

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56712/latam.v4i2.703>

Adult language learners' perception of the usefulness of learning strategies

La percepción de estudiantes adultos sobre a las estrategias de aprendizaje

Nahum Samperio Sánchez

nahum@uabc.edu.mx

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2408-1899>

Universidad Autónoma de Baja California
Tijuana, B.C. – México

Artículo recibido: 29 de mayo de 2023. Aceptado para publicación: 03 de junio de 2023.
Conflictos de Interés: Ninguno que declarar.

Abstract

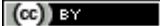
This qualitative study investigated the perception that adult English learners in a non-formal context have about the usefulness of learning strategies. Data were collected through field notes and qualitative surveys. The results indicated that participants perceived the strategies not only as very useful but also as dynamic, entertaining, and interesting. Likewise, the results showed that the inclusion of strategies contributes to the development of language skills and helped the participants to gain confidence in the use of the learned language. The pedagogical implications suggest that the inclusion of strategies, as a support tool outside the classroom, can have a positive effect on the perception, adoption of new strategies, and on the increase of time invested outside the classroom.

Keywords: learning strategies, perception, usefulness of strategies, adults, informal context

Resumen

Este estudio cualitativo investigó la percepción que tienen los estudiantes adultos de inglés en un contexto no formal sobre la utilidad de las estrategias de aprendizaje. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de notas de campo y encuestas cualitativas. Los resultados indicaron que los participantes percibieron las estrategias no solo como muy útiles sino también como dinámicas, entretenidas e interesantes. Asimismo, los resultados mostraron que la inclusión de estrategias contribuye al desarrollo de las habilidades lingüísticas y ayudó a los participantes a ganar confianza en el uso de la lengua aprendida. Las implicaciones pedagógicas sugieren que la inclusión de estrategias, como herramienta de apoyo fuera del aula, puede tener un efecto positivo en la percepción, adopción de nuevas estrategias y en el aumento del tiempo invertido fuera del aula.

Palabras clave: estrategias de aprendizaje, percepción, utilidad de estrategias, adultos, contexto no formal

Todo el contenido de LATAM Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, publicados en este sitio está disponibles bajo Licencia Creative Commons . 

Como citar: Samperio Sánchez, N. (2023). Adult language learners' perception of the usefulness of learning strategies. *LATAM Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades* 4(2), 1543–1559. <https://doi.org/10.56712/latam.v4i2.703>

INTRODUCTION

Despite the teaching of English in middle and high schools, there is a high degree of failure in English proficiency not only in Mexico but also worldwide (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, p. 100). Krashen (1983) suggested that learning in formal contexts, such as the classroom, does not give students the necessary ability to communicate spontaneously in the language being studied. This is why some companies train their employees to reach the level of proficiency required for the development of their work activities. To do this, they offer English courses or classes to employees at their own facilities. This represents an educational context different from classes in universities or language centers that require attention because there is not much research about student's learning methods of students in this context or similar contexts such as individual or private classes or in language centers. Research on learning English has focused, to a large extent, on children, adolescents, and young adults, generally in school environments and with groups that are homogeneous in age and knowledge of the language; however, this research aims to identify the perception that adult students, who are in informal educational environments, have about learning strategies with the purpose to contribute to their learning.

Learning English can be a difficult process for adult learners, especially when time has passed since they were in a school where they took English classes. During this time, study habits are lost, and other activities and obligations are prioritized. For some students, it is difficult to recall their own study and learning methods, which represents a challenge. Tam (2014) argued that adults, unlike youth, have unique needs, motivations, and interests. For many, learning may remain inconclusive because they give up studying and drop out of classes because of a lack of methods or strategies that show them the way forward to learn or develop language skills.

Learning strategies have been shown to be a contributing factor to learning English (Oxford, 2011; Griffiths, 2013). García-Ros, Pérez-González, Martínez, and Alfonso (1998, p.259) indicate that "the main differences between more and less successful students reside both in the breadth of their strategic repertoire and in the self-regulation of their application". The teaching or instruction of strategies (Chamot, 2004) has shown that teaching low-performing students how to use strategies influences their language achievement. These strategies are chosen and used with learning objectives and require effort, will, and investment in the study time of users. Samperio and Toledo (2022) suggested that investment of time through the implementation of strategies outside the classroom is necessary to learn the language.

Every individual has a repertoire of learning strategies that they have stored through their own study experiences and the different educational contexts where they have received classes. Chamot (1998) indicated that all students have cognitive control over how they learn, and thus, they can describe their thought processes. Therefore, they can choose methods that best suit their learning style or preferences for learning. This leads to more meaningful learning; however, it does not work in the same manner in all cases. Hartshorne, Tanenbaum, and Pinker (2018, p.2) suggest that adults "deploy conscious strategies and transfer what they know from their first language", but sometimes these learning strategies or methods are not suitable for learning English. In this way, for an adult who is far from an educational environment, such as school, it can be difficult to find or remember the learning methods that will lead them to achieve their objectives.

This research addresses the situation of adult learners learning English in a group of diverse ages, prior knowledge, prior educational experience, and occupations. Although this study is not the first to explore the process of teaching and learning strategies, there has not been much investigation exploring students' perception, adoption, and use of learning strategies in English

classes in non-formal settings; that is, where learning English does not represent a school requirement.

This work attempts to identify experiences in the teaching of English that are useful for adult students with the purpose of contributing ideas that can be applied and adapted to other learning contexts. The findings derived from this research can contribute to the development of methodologies used for groups of adult English learners in non-formal contexts such as language centers, private classes, and business classes, among others.

Literature review

Several factors contribute to learning and mastery of a second language. Samperio and Toledo (2022) suggested that there is an interconnectivity of factors that assist learning such as motivation, adequate investment in study time, and learning strategies. For the most part, studies on learning strategies have focused on formal educational settings with young adult students at universities, where learning English is a credit-earning or completion requirement (e.g., Oxford, 1990; Griffiths, 2013). Studies have also been conducted with older adults (e.g., Osle, 2020; Ramírez, 2016b) in language centers where the main characteristics of the students are the motivation that leads them to undertake learning, their age range, or their language level. However, no studies have been found that have been conducted with adults in non-formal settings such as private, individual, or group classes in their workplace. The European Commission, Education and Training (2010c) establishes that learning at an adult age includes all adults who have dropped out of school; that is, they are not in a formal context.

Learning strategies

Strategies have been recognized as a factor that contributes to learning a second language (Rubín, 1975; Oxford, 1990; Chamot, 2004; Griffiths, 2018). Every student uses strategies stored in their repertoire over time when necessary. Their repertoire may be more or less extensive, and it is improved through trial and error; however, not all strategies contribute equally.

Strategies have been defined in various ways by many authors. For example, Rubin (1987) identified them as techniques, operations, or routines that help students acquire knowledge, and they choose to learn, retrieve, store, and have it available for later use. Oxford (1990) explained that strategies constitute actions, behaviors, steps, and techniques that students consciously take to improve understanding in learning and make it faster and easier. Other authors such as Griffiths (2013, p.36) established that strategies are "activities consciously chosen by students in order to regulate their language learning". Derived from the range of definitions provided by research (e.g., Griffiths, 2018; Oxford, 1990), Samperio (2018) adds that strategies are actions or behaviors that students employ to learn, retain, or understand new information or to retrieve, remember, practice or use old information. Thus, it is possible to understand that everything that students do for the benefit of their learning in a conscious way and with a learning purpose can be considered a learning strategy. Consequently, adopting a behavior (for example, being responsible for your learning) or carrying out an activity (for example, writing notes) constitute strategies, which vary according to the objectives, individuality, or study conditions of each student.

Teaching learning strategies

Strategy instruction is one of the lines of research related to second language learning strategies. Since Rubin's (1975) work on good language learners appeared, it has been believed that these methods, behaviors, actions, or techniques that good, effective, or successful language students could be taught to less effective or weaker students to help them learn more, better, and faster.

The main objective of teaching strategies is to raise students' awareness of their own strategies and develop new ones. In addition, training students in their use should help them understand the strategies, recognize them, and use them to create a broader repertoire to choose when necessary to enhance their learning. Chamot (1998) suggests that when students begin to understand their learning processes and can exert control over them, they become responsible for their own learning. The purpose of teaching strategies is to make the student aware that strategies exist, and that they serve to improve their learning more effectively and faster. Therefore, Chamot and O'Malley (1994) suggested that the learning strategies used by good language learners can be taught to less competent students.

Hassan, Macaro, Mason, Nye, Smith, and Vanderplank (2005) found that there are many studies in the literature that have shown that strategy instruction has positive effects on students and their learning. However, they also state that there may be several constraints that restrict universality in teaching strategies. They state that "it is not clear whether relatively simple awareness-raising programs are more or less effective than longer, more expensive and more complex interventions" (2005, p. 6). Furthermore, Li (2022, p.76) indicates that "Although the instruction of learning strategies can be beneficial for language learners, in practice, it would create great challenges for the teacher in some traditional education contexts." Thus, the teaching capacity of learning strategies is not universally accepted (Griffiths, 2018). On this basis, it is necessary to consider, in addition to the conditions for its implementation, the individuality of the students who, because they are unique, have needs, deficiencies, beliefs, and different learning conditions, which can prevent the acquisition or acceptance of new learning methods. In this regard, Rees-Miller (1993) mentioned factors that can impact the effectiveness of strategic instruction, such as the age of the students, educational background, life experience, cognitive styles, and the mismatch between teaching and learning styles.

A discrepancy in the teaching of learning strategies in the classroom is the way in which they should be taught. Chamot (2004, p. 19) suggests that "teachers should certainly opt for explicit instruction and should probably integrate instruction into their regular coursework, rather than provide a separate learning strategies course". However, not all teachers know about strategies, and certainly, not all have the capacity to teach them explicitly in the classroom. In contrast, teaching strategies implicitly, that is, integrating them into daily classroom practice while providing students with opportunities to use the strategy, requires knowledge on the part of the planner in the first place. Second is the knowledge of the strategies of the teacher who teaches the class. Rees-Miller (1993, p. 679) stated that many individual and contextual variables are related to the success of learning strategies, not just to the instruction of integrated or explicit strategies. It is precisely the student's individual differences and all the variables that revolve around them that can make the teaching and learning of strategies more or less effective for each student.

Perception of English learning strategies

Lindsay and Norman (1977) defined perception as the process of interpreting and organizing sensations to produce meaningful experiences. Alternatively, Wolfe, Kluender, and Dennis (2009) consider that perception arises from a person's prior knowledge, idea, or internal sense; that is, the interpretation of the information received by the senses based on the experience of what is known. Along the same lines, Neisser (1976) and Oviedo (2004) cited in González, Ladino, and Escobar (2020) estimate that "perception is a process of collecting information that locates and determines a stimulus whose result is a significance between the experience and the knowledge that finally gives rise to judgments, opinions, etc." Consequently, judgments and opinions or

impressions and interpretations influence motivation, decision-making, and student interest, among others.

Knowing the perceptions of students about the processes of learning English is especially important since it is ultimately the student who experiences the implementation of processes both in the classroom and outside of it. In this way, both the teacher and the institution can benefit from knowing the perception that students have in relation to their teaching processes; therefore, they are able to make decisions for their benefit. Finally, it is necessary to mention that perception can contribute to adult students' acceptance and adoption of new ways of learning, which can contribute to meaningful language achievement; especially when their learning methods are fixed without necessarily being beneficial.

The perception that students have about learning strategies has been investigated, and findings indicate that students perceive the teaching of strategies as positive (Eliwarty & Maarof, 2017; Daouk, Bahous, & Bacha, 2016) or important (Griffiths, 2007) in the teaching-learning process. Eliwarty and Maarof (2017) studied the perceptions of 30 students in relation to the strategies used in teaching writing, with a focus on the learning process rather than the product. They collected data through surveys and interviews, and their findings indicated that all participants perceived the use of strategies as positive or highly positive in the writing process. The study participants reported that their writing skills improved. On the other hand, Daouk, Bahous, and Bacha (2016) examined not only students', but also teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of implementing learning strategies in higher education courses. The study was conducted in Lebanon, with 37 students. They found positive perceptions of the effectiveness of teaching strategies by both students and teachers. They suggested that this perception may have an impact on student performance and learning.

Di Carlo (2018) investigated the perception of 665 adult participants regarding the usefulness of cognitive strategies considering the gender variables of the participants. They found significant differences in 26 of the 80 strategies in the perception of utility in certain types of strategies between women and men. This suggests that, for men, some strategies are more useful than for women.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative-exploratory and experimental methodology. Qualitative data were collected using surveys and field notes. Similarly, learning strategies were designed and provided to students with the steps and objectives to follow through with activities to be performed outside the classroom.

Participants

The participants were 10 students in an English group at a factory in Northwest Mexico that provided English classes as training to its employees. For the company, it is important that course participants reach a level of competence that can help communication between the different company branches. By the time this study was conducted, the students had taken three-hour classes every Saturday for a period of six months (60 hours), which is equivalent to level A1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages. The level of knowledge acquired during these months varied among students due to individual differences. It is worth mentioning that attendance at classes was irregular for different reasons, internal and external to the participants themselves. In the group, there were a variety of professions and occupations within the same company; likewise, the age of the participants was not homogeneous. The formal education of the participants also differed, as described in more detail in the results section.

Instruments

The strategies

The main purpose of the strategies provided to the students was to develop different skills and aspects of language that were observed as language deficits through observation and field notes. The purpose was to correct the deficiencies or shortcomings that the students demonstrated in the classroom. In addition, it was intended to encourage students to invest additional time in addition to class time. The strategies were assigned weekly as homework for 7 weeks (7 strategies). However, students were informed that, although it was assigned at the end of each class, it was their decision to do the strategy. Each strategy included a series of steps that students should follow to practice the target skill. Likewise, strategies were named before they were simulated in class through activities.

The process for teaching these strategies was conducted in stages: to raise awareness of the strategy, model it, explain its benefits, practice it, and evaluate it. First, activities similar to the strategy were included in class; then, it was explained how it helped their learning, then its benefit was evaluated, and the strategy was assigned. It was emphasized to them that work at home was not compulsory; however, they were invited to develop it to improve their learning. The purpose in this step was to analyze the motivation, availability, or possibility of conducting the strategy.

The strategy included internet sites with possible material to use as a suggestion to reduce the search time and increase the practice time of the material to develop the strategies. However, the participants were free to search for other websites or other materials.

Strategies sought to develop one language skill (listening, speaking, reading, or writing) in each of them, as well as different aspects of language, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. To provide the participant with a specific purpose for doing the strategies, in each one of them, it was explained how conducting the strategy would help them in learning.

The survey

Qualitative surveys were used to collect data that indicated the perceptions of the participants. They were administered weekly after the completion of the first strategy. Each survey included 13 open questions to collect exploratory data such as opinions, points of view, and impressions of the participants. The survey sought to determine if all the activities were performed, the time that they invested in the activities, the possible problems when carrying them out, the possible prior use, and the opinions about their usefulness for learning or developing the language skills of the student. Finally, the survey asked about their likes in performing the activities in strategies. For each strategy, a survey was administered in the immediate class. Information was collected from each participant through seven surveys. It is worth mentioning that the number of surveys varied because of the attendance of the participants in the class.

Field notes

In order to gather information that the surveys did not reveal, field notes were collected to help describe the performance of the students in class. Because the researcher and the teacher were the same person, the field notes were brief. Words, names, situations, etc., which could later help explain more in detail when passing the notes to text, were written down. Field notes were organized in a Word format that included the time, observation, and possible observer comments. Derived from what was observed in class, the field notes helped determine the type of strategy that should be developed, which could help students improve their performance in that area.

Process

The strategies were designed weekly to contribute to the development of the language, as well as to correct gaps or deficiencies in the students based on what was observed in class on a weekly basis. In the first instance, vocabulary was identified as a deficiency in the students. Second, oral and written comprehension and oral production, including pronunciation and fluency, were identified. The learning strategies were elaborated weekly based on these observations and provided to the participants on Saturdays to develop during the week.

RESULTS

Participants

In the period of eight weeks, seven strategies were administered and seven surveys were conducted to collect data. Table 1 lists the pseudonyms of the participants, age, sex, highest degree, and position in the company.

Table 1

Demographic data of the participants

PSEUDONYM	AGE	SEX	DEGREE	POSITION IN THE COMPANY
Cris	38	Male	University	Accountant
Glad	35	Female	Middle school	Line leader
Jess	28	Female	High school	Operator
Sar	28	Female	High school	Operator
Fer	51	Male	High school	Technitian
Rica	45	Male	High school	Technitian
Say	25	Female	High school	Administrative assistant
Dru	35	Female	High school	Operator
Irm	53	Female	Middle school	Line learder
Ed	28	Male	Middle school	Operator

Field notes

The field notes were used to make specific observations and were collected immediately in class. They were made as descriptive as possible in the classroom in order to identify areas for improvement to design strategies for the students. Thoughts and complete sentences of what was observed in the class were written. In addition, the time at which the situation occurred was recorded (Samperi, Fernández, Baptista, 2014). The collection of data through field notes allowed the identification of areas for improvement to design the strategies. In this way, different recurring problems were identified during the lessons. Table 2 shows the areas of improvement identified in the field notes.

Table 2

Problems identified in class through field notes

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT IDENTIFIED IN CLASS	
1.	Lack of vocabulary
2.	Vocabulary application
3.	Pronunciation even with known and used words
4.	Lack of fluency
5.	Oral production of students
6.	Incorrect pronunciation
7.	Transmission of the message
8.	Failures in listening comprehension
9.	Failures in reading comprehension

Derived from the main problem observed in class through field notes, strategies were developed and administered by email. Each strategy sought to help students develop language skills or aspects derived from observations and information gathered. Table 3 lists the areas to be reinforced in language learning for students.

Table 3

Purpose of the strategies included in the study

STRATEGY	AREAS TO IMPROVE IN THE STRATEGY
1	Listening comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency
2	Pronunciation and vocabulary
3	Listening comprehension, vocabulary
4	Reading comprehension, vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency
5	Pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, and fluency
6	Oral production and fluency
7	Oral production and reading comprehension

The surveys

Data from 36 exploratory surveys were collected to determine the students' perceptions concerning the usefulness of the learning strategies, as well as the usefulness for the development of specific skills such as fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary learning, and self-confidence when developing them. This allowed us to obtain information of interest from the reality of the studied population. The follow-up surveys were in agreement with the strategies assigned to the students.

In terms of the perception of the usefulness of the strategies, 100% of the students reported that the strategies were useful for learning vocabulary, pronunciation, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, or gaining speaking fluency. In addition, 100% of the participants reported that the development of strategies provided self-confidence when reading, listening, and speaking in English.

The qualitative data were categorized according to the purpose already established in the survey and follow-up of the assigned strategies. For example, the survey asked if the strategy had been useful in developing fluency, and then asked why they considered it useful. The data emerged

from the analysis showed that students perceived that strategies were useful to improve in five areas described in Table 4.

Table 4

Reasons of participants in relation to the usefulness of the strategies

CATEGORY	EXAMPLES OF THE UTILITY PERCEPTION OF THE STUDENTS
Learn unknown vocabulary and expressions	1. I got to know new words understanding their meaning
	2. understand words for a conversation
	3. It is easier to identify errors when listening to words that you have in the vocabulary
	4. I expanded my vocabulary a bit
	5. You are learning more vocabulary
Gain or improve their self-confidence when using, practicing or studying English	6. The fear of expressing yourself is lost
	7. It is something you do repeatedly, and you begin to master it and feel more confident
	8. Little by little I am less afraid to pronounce
Obtain fluency in oral production, expression of ideas	9. To lose the fear of being wrong
	10. Being able to have the opportunity to read repeatedly generated fluency
	11. It makes my tongue not to get stuck so much
Improve reading comprehension and oral comprehension	12. Improve fluency
	13. every time you start practicing, it helps you a lot to be fluent
	14. they help to have a better comprehension
	15. because in one way or another you clear up your doubts about hearing and pronunciation
Improve or acquire pronunciation	16. more understanding
	17. you understand more and more vocabulary
	18. every time you have a better understanding
	19. you perfect your pronunciation
	20. say the words properly
	21. as you listen to it, you can pronounce it better
	22. it is more practical and faster to pronounce words
	23. hearing the words in repeated sentences helps to memorize how to pronounce them

Because the strategies were also intended to encourage the students to spend more time outside of class on their own study, the survey included a question to determine the approximate amount of time students spent during the week on which they developed the strategy. Table 5 shows the average number of hours that students invested in developing and practicing the strategy.

Tabla 5

Time invested to develop the strategy

Strategy 1 N=6	Strategy 2	Strategy 3	Strategy 4	Strategy 5	Strategy 6	Strategy 7
-------------------	------------	------------	------------	------------	------------	------------

	N=5	N=4	N=4	N=5	N=6	N=6
	M=3.8 hrs	M=4 hrs	M=4.3 hrs	M=3.5 hrs	M=2 hrs	M=4 hrs

The data displayed in Table 5 agree with the reasons that the students reported as problems when carrying out the strategies that mostly had to do with the lack of time. For example, Fer expressed the need when he reported "I need to give myself a little more time" and Ric repeatedly reported during the surveys that he needed to coordinate his time to dedicate more hours to study. On the other hand, Cris reported that a problem in fully implementing the strategy was the "lack of time". In the same way, Sar reported that a problem in being able to dedicate time to the development of the strategy was "arriving home late due to transportation." This suggests that the time she had left after her workday was left to other priorities.

Similarly, problems were also reported for not understanding the strategy due to absences from class, which led to not receiving an explanation of the strategy. This result supports the idea that learning strategies should be explicitly taught. In addition, personal problems were reported that did not allow students to invest time in the development of strategies (Fer) or a space to be able to concentrate adequately (Ric).

The students were also asked about their feelings or liking to perform the strategies in the way they were administered. Among the most reported reasons, it was possible to identify the pleasure of practicing the language, in addition to finding "dynamic and interesting" strategies (Sar), "they make you leave your comfort zone and what you are used to doing" (Jess). They also perceive them as a "good method to learn better" (Cris); furthermore, "it is entertaining" (Glad).

DISCUSSION

How students perceive the strategies

Knowing the perception that students have about the processes they experience in the classroom can lead to have practical learning applications. Perception of what is experienced can be a prelude to the will to do things. When something is perceived as pleasant, attitude tends to change, which can lead to acceptance. Thus, perception can become a mental image formed from experience, and it is vital to start learning. However, teaching new learning methods to adults who use fixed strategies can be challenging. For this reason, this study sought to understand the perception of students regarding the usefulness of the learning strategies assigned to ensure an investment of time in learning beyond class time. The findings of this study agree with those of Eliwarti and Maarof (2017) and Daouk, Bahous, and Bacha, (2016) who found that students and teachers perceived strategies as not only useful but also important in the writing process.

The focus of this study was to identify the perception that students have concerning the usefulness of the strategies provided to improve their learning and found that students perceived the strategies as useful for the development of listening comprehension, reading comprehension, fluency, confidence, pronunciation, and vocabulary learning. It is important to consider that different factors could have had an impact on the perception that students have about the usefulness of the strategy they developed, such as the ease of developing it, familiarity with it, the objective to be achieved, the scope of achievement, the ability that the developed, and even the taste for doing it, among others. However, it stands out that the students perceived the strategies as 100% useful. It is necessary to mention that the perception that the students expressed in this study might have originated from the experience of having used the strategy in

class, that is, the example provided in class about how to perform the strategy and the explanation of how the strategy could help them in learning. This finding might contribute to clarifying the discrepancy between teaching strategies explicitly or implicitly (Chamot, 2004). Explaining how a strategy helps students in specific areas of learning a language can help them make informed choices of strategies to improve specific language skills. Consequently, efforts can be made to achieve accurate learning objectives.

It is also necessary to emphasize that the strategies provided to students include chains of strategies. Oxford (2011) described them as a series of interlinked strategies that are regularly presented together. Strategies were not presented in isolation (for example, listening to the radio); consequently, a series of activities that could be strategies on their own were interlinked to reach a goal; however, they could also be beneficial on their own (e.g., read-search-pronounce-write-read-explain orally). Thus, in the series of activities, students could have perceived the strategy as useful based on one of the activities included in the strategy and not all of them.

Another factor that could have contributed to the positive perception of the usefulness of the strategies is the element of choice. That is, the strategies suggested a type of material to develop the strategy; however, a variety of similar materials were included that the student could choose in terms of their level of knowledge, difficulty, length, related interests, taste, etc. Choosing the material with which they were going to work could have been an element that allowed the development of the strategy at their level, consequently, permeating their perception.

We are aware that a favorable perception of the usefulness of strategies is not synonymous with success in the language acquisition process because learning is individual and inherent to each subject with different characteristics. In this way, underlying patterns and tendencies are observed in everyone, where the will and time to carry out the strategies are necessary. However, knowing what strategies help and how they help students learn becomes important to direct effort and achieve goals more adequately and quickly.

Problems students present when developing strategies

The perception of the usefulness of the strategies is not separate from the problems to carrying them out. Time was a relevant external factor considered an impediment to the strategies provided. The lack of time for adult students, as in the context of this study, is a recurring problem since language learning is not a priority for them; work and family may be priorities. This is why time is spent on work, family, or personal situations rather than studying the language. Of course, these reasons are not debatable; however, for learning to take place, an adequate investment of time is necessary (Samperio & Toledo, 2022) not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom. This study showed that providing students with strategies to develop increased exposure to language outside the classroom through their implementation. On average, the participants reported an investment of 11.6 extra hours in the 40-hour course to develop strategies. Although a problem identified in developing the strategies was the lack of time, this result demonstrates that the assignment of strategies as support outside the classroom brings with it an exposure of the student to language beyond the classroom. A pedagogical implication emerges from this problem, which suggests that the inclusion of strategies as a support tool outside the classroom can have a positive effect both the perception and adoption of new strategies, such as increasing time outside the classroom.

Strategy instruction contributes to skill development and learning

The data collected from the field notes made it possible to identify aspects such as lack of vocabulary, pronunciation errors, low oral fluency, and low listening and reading comprehension.

Additionally, insecurity regarding the use of the learned language was identified. Strategies were specifically designed to improve these areas. The design of strategies for the development and improvement of aspects of language and skills that need to be addressed also has pedagogical implications because the observed problems are not limited to this study group, since the same type of problems can be commonly observed in classrooms of English as a foreign language. Therefore, designing strategies for the development or improvement of areas that can commonly be improved, such as oral production, fluency, and pronunciation can have an impact not only on these aspects but also on motivation and students' confidence.

Through fieldwork and observation, progress could be observed in the use and practice of English. It was less necessary to explain the vocabulary or grammar already seen in the class. Similarly, an increase in oral fluency was observed during the performance of the students in the classroom and the final oral examination of the course; however, no data supporting this were collected beyond the instruments used in the study.

Another finding of this study indicates that students reported gaining confidence in the development of strategies. An example is Glad, who expressed, "I am losing the fear of expressing myself" due to learning vocabulary and learning ways to use the language orally. Similarly, Sar reported that little by little, she was less afraid of pronouncing, and Jess reported feeling more and more confident when practicing it. An increase in self-confidence and security was observed in students' performance in the classroom. They were more open to participating not only when the teacher asked questions but also when they interacted with their classmates.

However, regardless of the perception of usefulness that one may have of something, it is not possible to generalize the benefits that the strategies brought to all students. The benefits can be different for each student and according to the will and effort to carry them out. An example of this is Rica, who presented the greatest problems during the course and previous courses. Rica reported the greatest number of problems when carrying out the strategies and the least investment of time on average; consequently, he had the least progress in class both to gain confidence and in the development of skills. Rica (personal communication) reported a lack of time due to workload; additionally, he mentioned not having a space at home to be able to concentrate on studying and spend time developing not only strategies but also homework. Therefore, it is necessary to have the appropriate conditions for the study, such as the investment of suitable time, and the use of strategies to have a positive effect on learning.

Insecurity, which is commonly confused with fear, makes students feel that they cannot use the language even when they have extensive knowledge. This insecurity prevents production. Krashen (1983) proposed the affective filter hypothesis, in which he suggested that the emotional state of students and the attitudes they have acted as filters that allow or prevent the passage of information necessary for its acquisition. However, sometimes it is just a matter of adequate opportunity to ensure that the filter proposed by Krashen does not impede language acquisition. Teaching the students strategies as tools that will help them use what they have already learned can have a great impact on their confidence, and consequently, on their learning.

As Dubovičienė¹ and Gulbinskienė (2014) explain, adult students have characteristics that distinguish them from traditional schools since they come to courses with different experiences, not only in educational or work backgrounds but also in life experience. An adult student in a non-traditional context, especially when they choose to learn a language of their own free will, is expected to have a disposition toward learning, be self-directed, responsible, and adopt a positive attitude that will help them achieve their goals. Despite this, learning languages for adult students can be complicated, especially when there are common problems such as a lack of time not only to attend class but also to do something out of the classroom. Along with motivation, will can

lead students to make decisions to learn. In learning English at an adult age, willingness to do something for the benefit of learning becomes a factor to consider, since this becomes an essential element when using strategies. However, the perception of learning strategies precedes the will to perform them autonomously. In this study, students perceived the strategies as not only useful in their learning, but also as dynamic, entertaining, and interesting activities that serve to learn better. This may have contributed to the conscious decision to do the strategies voluntarily and could have an impact on their learning.

CONCLUSION

As a result of this qualitative research, it can be concluded that adult learners of English in a non-formal context perceive strategies as useful for their learning that will help them learn more and better. In addition, they consider the strategies dynamic, entertaining, and interesting, and their use will contribute to reaching their goals. These factors can also contribute to the selection and use of strategies outside of the classroom. The perception that the participants in the study have concerning learning strategies provided as study tools outside the classroom is intended for them to adopt strategies for later use and adapt them to new learning contexts. In this way, positively perceiving the strategies opens new paths for learning among adult students.

Similarly, it was also possible to verify that the use and practice of the strategies affected the development of skills, especially fluency in oral production, helping students gain confidence in making use of what they had learned. Of course, this effect would not have been possible without the will of the student to decide to carry out the strategy. For adult students, the main tool to achieve goals is motivation and will, which leads them to find ways to achieve goals.

REFERENCES

Chamot, A. U. (2004). Issues in language learning research and teaching. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 1(1), 14-26.

Chamot, A.U. & O'Malley, J.M. (1994). *The CALLA Handbook: Implementing the Cognitive, Language Learning Approach*, Addison Wesley, Reading, MA.

Chamot, A.U. (1998) Teaching learning strategies to language students', Centre for Applied Linguistics. Washington, DC. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No ED 433719)

Daouk, Z., Bahous, R. & Bacha, N.N. (2016). Perceptions on the effectiveness of active learning strategies. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 8(3), 360-375. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-05-2015-0037>

Di Carlo, S. (2018). La percepción de la utilidad de estrategias cognitivas según varones y mujeres aprendices de español: Un estudio empírico internacional. *Revista signos*, 51(98), 285-309. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-093420180003002850>

Dörnyei, Z. & Ryan, S. (2015). *The Psychology of the language learner revisited*. Nueva York: Routledge.

Duboviciene & Gulbinskiene (2014) Learning / Teaching EFL to Adult Learners at Language Courses. *Svetimosios kalbos* 16,(3), 138–149 <http://dx.doi.org/10.15823/zz.2014.019>

Eliwarti, E & Maarof, N. (2017) The Students' Perceptions of the Strategies in the Process Approach. *International Journal of Educational Best Practices*. 1(1), 73-91. <http://dx.doi.org/10.31258/ijebp.v1n1.p67-82>

European Commission Education and Training (2010c) *The European Disability Strategy 2010-2020* Brussels: European Commission

García-Ros, R., Pérez-González, F., Martínez, T. & Alfonso, V. (1998). Estrategias de Aprendizaje y Enseñanza del Inglés como Segunda Lengua en Contextos Formales. *Revista de Educación*, 316, 257-269.

Gonzalez, O.D, Ladino, J.S, Escobar, D, M. (2020). Students' perceptions towards the English teaching methods of a Foreign Languages program at a Colombian university: A case study, *Revista Espacios*. 41(48), 28-43 DOI: 10.48082/espacios-a20v41n48p03

Griffiths C. (2013). *The Strategy Factor in Successful Language Learning*. Multilingual Matters.

Griffiths, C. (2007). Language Learning Strategies: theory and perceptions, *ELT Journal*, 61(2) 91-99.

Griffiths, C. (2018). *The Strategy Factor in Successful Language Learning: The Tornado Effect*. 2nd ed. Multilingual Matters.

Hartshorne, J. K., Tenenbaum, J. B., & Pinker, S. (2018). A critical period for second language acquisition: Evidence from 2/3 million English speakers. *Cognition*, 177, 263– 277. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2018.04.007>

Hassan X, Macaro E, Mason D, Nye G, Smith P, Vanderplank R (2005) Strategy training in language learning: a systematic review of available research. In: *Research Evidence in Education Library*.

London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.
URL: <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=296>

Krashen, S. D. (1983). Principles and practice in second language acquisition. New York: Pergamon Press.

Li, M. (2022). Implementing Learning Strategy Training in Classroom Teaching in an Chinese EFL Context. Curriculum and Teaching Methodology. 5(3) 75-79 DOI:10.23977/curtm.2022.050310

Lindsay, P., & Norman, D. (1977). Human Information Processing: An Introduction to Psychology (2nd ed.). New York: Academic Press.

Neisser, U. (1976). Cognitive Psychology: Principles and Implications of Cognitive Psychology. Estados Unidos: Routledge

Osle, A. (2020). Enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera a adultos mayores experiencias de aprendizaje de un grupo de aprendientes del Reino Unido. Azulejo para el aula de español. 11, 9-24

Oviedo, G. (2004). La definición del concepto de percepción en psicología con base en la teoría Gestalt. Revista de Estudios Sociales, (18), 89-96.

Oxford, R. L. (1990). Language Learning Strategies: What every teacher should know. New York: Newbury House/Harper Collins.

Oxford, R. L. (2011). Teaching and researching language learning strategies. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.

Ramírez-Gómez, D. (2016b). Language teaching and the older adult: The significance of experience. Clavedon: Multilingual Matters. Kindle Edition.

Rees-Miller, J (1993). A critical appraisal of learner training: Theoretical bases and teaching implications, TESOL Quarterly, 27, 679–689.

Rubin, J. (1975). What the “Good Language Learner” Can Teach Us, TESOL Quarterly, 9(1) 41-51.

Rubin, J. (1987). Learner strategies: Theoretical assumptions, research history and typology. In A. L Wenden & J Rubin (eds.), Learner strategies in language learning, 15-30. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.


Samperio, N. (2018). General learning strategies and the transfer to language learning: Identification and effect on language achievement. Editorial Académica Española.

Samperio, N.& Toledo, D. (2022). Motivación, estrategias de aprendizaje y tiempo empleado como factores que influyen en el aprendizaje del inglés. Revista Nebrija de Lingüística Aplicada a la Enseñanza de Lenguas (RNAEL) 16(32), 147-197 <https://doi.org/10.26378/rnlael1632461>

Sampieri, R., Fernández, C., & Baptista, P. (2014). Metodología de la investigación (6a. ed. --). México D.F.: McGraw-Hill.

Tam, M. A (2014). Distinctive theory of teaching and learning for older learners: Why and why not? Int. J. Lifelong Educ., 33, 811–820.

Wolfe, J.M, Kluender, K.R., & Dennis, M.L. (2009). Sensation and perception (2ª edición). Sunderland, Massachusetts: Sinauer

Todo el contenido de **LATAM Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades**, publicados en este sitio está disponibles bajo Licencia [Creative Commons](#) .