On her reflection on how she had worked to achieve her goal, she wrote about the challenges of working under a time schedule. Mariela also identified her ‘weaknesses’ in a certain type of exam items. She then moved onto setting a new language goal even though this was not a necessary a requirement of the portfolio project.

Example 6.4

MARIELA
I decided to practice sentence transformation. I will search some exercises on internet or books and I will answer them. I will spend 30 minutes per day from Monday to Friday. I will solve the exercises at night from 8:00 to 8:30 pm. At the end of each exercise I will spend 15 minutes more to check them and if the sentences are incorrect I will rewrite them in a new page. The unknown word I will find, I will write them on a list and I will search their translation. Then, I write their translation on the list. (Entry form 4, 10/16/15)

> The last goal was very difficult to me. It was about sentence transformation, I worked 30 minutes daily for 2 weeks, from Monday to Friday. I completed all the exercises but some of them confused me because they needed complex grammar and vocabulary, they needed some phrasal verbs, that I didn't know. The simplest ones were solved fast. The schedule I did my activities were kind of difficult because I did all the activities late at night and I wasn't concentrated at all. In conclusion, all the activities were good and useful for the PET exam. now, I know my weaknesses on sentence transformation and I will keep doing this part of the pet exam until I do it right. (Submission form 4, 11/11/15)

As part of the portfolio project participant students were asked to write a final reflection about their work in the portfolio project (see 4.5.1). Although Mariela's meta-reflection was rather brief, she included a general self-evaluation of how she thought her language skills improved and how she had performed in the portfolio project. More importantly, Mariela explicitly wrote how she had learned to be an independent learner in this text. With this final reflection, it is evident that by working towards specific language goals and reflecting on the process this participant become more strategic.

Example 6.5

> MARIELA
> I think I improved my language skills but not a lot. I believe I have too much to improve yet. Although the teacher's responses were positive about my learning, I think I could do more activities to improve the same skills. There are some important things in the outcomes. One of them are positive reactions to my goals. I put all the possible time to reach them. The other one is that I've learned how to be organized and do my work on time using a specific schedule. As a language student, I learned how to become independent of the teacher to improve my language skills.
> (Final reflection, 11/30/15)

Mariela's reflexive texts and the consistency in the portfolio project submissions was evident from the first language goal to the last one. Moreover, in her final reflection this participant is once again evaluating her language level and expressing her motive of continuous improvement. She is also cognizant about her learning and the experience of working towards a goal. The most salient part of this text is the fact that Mariela learnt how to become an independent learner through her work in the goal-oriented portfolio.

Another participant in this group, Elizabeth (pseudonym), provided with detailed descriptions of the actions she planned in order to achieve her language goals in the portfolio project. The themes found in Elizabeth's texts include goals, self-assessment, challenges, and new goal setting. The following texts written by Elizabeth display evidence of goal-oriented strategic learning. For instance, in Examples 6.6. she set a language goal

and a strategic plan since her first submission. That is, she was focused and able to self-evaluate her work towards achieving her language goal.

Example 6.6

ELIZABETH

My language goal I have for these two weeks is to learn more vocabulary about daily life topics, for example shopping, school, etc. My plan is study a book and make lists of the vocabulary which will be divided in topics. The lists will include verbs and phrases related with the topics and I'll do exercises of the other auxiliary book with the same purpose. (Entry form 1, 08/10/15)

The last two weeks my goal was learning vocabulary. I did exercises according a topic and then I took notes about unknown vocabulary or vocabulary I know but sometimes I forget. I studied vocabulary about countries, geography, nationalities, and languages in a unit. Each unit has exercises such as listening, fill blanks, match words-phrases. Second unit was about appearances and clothes, but I had problems because I couldn't remember some phrasal verbs but My friends and I discuss about their meaning in English and we use them in a conversation so I discovered I learnt phrasal verbs by speaking with them and I haven't forgotten the phrasal verbs. I did three lessons in my free time or on the way home. The listening exercises take me more time because I enjoy listening thought I answered the exercise.
(Submission form 1, 08/27/2015)

As it can be observed in these texts from Elizabeth's first portfolio submission, she had a clear idea about the kind of language goal she wanted to achieve and the kind of strategic actions that would help her to do so. It is interesting to see how goal setting and strategic actions were clearly defined in the first reflection. Likewise, a recount of her experiences may reveal not only that she worked on this task, but also that she faced different challenges in the process. In her reflection, she included other strategic activities, such a practicing with friends. On her second portfolio submission (Example 6.7), Elizabeth was once again very clear about setting a language goal and about the kind of activities she needed to carry out. In addition, a strategic approach to learning is evident in the fact that Elizabeth decided to use materials that were available for her practice. This capacity of solving problems and using available resources is also part of being a strategic learner can be observed in the following example.

Example 6.7

ELIZABETH

My goal is going to practice my listening skills. I'm going to do PET practices for listening so I'm going to use a PET book which has stories and PET exercises. The book has own audio. Also, I'm going to listening to music. (Entry form 2, 08/27/15)

Last two week I was practising my listening. During the first week, I was reading an audiobook but the last half past of the book because I've started before.
I love it because I learnt British accent and the story was good for me. The second week I was doing listening exercises on a book. The last three day I listened to some podcasts in my cell phone. I love it. I usually practice listening in the evenings and in my free time. I would like to repeat it again. (Submission form 2, 09/18/15)

Through her texts and portfolio submissions, Elizabeth student maintained the same level of orientation and reflection. She could clearly set her new goals and the strategic actions she would undertake. But, the most revealing part of her strategic behaviour can be seen in her text on how she worked to achieve her goal (Example 6.8) In the following texts it can be observed that she adjusted the time invested and the activities when she had little time to work on her goal, which is evidence of her independent learning. Also, although her strategic plan is brief, it is linked to a motive, which is practice in a specific section of the exam.

Example 6.8

ELIZABETH

My goal is going to be improving my writing so I'm going to focus on letters and sentence transformation. I want to do PET exercises about writing.
(Entry form 3, 09/18/15)

My language goal consisted in improving my writing skill. I did exercises of PET writing which are sentence transformation, short and long letter. I did my goals at home in the evening at 7-8 pm approximately. One day I practiced on sentences transformation and the next day I did two letters; the short one and the longer one (100 words). I worked in this way for these weeks. When the day I had to do letters or sentence transformations but in that day, I didn't have time, I added them with the stablished activities for the next day. I tried to work systematically. I researched phrases online to improve my letters. My documents are divided in two parts:
1) Sentences transformation, and 2) Short, long letters.
(Submission form 3, 10/17/15)

As observed in the previous texts, Elizabeth's goal was not only clear and reachable, but also linked to the motive of preparing herself for specific area of the exam Evidence of strategic learning and development was found in Elizabeth's reflections. In the following

texts (Example 6.9), self-assessment, goals, strategic actions, reference to evidence, and challenges of the task are recurrent themes that. The texts indicate that having a clear language goal in mind helped Elizabeth to be systematic and consistent in her work towards achieving her goal, and in turn, strategic in the learning of a foreign language.

Example 6.9

> ELIZABETH
> In My next goal. I'm going to work in the PET parts which are more difficult to me. For example, in the listening part which I do intensive listening (fill in the blanks), and so on. Each day I'm going to focus on a skill part of the pet and I'm working in the evenings. Also I worked from Sunday to Thursday. Example: Sunday difficult reading Part 2 – Monday listening Part 2 (PET) and so on. (Entry form 4, 10/16/15)
>
> We worked in the difficult parts of the PET. I focused on the reading and listening parts. One day I did two PET activities which are similar and the other day other skill with the same kind of activities. I was working in the evening. The two first days I did by myself A test (1- reading/ 1-listening) to check my level and the last two days I did other test to check my final level, I mean my progress. I think sometimes I get low scores because I couldn't be concentrated because I thought about problems or thing which I hadn't finished but it was helpful to check myself also Now I know what PET part I need to improve to get a good score to pass my PET exam. (Submission form 4, 11/11/15)

In Elizabeth's final reflection (Example 6.10), she reported that from the work in the portfolio project her own approach to learning was transformed. Something important in the following text is that she could discovered new ways of learning the target language. This final reflection places emphasis on different aspects of the course and on student's learning. First of all, the portfolio project served for the purpose of self-evaluation. At the same time, this need for evaluation resulted in specific strategic actions she carried out. Second, the text indicates that she was more aware of the kind of investment necessary for her to learn English effectively by the end of the course. Overall, Elizabeth's reflections display the themes of self- assessment, goal setting, strategic actions, reference to evidence, challenges of the task, and new goal setting.

Example 6.10

> ELIZABETH
>
> Through the goals process I evaluate my homework with Answer Key and when I did some activities which didn't have answer I asked another teacher, who I consider with a good English level, to check my activities. And with the letter was difficult to

> me check my progress because I didn't ask someone to check them because These people were too busy but at the end I felt better because after it took me less time to write these letters and I learnt some useful tips. Also, I think my goals are important to me because I knew I had to deliver my goals and I need to improve my English so I forced myself to devote time for studying and manage my time because managing my time it was the only way to be able to study at home. Though, *me hubiera gustado* [I wish I had] do others goal such as my speaking and collocations because my speaking gets worse because I haven't practice, but I'll do more goals by my own. Finally, according to my progress and thanks to these goals I've found out that if I want, I can do it, but if I have discipline because Language learning requires practising, attitude and effort, and I realised there are a lot of materials online to study. (Final reflection, 11/30/15)

One more student who showed consistency in her portfolio submissions and reflections was Lilia (pseudonym). Although her texts not as reflexive as Elizabeth's text, she wrote strategic plans to achieve each of her goal. Lilia relied on text layout to organize het thinking and the strategic actions she planned. This indicates that learning is approached differently by each student. For instance, Lilia used bulletins to describe the strategic actions she carried out, ass it is shown next (Example 6.11). nevertheless, the quality of her evidence reported in her submission form are important indicators of goal-oriented strategic actions.

Example 6.11

> LILIA
> The language goal I have for these two weeks is:
> To learn vocabulary for using in a specific topic. "The money"
> Steps:
> *I'll look up on internet.
> *I'll read a text about the money
> *I'll write down the key words.
> *I'll write a text using the words related to this topic.
> *I'll try to practice with my partner for improving my knowledge.
> (Entry form 1, 08/10/15)
>
> For reaching my goal, the first week I did the following:
> *I watched videos on YouTube
> *I listened to tracks about conversations by using money vocabulary.
> *I read conversations but not definitions or concepts.
> The second week:
> *I did some exercises
> *I read definitions
> *I did same exercises that I had done before
> *I read and memorized vocabulary without translating.

> At the end, I felt pleased because I learnt the most words I wanted learn. as well as there was more vocabulary that I included in my evidences but I didn't learn all of them. (Submission form 1, 08/27/15)

This text written by Lilia in her first portfolio submission included evidence of her work, yet she did not indicate reflection in terms of self-assessment or the challenges when working towards a goal. Nevertheless, the quality of the evidence delivered corresponded to the kind of actions listed in her second reflection. This suggests that she invested time and practiced in this objective. A more structured strategic plan was presented by Lilia in her second portfolio submission. As it can be observed in Example 6.12, this time Lilia distributed the activities along the two-week time she had for goal investment. In her reflection written after the submission of evidence, she now sets a new goal; something which she did not do in her first portfolio submission. This indicates change, and therefore, development in the way she approached language learning. The portfolio project helped Lilia (Example 6.12), a student who seemed to be already focused and organized in her learning, identify other aspects she desired to improve.

Example 6.12

> LILIA
> My goal for the next two weeks is learning useful vocabulary for expressing ideas or writing in a better way.
> *First, I'll watch videos about that.
> *I'll listen to tracks or conversations
> *I´ll read information without translating
> The points above will be done in the first week. On the second week, I'll do exercises online.
> *I'll test my knowledge
> *I'll read the definitions and concepts
> *I'll try to put in practice what I learnt. (Entry form 2, 08/27/15)
>
> I read some articles in English and when I saw a strange word I wrote down it. I did my vocabulary in Word of all the words that I didn't know. Also, I heard the pronunciation of all that words. The next time I'll include that pronunciation by writing it in my goal. (Submission form 2, 09/18/15)

In the submission form text presented, Lilia reported the actions she carried in order to accomplish her goal. This was accompanied by some statements referring to the difficulties she had and statements related to a new goal she set for herself as a result of this process.

Goal setting and strategic actions were recurrent themes in Lilia's texts, as observed in Example 6.13. Even though Lilia was not very reflexive as the two previous participants were, her initial texts show evidence of goal setting and strategic actions. In later submissions, challenges in carrying out this task are displayed.

Example 6.13

LILIA
Listening Practice

I´ll listen to music in English and also I'll listen audio tracks about different topics. I'll include 14 audio tracks in a cd. After I'll write down the unknown words along with the transcript of the audio tracks. and some songs in English.
(Entry form 3, 09/18/15)

For this goal, I heard audios about different topics. First I heard and after I saw the transcript, without watching the vocabulary. Finally, I did the exercises at the back of sheet and compared my answers with the answer sheet. It was a little difficult because of the words in the document. They were difficult to understand, but I learnt some words and I felt well with this goal reached. (Submission form 3, 10/17/15)

Evidence of development in Lilia's strategic language learning can be seen in the following texts, which correspond to the last submission of the portfolio project. While in her first submission Lilia only listed the strategic actions, she would carry out when working towards a goal, in her last submission self-assessment statements were included. It is also interesting to see how even the layout of this participant's texts changed, from listing to paragraph writing, which suggest changes in the way she understood and approach her learning.

Example 6.14

LILIA
The next goal is practice reading comprehension with exercises in which you can put A → correct B → incorrect. I want to improve in this skill because is important for my pet exam. I'll include 14 exercises with this skill. I'll do one per day. And in this goal I'll include some exercises with sentence transformations. I'll time and write at the top of each exercise the time it takes me to finish it. (Entry form 4, 10/16/15)

I reached my goal practicing the part 2 and 4 from reading. That was part from PET exam. It was difficult for me, I thought it was going to be easy, however, I did it. I hope improving my English after do my goal. I practiced on Saturdays evenings

> because I had a lot of homework to do. I felt I improved more than before. (Submission form 4, 11/11/15)

In the final reflection (Example 6.15) Lilia wrote about the kind the difficulties she had while working towards her goals. But, the most salient comments about the portfolio is that she linked her actions to a motive and reflected on the difficulties of working in some sections of the language examination she is getting ready for. These can be considered indicators of how personal language goals can shape students' decisions in the learning process by conducting internal conversation, in which the ultimate goals, concerns, desires, or visions are identified for commitment.

Example 6.15

> LILIA
> 1.- I think I evaluate myself by doing activities on the computer. I searched for different activities on internet. Honestly, I expected more from me.
> I think I could have it done better. The problem was I did not have enough time. However, I tried to do my best in some goals. I feel it was helpful for me and made me reflect. I can say that I learnt, it was not in the way I thought, but I learnt and I want to continue doing goals by myself and for me.
> 2.- I think so. The reason is because with these goals I could test my English.
> It was good for me because now, I concern about continue working hard and no leaving the time goes. Thank you for this activity. I'm going to continue practicing and improving my English. (Final reflection, 11/30/2015)

In the text above, Lilia's reflected on the portfolio project and the impact it had in her own learning. Self-evaluation and challenges were recurrent themes in Lilia's texts, and her final reflection was not an exception. Lilia clearly evaluates the execution of her tasks of the portfolio project and mentioned not having the sufficient time to work towards her goals as the major constraint. When she was asked about the relevance of the portfolio in her learning, Lilia states that the goal-oriented task not only engaged her in reflexive thinking but also helped her discover a new way to learn the language.

The next examples correspond to Elsa (pseudonym) a student from this group. As it can be observed in Example 6.16, Elsa's, in her first portfolio entry, this student decided to work on her listening and included a number of strategic actions she would apply to achieve her goal. Some evidence of self-assessment and challenges faced can be observed in her descriptions on how she carried out the different strategic activities. In her submission form, she describes a set of different materials and the way she used them. Besides, her positive comments on the activity, she was focused and organized.

Example 6.16

ELSA

Improving my listening and understand the most important of an audio. I will use speak up magazines. I will listen to the articles without reading and then with it. I will listen unknown songs and try to get them. I will watch some TV shows. (Entry form 1, 08/10/15)

Developing my listening skill. Material I used:
*Songs *TV SHOWS
*Magazine *Reading with audios *Recording
HOW I APPLIED THEM:
During my first day, I started looking for magazines articles and songs I have never heard: with objective of not getting lost with the rhythm. It was kind of difficult but it was the only way to use songs. With the articles, the things I did were: first I listened it without seeing the reading and try to get it. This activity wasn't too difficult. Then if I didn't understand at all; I put the recording again. At the end, I listened with the reading and for making feedback I did exercises. The most fun I liked at my first goal was to watch T.V. shows I really enjoy it and it was for me the most helpful activity; I understand them without the need of subtitles. (Submission form 1, 08/27/15)

Unlike the first portfolio submission, in her second portfolio submission, Elsa displayed less reflexive thinking than in her first language goal activity, still she was consistent on her work towards achieving a goal as it can be seen in Example 6.17. Here, Elsa's text is brief but focused as she plans the kind of sections, including materials, which will help her in reaching her goal. Besides, in her submission form, Elsa expressed how she felt about working by herself in specific vocabulary, and comments on how she perceived her learning about it.

Example 6.17

ELSA

Learn more about Phrasal Verbs. Activities I will do:
Look for a list of the most important phrasal verbs
I will do worksheets about phrasal verbs
I will cut and paste some figures of phrasal verbs
look for in which cases I can apply them. (Entry form 2, 08/27/15)

- I did worksheets.
- I did online tests
- I use images for meanings
- Be organized and make the use of a schedule.

Something I like I that when I am organized I got my goals easily. During the first days, I felt lost because Phrasal verbs were boring for me, but then I noticed about

many exercises there were some of them funny. I could learn more about the topic. (Submission form 2, 09/18/15)

A similar organization pattern was found in Elsa's third portfolio entry. In her setting of the third language goal, Elsa was more focused on the goal she wanted to reach and accompanied goals setting with self-assessment statements. This time Elsa connected her goal to a motive, which is the passing of her language examination. When submitting evidence of this task, she explicitly wrote that she had to become more serious about what she had to do, which probably means committed to her own learning. The change is also evident in the text pattern and the kind of information she provided, which is a more reflexive than the previous submissions. This is interesting as it appears to be related to a gradual 'development' of self-regulation, and in turn, strategic learning. Besides this, the layout Elsa used to report on her work can be considered strategic as it reflects the specific strategic actions she carried out, including that of being organized and sticking to a timetable as part of her independent work. In general, evidence of changes in Elsa's strategic learning through the progressive work in her goal-oriented portfolio can be observed in Example 6.18.

Example 6.18

ELSA
Learn about "Sentences transformations".

- Read information about it.
- Do exercises
- Practice with tests

First at all I have to read for understanding because I don't know anything about that. I chose this because it will be very helpful for PET exam. With the process of my goal if I found new techniques I will apply them.
(Entry form 3, 09/18/15)

Sentences Transformation

- I based my practice in worksheets
- Before that I read some grammar about that.
- I watched videos with explanations about this.

With the pass of the days I become more serious about what I should do. This goal was very helpful for me, my surprise was that I didn't know anything about this and I discovered that part of this is what we already learned during this term. For the next

months, I will continue practicing this because as I already noticed it really needs patience and constancy. (Submission form 3, 10/17/15)

For her last portfolio submission (Example 6.19), Elsa worked on her reading comprehension skill. As it can be observed in the following texts, this time Elsa linked her strategic plan to a motive, succeeding in an exam. She became more aware of her approach to learning and wrote about her expectations about carrying out the activities she listed, too. Besides, she elaborated a more detailed plan by establishing a starting date for her work. Even though the themes found in Elsa's reflections only included strategic actions and reference to evidence of her work, the comments in her submission form show awareness about investing time and effort and working on your own to improve language skills.

Example 6.19

ELSA
Reading comprehension.
DATES: I will start on October 17th. Principally I use weekends for developing tasks or days in which I don't have something else to do.
ACTIVITIES

- Look for information or which techniques I could use
- Practice a lot
- To do activities about listening comprehensions.

WHAT I EXPECT:
To be honest this is the most boring skills for me, adding to that I sometimes get distracted. I expect to change that thought and to take more seriously this.
(Entry form 4, 10/16/15)

"Develop reading ability in PET exam."
Reading had been a very hard and boring ability for me however with this last goal I changed that though. For this time, I consider that I made a better effort due to I added an extra day (I worked 5 days). The things I did:

- Reading activities.
- Reading practice focused on PET exam.
- On line activities.
- On line quizzes.

What I learned is that when you get focused you success in what you do. now with PET exam what I could notice is that you have to take your time If you spend just a

> few minutes; make sure that your activity has a good quality.
> (Submission form 4, 11/11/15)

In her final reflection, Elsa reported that through her portfolio work she noticed what she was capable of doing. From the firs language portfolio submission to the final one, changes in Elsa's approach to language learning are evident. This gradual change involved more focused strategic actions and more commitment to her own work. Also, the way Elsa's perceived her learning was an interesting aspect of this participant since expectations, as she wrote, were often different from the actual activities she carried out. In her concluding comments, Elsa reflects on how she sees independent learning must take place, which is something very desirable and essential in a strategic learner. Elsa's portfolio was another evidence of how working towards a goal and constant reflection can transform learners' capacity of deploying their own strategic actions without direct instruction.

Example 6.20

> ELSA
> In my case, all the goals were very helpful for me. I could get something good of my learning. I made my best effort in every task, by the way, since the first goal I felt excited about what I would do. At the end of the process, I noticed of what I am capable of doing. Something very rewarding is that all the languages goals were really focused on what I was not good enough. Now, I feel better because as I could see if you prepare material, and you make a schedule, you will get a better result.
> (Final reflection, 11/30/15)

In general, the six participants in this first group were focused, organized, and constant in their work on the goal-oriented portfolio. Substantial evidence of self-assessment, goal setting, strategic actions and reference to the evidence they submitted were found in their texts. The students in this group also showed development in their strategic approach to learning as they moved from less reflective thinking to more reflexive internal conversation. A salient aspect of their texts is the recurrent pattern of self-assessment and reference to the challenges they faced while working towards their goals. But, what is more interesting about the texts presented above is the fact that goals played a significant role in mediating their strategic actions. It was the need, or motive, to work towards a language learning goal what shaped learning in these students. Finally, in their meta-reflections, this

group of participants expressed, based on their experience of having to work on goals, would help them to orient their approach to learning a foreign language.

Strategic learning and development in Group 2

A second group of participants was identified through the analysis of their reflections and evidence submitted in their portfolio project. A total of 5 participants, out of 18, fulfilled the number of submissions and evidence required in the portfolio project. Nonetheless, the correspondence between the reflections in the entry forms and the reflections about their work in their submission forms were inconsistent at times. Also, the pieces of evidence submitted on how they tried to reach their goals were not always connected to their written reflections, or, in some cases, this evidence was rather poor. Despite this, in some cases, the texts provided with evidence of strategic actions, which were unfocused at the beginning of the course, but gradually moved to a more strategic orientation to learning. In terms of the themes indicating the wider spectrum of their strategic actions, such as self-assessment, challenges of the tasks, and new goal setting, these were not as recurrent as in the texts written by students in the first group. Still, evidence of strategic learning and development was found. The following texts are taken from participants' portfolios written reflection and aimed at illustrating students' approach to learning based on their work towards reaching a goal.

The texts presented next belong to Cristina (pseudonym), a student who comply with the required submissions of the portfolio project, but evidence of her work towards attaining her language goals were very poor. This was accompanied by little reflexive thinking. The most recurrent themes found in Cristina's texts were strategic actions, which were listed but not detailed in terms of time devoted to her work, timetable observed, or challenges she had in pursuing her goals, as it can be observed in Example

Example 6.21

> CRISTINA
> Learn more phrasal verbs.
> In a piece of paper, I will write some sentences and expressions using phrasal verbs.
> In my bedroom, I will paste these pieces of paper to see them every day.

(Entry form 1, 08/10/15)

That goal was learn more phrasal verbs because I think they don't exist in Spanish I think that is the reason is a little bit more difficult to learn.
First, I was looking for a phrasal verbs' list on internet with the meaning of each one and a sentence to understand the meaning better.
Then, I bought some flashcards and I wrote on them the phrasal verb with the meaning and below a sentence with the phrasal verb.
Finally, I pasted the flashcards in my bedroom.
I mean, on the mirror, on the door and I pasted one in the living room next to the TV, so I was watching and reading the flashcards to learn them every day.
(Submission form 1, 08/27/15)

In Example 6.21, evidence of strategic actions and self-assessment can be observed. Cristina was very specific on the type of materials she used even though she only attached some colour papers with phrasal verbs to her submission. A possible explanation for this is that Cristina carried out the strategic actions to fulfil a class requirement as she did not mention the passing of a test or language improvement as her ultimate goal in the reflections. No evidence of self-assessment, challenges with the task, or new goal setting were found in Cristina's first portfolio submission. In the analysis of Cristina's second portfolio submission (Example 6.22) similar strategic actions were found as it can be seen in the following example.

Example 6.22

CRISTINA
A language goal I have for the next two weeks and how I can reach it…
is going to be: learn more vocabulary.
I will write the word and then the meaning in some flashcards as I did with the phrasal verbs, I will paste the flashcards in my bedroom and in my Livingroom.
(Entry form 2, 08/27/15)

A language goal I had for the past two weeks and how I reached it… was learn more vocabulary because sometimes I have problems with some exercises because of the vocabulary. I did some flashcards which I pasted in my room. I wrote on them the word and below I wrote the meaning. During the last two weeks, I saw the flashcards in my bedroom and I read them. So, I learnt them in that way.
(Submission form 2, 09/18/15)

As it can be observed in Example 6.22, Cristina's goal setting is very unfocused and is not attached to a self-assessment statement or to an ultimate goal, such as developing a

particular area of any of the language skills. In her submission form, Cristina mentions flashcard as the material used in learning vocabulary, yet she did not submit any evidence of the materials she used or nay other evidence of her work towards achieving a goal. The lack of reflexive thinking and self-evaluation in Cristina's texts suggests that she only fulfilled the forms, but she might not have engaged in more strategic and independent learning. However, the previous patterns changed in her third portfolio submission as it can be seen in Example 6.23.

Example 6.23

> CRISTINA
>
> … is to learn more verbs in past participle, because sometimes when I have to use Past perfect, Present perfect, and others as passive voice I know the structure but sometimes I don't remember the past participle of the verb. I will write in pieces of paper the verb in past simple and then the verb in past participle. I will paste this kind of flashcards in my bedroom because this method has helped me very much. (Entry form 3, 09/18/15)
>
> …was learn more verbs in past participle. I chose those verbs because they were the verbs I saw a week before so I wanted to learn them, because sometimes I forget the verbs I just saw once, so, first, I investigated the past participle of them. Secondly, I wrote the past simple of them and the past participle too, because there are some verbs that don't change and I get confused with the verbs which change. After I wrote them in pieces of paper, I pasted them in my room in order to read and learn them. (Submission form 3, 10/17/15)

Unlike her previous submission, these texts corresponding to Cristina's third portfolio submission includes some evidence of self-assessment and it is connected the strategic actions she planned to carry out. Also, this time Cristina included photographs as evidence of her work, which suggests she actually invested time and effort in reviewing what she believed had not learnt effectively. With the passing of the weeks, Cristina's reflections seemed to be more focused and texts more reflexive. In Example 6.24, Cristina links her strategic actions to a common goal to all participants, which is the passing of a language examination. She even uses the word 'focus' and details a plan she will follow to reach her goal.

Example 6.24

> CRISTINA
> A language goal I have for the next two weeks and how I can reach it…will be improve my writing skill. I will focus on sentence transformation. because of the Pet exam. I think I'm not god at that part of writing so I have to improve it. I will look

> for the best way to complete those exercises like tips, grammar and things like that. Then, I will look for exercises, I will print them and I will answer them. (Entry form 4, 10/16/15)

> A language goal I had for the past two weeks and how I reached it… was practice the writing part of the PET exam called "sentence transformation".
> First, I looked on internet exercises about sentence transformation.
> After I found one which was completed. I mean, I wanted one that explain a little beat of grammar and then the activity. After that, I printed my exercises.
> Then, I planned to answer one sheet every day and I did it. When I did not have too much homework to do I did two or three. However, at the weekend I did not do these worksheets. I felt very good when I did these worksheets because I know it will help me in my PET exam. While I was doing my goal I thought every exercise was easy and actually it was. After I checked my answers on internet, I feel proud of myself because I did it well. (Submission form 4, 11/11/15)

In the examples above, Cristina not only narrowed a common goal, such as passing a text, but also provided with more details on her strategic actions she undertook. She also mentioned the timetable she planned for her activities as well as the challenges she had in terms of time management. The evidence in her portfolio submission were all the worksheets she mentions in the texts. This suggests that she actually committed herself to achieve her own goal and that development of a more strategic approach to learning gradually occurred in the case of Cristina. The following texts (Example 6.25) correspond to Cristina's final reflection about the portfolio project.

Example 6.25

> CRISTINA
> My language goals I had in this course were "to learn more phrasal verbs" and it actually, helped me a lot. In this goal, I realised I did not know a lot of phrasal verbs. At the end, I asked for help to a friend who asked me the meaning of each phrasal verb and I did it well. I felt really proud of me. other goals were "to learn vocabulary, verbs in past participle and the last one was "to learn about sentence transformation. I am very thankful because all of them helped me and I realised I improve my English. I realised because I had good grades. Finally, I think I will continue doing these goals for my next semester in order to learn more vocabulary and grammar. (Final reflection, 11/30/15)

Although some inconsistency in reflexive thinking and evidence of working towards a goal was found in Cristina's portfolio, the final reflection suggests that the portfolio helped her learn more and better. In the texts, she indicates that the goal-oriented portfolio project is something applicable to future English courses. In addition, with each submission Cristina

showed a slightly gradual change in her approach to learning a foreign language as she went from less focused and reflexive to more goal-oriented in her independent work. An interesting feature of Cristina's reflections is that in some of her texts, she linked her actions to a motive, such as passing up an important examination. On the whole, in her texts Cristina planned and reported several actions that she considered helpful at the time of setting a goal. Yet, her work towards achieving a goal was not always supported by the evidence submitted.

Strategic learning and development in Group 3

Finally, 7 out of 18 participants displayed a different approach to learning compared to the other 11 participants in this study. The texts written by these participants were rather unfocused and provided with little or no evidence of reflexive thinking. Also, evidence accompanied their submissions, if any, was not always substantial. Although they comply with writing their entry and submission forms, their texts did not coherently justify the strategic actions reported at times. Statements making reference to self-assessment, goal-setting, strategic actions, and new goal setting were scarce in the texts produced by this group of participants. Another interesting finding was in the texts written by these participants was the lack of motive in their reflections. Unlike their counterparts, these students did not explicitly indicate their interest or desire of passing up a test or improve in a specific aspect of language. Thus, insufficient evidence of gradual change, or development in students' strategic learning was found in their texts.

Miles and Huberman (1994), suggest that divergent or negative cases provide a rich source for further analytic thinking as the researcher learn from them and grow understanding to incorporate when theorising. Therefore, in qualitative work they cannot as they can provide the hint that explains better what in under study. The following texts, which belong to Paola, help here to illustrate the patterns found in 7 participants. The aim of the texts is to exemplify how, in some cases, evidence of gradual change in participants' approach to learning was difficult to determine since strategic actions were the most recurrent theme in some of the students' reflections, as in the next example in which Paola wrote about her plan to work towards the goal of practicing the language.

Example 6.26

PAOLA
My language goal I have for the next two weeks is talking more in English.

> Practice more fluently my English. I will reach it by recording myself with my brother and my cousins that live in USA. (Entry form 1, 08/10/15)
>
> My language goal I had for the past two weeks was to practice my English more fluently. First what I did was practice by myself, watching TV., movies, and songs. Then I started to just talk in English with my brother (practice only).
> After a few days, I decided to record my brother and I with a "normal conversation".
> And that's what I did for the past two weeks. (Submission form 1, 08/27/15)

As it can be observed in the Paola's texts, she seemed to have thought about a language skill she wanted to develop, but rather than elaborating a plan to achieve a plan, Paola wrote about the type of materials she could submit as evidence of her work. This can suggest that, in the case of this participant, the text was not goal-oriented but task-oriented. This means she focused on completing the task. Moreover, her texts lacks of reflection. Self-assessment statements that could indicate how she perceived her speaking skill, or statements indicating the challenges she encountered while working towards her goal were not identified in Paola's' texts. A similar task-oriented pattern was found in Paola's second portfolio goal and submission texts. In example 6.27, Paola wrote about the type of evidence that could 'prove' she actually worked towards achieving a language/learning goal. However, unlike her previous submission, Paola listed a series of activities she would carry out, such as looking up difficult words and post them in a wall.

Example 6.27

> PAOLA
> "Reading" My new goal is to perfect my reading skills.
> I am going to read a couple of chapters of a back (photocopy some pages of the book) and as prove I will underline or do my own vocabulary wall list where I'm going to write words I don't understand from the book. After doing my vocab list, I will look for the definition. That should be a prove of my reading progress.
> (Entry form 2, 08/27/15)
>
> My goal was reading. I read a few chapters of a book called the Mate Runner (search). I read the back and then I highlighted all the words I didn't understand. I searched the words to understand it better. I did read the chapters at least twice which helped me reach my goal. It also helped me read a little faster.
> (Submission form 2, 09/18/15)

In the submission form, Paola's text is more consistent in terms of the correspondence between the plan to achieve her goal and the activities she reported; nevertheless, the text

does not include any evaluative statements or statements about difficulties while doing the activities. The text in the submission form does not necessary suggest that a more strategic approach to learning was adopted by Paola. However, as Paola progressively worked on her their language goal, she provided with more details about the kind of activities that could help her to achieve her goal. This can be observed in Example 6.28, a text written by Paola in the entry form of the third portfolio submission. In the text, she was more focused when setting a goal as she specified the number of songs and the timetable for the execution.

Example 6.28

> PAOLA
> Listening
> I will listen to music but answering worksheets according to the song I choose.
> I will do 7 songs. For my two-week goal.
> First, I'm going to search the songs, then I'm going to print out the fill-in-the blank work sheets. I will make sure to repeat the song at least twice. The first time I will fill in the blank as much as I can. the second time with another colour pen I will fill in the ones I missed. This will be done every 2 days. (Entry form 3, 09/18/15)
>
> The first day I started searching for the songs I would want to hear and do the activity. after I had the idea of what I wanted I started with the first song. I listened to it while I was responding the sheet of paper, and I did the same procedure every other day until I finished my two-week goal. I did have a couple of mistakes so I would write the definition or find out why I didn't get the word on the fill-in-the blank. I think I reached my goal how I was planning to reach it. (Submission form/October 16th). (Submission form 3, 10/17/15)

In contrast to Paola's previous submission form texts, challenges and evaluative statements appeared in her third submission text, as can be observed in Example 6.28. Not only was Paola's' goal reachable, but also plausible as the evidence attached to portfolio submission included the worksheets with song lyrics and different exercises. In her text, a more detailed description of the activities she carried out to accomplish her goal was provided. Moreover, she wrote about her mistakes and the strategies used to overcome the difficulties of the task. An evaluative statement was also part of Paola's submission text. However, this pattern was not found in Paola's last portfolio submission (Example 6.29). Although several activities were planned, evidence of the writing and reading activities carried out was not attached by Paola to her portfolio. In the entry form, Paola listed several actions and even set a timetable., but, in her portfolio submission text, she only reported actions

related to reading skills, one of the two skills she wanted to develop. In a close inspection, the actions planned and reported by Paola in her texts, were not necessarily goal-oriented.

Example 6.29

PAOLA
"Writing and Reading"

For my next goal, I would like to read a couple off interesting article I could find on the internet (about animals, etc.) and then I would like to practice my writing skills by writing small essays about each article I read, and if I have any problem with a word make a vocab. list if not than just do my essays. I would like to do around 6 to 7 articles (do one every other day) and do it around 7:00 pm- 7:45 pm reading and at 8 pm start doing the essay. I would do the same thing for every article I choose to do. This will help me achieve more on my writing skills and also on my reading skills. (Entry form 4, 10/16/15)

My goal for the past two weeks helped me a little more because every two days I read an article (a brief article) where I would explain what I read and what I understood from the articles. I also did a very small word list where I would right down words I didn't quit understand. and find the definition of each word. (It was a small list because I could understand every word.) I did about 6 or 7 articles and where about mostly science, animal articles. (Submission form 4, 11/11/15)

It is possible that setting a rather general goal, such as reading and writing, could not have helped this participant to focus on specific aspects of her learning and actually experienced a sense of achievement after investing time and effort. The fact that no evidence of Paola's work was attached to her submission forms might be linked to the lack of motive. That is, the reflective texts could have been written with no motive in mind, such as passing a language examinations or improving on a specific aspect of the language, but with the sole intention of comply with the portfolios submission as a required task of the course. In Paola's final reflection (Example 6.30), this participant evaluates the overall work in the portfolio project.

Example 6.30

PAOLA
From one to ten I believe I can evaluate myself with an 8. I consider I did a great job but also believe I could have done a little better. I think I could have worked harder in my week goals even though I think I did an excellent job. I could see my progress from week to week. Maybe if I'd given more proof of my progress by doing more activities would have shown even more progress of my goals. Every article and every activity that I did were important to me because I did it with all the honesty that I have. I enjoyed every goal I did and that I achieved. I tried to do every skill in my

> goals to improve myself. So, as a language student I considered my hard work in improving. (Final reflection, 11/30/15)

Compared to her counterparts, in Paola's texts statements related to a motive, such as passing a language exam or improving in a certain language skills were not found. Although some evidence of strategic plans can be read in her texts, self-assessment or difficulties were not mentioned. Moreover, evidence of her work towards her goal was rather inconsistent since her activities were not coherently justified by the evidence submitted. In her meta-reflection, an interest in adopting a different learning approach derived from her work in the portfolio project.

To summarize, the most recurrent theme in participants' texts was strategic actions. This were statements referring to learning activities participants planned to achieve a language goal. Strategic actions were found in both entry and submission reflections. The second most frequent themes found in participants' reflections were self-assessment and challenges. The majority of the students self-assessed their ability in a given skill or particular aspect of the language before setting a goal in the entry form. This pattern was found in the texts of 11 participants. The remaining seven participants only listed the activities planned to accomplish their goals, which rather general. Only six participants evaluated their work in each of the submissions, followed by the setting of new goal. The final reflections were indicators of changes in students' perceptions of their own learning and intentions to continue learning based on their language learning goals. Development was also evident along the submissions since most of the students went from less focused to more focused language goals and detailed strategic plans.

5.3 Learning journals

5.3.1 Introduction

Another source of data was learning journals. As described in the methodology chapter (see 4.5.2), a learning journal was employed to gather data from participants by making it part of their course activities. Journal data consist of participants' written accounts of their learning in the language classroom. Participants were asked to provide 3 entries each for a period of 10 weeks. Even though this was the number of entries required in a week, 4 students wrote more than three entries occasionally, and six participants wrote less than three entries in a week (see Appendix J).

A total of 509 texts from participants' learning journals were collected, transcribed, and analysed. The primary aim was to gain insight about students' experiences, feelings, and reactions to their leaning, but mainly to classroom activity as they engaged in reflexive thinking. The main assumption derived from theorizations of language learning and mediation (see 3.7.4 and 3.7.5) is that journals offer learners the opportunity to reflect on their personal growth and development (Mahn, 2008). Journal writing implemented in the language classroom can provide with insight into students' actual learning approaches derived from classroom activity (Gillette, 1994). This means that by analysing learners' texts it is possible to understand how the social context and *activity* itself influenced students on adopting a more strategic approach to learning.

5.3.2 Analysis of participants' journal writing

Data gathered from participants' journals were analysed inductively, using similar qualitative strategies and techniques applied to the analysis of data from portfolios at the initial analytic stage. But, unlike the analysis of the texts obtained from participants' portfolios, in the analysis of the texts from participant's journals the aim was at identifying emergent categories rather than themes derived from literature. Also, at a second stage in the analysis, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) (Silver and Lewins, 2014) was used in order to make new insights about the data.

First, data were coding manually. Each and every entry was transcribed, correcting only participants' misspelling of words and leaving their writings with the same syntactic and paragraphing organisation as it was important to maintain each entry as in its the original version (see Appendix L). After organising and transcribing data collected from participants' journals by using a text processing software, Microsoft Word, I organised 18 sets of data, one set for each student, consisting of the total of journals entries written for ten weeks (see 4.5.4). Once I had done this, I prepared the data sets for manual coding and analysis (Saldana, 2016). I printed the 18 sets of data in single-spaced format, leaving enough space to write comments between entries. For each set of data, I read and reread the transcripts; this was followed by highlighting on different colours meaningful chunks and making tentative codes on the data. At this initial analytic stage, I examined any patters that emerge from the data by reading line by line and keeping in mind the research sub-questions in this study. I kept a record of the emergent codes, and developed tentative categories (see Appendix N). Initial key word codes were primarily descriptive; as

described by Miles and Huberman (1994), “they entail no interpretation, but simply the attribution of a class of phenomena to a segment of a text. (p. 569). At this initial stage of the analysis 11 categories were identified.

Saldana (2016) states that coding is a cyclical act and that rarely is the first cycle of coding data perfectly attempted; it is in the second cycle, and possible in the third or fourth of recoding when it is possible to manage, filter and record for generating categories, themes and concepts, grasping meaning, and/or building theory (p.19). Likewise, Silver and Lewins (2014) note that whatever the approach to coding qualitative data, it will often be necessary to recode. In this study, the second cycle of the analysis was facilitated by CAQDAS. Some of the advantages of using CAQDAS include permitting the researcher to shift quickly back and forth between multiple analytic tasks such as coding, analytic memo writing, and exploring patterns in progress (Saldana, 2016). Moreover, the software’s ability to recode, uncode, rename, delete, move, merge, group, and assign different codes to shorter and longer passages of text with a few mouse clicks and keystrokes are important tools for the analysis (Silver & Lewins, 2014, p. 47). In addition, the data and coding displays of the selected program provided the researcher with a sense of necessary order and organization, and enhanced my cognitive grasp of the work in progress (Saldana, 2016, p. 56).

Considering the benefits of CAQDAS discussed above, in the second analytic stage of participants’ journals the 18 sets of data were analysed using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software NVivo 10. While some qualitative research methodologist recommend code the total body of data, others think that only most salient portions of the corpus related to the research questions merit examination, as explained by (Saldana, 2016; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). I decided to conduct whole text analysis trying to capture the essential elements of the research story (Saldana, 2016, p. 50). The only bits of data that were not coded were statement related to participants feeling unwell or reasons for class absence. Although in the re-coding of journal texts I was influenced by the initial code list (see Appendix N), I made efforts to keep the labels of the major categories near to the language used by the participant, using in vivo codes (Flick, 2002), trying to maintain the analysis as close to the data as possible. The second analytic phase helped to refine the first code list and to identify new patterns and connections in the data. Two categories, classroom activity and opinions of the lessons and the course were merged resulting in classroom activity. Statements in which participants referred their

work in the portfolio and journal writing were coded in a single category since they were connected and displayed reflection of self-learning. Table 4 summarizes the results of the two analytic phases.

As is can be seen the Table 4, in the second analytic stage, the eleven categories first identified were revised and some were merged. A total of eight categories resulted from the analysis. Classroom activity initially included codes that merely described events that occurred in the classroom, such as teacher's instructions, learning tasks, games, etc. A second category, participation in class, and classroom activity were merged together in 'classroom activity' because the codes in both categories were descriptions about classroom events.

Table 4: Categories identified in participants' journals

Analytic Stage 1	Analytic Stage 2

▪ Classroom activity
▪ Opinions about lessons
▪ Working with others
▪ Participation in class
▪ Linguistic knowledge learnt
▪ Own perceptions of learning
▪ Self-assessment
▪ Motive
▪ Working on portfolio
▪ Writing learning journal
▪ Opinions about the course
	▪ Classroom activity
	▪ Perceptions of classroom activity
	  ▪ Teacher's role
	▪ Working with others
	▪ Language and skills
	▪ Perceptions of learning
	▪ Self-assessment
	  ▪ Strategic actions
	  ▪ Motive
	▪ Portfolio and Journal

With regard to the categories working on portfolio and writing learning journal, these categories comprised a small amount of the whole body of data; the majority of the

participants did not write about their work in the portfolio in their journals, with the except of final entries in which participants wrote about keeping a learning journal. In Table 4, one category self-assessment, which were statements about participant's own difficulties and constraints in language leaning, displays two sub-categories. Self-assessment and motive in the initial code list, were moved to a single category in the second analytic stage. This was because, while codifying journals data using NVivo 10, it was found that self-assessment statements were frequently accompanied by at least one strategic action, or plan to learn more and better. It was also found that motive was strongly linked to self-assessment. Codes related to motive where statements about students' desires and needs to learn a particular aspect of grammar, become competent in the language, or improve in a particular language skill arose from participants' identification of their own.
In both the first analytic stage and the second analytic scale, codes related to linguistic aspects of language learning, such as grammar, syntax, vocabulary, or related to language skills such as listening, reading, and speaking were identified in participants' texts. These codes were initially grouped under one category labelled Linguistic knowledge learnt. But, in the second analytic phase, this category was labelled language and skills as it reflected more properly the type of information wrote by participants. Similarly, two categories, opinions about the lessons and opinions about the course, were merged. A new category labelled classroom activity included both codes about participants' opinions of the events that took place in the classroom and general comments on the course. While classroom activity included descriptions of the actual teaching and events which took place in the classroom, perceptions of the classroom activity were students' reactions to their instructor's teaching and each classroom event.

One subcategory was identified in the analysis of participant's perceptions of classroom activity; this was labelled 'Teachers' role' and it described not only positive comments about the instructor's teaching but also the attitude that the teacher took towards dialog journal. The comments wrote by the teacher every week, despite being shot phrases, were often part of students' entries and indicators of the role played by participant teacher in maintaining students motivated and engaged in both the lessons and their journal writing.

5.3.3 Findings from participants' journal writing

In general, journal texts were analysed inductively. The aim was to describe how learners' strategic learning developed by the mediation of reflective journal writing and which

aspects of the language classroom, if any, influence on students' strategic orientation towards their learning. The analysis of journal texts suggested that students writing was more descriptive than reflexive as classroom activity was the most frequent category, and perceptions of classroom activity the second most recurrent type. Yet, an interesting finding was teacher's role in maintaining students engaged in their journal writing as well as engaged in the lessons. The following examples illustrate how participants approached language learning as reported in their journal. They have been organized according to the type of information and evidence on strategic learning they display.

Self-assessment, strategic actions and motives

Journal entries were predominantly descriptions of classroom events, but some evidence of a strategic approach to learning was found. When strategic actions were found in the texts, they were short sentences about what participants did in order to carry out an assignment, review the language, and practice some aspects of grammar and/or vocabulary. They often included the use of internet and online resources for language learners. In examples 6.1, extracts written by three different participants are good examples of the kind of strategic actions found in journal texts.

Example 6.1

> ELIZABETH
> I think I didn't learn enough vocabulary because we learn grammar not vocabulary. I don't understand "of which" but I'll search it online (Extract 1, 09/09/15).
>
> LILIA
> To create my sentence, I had to look up the word in the translator and I was able to create it (Extract 2, 10/28/15)
>
> ADRIANA
> I practice the vocabulary by myself, and I try to do exercises online if I don't understand the topic (Extract 3, 10/29/15).

The surface analysis of journal texts revealed a few examples strategic actions as displayed in Example 6.1. participants' journal entries. But, in the second analytic phase of journal texts, it was revealed that strategic actions rarely occurred separated from self-assessment in participants' journals. That is, they were part of the broader category labelled self-assessment. This category refers to statements indicating participants' difficulty in learning the language or aspects of the language which were confusing to students. This can be

observed in the following texts written by Mariela (pseudonym). In example, 6.2, the first extract, Mariela reflects about her own learning and writes about an action to practice the language she has learnt in her English lesson. In the second extract, this participant is cognizant of her own learning style, and indicates how she finds opportunities to practice the language when she is not attending her lessons.

Example 6.2

> MARIELA
> It was easy for me but I didn't know the meaning of some words and phrases… I'm searching some exercises on the Internet to practice my English.
> (Extract 4, 08/12/15)
>
> I didn't have problems during the class, I used to use second conditional without knowing the grammar, but now it's clearer for me how and when I have to use it. I'm not using what I'm learning outside the classroom because I don't have a lot of people to talk to but I'm doing grammar exercises by myself. (Extract 5, 09/29/15)

As shown in Example 6.2, Mariela first wrote about the difficulties encountered in learning some aspects of the language, followed by statements indicating the type of activity she did or intended to do as part of her independent learning. In the second extract, Mariela addressed the limitation of not having a person to practice her English, a very common condition in the research setting, where English is not spoken beyond the English classroom.

Another example of self-assessment accompanied by strategic actions was found in Adriana's (pseudonym) journal. As it can be seen in Example 6.3, Adriana used her journal writing to recount the language learnt, to asses her own performance, and to elaborate a plan to learn effectively. It is possible to observe Adriana's comments about how difficult a new grammar aspect was and how well she learnt it. It is also possible to identify Adriana's strategic action to solve her learning problem. She goes from describing the language taught by the teacher in the lesson, to assessing her performance. Then, she reports on the type of strategic actions she carried out.

Example 6.3

> ADRIANA
> Today in class the teacher explained non-defining clauses. This grammar wasn't clear for me because. I get confused with the defining clauses. But, then wrote same

> sentences using relative pronouns. I wrote the complement of these sentences… I'm going to search information on the internet about this, and I'm going to practice more by myself because I think that it wasn't enough for me. (Journal entry, 09/03/15)
>
> Today, in the lesson, I learnt about relative pronouns. I consider that this grammar is quite easy for me because I've studied it before. And, then the teacher gave us a worksheet about this grammar, and I realized that I have some doubts, and in the afternoon, I searched in internet for another exercise about it because I think that the worksheet wasn't enough for me. (Journal entry, 10/01/15)

Example 6.4 includes a journal entry written by Roberto (pseudonym), in which he evaluates a grammar focus learnt in class and describes how he managed to organize the new information from his course. The journal entry is interesting as he details the activities he carried out to practice with the grammar introduced and plans on how to use the new grammar. The example also reveals that strategic actions are linked to a motive, which is passing an exam.

Example 6.4

> ROBERTO
> The reported speech is a very extensive grammar focus and a little complicated. In reported speech, to make it easier, I made a chart in my notebook with the tenses and I wrote some examples. I think that is helpful when I need to study. It'll be easier and I'm going to understand in a better way. This grammar will help me to pass the PET exam, but I have to study very hard. Also, I'm going to use this grammar in the real life when I need to tell a message to someone else... (Extract 6, 08/18/15)

The journal entries included in the example illustrates how some participants focused their writing on aspects of the language, mainly grammar. They also show evidence of self-assessment and statements indicating a plan to learn effectively what was taught in the classroom. Yet, this was not true in all of the cases. In most of the journal texts, comments related to learners' self-assessment were not followed by a report on strategic actions planned or carried out.

Perceptions of learning

In addition, description of classroom activity and self-assessment statements usually occurred together with participants' own perceptions of learning. In examples 6.38, Teresa (pseudonym) comments on how valuable are certain activities in helping her to evaluate

weakness and strengths of learning English. Moreover, Teresa engages in reflection in her journal entries.

Example 6.5

TERESA

With this, we had like a review and in my own experience I could analyse how much I have learned about the lessons and if it was necessary to study harder. I like these activities because they help me to evaluate myself and to know which parts of the grammar I have to improve in and study (Extract, 7/14th/15)

Today the teacher gave us our exams, and asked us to check them. I got a good grade; however, I know that I could have done it better. On the other hand, I did not feel so bad because my mistakes were not about grammar. I have to say that the grammar part was really good, but I failed in the reading and writing part. There were little mistakes but with a lot of points, so far that my grade went so down. Even my listening was OK, and that made me feel so proud because the listening part was a big problem for me, and now I can see that I improved it. (Journal entry, 10/16/15)

Despite the lack of strategic actions in the examples presented above, evidence of metacognitive awareness, essential to strategic learning, was found in participants' journals, usually in the form of insights about their own leaning. These were students' comments indicating whether they perceived changes in their learning style of approach. Also, a different pattern observed in participants' journals was classroom activity occurring together with categories such as perceptions of learning, self-assessment, and motives. Although no strategic actions were identified in this patter, reflexive journal writing helped some learners to raise awareness about the language they were expected to learn. For example, in the following journal entry, Cristina (pseudonym) describes her English lesson and identifies useful vocabulary. She also reports on seeking for opportunities to practice new vocabulary.

Example 6.6

CRISTINA

I had some problems to understand like four words but the activity that we did was helpful to understand them, so these days I have been trying to use them in my writing and speaking skills because I think that's an exercise to not to forget the new vocabulary that I have learned. The vocabulary we learned was about the use of a cell phone as calls; but I think the most important in that text was the importance of communication. (Journal entry, 08/13/15)

> On Wednesday, we had a review about what we learnt the day before…which means if the sentence or question is in simple present it has to be changed to simple past and things. We also learnt how to use If/Whether, and that was new for me, I incorporated 'whether' to my new vocabulary list that day. We did a worksheet about the grammar, which wasn't difficult at all. I think I just have to learn how the tenses change to other because I already know the structure of many tenses. We worked in pairs but we read the answers of the worksheet as a group. I didn't have problems with the homework because everything is in my notes so I did it very well, I think. (Journal entry, 08/19/15)

Language and skills

The second most recurrent category found in journal texts was language and skills, which refers to aspects of the language taught and learnt in each session and well as the everything related to the development of language skills. An interesting finding in the analysis of journal texts was that when participants wrote about language and skills in their journal entries, they also wrote about actions that help them to practice the language or improve their level of English. Although this was not true across all cases, examples from a few of the participants are presented here to illustrate how this occurred in participants' journal writing. In Lilia's journal (pseudonym), for instance, several examples of reflection on language learnt and a more active and independent approach to learning were found.

Example 6.7

> LILIA
> After that, the teacher gave us some pieces of paper, and we had to transform direct speech (questions) into reported speech. This made my mind work. I use reported speech when I practice it at home because I have got a book, which contains exercises about stories" (Extract 7, 08/25/15
>
> Today the class was about personal pronouns, object pronouns, possessive adjectives, possessive pronouns, and reflexive pronouns. The most important thing is that I used this outside classroom. I practiced with my friends, and we talked about the new things we have learned, for example, of reflexive pronouns, and I'm glad I continued learning (Journal entry, 09/14/15).

In example 6.34, Lilia writes about language learnt in her English class and, then, moves on reporting how she is motivated and finds opportunities to practice what she has learnt. The three extracts show a repeated pattern in which the learner first revised the content of

the lesson in terms of grammar and vocabulary. This is followed by becoming aware of how she can learn effectively and certain motivation to carry out independent work.

Working with others

The least frequent category in participants' journals was 'working with others'. Rather than being a description of group and/or pair work students got involved as part of the activity in the classroom, this category refers to participants' perceptions on working with one or more classmates and the effects this had on their own learning. In the following example (Example 6.39), Elizabeth (pseudonym) reports on the role played by others in finding and correcting a particular mistake in the use of the language, and Dana (pseudonym) explains how she is helped by her classmate when they are required to work in pairs.

Example 6. 8

> ELIZABETH
> I worked in groups to answer the worksheet, so they help me to realise my mistakes; for example: His boss asked him not to play computer games. But, I usually forget adding "ed" and my group helped me… (Extract 8, 12/18/15).

> DANA
> …If I had a doubt my partner explained me and I could understand better. I think is possible to work in pairs because you can be supported by your partner.
> (Extract 9, 08/18/15)

Portfolio and journals

The least frequent category found in journal texts was portfolio and journal. This category refers to participants comments on their goal-oriented portfolio and meta-reflection on journal writing. The analysis revealed that only 4 participants, out of 18, wrote about their work on their portfolio project or set a new goal in their journal entries. Julie (pseudonym) was one of the four participants who after evaluating her performance in one of the language tests of the course set a language goal for her next portfolio submission. In Example 6.11 she uses the word 'objective', which in her journal often replaced the word 'goal'.

Example 6.11

> JULIE
> The only part that was difficult was the listening. I think my next objective will be study listening but about the exam PET because I have some problems to understand

> what the people say in the conversation or sometimes I get confused the meaning of the words and that confused me. (Journal entry, 08/26/15)

Besides Julie, Dana used the learning journal to write about her goal-setting for the portfolio project. In her journal entry (Example 6. 12), Dana refers to one of the sessions in which participants were asked to submit evidence of their work towards achieving a language goal. As she engages in reflection, it is possible for Danna to connect both her work in the portfolio and her journal writing; this serves Danna for planning on her new language goal. The example next is interesting as it provides with evidence of self-regulation through dialogic journal. However, a similar journal entry was found only in the diaries of four of the participants. This unexpected result will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Example 6.12

> DANA
> Today we gave or evidence of the goal to the teacher. I could reach it and I think I could really improve a little bit my listening skill but I think I need to improve it more. Then I wrote in my new goal to work with the same skill but now I will work with an audio book and activities and to read this new goal. (Journal entry, 08/27/15)

Reflexive writing

As mentioned before, entries were predominantly descriptions of classroom events, but a few participants, as it is the case of Mariela, engaged in more reflexive writing. This can be observed in the following example. In the texts, own perceptions of learning stand as the predominant category. The extracts reveal Mariela's metacognitive awareness, a key component of strategic learning. Constant reflections indicating metacognitive awareness was the most salient characteristic of Mariela's entries; her final reflection was not the exception. As it is shown in Example 6.5, this student reports on a change in how she learns English and how she regulates her own learning.

Example 6.5

> MARIELA
>
> One thing I've discovered about me is that when I pay attention I learn better, and with that I can be more participative. I like to know about things, which I can use during a conversation because my best friend and me text in English and I think is a good way for keeping practicing outside the classroom. (Extract, 09/10/15).
>
> Something I've discovered about my learning is that I'm better when I'm practicing constantly, and it's better when the process is fast (Extract 7, 10/15/15).

> I've noticed that with the pass of this term I think I have been better with the things I do at class. Sometimes I get distracted but I know how to fix it, I have discovered too, that when I listen what Miss is explaining everything seems easier for me. I like how classes are. I really enjoy them and the best is that I continue learning. I have noticed some changes on my learning and me. Now I know that you can learn easily. (Final Entry, 11/05/15)

To summarize, the predominant category in all participants' journals was classroom activity. That is, descriptions of classroom events, including language tasks, group and pair activities, teachers' instruction, and participants' perceptions of what happened in the classroom. Even though all participants were committed to their journal writing, an innovative activity for them, not all of them provided with fewer details on classroom events and engaged in a more dialogic writing. An interesting finding was the fact that self-assessment, one of the categories identified, usually involved two subcategories, namely strategic actions and motives. That is, some learners first wrote about difficulties they had regarding a particular aspect of the language or about the complexity of grammar or vocabulary. Then, they moved onto planning or describing actions to learn the language effectively. These actions were often linked to a motive as well. The examples above illustrate how some of the participants reported on their efforts to learn the language besides the instruction they received, and suggests that through journal writing learners were able to plan a certain learning activity before carrying it out.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, the procedures for the data analysis has been described. Data gathered from students' reflections in their portfolio project submissions and from students' journal entries were first transcribed and then analysed using qualitative techniques. With regard to participant's goa-oriented portfolio project, the texts produced by participants were coded and themes were identified in participants' written reflections, including: self- assessment, goal setting, strategic actions, reference to evidence, challenges of the task, and new goal setting. While the identification of themes was the main objective of the analysis, these results became more significant as themes were used to illustrate the most salient cases in this group of participants. Regarding data gathered from participants' journal writing, the qualitative analysis yield a set of categories and the results indicated that students engaged

in less reflexive thinking and the recount of their experiences in the classroom revealed that unless the role played by the teacher and by their peers in the class were significant to their learning. The descriptive interpretation provided by the researcher in this chapter aimed at showing the results of the study and help the reader track development in strategic learning displayed by most of the participants in this study.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

The focus of this study is the development of strategic learning without direct instruction or training, but by means of mediation from learners' goals and classroom activity. It sets out to investigate how the implementation of mediation tools in the classroom can help learners develop and strategic approach to language learning. The study was guided by the following main research questions and sub-questions:

Main Research Question: To what extent, and in what ways do students' strategic learning develop in classroom mediated *activity*?

Sub-question 1: How is learners' strategic learning developed by the mediation of their particular goals?

Sub-question 2: How is learners' strategic learning developed by the mediation of reflective journal writing?

Sub-question 3: What other aspects of the language classroom influence on students' strategic orientation towards their learning?

In the previous chapter, the analysis and results of participants' portfolios and learning journals were presented. The present chapter focus on the discussion of the major finding. It has been divided into three main sections. Section one presents students' strategic learning and the mediation of goal directed tasks. Section two critically discusses students' strategic learning and the mediation of learning journals. Section three emphasises students' perceptions about the role of classroom activity and their strategic orientation.

6.2 Mediation and strategic learning

As discussed in Chapter 3, mediation is the principle that unities all varieties of sociocultural theory. The notion of mediation is rooted in the observation that humans do not act directly on the world, rather their cognitive and material activities are mediated by symbolic artifacts, such as language and material artifacts, namely tools (Lantolf, 2001; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Lantolf, Poehner & Thorne, 2015). The idea that human mind is mediated implies that it is a functional system in which the properties of the natural, or biologically specified brain, are organized into a higher, or culturally shaped, mind through

the integration of symbolic artifacts into thinking. In turn, mental capacitates include voluntary attention, intentional memory, planning, logical thought, problem solving, learning and evaluation of the effectiveness of these processes. These theoretical considerations, if applied to the field of language learner strategies in EFL/ESL learning, suggest that language learner strategies are a wider spectrum than a special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, retain new information, or use the language. Thus, in the present study, the term strategic learning has been proposed to conceptualize processes and actions carried out by learners in tool-mediated and goal-oriented activity. That is, the actions motivated by specific objectives, under specific learning conditions, to fulfil specific goals (Donato, 2000; Donato & McCormick, 1994).

As for the term 'development' in the above research question, it means how learners gain control over their own mental activity by means of mediation; it describes a process by which higher forms of thinking evolve, rather than an attribute of the learner (Lantolf, 2000; Zuengler & Miller, 2006). That is, how learners gain control over their own learning, or self-regulate, helped by learning tasks, activities, dialoguing with one self, as in reflexive dialog. Since both the concept of mediation and activity theory inform this study, strategic learning was analysed at the level of actions carried out by learners in tool-mediated and goal-directed activity (Donato, 2000). In general, evidence of how this occur was found in both portfolio project and the journal writing, as it will be discussed in the following sections.

6.3 The mediating function of learners' goals

The relevance of learners' goals in learning English strategically was evident in this study. Participants were part of the activity of learning English as a foreign language, and they had a strong motive for this, which was becoming English language teachers. Besides their motive, the participants of this study had the particular language goal of achieving a B2 English level from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Learning (CEFR; COE, 2001) as well as passing an institutional exam. Unlike previous English III courses at Universidad de Chiapas, in this course a goal-oriented portfolio project was introduced as a regular learning activity. The actual implementation of the portfolio required participants write an entry and a submission reflection. In the entry reflection, participants were given a prompt and expected to write about a language goal they set for themselves and about how they would work towards achieving their goal (see Section 4.5.3). These language students did not receive any special training on strategies or

any other type of instruction aimed at modelling their portfolio work. The participant teacher limited herself to follow the guidelines provided by the researcher for the portfolio project.

Closely related to the concept of mediation, sociocultural theory proposes the theoretical framework of human activity (see Section (3.5). In activity theoretical terms, it is fruitful to move from the analysis of individual actions, such as language learning strategies, to the analysis of their broader activity context and back again. In this way, activity theory provides both theoretical concepts to understand human development as mediated activity, but also a tool to uncover and organize an analysis of interactions among different elements of the subject's activity system. Under this scheme, activity, such as language learning, is not merely doing something, it is doing something that is motivated by a culturally constructed need (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Motives, in turn, are only realized in specific actions that a goal oriented, both intentional and meaningful and carried out under particular conditions, or operations, and through appropriate mediational means. Consistent, with this view, goal-directed actions in the present study were identified as participants' efforts to pass an important examination. Operations referred to what students reported, in terms of strategic actions, in their portfolios. And the mediational means was the portfolio itself. That is, the three levels of activity theory scheme, namely the level of motivation, the level of action, and the level of conditions were observed in at least l1 of the participants' portfolios.

According to activity theory, learners' actions have meaning because they are linked to the activity's motive and its immediate goal. In this respect, it was found that participants who actually wrote about having the motive of passing the institutional exam, either in the entry or in the submission form, were more focused and provided with more details about the type of actions they carried out to achieve a particular language goal (see Section 5.2.3). In contrast, participants whose portfolios texts did not contain a reference to a motive, were less focused at the time of narrowing their goals. In terms of the type of evidence submitted, a similar pattern was observed. When motives were explicitly written in entry forms or included in the submission forms, the type of strategic actions reported by participants were significantly more coherent and achievable, and so it was the evidence of their work. The results were similar to previous research. For example, in his study of changes in strategy use among Chinese undergraduate and postgraduate students as they moved from a university in located in China to a university in the United Kingdom, Gao (2006) found that participants were influenced by a strong orientation towards the goal of

passing English examinations when using strategies. Similarly, Gillette (1994) concluded that effective language learners use positive learning strategies, which are goal-driven, systematic, and intuitively obvious, but apparently, learner's initial motive determines the quality of language study overall and influences the effectiveness of specific strategies.

6.4 The development of strategic learning

Sociocultural perspectives consider that development is a necessary condition of every individual. While some innate capacities serve individuals for essential human activity, higher order capacities, or skills, are developed over time and with the help of external means. The notion of development in the present study has been used to explain learners' differences in how they approach learning a foreign language. Whereas mainstream language learning strategy research has considered individual traits, such as strategies, aptitude, and motivation as determinant in language learning; SCT informed research has place emphasis on how external mediation agents can play a significant role in changing learners' learning capacity. Transforming innate traits and tracking the changes in how learners approach learning is what this study concerned about.

The findings of this study revealed that strategic language learning emerged and developed in most cases. The majority of students managed to develop a plan to achieve their goal, and this plan was made of, not one, but different strategic actions (see Section 5.3.3). The results indicated that students were able to organize their strategic actions following a sequence of steps to be followed. Nonetheless, as it was expected considering the postulations of sociocultural theory, different patterns were observed among participants in their work towards achieving language goals. The majority of the students self-assessed their ability in a given skill or particular aspect of the language before setting a goal in the entry form. This pattern was found in the texts of 11 participants. The remaining seven participants only listed the activities planned to accomplish their goals, which rather general. Only six participants evaluated their work in each of the submissions, followed by the setting of new goal.

Grouping students into three different groups based on the evidence submitted could suggest that 'good language learners' and 'less effective language learners' were identified as in strategy mainstream research underpinned within the cognitive approach; however, using sociocultural framework as an interpretative framework, the distinction among these three group of students can be explained in terms of cognitive development. Sociocultural

perspectives suggest that learners are individuals whose cognitive growth depend on external mediation. It is external mediation which help, learners in this case, to transform their thinking. How this process occurs may be different for each individual since higher-order functions are only developed based on the type and amount of mediation. Therefore, it could be argued that some students need more explicit mediation than others do. This can lead to further debate regarding strategy instruction as a form of mediation. The individualistic view implicit in strategy training; however, suggests that strategies are directly taught to students, who learned them and transfer them to other language tasks. In contrast, sociocultural perspectives applied to strategy research suggest that strategic actions appear as students find a motive for language learning, as it was showed in the evidence from students' goal-oriented portfolios.

Another possible explanation for participants' differences is what has been theorized as the unstable nature of activities (Donato, 2000; Lantolf, 2000). According to sociocultural perspectives, activities in a particular setting, such as the classroom, do not always unfold smoothly. Therefore, what begins as one activity can reshape itself into another activity in the course of its unfolding. This was particular evident in the second group identified, in which participants' first and second portfolio submission might have been linked to a different motive from that of passing an institutional exam, but to the sole aim of complying with a course requirement. Nonetheless, evidence of a more responsible and independent approach to learning was found in their third, and even until their final portfolio submission, which suggests a shift in their motives and, in turn, in their strategic learning.

From this is could be suggested that sociocultural theory is a robust framework for investigating and explaining the development and use of strategic learning. Implications deriving from this theory include a reappraisal of what is meant by "strategy training," the importance of the inclusion of mediation as a critical variable in the development of strategic learning, as other researchers have indicated (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Gillette, 1994; Gao, 2010). These results are consistent with those in Donato and McCormick (1994) study which showed that the students develop their strategies from the mediation of a learning portfolios.

6.5 Journal writing and its mediating function

Learning journals have been used widely by teachers as a way for learners to keep track of their work and achievements. In this study, the journal writing is defined as a mediated learning activity purposefully introduced into classroom activity to engage students in reflection and self-regulation process. Based on the premise that "human speech has a dual mediational, macro functions, a primary function, to mediate our social activity, and a secondary function, to mediate our mental activity (Appel &Lantolf, 1994), it is thought that journals offer learners the opportunity to reflect on their personal growth and development (Mahn, 2008). Nevertheless, it was found that the content of journals were mainly descriptions of what occurred in each of the lesson, and no evidence of a dialogic process was found in all of the participants' journal texts. For instance, Maria seemed not to have engaged herself in a more dialogic approach to journal writing. She merely described every single moment of each lesson. The only statement in which she was more reflective about her learning was, "In the past, I saw this grammar but only with food. I used to think It was easy, but now I don't think so. It's a little complicated because some things are countable or uncountable. I have to practice it to have better results" (09/22/15). It seems that the only motive she had in learning activity was obtaining satisfactory results in her exams. The same seems to have occurred with Alicia since the only statement referring to her learning was, "I think this is difficult grammar because you have to remember, all changes that you have to do with the sentences...But if I practice I will understand it better and will be easier for me. I hope to get good learning" (09/20/15). She also wrote, "Also, we worked in the book; we did some exercises, (the grammar is a little confusing for me but if I practice it will be easy, so I have to do more exercises about it and also check again the rules and when I will use it." (09/08/15). This might be an indicator of either no commitment to journal writing or to a different pace in the development of a strategic approach to language learning.

Another student, Dana, referred to classroom activity as the vehicle for better understanding; nevertheless, the only evidence of how classroom activity resulted in strategic learning was found in the following lines, which include a self-assessment statement, a motive statement, and a specific strategic actions this student carried out. "At the beginning of the class it was a little hard to understand and memorize all those things, but after all the activities we did it was clear for me, but I think I need to do more exercise about this topic. I can practice with my classmates and it's something we do." (08/14/15). In another entry, Dana wrote, "Today we saw a new grammar called "Defined Clauses"

and it is an easy grammar, but I get confused sometimes. I knew this grammar, but I didn't know the different between 'who' and 'whose', but now the teacher explained…I liked the class. I just felt a little stress to understand the topic, but I just need to practice and do more exercises about it" (09/02/15). This suggests that rather than being strategic this student believed that classroom activity was enough to learn effectively.

One last type of journal entry was distinguished in some students' entries. When students' self-assessment indicated, they had no difficulties in their learning, a rather passive approach to learning could be distinguished. For instance, Tina wrote, "I think I learned new and better things about this grammar, and I learned enough to use it outside the classroom in my daily life" (08/17/15). She also wrote, "I think I use this grammar in my daily life because I did it in this report" (08/18/15). When this type of statements appeared in learner's journal, no evidence of strategic actions could be identified. Even when she reported active participation in classroom activity, she felt there was no need for extra work and practice.

In general, the analysis of student's journal revealed that although participants' strategic actions are presented in isolation in LLS taxonomies, they do not appear disconnected from self-assessment or perceptions about learning in discourse. Self-assessment codes were linked to strategic action codes. It was also found that in students' entries reference to strategic actions usually appeared closed to statements in which it was expressed how they perceived their own learning, as in the case of Mariela, who wrote "I didn't have problem with the activities. I'm trying to speak more outside the classroom. I'm starting to feel comfortable with my English level." Here, Mariela first self-assessed her performance in classroom activities and, then, wrote about a strategic action she is carrying out, followed by a statement on how she feels about her competence in the language. This patter was found, consistently, in half of the class journals. It has to be mentioned that when analysing students' entries sometimes categories overlapped. That is, there were a few students who wrote about their opinion of a specific material used by the teacher in class, and, at the same time, they reported about their learning, "With a presentation, which is a good material; I think I could learn better with that tool, and I like that the teacher takes a good time for letting us to take notes and to think more about it" (Elsa, 08/18/15).

The findings suggest that in fact, speakers of English rely on dialogue with the self in order to accomplish the task mentioned above. The way in which the journal engaged in the dialogue with the self, according to the findings in this study, was through talking first person. This finding once more demonstrates that speech plays a crucial role not only in

accompanying the performance of a task, but in understanding it and achieving its goals. Based on the findings, it can be interpreted that dialogic journals mainly contributed to the development of student's self-regulation in some of the cases. Participants' journal writing activated self-regulating functions in at least 8 students. Although some students reported less use of strategic actions than others, one journal entry could reveal a lot about the processes involved in being strategic.

This finding also support the connection established between language goal tasks and reflective dialogic journal writing. Participants in this study who delivered evidence on their language goal tasks and this were justified in students' texts written before and after goal setting, were also those students who showed more self-regulation processes in their journal entries. From this perspective, learners of English participate in particular, local contexts in which specific practices create possibilities for them to learn English. In this study, the analysis of learning journal entries served for the purpose of understanding students' participation in classroom activities and deciphering how this influence on strategic development.

In a few learning journals it was revealed that the mediation of strategic activity and mediation tools were explicitly described as well as the kind of strategic actions that resulted from learner's participation in this activity. This only confirmed that a dialogic approach promotes reflection about own learning and that motives, such as the desire to know more about specific language forms can lead to strategic actions. For example, Adriana set herself a goal in their journal writing, and this was not part of the portfolio project. "I have a goal during this week; it is to practice this grammar with my friends until we master it because I'm going to have exam and I want to have a good score." (10/13/15).

A different type of texts was found in the analysis of learners' journals. Some students, for instance, wrote self-assessment statements, but these were not accompanied by strategic actions In the analysis of journals, when statements related to strategic actions were not found, but self-assessment statements were part of students' writing, students indicated they had adopted an active approach to learning. This kind of text, in which students identified some problems with the language they were studying at the time, but managed to participate actively in classroom activity were frequently found in students' entries. It seems that the dialogic process of writing about their lessons and learning in their journals mediated students general approach to learning although this mediation did not necessarily result in specific strategic actions

However, it seems that the continuous dialogic exercise, in which the student writes to herself what she learnt, or tried to learnt in lesson, as well as the constant self-evaluation, at some point can produce changes in the way students perceive learning. And, at some point, these changes mean the incorporations of strategic actions. Evidence of strategic actions and self-regulation processes, also referred to as high-order functions, were also found in Julie's journal entries. Julie wrote, "Today in the afternoon I will practice at home with the things or with my family or maybe I will practice with other books. I don't know how I can difference between all the possessives but I have to read and practice every day" (08/14/15). In these lines, the emphasis is on how committed this learner is with spending extra time practicing and reviewing what she has learned in class. In another entry she wrote, "I learnt a new word "Deceived". Then the miss did a game that if someone lose that person had to answer a question about the report speech. Then we had a review about all that we saw in the unit 21 & 22. The teacher gave us some questions in order not to forget it. When I arrived home, I read again the report speech and I did some activities" (08/25/15). The verbs used in past tense indicate that she actually carried out these activities and took responsibility over her learning. As in other journals, it was found that Julie referred to her language goals in her journal writing. This can be observed in the following entries:

The fact that their work on language goals involved in the portfolio project were mentioned by this student in her journal have several implications. Firstly, as it can be observed in the first extract, she first reported a difficulty she had with listening skill; then, based on this, she thought about the next language goal task as a good strategy to improve in this skill; she also justifies her need to devote more time to improve her listening skills and to do it systematically, as in the form of the goal-oriented activities implemented in the classroom. Second, she refers to her language goals, to specific strategic actions she had carried out, and, in general, to different elements of classroom activity as something positive that has helped her to understand better the language learnt in class. This suggests that there is connection between the mediation function of keeping a journal writing and a strategic approach to language learning.

A different type of journal entries was identified in some students from this group. For example, Dona only wrote descriptions of classroom events. The dialogic process was not evident in her writing excerpt for the following line, "Today I learned some new words. It was easy because those words are in the students' book…I think It was easy to learn them because I read the definition of the word, but before I've already read the word in a

sentence so that helped me to understand better the definition (08/11/15). In general, her reflections showed very little on self-assessment and perceptions about her learning and no strategic actions were mentioned.

However, not all of the students wrote this type of texts on their journals. Although all of the students receive the same type of instructions and participated of classroom activity, some journal entries were more descriptive that dialogic. Students who include accurate descriptions of every single task and language form studied in the lessons, seemed not to have been engaged in a dialogic conversation with themselves. For instance, in Amelia's journal entries, no evidence of strategic actions was discovered. no entries referring to assessment, active participation, social interaction or perceptions of her learning were written in her journal. Another interesting finding was that some students described the instructions they receive from their teacher, but others linked their learning in a certain lesson with their language goals. In sum, strategic actions, were found alongside other categories which suggest that how learners self-assess their learning or performance in the classroom and how they think they can take a more strategic approach to their learning.

6.6 Classroom activity and strategic learning

In this study, we have also reconceptualised the classroom as an emerging and dynamic culture. As in any cultural group, the culture of the classroom plays an important role in fostering strategic learning. According to the sociocultural theory of education, learning is social, that is, we learn through interacting with others, through a meaningful exchange of ideas, concepts, and actions. This premise has been applied to the field of SLA and has challenged the behaviourist approach that claimed that learning was a passive and individual activity (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). This understanding of learning as social, has given SLA teachers new elements to explore their practice and profit from the natural relationship teacher-students and student-student. The original idea of Vygotsky in relation to human mediation stated that the child should be assisted by an adult in achieving a task he/she could not do alone. Researches have explored both approaches, that is, adult guidance and peer collaboration, for this reason, I have subdivided the information obtained from student's perceptions about classroom activity in two groups, teacher as a mediator, and peers as mediators.

With regard to the role of the teacher as a mediator, it could be said that the role of the teacher was emphasised, in what is now known as “traditional classrooms” the pattern of interaction between teachers and students was the following: the teacher asks a question, the student answers, and the teacher gives feedback. This is the end of the interaction. In this model, the questions asked by the teacher are, in many occasions, display questions, which presuppose a determined answer from the student. In this structure, the student never gets the opportunity to ask the question or to give a creative answer. But this pattern is changing due to new understandings about the relationship between teachers and learners. In this study, the findings revealed that teacher played a key role in both classroom activity and how students participated in it. Although it could be assumed that she was only doing her job as a teacher, the evidence suggests that she mediated students’ learning in different ways. In addition, peer feedback can be justified and supported by process writing theory and sociocultural theory. As far as process writing theory is concerned, it provides opportunities for learners to discover negotiate meaning and practise a wide range of language and writing skills. Teacher’s response not only helps learners to revise their exercises in class, but also gives them a sense of audience and writing become a more purposeful communicative act.

From a sociocultural theory standpoint, peer response is derived from principles which relate social interaction and mediation to individual development. The mediation happens through various forms of scaffolding that is supported by more expert peers or peers with similar level of achievements through interaction. Hence, through collaboration, students engaged in language-mediated cognitive activities that facilitated learning. Furthermore, learners working in pairs to complete grammar exercise, as they did so, served to engaged them in language-mediated cognitive activities which facilitated the co-construction of language knowledge and helped them attain a higher level of performance. The fidings of the study supports the idea that where there is mutual engagement, shared responsibility, variety of roles and symmetrical distributions of talk amongst students in groups, students may easily find a chance to learn. Good examples of supportive frameworks can be found in students’ journal entries.

These types of studies lead to the conclusion that the interaction between the teacher and the student is crucial in student’s cognitive development and that when the content is meaningful and situated, learning and development to happen. In addition, as Vygotsky (1997) emphasized many times, the best, or the only possible, role that the teacher can play in the dynamic process of teaching and learning is that of the “director of the social

environment" (p. 339)., While it has been argued that teachers should not attempt directly to influence the educational process by transmitting knowledge to their students. Just as a gardener would rather direct efforts at changing the conditions of plant growth by increasing the temperature, regulating the moisture, and choosing the right type of fertilizer, the teacher should focus on changing the social environment of the classroom by introducing appropriate activities and creating challenging problem-solving situations. In the same way, students' reports that the teacher cared about the class and tried to enrich the class with different teaching materials. It was also teacher's responses to students' journal entries what might have caused students' engagement in this activity.

6.7 Conclusion of the findings

Data from the study can be interpreted in different ways. It would be possible, for example, to compare the list of emergent strategies in this study with other strategy taxonomies. However, this study did not set out to reiterate what is already well- documented in terms of strategy types, and its purpose was, rather, to explore the nature of learner strategies evolving from students' participation in classroom activity and the use of mediation tools in the classroom. A sociocultural perspective highlights the critical role of mediation in cognitive and social development. It is proposed that learners' actions to facilitate or, sometimes, constrain their language learning cannot be fully understood without considering learners' motives and goals from which strategies emerge and develop. The findings discussed in this chapter were consistent with the theoretical postulations guiding this inquiry since students reported on strategic actions to learn English as they engaged in a goal-oriented task. Therefore, questioning whether individual variability in L2 achievement can be entirely accounted for by personality factors such as extroversion, or language aptitude, we suggest that the role of learners' goal and mediations tools should be placed first.

Several important conclusions can be drawn from the present study. First, tasks in a language classroom cannot be generalizable because activities vary according to participants and circumstances. Second, tasks do not manipulate learners to act in certain ways because learners invest the own goals, strategic actions, and more importantly, motives into tasks (Coughlan & Duff, 1994). Donato, 2001). Therefore, standard theories of development, which Donato (2002) have described as featuring the individual as a generic and autonomous knower using individualistic and inaccessible cognitive processes, need to be supplemented by interpretative tools of sociocultural theory. In addition, it

seems that the systematic act of documenting and thinking about performance is the catalyst and mediator for developing and sharpening one's strategies. By focusing more specifically on how the interpretive framework provided by activity theory may account for the participants' differential investment in their language goals. As predicated by activity theory, the motives that underlie why individuals engage in activities influence how goals are subsequently formulated; a given goal can be operationalized by a variety of actions (i.e., the specific mediational means or strategies selected to carry it out). Finally, the findings suggest that the debate on whether strategies should be explained either from a behaviouristic perspective of from a cognitive perspective can be resolved thy thinking of strategic learning as involving both behaviour and consciousness arising in tool- mediated activity. A simple portfolio project or a learning journal can serve for the purpose of mediating learners' minds.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents a summary of the thesis. The first section addresses a restatement of the rationale for this research. This section also includes an outline of the literature review, which led to the adoption of a different theoretical perspective for the study of strategic learning and to the selection of methodology approach. Following the formulation of the research questions and the findings of the study, the limitations of this research will be discussed together with areas for further research. Finally, the implications and contributions of this thesis will be considered.

7.2 Research rationale

This thesis had the aim of exploring the how EFL students' strategic learning could be developed without direct instruction or training, but from learners' participation in classroom activity, which mediated their learning. In particular, the focus of the study was to investigate the role of learners' goals and goal-directed tasks as mediation means in the development of students' strategic learning. To conduct this research, I was inspired by Donato and McCormick's (1994) seminal work on strategies investigated under the sociocultural paradigm as well as for from a comprehensive review of LLS and SI literature. However, the primarily reason for undertaken research in strategic learning, as explained in Chapter one, was the predominant cognitivist approach in mainstream LLS and SBI research and the need for a more holistic perspective that considers the role played sociocultural aspects of learning in students' strategic orientation. A comprehensive literature review presented in Chapter two suggest that strategies are essential to language learning. In turn, it has been assumed that language learning strategies are teachable and learnable. Nevertheless, findings have partially proved that direct strategy instruction ends in more effective learning.

In the review of strategy instruction presented, shortcomings in LLS and SI studies were discussed. The discussion lead the reader to the need for a different approach to the study of strategic learning, which could reveal more about how learners can take a more strategic approach to learning. The arguments in favour of a more holistic approach to the study of strategies were also brought to the discussion by citing strategy experts' views about forty years of research and by reviewing empirical research concerning strategic learning and

sociocultural theoretical perspectives. Since the review of literature suggested that there appeared to be a small number of strategy studies framed within sociocultural theory and that knowledge on strategic learning needed to be furthered explored, the current study was informed by sociocultural theoretical perspective. Activity theory and the notion of mediation are at the core of the theoretical framework in this study.

The methodology adopted for this study did not conform to well-established research design; nor did it follow models from previous strategy instruction empirical works. Instead, a methodological responsiveness criterion was adopted. The implementation of new mediation tools into the classroom, resembled an intervention component. However, qualitative strategies were followed for data gathering and analysis. A portfolio project and a learning journal served two-fold purpose; they were mediation tools and data collection methods in this study. Qualitative techniques were used to analyse data about learners' strategic actions and participation of classroom activity. The study involved students who want to pursuit a career in language teaching at a Mexican public university, located in the south of Mexico. It involved eighteen students enrolled in a compulsory English course of the TEFL program at University of Southern Mexico. As a part of their classroom activity, these students were asked to periodically set their own language goals and submit evidence on how they tried to achieve their goal. These activities were accompanied by written reflections on their portfolio work. Another mediation tool introduced in the classroom was a learning journal. Students were asked to write at least three entries a week, for a period of fifteen weeks. Focus-group interviews were also used to gather data on students' perceptions of the classroom activity and their own learning. Data collected was analysed using content analysis. Themes and categories were identified and utilized to report the findings.

Overall the aim of the study was to investigate the extent to which strategic learning is mediated by learners' goals and mediation tools. The main objective was to illustrate how a goal oriented portfolio and a learning journal implemented in the classrooms can mediate EFL learners' strategic orientation by means of reflective learning and goal-directed activity.

7.3 Research questions and findings

The study was guided by the following a main research questions and sub-questions.

Main Research Question: To what extent, and in what ways do students' strategic learning develop in classroom mediated *activity*?

Sub-question 1: How is learners' strategic learning developed by the mediation of their particular goals?

Sub-question 2: How is learners' strategic learning developed by the mediation of journal writing?

Sub-question 3: What other aspects of the language classroom influence on students' strategic orientation towards their learning?

Regarding research question one about how learners' strategic learning was developed by the mediation of their particular goals. The findings indicated that the use of goal oriented tasks, such a portfolio project, can help learners in develop a more strategic approach to language learning although 'development', as suggested by Activity theory, appears at a different moment in individuals. That is, for learners to use strategies it matters their motive and the intentionality of mediation tools. It should also be noted that strategic actions do not occur in isolation, but they are accompanied of learners' self-assessment of their language knowledge and skills. Self- regulatory process appeared to be closely linked to learners' strategies. These results are consistent with previous studies (e.g. Donato & McCormick, 1994; Gillette, 1994; Parks, 2000) which showed that strategies are the result of not only cognitive process but also of mediation in social activity.

In answering research question two, the analysis of students' learning journals has shown, to some extent, that when students have a dialogic process and reflection is involved, learning can be mediated, and in some cases this can result in a more strategic approach to language learning. In students' journal writing it was found that they wrote a description of classroom activity in all of their entries as well as opinions of the different language tasks, classroom activities, and social interaction they had in their lessons. Most of the students also included a description of the kind of linguistic knowledge they had been taught or they had learned in their lessons. However, when these descriptions were accompanied with self-assessment and motives to language learning, strategic actions were mentioned in students' entries. Another interesting finding is that while half of students reported that

keeping a learning journal along the term was a good opportunity to develop writing skill, the other half of participants reported that journal writing had helped them to think about their own role as language learners, the degree of participation they had in classroom activity, the weaknesses and strengthens they had in English, and the changes in the ways they learn experienced during the course. In addition, the information provided by participants in the learning journals was found to be consistent with their language goals submissions and reflections. In contrast, to previous learning experiences, as reported by students in their journals teachers' responses to journal writing were positive to students as they felt their language needs and constraints were important for their teacher. Thus, the use of dialogic journals to mediate students' learning provide opportunities for students to develop metacognitive awareness and, in some cases, to develop strategic learning. Similar outcomes have been found in strategy research framed within sociocultural perspectives (Gillette, 1994).

With regard to research question three, the findings from the learning journals showed that students tend to be more aware of the kind of actions they have to deploy in order to learn English effectively when they actively participate in classroom activity. Classroom activity that positively influence student' learning, according to students report, included the use of worksheets in the classroom; the wide range of tasks and activities they had to carry out in each lesson; pair and group work, and teacher's attitude and support. In answering this research question, the mediation from the teacher, as reported by students, seem to be of relevance in students' becoming more responsible of their own learning.

The main question guiding the present study was answered after analysing the information gathered from students' goal oriented portfolios and learning journals. According to the findings, students can develop a strategic approach to learning as a result of mediated classroom activity. In this thesis, activity, was is used to describe aspects of social practice that are believed to provide conditions for psychological development (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Purposeful mediation introduced to the classroom and the mediation of learners' goals appear to contribute to learners' development of higher forms of thinking, such as strategic learning. However, development occurs different in each student, with some appearing to need more direct forms of mediation.

7.4 Limitations and further research

Certain limitations of the study must be addressed in this final chapter. An important limitation is that sociocultural theory informing this study sees the individual as socially bounded. Although this view has been adopted in this inquiry, neither the function of language as mediation symbolic tools, not the social aspects of learning in strict sense have been considered. Besides, the concept of mediation has been paired to that of agency. The present study, however, did not attempted to find explanations to strategic learning by investigating the role played by agency. Yet, according to sociocultural researchers learning can be explained in terms of students' agency and mediation.

In terms of methodology, a limitation of the study is its research approach itself. The fact that it has not been aligned to either a quantitative or a qualitative research paradigm, nor has it privileged any of the research designs found in specialized literature, can pose several questions with regard to its validity. However, Donato (2000) remarks that regarding empirical works grounded on SCT, a characteristic of these studies is that they are constructed within their own theoretical and philosophical frameworks and subject to their own standards of quality and verification (p. 29). All in all, the present study has followed a more holistic approach to research, without ignoring the ethics and principles of research rigour in empirical works. In this study, I analysed how mediation in the form of organized learning activity play a key role in developing students' strategic learning based on students' written reflections collected from their work in goal-oriented portfolios and learning journals. In further research, these methods could be supported with observational methods that could illustrate how language and classrooms interactions contribute to students' strategic language development. In addition, the use of teacher's journal could be a valuable source of data as it can provide with deeper insights into the effect of mediation of classroom activity.

As the researcher went into this study, she approached the belief that what was important was exploring L2 strategic learning as it evolved from the use of mediated learning activities in the language classroom. This researcher's focus blocked out a number of other possible research venues. One concern of the TEFL program selected to carry out this research project is that students' reach a B1 level on English in the Common European Framework of Reference, after completing their third term of studies. While in the past, it was reported that most of the students failed the institutional test used to measure students' proficiency (Escobar, 2012), the Coordinator of the program reported to the researcher that

all of the participants of the study approved this test. Two pieces of research my come out of this. First, an in-depth exploration on how specific mediation tools introduced into classroom activity affect L2 students' English proficiency, and second an investigation on what other forms of mediation (e.g., mediation by others), or contextual factors, contribute to L2 learners' language improvement can be conducted. Therefore, although the purpose this study was not to test the effectiveness of the alternative approach to develop students' strategic learning proposed here, it seemed to have positively affected not only students' learning but also their language proficiency.

Furthermore, the results of this study are bounded by the contexts in which it was conducted. As such, transferability of finding is limited to students, schools, and settings that may be similar to the contexts of this study. First, this study was conducted at a state in a peripheral area of Mexico. Second much of the data generated in this study relied on participants' texts from classroom activities, which may be selective. Second, as this research project was carried out at the university where the researcher has taught for fifteen years as a language teacher, her feelings, motives, and experiences might influence on her interpretation of the data; they were explained in a reflective and reflexive manner to enhance trustworthiness. Moreover, participants may have provided with information they thought their teacher and the researcher wanted to obtain and; however, the use of learning journals helped the researcher to understand students' thinking and motives towards language learning during the study. Finally, the study is bounded by time and space, to the extent that the practices described here in were implemented over a term in one specific language classroom from a state university. As this study explored the development of strategic learning from mediated classroom activity, when applying the findings of this study to other language classrooms, limitations of the study must be carefully considered.

It is because the limitations of this study that further research is needed. Through this study, I have tried to understand how learners' goals and classroom activity can mediate learner's strategic English language learning. This study explored the use of mediational tools in the language classroom setting, such as the goal oriented portfolio and learning journal. The results of the study are limited to the events that were available for documentation in this specific classroom within the Mexican context. It would be useful to explore how mediation tools are used by teacher and learned in different instructional contexts such as different levels and schools for better understanding of the role mediation and classroom activity play in students' development of strategic learning.

7.5 Implications and contributions

This study has demonstrated the ongoing relevance of language learning strategy research from a sociocultural perspective. It has strengthened the view that integration of cognitive and sociocultural theories is possible and desirable in educational practices and research in order that students have appropriate learning opportunities. Moreover, the study has contributed to advance an understanding of how learners, teachers and researchers can come to learn more about strategies through relevant classroom practices. Besides, based on the findings in the present study, three key implications can be drawn. The first implication is for research in strategic learning. The second one is for EFL classrooms and English instruction. The third one is for English language teachers at university level in Mexican contexts.

7.5.1 Implications for research on language learning strategies

This section addresses the implications and applications for research in the field of language learning strategies. On the macro level, the current study suggests theoretically interesting findings which can be used as a basis for studying learners' strategic approach from a more holistic perspective than that offered by cognitivist researchers. From sociocultural perspectives, for learners to develop high-order functions, or strategic learning, it matters the learner, the social-context and the social activity in which they participate. The application of the concept of mediation to language learning, more specifically, to the development of strategic learning, can reconcile the dichotomy of the behavioural and cognitive aspect of strategies, as it involves both: thinking and doing. Furthermore, activity theory, as theoretical framework provided with explanatory potential to decipher why and how learners use strategies. This was revealed in students goal oriented portfolios, in which they had a motive to work towards a specific language goal.

At the micro level, the mediation tools used in this research bring new knowledge to different areas of research. First, the concept of mediation, has not been fully explored in applied linguistics research; however, the findings in this study suggest that different forms of mediation can bring positive effects to students' learning, if applied thoughtful to language teaching and learning. It is through mediation tools that students' can regulate their own learning process, reflect on them, and eventually adopt a more strategic approach to it. Goal oriented tasks and learning journals served for this purpose in this study. With these reasons, these tools, or other similar tools are valuable in conducting research framed within sociocultural theoretical perspectives.

7.5.2 Implications for EFL classroom and English instruction

The implications of strategic development through mediation mentioned in this study provide some guidelines and directions for English language teachers. In contrast to strategy training, in which explicit demonstration of the use of strategies and students' strategic awareness are promoted, a sociocultural perspective on language teaching and learning regards strategies are related to both individual cognitive processes and the mediation of the social context in which learning takes place; consequently, cultural institutions (e.g. language classroom) and the social activity (e.g. learning a foreign or second language) can impact in a significant manner in strategy development.

This study enhances the role of the language classroom as a socio-cultural arena; it is in the language classroom and through classroom activity that learners can both learn the language and develop their own strategies for effective learning. Therefore, it is essential to find tools that can mediate students' learning, but most important, to transform the learning activity itself by implementing goal oriented tasks and activities that involve students' reflection. As suggested in Chapter one, it is not enough to try to teach students a given number of strategies from fixed taxonomies and ask them to apply those strategies to different tasks. It is beneficial to raise students' awareness of the importance of being strategic by bringing language activities that let them rephrase their motives and take actions to language learning. These viewpoints are supported by a number of researchers (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Gillette, 1994; Parks & Raymond's 2004; Gao, 2006).

7.5.3 Implications for English language teachers at university level in Mexican contexts

This section introduces some implications for English language teachers at university level in Mexican contexts. The first implication involves teaching methodology for the English language teacher and the second one is for helping students develop a more strategic approach to language learning.

Since the south of Mexico, where Spanish is the only language spoken and where there is no tourism that uses English as main language, students have fewer opportunities to have practice in English outside the classroom. In this study, some classroom tasks were identified and discussed in terms of the ways they mediated students' learning. Another practice that was noted in the classrooms was the use of supplementary materials, such as worksheets. Van Lier (1996, p. 171) has pointed out, "in order to learn, a person must be

active, and the activity must be partly familiar and partly new, so that attention can be focused on useful changes and knowledge can be increased". In this study, students used a variety of mediating resources in their learning. These included social agents (teachers and peers) and psychological tools such as their language, in dialogic journals. Teachers could find value in these or in other mediation tools as resources for cognitive development. For example, although some teachers had used these tools (e.g. journals) as classroom, they may not always know of the facilitative functions of those resources or others that they could use to mediate students' strategic learning.

Another important pedagogical contribution of this study is that it lends support to the notion of development as concept which can help teachers understand the differences among learners. Rather than considering students as 'good language learners' or 'poor achievers', sociocultural perspectives see learners as individuals whose higher mental functions develop at different pace, but more importantly, through the mediation of tools. If language teachers at university level adopt this view, it is possible to have learners who can take a more strategic approach to language learning. Furthermore, in this study the teacher provided opportunities for collaborative creation, revision and exchange, as reported by students in their learning journals. This is a practice that is worthwhile promoting in English as a second language classes in Mexican classrooms. It will help students better understand themselves as learners.

Furthermore, the present inquiry on an alternative approach to develop L2 strategic learning contributed to a shift in the teaching practices of the participant teacher, who implemented learning journals in one of her Language Department courses on her own volition. Although this was reported in informal conversations during the time the study was being carried out, it is worth mentioning that the participant teacher not only acknowledged the value of journals as a mediation tool in the process of learning a foreign language, but was also willing to introduce them as a regular classroom activity in the courses she coordinated. This demonstrates that in contrast to strategy training components, which are usually tailored by researchers to instruct students on specific learning strategies and may be difficult to replicate in a different learning situation from that of the research setting, the use of mediated learning activities can result in a valuable approach for both teachers and leaners. Relying on classroom activity and culturally constructed tools (e.g., portfolios, journals) made available to teachers, avoid the conflicts addressed by McDonough (2006) and Ress-Miller (1993) regarding strategy instruction, such as the whether to use L1 and L2 when teaching strategies, how explicit the instruction

should be, how long strategy instruction must last, and how trained teacher must be in order to teach strategies.

In summary, the aforementioned implications of this study are not absolute recommendations, but open new horizons to those interested in helping language learners become more strategic considering their own motives and goals. In particular, English language teachers at university level in Mexican contexts may consider these implications on the basis of their teaching situations, classroom conditions and students' language goals. They should understand the limitations of introducing new forms of mediation to the classroom so that they make appropriate adjustment based on their actual teaching context and situations.

7.6 Summary

The present study has investigated the role of mediation from learners' goals and classroom activity in the development of students' strategic learning. The study was conducted in a language classroom at University of Southern. A teacher and 18 undergraduate students participated in the study. Base on the findings discussed in Chapter five, several conclusions can be drawn. First of all, the current study strongly suggests that strategic development is an inherent process that needs to be nourished in the classroom by adopting a different view of the learner as a social individual and by looking at classroom activity as the means through which language learners become aware of their motives, set their own goals, and find the strategic actions that can help them to learn effectively. The current study also lends support to previous SCT-based strategy research as well as gives more empirical evidence that the use of strategies can be developed rather than taught and that they are context-mediation bounded. In addition, the findings of this study suggest that mediation tools used in this study can be brought to the classroom to help Mexican learners be more strategic and succeed in English learning. Finally, the researcher hopes that the current study can provide more insights into the role of the classroom practices and students' strategic actions. Such insights may be useful for teaching English in Mexico and similar contexts.

7.7 Concluding remarks

The final point I will make it that this study has contributed enormously to my own professional growth as an EFL teacher, trainer, and researcher. I am sure that the skills I have developed over the last six years will prove invaluable to my work in educational settings.

In particular, investigating the role of mediation and learners' goals has changed my perspective on what the 'departure point' for teaching strategies must be. Moreover, seeing how strategic learning evolved over time without necessarily instructing TEFL students on strategies was not only fascinating, but also made me reflect on the importance of provide future English teachers with different learning experiences, hoping that in turn they will use them in their teaching practice.

Finally, on a personal level, this thesis has proved a psychological and emotional challenge which has taught me a lot about myself and what I am capable of.

Appendix A Letter for institutional approval

XXX
Director
University of Southern Mexico
Language School

January 5, 15

Dear Sir
Subject: Permission request to carry out research in the ELT undergraduate program
I am enrolled as a PhD student at University of Southampton; I would like to carry out a research project with the aim of improving students' learning.

Reason for research
For several years, educators and teachers have speculated about the reasons why some students are more successful than others. This research project aims to examine how students develop a more strategic approach to the learning English.

Purposes of the research
1. To develop an action plan that provides learners with enough opportunities to develop a more strategic learning.
2. To implement and evaluate the outcomes of the action plan.

The University of Southampton Human Ethics Committee has granted Ethics Approval for this study (ERGO reference number: 13359). With your agreement, and that of the head teacher, teacher(s), and the students, I wish to collect data from January until the first week of December 2015. I would like to invite at least one English teacher and his/her students to participate in this project.

Ethical considerations

All information provided by the participants will remain confidential between the teacher(s), myself and my supervisor. Confidentiality will be preserved through the use of pseudonyms. The school, the teachers, and students will not be identified in any reports of the study different from this thesis. All project data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. The research participants will receive letters informing them of the aims of the research; their roles and their consent to participate in it will also be sought. They will be assured that their participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw from the research anytime without giving any reasons before the end of the project. I know that the teacher(s) are very busy; with your permission, I wish to relieve them of some of their teaching duties so that we can have time to work together when necessary.

Elements of this research will be published in academic journals and presented at academic and education conferences. If you agree for me to undertake this research in the school, please confirm your consent in writing. Please indicate also whether you would like to receive feedback on the study when it is completed. Feedback will be available at the end of 2017.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the research, please contact me, or my supervisor.

PhD Student: Student number: 26524953 Maria Magdalena Escobar Mendoza Email: mmey12@soton.ac.uk Phone: 962 62 19684	Supervisor: Alasdair Archibald Email: A.N.Archibald@soton.ac.uk

I thank you for your cooperation and prompt response.

Yours faithfully,

Maria Magdalena Escobar Mendoza

Appendix B Teacher's information sheet

Teacher's Information Sheet

As a PhD student of the program MPhil/PhD Modern Languages at University of Southampton, I am carrying out an Action Research project with the aim of improving English teaching and learning in your university. This project will start in August 2015 and will last for 5 months.

Reasons for research

Language learning strategies have been taught to EFL students to help them become more effective learners. Strategy instruction has taken different forms, most of them based on a training model with a sequence of steps aiming at helping students tackle specific language difficulties. However, less emphasis has been placed on the study of the overall strategic development of learners and the role of the learning context. A reconfigured classroom context and pedagogical practices are worth to be studied since they can provide with more information on how strategies are developed.

Purposes of the research

- To study an alternative way of teaching English to Mexican students who have limited contact with native speakers and very few opportunities to learn the target language outside the language classroom.
- To raise awareness on the importance of classroom context in the development of strategic learning
- To develop and action plan to reconfigure classroom context and pedagogical practices based on the understanding or current practices.

I understand you are a very busy teacher, so once I week I intend to help you with administrative duties in order that we can have time to come together for our meetings. All the information that you will provide will remain confidential. Confidentiality will be preserved through the use of pseudonyms. The university, yourself and your students will not be identified in any research reports. All project materials and recordings will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. If they are used, audio recordings will be erased after the end of the project. The transcripts will be destroyed too.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time before the end of the collection of data. Elements of this research will be published in academic journals and presented at academic and education conferences. If you agree to participate in this research, please complete and sign the enclosed consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the research, please contact me, or my Supervisor at:

PhD Researchert: Maria Magdalena Escobar Mendoza Email: mmey12@soton.ac.uk Phone: 962 62 19684	Supervisor: Alasdair Archibald Email: A.N.Archibald@soton.ac.uk

I thank you for your cooperation and participation.

Maria Magdalena Escobar Mendoza

Appendix C Student's information sheet (English)

Student's Information Sheet

As a PhD student of the program MPhil/PhD Modern Languages at University of Southampton, I am carrying out an Action Research project with the aim of improving English teaching and learning in your university. This project will start in August 2015 and will last for twelve weeks.

Throughout this university term, I may observe record the classroom talk and make notes of the environment and the teaching and learning taking place. My Supervisor (see below) and I are the only ones who will listen to the recording and view any written information collected from your activities part of the English class. Also, evidence of your work and tasks from your English class will be collected and used for research purposes strictly. At the end of the term, I may ask you to take part of an interview with some of your classmates. You will do this in one of the study rooms of this school building.

Whenever, I write about this research your name will not be used. I will allocate a number to you. The real names of the teacher and school will be changed in research reports of this project. This will help to protect everyone´s privacy. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you do not participate, no notes will be taken about your activities in class, your voice will either not be audio recorded, or will be erased from any class recording, and you will not partake of the final interview with your classmates. If you do participate you are free to withdraw at any time before the end of the research project, and any information about you will be deleted from the research project files.

Elements of this research will be published in academic journals and present at academic and education conferences.

If you agree to participate in this research project, please complete and sign the enclosed consent form and return it to me through your English teacher. If you have questions or would like to receive further information about the research, please contact me at:

PhD Researchert: Maria Magdalena Escobar Mendoza Email: mmey12@soton.ac.uk Phone: 962 62 19684	Supervisor: Alasdair Archibald Email: A.N.Archibald@soton.ac.uk

I thank you for your cooperation and participation.

Maria Magdalena Escobar Mendoza

Appendix D Student's Information sheet (Spanish)

Students' Information Sheet (Spanish Version)
Hoja Informativa para alumnos (Versión en Español)

Como alumna de doctorado del programa Doctorado en Lenguas Modernas en la Universidad de Southampton, llevaré a cado un proyecto de investigación-acción con el propósito de mejorar la enseñanza y el aprendizaje en tu universidad. Este proyecto dará inicio en agosto de 2015 y tendrá una de doce semanas.

A lo largo de este ciclo escolar en la universidad, posiblemente observare tu clase de inglés para tener un mejor entendimiento de cómo aprendes. Durante este tiempo, es posible que realizare grabaciones de audio de la clase y tomaré notas acerca del ambiente y de cómo se lleva a cabo la enseñanza y el aprendizaje. Únicamente mi Supervisor del proyecto (ver abajo) y mi persona escucharemos las grabaciones y revisaremos cualquier información escrita que se haya recabado a partir de tus actividades en la clase de inglés. De igual forma. Evidencia de tu trabajo escrito y actividades de tu clase de inglés será recogida estrictamente para propósitos investigativos.

En cualquier ocasión en la que yo escriba acerca de esta investigación tu nombre no será utilizado. Los nombres reales de tu maestra y de la escuela serán cambiados en los reportes que resulten de esta investigación. Esto ayudara a proteger la privacidad de todos los involucrados. Tu participación en este proyecto es totalmente voluntaria. Si no deseas ser parte del proyecto, ningún dato será tomado acerca de tus actividades de clase, tu voz será borrada de las grabaciones de audio, o de cualquier grabación de clase, y no participaras en la entrevista final junto con tus compañeros de clase. Si estás de acuerdo en ser parte de este proyecto, tienes la libertad de retirarte del mismo en cualquier momento, durante o al final de la investigación; y cualquier información acerca de tu persona será eliminada de los archivos del proyecto.

La información acerca de esta investigación será divulgada en publicaciones académicas y presentada en eventos de tipo académico, así como conferencias en el área educativa.

Si estás de acuerdo en ser participante de este proyecto de investigación, por favor completa y firma la forma de consentimiento adjunta a esta hoja informativa y entrégala a tu profesora de inglés quien me la hará llegar. Si tienes alguna duda o te gustaría recibir más información, favor de contactarme en:

PhD Researchert: Maria Magdalena Escobar Mendoza Email: mmey12@soton.ac.uk Phone: 962 62 19684	Supervisor: Alasdair Archibald Email: A.N.Archibald@soton.ac.uk

Agradezco tu cooperación y participación.

Maria Magdalena Escobar Mendoza

Appendix E Consent for participation in Research

(Version Number: 001 Date: 10/12/2014)

Study title:	A sociocultural approach to develop strategic learning in the language classroom.
Researcher name:	Maria Magdalena Escobar Mendoza
Student number:	26524953
ERGO reference number:	13359

Please tick the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood all the information provided in the Information Sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about ☐

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be ☐

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without any penalization or loss of benefits. ☐

I understand I will not be paid for participating in this study. ☐

Data Protection

I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password-protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

Participant consent

Name of participant (print name) ……

Signature of participant…….....

Date……

Appendix F Curricular courses and course program

MAPA CURRICULAR (trayectoria ideal)

AREAS	SUBÁREAS	1er Semestre	2º Semestre	3er Semestre	4º Semestre
FORMACIÓN BÁSICA		C8 T3 θ Sociedad actual H5 P2	C5 T2 θ Naturaleza del Conocimiento H3 P1	C4 T1 θHerramientas Avanzadas y Especializadas de Computación H3 P2	
		C4 T1 θ Aprender a Aprender H3 P2			
FORMACIÓN DISCIPLINARIA	LENGUA Y CIVILIZACIÓN INGLESA	C12 T2 ♦ Inglés I H10 P8	C7 T1 ♦ Inglés II H6 P5	C7 T1 ♦Inglés III H6 P5	C7 T1 ♦Inglés IV H6 P5
			C5 T1 ♦ Inglés para Propósitos Académicos: Lectura H4 P3	C5 T1 ♦Inglés para Propósitos Académicos: Comunicación Oral H4 P3	C5 T1 ♦ Inglés para Propósitos Académicos: Redacción H4 P3
	LENGUA ADICIONAL		C8 T3 □ Lengua Adicional I H5 P2	C8 T3 □ Lengua Adicional II H5 P2	C8 T3 □ Lengua Adicional III H5 P2
	LINGÜÍSTICA	C6 T2 θ Morfosintaxis del Español H4 P2	C6 T2 ♦Introducción a la Lingüística H4 P2		C8 T3 ♦ Descripción Lingüística del Inglés H5 P2
				C5 T1 ♦Fonética y Fonología H4 P3	
	PEDAGOGIA	C6 T2 ♦Introducción a la Didáctica de las Lenguas H4 P2	C7 T3 θ Principales Corrientes de la Educación H4 P1	C7 T3 ♦Evolución de la Metodología en la Enseñanza de Lenguas H4 P1	C7 T3 ♦Didáctica de la Gramática y de los Elementos Léxicos H4 P1
					C6 T2 ♦Didáctica de la Comprensión de lectura H4 P2
	INVESTIGACIÓN	C5 T1 θ Taller de Redacción de Textos Académicos H4 P3		C9 T3 ♦ Observación de la Práctica Docente H6 P3	
DESARROLLO PERSONAL		C1 T0 Actividades Culturales H1 P1	C1 T0 Actividades Culturales H1 P1	C1 T0 Actividades Culturales H1 P1	C1 T0 Actividades Culturales H1 P1
		C1 T0 Actividades Deportivas H1 P1	C1 T0 Actividades Deportivas H1 P1	C1 T0 Actividades Deportivas H1 P1	C1 T0 Actividades Deportivas H1 P1
FORMACIÓN AMBIENTAL		C4 T1 θ Naturaleza y Sociedad H3 P2	C4 T1 θDesarrollo Sostenible H3 P2		
SERVICIO SOCIAL					
INTEGRADORA					
ELECCIÓN LIBRE					C5 θ ♦ Optativa A
	Créditos	47	44	47	48
	Horas teóricas	12	13	13	13+
	Horas prácticas	23	18	21	17+
	Hora/semana	35	31	34	30+
	Unidades académicas	7	7	7	9

C: créditos **H:** horas/semana **T:** horas teóricas **P:** horas prácticas θ : Español ♦: Inglés □: Lengua Adicional

- Para poder inscribirse a la materia de Herramientas Avanzadas y Especializadas de Computación el estudiante deberá comprobar tener conocimiento básico de computación: sistema operativo Windows, procesador de textos Word, manejo de hoja electrónica Excel y Power Point. (Ver descripción del Área de Formación Básica en la sección 13.1 de este documento)
- Los créditos del Área de Desarrollo Personal se obtienen a través de la práctica, promoción y asistencia de/a actividades artísticas y deportivas (Ver descripción de esta área en la sección 13.3 de este documento). Aunque las unidades académicas de esta área se llevan a lo largo de los primeros cuatro semestres, en este mapa curricular se aprecian únicamente en la cuenta de materias del 4º semestre ya que es cuando se concluyen.
- Requisito de permanencia: Acreditar examen de inglés nivel B1 del Marco de Referencia Europeo al finalizar la unidad académica de Inglés III.
- De las cinco unidades académicas optativas, el estudiante debe tomar al menos tres de las que ofrece su escuela y dos puede elegirlas entre las que se ofrecen en cualquiera de las otras dependencias de la Universidad y en otras instituciones de educación superior, siempre y cuando dichas unidades académicas tengan cuando menos 5 créditos cada una. (Ver descripción del Área de Elección Libre en la sección 13.7 de este documento)

AREAS	SUBÁREAS	5º Semestre	6º Semestre	7º Semestre	8º Semestre	9º Semestre
FORMACIÓN BÁSICA						
FORMACIÓN DISCIPLINARIA	LENGUA Y CIVILIZACIÓN INGLESA	C12 T2 ♦ Inglés V H10 P8	C12 T2 ♦ Inglés VI H10 P8	C8 T3 ♦ Literatura de la Lengua Inglesa H5 P2		C6 T2 ♦ Arte y Cultura Contemporáneos H4 P2
		C6 T2 ♦ Desarrollo de la Lengua Inglesa H4 P2				
	LENGUA ADICIONAL	C8 T3 □ Lengua Adicional IV H5 P2	C8 T3 □ Lengua Adicional V H5 P2	C8 T3 □ Lengua Adicional VI H5 P2		
	LINGÜÍSTICA		C6 T2 ♦ Sociolingüística H4 P2	C6 T2 ♦ Análisis del Discurso H4 P2		
	PEDAGOGÍA	C6 T2 ♦ Didáctica de la Expresión Escrita H4 P2	C5 T1 ♦ Evaluación de los Aprendizajes H4 P3	C6 T2 ♦Diseño de Programas de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera H4 P2		C6 T2 ♦ Aspectos Psicológicos del Aprendizaje de Lenguas H4 P2
		C6 T2 ♦ Didáctica de la Comunicación Oral H4 P2	C6 T2 ♦ Práctica Docente H4 P2	C6 T1 ♦ Taller de Práctica Docente H5 P4		
	INVESTIGACIÓN		C8 T3 ♦ Introducción a la Investigación H5 P2	C5 T1 ♦ Investigación Educativa H4 P3		
DESARROLLO PERSONAL						
FORMACIÓN AMBIENTAL						
SERVICIO SOCIAL					C30 T0 ♦ Servicio Social H30 P30	
INTEGRADORA						C7 T1 ♦ Seminario de Titulación H6 P5
ELECCIÓN LIBRE		C5 θ♦ Optativa B	C5 θ♦ Optativa D	C5 θ♦ Optativa E		
		C5 θ♦Optativa C				
	Créditos	48	50	44	30	19
	Horas teóricas	11+	13+	12+	0	5
	Horas prácticas	16+	19+	15+	30	9
	Hora/semana	27+	32+	27+	30	14
	Unidades académicas	7	7	7	1	3

C: créditos **H:** horas/semana **T:** horas teóricas **P:** horas prácticas □: Lengua Adicional θ : Español ♦: Inglés

- De las cinco unidades académicas optativas, el estudiante debe tomar al menos tres de las que ofrece su escuela y dos puede elegirlas entre las que se ofrecen en cualquiera de las otras dependencias de la Universidad y en otras instituciones de educación superior, siempre y cuando dichas unidades académicas tengan cuando menos 5 créditos. (Ver descripción del Área de Elección Libre en la sección 13.7 de este documento)

Total créditos: 377
Total horas teóricas: 92+
Total horas prácticas: 168+
Total horas/semana: 260+
Total unidades académicas: 55

Nombre de la unidad académica:	**INGLÉS III**
Área / Subárea:	Formación Disciplinaria /Lengua y Civilización Inglesa
Nº de horas teóricas/prácticas:	1/ 5
Nº de créditos:	7
Semestre:	3º
Prerrequisito	Inglés II
Lengua de instrucción:	Inglés
Total de horas de estudio:	90 horas de clase presencial: 15 teóricas 75 prácticas 15 horas de estudio independiente
Programa elaborado por:	Ana María C. Domínguez Aguilar Margaret Mulhern Elizabeth Us Grajales

Objetivo General *

Al finalizar el curso el alumno estará capacitado para comprender las ideas principales de textos que tratan de temas tanto concretos como abstractos. Relacionarse con hablantes del idioma Inglés con cierto grado de fluidez y naturalidad, de modo que la comunicación se realice con poco esfuerzo por parte de los interlocutores. Producir textos escritos claros y detallados sobre temas diversos, así como defender de manera sencilla un punto de vista sobre temas generales indicando los pros y los contras de las distintas opciones. Familiarizarse con los formatos de exámenes internacionales: PET y TOEFL.

* Nivel B1 del Marco de Referencia Europeo para el aprendizaje, la enseñanza y la evaluación de las lenguas.

Objetivos Específicos

Objetivos académicos

Pragmáticos

Al concluir el curso el alumno podrá:

- Expresar preferencias, emociones, acuerdos y desacuerdos
- Describir cualidades, personalidades, problemas, experiencias y sucesos
- Narrar anécdotas y eventos históricos
- Ofrecer y buscar información factual: identificar, preguntar y responder
- Analizar y discutir problemas del ambiente y temas mundiales

Socioculturales

Reconocer características culturales distintivas de países de habla inglesa y relacionarlas con las de su propia cultura:

- *Tipos de refranes, modismos*
- *Grupos profesionales y las instituciones en las que trabajan*
- *Culturas regionales incluyendo minorías y estereotipos*

- *Conocer algunas de las convenciones sociales de los países de habla inglesa*
- *Conocer las diversas maneras de enfrentar los problemas ambientales en el mundo (problemas de agua, aire, ruido, deforestación, basura, transgénicos)*

Objetivos formativos

Al terminar el curso el alumno habrá desarrollado su habilidad para:

- Establecer objetivos personales y llevarlos a cabo
- Reflexionar sobre la experiencia personal en el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua
- Identificar y evaluar estrategias personales de aprendizaje
- Responsabilizarse y llevar a cabo tareas acordadas
- Valorar las diferencias culturales
- Expresarse de manera clara y detallada
- Organizar ideas para una presentación en clase
- Asumir actitudes de respeto hacia el ambiente
- Disfrutar la lectura de textos auténticos

Contenido

Comprensión Auditiva

Conversaciones, discursos y/o conferencias, programas de radio o televisión

- Personajes celebres
- Tradiciones y costumbres.
- Descripciones de personas,
- Ocupaciones, empleos y lugares de trabajo.
- Asuntos ecológicos
- noticieros

Comprensión de Lectura

Textos académicos y no académicos de mediana extensión, artículos, informes, didácticos y auténticos:

- Problemas contemporáneos (medio ambiente, política, adicciones, pobreza)
- Conceptos comunitarios incluyendo: amistad, empleo, quejas, periódicos, cuestionarios
- Enseñanza – aprendizaje
- Cuentos o novelas cortas

Expresión Oral

Conversación con cierta fluidez y espontaneidad sobre:

- Peticiones
- Quejas
- Acuerdos y desacuerdos
- Problemas cotidianos y mundiales
- Emociones
- Costumbres
- Narración de una historia ficticia de un cuento o novela corta
- Defensa de puntos de vista sobre situaciones locales y mundiales
- Presentación de temas relacionados con aspectos socioculturales del curso.

Expresión Escrita

Textos claros, coherentes, detallados y siguiendo las normas establecidas del género elegido:

- Redacciones o informes transmitiendo información cultural o problemática social o ambiental
- Asuntos controvertidos del momento
- Breve ensayo sobre alternativas sostenibles para la problemática ambiental.
- Narración de anécdotas o sucesos históricos
- Bitácora de aprendizaje o diario interactivo

Lingüísticos

Gramática

- Presente perfecto progresivo
- Contraste de tiempos (presente perfecto vs. presente perfecto progresivo)
- Voz pasiva (presente y pasada)
- Contraste de voz activa y voz pasiva
- "*Used to*" para acciones habituales en el pasado
- Pasado perfecto
- "Wh" questions: sujeto y predicado
- Cláusulas relativas con sujeto y objeto: who, that, which, when, where; Pronombres relativos como sujeto y objeto; Oraciones que contienen "it" con formas adverbiales
- Discurso indirecto con say y tell; incluyendo modales e *if* y adverbios de tiempo (time phrases)
- *Phrasal verbs*

Léxico

Vocabulario asociado con los campos semánticos de:

- Cualidades, emociones y relaciones interpersonales
- Empleo
- Educación
- Hábitos, costumbres y estereotipos
- Refranes, y modismos
- Problemas ambientales

Fonética

- Entonación en oraciones complejas y en preguntas sobre preferencias
- Acentuación en palabras y oraciones
- Pronunciación de auxiliares y frases
- Unir sonidos (blended consonants)

Técnicas de Enseñanza-Aprendizaje

- Trabajo individual, en parejas y en equipos
- Drama, simulación, juego de roles
- Proyectos de temas culturales, medio ambiente y educación (poster, collage, folleto, etc.)
- Lecturas variadas
- Repetir con palabras propias un relato (retelling)
- Cátedra
- Mesa redonda

Actividades a Desarrollar

- Escuchar avisos, instrucciones, información, etc.
- Escuchar para llenar espacios en blanco
- Escuchar un diálogo y verificar las predicciones
- Escuchar medios de comunicación: radio, televisión, cine
- Comprender la descripción de acontecimientos, sentimientos y deseos
- Leer para obtener información y/o placer
- Realizar ejercicios de lectura y escritura guiados y semi-guiados
- Participar en conversaciones de tipo formal e informal
- Completar cuestionarios
- Producir posters para exponer
- Tomar notas
- Resumir un cuento o novela corta
- Escribir reseña de películas o libros, cartas personales
- Elaborar mini-diálogos basados en comics, videos, material visual
- *Hablar y/o escribir sobre la problemática ambiental*
- Realizar practica de exámenes PET y TOEFL
- *Escribir en la bitácora de aprendizaje para reflexionar sobre su aprendizaje, vida, nociones*

culturales

Estrategias a Desarrollar

- Uso de analogías
- Predecir
- Explorar temas con lluvia de ideas y organizadores visuales
- Organizar, estructurar y ordenar oraciones en secuencias para producir textos coherentes de lengua.
- Reconocer la estructura textual de un discurso oral o escrito.
- Buscar con rapidez detalles relevantes en textos de mediana extensión
- Escuchar atentamente para intentar captar las ideas principales
- Reconocer palabras claves y claves contextuales
- Elaboración de campos semánticos
- Reproducir la entonación de las frases escuchadas
- Parafrasear, usar aproximación
- Elaborar inferencias
- resumir

Acreditación

Expresión oral (continua)	
▪ Presentaciones	
▪ Conversaciones de temas varios	
▪ Exámenes	20%
Expresión escrita	
▪ Textos varios	
▪ Exámenes	20%
Comprensión de Lectura	
▪ Actividades de comprensión de diversos tipos de textos	
▪ Exámenes	15%
Comprensión auditiva	
▪ Actividades de comprensión	
▪ Exámenes	15%
Gramática y Léxico	
▪ Exámenes	20%
Elaboración de una bitácora de aprendizaje	10%
100%	

Observaciones

Los temas socioculturales se enlistan como una referencia y guía para el curso sin que estos tengan que ser tratados en su totalidad durante el semestre. Se sugiere que el número mínimo de entradas en la bitácora de aprendizaje sea de 12.

Appendix G Portfolio protocol

Entry form:

Personal language goals

Name: _____

Date: _____

A language goal I have for the next two weeks and how I can reach it

Submission form:

Personal language goals

Name: _____

Date: _____

A language goal I had for the next two weeks and how I reached it

Final reflection form

Setting goals for myself- Final Reflection
Name:
_____
Date: _____

The *language goals I had in this course and how I achieved them*

- How do I evaluate myself in the previous submissions and reflections?
- Are there any important or relevant points about my language goals and reflections?

Appendix H Portfolio: Teacher's guidelines

Personal language goals

Aim clarification of language goals, guidance and encouragement on portfolio project
Time 30-35 minutes

Procedure

1. Students think of personal language goals they have set for themselves.
2. They talk about these goals in groups of three of four.
3. Students write down language goals that they have for the next weeks.
4. They share these goals with a partner.
5. With the same partner, students talk about various ways in which they can accomplish their goals. They should write a series of steps. For example: I plan to learn five new words every day. I plan to speak with native speakers.
6. Volunteers speak about their personal goals.
7. Students write a short reflection about: A language goal I have for the next two weeks and how I can reach it.
8. During the following two weeks, students will be working by themselves on reaching that goal and collecting evidence on how they did it.
9. At the end of the two-week period, volunteers talk about whether and/or how they were able to accomplish their goals.
10. Students write about whether and/or how they were able to accomplish their goals and attach any evidence.

Note: Use the entry and submission forms provided.

Appendix I Learning journal: Student's guidelines

Learning Journal Guidelines

Procedure for journal writing

1. Recall your experience in learning a foreign language and how you approach learning the language.
2. Make entries when is required by your teacher
3. Write the date of the entry
4. Use reflection questions on the first page of your journal to guide your writing.
5. Feel free to include any relevant information about your learning in the classroom and/or outside the classroom.

Questions about your learning

1. What are some of the things you learned in the lessons? Did you learn anything new?
2. What activities were you asked to take part in?
3. Did you contribute actively to the lessons?
4. What learning materials did you use? How effective were they?
5. Did your work in pairs, groups, or individually?
6. Did you have any problems during the lessons?
7. What was your main accomplishment of the lesson?
8. Did you discover anything new about your learning?
9. Are you learning enough language in the classroom?
10. Are you using what you learn in the lessons outside the classroom?

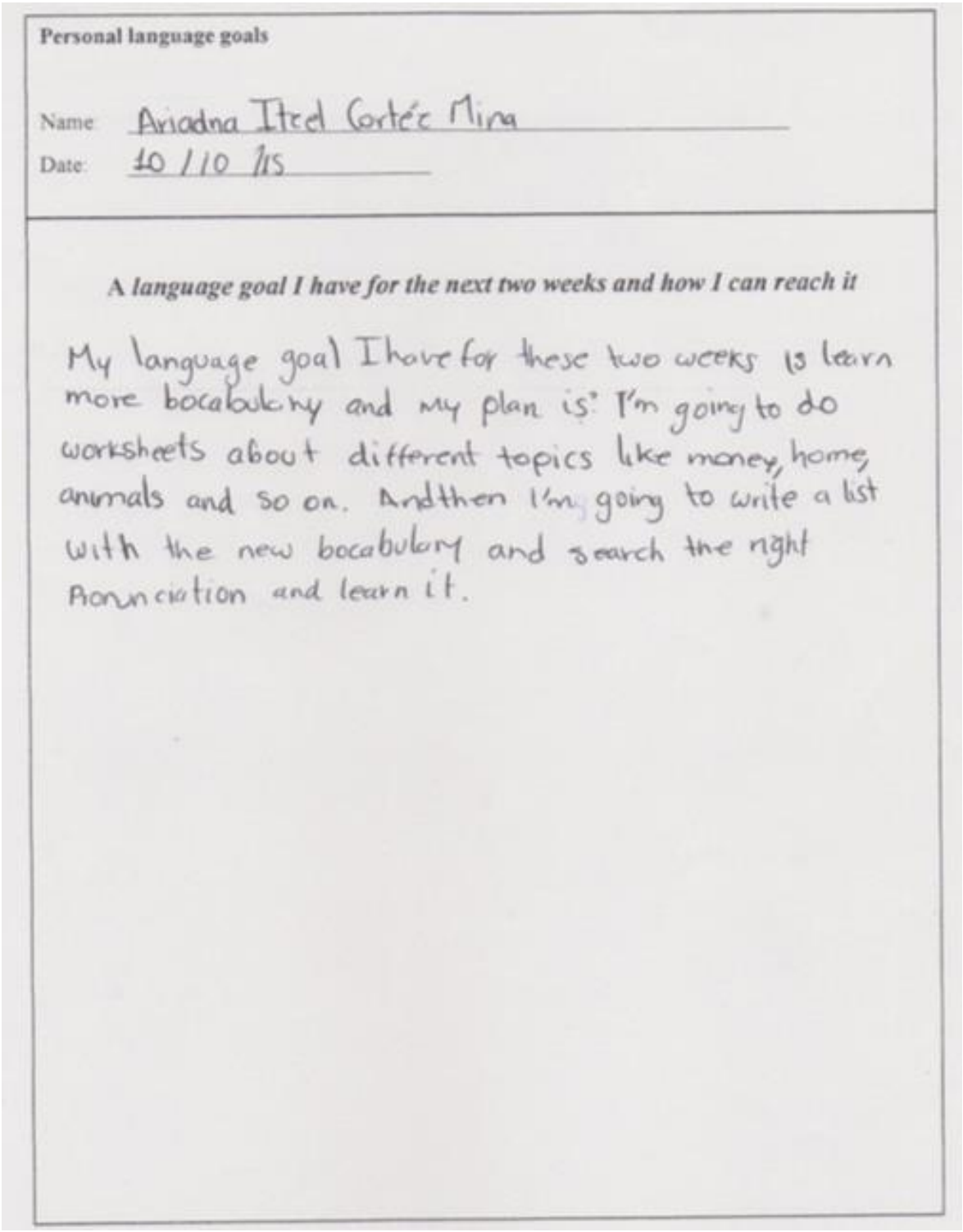
Appendix J Learning journals: entries record

	Name	**Week 1** Aug 10 – Aug 14	**Week 2** Aug 17-Aug 21	**Week 3** Aug 24-Aug 27	**Week 4** Aug 31-Sept 4	**Week 5** Sep 7-Sept 11	**Week 6** Oct 5- Oct 9	**Week 7** Oct 12- Oct 16	**Week 8** Oct 19-Oct 23	**Week 9** Oct 26- =Oct 30	**Week 10** Nov 2- Nov 6
1	Daniela	journal entries 3*	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 0	journal entries 0	journal entries 0
2	Elsa	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3*	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3
3	Elizabeth	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3
4	Dana	Journal entries 3*	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3
5	Lilia	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3
6	Amelia	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3
7	Betsy	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 0	journal entries 0	journal entries 0
8	Roberto	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3
9	Adriana	Journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3
10	Paola	Journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 3	journal entries 0	journal entries 3	journal entries 3

11	Maria	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	2	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3
12	Alicia	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	2	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3
13	Cristina	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	1	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3
14	Fernanda	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3
15	Jazmin	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3*	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	2
16	Mirna	journal entries	0	journal entries	3	journal entries	0	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3
17	Teresa	journal entries	2	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	2	journal entries	3
18	Julie	journal entries	3*	journal entries	3	journal entries	3*	journal entries	3*	journal entries	3	journal entries	3*	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3	journal entries	3

*More than three entries in a week.

Appendix K An example of student's portfolio protocol



Personal language goals

Name: Ariadna Itzel Cortéz Mina

Date: 10/10/15

A language goal I have for the next two weeks and how I can reach it

My language goal I have for these two weeks is learn more bocabulary and my plan is: I'm going to do worksheets about different topics like money, home, animals and so on. And then I'm going to write a list with the new bocabulary and search the right Pronunciation and learn it.

Personal language goals (1)

Name: Ariadna Itzel Cortéz Mina

Date: August 27th, 2015

A language goal I had for the past two weeks and how I reached it

Two weeks ago I started to study vocabulary, I have a book about vocabulary and I answered some units about Nancy, food, health, house and another topics. In these sheets I found some unknow words and I made a list about the new words. I wrote the meaning in spanish because is easier for me to learn the words and then I use a dictionary to listen the correct pronunciation. First I answered all the worksheets and then with the new vocabulary I started practice saying sentences using the words. I enjoyed to do worksheets because I consider that I can learn better. When I was learning the new words there were some words that I always forget but now I'm continuing to practice the words but I learnt some new words.

Personal language goals (2)

Name: Ariadna Itzel Cortéz Mira

Date: Agust 27th, 2015

A *language goal I have for the next two weeks and how I can reach it*

My next goal for the next two week is practice the Verbs because I'm forgetting some Verbs that I suppose that I've already Know. I'm going to do a big list and I'm going to search the pronunciation in a dictionary. Then I'm going to Practice speaking and ose making sentences.

Personal language goals (2)

Name: Ariadna Itzel Cortéz Mina

Date: ~~September~~ 18th, 2015

A *language goal I had for the past two weeks and how I reached it*

During this week, I started to study the verbs because I supposed that I already knew but I was forgetting some verbs so now I studied the verbs in difference tenses. I wrote the verb in a paper like I was writing the verbs I was repeated each one and made sentences with the verbs. Now I learnt better the words but some of them I forgot sometimes but I still working on it.

Personal language goals (3)

Name: Anedra Itrel Cortéz Mina.

Date: September 18th, 2015

A language goal I have for the next two weeks and how I can reach it

For next goal, for the two week I'm going to search woorksheets about song I'm going to complete listening the songs. I choose this because I want to improve my listening and also because I like to listen music.
Also I'm going to listen the song and I'm going to try the lyrics of the song.

Personal language goals (3)

Name: Ariadna Itzel Cortez Mina

Date: October 16th, 2015

A language goal I had for the past two weeks and how I reached it

In my last Goal I listened songs. I write the whole songs and fill in the blanks. With this Goal I really enjoyed because I like listening songs. I n the part where I had to write the whole songs I realised that I didn't have a lot of mistakes. I Im proud of that.

This singers that I choose the songs they're are british. but I choose just a few Americans. I like to listen this songs but sometime I couldn't understand the words in british so I listened the songs 3 times but In the part that we had to stop the song in every phrase tha I could listen. Then listened the whole Songs to check my mistakes.

Personal language goals (4)

Name: Ariadna Iteel Cortez Mina

Date: October 16th, 2015

A *language goal I have for the next two weeks and how I can reach it*

For my next Goal I'm going to practice the reading part of Pet exam. The part 4 sentence transformation and Part 5 write letters.

I'm going to do that because I want to improve my writing skill. I'm going to do 1 letter and five sentences transformation per day. I'm going to do that in the afternoon because it's the time the I feel relax. I'm going to search the material on Internet to do it.

Personal language goals (4)

Name: Ariadna Itzel Cortés Mina
Date: November 6th, 2015

A *language goal I had for the past two weeks and how I reached it*

In the last goal I did the Part 1 and Part 2 of Pet's exam. During the goal I could realize that something that was difficult for me it's the sentence transformation that is the Part 1 but I'm going to continue Practice. The second Part I enjoyed doing because I like writing letters. I did the goal for two weeks. I did 5 sentence transformations and 1 letter per day. In the letter sometimes I had problems with that because sometimes I wrote more than 45 words so I had to erased some ideas and also in some letter I had to think more because any ide came to my mind. But in general I really thi goal because I practiced Pet that it's something important and a-t the same time I learnt some things new in the sentence transformation that I didn't know. I'm refering to a some new phrases and phrasal verbs.

Personal language goals – Final reflection

Name: Anadna Itzel Cortéz Mina

Date: November 13th, 2015

The language goals I had in this course and how I reached them

- How do I evaluate myself in the submissions and reflections of my language goals?
- Is there anything important to myself as a language student in the outcomes of this activity?

I think that during this activities I consider that I did it good but in one of my lost goals I did some worksheets about vocabulary but I think that I didn't learnt all the words that I expected to learn but I'm trying to continue learnt it. Also During the goals I was very disciplined and took my time for the activities. Something that I really liked is that I practice for the Pet exam but in some exercises I didn't get well but I'm continuing practice. Some that I notice is that in my goal that I had to study the verbs some of them I didn't remember at all but I think I could do it's to use it. Something important that I notice and I'm really proud is that with the goal that I had to practice listening, I wrote the lyrics of the song in some song and I realize that know I improved my listening skill because now I understand better the listening part and I got good score in that part in the exam. In general I think that these activities helped me a lot to practice my english and to realize in what skills I need to practice more and also to be

disciplined with the language because in the others last semester I didn't do something like this and I consider that it's important so despite of some difficulties that I had I think that I did very good furthermore I was expected better results but I'm going to continue practicing.

Appendix L An example of student's journal transcription

By Adriana

August 11th, 2015

Today It was the first class, we didn't do to much during the class, we only answered one page, learnt about vocabulary when you' are talking using your cellphones and some new phrasal verbs. First when the teacher started the class she asked us about our holiday, what we did in our holiday and then we made a test about how we use the cellphone. I think that the class wasn't enough because we only use one page of the book and no more material.

August 13th, 2015

Today during the class, the teacher teach us the topic "Have something done". It was something new for me because I didn't know how to say when other people make your things. In the class I participated once because the teacher chose the people for participate. We used a worksheet for each partner but I consider that the best way to understand the material is using a worksheet for each one. I think that I'm not learning enough in the classroom in the classroom because one hour per day It's not enough to learn English and also we need to practice the four skills every day to improve our English. But when I have the opportunity to practice the new vocabulary and grammar I tried to do it.

August 14th, 2015

Today In the class the teacher teach us about possessive pronouns and adjectives but when the teacher was explaining I get confuse because she went so far. but I got something about the topic. I contribute a little in the class because I couldn't understand all the topic and I only participated once. When the teacher finished the explanation she give us a worksheet and now I worked with two people with only one sheet It was so difficult to me to do the exercise and I think that know I'm going to search more information about the topic because I understand a little now I didn't learn enough.

August 18th, 2015

Today we learnt the topic "Reported Speech". I like this topic but sometimes I get confuse with the tense. I didn't participate a lot because the teacher chose the people to participate. We use a worksheet, we did it in pairs. The teacher presented us slides about the topic and also because I had learnt this topic. In the topic, another thing that I often get confuse It's with the time expressions. In general, I think to presents the topic with slides It's a good way because you don't waste time writing in the board.

August 19th, 2015

Today we continued to the topic "Reported Speech". We learn reported speech questions, for me was a kind of difficult because I didn't remember at all the topic. Also, I remember about the use of If and weather. After the teacher teach us the topic, she gave us a worksheet and we answered it in groups and then she leaves us homework. I consider she explain us very well and she gave us more information than in the book and this is going to help us.

August 20th, 2015

Today in the class start with a new lesson. First the teacher gave us the answers of the last homework then we opened the book and talked about strange success in the world like UFO'S and then we practiced the reported speech in the book. I learnt the pronunciation about some words. Also, I participated once in the class. The grammar of reported speech I've been using when I talk to my friends. But sometime I make mistakes but I tried to do it well.

August 25th, 2015

Today in the class, we saw about UFOS and we use the book because there was some questions. We made the questions each other and then the teacher said us that we had to convert the answers in reported speech. We made it. I consider that this helped me to study the reported speech. Then we practice with some peace of papers and in a group of three we cover the questions in reported speech that helped me a lot because convert questions was difficult to me. I consider that this class helped me a lot to study for the exam.

August 26th, 2015

Today in the class we played the review of the topic that we saw two weeks ago that was reported speech. First the teacher gave us some peace of papers that was a words with the meaning and in groups we worked to match the words with the meaning. There were a lot of words, my group finished first and we won. Then we played a game. We made a circle and we had to say a number while we were clap in our legs. I was a kind difficult for me because It's difficult to me to be coordinated but I could do It.

August 27th, 2015

Today the teacher asked us about our learning goal and then the teacher gave us a sheet to write what we did about our goal. Second, the teacher said us that we had to give her the grammar folder. And then we wrote our next goal and I wrote about to learn again the verbs and I'm going to search the meaning and the listening. This is that we did today.

September 1st, 2015

Today in the lesson I learnt about relative pronouns. I consider that is topic is quite easy for me because I learnt before. And then the teacher gave us a worksheet about this topic and I realize that I have some doubts and in the afternoon I search in internet another exercise about it because I think that the worksheet wasn't enough for me. Then we make groups to represent a conversation using the topic and critizing people. I think this activity was fun and helpful to us because we could practice the skill: speaking.

September 3rd, 2015

Today in the class the teacher explain us about the nondefining clauses this topic wasn't clear for me because I get confuse with the defining clauses. But then wrote same sentences using relative pronouns. I wrote the complement of this sentences. The topic that I get confuse I'm going to search about information on the internet. and I'm going to practice more because I think that it wasn't enough for me.

September 4th, 2015

Today In the class the teacher taught us about some verbs with preposition. I think that this is going to help me because sometimes I didn't know how to say something. The teacher gave us an advice about how we can learn this verbs with prepositions. I'm going to follow her advice because It's going to help me a lot. Then I'm going to use it with my friends when I'll be talking. The teacher gave us a worksheet. We saw the structure of the topic and then the teacher leave us the homework. I think this class was good because I could remember this verbs and learn some of this.

September 8th, 2015

Today in the class, the teacher teach us about the topic: Passive Voice. I think that this topic is quite easy because I had ever seen before. First the teacher said us to answer the exercise in the book and I had problem with one sentence because I confuse the time but I think If I practice more I can answer correctly this topic then. I have a goal during this week to practice the topic with my friends to dominate the topic also because I'm going to have exam and I want to have a good score.

September 9th. 2015

Today in the class, we saw the lesson 24. First, we observe the pictures and then we practiced describing the picture with a partner. but we used some phrases in the book. Then the teacher asked us about something could be invented in the future, we made groups of three people then we write about an object then the teacher said us to read aloud each group. Then we made an exercise in the book abut passive voice the we checked it and we finish the class. I think in this class, we practice a little the grammar and vocabulary but we can practice more then.

September 10th, 2015

Today in the class the teacher teach us about the differences to use, DO, MAKE and Have with the Things. First the teacher gave us a worksheet about this topic. And we answer this worksheet. I think the work really help me know the difference about the use of this verbs. I didn't have any problem with the lesson but I'm going to study this words then. I consider that I'm learning more in the classroom that the last term because the teacher always was in a hurry and we saw the lesson very fast and we can't know if we were right or wrong in the exercises.

September 22th, 2015

Today in the class, the teacher present us a topic called "Countable and uncountable nouns". First, the teacher teach us in what cases we can use it for example the liquids and food, so I could comprehend and learn new words It has a plural way or not. She told us that we have to study the topic because It's the only way to know if a Noun It's countable or uncountable. Then, we started answered a page online together, we answered according our knowledge about the topic and we got a score, so we started to work in the book we answered a grammar spot and one exercise about too many, too much and enough some of us had mistakes in the exercise but the teacher answered our doubts.

September 23rd, 2015

Today in the class, we practiced the countable and uncountable nouns. First the teacher told us to play a role play we played with an elastic band we had to pass it into our whole body and the person who lose has to answer a question about uncountable and countable nouns. Then the we played again and we made two circles and the teacher gave us a piece of papers and in pair we have to ask some questions using How much, How many, and answer with a lot, little, too much, too many and so on. Then the teacher gave us a worksheet about "But on the other hand…" we had to answer sentences with too many, too much and enough. We did it and the we talked about with a partner. I consider that in this class we had enough practice about this topic, now I think that I know now to use the topic. Now learnt enough.

September 24th, 2015

Today we didn't have classes because the teacher have us her comments about our last goal. In my comment the teacher wrote me that I have clear idea about how make my goal. In my last goal I studied the verbs because I was forgetting some of them. Now I remember the verbs better but dome of them I'm going to continue studying because It's kind of difficult remember it. I'm going to try to use it in a conversation because my learning style is auditive. Then the teacher explained us about how to make our goals better and I'm going to take in account. After Miss Magda arrived and she mentioned about and interview and finally we made the arrangements about the time and the day of the interview.

October 6th, 2015

Today in the class, we played a game in which we have to write a word and my partner behind me have to write another word with the last letter that I wrote. Then when all of us wrote a word one by one have to explain to the other partner a word without saying the word. I like this activity because sometimes we don't know how to define a word to another person who say the word. also because It's a good technique that we can use as futures teachers that we will become. Then in the class the teacher gave us a sheet about a topic what makes a good learner. So we read this sheet then we chose one the things that involved to be a good learner then what we taught about it. I consider that that sheet is going to help to improve my techniques to study and take some things to consider.

October 7th, 2015

Today in the class, the teacher taught us the collocations, something that was new for me because I didn't know the topic. Well I already used the topic but I didn't know the name. First when the class started the teacher asked about volunteers to represent a conversation then the teacher explained us about the collocation and and the differences between this one and the phrasal verbs. Also she explained us the types of collocations. Then we made an exercise in the book. I consider that in this class I learn enough about the topic also because the teacher explain us very well and I could understand the topic

October 8th, 2015

Today in the class the teacher asked us about what was our favorite TV commercial and also about what we think about it was good or bad the influence of the commercials. Then teacher said us to make teams of 5 people the teacher gave us a picture and then we had to create a script of a commercial then each team presented the commercial to the others. I like this activity because it was fun and also because we practice our speaking.

October 13th, 2015

Today in the class the teacher gave us our learning goal. Then teacher ask us if we have doubts about the topics that we saw. Something that I didn't remember very good was Reported Question but the teacher explained a little also she explained us and gave us examples about countable and uncountable nouns. I consider that the last topic it is a kind of difficult to me sometimes. But I'm going to practice today in the afternoon to get a good score in the exam.

October 14th, 2015

Today in the class the teacher gave us a worksheet about too many, too much and enough. In this class I learnt something new because we did the worksheet It was a practice of an exam because tomorrow we have a exam about that. The worksheets were about first conditional and countable and uncountable. I did it I didn't have mistakes in the first conditional but in the Countable and uncountable I had 4 mistakes. I learnt about my mistakes I consider this types of exercises It's good because we can realize what topic we didn't understand yet and we have to practice more.

October 15th, 2015

Today in the class we had an exam. During the exam I feel well but in one part about to choose if was uncountable and countable but leave it and at the end of the exam I answer it and I feel more confidence because I could analyze better. Something that I liked was the part in which we had to write letters. So at the end I expect to have a good score in the exam.

October 20th, 2015

Today in the class the teacher taught us about the reflexive pronouns. We had seen this topic before but the teacher didn't explain us a lot but today she gave us details about this topic. Then the teacher gave us a worksheet about the topic we practice with this one and also I shared that one with a partner, we did it and we checked the correct answers them. Then we made an exercise in the book about this topic then we checked the exercises and the finished with the class.

October 21th, 2015

Today in the class the teacher taught us about Each, every, and all, some words that we use to make and emphasis in a sentence. I used to use this word but in a correct way because I didn't realize that some of them are to use in a uncountable and countable way, so I consider that today I learn something new. Then we practice this topic with a worksheet that the teacher gave us so I could understand better the topic. At the end we played a game call "zip zap zep" I really like this game because most of us we don't have coordination of our baby so we made mistakes a lot of times but I really enjoy this game. When a person lose in the game the teacher ask a question according to the topic.

October 22nd, 2015

Today in the class the teacher gave us a worksheet about how we look after the earth. We answered the questions and then we asked three different person the same questions. Then we got the average of each person and we got our score and the teacher said us if we got the lowest score we didn't take care the earth and if we got the highest we were conscious about the earth. Then we create a paragraph about giving recommendations to the people

got the lowest score. I really like this activity because it make us conscious about the nature and earth.

October 27th, 2015

Today in the class the teacher gave us a worksheet that I made. This worksheet had a lot of funny activities because it was of one of my favorite songs. First we listened the songs and we tried to answer each exercise. I consider that this type of activities are good because we can improve our listening skill and at the same time have fun in the class. Then when we finished to do the worksheet we sang the song and I really liked that. But firs of all the teacher introduced us asking us about what we can do I we were our mom or another person and at the end we think about someone that we wanted to be and why the we told it each one.

October 28th, 2015

Today in the class the teacher gave us some sheets to create a comic. in the comic we draw and wrote a little about an story of whatever person. This activity was in pair. with my partner we wrote a story about a woman with tragic end. Then each pair presented all the comics that we made. some of them was really beautiful and funny. I think this type of activities are really good for us because in this way we can improve or speaking skill also in this way we can lose the nervous that sometimes we feel in front of the others.

October 29th, 2015

Today in the class the teacher told us about the topic that we saw in the last three day she told that she introduce the new topic in a deductive way. So It was really different than in other classes. I think that this was It's good and I really like but just for some topics in English. then the teacher explained us the grammar and she gave us some examples. then the teacher gave us a worksheet about the second conditional. We did it in pair this worksheet. I consider that this topic is easy for me because I've already know the topic.

November 3rd, 2015

Today in the class the teacher taught us about expressions with prepositions. First the teacher asked about when we use in, on, and at in our day life we answered with some expressions. then the teacher gave us a worksheet that we answered in pairs. then we connected the exercises in the group, the teacher asked for participations. I liked to remember this topic because sometimes I get confuse in some cases but I consider to practice more the topic with the extra worksheet that the teacher gave. Finally when we answered the exercises the teacher asked for doubts and she gave us a extra worksheet.

November 4th, 2015

Today in the class the teacher started asking us about the differences between trip, travel and Journey. I had an idea about it but It wasn't clear. The teacher showed us a video about this tree words an I could realized that my idea was right. I think that It's very important to know the differences to use the word correctly. Then we checked the homework that the teacher let us the day before. It was about a part of pet's exam. The exercise was a little bit easy but I think I took a lot of time answering the exercise so I need to improve that.

November 5th, 2015

Today in the English Class we had a exam about second conditional, every, each and all and prepositions. In the exam I had some difficulties about remember about the expression with prepositions because sometimes I confuse the preposition with the word but I didn't have problem with the other topic. Also I didn't feel comfortable with the listening because I couldn't understand at all at the first time but I needed to be very concentrated I could answer at all and I felt very proud of that

November 13th, 2015
Final entry

About my experience about writing the journal I think It was really new for me but I really liked it because I consider that at the same time that I was writing the Journal I remembered the topic that we saw in class something that It's important for me because sometimes it's difficult to me remember the thinks. Also I think that It's a good idea because during the experience the teacher read all our comment about every day and at the same time she took into account our comments and she improved her class in a way that all of us could learn better and feel comfortable during the class. Also because she gave us extra material something that in the others last terms the teacher didn't do.

In general I liked to do this activity because I think at the same time we were improving our writing skill and I really consider that did It this activity I improved my writing skill because I realized that so despite that It was new for me I liked and It's a good way to know about the students' experience.

Appendix M Text preparation for manual analysis

Name: Adriana (Pseudonym)	Codes and comments
Setting goal for myself Date: 10-10-15 **A language goal I have for the next two weeks and how I can reach it** My language goal I have for these two weeks is learn more vocabulary and my plan is: I'm going to do worksheets about different topics like money, home, animal and so on. And then I'm going to write a list with the new vocabulary and search the right pronunciation and learn it.	
Date: August 27th, 2015 **A language goal I had for the past two weeks and how I reached it** Two weeks ago, I started to study vocabulary, I have a book about vocabulary and I answered some units about Money, food, health, house and another topic. In these sheets, I found some unknown words and I made a list about the new words. I wrote the meaning in Spanish because is easier for me to learn the words and then I use a dictionary to listen the correct pronunciation. First I answered all the worksheets and then with the new vocabulary I started practice saying sentences using the words. I enjoyed to do worksheets because I consider that I can learn better. When I was learning the new words, there were some words that I always forget but now I'm continuing to practice the words but I learnt some new words.	

Appendix N Analysis of journal texts: categories and codes

Categories	Codes
Classroom activity: Description of the activities carried out in the classroom in a specific lesson; including content of the lesson, teaching-learning materials and other aids used by teacher and learners. It includes descriptive activities referring to working in the portfolio and instructions related to journal writing.	The teacher taught us how to use reported speech. The teacher showed us some slides… The teacher asked us to complete… The teacher gave us a worksheet. The worksheet contained three exercises about the topic. We played a game We participated in a role play. We did an activity from the book. We checked our answers We read an article about… We worked on a worksheet in pairs. We answered some exercises from a book… We compared our answer… We had an exam… In class, we answered page number … At the end, the teacher gave us a passage we had to read… Later, we analysed the conversation and extracted some important words… We wrote about how we reached our language goal. We wrote about a new goal for the next two weeks. The teacher asked us what our goal was. The teacher gave us her response about the previous language goal…
Working with others: Students opinions and perceptions of working with other students-	I like working with a partner because she can help me to understand grammar. When I don't know the answer in the worksheet she helps me.
Opinion of the lessons: Including content of the lesson, teaching materials, teacher's performance	I think… I think we developed our speaking skill I think is good to have a variety of activities in class. In my personal opinion, I think we need to … The activities were easy to do. The activities were good because they helped us to remember… Today, we had an interesting class... This class was interesting because we are learning…
Participation in class:	I participated actively in class I contributed actively in the classroom today. All class participated actively. I didn't participate actively today, but I would like to participate more the next days.
Linguistic knowledge learnt:	I discovered … I learned… I learned some expressions like … We learned how to … We learned how to use "have something done" and how to use… We are learning enough words and phrases …some practice helped me to improve my knowledge of reflexive pronouns

Own perceptions of learning:	I'm learning more each day and that makes me feel comfortable with myself. I think I'm learning more each day; even more than in previous courses, I had before. I'm reaching some of the goals that I want. I'm very happy for that goal reached. I'm not using what I'm learning outside the classroom I'm starting to feel comfortable with my English level. I think I'm learning enough language in the classroom. I think I'm doing my best in class. I think I learn more this way… I think I learned a lot … *This semester was different my way of learning English changed. * In class, all the activities, all the worksheets helped me a lot. I discovered a lot about my learning, I'm better at using grammar on activities about writing.
Self-assessment: of their performance in the class and of their learning	I didn't know… I don't know the meaning of… I understand grammar and vocabulary I understood the content of the lesson and most of the vocabulary I already knew how to use …but I didn't know how to… I didn't have problems during the activities. In this week, I didn't have any problems understanding the lessons. The activity wasn't difficult to me… I used to use these words, but I think I used them correctly.
Motive: reference to wish and desires about the class and their learning	I'm interested in learning more about… I'll do my best to learn a lot of things this semester I hope to learn more things next class… I'm excited about learning. I would like to do more activities next week. I would like to have more practice with… I would like to participate more in class. I want to learn more. I'm going to study more than I used to because I want to improve my English.
Working on portfolios.	The [language] goal [activity] helped us to improve our weaknesses. I used the [language] goal [activity] for improving on PET activities. This helped me a lot even on the partial exams at school.
Writing learning journals:	The learning journal … has useful because we practiced writing … Writing my journal was an interesting task, but was a kind of boring writing on it every day. I'm going to miss writing on my journal because it was like a habit to me. I developed my writing.
Opinions of the course:	The activities on class helped me to improve on social interaction, I used to work in pairs and that was nice. We used to play games and heard songs and that made the class interesting. I would like to have a course like this again)

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