

ARE LOW ACHIEVERS LOW STRATEGY USERS?

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study is to identify the strategies that high achievers and low achievers have in common and how they use strategies. Quantitative data was collected through the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The qualitative data were gathered through ten individual semi-structured interviews. The general sample comprised 38 Low achievers and 19 High Achievers who belonged to the language center at a northern Mexican University. Data were analyzed with computer software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Excel. Quantitative overall results indicate that there is not a significant difference in the frequency of strategy use between high achievers (HA) and low achievers (LA). However, a difference was found in Metacognitive and Memory strategies used by HA and LA. Findings also show a statistically significant difference in nine strategies of the questionnaire. In contrast, qualitative data shows that HA achievers use strategies more appropriately for their learning goals whereas LA use strategies less focused on their goals.

KEYWORDS: Learning strategies, low achievers, high achievers, achievement, language learning

¿LOS ESTUDIANTES DE BAJO NIVEL DE USO DE ESTRATEGIAS SON ESTUDIANTES DE BAJO RENDIMIENTO?

RESUMEN: El propósito de este estudio es identificar las estrategias que los estudiantes de alto y bajo rendimiento tienen en común y de qué manera usan las estrategias. Los datos cuantitativos se recopilaron a través del Inventario de estrategias para el aprendizaje de idiomas (SILL). Los datos cualitativos se recogieron a través de diez entrevistas semiestructuradas individuales. La muestra general comprendía 38 alumnos de bajo rendimiento y 19 de alto rendimiento que pertenecían al centro de idiomas en una universidad del norte de México. Los datos fueron analizados con los programas SPSS y Excel. Los resultados globales cuantitativos indican que no hay una diferencia significativa en la frecuencia de uso de las estrategias entre estudiantes de alto y bajo rendimiento. Sin embargo, se encontró una diferencia en las estrategias metacognitivas y de memoria. Los hallazgos también muestran una diferencia estadísticamente significativa en nueve estrategias del cuestionario. En

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contraste, los datos cualitativos muestran que los estudiantes de alto rendimiento usan estrategias más apropiadas para sus objetivos de aprendizaje, mientras que los de bajo rendimientos utilizan estrategias menos enfocadas en sus objetivos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: estrategias de aprendizaje, bajo rendimiento, alto rendimiento, rendimiento, aprendizaje de idiomas

INTRODUCTION

Does low achievement strictly mean low strategy use? Many factors affect language learning positively or negatively. Individual differences of the learner, personality, learning style, motivation; along with factors such as learners' goals, needs, wants, and deficiencies in the language, among others, are aspects that might help deploy and shape the type and the frequency of use of the learning strategies (Oxford, 2017). Strategy theory suggests that learning strategies are an important part of the learner's academic development not only in learning in general but also in language learning. Research conducted in the area of language learning strategies has demonstrated a positive correlation between the use of learning strategies and success (Oxford, 1990; Griffiths, 2003, 2015; Ghafournia, 2014). The more frequently learners use learning strategies, the more successful the learners can be in language learning. Researchers have posited that high achievers and low achievers use different types of strategies and at different frequency rates (Griffiths, 2013). Nonetheless, there are learning strategies that both high achievers and low achievers use in a similar way; for instance, reviewing or revising, making notes, relating new information to old information, and looking for opportunities to practice are some strategies that both high achievers and low achievers use (Samperio, 2017b). Pressley and Woloshyn (1995) identified these strategies as general learning strategies, and learners use them for different tasks and across disciplines of knowledge. However, although high and low achievers might use these general strategies similarly, the outcomes learners obtained might be a differentiating factor in achievement.

Chakrabarty and Saha (2014) describe low achievers as “a group of learners who fail to exhibit expected capability in attaining specific grades” (p. 160)”. Research on strategy use has established that the frequency of strategy use is a considerable factor in reaching success or achievement (Habók & Magyar, 2018; Griffiths, 2018). Additionally, the way in which a strategy is used might also be of great importance in contributing to achievement or success in language learning (Samperio, 2017a). Good, effective, proficient or successful learners are frequent users of strategies, and they usually use different types of learning strategies than low achievers. On the other hand, low achievers use a few strategies, less frequently, and they do not frequently achieve goals; they face difficulty to master language skills. Thus, the adequate and frequent use of effective strategies might help low achievers in being successful language learners.

Although learners engage in English lessons with a wide repertoire of learning strategies that they use across different learning contexts (Pressley & Woloshyn, 1995),

they might fail to attain good results in language learning. The strategies learners have in their repertoire might have proved to be efficient for their learning purposes, and they use them as the core strategies of their learning (Griffiths, 2003). However, low achievers might be using these strategies incorrectly. There is a lack of research on how low strategy use affects low achievement.

Samperio (2017b) found a set of strategies that low achievers and high achievers use similarly in language learning. He found that although both types of learners use the same strategies, they both use different processes. Thus, a learner might be using an adequate type and a significant number of strategies, even at a high-frequency rate; however, they might not be using the strategies efficiently because they are not directing the effort to areas they need to improve. Then, it is important to present the way low achievers use strategies in order for teachers to teach strategies to learners in areas they need to improve.

The main objectives of this study are to identify the strategies that high and low achievers use; additionally, to identify the strategies that both types of learners have in common and the differences there might be in the use of such strategies. With the purpose of achieving the stated objectives, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- What learning strategies do high and low achievers use in common?
- How do high and low achievers use learning strategies differently?

LITERATURE REVIEW

To begin, it is important to define what a learning strategy is. A language learning strategy can be defined as an individual action or behavior consciously and deliberately chosen by a learner in order to, mainly, understand, retain, retrieve and use information in language learning (Samperio, 2017b); additionally, Oxford (1990, p.8) states that strategies make language learning “easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations”. It can be concluded that strategies are purposeful, consequently, goal-oriented actions. Learners use strategies with a purpose in mind, and it might be the variable that facilitates success. That is, purposefully addressing strategies to areas that need to be understood, improved, or rehearsed can greatly enhance language learning. Nonetheless, it is not clear on what basis learners choose and use certain strategies and why they prefer them instead of others (Gu, 2005). It comes from the basic assumption that each learner has his/her own individual differences, and how this affects their learning.

Rubin (1975) identified seven characteristics of good language learners. According to Rubin, good language learners have a strong desire to communicate; they are not inhibited; they attend to form; they practice; they monitor their own speech and the speech of others, and they attend to meaning. Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary and Robbins (1999) indicated that “differences between more effective learners and less effective learners were found in the number and range of strategies used, in how

the strategies were applied to the task; and in whether they were appropriate for the task” (p.166). Rubin (1975) also mentioned that these characteristics much depend on variables such as target language proficiency, age, situation, cultural differences, and learning style. However, poor or good performance in language learning greatly depends on the motivation learners have to learn a language since it is the driving force to take actions in learning (Dörnyei, 2005).

Low achievers

Vann and Abraham (1990) defined unsuccessful learners as learners who move relatively slowly through an intensive English program. In a similar way, Wen and Johnson (1997) defined low achievers as learners who spend more time learning English and, in spite of that they have lower scores. Nonetheless, moving slowly should not define an unsuccessful learner. It simply explains that a learner might reach success at a different pace. Wen and Johnson’s description of low achievers adds the *low score* factor which is seen as the most common measure of low achievement; however, there are many factors that cause learners to be low or high achievers; such factors can be physiological or psychological, which might be multidimensional in nature (Chakrabarty & Saha, 2014). Normazidah, Koo, and Hazita (2012) explain that low achievers see English as a difficult subject to learn. They depend on the teacher as an authority, and they lack support to use English in an environment outside the classroom. They lack exposure to the target language; they have a limitation of vocabulary, and they lack the motivation to learn English, which causes a negative attitude towards the learning of English. Additionally, Chang (2010) states that some of the weaknesses come from learners’ attitudes to learning such as laziness, which correlates to the motivation for learning the language. Similarly, Alderman (2004) points out that poor performance comes from a lack of motivation, effort, and effective learning strategies. Samperio (2013) states that for a learner to reach success in language learning, a learner must be motivated to learn and to adopt adequate behaviors in learning; he adds that a learner must have a repertoire of strategies to choose from to solve language tasks. Finally, he explains that language learners need time to engage in proactive behavior outside the language classroom to practice the language and to expose themselves to language learning.

Macaro (2001) states, “those learners who are proactive in their pursuit of language learning appear to learn best” (p.264). Then, it is reasonable to believe that successful learners are proactive in their learning, and they use a number of learning strategies, which they acquired or learned over time and experience (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Therefore, they are able to find ways to help themselves deal with learning in any learning context; including everyday life situations.

Findings in research explain that learning strategies are purposefully used and goal oriented. Strategies are oriented to understand, practice, memorize, recall information, compensate for missing knowledge, and, additionally, to make learning easier, faster and more enjoyable (Oxford, 1990). The reason a learner consciously uses a learning

strategy significantly depends on the goals and the needs for learning a language. Passing an exam might push the learner to review his notes and to try to memorize grammar rules or to form study groups. Speaking proficiently for a job position at work can enhance communicative strategies, which might include pronunciation, fluency or practice strategies. Nonetheless, it is not clear if the strategies that learners use are fully oriented to their learning goals. The learning goal might define the right use of a strategy; for example, if the learner reviews his notes in an attempt to recall and memorize information seen in class whereas his goal is to improve speaking might not help him or her to reach their goal. However, if a learner is able to recognize his or her needs, then their choice for strategies might considerably improve learning because their effort will be boosted directly to the source of motivation for learning. Macaro (2006) explains that motivation and goals are so integral to strategies that a change in either of them can actually influence the actual nature of the strategy. For example, if motivation increases, the strategies learners use might also increase.

The way in which a learning strategy is used can influence the beneficial effect of the strategy. Samperio (2017a) suggests that a difference between low and high achievers resides in the way they use the strategies. In his research, he observed that both high and low achievers use some strategies but with different goals and purposes; for example, both types of learners reported watching TV as a strategy to practice. Findings indicate that high achievers watch TV with a purpose in mind such as observing grammar and pronunciation while low achievers just reported watching TV without a purpose in mind. Similarly, they both reported listening to the radio. High achievers reported listening to the radio in order to be able to identify vocabulary or phrases and to observe the pronunciation of the speakers whereas low achievers listened to the radio for fun. Although his findings are not conclusive, it is necessary to observe why and how low achievers are using strategies since little research has been conducted in this area; therefore, it is necessary to explore in more detail this aspect of strategy use.

Work conducted on high and low achievers

Much research on strategy use has been conducted on successful language learners (Green & Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2003, 2015; Cohen 2011); studies have aimed at discovering what successful learners do so that the strategies they use can be taught to low achievers. However, there is also research conducted on the strategies that low achievers use and ways to help them improve their use of the strategy. For example, Zewdie (2015) compared the language learning strategy use between high and low achievers. He discovered that both, high and low achievers use similar types of strategies. The difference he found fell on the way in which learners use the time for studying. He discovered that high achievers spend more time on task and in a more strategic way; they are more active in producing language, and they distribute their practice over multiple times monitoring their performance.

Similarly, Rajak (2004) investigated the learning strategies of low achieving learners of ESL. Although his findings indicate that low achievers reported an interest in learning English, which is an important factor in both learning and strategy use, the overall results obtained demonstrated that the low achieving learners used language learning strategies in a moderate frequency; that is, they do use strategies but without the enhancing effect in their achievement. Boggu and Sundarsingh (2014) investigated the language learning strategies among the less proficient learners by means of the SILL. Their findings indicated that the less proficient learners used Compensation and Memory strategies more frequently than Cognitive, Metacognitive, Social and Affective strategies. Boggu and Sundarsingh (2014) explain that less proficient learners employed Compensation and Memory strategies to substitute their lack of knowledge by guessing or inferring from various context clues or depending on their memory retention skills.

In a similar way, Tang (2015) discovered that high and low achievers vary considerably in Metacognitive strategy use. High achievers have a higher metacognitive behavior, and they are able to use more often strategies such as self-monitoring, planning, setting goals, seeking practice, overviewing, self-evaluating, paying attention, and identifying. It is important to consider that the behaviors that learners have towards learning a language come from varied sources such as motivation, interest in learning, attitudes towards learning, among others. Tang (2015) suggests that a Metacognitive strategy-training program for language low achievers would greatly improve low achievers in language learning.

Teaching learners how to use learning strategies can motivate learners to continue learning the language and not give up. Nonetheless, research on learners' willingness to adopt and use new procedures and methods for learning should be explored more closely.

METHODOLOGY

This study followed a mixed-methods approach designed to address the research questions and to observe data from the quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The study was conducted throughout a sixteen-week course, and data was collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

Participants

The university through its Language Center offers language classes not only to learners of the university but also to people from the community. The sample is composed of 57 learners: 38 low achievers and 19 high achievers. Learners belonged to all six levels that the language center offers. People of the community include a variety of different types of learners, from homemakers and high school learners about to enter the university to already university learners or professionals in areas such as

engineering, law, medicine, etc. Table1 shows the gender, type of student, and age of the participants.

Low achiever (N=38)		High achievers (N=19)	
Female	27	Female	16
Male	11	Male	3
Type of student		Type of student	
University student	24	University student	10
Non university student	14	Non university student	9
Age		Age	
18-22	27	18-22	12
23-27	7	23-37	6
28-more	4	28-more	1

Table1 Descriptive data of participants in the study

Instruments

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learners (SILL) version 7.0 for learners of English as a second or a foreign language developed by Oxford (1990) was used to gather numerical data. The SILL was used because it is the most reliable and influential tool used to study learning strategies (Chamot, 2004). Oxford (1990) categorizes her inventory in six subscales: Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, Metacognitive, Affective, and Social strategies.

Additional to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews added a qualitative dimension. Interviews complemented and extended the quantitative findings of the questionnaire. This type of design helps in complementing both approaches to provide a much more detailed perception of the findings. Creswell (2007) discusses the importance of selecting the appropriate candidates for interviews. Therefore, interviewees were selected to be as representative as possible of the variables of the learners in the sample. Learners were identified as High Achievers (HA) and Low Achievers (LA) according to final grades provided by the language center. Additionally, the sample also considered Low Strategy Users (LSU) and High Strategy Users (HSU) according to the average obtained in SILL and utilizing the frequency analysis of the quartiles.

Since achievement, for this study, is based on learners’ final grades, data were collected at the end of the term. Accordingly, 10 learners were approached for the interviews at the beginning of the following term. Data of five High Achievers (HA) with high strategy use (HSU) and five Low Achievers (LA) with low strategy use (LSU) were considered for the interviews.

The semi-structured interview aimed, mainly, at discovering the strategies they use to aid the areas that they consider difficult and the areas which they need to improve, in learning English. Additionally, interviews also inquired about the nine strategies that showed a significant difference in mean scores in the qualitative data. Such strategies were identified from the results of the SILL. Data of the interviews were scrutinized for strategies that learners use in language learning. After several cycles of reading, the strategies gathered were sorted into the six categories that the questionnaire proposes: Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, Metacognitive, Affective and Social strategies.

RESULTS

The strategies that low and high achievers use in common

This study considered achievement based on the final grades obtained at the end of the term on a scale from 0 to 100. It is important to mention that the language center where the study took place considers less than 70 a non-passing grade, which implies low achievement. Therefore, a learner must obtain a grade of 70, or higher, to be promoted to the next level. The final grades comprise all formal evaluations of all the skills of the learner, projects, homework, participation, etc.; consequently, it is an integral grade.

Low Achievers, for this study, (LA) are the students who obtained 70 as the final grade (N=38) whereas High Achievers (HA) are the learners who obtained 100 (N=19) as the final grade. It is essential to acknowledge here that a learner whose grade is 70 should be considered a successful learner since 70 allows learners to continue studying the next level. However, for the goal of this research, learners with a passing grade of 70 will be referred to as Low Achievers. It is equally important to acknowledge that students whose grade was lower than 70, although they are low achievers, they were not considered for the study since many of them dropped out even before finishing the course.

Cronbach test for reliability was applied to the SILL. Analysis at a global level indicated an alpha coefficient of $\alpha=.92$ which suggests that the questionnaire is a reliable instrument. Data of the questionnaire were analyzed in three different ways: globally, in categories, and individually to observe differences or commonalities.

The HA group (N=19) was associated with more frequent use of strategies $M=3.47$ ($SD=.52$). By comparison, the LA group (N=38) was associated with less frequent use of strategies $M= 3.24$ ($SD=.40$). To test the hypothesis that HA and LA were associated with a statistically significantly different mean of strategy use, an independent sample t-test was conducted. High Achievers cannot be associated with a statistically significantly larger mean of strategy use than Low Achievers. In other words, there is no statistically significant difference in the frequency of strategy use observed globally.

Qualitative data indicate that both HA and LA use similar types of strategies as reported by interviewees. High Achievers and Low achievers do not differ greatly on

the strategies they use even the ones they use at a low-frequency rate. It was possible to gather from data an important number of strategies that they use similarly. For instance, a higher number of Metacognitive and Memory strategies and a lower number of Compensation and Affective strategies. The strategies reported by interviewees were quantified and categorized according to Oxford's definition (1990). Figure 1 shows a comparative chart of the strategies gathered from the interviews. The number represents the times that strategies of that category were identified.

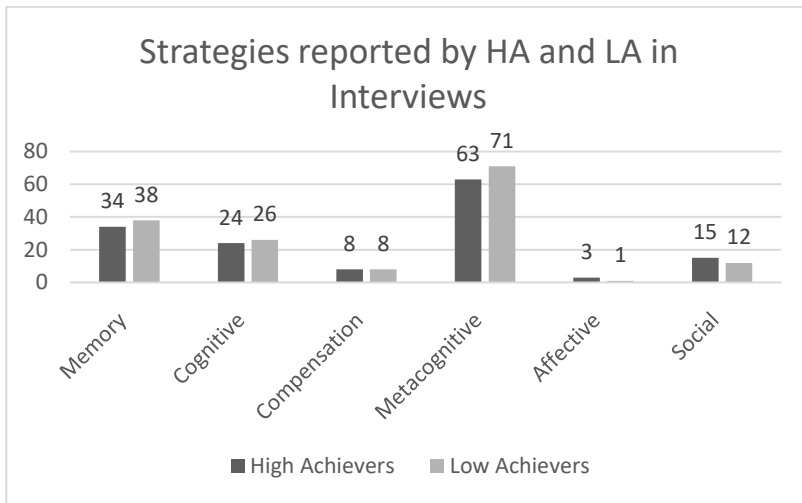


Figure 1: Types and total number of strategies reported by interviewees

As can be observed in Figure 1, Low Achievers reported a slightly higher number of Metacognitive, Memory and Cognitive strategies. In contrast, HA reported a higher number of Social and Affective strategies.

In contrast, quantitative data of strategies computed into categories show that LA use Compensation ($M=2.90$) and Affective strategies ($M=3.21$) more frequently than HA. It was also observed that HA use Memory ($M=3.21$), Cognitive ($M=3.53$), Metacognitive ($M=3.93$) and Social strategies ($M=3.97$) more frequently (See Table 2).

Category	Student type	Mean score	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Memory	Low Achiever	3.09	-.662	55	.510	-.114	.172
	High Achiever	3.21					
Cognitive	Low Achiever	3.15	-2.686	55	.010	-.375	.139
	High Achiever	3.53					
Compensation	Low Achiever	2.90	.447	55	.657	.061	.137
	High Achiever	2.84					
Metacognitive	Low Achiever	3.58	-1.974	55	.053	-.347	.176
	High Achiever	3.93					
Affective	Low Achiever	3.21	.223	55	.824	.039	.177
	High Achiever	3.17					
Social	Low Achiever	3.53	-2.229	55	.030	-.442	.198
	High Achiever	3.97					

Table 2: Mean scores and t-test for independent samples values of strategies computed into categories

A higher mean score suggests higher frequency; however, a t-test for independent samples was applied to strategies computed into categories to see if the difference was statistically significant.

Despite the difference in mean scores, a t-test for independent values on Table 2 showed no significant differences in Memory (.510), Compensation (.657), Metacognitive (.053) and Affective strategies (.824). Nonetheless, Cognitive (.010) and Social strategies (.030) do show a statistically significant difference. To be precise, HA use Cognitive and Social strategies more frequently than LA.

Since there was not a significant difference in most of the strategies computed into categories, and neither on the overall analysis, it was necessary to observe the strategies that HA and LA use at a single level. Therefore, strategies in the SILL were analyzed at a single level, and each strategy was contrasted with its counterpart.

Figures 2 and 3 show contrastive graphs of the strategies of the questionnaire. As it can be perceived, axes of each strategy seem to follow a parallel pattern; that is, the strategies that HA frequently use are also frequently used by LA, and the strategies that HA use at a low-frequency rate, LA also use them at a low-frequency rate.

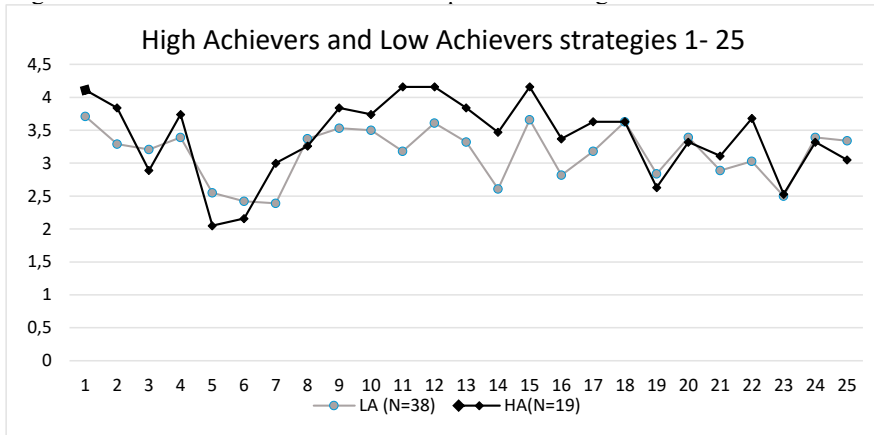


Figure 2: High and Low Achievers mean scores comparison. Strategies 1-25

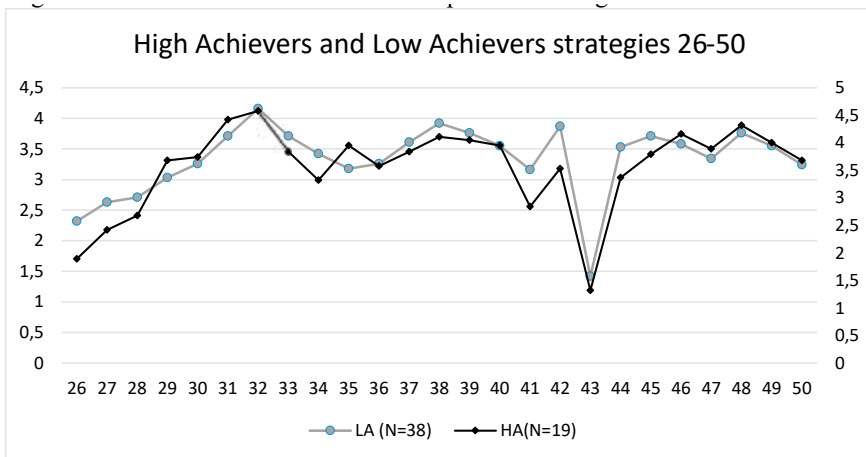


Figure 3: High and Low Achievers mean scores comparison. Strategies 26-50

High Achievers and Low Achievers differ mostly in the frequency of use. However, figures 2 and 3 show that there are strategies that HA use less frequently than LA (or LA use such strategies more frequently than HA), for instance, strategies 3, 5, 6, 19, 20, 25, 26, 27, 34, 41, 42, and 44. This suggests that HA use different strategies to reach their learning goal.

Although in Figures 2 and 3 it is possible to observe that HA use less frequently strategies above-mentioned, results of the t-test for independent samples indicated no significant differences in most of them. In other words, HA and LA use strategies at a similar frequency rate. However, t-test results of strategies in isolation also show a significant difference in strategies 2, 11, 12, 13, 14, 29, 31, 35, 48. Table 3 shows t-test values and categories of strategies that showed a significant difference between HA and LA.

Table 3 shows that High Achievers use the nine strategies statistically more frequently than their counterparts. Among the strategies that high achievers use more frequently, it can be observed that they use four Cognitive strategies (11, 12, 13, 14) and two Metacognitive strategies (35, 31) more frequently.

Table 3: T-test values of strategies with a significant difference.

Item	Category	LA Mean	HA Mean	t	df	Sig.	Mean Diff	Std. Error Diff
2	Memory	3.29	3.84	-2.14	55	0.37	-.39	.250
11	Cognitive	3.18	4.16	-3.70	55	0.00	-.97	.263
12	Cognitive	3.61	4.16	-2.26	55	0.28	-.55	.244
13	Cognitive	3.32	3.84	-2.17	55	.034	-.52	.242
14	Cognitive	2.61	3.47	-3.12	55	.003	-.86	.278
29	Compensation	3.03	3.68	-3.11	55	.003	-.65	.211
31	Metacognitive	3.71	4.42	-2.64	55	.011	-.71	.269
35	Metacognitive	3.18	3.95	-.246	55	.017	-.76	.309
48	Social	3.76	4.32	-2.12	55	.038	-.55	.260

Although it is not conclusive, the use of more Cognitive and Metacognitive strategies might be a factor that contributes to higher achievement. Research in strategy use has suggested that higher use of Cognitive and Metacognitive strategies contribute to higher achievement (Magno, 2010; Bruen, 2001; Bachman & Palmer, 2010).

Contrary to expectations, this study did not find a significant difference in the frequency of strategy use between HA and LA in the overall analysis. Nonetheless, strategies computed into categories showed a difference in Cognitive and Social strategies, that is, HA use them more frequently. Additionally, the analysis conducted on strategies individually shows that HA use nine strategies at a higher frequency rate than LA. However, the findings of the current study do not support the previous research, which explains that HA use strategies more frequently than LA.

Qualitative findings, described in the next section, support quantitative findings and signal a higher use of Cognitive strategies by HA. Additionally, findings indicate a higher use of Metacognitive and Memory strategies by both HA and LA.

How high and low achievers use learning strategies

Findings in quantitative data in the previous section have established that HA and LA use strategies similarly. By means of interviews, it was intended to observe if HA and LA use strategies differently. The creation of profiles of learners for the interview

allowed to observe that twelve Low Achievers are also identified in the range of low strategy use ($M=3.0$ or below); that is, Low Strategy Users (LSU). This would not support the idea that students who use a greater number of strategies get higher grades. In contrast, seven Low Achievers are also High Strategy Users (HSU), ($M=3.6$ or above). To be precise, low achievers can also frequently use strategies; however, their frequent use does not boost them to obtain high grades.

On the other hand, out of the nineteen High Achievers observed in the data, eight HA are also High Strategy Users (HSU), and three HA were low strategy users. This would support the idea that the higher the number of strategies used, the higher the achievement. In other words, despite the low frequency of strategy use, they managed to obtain a passing grade of 100.

Simple statistical analysis was used to examine the number and the type of strategies gathered from interviews. It showed that HA and LA use a very similar type of strategies (see Figure 1). HA and LA reported a higher number of Metacognitive, Memory, and Cognitive strategies and a lower number of Social, Compensation, and Affective strategies (see Figure 1). In order to identify the difference in strategy use, the nine strategies that showed a significant difference were included in the interviews.

Despite findings in quantitative data, qualitative data of the nine strategies observed showed no significant differences between High Achievers and Low Achievers. An example of this is the Memory strategy (number 2 in the questionnaire) which tries to discover if learners write sentences with new vocabulary in order to memorize it. Neither High Achievers nor Low Achievers reported using the strategy. They, instead, reported using other strategies to pursue the same goal. Learners reported making lists of vocabulary and repeating the list aloud or in writing in order to store the new vocabulary in memory. Additionally, on strategy 12, *I practice the sounds of English*, both HA and LA reported repeating aloud or in silence in order to practice the pronunciation of the new word, attending pronunciation lessons in the SAC, or following teachers' advice in pronouncing the word. Making lists of vocabulary and trying to store information by repeating are strategies that learners transfer from their general learning, which they have found useful for their learning. However, differently from HA, LA reported paying attention to the mouth of the speakers.

It is apparent that the language level of the learners, despite their categorization in this study, is a variable that affects the choice and the use of a strategy. For instance, starting a conversation in English (strategy 14), looking for people to talk to in English (strategy 35), using the word in different ways (strategy 2 and strategy 13), or finding a word or a phrase that means the same to what we want to say (strategy 29) require a certain level of language knowledge to be used correctly. On one hand, starting a conversation requires not only the language knowledge to engage in a conversation but also an adequate level of Willingness to Communicate (Reinders & Wattana, 2011) and self-esteem. Additionally, it entails Affective strategies that can help the learner feel comfortable with what he or she is able to say. Learners may experience feelings of insecurity, nervousness, lack of confidence, or shame. A lack of knowledge to engage

in a conversation may push the learner to look for different ways to practice. However, starting a conversation denotes a way to look for practice in a meaningful way.

Additionally, using circumlocution or a synonym to convey intended meaning is a strategy that even native speakers use in their L1. Very often, we are not able to access the word we want to say even though we know it, and we turn to other words or expressions to deliver the message. This strategy is probably transferred to language learning in an attempt to make ourselves understood. Nonetheless, in language learning, it is necessary to have a repertoire of vocabulary and grammar structures in order to be able to use it adequately.

Qualitative data helped in deepening the understanding of quantitative data; consequently, it does not allow us to generalize findings since HA and LA show similarities, but also they show differences. It was found that LA could use the same strategies as HA, and vice versa, and with the same purpose in mind as HA. For example, repeating aloud or writing many times to memorize or to practice the sounds of English. In contrast, LA seem to invest more time in strategies that require more effort. For example, making index cards to memorize vocabulary or investing time in webpages to practice vocabulary.

Both HA and LA use similar strategies to store and recall vocabulary, such as repeating and writing many times the word. They also reported making sentences or questions with the new word to be able to memorize it. LA can spend more time memorizing vocabulary. They reported making index cards and looking for the translation of the word. LA can also deploy complex strategies such as trying to explain the vocabulary to classmates to corroborate they have understood.

Neither HA nor LA have in mind trying to speak like native speakers; instead, they try to improve their pronunciation by watching TV and listening to the radio. However, HA pay attention to the way native speakers produce the sounds of English. They pay attention to the movement of the mouth, lips, tongue, and teeth. In contrast, LA pay attention to their own mouths to produce the sounds of English. Both HA and LA follow teachers' advice on pronunciation. However, repeating many times aloud or in silence seems to work for both types of achievers to improve pronunciation.

Both HA and LA look for help with someone with more language knowledge such as the teacher, a classmate, or they look for clarification on the internet. Both types of learners mostly put into practice their knowledge when they watch TV or when they listen to the radio, and they look for opportunities to practice speaking in environments in which they can feel safe such as in class or in conversation classes in the Self Access Center where conversation classes are adapted to their level.

DISCUSSION

The present study was designed to determine the strategies that high achievers and low achievers use in common, and how differently they use learning strategies. Contrary to expectations, quantitative data suggested that HA and LA are not entirely on opposite sides of the frequency of strategy use. Quantitative data allowed observing that, in

overall; HA and LA do not have a significant difference in frequency of strategy use. These findings are consistent with Zewdie's (2015) findings who compared the strategies of HA and LA and discovered that both types of learners use similar strategies and at a frequent rate. A factor that can be attributed to these findings is the instrument that was employed to measure strategy use. The strategies included in the questionnaire do not allow observing all the strategies learners use. Interviewees reported an ample number of strategies, which were not included in the questionnaire.

However, the analysis of strategies computed into categories shows that HA use Metacognitive and Memory strategies at a higher frequency rate. Furthermore, results indicated that HA use nine strategies more frequently than their counterpart (see Results section).

Researchers have demonstrated that the frequency of strategy use as well as the type of strategies can be a differentiating factor between success and failure in language learning (Griffiths, 2003). It is important to note here that a strategy is not an isolated action but a "chain" of actions or behaviors that contribute to reaching the intended learning goal. Oxford (2011) suggests that strategies are interlocked in chains and mutually supportive. For example, the strategy of *reviewing lessons often* might differ in the activities learners use to review. A learner would review information by reading; in contrast, another learner may make notes, highlight important information, make summaries, make questionnaires, etc. Thus, the successful effect of the strategy might be attributed to the activities that the learners perform while using strategies. Additionally, the number of activities can be sparked by the learners' motivation or learning goal. For instance, a more motivated student might invest more time and more activities can be deployed. Very frequently, learners mechanically use strategies that they believe, or perceive, beneficial for their learning; nonetheless, they might be misdirecting effort and time because they do not purposefully use strategies for reaching their learning goals.

Both High Achievers and Low Achievers reported fluency in speaking and grammar as their areas in which they feel they need to progress. High Achievers seem to better direct effort to such areas. For example, they reported attending conversation classes in the Self-Access Center (SAC) and looking for opportunities to speak with classmates, family or friends, which eventually would help them to improve fluency. Low achievers, in contrast, reported strategies that might not help them improve the areas they need, for instance, translating, listening to the radio, and watching TV; nonetheless, it was not inquired how these strategies would improve their fluency in speaking. This could indicate that LA are misdirecting effort to strategies that might not help them reach their learning goals. This finding concurs with Chamot et al. (1999) who discovered that more effective learners differ from less effective in selecting appropriate strategies for the task. The appropriateness of the strategy for the task can greatly reduce effort and time in learning. However, it is necessary to consider that, at times, learners perceive what they do in learning as something useful, or even pleasant, and they hardly ever consider the outcomes of their learning activities.

Low Achievers invest more time in learning English outside the classroom. To some extent, this finding was unexpected. Researchers have demonstrated that the investment of time for learning is a characteristic of good learners (Rubin, 1975, 1987), or high achievers. However, the number of strategies reported by LA in interviews suggest that they invest more time in learning outside the classroom. A possible explanation is that the strategies LA use might not be appropriate for the task; consequently, they spend more time performing activities that help them in reaching their learning goal. They need more and different mechanisms to boost their learning. Low Achievers reported conducting activities outside the classroom that help them in learning; for instance, reviewing, reading and rereading notes, watching videos for pronunciation, or attending to pronunciation class in the SAC, writing vocabulary many times, and doing exercises on the internet, which represent invested time. However, such strategies do not seem to help them entirely in the areas in which they need to improve such as fluency in speaking and grammar.

It is reasonable to believe that the perception learners have about their learning is distorted by what they pursue in language learning. However, what they have to know, the deficiencies they have in language learning, and what they want are different things, and might lead the learner to use strategies inadequately. That is, learners may perceive the need to improve fluency in speaking because it is what they want; it is their goal, but what they lack is the correct grammar or vocabulary to express their ideas; therefore, more effort should be directed to grammar practice and vocabulary acquisition strategies instead. Consequently, it is the job of the teacher to provide feedback to learners, to help them in identifying their lacks and needs, and to provide learners with strategies to help them improve in such areas.

It was also interesting to observe that High and Low achievers use strategies such as trying to memorize lists of vocabulary to store information in their memory, however, LA reported it more frequently. Memorizing by writing many times, repeating aloud or silently, can be considered a rote-learning memory and, according to Himsel (2012), other strategies can give better results than trying to cram information in memory. Van Blerkom (2009) suggested that by only reading information is not enough to get it into the Long-Term Memory. He explains that much of that information will never make it past the immediate memory and into the Working Memory. Thus, learners could use mnemonic devices such as making acronyms, associations, explaining with own words, or making predicting questions as better strategies for memorizing; that is, transforming information into something more meaningful.

Thompson (2005) explains that good language learners are more willing to take risks. However, LA seem to remain in their comfort area and tend to look for the help of someone more knowledgeable such as the teacher, or they even turn to the dictionary to look for the word they want to use. Additionally, since they interact with their classmates and in the classroom, they tend to use Spanish because they know that their interlocutor will understand what they want to say. This finding can be attributed to learners' personality and the self-perception of what they can do with their language knowledge. Similarly, it can be attributed to the affective filter (Krashen,

1988), which associates emotional variables. This psychological barrier might hinder language production and inhibit the opportunities to improve fluency in speaking.

At times, language learners do not feel secure with what they know and feel afraid of making mistakes even though they can identify and correct their mistakes. Both HA and LA are capable of recognizing their mistakes, they are aware of their own mistakes, and they are tolerant of their own mistakes. To this, Thompson (2005) explains that not being worried about making mistakes in language learning is a feature of good language learners. Additionally, HA can monitor their performance, and they are able to adapt strategies to suit their needs, for example, not doing anything when they spot a mistake for the sake of fluency or thinking how they can improve next time. Similarly, Low Achievers are also able to notice their mistakes, and they deploy strategies such as contrasting correct and incorrect forms for them to clarify information, which eventually will help them do better in learning. Both HA and LA can manage their mistakes and can deal with them in order for them to build confidence.

This research did not intend to investigate the influence of variables such as age and gender in the selection and use of language learning strategies. However, research has posited that the gender (Roohani & Zarei, 2013; Viriya & Sapsirin, 2014) and age of the learner (Suesca & Torres, 2016) influence the choice of learning strategies. Therefore, it is important to encourage research that explores the influence that age and gender of low achievers and low strategy users as contributors to low achievement in language learning.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the current study was to determine the differences in strategy use between Low Achiever and High Achievers. Findings suggest that, in general, High achievers do not differ from Low achievers in the frequency of strategy use of the strategies included in the SILL. Findings also indicated differences in how learners choose appropriate strategies for pursuing their learning goals. Low Achievers do not purposefully choose the correct strategies that can boost their learning and that they do not wisely spend effort in using strategies. Although Low Achievers frequently use strategies which lack focus, this is not limited to low achievers. High Achievers also tend to use inappropriate strategies for the purpose in mind. That is, they select the strategies that might not help them in learning. Thus, it cannot be concluded that Low Strategy Users are Low Achievers. Low achievers can display a wide variety of strategies, and they use strategies in the same way as HA do; nonetheless, they are not necessarily low strategy users.

One of the most significant findings to emerge from this study is that low achievers do not choose strategies consciously that match their learning goal, and they select strategies from their repertoire, which they perceive as useful. Researchers have not treated in much detail the conscious reasons learners have for using a learning strategy. Consequently, it would be interesting to know if learners can choose strategies that aid their learning goal.

A pedagogical implication of these findings is that strategy instruction should deal with learners' necessities and the deficiencies in language learning, in consequence, direct strategies to aspects that will influence learning.

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