

The Good Language Learner

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Do you think that there is such a thing as a 'good language learner'? To what extent do you think that it is possible for people to become 'better' language learners? Discuss with reference to your own students, past or present.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, second language acquisition (SLA) research has shown that every language learner assimilates and learns a language differently. It has been observed how in the same classroom some students progress rapidly while others struggle and seem to show slower progress in their language development (Lightbown & Spada, 2001:29).

Additionally, some researchers believe that, SLA is influenced by personal factors that may facilitate or hinder learner's language development. Personality factors such as learning styles and preferences and affective considerations, like motivation, aptitude and attitude have a great impact on how successful a student can be (Lightbown & Spada, 2001:29).

I believe that many different factors intervene in successful language learning. Especially, when we teachers have more than 20 different personalities in the classroom, and they all demand specific and specialized attention. It becomes an issue to face when we need to train each student to use their styles, strategies and personalities, for their benefit by adapting these skills to meet the demands of their learning context. I consider "good language learners" (GLLs) exist, and that every learner has the potential to become "better" at learning the target language. Therefore, students have a GLL within them that sooner or later comes to surface with the use and adaptation of different styles, and strategies. Moreover, it is important to consider that defining a 'better language learner' (BLL) is difficult. What may be considered a GLL may be considered by other language classrooms and language teachers an average language learner. So, it is critical to consider students' learning purposes and teaching context when aiding students become BLLs.

This paper has the purpose of discussing what characteristics a GLL presents. Additionally, the extent to which a GLL can become "better" will be discussed according to the writer's observations and the personal opinion of 7 EFL university students who participated in a 10-item questionnaire.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The Good Language Learner.

For many years now, researchers have attempted to describe what characteristics and actions GLLs possess with the purpose of transferring them to less successful learners through everyday language teaching.

According to Rubin (1975), it is necessary for teachers to observe language learners and isolate those strategies and characteristics that make some students more successful than others. By isolating these characteristics and transferring them to less proficient learners through daily teaching methodology, teachers may enlighten less successful learners' path to their language development. Some of these GLL characteristics that Rubin considers are (1975: 45-48) outlined in Table 1.

Lightbown & Spada (2001) contribute to this list of GLL characteristics by classifying them into five main categories: motivation, aptitude, personality, intelligence, and learner preferences. However, it is considered that a single characteristic may be part of more than a single category. Table 2 outlines a questionnaire developed by Lightbown & Spada (2001: 29) in which students are encouraged to reflect on the characteristics of GLL. Although some items do not relate directly to language learning, it gives a starting point to reflect upon on the possible skills proficient learners may come to develop.

Table 1 The Good Language Learner

Good Language Learner Characteristics	Description
<i>They are willing to guess and are comfortable with uncertainty</i>	Learners are able to take whatever clues are presented to them and narrow their knowledge to obtain the desired meaning of the target language. An inaccurate guess does not hinder the learner but instead is rapidly reanalyzed. However, as young learners get older their guessing strategies change and need more information to formulate a specific guess.
<i>They are willing to try everything to get meaning across and communicate in the target language</i>	This learner may use any type of nonverbal communication such as gestures or mimicking to convey meaning.
<i>Good language learners are undisturbed</i>	They do not mind when they seem foolish to their classmates as long as their message is being understood.
<i>They look for grammar patterns in their speech and those of others who speak the target language</i>	The student is constantly looking for the connection among different elements as well as analyzing and categorizing the elements to which the learner is exposed.
<i>The good language learner constantly looks for opportunities to practice the language</i>	Opportunities such as movies, radio programs or direct contact with a native speaker are always prioritized. They are always eager to participate and speak in class or initiate a conversation with the instructor in the target language.
<i>They constantly monitor their use of the target language and that of their peers with the purpose of learning from individual mistakes</i>	Learners use meta-cognitive skills and reflect on their learning and progress. They assess their peers' development and learn from their observations using the valuable information to improve their use of language.
<i>They prioritize meaning and know that language accuracy is not enough to convey meaning</i>	The good language learner understands importance of the context, the participants and the rules of speaking.

Adapted from Rubin, 1975: 45-48

On the other hand, Brown (2007) considers students are individuals that use different strategies to obtain communicative competence. He emphasizes the need for teachers to prepare students to receive the information that they convey (meaningful input) instead of only delivering it without considering how students are assimilating the target information (Brown, 2007: 258). Table 3 illustrates Brown's account for GLL.

Table 2 Good Language Learner Questionnaire

Which characteristics seem to you most likely to be associated with success in second language acquisition in the classroom? Which ones would you be less inclined to expect in a successful learner? In each case rate the characteristics as follows:

- 1= Very important
 2= Quite important
 3= Important
 4= Not very important
 5= Not at all important

A good Language learner is willing to:

A is a willing and accurate guesser.	1	2	3	4	5
B Tries to get a message across even if specific language knowledge is lacking.	1	2	3	4	5
C Is willing to make mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5
D Constantly looks for patterns in the language	1	2	3	4	5
E Practices as often as possible.	1	2	3	4	5
F Analyses his or her own speech and the speech of others.	1	2	3	4	5
G Attends to whether his or her performance meets the standards he or she has learned.	1	2	3	4	5
H Enjoys grammar exercises.	1	2	3	4	5
I Begins learning in childhood.	1	2	3	4	5
J Has an above-average IQ	1	2	3	4	5
K Has good academic skills.	1	2	3	4	5
L Has a good self-image and lots of confidence.	1	2	3	4	5

(Lightbown & Spada 2001: 29)

Table 3 "A Good Language Learner..."

1. Find their own way.
2. Organize information about language.
3. Are creative, developing a "feel" for the language by experimenting with its grammar and words.
4. Make their own opportunities for practice in using the language inside and outside the language classroom.
5. Make their own opportunities for practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom.
6. Use mnemonics and other memory strategies to recall what has been learned.
7. Make errors work for them and not against them.
8. Use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of their first language, in learning a second language.
9. Use contextual cues to help them in comprehension.
10. Learn to make intelligent guesses.
11. Learn chunks of language as wholes and formalized routines to help them.
12. Learn certain tricks that help to keep conversations going.
13. Learn certain production strategies to fill in gaps in their own competence.
14. Learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language according to the formality of the situation.

(Brown, 2007: 299-360)

2.2 Learning a Second Language.

Learning a second or foreign language is known to be a difficult and complex process that needs specific instruction and in which many factors may intervene. A language classroom is composed of individuals that are characterized by different personalities, learning styles and learning preferences that can influence their SLA (Harmer, 2007). Therefore, as language teachers we need to find a way to meet these individual differences the best possible way to ensure students' best use of the input we are transmitting. Factors such as learner's learning strategies, learning styles and personality (motivation, attitude, aptitude among others) may have a strong role in a student's language development (Rubin, 1975; Lightbown & Spada, 2001; Brown, 2007; Hodge, 2000). Rubin in his 1975 article discusses that successful language learning depends on three factors: 1) *aptitude*, which describes a learner that has an innate ability to learn the language; 2) *motivation*, whether instrumental or integrative: intrinsic or extrinsic and 3) *opportunities*, which the author considers is an activity in or outside of the classroom in which the student is exposed to the target language. Brown (2007:21) considers that

‘...Successful language learners are usually people who know how to manipulate style (as well as strategy) level in their day-to-day encounters with the language. This means that they are first aware of general personality and cognitive characteristics or tendencies that usually lead to successful acquisition and strive to develop those characteristics...’

Other researchers, such as Tricia Hedge (2000:20) consider that aspects such as affective factors can also have an influence on language development. Emotional reactions to learning and the input received may have positive or negative effects. For instance, it is widely considered that an introvert learner is less successful than an extrovert one (Hedge, 2000:20). However, it is still uncertain if success or failure can be attributed to introvert or extrovert personalities. In contexts where speaking is important introvert personalities can be considered ‘underachievers’ while in lessons where language accuracy is emphasized extrovert students may be considered unsuccessful learners. Other factors considered by Hedge (2000) as affective are anxiety, ethnocentricity, attitude and motivation.

The following sections focus on three specific areas: learning strategies, learning styles and affective factors aiming at providing a detailed description of what each factor entails.

2.2.1 Learning Strategies.

According to Oxford ‘...learning strategies are behaviors or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable’ (1989, cited in Ellis, 1994: 331).

Ellis adds that a strategy, for research purposes, is a production set that is used to solve a problem in language learning. Research has pointed out that the adequate use of learning strategies can help learners improve their overall language proficiency or a specific area of communicative competence (Ellis, 1994).

Classifying learning strategies has been an issue that researchers have undergone for some time now. Although many authors contribute with their own classification of strategies, it is still an issue that arises much debate. Oxford (1990, cited in Ellis, 1994)

and Hedge (2002) have classified learning strategies in two main groups as showed on Table 4.

Table 4 Learning Strategy Classifications.

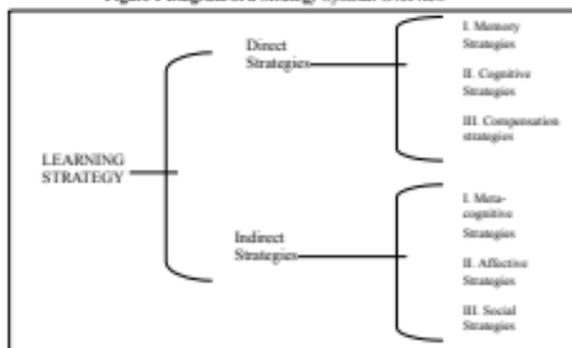
Strategy	Description	Sample Activities
<i>Direct Learning Strategies</i>	Students are required to make direct use of the language to carry out their mental processes. Strategies classified in this category include memory, cognitive and compensation.	Sample activities that fall into this category are 1) remembering more effectively, 2) using all cognitive processes available and 3) compensating when a piece of information is unknown.
<i>Indirect Learning Strategies</i>	Learners are provided with... "indirect support for language learning through focusing, planning, evaluating, seeking opportunities, controlling anxiety, increasing cooperation and empathy and other means..." (Oxford, 1990 cited in Ellis, 1994: 536). This category includes meta-cognitive, affective and socio-affective strategies	Considers activities such as 1) organizing and evaluating students' own learning, 2) managing emotions and 3) learning with peers.

Adapted from Ellis, 1994; Hedge, 2002; Brown, 2007

According to Ellis (1994), strategy use can be influenced by personal factors, such as beliefs about the target language, learner factors such as age, motivation or aptitude, learner's personal background and social and situational factors. However, a GLL uses specific strategies in specific ways. For instance, O'Malley and Charnot (1989, cited in Ellis, 1994) consider that GLLs use "metalingual strategies". In other words, they follow their preferred learning styles and are aware of their own learning processes and preferences.

Research into learning strategies has contributed enormously to ELL methodology by providing an insight of the characteristics of effective language learning (Hedge, 2000: 81).

Figure 1 Diagram of a Strategy System: Overview



(Oxford, 1990: 16 cited in Ellis, 1994: 540)

How can teachers help students become aware of their capabilities and develop new strategies? According to Brown (2007) it is important to raise learners' awareness and consider the relationship awareness-action. In other words, '... when learners are aware of their own capabilities and limitations, they can efficiently adopt pathways to success that capitalize on strengths and compensate for weaknesses.' (Brown, 2007:261). Activities such as informal self check-lists, using formal personality and cognitive style tests, reading and participating in discussions and encouraging GLL behavior are recommended to help students become aware of their strategy preference. In this awareness process, training students in the best use of strategies is crucial. Hodge (2000) considers that students can be trained to develop strategies they need. Table 5 describes training activities for classroom use.

Table 5: Activities that train cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies.

Strategy	Possible Activities	Example
Cognitive	- Encourage students to replace activities expected from the teacher with activities that are self-reflective.	- Instead of giving students the meaning of a word, have them deduce it from context. - Use knowledge of affixation. - Checking in a dictionary.
	- Encourage students to analyze language.	- Use textbooks as extra resources. - Have students search for language data in them. - Find patterns among the data found.
Meta-cognitive	-Have students share their thoughts about self-helping strategies.	- Encourage students to participate in a writing activity in which they share their preferred strategies. - Have a discussion about written texts.
	- Self-monitor their progress encouraging autonomous learning.	- Use checklists that promote reflection about their own learning. - Promote peer assessment and discussion.

Adapted from Ikdge, 2000: 90-94.

2.2.2. Learner Styles

The term styles, according to Brown (2000: 260)

'...whether related to personality (such as extroversion, self-esteem, anxiety) or to cognition (such as left/right brain orientation, ambiguity tolerance, field sensitivity), characterize the consistent and enduring traits, tendencies, or preferences that may differentiate you from another person.'

In other words, a learning style is a preference an individual has in relation to obtaining, processing and retaining information (Gass & Selinker, 2008)

A person's preferred learning style emerges from the internalization of the environment surrounding them considering cognitive, physical and affective factors (Brown, 2000). Therefore, there are an infinite number of learning styles that influence's each individual's language acquisition. As a result, psychologists have given a wide variety

of learning style taxonomies but it is still uncertain to what extent a specific individual style can affect language learning (Hedge, 2002).

According to Reid (1987 cited in Ellis, 1994 and Peacock, 2002), learning styles can be divided in 6 main categories as showed in table 6.

Table 6 Learning Styles according to Reid (1987)

Learning Style	Description
Visual Learning	Students prefer to read or interpret tables and drawings.
Auditory Learning	Learners prefer listening to a talk or a radio program.
Kinesthetic Learning	Learners and teacher are engaged in Total Physical Response.
Tactile Learning	Includes building things or hands-on exercises.
Group Learning	Learning with others is preferred.
Individual Learning	Learners prefer to work individually

Adapted from Ellis, 1994; Peacock, 2002.

Another taxonomy provided by Willing in 1987 (Table 6) was obtained as a result of a study carried out on adult ESL learners. However, researchers question the validity and reliability of the results Willing obtained due to the small number of participants (Ellis, 1994).

A number of areas have received attention on behalf of SLA researchers to try to identify learning styles. Areas such as Field dependence vs. independence, reflectivity vs. impulsivity and visual vs. auditory styles as described in table 7, have puzzled researchers in recent years.

Table 6 Four Learning Styles used by adult ESL Learners.

General Learning Style	Main Characteristics
Concrete Learning Style	Direct means of processing information; people oriented, spontaneous, imaginative, emotional, dislikes routine.
Analytical Learning Style	Focuses on specific problem solving, object oriented, dislikes facts, prefers logic, etc.
Communicative Learning Style	Fairly adaptable, responsive to facts that do not fit, prefers social learning and a communicative approach; enjoys taking decisions.
Authority-oriented learning style	Rely on other people; needs teachers directions and explanations; likes a structured learning environment; intolerant of facts that do not fit; prefers a sequential progression; dislikes discovery learning.

(Willing, 1987 cited in Ellis, 1994: 507)

For teaching purposes, on one side, students need to find the specific timing and situation to evoke a specific style while teachers have to deal with different individuals in a lesson and find the right way to be flexible among them (Brown, 2000). On the other hand, teachers need to consider that when teaching and learning styles are mismatched, students may run the risk of suffering learning failure, frustration and demotivation (Rein, 1987 cited in Peacock, 2001). It is an endless task for teachers to meet every learning style in a single lesson. However, seeking a balance in teaching methods to suit students' preferences is highly recommendable (Felder, 1995 cited in Peacock, 2001).

Table 7 Learning Styles and their Main Characteristics

Learning Style	Concept	Main Characteristics
Field independence	A learner's ability to distinguish a specific item among a field of distracting factors.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Distinguish parts from a whole. 2. Analyze specific items without being distracted by "contaminating" factors. 3. Closely related to classroom learning where students need to answer exercises, drills and focus on specific chunks of information. 4. It involves analysis, attention to details. 5. It increases as children grow and mature into adults. 6. Considered a stable characteristic in adults. 7. Usually authoritarian, agnostic and highly individualistic societies.
Field dependence	A learner's ability to understand the "whole" of a specific language item or factor. Their analysis strongly depends on the parts embedded in the field.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students perceive the "whole picture" or the general configuration of a specific problem. 2. Successful learners of the communicative aspects of language. 3. Students who are highly self-identified, empathetic, and perceptive of people's feelings. 4. Inquire natural face-to-face learning difficult to obtain in a language classroom.
Reflectivity	Systematic thinkers that tend to make decisions are made slowly and reflectively	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learners tend to weigh all their possible considerations. 2. Learners tend to make less reading errors. 3. Successful inductive reasoning. 4. Slower but more accurate learners. 5. Requires teachers to be patient in allowing them sufficient time to analyze their work.
Impulsivity	A learner that makes a quick guess based on "hunches". Several guesses are usually made before obtaining the answer.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers tend to judge hastily impulsive guesses. 2. Learners make a large number of guesses, but inaccurately. 3. Teachers need to be patient with multiple guesses and the amount of mistakes made.
Auditory	Preference for auditory input.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learners prefer listening to lectures or audio taped exercises. 2. Unable in classroom settings.
Visual	Preference for visual input.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students prefer reading and analyzing charts, drawing or any other type of graphic material. 2. Unable in classroom settings. 3. Use strategies such as feelings or word grouping.

Adapted from Brown, 2000: 114-122; Lightbown & Spada, 2001: 35; Oxford, 2002.

2.2.3 Affective Factors.

Closely related to personality, affective factors such as motivation, risk-taking, anxiety, learner's beliefs, attitude and inhibition can have a major influence in the development of a L2.

Although difficult to describe scientifically (Brown, 2000), students' affective domain involves an infinite number of personality traits and emotions that, in combination with cognitive processes, can help researchers and teachers understand the language learning process. In the following sections, attention will be given to motivation; risk-taking and anxiety for the remaining aspects are beyond the scope and purpose of this paper.

2.2.3.1 Motivation.

Research has revealed that positive attitudes and motivation are strongly related to successful second language learning (Lighbrown & Spada, 2001). However, defining motivation and how it influences SLA is still an issue researchers have attempted to solve.

In 1972, Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert emphasized the difference between integrative and instrumental motivation (cited in Brown, 2000; Lighbrown & Spada, 2001). Gardner & Lambert (1972) distinguish both by stating that '...the former reflecting a sincere and personal interest in the target language, people and culture the latter its practical value and advantages' (cited in Ushioda, 2008).

In other words, integrative motivation is based on a culturally and socially driven interest while instrumental motivation is related to more immediate and practical goals (Lighbrown & Spada, 2001).

In the 1990's the terms intrinsic and extrinsic motivation appeared as a consequence of the birth of more education-friendly and classroom-based teaching methods (Ushioda, 2008). Considering motivation as an element that arises from internal or external factors, intrinsic motivation is that in which no physical prize or reward is received other than the personal satisfaction of carrying out the task while in extrinsically driven motivation learners are moved by a reward such as money or a prize received externally (Brown, 2000). The main difference between integrative/instrumental and intrinsic/extrinsic motivation lies in its purposes and rewards. While

integrative/instrumental are purpose oriented and are ways of extrinsic motivation (Ushioda, 2008), intrinsic/extrinsic motives are based on what is actually obtained from performing the task. For instance, a student may have a strong instrumental motive for taking a proficiency test: obtaining a job. However, little or no intrinsic pleasure from performing the test may be obtained. Moreover, motivation in GLLs is not only influenced by the social context in which they interact but instead it is constructed or constrained by it (Ushioda, 2008).

For teaching purposes students need to regulate their motivation based on their interests and objectives while teachers need to move from teacher-regulated motivation to student-centered motivation by involving learners in their learning and in decision-making tasks. Furthermore by varying activities, tasks and materials and by using cooperative instead of competitive activities, motivation can be encouraged in the classroom (Lightbown & Spada, 2001).

2.2.3.2 Risk-Taking

Learners who are willing to take chances in their learning, to follow their hunches and take the risk of being wrong are potential GLLs (Brown, 2000). Although in the classroom teachers can diminish the negative feeling risk-taking entails, in the real world students face a challenge: students the fear of taking risks and experimenting with their language development.

Self-esteem, by some researchers, is considered to influence risk-taking. When students with high global self-esteem make foolish guesses, the risk of being laughed at increases but the consequences are over seen (Brown, 2000). Furthermore, according to Beebe (1989 cited in Brown, 2000: 150), fossilization is a phenomenon that may be the result of the lack of willingness to take risks. In other words, students who prefer to "play on the safe side" and fulfill the minimum requirements of the task may choose to have their mistakes overseen thus becoming fossilized.

For teaching implications, teachers need to balance the interventions of overly high risk-takers to avoid having their wild guesses dominate the lesson and the rest of their classmates. Also, language instructors need to encourage students to take risks in an

environment of confidence that will lead them to value themselves as individuals known for the risks that they take (Brown, 2000).

2.2.3.3 Anxiety

Although difficult to measure and define, anxiety is closely related to feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry (Scovel, 1978 cited in Brown, 2000). Throughout the years, three basic components of foreign language anxiety have been identified (Howitz et al.1986; MacIntyre & Gardner 1989, 1991c cited in Brown, 2000: 151):

1. 'Communication apprehension, arising from learners' inability to adequately express mature thoughts and ideas.
2. Fear of negative social evaluation, arising from learner's need to make a positive social evaluation, arising from a learner's need to make a positive social impression on others; and
3. Test anxiety, or apprehension over academic evaluation.'

Between the 1960s and the 2000 the concepts of debilitating and facilitative anxiety emerged (Alpert & Harber, 1960; Scovel, 1978 cited in Brown, 2000) explaining how anxiety could benefit or harm the learning process. The concept behind facilitative anxiety is that a certain level of concern and apprehension is needed to fulfill a task. However, excessive concern may hinder students' learning: 'too much concern may get in the way of success' (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Anxiety and competitiveness are closely related and when combined can result in a key to successful learning (Bailey, 1983 cited in Brown, 2000:152). For instance, a student may wish to compete with a classmate during a debate and feel anxious to get to the discussion. However, an excessive sense of anxiety can result in student's low self-esteem and weak language development. It is still unclear if anxiety is an emotional factor, part of students' personality or a combination of both (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

3. THE NATURE OF THE TEACHING CONTEXT AND THE TARGET STUDENTS.

Participants, 7 Mexican EFL university students, were enrolled in a TOEFL test (ITP) preparation course at a private university and participated in a 45-minute lesson on a

daily basis for a semester period. As a core course of their BA program, EFL was considered obligatory for students studying at this private university. Once at a high intermediate level they were encouraged to take the ITP course. Therefore, a score of 500 points on the ITP was a graduation requirement. Table 8 outlines details on students' general background.

With the purpose of obtaining students' opinions in relation to the course, participants answered a ten-item questionnaire (Appendix A). Spanish, participants' L1, was used with the purpose of providing students freedom and confidence to answer the questionnaire. When asked directly during class, students expressed they felt obligated to take the course and forced to take the ITP test resulting in high levels of stress, anxiety and discomfort towards the class and the TOEFL test. I consider their motivation and anxiety played an important role in their language development. However, I believe they all can become better at using their personalities, strategies and styles to improve their learning becoming BLLs.

Table 8 Participants' Background.

Age	Number of Students	Sex	Number of Students	BA Major	Number of Students
20	2	Females	3	Graphic Design	4
21	4	Males	4	Architecture	3
42	1				
TOTAL			7 Participants		

For 9 years, I have taught adults, adolescents and children in many different contexts and I have come to the conclusion that a GLL is someone who fulfills his/her personal goals and does not give up despite the difficulties found along the way. They are persistent and curious about their learning and are willing to cope with adverse situations. The GLL is someone who is willing to try out new strategies to become a BLL, is eager to use the language and enjoys having a conversation with someone in the target language. But above all, GLLs are who enjoy learning and speaking the target language.

In the following paragraphs, I intend to give further explanations to these beliefs in relation to the results obtained from the questionnaire and my everyday observations.

4. ANALYSIS OF STUDENT CASES

4.1 Learning Strategies

As mentioned in section 2.2.1, a strategy is a set of actions that students implement to solve a problem they face in their learning experiences (Ellis, 1994). Many of the issues students face in the classroom are due to the lack of knowledge regarding the specific strategies that can lead them to further development. Student A (Appendix B) stated in her questionnaire that she had a hard time working with her time management skills. She mentioned to struggle obtaining main ideas in reading passages because she wanted to understand every word in the text thus using up all her time. In this case, the student was having difficulty with her tolerance of ambiguity. She could benefit from activities that could encourage her to reflect that ambiguity is acceptable to certain extents. Activities such as brainstorming text's ideas or skimming reading passages (Brown, 2007) could provide learners the opportunity to reflect on their strategies and improve their methods. Brown (2007:270) suggests that by encouraging students to ask questions to the teacher or to each other and by keeping theoretical explanations to a minimum, they have the opportunity to improve their language development. In this case, this female student can improve her test-taking strategies by developing her tolerance of ambiguity.

On the other hand, another female student had a hard time finding a way to improve her listening ability. Throughout the semester I observed she had a hard time keeping up with the conversations and the questions being asked during the recording. She usually omitted answers because she did not have enough time to read the four answer choices and make a choice. Her difficulty turned soon into desperate choices leading to low average scores. Although I considered her a low-achiever, I believe she could benefit from cognitive strategies such as predictions and inferences that could help her gain knowledge and time in the listening section. For instance, the instructor could play an audio and have her brainstorm possible questions to be asked in relation to the audio. Guessing the possible question to be asked or the main topic of a conversation could

help this student promote their cognitive strategies resulting in good time management skills.

4.2 Learning Styles

Every student is an important individual that has a specific personality that may intervene in the language learning process as mentioned in section 2.2.2 of this paper. Brown (2000) considers that people come to pick a specific style as a result of their interpretation and internalization of the learning environment in which they interact. However, these learning traits are not permanent, instead they can change or evolve as time goes by thus making the teacher's job more difficult.

As outlined in Table 7, specific learning styles such as field dependence vs. field independence or visual vs. auditory have been given specific attention by research in SLA. Although each learning style has specific advantages and disadvantages, students still manifest a preference for either one. For instance, student B (appendix B) who wrote on her questionnaire, '*I would understand more when I listen to the language on TV or in music*'. This answer suggests this student prefers to work with the auditory style. However, it is necessary to enlighten students' opinions and encourage them to try and use all the tools available to enhance their learning (Lightbrown & Spada, 2001: 35). As teachers, it is necessary to provide opportunities in our lessons for different learning styles to be enhanced seeking for a learning style balance among our methods. Nevertheless, this balance needs to be equal among teachers and students. Therefore, training student B to learn in a visual environment when she is mainly auditory can enhance her language development making her a BLL. Activities such as debates, role-plays, group discussions related to diagrams, figures or tables could encourage this learner to use both styles.

As mentioned in section 2.2.2, field independence is the behavior students present when trying to pay close attention to specific information in a context where many factors may be distracting. Students C and D (Appendixes B) mentioned having a hard time focusing their attention on the audio while taking a practice test. These students considered they were easily distracted and had difficulty focusing their attention on a specific element. Although they were trying to be field independent, their answers portrayed a struggle with this issue. It may seem they are not GLLs, but I consider their

behavior can be improved. Engaging learners in activities such as brainstorming, focusing on specific information and note-taking can encourage them to become more field independent through constant practice.

4.3 Affective Factors.

Motivation is believed to have a positive effect on learning a language. Nevertheless, it is still unclear if motivation leads to successful learners or if successful learning leads to highly motivated people. Lightbrow & Spada (2001: 34) suggest that,

'...if we can make our classrooms places where students enjoy coming because the content is interesting and relevant to their age and level of ability, where the learning goals are challenging yet manageable and clear, and where the atmosphere is supportive and non-threatening, we can make a positive contribution to students' motivation to learn.'

For instance, participant E (Appendix B) considered that the course was a complicated experience. However, she mentioned that *'the challenge was gratifying'*. This response leads me to believe that she is intrinsically motivated; her reward for learning the language was personal satisfaction. Additionally, this student mentioned *'I did not fulfill my objectives because I do not advance from personal level'* and *'I feel good with the course but not very secure'*. These responses could point out that students' lack of motivation is leading to a sense of anxiety and failure. According to Lightbrow & Spada, (2001: 33) SLA heavily relies on learner's attitudes: it may be a source of enrichment or a source of resentment. If a participants' reasons for learning the language is external pressure then internal motivation becomes minimal and attitudes toward learning become negative. As described in section 2.2.3.1, a possible solution is to help this learner establish reachable goals by providing varied and dynamic activities. Providing a reliable environment and helping her perceive an error-friendly classroom may encourage eagerness to experiment with her language capabilities.

Another issue considered is the will to take risks in the classroom. In the language classroom, students who are high risk-takers are known for taking wild guesses and following their "hunches". Risk-taking has been highly associated with self-esteem;

high self-esteem usually results in high-risk takers. A male student talked to me at the beginning of the course mentioning that he would appreciate my patience with him because he had a poor English level. When called upon to participate, he preferred to hide in the back of the classroom and avoid being noticed. As the semester progressed, I approached him individually trying to motivate him to participate and make him aware that a positive attitude makes a difference in learning. As mentioned in section 2.2.3.2, it is necessary to encourage high risk-takers to allow the rest of the class to intervene to avoid overwhelming the lesson with their guesses. Therefore, encouraging low risk-takers to participate, by for instance praising students for making sincere efforts to try out language or by using fluency activities without pointing out errors, may provide them with opportunities to feel self-confident encouraging them to take risks with their language learning.

Anxiety is a factor that may lead to positive or negative development of language learning. As outlined in section 2.2.3.3, debilitating or facilitative anxiety may be helpful or harmful for students' language development (Oxford, 1999 cited in Brown, 2000). Students' answers to the questionnaire revealed that all of the participants felt a specific feeling or emotion as part of their anxiety towards the course and the ITP test. For instance, 2 students said to feel 'nervous but felt good'; 1 mentioned to feel unprepared for taking the ITP test; while another denied being capable of taking the test. These answers suggest that the first two participants were anxious while the remaining 2 students were affected by a debilitating anxiety that hindered their development. According to Gass & Selinker (2008), anxiousness depends on the social context the learner is immersed in. Therefore, by making their environment a comfortable place to work in we motivate them and train them to use their anxiousness for their benefit. When doing this, teachers provide opportunities for students to become BLLs.

5. CONCLUSION

The results obtained from the questionnaire showed that all except one participant felt their TOEFL ITP course was useful in some way. Most of the students stated to have improved their test taking strategies, their grammar knowledge and fulfilling their objectives. However, improvement of test-taking strategies does not necessarily lead to language development. I believe some students were successful in finding specific strategies and styles that allowed them to fulfill their purposes. In this case, their overall

purpose was to become acquainted with the test and increase their score. Therefore, leading me to believe that a GLL can become a BLL when teaching and learning purposes are reached.

On the other hand, for students to succeed in this course they needed to find their preferred styles and strategies. So, it was important for them to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, styles and preferences and rely on their meta-cognitive strategies to reflect on possible actions that would make their learning more effective (Brown, 2007). But, students need help in accomplishing these difficult tasks. According to Oxford (2002), it is necessary for teachers to explore their students' potential and assess their learning strategies and styles with the use of style surveys. Using self-checklists or personality and cognitive style tests can help raise students' awareness of the capabilities and traits that need improvement (Brown, 2007). By guiding students in finding their preferences, they have the opportunity to consciously use language-learning strategies 'to make learning quicker, easier, more effective and more fun' (Oxford, 2002: 130). Therefore, the participants considered for this paper could have strongly benefited from awareness activities that could enlighten their path to self-discovery and language development.

I strongly believe that every student has an opportunity to become a BLL. As outlined in this paper with specific samples, depending on students' strengths and weaknesses teachers can implement specific activities or tasks to train students to become aware of their personality traits and modify them to suit their learning needs. The importance of our job lies in helping students to go about "learning to learn" which will help them and ourselves as language teachers, to 'lessen the difference between the good learner and the poorer one' (Griffiths, 2008).

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**APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE**

With the objective of evaluating the course and my teaching methods, please answer the following questions expressing your honest opinion about what is being asked.

1. - How did you feel in this TOEFL course? How did you feel about the TOEFL test in the past, before taking this course?

2. Do you feel you achieved your goals in this course? Yes no

3. If yes, give an example of a goal you achieved.

4. Do you feel more confident when taking a TOEFL sample test? Yes no

5. Please explain your answer.

6. In what way has this TOEFL preparation course been useful to you? Please explain.

7. What aspect of the course did you have the most difficulty with? Please explain.

8. What aspect of the course or test was the easiest for you? Please explain.

9. Do you believe your English has improved? Yes no Why or why not?

10. Do you like to study English? Yes no Why or why not?

Age _____ Sex: M F

Career: _____

APPENDIX B
Participants' Responses to Questionnaire

78	So A	So B	So C	So D	So E	So F	So G
1	I had never practiced before and the course was useful.	Nervous but now I see it easier. I feel more relaxed.	Very Comfortable but Good.	I felt comfortable because the teacher paid attention to us all the same.	I feel good but not very secure to take the test. I felt nervous. It was gratifying.	Nervous before taking it, the course was nice and complete.	Very secure, before very insecure.
2	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.	No.	No.	So, so.	No.
3	Because I learned. For example I learned more vocabulary.	Yes. Well so so, now I understand better. For example, reading comprehension and I understand more listening.	Because I practiced in class and I feel that I did very good and I will be able to go on to French.	Because I can't concentrate when answering the tests.	Because I did not advance in my personal level.	I need more time and dedication.	My English level is very low.
4	yes.	Yes.	No.	Yes.	No.	Yes.	Yes.
5	Because I practiced.	Because I know I will understand better.	I got distracted very easily and I don't pay attention during the listening. I am not prepared.	I feel a little more secure, but I need more interest.	Because I do not advance in the personal. I can not take the test.	Because during the course we took similar tests.	It's good for practice.
6	For the specific learning, to practice and be better when answering.	I understand better when I listen to songs.	I worked a lot.	Because I learned things like grammar.	To see everything that I still need to learn.	To get to know more things about many aspects.	Because we saw little of all the aspects of English.
7	Understanding every word in reading. The listening.	Listening. I would understand more when listening to the language on TV or in music.	Paying attention during listening.	Concentrating during tests and understanding vocabulary.	Listening.	Grammar.	Reading.
8	Understanding the teacher.	The grammar part of the DVD.	Grammar.	Participating in class.	Grammar.	Talking in English.	Listening.
9	Yes, because of the practice.	Yes, because I understand more.	No because I already had a good level.	Yes because I improved a little now I understand the language better.	Yes. A little because I still need to pass the course.	Yes because I learned more vocabulary and we reviewed what I already know.	Yes because I feel secure of what I have learned.
10	Yes, because it's interesting to learn a language.	Yes because it's a different culture and I like music in this language.	Yes because I like the language.	No, because it's dull I don't learn.	Yes because I would like to dominate it.	Yes but I need more time to learn it and school does not allow it.	Yes because it is a challenge for me.