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***Investigating Affective Factors
and Skill Strategies of University Students
in English Language Oral Examinations***

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Abstract

Learning a foreign language, most of the time, occurs in an instructional setting where the language is taught to a group of foreign language learners (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). In this setting, sometimes language teachers concentrate on usage rather than on use (ibid). As a result, oral evaluation seems difficult to be carried out under the use perspective. However, testing the oral ability is important during the learning process of a foreign language. According to Hughes (1989, p. 101) “the objective of teaching spoken language is the development of the ability to interact successfully in that language, and that this involves comprehension as well as production”. This is one of the main goals of foreign language learning, learners interacting and communicating in that new language. However, when learners have the opportunity to practice and be evaluated in the oral skill, they could face different kinds of experiences such as nervousness, stress, stage fright, and so on. A way to know about those experiences is giving them the opportunity to reflect about their performances.

This paper will analyze students’ reflections about their experiences in the oral language test; those reflections will be carried out after their performances. Moreover, this study will attempt to identify what kind of strategies these students make use of in their presentations. Dewey (1993, cited in Hatton and Smith, 1995) states that reflecting is a way to analyze and face issues to find possible solutions. In fact, when people have the opportunity to reflect, they could discover moments of joy, concern and success in their lives.

The orientation of this project is a case study since it will only explore bounded system over time through detailed examination of the case (Clandinin &

Connely, 2000). This orientation will allow the researcher to focus on the participants' experiences after their oral presentation. The data collection procedure will be through narrative texts which will be written by the study subjects, university students.

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For with God nothing shall be impossible. (Luke 1:37)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FRONT MATTER

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Dedications	iv
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Purpose of the Study	3
1.2 Study Significance	4
1.3 Research Questions	5
1.4 Chapter Conclusion	5
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	
2.0 Introduction	7
2.1 The foreign language learning process	8
2.1.1 Natural and instructional settings	9
2.1.2 Use and usage	10
2.2 Communication practice	12
2.2.1 Role-plays: advantages and limitations	13
2.2.2 Testing the oral skill	15
2.3 Affective factors	16
2.3.1 Personality factors	18
2.4 Learning strategies	20
2.4.1 Metacognitive, cognitive, and social affective strategies	21
2.4.2 Communication strategies	22
2.5 Conclusion	24
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	
3.0 Introduction	25
3.1 Context of the research	25
3.2 Participants	27
3.3 Data collection instruments	28
3.4 Data collection procedure	28
3.5 Data analysis procedure	29
3.6 Conclusion	30
CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS	
4.0 Introduction	31
4.1 Research questions	31
4.2 Analysis of participants' affective responses	32
4.2.1 Participants' affective responses before the oral examination	32

4.2.2	Participants' affective responses during the oral examination	35
4.2.3	Participants' affective responses after the oral examination	38
4.3	Analysis of the participants' strategies used in the oral examination	41
4.3.1	Memory strategies reported by participants	41
4.3.2	Cognitive strategies reported by participants	42
4.3.3	Compensation strategies reported by participants	44
4.3.4	Affective strategies reported by participants	45
4.3.5	Metacognitive strategies reported by participants	46
4.4	Conclusion	47
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS		
5.0	Introduction	48
5.1	Overview	49
5.2	Summary of key findings	51
5.3	Implications of the study	52
5.4	Limitations of the study	52
5.5	Suggestions for further research	52
5.6	Conclusion	52
References		
		54
Appendix A: Participants' perception questionnaire		
		57
Appendix B: Participants' perception data tables		
		58

Investigating Affective Factors and Skill Strategies of University Students in English Language Oral Examinations

CHAPTER 1

1.0 Introduction

A neighbor approached me the other day and said she was desperate to practice her English. She had to travel to the United States several times a year, and she said she was always tongue-tied and unable to speak when she had to pass through airport immigration. She said that she had studied English for quite some time, but that her lessons always began with grammar instruction and almost never got to the point where students were asked to produce the language orally in authentic situations. According to her, grammar instruction alone was not sufficient in meeting her language needs because, in the end, she could not communicate.

As this woman's language learning experience illustrates, learning a foreign language, most of the time, occurs in an instructional setting where the language is taught in a manner that lacks authenticity, making it difficult to meet the learners' actual communicative needs. In this setting, sometimes language teachers concentrate on usage (i.e., language elements associated with grammar and vocabulary acquisition) rather than on use (i.e., actual language production in all its forms) (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). That is, more importance is placed on teaching grammatical rules and vocabulary than on the use of the language as a means of communication. Language actually consists of several skills, and learning involves the acquisition of those skills. Assessment of some sort is the only way that instructors can ensure that students are acquiring what has been presented during

instruction. However, instruction that is based almost exclusively on grammar and vocabulary and assessed solely on those aspects ignores the other components of language such as those related to production skills. However, testing the oral ability is relevant throughout the foreign language learning process. According to Hughes (1989, p. 101) “the objective of teaching spoken language is the development of the ability to interact successfully in that language, and that this involves comprehension as well as production”. This is one of the main goals of learning a foreign language, learners interacting and communicating in that new language.

Nevertheless, when learners have the opportunity to practice and be evaluated in the oral skill, they often face different kinds of emotions such as nervousness, stress, anxiety, and more. One of the problems of ignoring our students’ feelings is that this might affect their learning. Brown (2001, p. 61) expresses the view that affective principles are “characterized by a large proportion of emotional involvement”. That is, language ego, self-confidence, risk-taking and language-cultural connection affect in some way students’ language production (ibid.). This being the case, when students are encouraged to reflect on their learning, especially the emotional issues associated with oral evaluation, reflection could be useful for them. As Dewey (1993, cited in Hatton and Smith, 1995) points out, reflecting is a way to analyze and face issues to find possible solutions. In fact, when people have the opportunity to reflect, they could discover moments of joy, concern and success in their lives. However, when thinking of reflecting on the processes students experience when undergoing oral language testing, several questions arise. Why is testing oral ability relevant during the learning process of

language learning? What can we learn from these types of tests? And how can understanding these processes inform the general subject of foreign language teaching?

1.1 Purpose of the Study

One of the principal aims of this study was to find out the affective factors that participants report as influencing their performance during oral testing. Another aim of this project was to determine the strategies that participants report employing in order to assist them in coping with the demands of oral testing. The data consist of narrative texts which were written by university students in which they reflected on their experiences, feelings, and strategies when taking oral examinations. The students in the study were requested to write narratives about their oral evaluation experiences and issues related to them. They had four exams during the semester, and they wrote a narrative after taking that kind of oral evaluation. After reading the narratives, it was possible to find students who had included in their papers relevant information about the issues proposed. One of the proposed outcomes of this research was to find out how oral testing might be implemented in a manner that is sensitive to the affective needs of the learners. Another proposed outcome was to realize the strategies that learners employed during oral testing so that teachers could become more aware of these strategies in order for them to be shared with students who will face similar demands during oral evaluation in the future.

1.2 Study significance

As previously stated, because of the focus on usage that some teachers often adopt during their foreign language classes, students are often unprepared to face the demands of oral assessment. Nevertheless, it is necessary for them to be exposed to this kind of testing. As McNamara (2000, p. 11) says “a language test is a procedure for gathering evidence of general or specific language abilities from performance on tasks designed to provide a basis for predictions about an individual’s use of those abilities in real world context”. As previously noted, one of the main goals of any foreign language course is that learners develop their ability to communicate in the language. Because of that, oral testing is necessary given that by doing it teachers can collect reliable data about the abilities of learners in the foreign language (Davies & Pearse, 2000).

This study is also relevant because understanding the emotional factors that university students face before, during and after oral testing will facilitate the institution in creating oral testing procedures that are sensitive to the affective needs of the learners. As Brown (2001, p.61) mentions using a foreign language involves developing “a new mode of thinking, feeling, and acting [which could create in their learners] ... a sense of fragility, defensiveness, and a raising of inhibitions”. The results of this investigation will provide data that enable teachers and institutions to treat the learners with affective care to help them face their fears. Another meaningful contribution that this study could make is finding out the strategies that learners employ during oral testing. This is significant because these strategies could be useful to future learners during similar testing procedures, as well as during authentic situations where they need to use the

English language. As Cohen and Macaro (2007) say, language learning strategies have an important role during language learning because they help learners improve knowledge and the use of the foreign language. In other words, they could facilitate learners to accomplish tasks in a more effective manner. The results of this study will be also useful because they will contribute to our wider understanding of oral evaluation, emotional factors, and coping skills associated with this type of assessment.

1.3 Research questions

The current investigation intends to explore the issues discussed above by addressing the following research questions:

1. What affective factors do participants within this context report as influencing their performance before, during and after oral testing?
2. What strategies do participants within this context report employing in order to assist them in coping with the demands of oral testing?

1.4 Chapter conclusion

This qualitative research was carried out to know the learners' different perceptions about oral language testing, as well as how they reflect, feel and face their oral presentations.

This study provided information for understanding students' reactions and behavior so that they can face their fears about speaking in the foreign language and help us understand the factors at work in similar situations.

The following chapters will discuss the literature review, the methodology, the results, and the conclusion of this qualitative research. In chapter two the

literature review will be presented. Chapter three is related to the methodology, the participants, and the instruments used in this qualitative research. Chapter four has to do with the results, the analysis and interpretation of those results. Finally, the conclusion of this research will be presented in chapter five.

2.0 Introduction

As briefly discussed in the previous chapter, students are often not fully prepared to speak the foreign language they are learning. They spend plenty of time learning grammar, vocabulary and reading, but often times the oral skill is neglected because of difficulties associated with teaching and assessing this skill. Not only does the lack of attention to this skill affect language learning instruction, but also the lack of practice does not lead to students gaining ease and familiarity with the use of it from an affective perspective. In the opinion of Rubin and Thompson (1994, p. 9) language learning is seen as a long process which involves “reorganization of your thinking, lots of exposure, and a tremendous amount of practice”. That is, without regular practice and exposure to the oral skill, students do not become accustomed to speaking the foreign language, which may result in feelings of fear, anxiety, and other emotions associated with oral performance.

As a result, when students are asked to participate in oral assessment, they may become overwhelmed with emotions, which could have a negative impact on their assessment. Carrasquillo (1994) holds the view that one of the main objectives of a language program is “the systematic development of ...natural communication situations for meaningful interaction...” (p. 6). Due to language programs should incorporate regular speaking instruction, taking into consideration how students manage their emotions so that oral assessment might take place in a manner that it is not only fairer, but also more sensitive to the needs of learners.

This study seeks to identify what affective factors have influence in the learners, as well as what kind of strategies they use to cope with the speaking skill, and to suggest ways to increase students' success in managing this skill in testing settings. This chapter, thus, provides the theoretical framework which underpins the current investigation. It begins with a discussion of foreign language learning in terms of natural and instructional settings, and then continues with a discussion on how the speaking skill is often taught and tested. The next section turns to a discussion of affective factors that influence learning and testing, and finally provides a discussion of various learning strategies that are often employed when learning languages.

2.1 The foreign language learning process

Language gives the impression to be a natural phenomenon of daily life which people hardly ever stop to think about. However, it is more than that. Kramsch (1998) states that language is the main means of communication that people use to interact in society, and in the opinion of Lightbown and Spada (2006), learning language is one of the most surprising achievements of human development. Nevertheless, Gower, Phillips and Walters (1995) point out that language learning does not only mean to learn grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. It involves students doing meaningful and interactive activities in both receptive and productive skills in order to learn to use the language. However, the language learning process varies for different individuals since learning a foreign language happens in different environments. The common consensus is that foreign languages are most commonly learned in two broad ways: natural and

instructional learning settings (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). These two different kinds of settings are discussed in further detail below.

2.1.1 Natural and instructional settings

Natural settings for language learning consist of environments where the target language is used to conduct day-to-day interactions within society (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Learning a first or second language occurs in a natural setting where the learner is exposed to the language constantly. In other words, the learner faces real situations where he/she must make use of the language to be in contact with the society. On the other hand, learning a foreign language, most of the time, occurs in an instructional setting where the language being learned is not the primary language used within that context. In this case, the language is taught to a group of foreign language learners (ibid). In this environment, Rubin and Thompson (1994, p. 23) point out that “[t]he emphasis is often on *knowing* about the language, on being able to produce correct sentences on cue, and on knowing why they are correct or incorrect”. That is, teaching grammatical rules and vocabulary is more important than focusing on the use of the language as a means of communication, hence sometimes language teachers concentrate on usage rather than on use.

Within the last few decades, however, there has been increased attention in language classrooms on teaching a foreign language from the communicative perspective. According to Gebhard (2006) “the primary goal of a communicative classroom is student development of communicative competence in English” (p.

63). Nevertheless, grammatical approaches persist in the field of foreign language teaching. Wagner (n.d.) sums the situation up:

Based on several semesters of foreign language study, I do not believe that current methods of teaching grammar in the classroom are sufficient enough for acquiring the abilities to survive in a second language....The Classical Method is still very much alive in the foreign language educational system, although it has never proven itself to be a practical or successful method of learning a foreign language.

As a result, some practitioners think that by analyzing the grammar and by finding equivalents between the students' language and the language to be studied, the students will learn how the foreign language is constructed without taking into account the foreign language use.

The discussion above raises issues about the teaching of 'use' versus 'usage' in the foreign language classroom, which is discussed in the following section.

2.1.2 Use and usage

Widdowson (1978, cited in Ellis, 2003, p. 13) defines 'usage' as "that aspect of performance which makes evident the extent to which the language user demonstrates his knowledge of linguistics rules", and 'use' as "that aspect of performance which makes evident the extent to which the language user demonstrates his ability to use his knowledge of linguistic rules for effective communication".

In fact, Brown and Attardo (2000, p. 206) also argue that "the focus of learning should be on communication not rule learning". In other words, the main purpose of a language class is the student developing his/her communicative competence in English (Gebhard 2006); however, most of the time learners know

more about grammar rules than how to use them to develop their communicative competence.

As reported by Howatt and Widdowson (2004, p. 151) the grammar-translation method is focused on “the teaching of grammar in isolation from texts”. Davies and Pearse (2000) observe that this method focuses on languages as systems of rules which should be memorized, and apply them for the construction of correct sentences mainly in writing. While the teacher’s role is to provide explanations of grammar rules’, the learner’s role is to memorize those grammar rules. Having this kind of focus, learners find few opportunities to put into practice what they have learned.

In the opinion of Fotheringham (2009) grammar based language instruction could be one of the main reasons why individuals are often unsuccessful and uninterested in foreign language learning. That is, input could be an answer to this lack of interest since language ability is learned, not taught (ibid). On the other hand, he also observes that there are other reasons for continuing with this grammar based language instruction such as ignorance, arrogance, or tradition. Consequently, Harmer (1998, p. 30) reports that a special focus on grammar would not let students acquire language; hence it frequently does not allow them to put into practice their language learning in the productive skills such a communication practice. In the next section the information related to communication practice is presented.

2.2 Communication practice

As previously mentioned, learning a foreign language often takes place in an instructional setting. Nevertheless, this does not mean that learners are not able to have sufficient communication practice, which is one of the primary goals of language learning. In fact, practicing the language in circumstances that are possible inside and outside the classroom will give the students a purpose to use the language (Baker and Westrup, 2003). However, language teachers should spend time with the learners practicing the foreign language in a less controlled manner. That is, letting them use their knowledge for communication practice.

According to Ur (1981, p.2):

Communication practice is one of the most important components of the language learning/teaching process; it is also one of the most problematical. It is much more difficult to get learners to express themselves freely than it is to extract right answers in a controlled exercise.

In the opinion of Gebhard (2006, p. 68) there are four factors that may support to have a communicative classroom:

- *reduction in the centrality of the teacher*
- *an appreciation for the uniqueness of individuals*
- *chances for students to express themselves in meaningful ways*
- *choices, both in relation to what students say and how they say it.*

In other words, decreasing teachers' talking time, and giving learners more opportunities to express themselves with more freedom could make them feel more secure about themselves. Moreover, language teachers have to take into account that they are dealing with individuals who are unique. That is, the group cannot be treated as if it were homogeneous because it is consisted of individuals with different personalities, experiences and backgrounds, which can be used as a resource to support language learning. With the above in mind, teachers could

create opportunities for learners to put the oral skill into practice. Meaningful ways to take learners to communication practice might assist them to express their own ideas. This can guide learners to deal with a great variety of choices about what they want to say and how it might be said. These suggestions given by Gebhard (2006) could enable and prepare learners for interactive communication. The next section will discuss how to get students to talk or communicate in the classroom through the use of role plays.

2.2.1 Role-plays: advantages and limitations

Role-plays have been considered as a possibility for communication practice. In the opinion of Lindsay (2000, p. 149) communication could be carried out naturally “when one person has information, ideas, or opinions...” which are created to be exchanged with someone else. In fact, when learners have access to communication practice to speak about particular situations of their interest, instead of giving them general issues, they find this kind of practice less complicated (ibid).

Role-plays have to do with giving learners an appropriate topic which offers interest and motivation for interacting through the foreign language, guiding them to communication practice in a meaningful chance. Claxton (2008) holds the view that in role-plays, learners act out roles in specific situations which encourage them to use the language to face that condition using their imagination to activate their knowledge. Learners can use the kind of language they are requiring for that particular situation. They are not limited to use only the language learned in a specific class. The use of “[t]he language can correspondingly vary along several

parameters: according to the profession, status, personality, attitudes or mood of the character being role-played, according to the physical setting imagined, according to the communicative functions or purpose required” (Ur, 1981, p. 9).

Moreover, when learners are required to do these kinds of activities, they try to organize and imagine their dialogue based on real-life situations. In the opinion of Lindsay (2000) these kinds of activities let students practice the foreign language freely. This conception of role plays makes learners realize that this type of practice is not too complicated, and it is more significant because they are closer to situations that might take place outside the classroom. Nevertheless, sometimes role-plays might not work or yield good results. As reported by Ur (1981, p. 10), teachers who are in favor of role-plays might be facing two main issues: “the problem of student inhibition... [and]...the question of purpose”. The first one is related to learners having problems pretending to be someone else during role-play activities. That is, sometimes they find role-plays difficult to carry out because they may feel embarrassed to participate in these activities. The second problem has to do with not specifying to learners the objectives of the role plays. Because of this, learners might not be motivated to cooperate in these exercises (ibid.).

Nevertheless, there are some suggestions that teachers can take into consideration to be able to carry out role-plays in class. The first one is related to the purpose of the role play. That is, it is necessary that teachers give an explanation to the learners about why role plays are being carried out in class. Learners need to know that there is a purpose in these activities, and this purpose is not simply to pretend to be someone else. If students know about the main objective of role plays, they will be more interested and involved. In the opinion of

Joyce et al. (2000, cited in Starko, 2010) the main objective of a role play is the participation of learners in a particular situation to reach a solution or understanding. That is, role playing means talking about something in a specific scenario so that participants could achieve a final objective. Taking into account these basic suggestions, role-plays could give better results and work in language classes. If a teacher does decide to make use of role-plays in class, the next step is to have a meaningful way to test the oral skill.

2.2.2 Testing the oral skill

Hughes (1989) holds the view that the main goal of learners while learning spoken language is to improve the ability to communicate effectively, and this has to do with comprehension and production. There are some basic parts which should be taken into account while testing the oral ability: *representative tasks, elicit a valid sample of oral ability, and ensure valid and reliable scoring* (ibid, p. 113). The first one has to do with including a meaningful model of the specific content while setting tasks. The second one involves selecting suitable techniques such as interviews, interaction with fellow candidates, and responses to audio or recorded stimuli. The testing technique might be related to the teacher's objective during the language course. The last one, *valid and reliable scoring*, has to do with organizing suitable scales for scoring (ibid). In the opinion of Hughes (1989) looking for the accurate measurement of oral ability involves time, effort, and training to achieve valid and reliable results. Nevertheless, all the elements involved in the measurement such as content, rating scale levels, and techniques used in oral testing will vary according to institutions. After taking into account all

these elements while testing oral ability, the next step is to pay attention to the emotional factors presented during this kind of testing.

2.3 Affective factors

Brown (1994, p. 22) expresses the view that “[affective principles]...are more central to the emotional processing of human being”. The affective principles of language ego, self-confidence, risk-taking and the language-cultural connection influence, in some way, students’ learning (ibid.). For example, language ego has to do with the way learners feel about thinking, interacting, and feeling, in the foreign language. During the development of this language ego, learners will need teachers’ support, patience, and understanding to face their fears and insecurity in order to form this second identity (ibid.). Therefore, this situation might help teachers to realize that students may feel intimidated to produce oral communication in the classroom, and that it is necessary to treat students with affective care in order to give them confidence to develop their learning. Students need to feel that they can produce language in an emotionally safe environment where they have a good relationship with both teacher and classmates. As reported by Law and Eckes (2007) a learning environment has to do with an encouraging orientation that takes learners to have a comfortable behavior, as well as confidence to express themselves without fear of being ridiculed or punished by the teacher or the classmates. Moreover, teachers should create a caring atmosphere where students can ask questions freely, and they do not feel vulnerable to making mistakes since they take part of the learning process (Baker and Westrup, 2003).

The second affective principle is related to self-confidence or self-esteem, which has to do with how the learner feels about his/her ability to achieve a task in the foreign language (Brown, 2002). If learners start developing high self-confidence, they will start believing in themselves, which will facilitate their language learning. When students feel that they can be successful in their second language production, their self-confidence increases, which encourages them to take risks, which is discussed further below.

The third affective principle is risk-taking, which according to Beebe (1983, cited in Gass and Selinker 2001), could be “a situation where an individual has to make a decision involving choice between alternatives of different desirability; the outcome of the choice is uncertain; there is a possibility of failure” (p. 361). That is, once students have reached high self-confidence, they need to start taking risks by putting into practice the foreign language in both natural and instructional settings. During this practice, they should not be worried about making mistakes or appearing foolish as they attempt to overcome their fears.

The last principle proposed by Brown (1994) is the language-culture connection which is related to learning a language, but also the culture of that language. When students are learning a foreign language, they also need to know about cultural values, beliefs, traditions, ways of life, thinking, feeling and acting, all those characteristics that take part in culture. Learning a foreign language involves more than using it; it also involves knowing how to use the language so that the learner can work within the society, which is related to culture. A way to introduce learners to that new culture is to include activities or material in class that allow learners to see the connection between the language and the target culture.

Teachers should emphasize that no one culture is better than any other one; people represent their realities in different ways (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Taking into account these affective principles, teachers could help learners to improve their foreign language considering the emotional side.

2.3.1 Personality factors

In the opinion of Brown (1994) language works as a way of interacting with people; nevertheless, he also argues that language involves adopting a kind of behavior to take part in a society. That kind of behavior is going to be related to personality factors. In fact, those personality factors are going to be embedded within those verbal interactions that are necessary to succeed in the acquisition of a foreign language. That is, personality of the learners might be a contributing factor to be successful or not in language learning (Ellis, 2003).

Some of those personality factors have to do with *extroversion and introversion, inhibition, anxiety, and empathy* (Brown 1994, p. 141). Extroversion and introversion have an important role in learning a foreign language because according to the kind of personality adopted by the learner, he/she will have progress in different ways (Gass and Selinker, 2001). For example, extroverted learners could be good at oral activities, whereas introverted learners could be good at written tasks. Hence, it might be said that extroversion is useful for some activities and introversion for others; each one has its own advantages.

Another personality factor is inhibition which in the opinion of Brown (1994), it is going to have influence in language learning. This factor is related to the process of creating defenses to protect the ego. However, inhibition does not allow learners to take risks to practice the language; hence they are avoiding making

mistakes which is a necessary part of the learning process. As Baker and Westrup (2003) state, students need to learn from their own mistakes, and they should not feel afraid of making them. Conversely, if those learners continue with their language defenses, they will never accomplish the main goal of any language to communicate efficiently. When learners try to lower their level of defenses, they will be ready for self-exposure, which may facilitate their language learning (Brown, 1994).

The next personality factor is anxiety which is related to “feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry”, all these kinds of feelings are presented during language learning (Brown, 1994, p. 141).

Three elements of language anxiety are identified: *communication apprehension*, *fear of negative social evaluation*, and *test anxiety* (Horwitz, 1986 and MacIntyre and Garner, 1989, cited in Brown 1994, p. 142). *Communication apprehension* is related to the difficulty for learners to express themselves to others because of their lack of development in the language taking them to feelings of irritation and apprehension. *Fear of negative social evaluation* has to do with learners’ anxiety about being criticized or judged by others due to their linguistic incompetence (Brown, 1994). As reported by Barley and Nunan (1996), making mistakes in a language class is higher because “a learner may get the answer right in terms of content, but wrong in terms of form or pronunciation” (p. 156). As a result of this, learners feel more susceptible to negative social evaluation by their teachers and classmates. In fact, learners who are exposed to regular error correction from the teacher could be perceived by them as a form of constant embarrassment (ibid). Giving a positive social impression to others will be learners’ goals.

Test anxiety is another kind of language anxiety which takes places when learners are facing feelings of restlessness or failure during their foreign language evaluation (Brown, 1994). Therefore, learners' linguistic competence will be affected by their anxiety in the assessment.

Empathy is another personality variable which could be defined as “the projection of one’s own personality into the personality of another in order to understand him or her better” (Brown, 1994). This might help during classroom interaction so that one person can understand and feel what the other person is saying. All these personality factors are going to influence foreign language learning in a positive or negative way. Some of these personality factors are related to different kinds of learning strategies. As such, the following sections will discuss learning strategies that learners make use of in order to improve their oral skill.

2.4 Learning strategies

According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), learning strategies could be defined as a particular kind of behavior or thoughts that people make use of in order to improve their “comprehension, learning, or retention of information” (p. 1). Oxford (1990, p. 1) also defines them as “steps...[or]...tools” used by the learners to improve their language learning. Cohen and Macaro (2007) explain that language learning strategies have some purposes such as improving learning and the use of the foreign language, accomplishing particular tasks, facing specific problems, carrying out learning in an uncomplicated, fast, and pleasant way; and compensating for insufficient language ability. In fact, learning strategies play a

meaningful role during language learning. Oxford (2011) points out that the effective use of strategies will depend on selecting adequate strategies according to the learners' intention and circumstances to manage some conditions of their learning process. These learning strategies could enable learners to have a positive attitude towards language learning. Moreover, Cohen and Macaro (2007, p. 37) also point out that:

the strategies a learner uses and the effectiveness of these strategies very much depend on the learner him/herself (for example, age, gender, language aptitude, intelligence, cognitive and learning style preferences, self-concept/image, personality, attitudes, motivation, prior knowledge), the learning task at hand (for example, type, complexity, difficulty, and generality), and the learning environment (for example, the learning culture, the richness of input and output opportunities).

That is, learning strategies are going to vary according to learners' necessities, interests and personality factors. In the next section, information related to three types of language learning strategies is presented.

2.4.1 Metacognitive, cognitive, and social affective strategies

In the opinion of O'Malley et. al (1998, cited in Gonzalez, 1999) there are three types of language learning strategies: *metacognitive, cognitive and social-affective strategies*. Gonzalez, De Rivera, Schallert, Flores and Perrodin (1999, p. 110) state:

Metacognitive strategies refer to the learner's conscious access to his or her own perceptual, attention, memory, or higher-level thought processes (e.g., creativity or problem-solving abilities). Cognitive strategies refer to internal mental processes that are used automatically for learning (e.g., perception, attention, memory, problem-solving, and so forth). Social affective strategies refer to internal emotional processes that are learned within a particular sociocultural reality.

The language learning strategies that learners make use will be influenced by their idiosyncratic preference and developmental level, as well as the linguistic and cultural content where they are involved. As reported by Nisbet and

Shucksmith (1986, cited in O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) *metacognitive strategies* are useful for a variety of learning tasks such as planning to listen for key words or phrases, organizing written or spoken discourse, monitoring or reviewing information, evaluating and checking information. *Cognitive strategies* are based on improving language learning (listening and reading comprehension) through tasks such as repetition, grouping and classifying words, inference, summarizing, applying rules to understand language, and transferring. *Social affective strategies* have to do with contact with another person, these strategies could be used in working with peers to solve a problem, questioning for clarification, and self-task (ibid.). According to students' necessities it will be useful to implement the most adequate strategies into the classroom. The following section will be about the communication strategies used in the classroom.

2.4.2 Communication strategies

According to Davies and Pearse (2000), there are some suggestions when teaching speaking; for example, teachers should make a comfortable environment so that learners will not be anxious about participating in class. Moreover, including activities in pairs or groups reduces the level of stress since the learners can make use of the foreign language without the rest of the learners listening. Exposing the learners to natural speech and pronunciation lessons will guide them to pronounce intelligibly, and develop speaking skills (ibid.). Learners should be accustomed to combining listening and speaking in a natural way. That is, teachers should use English as much as they can in the classroom since it is the only opportunity for learners to be involved in the foreign language.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) point out communication strategies are more related to language use than language usage, which allows learners to improve their oral skill. Tarone (1981, cited in Brown 1994, pp. 120-121) reports four communication strategies: "*avoidance, prefabricated patterns, appeal to authority, and language switch*". The first strategy could be divided into three subcategories, *lexical avoidance* when the learner avoids using a certain word or tensing because he/she is not sure about their appropriate use. The second subcategory is called *phonological avoidance* because if the learners cannot pronounce a word correctly, they will avoid that word because of phonological difficulty. The last subcategory has to do with *topic avoidance* which is used by the learners when finding it difficult to continue expressing themselves clearly in relation to certain themes. They could face these kinds of situations by changing the topic, avoiding answering or continuing the conversation because the communication exchange has become too difficult to continue it fluently (Brown, 1994).

The second communication strategy has to do with memorizing phrases or sentences which have not been internalized by the learner. Some examples of those utterances could be found in pocket bilingual books which have a list of the most common phrases used in different occasions. Nevertheless, this kind of communication strategy can guide learners to store errors because the lack of knowledge for forming a particular structural rule (ibid).

The third common strategy is related to a direct appeal to authority; that is, learners may ask the teacher or a native speaker about a specific word or phrase. Also learners could make use of a bilingual dictionary, or take the risk to create their words or phrase, and then ask for feedback about its correctness. This

strategy is useful for learners whose self-esteem is not high yet since making use of it; learners will feel more secure about what they are doing (Brown, 1994).

The fourth strategy is associated with learners using their mother tongue; in other words, they switch in the hope the listener will understand the message. However, sometimes learners could use their native language to express long ideas which might be difficult for the hearer if the learners' native language is unknown for him/her (ibid.). These four strategies could guide teachers to know how learners are facing foreign language learning so that they receive support to improve their communication strategies.

2.5 Conclusion

This literature review included a detailed description of the topics that are related to the proposed study. It included a variety of topics such as: the foreign language learning process, communication practice, affective factors and learning strategies. The following chapter of this study presents the research methodology section which will include: a more detailed description of the participants, data gathering and analysis procedures, and some limitations of the current investigation.

3.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to find out the learners' different perceptions about oral language testing, as well as how they reflected, felt and faced their oral presentations. This study provided information for understanding students' reactions and behaviors when speaking in the foreign language. In this chapter specific information about the context of the research, the participants and the instruments used in the study is provided. Also, there is a detailed description of the data collection and analysis procedures that were used to carry out this research, as well as a conclusion.

3.1 Context of the research

The research was carried out in a tertiary program in an important public university located in central Mexico. This university offers English classes to students of all majors; as a result the students have the option to take these classes in their faculty or in another one. Because of this, English teachers could have a mixture of students from different majors in a classroom. When the research was carried out, the students in the English classes were from different majors.

Regarding language instruction, it can be compulsory or optional depending on the major where the students are enrolled. For example, students who are enrolled in Architecture, Arts, Biology, Communication Sciences, Public

Accounting, Physical Culture, Nursing, Stomatology, Mathematical Physics, Chemistry Engineering, Medicine, and Psychology, English courses are compulsory because it is part of their curriculum, and as a result, students get a grade at the end of the courses. While students of Law and Social Sciences, Chemical Sciences, Computer Science, Administration, Economy, Electronics, Philosophy and Letters, Civil Engineering, and Languages, FGUM English courses are optional because it is not part of their curriculum. Students can take the courses in the university (compulsory courses) or in another place (optional courses).

Regarding English courses, the students need to cover four levels of English, which means four quarters or two years. They have the option to take the courses in the quarters they decide. That is, they have four quarters or five years to complete the levels. The courses can be taken in sequential fashion or separated. For this reason, it is a little complicated for the students to take their English courses seriously since sometimes they leave a long period of time between the courses. The English courses are organized in four levels, from beginning to low intermediate. The English lessons could take place four times a week or twice a week. The classes last from one to two hours. Most of the classes have from 15 to 35 students.

The official syllabus is organized in four units, and there is a schedule for when each unit needs to be covered and evaluated. The book used in this course was *Prime Time 1*. The book consists of five units, but during this period of time teachers have to cover four units. This study is focused on four majors:

architecture, city planning, civil engineering, and graphic design because the participants were studying these majors.

3.2 Participants

The data used for this research was gathered from thirteen university students who were enrolled in different majors. All of them had been studying English as a foreign language since secondary and high schools, except for three students, two of whom began studying English at an earlier age, and one of whom had never studied English until university. In fact, at the time of the study the student who had very little experience with English was taking English 1 for second time because he had failed it the first time. During that course, he was using the *Top Notch* English language textbook. Nevertheless, in spite of their previous English language study, their level of English was basic. The participants were selected for this research because this was their first quarter that they had English lessons using the new book *Prime Time 1*.

The class where this research was carried out was in the beginning level; level 1. The class consisted of twelve students from four different majors; *architecture* ($n=6$), *city planning* ($n= 3$), *civil engineering* ($n=1$), and *graphic design* ($n=2$). They were in different quarters of their majors; *eighth quarter* ($n=2$), *seventh quarter* ($n=1$), *sixth quarter* ($n=2$), *fourth quarter* ($n=4$), and *second quarter* ($n= 3$). In these majors, the English course was compulsory, not optional, because it is part of their curriculum. The participants consisted of seven women and six men. Their ages were from 18 to 25 years old. Participants were all native speakers of Spanish and their schooling took place in public schools, except for one who went to private

schools from kindergarten to high school. This group of participants belonged to the middle and lower economical classes. Most of the participants showed interest in cooperating in order to make a contribution for the research.

3.3 Data collection instruments

The instrument used in this research was a questionnaire where subjects were to give personal information, but also information about their experiences in oral language testing, as well as the way they reflected, felt, and faced their oral presentations that they experienced through the course during the research period in narrative form (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was given to the participants after their first oral examination in order to provide data for the research questions that were outlined in Chapter one.

3.4 Data collection procedure

The data collection procedure was through the questionnaires which elicited written responses from these university learners. The learners were requested to write their reflections about their experience during the oral evaluation. After the evaluation, the questionnaires were sent via e-mail to be answered by the participants. The responses were written in their native language, Spanish, because they were taking English 1, and allowing them to answer in their native language would allow them to express their perceptions more effectively.

The procedures for the oral tests were the following: the participants were asked to perform a role play in the classroom. The role play needed to be related to the topics covered in each unit. Learners had to work in randomly assigned

pairs. After that, they had 10 minutes to agree about the topic they would talk about during their presentation. The topic needed to be related to the unit covered to be accepted for the oral evaluation. Learners were asked to each take part in the conversation eight times during their role play. After their presentations, they had to answer the questionnaire about their assessment experience. The intention for this strategy was that this kind of reflection could help them perform during their next presentation better, making them more conscious about their weaknesses and strengths.

3.5 Data analysis procedures

While the orientation of this study primarily relies on survey techniques and questionnaire data, methodological issues related to narrative inquiry are also relevant since the participants were asked to ‘tell their story about the assessment experience’. This kind of research has been used as a way of understanding and interpreting the personal identity, lifestyle, culture, and historical world of the participants (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). In other words, narrative research has contributed to qualitative research traditions that seek to understand the individual in her or his contexts. According to Patton (1987) qualitative methods in evaluation allow the evaluator to study selected issues or events in depth and detail without the constraints of predetermined categories of analysis.

On the other hand, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define narrative inquiry as “a way of understanding experience” (p. 20). That is, compiling information through this kind of research aids in the comprehension of people’s behaviors, taking into account their experiences, realities and factors that benefit or affect their lives. To

accomplish all this, narrative research uses a variety of data collection methods depending on the purpose of the inquiry, collecting material from literacy works, diaries, written autobiographies, conversations, or oral life stories obtained in interviews as well as open-ended questionnaires (ibid). Moreover, Lieblich et al. (1998) mention that “narrative research ... refers to any study that uses or analyzes narrative material” (p. 2). As it is seen, this kind of research takes into consideration one’s reality, experience, and all those factors that are seen to benefit or affect people’s lives.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter included relevant aspects related to the research, as well as the reasons why this study was carried out under this method. It also described the justification for the method. The data gathering strategies were also presented and explained. It is now time to move on to chapter four of this research study; this includes the data analysis procedures followed to obtain the results.

Data Analysis and Results**4.0 Introduction**

In this chapter the results of the data analysis of this investigation will be presented following the methodological framework described in the previous chapter. According to the two research questions, the results will be organized and discussed in two different sections. Moreover, specific examples from the data will be provided and discussed.

4.1 Research Questions

This current investigation is taking into account the following research questions:

1. What affective factors do participants within this context report as influencing their performance before, during and after oral testing?
2. What strategies do participants within this context report employing in order to assist them in coping with the demands of oral testing?

In order to answer the research questions mentioned above, a questionnaire (see Appendix A) was utilized in order to gather information from the participants about their affective states during testing as well as the strategies that they used during the testing procedures. According to Oxford (2011) this kind of data collection tool is significant in carrying out a study of this nature. Moreover, Josselson (1995, cited in Oxford, 2011) mentions that such data is useful because participants to share their emotions, ways of thinking and experiences. After

analyzing the data, it was possible to identify some categorizations that assist the descriptions of affective factors and learning strategies that influence participants' performance during oral testing.

4.2. Analysis of participants' affective responses

In this section, the main features related to students' affective responses that influenced the test taking process are identified. The description of these characteristics will have to do with the first research question mentioned above. As mentioned in chapter 3, the questionnaire explored the students' responses in relation to test taking **before**, **during** and **after** the testing process. As such, the results described below are organized according to this temporal dimension and are described in the following sections.

4.2.1 Participants' affective responses *before* the oral examination

According to the participants' answers, some of the emotions that they experienced before their first oral examination could be divided into three categories, 1) negative emotions such as anxiety, concern, lack of confidence, as well as fear; 2) positive emotions related to excitement, and 3) neutral emotions, where the participants seemed not to be worried or excited.

The first category has to do with negative emotions which were reported by the participants. The main problem that the participants pointed out was nervousness of speaking the foreign language. Most of the students mentioned in their questionnaires that before starting their oral examinations, they were already nervous because they would have to speak English, and they felt insecure about

using the foreign language. Moreover, the participants had another problem which had to do with performing their oral examination in front of the group. This may be closely related to a general fear of public speaking. Here are some of the comments that the participants made (see Appendix B for further information related to participants' comments):

Participant 2: *“Mis principales sentimientos fue el pánico que sentía al pasar frente a todos, la inseguridad que tenía acerca de mi pronunciación, el miedo a las críticas que realizarían después de oírme, y demasiados nervios.*

Participant 5: *“... muy nerviosa al hablar en público y más en Inglés, (no lo manejo nada bien)...”.*

Participant 8: *“Antes del examen me sentí un poco nerviosa e incómoda porque pensaba que me iba a equivocar”.*

Participant 11: *“Antes de la presentación estaba insegura nerviosa y temerosa...”.*

With this information, it was observed that participants' anxiety could be related to their lack of self-confidence. According to Brown (2002), developing high self-confidence will allow the learners to make use of the foreign language having better results in their oral production.

In the second categorization, positive emotions, there was a participant who described his first oral examination as a good experience. Although he had not practiced the foreign language for about two years, he mentioned that happiness and excitement were the main emotions he felt in this kind of assessment. He was the only participant who was encouraged by the activity even though he had not put into practice the foreign language for a long time. This is the comment that the participant expressed:

Participant 7: *“Los sentimientos eran reflejados en alegría porque tenía más de dos años que no cursaba nada de Inglés y en emociones solo ansiedad”.*

“Antes del examen con ansiedad por pasar...”.

This participant showed that he did not have any problem with his language ego because he liked thinking and interacting in the foreign language. Moreover, his self-confidence is quite high which allowed him to take a risk without paying attention to fear of failure.

In the last categorization, neutral emotions, there were two participants that mentioned they did not experience any kind of insecurity before doing their oral examination. These were the only participants who did not feel nervous or excited about this activity. The following comments were taken from the questionnaires:

Participant 9: *“Al inicio... no me sentí muy nervioso ni nada por estilo”.*

Participant 10: *“Antes del examen oral estaba normal...”.*

According to the way that these two participants answered the questionnaire, it seems that their language ego, and self-confidence are high which let them feel safe before the oral test. This first analysis had to do with the participants' kind of emotions expressed before doing the oral examination. The next section will be about the emotions that were presented *during* the participants' performance.

4.2.2 Participants' affective responses during the oral examination

In this section, the affective responses described by the participants *during* their first oral examination will be presented. The description of the features will continue answering the first research question. There were two significant findings during the testing process in relation to affective responses, which include: 1) negative emotions such as nervousness and criticism, and 2) positive emotions which have to do with confidence, excitement and commendable performance.

In the first category, negative emotions, the most repeated issue in the participants' questionnaires was focused on nervousness during their performance. Most of the students were nervous during the oral examination, and some of them pointed out that this activity was difficult to carry out because of their anxiety. Some examples of these situations could be observed in the following excerpts:

Participant 4: *"...me sentí nerviosa...pero siento que el motivo de que me sintiera nerviosa fue porque ya no había practicado este idioma (inglés) ya no la tenía como materia entonces digamos que perdí la práctica..."*

Participant 6: *"Pues sí me puse muy nerviosa y yo creo que por lo mismo de los nervios cuesta un poco más de trabajo y lo cual hace como que se te olviden las cosas"*

Participant 10: *"...pero durante el examen oral me sentí un poco nerviosa y sentí que se cuatrapearon las ideas..."*

As it can be observed, nervousness can have an effect on the development of the foreign language speakers given that they faced different kinds of issues during their performance. That occurred in the case of participant 10 because *before* starting the oral evaluation, she was not worried or anxious. Nevertheless, the circumstances changed when she had to carry out the activity. She started feeling a little nervous, and she could not handle it because of her anxiety.

On the other hand, these participants emphasized other difficulties such as memory problems, inaccurate organization of ideas and grammar structures, as well as lack of practice. In fact, this anxiety could be related to self-consciousness and lack of self-confidence.

The second issue mentioned by the participants, was criticism. In this first category related to negative emotions, there were two participants who reported to be affected by the audience's criticism, i.e. they felt judged, and criticized by their classmates during the oral evaluation. These are the comments that the participants remarked on:

Participant 2: *"...durante la presentación me sentí peor porque sentía que estaba cometiendo varios errores y que mis compañeros se estaban dando cuenta..."*.

Participant 8: *"Durante el examen me sentí un poco incómoda ya que uno de mis compañeros a mi parecer es muy creído y de todo se burla..."*.

With respect to these comments, the two participants related criticism to negative feedback because they were concerned about their classmates' opinions during their oral evaluation. In fact, these two participants were already worried about their performance *before* doing the oral evaluation, and their main concern was that they would make mistakes in front of their classmates. *During* their performances the preoccupation with negative criticism influenced the participants to focus on taking care and protecting their images because they wanted to give a good impression to the audience.

The last category is related to positive emotions, in this part, there were participants who commented that *during* their oral evaluation, they were nervous.

However, when the assessment was taking place, participants' level of anxiety was lessening gradually, and their level of confidence was increasing, i.e. they felt more confident while performing the task. Here are some comments expressed by the participants:

Participant 1:“...después de dialogar un poco me sentí seguro de hacerlo, aunque no del todo bien en cuanto a mi desempeño”.

Participant 9:“... mientras estaba al frente con mi compañera quizá nos entró un poco la duda, pero no fue muy difícil superarlo, ya que supimos llevar la conversación muy amablemente”.

Participant 11:“...durante la presentación me sentía nerviosa pero conforme se avanzó en el diálogo los nervios fueron desapareciendo....”.

These participants could overcome nervousness and their confidence increased as the performance progressed; however, participant 1 was not completely satisfied with his performance even though he felt confident.

On the other hand, there were other participants who explained that *during* their oral evaluation, support from their classmates and the teacher facilitated them to carry out the task. These are some of the comments done by the participants:

Participant 2:“...la profesora con su cara que puso nos dio confianza, al menos yo lo sentí así en lo personal”.

Participant 5:“...me sentí muy tranquila, y sobre todo en confianza, eso es lo que me hacen sentir mis compañeros, creo que eso hace que el ambiente sea mucho mejor, y así facilitar la tarea”.

Participant 12:“Durante la presentación me sentía un poco nervioso pero ya cuando iban pasando mis compañeros me sentía más en confianza”.

Concerning these comments, empathy from classmates and the teacher was useful and encouraging to the participants to perform the task. Actually, these participants seemed to perceive that their classmates and the teacher were

considerate listeners who gave the impression of sharing and understanding the participants' feelings, as well as being in the participants' place. For this reason, the participants could experience an adequate environment, and they developed the task feeling more comfortable.

This second analysis was related to the participants' sort of affective factors experienced *during* the oral examination. The following section will take into account the emotions that were expressed by the participant *after* their performance.

4.2.3 Participants' affective responses *after the oral examination*

In this last section, participants' comments after doing their first oral examination will be analyzed, which continues to be related to answering the first research question. In the analysis of the participants' affective answers, there were three main categories which were classified as 1) negative emotions which were related to dissatisfaction; 2) positive emotions that have to do with tranquility, satisfaction and commendable performance, and 3) neutral emotions, related to lack of worry or excitement after the first oral examination.

In the categorization of negative emotions, there were two participants who commented that dissatisfaction with their performance was the main feeling after doing their first oral examination. Indeed, both participants pointed out that nervousness affected them during their oral examination, and consequently they could not have better results. Although these two participants had positive attitudes in different moments of the oral examination, their level of stress did not lessen,

and they could not overcome it. In the following excerpts the two participants expressed their concerns:

Participant 2: “...después de la presentación me sentí mal porque al pasar con la profesora me di cuenta que si en unas palabras y algunas cosas las dije mal, pero eso fue consecuencia de mis nervios.”

Participant 7: “...al finalizar inconforme ya que los nervios me ganaron y no expuse un examen como yo hubiera querido”.

In this part, it could be observed that participants' oral performance was affected by anxiety, and as a result they made mistakes. When foreign language speakers are not able to handle their level of stress, their verbal performance could be affected. As a result, they are not using the foreign language efficiently, that is, they are not really proving what they have learned or acquired because of their affective emotions.

The next category has to do with positive emotions. In this section, there were participants who explained that after doing their oral examination, they felt relieved because the activity was over. After their performances, the examiner provided feedback to the participants so that they could identify their mistakes. Here are some of the excerpts that the participants pointed out:

Participant 3: “...después tranquilo observando los errores que tuve”.

Participant 4: “...al final me sentí bien porque la profesora nos dijo que lo hicimos bien y ... nos corrigió pero de manera constructiva y eso en lo personal me anima mucho porque sé que puedo equivocarme y así continuar aprendiendo y practicando pero sin temor a una mala crítica”.

Participant 11: “al término de la presentación me sentía tranquila por haber concluido con el diálogo”.

According to these comments, the participants could carry out their oral examination in spite of being under pressure, but as soon as their performance

was over, they felt tranquil. Furthermore, they commented that the examiner's feedback was useful since they could identify their mistakes to improve their speaking skill. These participants perceived feedback as a positive criticism to continue learning and acquiring the foreign language.

The last category has to do with neutral emotions. In this section, there were two participants who did not comment to have been worried or relaxed after doing their oral performance. They did not describe any kind of affective emotion. Here are some of the excerpts that the participants mentioned:

Participant 9: *"Ya cuando finalizó nuestro turno todo seguía normal..."*

Participant 10: *"...después del examen solo quería saber en qué me había equivocado".*

With respect to the answers given by the participants after their oral examination, the comments show that they were not anxious or relaxed after their oral examination. In fact, participant 9 was tranquil from the beginning to the end of the evaluation. Nevertheless, participant 10 was only nervous during her performance, and at the end of the activity she was focused on receiving feedback from the examiner. According to these participants' answers, it seems to be that they have been working on their language ego, and self-confidence which have let them handle with this kind of oral evaluation.

This third analysis was focused on the participants' type of affective filters faced after doing the oral examination. The next section will be related to the kind of strategies that the participants made use of dealing with this evaluation.

4.3 Analysis of the participants' strategies used in the oral examination

In this section, the most meaningful characteristics related to learning strategies in the analysis of the first questionnaire will be presented. The description of these aspects will be related to the second research question of this investigation. The results are organized in the sections below according to the learning strategies that were identified within the participants' responses.

Oxford's (1990) categorization of language learning strategies is used to organize the participants' responses, and they are divided into direct and indirect strategies. Among the direct strategies, the participants made use of memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. On the other hand, there were participants who used indirect strategies such as affective and metacognitive strategies. As a result, the language learning strategies are discussed below in relation to memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, affective strategies, and metacognitive strategies.

4.3.1 Memory strategies reported by participants

According to the participants' answers, *reviewing well* was one of the sets of memory strategies identified in the data. The main comment that some participants pointed out in their questionnaires was revising specific foreign language information constantly to deal with their first oral examination. Here are some of the excerpts that the participants mentioned (see appendix B for further information related to participants' comments):

Participant 3: "*Frecuento los libros y ejercicios realizados en la clase*".

Participant 6: “...trato de repasar los verbos y todo lo que hemos visto hasta ahorita...”.

Participant 8: “...trato de recordar lo estudiado...”.
“...recordé varios de los diálogos de las unidades trabajadas...”.

Participant 11: “El ponerme a estudiar...”

With these comments, it was observed that these participants frequently reviewed the foreign language information given by their professor so that they were able to retain and use that knowledge during the oral examination. Oxford (1990) holds the view that by making use of this strategy, learners remember more, and they are more familiarized with the foreign language. This allows them to employ the foreign language more spontaneously and easily, which is the goal of this strategy.

4.3.2 Cognitive strategies reported by participants

In this section, there were two sets of cognitive strategies employed by the participants. The first set has to do with *practicing strategies* and the second one with *analyzing and reasoning strategies*.

In the first set mentioned above, there was a participant who used the *repeating strategy* to be prepared for her first oral examination. The learner mentioned that one of the strategies she used was reading and rehearsing in her mind what she wants to express before making use of the foreign language.

This is the excerpt that the participant expressed:

Participant 8: “... leer y pensar lo que quiero decir antes de abrir la boca”.

This participant showed that the practice of repeating the foreign language over and over again helped her organize her ideas so that she could use them later in communicative activities; for instance, the oral examination. Oxford (1990, p. 43) expresses the view that "...practice is usually needed to reach acceptable proficiency...", and that the numbers of hours of practice will vary depending on the complexity of the foreign language.

Another participant made use of a different set of *practicing strategies*. This set is called *reorganizing and using formulas and patterns*. The participant pointed out that learning phrases to work with them was one of the strategies that she used. This is the comment that the participant expressed:

Participant 11: "...tratar de aprenderme frases para poder trabajar con ellas".

As it can be observed, this participant realized that through learning prefabricated phrases, single expressions, formulas or patterns, she was able to reuse that foreign language information to carry out the oral examination. Using this strategy gives learners various advantages such as increasing their comprehension and production, and having better self-confidence, taking them to have better results during their learning process (Oxford, 1990). As it was mentioned at the beginning of this section, the second set of cognitive strategies found in the data was the one called *analyzing and reasoning*. From that set of strategies, there was a participant who employed one of them named translating strategies.

This participant commented that listening to music in English and looking up the songs' translations, as well as watching movies with subtitles in Spanish has

helped him during his language learning process. These are some of the strategies that he reported employing in order to face the oral examination. The following excerpts were taken from the participant's questionnaire:

Participant 7: *"...escuchar música en Inglés y buscar sus traducciones me ha ayudado mucho en la conjugación de las palabras así como en el entender bien la pronunciación de las palabras..."*.

"...ver películas con subtítulos en español".

Concerning these comments, translating was a useful strategy for this participant since it allowed him to have a better understanding of the foreign language, as well as its pronunciation. Comprehension and production in the speaking and writing skill are two advantages that learners could benefit from if they implement this strategy in their learning process.

4.3.3 Compensation strategies reported by participants

In these kinds of strategies, one participant included a specific strategy called *getting help* which is part of another set of strategies called, *overcoming limitations in speaking and writing*.

This participant explained that when he does not understand specific information about the foreign language, he asks questions to the teacher so that he can get help, and solve his doubts. Here is the comment that the participant made:

Participant 7: *"...preguntar al tutor de la materia en las pequeñas cosas que no comprendo totalmente..."*.

With respect to this answer provided by the participant, it can be said that he overcomes his foreign language limitations through the teacher's help to be provided with the missing information of the language. This strategy is quite useful

during speaking activities since it lets learners continue in the conversation in spite of the interruption, providing them with new knowledge of the language to accomplish their verbal task.

4.3.4 Affective strategies reported by participants

Regarding this section, two sets of affective strategies were used by the learners. The first set is related to *lowering your anxiety strategies* and the second one to *encouraging strategies*.

With respect to the first set, there were some participants who commented on making use of *lowering your anxiety strategies*. These participants commented that trying to be relaxed and calm was necessary, imagining being alone, as well as ignoring or not paying attention to their classmates helped them control nervousness during the oral examination. Some examples of these situations could be observed in the following excerpts:

Participant 1: *“Intentar estar tranquilo, es lo primordial”.*

Participant 2: *“Tratar de conservar la calma e imaginar que estoy sola, porque más que nada me traicionan los nervios al estar enfrente del grupo...”.*

Participant 8: *“... para poder hacer bien mi examen ignoro a la gente... También el no hacer caso a la gente que está presente”.*

With this information, it was observed that these participants reduced their level of anxiety regulating their emotions, and attitudes. Keeping calm helped participants accomplish the task in spite of not feeling confident. Participant 2 and 8 also lowered their anxiety through focusing on the oral examination and ignoring all the external factors that could interfere in their performance. *Lowering your*

anxiety strategies help learners to develop self-esteem which is reflected in their language learning process (Oxford, 1990).

In the second set of encouraging yourself strategies, two participants reported to have employed *taking risks wisely strategies*. These learners explained that expressing their ideas spontaneously was the strategy used in their oral examination. In fact, they commented that after the oral examination, they received positive feedback to overcome their limitations in the foreign language. These are the comments that the participants remarked on:

Participant 4: “...*para tener un mejor examen oral lo mejor es decir lo que estoy pensando en el momento ya que seré corregida de forma positiva y así practicar y solucionar mis errores de pronunciación*”.

Participant 5: “... *expresar las cosas, o de pronunciar las palabras sin pena, porque sabemos que ella [la profesora] estará ahí para decirnos sutilmente como es la pronunciación*”.

These participants realized that motivating themselves to use the foreign language was a helpful strategy. Even though, they could face some difficulties during their performance, they decided to take the risk. Receiving positive feedback from the teacher was another factor that influenced the learners to use this strategy because they faced the fact of making mistakes as a way to overcome that lack of knowledge and improve their language learning process.

4.3.5 Metacognitive strategies reported by participants

Concerning this kind of strategies, the only set identified in the data was the one called *centering your learning*. From that set of strategies previously mentioned, only one participant employed *paying attention strategies*. The

comment that this learner reported was reading carefully. This is the excerpt that the participant expressed:

Participant 12: “*Pues leyendo con atención...*”
“*...le entiendo mucho a las lecturas...*”

With this comment, it was observed that this participant focused on his learning process. That is, he decided to pay attention to a particular language skill that has given him results to improve his language learning. In the opinion of Oxford (1990, p. 138), this strategy “...helps learners to converge their attention and energies on certain language tasks, activities, skills or materials”. With this strategy, *paying attention*, the participant is learning, coordinating and adjusting his learning through selecting a certain language skill to have a more efficient language learning process which is the goal of this strategy.

4.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present the analysis of the data that was gathered in order to fulfill the general aims and objectives of the present investigation. The level of detail in this chapter provided the results and the answers to the research questions, which were presented in Chapter one of the current thesis. The next chapter of this work will present the implications of the findings, the study limitations, as well as the study contributions.

Conclusions and Recommendations**5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary of the research project presented in this thesis. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the aims and objectives of the study as well as a summary of the study's findings and their relation to the research questions. It continues with a discussion of the possible implications. The chapter ends with the study's limitations, suggestions for further research, and the final comments on this study.

5.1 Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore the learners' different perceptions about oral language testing, as well as how they reflected upon the experience, perceived and coped with their oral presentations. This study provided information for understanding students' reactions and behaviors before, during and after a speaking assessment in the foreign language. Another objective of the current study was to explore the strategies that learners employed before, during and after an oral assessment in their foreign language. The study provided information about the different types of strategies that distinct participants employ in order to better perform and cope with the demands of an oral assessment in the foreign language.

5.2 Summary of key Findings

According to research question one, results showed that a range of affective factors influenced the participants' performance before, during and after the oral assessment procedures. The general categorization of these affective states can be described as positive, neutral or negative responses to the assessment situation; however, participants reported different perceptions about what these different affective states included as well as what their catalyst too.. During all phases of the exam, participants reported general feelings of anxiety, which could be closely related to a fear of public speaking and performing. Some anxiety was caused by a fear of being ridiculed and losing face publically in front of their classmates and teacher. Furthermore, anxiety was provoked by a fear of performing badly on the assessment, which could affect their overall course grade.

On the other hand, participants also reported the exact opposite perceptions about the assessment procedures during its various phases. For example, various participants reported that anxiety was lessened during the assessment procedure due to a feeling of support that they received from their classmates and teacher as they looked out over their audience during the oral assessment. Furthermore, various participants reported that the feeling of anxiety was replaced by a feeling of confidence as the assessment procedure progressed. This feeling of confidence even evolved into a feeling of triumph toward the end of the assessment procedure when participants perceived that they had overcome their initial fear of failure and performed well on the assessment. Certain participants who felt that they had performed well on the oral assessment procedure reported feeling increased

motivation to continue working hard on their foreign language proficiency as they believed that communicating in a foreign language had, indeed, become possible.

Regarding the second question, we can claim that participants reported a variety of strategies which facilitated their performance on the oral assessment as well as helping them to cope with the demands that the procedure placed on them. The strategies that participants employed included memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, affective strategies and metacognitive strategies. Memory strategies include activities such as reviewing materials from class thoroughly and constantly in order to become intimately familiar with the contents that they are expected to master. Cognitive strategies included participants reported wide reading and rehearsing different linguistic chunks extensively in the mind in order to facilitate their familiarity with those contents. As such, participants felt more comfortable when employing these linguistic items after having rehearsed them extensively, even if this rehearsal process took place autonomously without the participation of an interlocutor present. Compensation strategies included looking for assistance with course contents that were difficult for them. This allowed them to overcome their own limitations as they looked for help from the course instructor. Participants also reported employing affective strategies, which involved consciously lowering anxiety levels through deep breathing techniques or simply providing self-encouragement through positive thinking and maintaining a positive attitude. Finally, participants engaged in metacognitive strategies, which involved consciously maintaining their attention span and remaining focused on successfully finishing the task at hand.

5.3 Implications of the Study

The results above have various implications for classroom teachers and their resulting classroom practices regarding the assessment of the oral skill. First, both teachers and students should be more conscious of the affective responses that oral testing may provoke in order to recognize how these affective factors could affect test performance when assessing the oral skill. The fact that a large majority of this investigation's participants experienced a large amount of anxiety before, during or after the assessment process is relevant. Such anxiety certainly affects test performance as students face the demands of the assessment situation, and the consequences of lowered performance have real-world consequences since students' grades impact their opportunities in life for future study, job opportunities and more. As such, teachers should be sensitive to the fact that students may be underperforming during such assessment procedures, and measures should be taken to balance these assessment scores with additional assessment procedures which can provide a more balanced view of the students' actual capabilities.

On the other hand, students also need to be aware of the demands that formal, oral assessment may place on them. Students should be conscious of the fact that anxiety can debilitate their performance in oral assessment and become familiar with the kinds of strategies that may facilitate their performance during these procedures. As such, it may be advisable for strategy instruction to become an explicit facet of the curriculum in order to expand the students' natural strategy inventory when engaged in assessment practices.

5.4 Limitations of the study

One of the limitations of the study could be found within the sampling procedure and the number of participants. The limited sample provides results which should not be generalized to a larger population. Additionally, due to the limited data gathered from the participants, adding an interview to the data gathering process may have added a richer perspective of how participants perceived the assessment process.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

The data gathered for this study only focused on the first oral examination that was performed within the research context. It would be a significant contribution to this field if the study adopted a longitudinal approach which could provide insights into how participants respond affectively to oral assessment as they become more familiar with the process and gain more experience with these procedures as a course progresses. Furthermore, the data for the current investigation was limited to linguistic data which described the participants' perceptions. An important contribution to this area of study would include the analysis of multimodal data, possibly in the form of video recordings of the assessment procedures in order to provide insights into how such affective responses manifest multimodally during the testing process.

5.6 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the affective effects that oral assessment has on foreign language learners as well as the strategies that they may adopt in order

to cope with the demands of such procedures. The study finds its relevance as it was performed in a particular academic context that has specific sociocultural needs that must be addressed as the university attempts to meet international language standards that have become increasingly common around the world. As industrialized countries place increasing demands on developing nations in regards to language learning and proficiency, countries like Mexico must better understand how to facilitate members of society to meet the expectations of a globalized society where speaking and interacting in a foreign language has become commonplace. This study has taken a small step in helping the context to better understand the problems that its participants face as they attempt to meet such demands.

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APPENDIX A

Examen oral de Inglés 1

Nombre: _____

Edad: _____ Carrera: _____ Semestre: _____

Instrucciones: escribe tu autobiografía acerca de tu experiencia en el primer examen oral. Usa las siguientes preguntas como guía.

1. Describe el procedimiento del examen: contenido, tiempo y escenario.

2. ¿Cómo te sentías antes, durante y después de tu presentación?

3. Describe tus sentimientos y emociones.

4. ¿Qué problemas tuviste con la lengua extranjera durante el examen?

5. ¿Qué tipos de estrategias usas para enfrentar este tipo de examen?

Gracias

APPENDIX B

Categories Participants	Participants' emotions in oral tests			Oral test's problems	Used strategies
	Before	During	After		
Participant 1	<p>“Al inicio un poco nervioso...”</p> <p>“Nerviosismo, acelerado, preocupado ...”</p>	<p>“...después de dialogar un poco me sentí seguro de hacerlo, aunque no del todo bien en cuanto a mi desempeño”.</p>	NP	<p>“Pues creo que fueron unas palabras tanto en traducción como en la dicción...”</p>	<p>“Intentar estar tranquilo, es lo primordial”</p> <p>“...aprehender las cosas que vas conociendo... ir practicando ...”</p>
Participant 2	<p>“Antes de la presentación me comencé a sentir insegura con mucho miedo de pasar al frente del grupo...”.</p> <p>“ Mis principales sentimientos fue el pánico que sentía al pasar frente a todos, la inseguridad que tenía acerca de mi pronunciación, el miedo a las críticas que</p>	<p>“...durante la presentación me sentí peor porque sentía que estaba cometiendo varios errores y que mis compañeros se estaban dando cuenta...”</p> <p>“...la profesora con su cara que puso nos dio confianza, al menos yo lo sentí así en lo personal”.</p>	<p>“...después de la presentación me sentí mal porque al pasar con la profesora me di cuenta que si en unas palabras y algunas cosas las dije mal, pero eso fue consecuencia de mis nervios.”</p>	<p>“... la pronunciación porque a veces siento que se me traba la lengua en algunas palabras...”.</p> <p>“... otro problema es que se me olvidaron las reglas acerca de cómo decir ciertas frases... y los nervios traicioneros”.</p>	<p>“Tratar de conservar la calma e imaginar que estoy sola, porque más que nada me traicionan los nervios al estar enfrente del grupo...”</p>

	<p>realizarían después de oírme, y demasiados nervios.</p> <p>“El temor de que la profesora me regañara frente a todos...”.</p>				
Participant 3	<p>“Antes nervioso por no saber cómo me iba a ir...”.</p>	NP	<p>“...después tranquilo observando los errores que tuve”.</p>	<p>“La pronunciación fue el problema”.</p>	<p>“Frecuento los libros y ejercicios realizados en la clase”.</p>
Participant 4	<p>“Me sentí nerviosa”.</p>	<p>“...me sentí nerviosa...pero siento que el motivo de que me sintiera nerviosa fue porque ya no había practicado este idioma (ingles) ya no la tenía como materia entonces digamos que perdí la práctica...”</p>	<p>“...al final me sentí bien porque la profesora nos dijo que lo hicimos bien y ... nos corrigió pero de manera constructiva y eso en lo personal me anima mucho porque sé que puedo equivocarme y así continuar aprendiendo y practicando pero sin temor a una mala crítica”.</p>	<p>“...mi problema fue que no me acordaba mucho, que no me exprese tal y como ya lo había pensado y practicado, me trabe y con mayor razón me puse nerviosa...”</p>	<p>“...para tener un mejor examen oral lo mejor es decir lo que estoy pensando en el momento ya que seré corregida de forma positiva y así practicaré y solucionaré mis errores de pronunciación”</p>

Participant 5	“... muy nerviosa al hablar en público y mas en ingles, (no lo manejo nada bien)...”	“...tuve sentimientos encontrados al momento de estar enfrente, fueron momentos de nerviosismo pero a la vez de emoción, pues me gusta la idea de aprender Inglés y que mejor que llevarlo a cabo de esa forma, cuando ya estuve presentándolo, me sentí muy tranquila, y sobre todo en confianza, eso es lo que me hacen sentir mis compañeros, creo que eso hace q el ambiente sea mucho mejor, y así facilitar la tarea”.	NP	“...tuve algunos problemas de pronunciación ...” “ no sé mucho vocabulario...” “... en algunas preguntas cambiaba las palabras, o me faltaban...”.	“... expresar las cosas, o de pronunciar las palabras sin pena, porque sabemos que ella [la profesora] estará ahí para decirnos sutilmente como es la pronunciación”.
Participant 6	NP	“Pues si me puse muy nerviosa y yo creo que por lo mismo de los nervios cuesta un poco mas de trabajo y lo cual hace como que se te olviden las cosas”.	NP	“... muchas palabras no sé el significado y por lo mismo no se que se me está preguntando...” “... también se me dificulta	“... repaso pero me cuesta mucho trabajo aprender el Inglés no sé si porque yo me pongo limites y me bloqueo...”

				<p>mucho identificar en tiempo esta la preguntas en presente, pasado, o futuro”.</p>	<p>“... trato de repasar los verbos y todo lo que hemos visto hasta ahorita...”.</p> <p>“... repase las preguntas y pues yo sola las repaso y las repito y si las digo bien pero ya con gente me ganan los nervios y se me olvida...”.</p>
Participant 7	<p>“Los sentimientos eran reflejados en alegría porque tenía más de dos años que no cursaba nada de Inglés y en emociones solo ansiedad”.</p> <p>“Antes del examen con ansiedad por pasar...”.</p>	<p>“...durante el examen nervioso...”.</p>	<p>“...al finalizar inconforme ya que los nervios me ganaron y no expuse un examen como yo hubiera querido”.</p>	<p>“Ninguno por lo mismo de que al tener un grupo reducido uno opta por tener más atención a clases”.</p>	<p>“...preguntar al tutor de la materia en las pequeñas cosas que no comprendo totalmente...”.</p> <p>“...escuchar música en Inglés y buscar sus traducciones me ha ayudado mucho en la conjugación de las palabras así como en el entender bien la pronunciación de las palabras...”.</p>

					“...ver películas con subtítulos en español”.
Participant 8	“Antes del examen me sentí un poco nerviosa e incómoda porque pensaba que me iba a equivocar”.	“Durante el examen me sentí un poco incómoda ya que uno de mis compañeros a mi parecer es muy creído y de todo se burla...”	NP	“Creo que el Inglés no es lo mío...”	“... para poder hacer bien mi examen ignoro a la gente...” “...trato de recordar lo estudiado, no me gusta memorizarlo ...” “...recordé varias de los diálogos de las unidades trabajadas...” “... leer y pensar lo que quiero decir antes de abrir la boca”. “También el no hacer caso a la gente que está presente”.
Participant 9	“Al inicio ... no me sentí muy nervioso ni nada por estilo”.	“... mientras estaba al frente con mi compañera quizá nos entro un poco la duda, pero no fue muy difícil superarlo, ya que supimos llevar la	“Ya cuando finalizo nuestro turno todo seguía normal...”	NP	NP

		conversación muy amenable”.			
Participant 10	“Antes del examen oral estaba normal...”.	“...pero durante el examen oral me sentí un poco nerviosa y sentí que se cuatrapearon las ideas...”	“... después del examen solo quería saber en qué me había equivocado”.	“El problema que tuve con la lengua extranjera durante el examen fue la pronunciación ya que por los nervios lo pronunciaba diferente”.	“Para este tipo de examen no memorizo las cosas porque solo me confundo mas y se me olvida todo y lo que dije es lo que he aprendido durante el curso”.
Participant 11	“Antes de la presentación estaba insegura nerviosa y temerosa...” ” “ <i>Nervios</i> , por no saber expresarme bien como lo hago con el español. <i>Insegura</i> , por no saber muchas frases y dar la idea correcta de lo que deseo expresar. <i>Temerosa</i> , por no saber que reacción tendría la	“...durante la presentación me sentía nerviosa pero conforme se avanzo en el dialogo los nervios fueron desapareciendo ...”	“...al termino de la presentación me sentía tranquila por haber concluido con el dialogo”.	“El no saber muchas frases para poder emplearlas en mi conversación, así como la pronunciación correcta de la lengua extranjera”.	“ El ponerme a estudiar ...” “...tratar de aprenderme frases para poder trabajar con ellas”.

	teacher al decir mi presentación si estaría correcta o equivocada”.				
Participant 12	NP	“Durante la presentación me sentía un poco nervioso pero ya cuando iban pasando mis compañeros me sentía más en confianza”.	NP	“Pues en la primera parte le entendía [a su compañero] muy bien pero la segunda ya no pues yo le entiendo mucho a las lecturas”.	“Pues leyendo con atención pero como no había ido a varias clases por eso no le entendí”.