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Facultad de Lenguas

*Strategies to infer meaning of unknown words in a text used by children in a
secondary school in Tehuacán*

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in a secondary school in Tehuacán*

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LICENCIADO EN ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS

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Dedication

For all those teachers who believe that it is impossible that students in a community can not learn a second language easily without previous knowledge of English language.

I also dedicate this work to my grandmother Maria Felix and my grandfather Ildefonso Brenes who made me happy during my childhood because they bought me everything that I wanted and I needed, they made me dream and feel like a little princess.

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Abstract

In Mexico, learning English has become essential because in the competitive job market, speaking English is not an option, but a necessity due the enrollment of students learning English as a foreign language in the formal education system. Thus, this project was conducted to determine how ten adolescent students were able to understand an A1 reading comprehension task through the use of context clues. The students were selected depending on their level of performance (high, medium and low).

In this study, some of the reading comprehension strategies that the participants of this research use to infer meaning of unknown words are: the context, the use of the dictionary, the use of cognates, recognition of titles, studying vocabulary and teacher`s help. These strategies are explained and the results demonstrate the rate scale in which these strategies are used by the participants of the study as well.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This is the first chapter of a research based on skills that 10 students from a secondary school develop in reading comprehension. These students have little formal instruction in English, namely in reading comprehension strategies. In this introduction, further chapters are briefly explained and outlined. This chapter begins with the purpose of the study followed by a succinct description of the participants and the place where this research was developed. Later, the background of the researcher and her reasons to conduct this particular research are explained. Finally, a research question is presented. This research question will be presented in Chapter 3 besides the methodology of this research. In the following section, the role of English as a global language, and its consequences to hold such a status are explained.

English is the language of business and globalization, it has been widely spread throughout the world and it has become the main language in many regions of the world where it is spoken or learned as a foreign or second language. In Mexico, English is very important because in the competitive job market, speaking English is not an option, but a necessity due the enrollment of students in the formal education system. According to UNESCO, “gross enrollment ratio at the secondary school level has increased from just 54 percent in 1991 to 90 percent in 2014” (Magaziner and Monroy, 2016, para. 1). This large scale growth in enrollments has placed tremendous pressure in the Mexican education system.

Kolb's model (1984) suggests that the learning process requires a continuous recycling experience, reflection, conceptualization and active experimentation. A formal presentation of the system will be reasonable only if the amount of experience is relevant in useful contexts. From the communicative point of view, experiential learning implies encouraging authentic language use and it involves the learner, specially in receptive skills. In other words, the learner is brought in touch with real life language use by being exposed to authentic language, for example, when reading a text. This is why, doing research in this area is of high importance.

1.1 Significance of the study

The purpose of this thesis is to provide theoretical and empirical justification in my experiential language teaching to justify how students predict meaning when they read any text through the use of inference mechanisms. Such analysis includes the different skills they need to develop in reading comprehension without too much language knowledge. The results of this paper aims to prove that students use certain strategies of inference to predict meaning when they read a text in English.

The significance of the study is based on the fact that teenagers can understand English texts without taking English classes before arriving to junior high school. This research has proven that students can comprehend English texts with the use of different strategies to infer meaning of unknown words.

1.2 The context of the research

This research was performed in Altepexi which is a small town in Tehuacán located in Puebla valley. Here, English language is learned in secondary schools as part of the

mexican educational program, that is, the national curricula. The participants in this study were 10 adolescents who present different range of performance levels in the classroom (high, medium and low according to their scores at school), 4 girls and 6 boys, all of them from a public secondary school.

1.3 Background of the researcher

I have had the opportunity to work with different generations of students, based on the observations I have done during 19 years of experience with adolescents in this context, I assume each generation has presented difficulties while learning English language; in addition, with the implementation of the *Reforma Educativa* in Mexico and the new necessities of the curricula, I have also changed my way of teaching.

Specifically, in a global world, the objective of the syllabus in basic education implies to develop the four abilities needed to learn a language: listening, speaking, reading and writing, which final aim is that of developing a communicative competence on students. Based on this description, I chose reading skill to work with my students because I aim to prove that the practice of reading itself will provide my students with reading comprehension strategies to infer unknown words in English language; thus I will help my students to ease and probably accelerate the process of developing reading skills in English.

1.4 Research Question

What reading comprehension strategies do students, from an public secondary school, use to infer meaning of unknown words in an A1 reading comprehension task?

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, it was described briefly the importance of the English language in the world, in Mexico and in the context where this study was carried out as an overview to the problem of A1 English reading comprehension text. Furthermore, the following chapter is based on the literature review, the main topics related to the aim of this research will be stated and developed.

Chapter II

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, there are presented some aspects and concepts related the strategies that learners use to comprehend whatever they read from the literature to practical issues. Some important aspects that will be reviewed in this chapter are how some reading clues can help learners to predict meaning in small texts when they read through inference mechanisms.

2.1 What is reading?

According to Stauffer (1969) reading skill can be described in several ways depending on the observed necessities that he saw through the time. This apparently simple act of reading has many conceptions due the importance and complexity of itself:

“Reading is a complex process.
Reading means to get information from the printed page.
Reading is the ability to pronounce and comprehend the printed word.
Reading is interpreting signs, letters or symbols by assigning meanings to them.
Reading is receiving ideas and impressions from an author via the printed word.” (Stauffer, 1969, p. 5).

In other words, reading is the interaction between the reader (person who reads) and the written text to be read. It doesn't matter if the reader reads aloud or in silence, the main purpose is to obtain information and to understand the text. For instance, if the reader has the disposition to receive information, he will have an idea about what he reads.

However, if the reader has a mental noise in that moment, probably, he can not catch the message of whatever he reads at that time. Additionally, Harvey and Goudvis (2000, p.5) claim that “reading is thinking”. In other words, when students develop the ability of reading, they become thinking and they form images in their minds so as time passes they make judgements of whatever they know in relation of whatever they have read.

As mentioned before by Stauffer, (1969, p.5), “Reading is interpreting signs, letters or symbols” by assigning meanings to them. Reading is an skill performed through the thinking process that happens in the brain. Thus, reading demands that readers can “pick up factual information” (Harvey and Goudvis, 2000 p. 159) as soon as they read, students will become aware of their thinking processes. It is called a strategy to access to the content particularly in difficult more challenging Harvey and Goudvis (2000 p. 159). In other words, when learners have access to the text their brain decodes the new information and their minds are molded.

2.2 Reading strategies and its use

In order to improve reading skill, it is necessary to mention some reading strategies that students can use in order to improve their comprehension while learning English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL). For instance, Kottler, Kottler, and Street (2008 p. 33) suggest that one of the strategies that functions on students’ interest on reading is the selection of interesting material in class:

“English learners benefit greatly from the use of visual aids”.
“English learners may not be familiar with the objects or may not yet connect the english words to the objects. Select models of items to support your units. one high teacher found having

artifacts and pictures to show students to be extremely helpful.”
(p. 32)

In other words, to increase the interest on reading, the teacher should provide attractive material according to students' age, likes and interests to obtain students' attention but also the material must reinforce knowledge of other subjects that are complementary. By this way, students might reinforce their previous knowledge with the new one acquired in their language class. Furthermore, the use of authentic material increases reading interest by using the technique of pre reading, during reading and after reading activities that can keep interest on students.

As it has been considered, reading is a complex process. Due to the fact that there are different strategies that can help reading comprehension in students, this part of the literature review chapter aims to describe some of these strategies such as: skimming, scanning, the use of the dictionary, the use of cognates, and other inference clues like (titles and subtitles, pictures, maps graphs and schemes). Furthermore, it is important to mention additionally that the teacher's role in the classroom is essential when they enhance students in reading.

2.3 Inferring meaning of unknown words through reading strategies

According to Anderson & Pearson, (1984, mentioned in Dole, Roehler and Person, 1991 p. 245) “one of the most common findings of recent reading research is that drawing inferences is an essential part of the comprehension process, even among young children”. In other words, when students infer meaning of unknown words they realize in their minds their thinking process that allows them to construct meaning and have knowledge of new things along their life. Furthermore, “inference is the heart of

the comprehension process” as people can “construct their own models of meaning for a given text, readers and listeners alike use inferencing extensively to fill in details omitted in text and to elaborate what they read” (Anderson, 1977; Anderson, Spiro, & Anderson, 1978 mentioned in Dole, Roehler and Person 1991 p. 245). Thus, in this research we can see that inference is used as a means by the participants to understand or interpret unknown words. Additionally, Baretta, Tomitch, MacNair, Lim, and Waldie (2009, para. 5) claim that:

“the act of inferencing is paramount for text comprehension because it makes possible for readers to establish a representation of the meaning of the text in memory on the basis of its coherence relations and the readers' general knowledge (Gernsbacher, 1990, 1997; Halldorson & Singer, 2002; Linderholm, 2002; Long, Oppy, & Seely, 1997; Magliano, Trabasso, & Graesser, 1999; Noordmann & Vonk, 1992; Trabasso & Magliano, 1996; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983)”.

In other words, definitions given by Dole et al (1991) and Baretta et al (2009) establish that, when students infer meaning of unknown word, they comprehend a text and elaborate their own meaning of the text in their memory; thus, students develop the reading comprehension skill. In the following sections of this chapter there are some reading strategies enlisted.

2.3.1 Skimming

As previously mentioned, skimming is one of the strategies used to develop the reading skill. Marks Beale (2013) mentions that:

“Skimming is one of the tools you can use to read more in less time. Skimming refers to looking *only* for the general or main ideas, and works best with non-fiction (or factual) material. With skimming, your overall understanding is reduced because you don't read everything. You read only what is important to your purpose. Skimming takes place while

reading and allows you to look for details in addition to the main ideas”
(para. 4-5).

In other words, Marks Beale (2013) says that skimming is an important tool to get information from a reading text. This can help students to save time when they read to get only the main ideas from the text trying to reduce it and avoiding to read the text completely. In another perspective Grellet (1992, p. 19) states that skimming is an activity “which requires an overall view of the text and implies a definite reading competence”. Both authors have similar conceptions about this strategy, in short, both point of view give the idea that skimming is used to obtain a global generalization of the text.

2.3.2 Scanning

Marks Beale (2013) said that students scan a text when they give a quick view of the text by looking over the written information. Particularly, Marks Beale (2013) claims that “You scan when your aim is to find specific pieces of information.” (para. 25). Marks Beale (2013 para. 18) mentions that “scanning is another useful tool for speeding up your reading. Unlike skimming, when scanning, you look only for a specific fact or piece of information without reading everything.”.

It seems that both authors, Marks (2013), and Grellet (1992) share similar conceptions about *scanning*. For instance, according to Grellet (1992, p.19), scanning is used to locate specific information in a passage. She claims that only “with the eyes wander over the text until we find” the information “what we are looking for”, it could be “a name a date or less specific piece of information” like telephone directories, a page of

classified advertisement, train schedules or scanning information from a newspaper article to find information about different persons.

In other words, Grellet (1992) and Marks (2013) support that scanning is a technique used to locate information in a text, in other words, it is to look for specific information. For instance, it might help to read a text quickly to solve specific questions in exams of reading comprehension. Another example can be when people give a glance to specific information while looking for a job in the newspaper or they want to buy a house or rent an apartment, they pick up the information they need with their glance.

2.3.3 The use of the dictionary.

Kottler, Kottler, and Street (2008, p. 101), mention that if somebody is learning a new language it is necessary the use of a bilingual dictionary “as an additional resource” to find new words while reading, for example some students can not understand a paragraph because of some words, consequently they lose the main idea of the topic in the text, that is why the use of dictionary can be helpful . Furthermore, according to Donaghey, Rogers, Maruniak, Varela, Flavel and Carmichael (2013), the dictionary is an important tool when students are learning a language because dictionaries can help students to find unknown words which might limit the general understanding of the text. For some students dictionaries are vital because without them they feel lost when they do not know all words while reading a text.

Continuing with Kottler, Kottler, and Street (2008, p. 101), “students should have access to the libraries and also need an orientation to the library collections and how to access them. As some children have no time to read at home, time in class should be

provided.” In other words, as students have no orientations of how to use libraries and library, it is necessary to promote reading in the classroom.

Additionally, Sadoski, (2004 p. 66) thinks that readers are “underskilled and undermotivated” in the use of a bilingual dictionary and when they feel fed up they are not interested in the text anymore. In other words, both authors argue that reading becomes tedious for students when they are consulting in the dictionary with many word they can not get through the context and they have time pressure to finish reading. By comparing Sadoski (2004) and Kottler, Kottler, and Street (2008)’s opinions, it can be inferred that most students fed up and desperate when they have to look for a lot of words in the dictionary then they become stressed and lose interest in reading.

Moreover, there exist two types of dictionaries: bilingual and monolingual. On the one hand, according to a Donaghey et al. (2013) a bilingual English-Spanish dictionary has two parts. One half provides english words with spanish meanings and the other half gives spanish words with english meanings “ and the other one the opposite organization” (p.34) . On the other hand, a monolingual dictionary contains words with spanish meanings all of them with alphabetical order.

To sum up about the use of dictionaries as a tool for the betterment of reading comprehension, this is an indispensable tool for people who are learning a second language because it provides the comprehension of new vocabulary and clarifies doubts.

2.3.4 The use of cognates

When students are reading a text, cognates play an important role. Cognates are words in English which look similarly to words in spanish they can be understandable easily.

Kottler, Kottler, and Street (2008, p.62) defined cognates as English words very “similar” to Spanish and sometimes “they are pronounced differently” or they have different spellings as well. In other words the easy association of the mother tongue with the target language can help students to recognize some words in a text which are associated with their mother tongue in relation to the studied target language, English in the Mexican context.

2.3.5 Examining clues available in title and subtitles.

According to Saggion and Lapalme (1998 p.7) “Titles usually contain complete descriptions of the document in order to convey the information in a more precise form” that means that titles are so generous because they enroll the topic about without starting reading yet. On the other hand, subtitles according to the same authors “Indicate the sub themes of the document but also complete descriptions of entities that could be found there. Subtitles indicate the content of the section”, in other words that might be used in the abstract to indicate some section about the different themes in a text.

2.3.6 Clues in pictures, maps, graphs and charts.

According to Tversky (2001, p. 80), “pictures represent meaning more directly than alphabetic written language”, usually pictures are used to communicate, to map places and people can guess meaning by using them too. In other words pictures have the intention of communicating implicit messages; sometimes a pictorial representation says more than a hundred words. “Pictures communicate and represent concepts. Actually with the proliferation of technology pictures, depictions and visualizations are rising again creating, producing and transmitting pictures. Pictures are used to concrete ideas and

create spatial inferences” (p. 81). One example of the use of images to develop comprehension is the use of concept maps which mostly use images.

According to Saeedi , Saif, Asadzadeh and Qavam (2013, p. 546) “concept maps provide multiple individual views and experiences and the representation of knowledge is extensive”. In other words concept maps are not easy. individuals summarize a whole text as each one thinks is correct or understandable but it depends of their experiences and the level of knowledge they have to make them assertively. In addition, Heinze-Fry and Novak, 1990; Novak, Gowin, and Johansen, 1983; Starr and Krajcik, 1990; Willerman and MacHarg, 1991 (cited in Edmondson, 2005 p. 20) argued that “concept maps promote meaningful learning and effective teaching. They have been helpful in representing qualitative aspects of students learning” in other words concept maps help students and teachers. Students can express their feelings and opinions and for teachers might be an evaluation of a theme given by this way the teacher can check the student's comprehension.

Hall and Sabey (2007 para.21) define graphic organizers as “examine the organization of a text” in other words, this happens when students have read the whole text and they have the idea of the way they are going to organize it graphically. According to Hall and Sbey (2007) this graphic organizers are helpful to pick out the most important information in a text and discern meaningful connections. when students get enough ability in realizing them they have acquired literacy skills and then they are able to emphasize content connections. Semantic word maps help students to understand the relationship between words by grouping them according to the categories, after examining them they need to work into a graphic organizer. This activity is valid when the goal is learning concepts.

2.3.7 Contextualization cues, situated inferences.

Levinson (2003, p. 35) claims that “utterances carry with them instructions about how to build the contexts in which they will be interpreted” in other words this expressions how people can interpret or infer by context for example in the following dialogue:

A: Hey, how about supper together
B: I have a jealous husband

2.1 Example taken from Levinson (2003, p.35)

Person B does not mentions that she can not go, she argues implicitly the reason. As a consequence Person A must interpret the implicit cue. It is in certain way pragmatics. Gumperz (1992 in Levinson, 2003) mentions that “the notion of contextualization cue is better exemplified rather than analytically explicated” (p.33). “Those assumptions can create their own contexts. Some have argue that the interlocutor accommodate the utterance by interpreting it and the central meaning depends of the background” (p. 34). In other words both assumptions are closely associated and are explained with the exemplification above in the dialogue where an implicit cue appears. For instance, anybody without a great reading comprehension can interpret that person B can not go, because she has a jealous husband.

2.4. Developing comprehension.

Thorndike (in Stauffer, 1969) establishes a comparison between reading activity with a math problem. He mentions that seldom activities represent the same difficulty level because in both cases students must take use of reasoning to understand. it consist in selecting the right elements of a certain situation. For instance, at the time of developing the activity of reading the word must be selected, repressed, emphasized, correlated and

organized so the reader must manipulate the ideas to discover the logical relations in order to synthesize information and draw conclusions. In contrast, mathematics' students realize logical operations because they have to respond to a stimuli. the author also mentions that "in psychology today, the term reasoning usually refers to the solution of problems by logical operations" (p.13) as in maths because reading is reasoning.

In other words these two complex activities have a relation each other because in both cases they respond to a stimulus. when students solve a math problem they firstable have to read. After reading, their brain must process the known information with the act they will realize (the operation) they will put into practice to solve the problem.

2.4.1 The schemes as comprehension strategy.

According to Tracey and Mandel Morrow (2006, p. 51), schema theory is considered a constructivist theory that "strives to explain how knowledge is created and used by learners", in other words when students use schemas they can build their own knowledge. Duke and Pearson (2002) also suggested that visual representation can help readers understand, organize, and remember what they read. In other words schemes can work as visual help for students who have difficulties to comprehend a text while reading.

2.4.2 Drawing as comprehension strategy.

This technique is used to communicate something. In education, this technique helps the teacher and psychology therapists to discover a necessity of whatever a person represents in a drawing. Drawing is deeper because it is the collection of the

information through pictures or symbols that students can realize according to their interpretations, feelings and interests of whatever they read. For Kottler, Kottler, & Street (2008, p. 87), this reading technique can help students to understand a reading text through a picture by saying that “pictures can enhance vocabulary development”. It is also used by therapists to describe situations. For instance, Kottler, Kottler, & Street (2008, p.87) mentioned that “in psychology, therapists use this technique to create sense of intimacy that does not require too much verbal elaboration in patients. in language it can describe a sequence of events to be interpreted”. In other words, as evaluative technique, when drawings do not show whatever the text mentions that is the result that students did not understand the text. The evaluation of any reading text made with drawings is considered a subjective evaluation and it has too much meaning in comparison with the evaluation that psychologist realise when they ask people to draw their family, or their hand.

2.4.3 The teacher as a tool to receive logical relations

According to SEP (2006, p.66) “the role of a teacher changes from one activity to another or from one stage of an activity to another. We have used the term *facilitator* Any role that the teacher adopts and which is designed to help students to learn” in other words the teacher is a facilitator who can change the roles according to the activity they are realizing”. In other words, brainstorming is a pre reading activity to invoke students to read and enrich it with the rain of ideas to make it interesting.

2.4.4 Rereading

Rereading consists on repeated encounters with the text, it offers the opportunity to rethink messages and see features that learners have not seen at the beginning of reading. For instance, Swaffar (2001) presents an example:

“After monitored feedback on their initial reading, the class is ready for rereading (a second, more informed reading) to establish the discourse pattern of the text as a semantic system.” Students use a “matrix schema at this juncture because matrices enable reading that reconstructs textual meaning as a visual pattern. Without such a matrix, students have little recourse but to believe they must understand every word in the text before they can "read." The illusion that "understanding every word" yields a meaningful reading is difficult to break without a matrix.” (p. 138-139)

In other words, a guided matrix can be introduced (brainstorming and skimming activities) to allow students select phrases or sentences from the text. Additionally, matrix means origin; then, when students reread they make wider their semantic concepts because they reinforce whatever they have read before. Consequently, while rereading they comprehend faster.

2.5 Conclusion

The literature review in this study was made with the purpose of investigating the reading strategies that students can apply while they read; this literature review is based on study theories that allow teachers to use them in the classroom with the only reason of the development of the reading comprehension skill.

To finish this chapter, I can conclude that students can discover their own strategies to understand an A1 Comprehension task through inference mechanisms without falling

down into traditional methods of boring translations that only increase student's anxiety and despair. By this way, students and teachers assume that reading strategies improve students comprehension through the use of attractive material and varied activities to reinforce students previous knowledge with the new acquired in class (scaffolding theory in education, Bruner, 1957 in McLeod, 2008, 2012); where the teacher's role is a facilitator to enhance students interest in reading.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter the research methodology is presented. This is a research developed with a qualitative method. This method is used in this research because it analyzes the perspective of those involved in the research phenomenon and how this perspective affects their own interpretation of the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In other words my participants' answers, are interpret through an analysis. This analysis considers all possible inference of meaning theories in reading comprehension. The first part of this chapter talks about this methodology used. After that it describes the context where the investigation took place. Then, a brief description of the participants is established; later, the process of how they were selected and the description of collecting data is presented in the overall research description section. After that, the instrument that was used (questionnaire) and the type of questions used (open-ended) are presented before the collection of data section.

3.1 Methodology

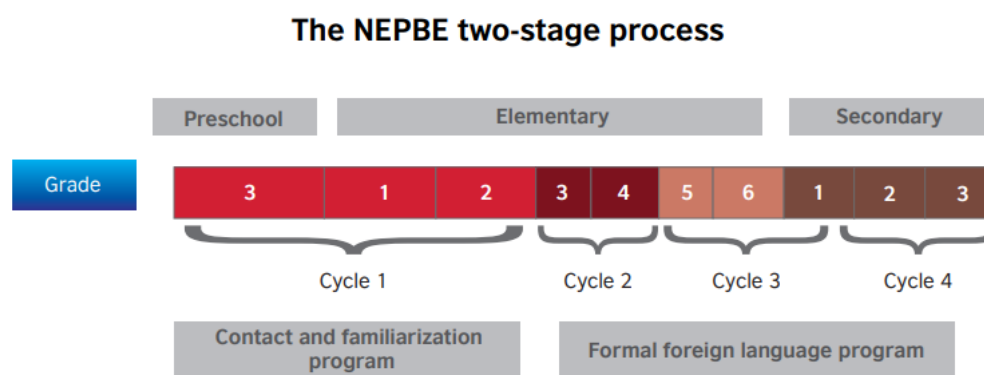
This investigation uses a qualitative method. According to Kothari (2004 p. 3) this type of research method corresponds to participant's "attitude or opinion research designed to find out how people feel or what they think about a particular subject" That is why this is a qualitative study because the attitudes and perspectives presented here would be

difficult to analyze using a quantitative method. Consequently, this qualitative research is especially relevant because the participants of this study were applying different reading strategies to infer meaning of unknown words; consequently they were able to express, what they thought, were the best strategies to infer meaning of unknown words. Particularly, this research methodology is considered analytical because it uses facts that students identified and helped to discover the way they infer the meaning of unknown words. Furthermore, through this gathered data, the information analysis was made through a critical evaluation.

3.2 Context

According to the British Council (2015, p.8) “the English language has been taught in Mexican public schools since the 1960s”. Additionally, it mentioned that, in the reformation of the educative program, the English plan was divided in 4 cycles: Secondary school corresponds to the 4th cycle (See Figure 3.1) where “students obtain the required competencies to use English in an effective way by participating in specific activities with the language, defined by and based on the social practices of the language in different social learning environments” (British Council, 2015, p. 15). In means that students in secondary school need to develop communicative skills in any topic, thus reading comprehension is particularly practiced within a literary and ludic environment.

Figure 3.1 Taken from the British Council (2015, p.15)



“The purpose of English language teaching for Cycle 4 in Basic Education (1st, 2nd and 3rd grades of Secondary school) is for students to consolidate their proficiency in English in basic communicative situations and to develop specific competencies particular to social practices of the language within a range of communicative situations” (SEP, 2011 p. 103). In the Mexican public basic education, “it was necessary to look for options to optimize the nonnative language learning process”, then, the communicative approach was implemented in secondary schools (SEP, 2011, p. 98). It is expected that students in secondary education could develop plurilingual competencies to face “the communicative challenges of a globalized world” (p.91). By this way students have to develop four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) (p. 99). where “reading comprehension is particularly practiced in the literary and ludic environment” (p. 100). Therefore, all students need opportunities to share their experiences and knowledge about reading as well as the identification of other “linguistic aspects and uses of English marking similarities and differences between English and their mother tongue” (ibid).

Specifically in Puebla, there exist a community named Altepexi. Altepexi is a municipality in Tehuacan valley. Its name come from the Nahuatl etymology “Atl” which means water and “Tepetl” means stone. The complete word Altepexi means *agua que cae del cerro*. Altepexi is a semi urban town at the south west of Tehuacan city. This community has very ingrained customs and traditions and it has two secondary schools one is a general secondary and the other one is technical secondary.

This research was developed in the general secondary of Altepexi. This school is named “Antonio Garcia Cubas” that is located in the National avenue without number, Colonia Centro. This secondary school is 34 years old at the community. It is a big school. It has 18 groups in the morning and 6 groups in the afternoon. Mainly, this secondary school has a good infrastructure, however not all classrooms have the necessary material to teach. Some of the classrooms have overhead projectors, light or bulbs. Additionally, this school has a chemistry lab, 3 basketball playgrounds, and a football playground and 5 workshops (textile industry, computers, handiworks, electricity and welding). Furthermore, it has a library, an audiovisual room, a stationary shop and a cooperative shop and a big parking lot.

Regarding the English language context at this public secondary school, the tools that students use to learn English are: the dictionary, textbook, reading book in English language. In addition, there are some material that teachers carry to the classroom in photocopies or they use authentic material in worksheets. Furthermore, the material that is available in the classroom of the participants are: a computer, a tape recorder, an enciclomedia, an overhead projector and a USB. Finally, some types of interaction and

dynamics that teachers are allowed to use in the classroom can be: group dynamics, teamwork, pairs work, or individual work depending on the necessity of the activity.

3.3. Participants

In this research, 10 adolescents from a group of 34 students were randomly selected. They are considered to have a high, medium and low performance level in all their school subjects, all of these levels are assigned because of their scores according to the principal of this institution. Specifically, there were 4 girls and 6 boys from the already described secondary school named “Ing. Antonio Garcia Cubas” . Their ages are 12 years old and they course first grade of Junior high school.

3.4 Overall recovering structure Designs

Before being able to collect the data, I asked the school's principal for an authorization to apply the instrument to the students from the classroom where I teach. Then, it was informed to the students' tutor. Later, I chose the participants randomly. I choose to work with a group 1° B morning shift because I observed that 2 of the girls had a higher level of performance and, as a teacher of the group, I thought it will helped me a lot to improve my work. After that, it was informed to the students that they were selected for my research work. Consequently, I needed their participation for answering some questions. The participants accepted delightly with their interrogative faces and students were a little frightened. I continued teaching them and during that period of time I had some periods of time off to apply the questionnaire.

After designing the instrument, it took me two months approximately to complete the application to the participants due to different school factors. For instance, lack of free

time to answer the questionnaire at school, or student's careless at carrying the questionnaire home and they lost it or some of them forgot it at home; additionally, another factor was that students were not attending to school or changed activities at school.

3.5 Instruments

According to Burns (2010), the questionnaire is used to make responses from people that might propose valuable information for a survey. Dörnyei (2003 as cited in Burns, 2010, p. 81) mentions that “the attitudinal questionnaire (attitudes, opinions, beliefs, interests and values)” because it was based on students opinions and beliefs with the same type of questions; also, by using an open ended questionnaire it is possible to obtain different perspectives. Furthermore, Burns (2010 p. 85) mentioned that in questionnaires “that consists only of open-ended items... It is often very useful to ask the same kind of question using an open-ended form because then you get a different perspective”. As a consequence, a sample of the questions in the final version of the instrument are shown below. For the complete version of the questionnaire see Appendix A.

- *1.-Tell me. What do you do to understand a text in English?*
- *2.-Do you think that the mentioned strategy works for a better understanding in English exams?*
- *3.-Why?*

As previously mentioned, the questions which were written above are the ones used in the instrument to gather data for this research. These questions were designed from the

necessity to know the strategies that students used to infer a text while reading small texts in English language used in the participants' English classes.

The final version of this instrument was done by selecting and simplifying the questions according to their importance. In other words, it was necessary to adapt and analyze questions till the objective of avoiding repetition was accomplished. In short, the purpose of this questionnaire was to find the valuable information to get students believes about their strategies of inferring unknown words in a reading task where the language was not their first language (spanish) but English.

3.6 Data Analysis

In order to analyze the information, the participants' answers were divided according to the number of participants and they were selected randomly because of their level of performance in the group, it means that they were chosen because of the well understanding of English language classes. Their answers were classified by their genre such as: F1, F2, F3, F4 which are the female participants and M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, M6 which are the nicknames for the male participants. The students' answers in the questionnaire were about the students' feelings or opinions about what they do to understand a text in English, specifically to infer unknown words in an English language text. The answers were varied because everybody learns and understands in different ways. The key words that could help the researcher to identify the ways students infer what they read a text are written down in the last column.

Table 3.1 Example of the analysis

student's name	Pregunta 1 Cuentame. ¿Cómo le haces para entender un texto en inglés?	Question 1 What do you do to understand a text in English?	¿Crees que la estrategia que utilizaste te sirve para tener una buena comprensión de lectura en los exámenes de inglés?	Do you think that the mentioned strategy works for a better understanding in English exams?	¿Por qué? Why?	Strategy used	
F1	Buscarlo en el diccionario.	look it at the dictionary	Si	Yes	El diccionario me ayuda a encontrar las cosas que yo no le entiendo.	The dictionary helps me to find the things I do not understand	Dictiona ry
M1	Tendremos que localizar las palabras parecidas al español.	We have to locate the similar words to spanish.	Si		Porque son palabras parecidas al español y se entienden un poco... me ayudan a saber de qué se trata el texto.	Because those are words that look like spanish and they are are a little understandable... They help me to know what is the text about.	Cognates

In Table 3.1, we can observe that there are 8 columns painted with different colors that represent: first the participants' nickname, second the questions in Spanish related to the strategy that participants use to infer the meaning of unknown words in English, their translation in English and finally the identification of the strategy.

In order to be more specific, the first column in black has the participants' nickname which were selected by their genre. F1, F2, F3, F4 correspond to the females and M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, M6 correspond to males. On the second column, there appears the question number 1 in pink color: *Cuéntame. ¿Cómo le haces para entender un texto en inglés?* The second question on the third column is colored in yellow. It was *¿Crees que la estrategia que utilizaste te sirve para tener una buena comprensión de lectura en los exámenes de inglés?* and the last question colored in green was *¿Por qué?* After that, the questions were translated into English because the questionnaire was applied in Spanish. Finally, the identification of the strategies were colored in gray. It corresponds to the interpretation given by the researcher from each student.

The identification of the strategies was not easy because I needed to comprehend the student's main feelings or opinions that they tried to express in order to pick up the essence of their answers to infer unknown words in English.

The origin of the table used to analyze the information was born by the necessity of having clear the representation of every participant's answers. As established, it classifies male and female participants next to a number as well. It was designed in order to help this researcher to have a better understanding of the different answers that this researcher could obtain. Furthermore, the main findings were that there exist six

main reading comprehension strategies used by the participants of this research which were: the use of dictionary, the inference by context, recognition of the title to infer meaning, the use of cognates, the teacher's help and studying vocabulary. The way of how the strategies were located, in the participants' given answers, was by using the key terms that students did in their own words and giving them appropriate meaning and significance semantically thinking.

3.7 Conclusion

First of all, in this chapter, the method of investigation for this research was identified. Then, an analytical methodology was identified. After that the context of the investigation with the purpose of focusing on the place where this research has been performed was situated. Then the participants were mentioned in order to give the necessary answers that are the reason of this thesis. Consequently, the steps to carry out the study in the school were mentioned:

- a) The petition to the school principal.
- b) The petition to students tutor
- c) The petition to the students active participation in this research paper.

Additionally, the time that this work lasted as well as the problems that the researcher had during the collection data process were presented. Finally, the information to analyze the information and the identification of the strategies was described as well. In the following chapter the results are explained.

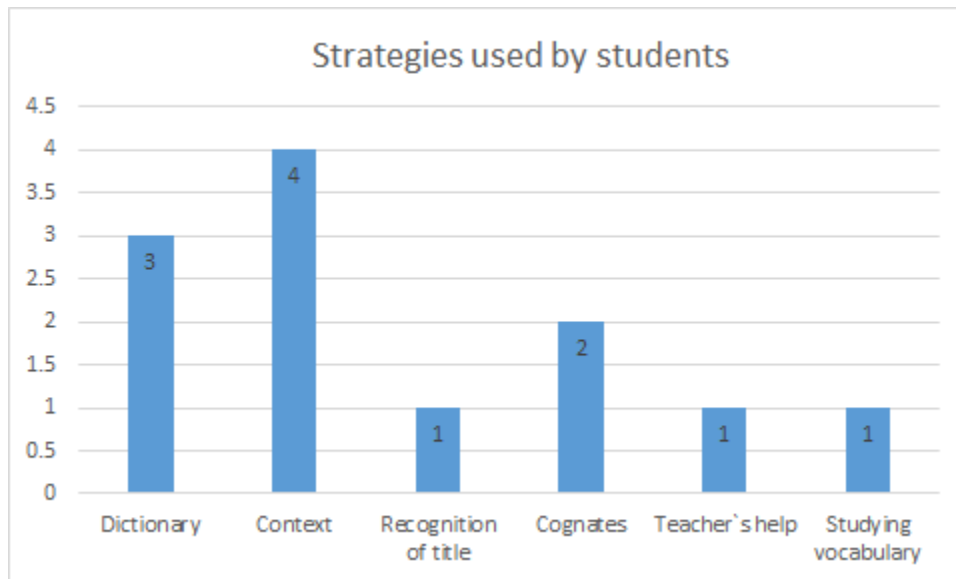
Chapter 4

Results

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the obtained results from 10 questionnaires answered by adolescents 4 girls and 6 boys in the community of Altepexi, from an elementary school named Antonio Garcia Cubas. Additionally, the answer to the research questions is going to be provided in the last section of this research.

4.1 Obtained results



Graph 4.1 Strategies used by students to infer meaning of unknown words in English language

In Graph 4.1, we can observe, in the obtained results from the questionnaire with open ended answers, three students look up unknown words through the use of a dictionary in order to know the meaning of these words. In the second bar from the Graph 4.1 we can see that four students mentioned that they infer meaning through the reading' context. In

the third bar, the reader can see that only one student infers meaning through the recognition of title. Furthermore, two of ten students infer the meaning of English unknown words by the use of cognates. Finally, 1 student remembers the meaning of unknown words just studying vocabulary (See Graph 4.1).

4.2 Answer to Research Question

In this section of Chapter 4, the answer to the research question is given. In order to do so, the research question is given again:

- What reading comprehension strategies do students from a public secondary school use to infer meaning of unknown words in an A1 reading comprehension task?

In this specific study, ten students from a secondary school were interviewed to know what their main strategies to infer the meaning of unknown word were in a text written in English.

There are two texts that were used with the 10 participants of this study. One was taken directly from the English student's book that we use in classes. This book is *Explore 1*; mainly the reading is about *Chapultepec Park* which is a place we have in Mexico See Appendix C Furthermore, there was used another text which was adapted from *The free encyclopedia Wikipedia*, this text is about the *Human Skeleton*, see Appendix D.

Both texts are very short because students were in first grade of secondary school. Moreover, both texts contain information that helps them to reaffirm their general knowledge about a close context to them. I chose those texts because they are small, they offer students general culture and knowledge about their context and they are not

boring according to my opinion. Additionally, the skeleton text is a technical text and it is about the skeleton function as well. This kind of text are in the content of the program in unit 3 of this secondary school's curriculum, that is why I selected this topic. In other words, it is not in the book but it complements the textbook readings. The text originally is so long but I selected the most important information according to the student's performance level (See Appendix D). Finally, this text fulfils SEP's requirements (2011, p.131) such as "write notes to describe the components of different human body systems in a chart and as a result the product requires charts of human body systems". In other words, this text not only reinforce what is asked in the English language subject but also it reinforces whatever students study in biology about the body functions and the celebration of the *Death day* on November 2nd.

In the following paragraphs, I will present the obtained results from the instrument: firstly, according to the study most students infer unknown words when they read through the context. That means most students apply skimming and scanning search of reading strategies. According to Grellet (1992, p.19), by scanning "only with the eyes wander over the text until we have the information that we are looking for" He also mentions in case of skimming "that is an activity that requires an overall view of the text and implies a definite reading competence" definitely the 4 students that infer unknown words through the context is because they have developed a higher level of reading competence. I can infer that skimming is a good strategy to infer meaning of unknown words since during the application of this strategy students were able to read faster to look for factual information. This activity is usable when the teacher gives them the reading without title and they need to put one according to their understanding.

Furthermore, scanning is when students look for specific information. This strategy helped them to infer meaning of unknown words by avoid stopping during reading.

Secondly, a dictionary is used by three students. According to Kottler, Kottler, and Street (2008, p. 101), if somebody is learning a new language it is necessary the use of a bilingual dictionary “as an additional resource”. For instance, in the teaching practice performed by this researcher, I usually perform some steps to use the dictionary. The first step I do is to read the text aloud thus my students pay attention to unknown words; the second step is that everyone in the classroom reads aloud the text again. The third step is to look for unknown words, and the fourth step is to use the best meaning of the word that might not affect the general meaning of the text. I personally believe that the dictionary help students not only to find meanings because they might find different meanings from a single word, but also they might construct meaning through the use of the dictionary by inferring how to use the best meaning of a word in order to keep the message in a text.

Thirdly, regarding the main findings, cognates are used by two students; this strategy refers to the identification of words in English very “similar to Spanish” mentioned by Kottler, Kottler, and Street (2008, p.62). Furthermore, in the fourth place we have a tie among three students’ reading comprehension strategies which are: recognition of title, teacher’s help and studying vocabulary.

To sum up these results, there are several steps to use them in order to help students to comprehend texts. This author believes that a teacher must be a facilitator of students to comprehend easier and better. For example, when exams appear the teacher is not there to help them thus teacher needs to provide them with enough tools and knowledge in

order to be prepared. Specifically, in this group of study, the enlisted strategies have helped students to reduction the time to comprehend a text in English language. It is necessary to mention that some of the strategies might be connected because of their use such as scanning-skimming or use of dictionary-use of context-cognates. However, these strategies are not necessarily the same as well, there is not a single strategy to use while trying to infer meaning of unknown words in English language.

4.3 Conclusion

In this Chapter 4, the reader can see the obtained results represented in Graph 4.1 besides the answer to the research question. In the following section, the conclusion of this research is presented.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents main findings of this study, limitations of this research and further research recommendations. All of this sections are based on the study of 10 students from the classroom where I teach.

5.1 Findings

The main finding of this research was that there were six main reading comprehension strategies used by the participants of this research which were: the use of dictionary, the inference by context, recognition of the title to infer meaning, the use of cognates, the teacher's help and studying vocabulary. (See Graph 4.1). As a matter of fact, this research aimed its purpose at locating the used strategies to infer meaning of unknown words in and English text in A1 level with students of 1^o grade of secondary school.

This research has helped me to recognize the level of importance that my students have given to the way I teach. My 19 years of teaching experience in that community with adolescents is the result of how education has changed and my ways of teaching too. Although students learn using different strategies, now I am aware about the most functional strategies for developing reading comprehension, which in fact, I have discovered with this study as a teacher and researcher.

5.2 Limitations of the research

One of my limitations during the development of this work was that good proposal theories were realized with ancient authors and the library does not have many actual books for this investigation. Another obstacle was the necessary time for applying the questionnaire. I consider it took too much time (two months) due to school's change of activities and students own activities. In addition, I needed time because I am a school teacher in the school where I applied the survey was limiting me with the time as well. Furthermore, the sample of this research was too small to draw general conclusions. The use of only one text to evaluate the strategies was not enough, besides there is only one researcher who was making the interpretation. Finally, if I have had more time this research would have more content, more authors that had argue about the theme and other explanations. In short, I think this research could have more impact and support on this topic.

5.3 Further research

As a matter of fact, these results are not generalizable. I consider there is a lot of more interesting material that might be used in this research about inference in reading but I had to adjust my work according to my participants results. For instance, it can be necessary to adapt my reading comprehension activities into the pre-reading, reading and post-reading sections of a lesson plan. I recommend this study be applied in other school levels like primary, secondary, preparatory and at the university. I suggest to apply this survey in different contexts such as a different country, town, city or in a different small community.

5.4 Conclusion

It is important to say that these students in secondary school (See Chapter 3, subsection 3.3 Participants) have had experience with the English language through the bombing of mass media, video games, films and so on. Regarding the accessibility to these sources, these students needed to have a good teacher`s intervention to induce students into the dynamic of reading in English. The main purpose of this study was to discover the strategies of reading comprehension that all they apply at the time of inferring the meaning of a word in English. I think it was a titanic work for the researcher of this investigation; however, it was an unforgettable life experience that I had to do in my life.

The implications of this work were in my participants because through the discovering of these strategies, now I can help them while having reading problems when reading a text. Additionally, the located strategies in this research will help me in the future to identify the most functional ones when reading comprehension is performed in my classes.

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APPENDIX A

GOBIERNO DEL ESTADO DE PUEBLA
SECRETARÍA DE EDUCACION PUBLICA
SUBSECRETARÍA DE DESARROLLO EDUCATIVO
DIRECCION DE EDUCACION SECUNDARIA
INSPECCIÓN GENERAL DE EDUCACIÓN SECUNDARIA ZONA 20
ESC. SEC. "ING. ANTONIO GARCÍA CUBAS" CLAVE ES 347-89
ALTEPEXI, PUE.
CUESTIONARIO

ELABORÓ PROFA. BLANCA EUGENIA ARAGON ROJAS.

1.- Dime ¿Cómo comprendes un texto en inglés?

2.- ¿Crees que la estrategia que usas en el cuestionario te sirve para entender mejor en los exámenes?

3.- ¿Por qué ?

APPENDIX B

student's name	Pregunta 1 Cuentame. ¿Cómo le haces para entender un texto en inglés?	Question 1 What do you do to understand a text in English?	¿Crees que la estrategia que utilizaste te sirve para tener una buena comprensión de lectura en los exámenes de inglés?	Do you think that the strategy that you used in the questionnaire serves you for a better understanding in English exams?	¿Por qué?	Why? 1	Strategy used
F1	Buscarlo en el diccionario.	look it at the dictionary	Si	Yes	El diccionario me ayuda a encontrar las cosas que yo no le entiendo.	The dictionary helps me to find the things I do not understand	Diccionario
F2	Tengo clases de inglés desde un tiempo fuera de la escuela y normalmente ya puedo entender casi cualquier texto en inglés y cuando no es así, trato de guiarme por el contexto.	I have taken english classes out of school long time ago, so I almost can understand any text in English and when I can't I guide myself through the context.	Si	Yes	Me guio del contexto	I am guided by the context	context

F3	<p>Cuando leo el texto y encuentro palabras desconocidas, para mi no les doy importancia o simplemente las ignoro antes de usar el diccionario de inglés español; primero analizo las palabras que aun no conozco y ahí veo cual si es de importancia y esas si las busco en el diccionario pero para poder comprender mejor trato de no hacer muchas pausas para revisar el diccionario.</p>	<p>when I read a text and I find unknown words. I do not give them enough importance. Before using the dictionary English-spanish I identify the most important words, then I look for them in the dictionary for a better comprehensio n. I try to avoid interruptions using the dictionary.</p>	Si	Yes	<p>Primero leemos y luego vamos viendo las palabras que se parecen al español, saltándome las palabras que no conozco para después buscarlas en el diccionario pero a veces en los exámenes no podemos usar el diccionario porque no nos da tiempo.</p>	<p>First we read and after we identify the words similar to spanish. I jump out unknown words and I look for them in the dictionary later. But sometimes we can not use the dictionary in the exams due time.</p>	Context / Dictionary
F4	<p>Observando y al momento de leer, ver si conozco algunas palabras, recordar si ya habíamos visto este tema y al ir leyendo ya sabré de lo que trata el texto.</p>	<p>Observing when I read to check if I know. Remember if I some words; and if I had already seen this theme go to the text, continue reading . So I will know what is the text about.</p>	Si	Yes	<p>Hay algunas palabras que se parecen al español</p>	<p>There are some words that are similar to spanish.</p>	Context, recognition of title and cognates


M1	<p>Tendremos que localizar las palabras parecidas al español.</p>	<p>We have to locate the similar words to spanish.</p>	Si		<p>Porque son palabras parecidas al español y se entienden un poco.... me ayudan a saber de qué se trata el texto.</p>	<p>Because those are words that look like spanish and they are a little understandable ...They help me to know what is the text about.</p>	Cognates
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M2	Intento recordar qué significan las palabras de inglés al español y de ahí me baso.	I try to remember the meaning of the words in English to Spanish. I'm based on that.	Si en ocasiones	Yes in occasions	¿Por qué? Intento recordar las palabras e inglés a español o las palabras parecidas	Because I try to remember all the words in English to Spanish. They are similar words.	Context
M3	Estudio las palabras.	I study the words.	Si	Yes	Me guío una palabra que se relacione con el contexto.	I am guided by words that relate to the context.	Studying and context
M4	Leyendo las instrucciones en inglés de la profesora.	Reading the teacher's directions	Si		Porque así le puedo entender a la lectura	because by this way I can understand the text.	Teacher's help
M5	Leo en el diccionario, me acuerdo y lo hago en español.	I read in the dictionary, I remember and then I do it in Spanish.	Si	Yes	Busco en el diccionario y lo que le entiendo	I look at the dictionary and whatever I understand.	Dictionary
M6	Saco mi diccionario de inglés.	I take my English dictionary.	Si	Yes	A la hora de sacar el diccionario ahí están las palabras que no sabemos porque allí están todas las definiciones.	at the time I get my dictionary. The words are there. The words that we do not know, because all definitions are there.	Dictionary

APPENDIX C

Chapultepec Park Text taken from the student's book Explore 1 p.127

CHAPULTEPEC PARK



Chapultepec Park is a great place to visit for all the family. There are many interesting museums and there is a fantastic old castle. There are two lakes and there is a zoo which has elephants and pandas. There is also a big concert hall. Chapultepec Park is located in downtown Mexico City near the Diana Fountain. It is easily accessible by bus or by subway (Metro Auditorio or Chapultepec).

APPENDIX D

Human Skeleton Text adapted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_skeleton

GOBIERNO DEL ESTADO DE PUEBLA
SECRETARIA DE EDUCACION OBLIGATORIA
SUBSECRETARIA DE DESARROLLO EDUCATIVO
DIRECCION DE EDUCACION SECUNDARIA
INSPECCION GENERAL DE EDUCACION SECUNDARIA ZONA 20
ESC. SEC. "ING. ANTONIO GARCIA CUBAS" CLAVE ES 347-89
ALTEPEXJ, PUE.
PARTIAL ENGLÉS EXAM I
CICLO ESCOLAR 2015- 2016

TEACHER'S NAME: BLANCA EUGENIA ARAGON ROJAS.

STUDENT'S NAME _____ GROUP _____ LIST NUMBER _____

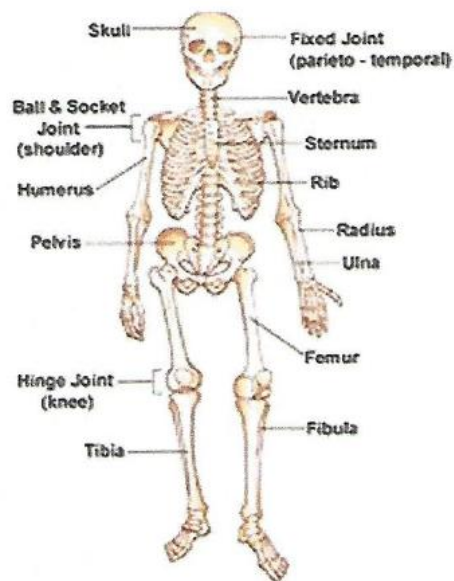
DATE _____

Read the text and answer the 2 questions below.

Our **skeleton** is tough and flexible. It supports weight and protects our internal organs. Bone tissue stores minerals, such as calcium, and it is constantly renewed, which is how our bones are able to heal.

1.- what is the function of the skeleton?

2.- what do our bones contain?



APPENDIX E

Participants' answers

- F1 1.- ¿cuéntame cómo le haces para entender un texto en inglés? buscarlo en el diccionario
- F2 1.- ¿cuéntame cómo le haces para entender un texto en inglés? Tengo clases de inglés desde un tiempo fuera de la escuela y normalmente ya puedo entender casi cualquier texto en inglés y cuando no es así trato de guiarme por el contexto.
- F3 1.- ¿cuéntame cómo le haces para entender un texto en inglés? Cuando leí el texto y encontré palabras nuevas o desconocidas para mí no les doy importancia o simplemente las ignora antes de usar el diccionario de inglés-español primero analizo las palabras que aun no conozco y ahí veo cual si es de importancia y esas si las busco en el diccionario pero para poder comprender mejor trato de no hacer muchas pausas para revisar el diccionario
- F4 1.- ¿cuéntame cómo le haces para entender un texto en inglés?
R= Observando y al momento de leer ver que si conozco algunas palabras recordar que si la abrimos visto este tema tal vez leyendo de observar el texto tal vez ya sobre sobreto que trata el texto

M1 1.- ¿cuéntame cómo le haces para entender un texto en inglés?

tendremos que localizar
las palabras parecidas al
español

M2

1.- ¿cuéntame cómo le haces para entender un texto en inglés? Intento recordar que
significan las palabras de Inglés al Español y
de ahí me bazo

M3

1.- ¿cuéntame cómo le haces para entender un texto en inglés? lo estudio las
palabras - las palabras

M4

1.- ¿cuéntame cómo le haces para entender un texto en inglés? leyendo las
instrucciones de inglés de la profesora

M5

1.- ¿cuéntame cómo le haces para entender un texto en inglés? leo donde me dirijan
y de ahí me acuerdo y lo ago en español

M6 1.- ¿cuéntame cómo le haces para entender un texto en inglés?

soo, mi diccionario de inglés