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FROM THE EDITOR

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While computer technology has established its rightful place in a foreign language classroom, no longer being viewed as a novelty, an extra or a resource exerting a 'wow factor', it cannot pass unnoticed that the specific implementations of computer technology have been changing over the years of publication of *Teaching English with Technology*. Computer-Mediated Communication, e-learning or Internet-based language teaching are giving floor to m-learning, telecollaboration via social networking portals or virtual worlds. More and more powerful computers, more accessible smartphones and lower Internet transfer rates make learning in virtual worlds or mobile applications much more frequent than before. It is inevitable that also greater research interest will be devoted to these forms of Computer-Assisted Language Learning.

Thus, the publication strand from the January issue of *Teaching English with Technology* is continued in two different dimensions – on the one hand, we can see further explorations of the new subbranches of CALL mentioned above. It is useful to note that especially with Second Life we are moving from tutorial-based articles to more theoretical deliberations over the philosophy of learning underlying educational applications of SL. At the same time, well-developed studies into the application of MALL in the foreign language classroom clearly demonstrate the potential of such BYOD instruction (Bring Your Own Device) for language learning and teaching purposes.

The other publication strand, continued throughout a number of issues so far and quite visible also in the current volume, is expansion of technology-assisted instruction to all areas of the world. We are more than happy to welcome articles from Indonesia, Ecuador, Iran, Turkey and Poland, as we strongly believe that such a diversification of views on the role of computer technology in the FLT classroom will ensure constant interest of our readers.

In this month's issue of *TEwT* **Anna Turula** (Cracow, Poland) explores a well-known concept of learner autonomy, showing its new manifestation in a course run in a social networking environment *Italki*. The author concludes that learner autonomy is fostered by

new learning tendencies and technological affordances of the new media, and it can be both self- and other-regulated, yet in its nature is determined by individual learner issues, motives and attitudes.

On a MALL note, **Farzaneh Khodabandeh, Jalal ed-din Alian** and **Hassan Soleimani** (Tehran, Iran) investigated the effect of mobile assisted language learning tasks (MALL) on participants' English grammar learning, realised within the framework of Task-Based Learning. The study concluded that sharing tasks in virtual networks can have positive results for language learning, specifically grammar learning.

"Using the *Second Life* Digital Environment for FL Education: A Postmodern Perspective" by **Levent Uzun** (Bursa, Turkey) puts forward Second Life as a useful model to focus on and investigate in order to derive some theoretical and practical guidelines and conclusions that will be consistent with all philosophies, applications, stakeholders, instruments, and conditions in educational settings in the current age of technology and in the future.

Referring to m-learning in an Indonesian context, **Priyatno Ardi** (Yogyakarta) highlights the opportunities created by *Schoology* m-learning platform, a social networking learning management system, for facilitating the exercise of autonomy in English language learning. The study reports how *Schoology* m-learning platform fostered learner autonomy in an EAP class at an Indonesian higher education.

Research on teacher technology use has been the topic of the article "Exploring the Use of Educational Technology in EFL Teaching: A Case Study of Primary Education in the South Region of Ecuador". **Lida Solano, Paola Cabrera, Eva Ulehlova** and **Verónica Espinoza** show that technology is not commonly used in state schools of the south region of Ecuador and, if used, it is not adequately applied. Thus, the study calls for teacher trainers to work out methods of integration of technology tools with appropriate teaching strategies in EFL classrooms.

Finally, **Mohsen Ebrahimzadeh** and **Sepideh Alavi** examined the effect of a commercial digital video game on high school students' language learning motivation. Results indicated a significant language learning motivation increase over time. According to the authors, the use of commercial digital video games can help enhance high school students' language learning motivation.

We wish you good reading!

LEARNER AUTONOMY AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT IN THE CONTEXT OF *ITALKI*

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Abstract

The article looks at language learner autonomy as a social construct in relation to the context and its user based on the example of *Italki*, a social networking site for tandem language learning. Considering the two foci – the context and the learner – the study is divided into two parts, both carried out from the perspective of online ethnography, each utilising different techniques and tools. Part 1, based on participatory observation and user experience of the author, was aimed at investigating the context of *Italki* as a language learning environment. Its affordances, noted in the course of the study, are analysed against the three aspects of social learner autonomy (Murray 2014): emotional, political, and spatial, in order to investigate the potential of *Italki* for interdependent learning. In Part 2 of the study, with its focus on the learner, the data were gathered by means of semi-structured open-ended interviews with *Italki* users (N=10). One of these interviews evolved into a case study, in which elements of social network analysis (SNA) were utilized to look at learner autonomy of an individual user.

The results of the study indicate that learner autonomy in the digital age can be both self- and other-regulated; characterized by learner independence as well as interdependence. All this is very much promoted by new tendencies in language learning and affordances offered by the new media. At the same time, though, the nature of the autonomy exercised will, to a large extent, be determined by individual learner agendas, motives and attitudes.

Key words: learner autonomy; tandem learning; online ethnography

1. Introduction

Palfreyman (2006) argues that one needs to *always* look at learner autonomy in the context of learning. Such contexts frame education, among others, by providing resources, both material and social. At the same time, though, central to these contexts is always the learner who uses these resources, with his/her unique agenda, motives, and attitudes.

With such a point of departure, this article proposes that the contemporary concept of language learner autonomy as a social construct (Dam, 1995; Little, 2004; Murray 2014) may be investigated from two perspectives. On the one hand, learner autonomy is about reaching out as the learner's "means to transcend the barriers between learning and living" (Little,

1995: 175). Living has certainly changed: the learner's means have become networked and highly influenced by the ways of Web 2.0. This has altered the nature of autonomous learning in general and, in particular, the character of self-accessed education. Social – or interactive (Hauck et al., 2012) – resources are more easily available nowadays, and, as a result, they may prevail over the material ones. This results in a shift from independence to interdependence in contemporary autonomous learning. Looking at learner autonomy as a social construct can involve examining the nature of such a shift vis-à-vis functionalities of individual learning environments.

At the same time, though, it is equally intriguing to see to what extent such a shift can also be seen in learner agendas, motives and attitudes. In such a case, the research will focus on:

(i) whether the autonomous learner of today utilizes interactive resources to satisfy his/her individual learning needs *as well as* to reach out to *the other*;

(ii) if he/she attempts to transcend the barriers between learning and living *but also* communicative / cultural boundaries;

(iii) if he/she wants to utilize what others offer *and* to be a resource him/herself in establishing different communities of learning.

The present article attempts to look at both the context and the learner in its investigation of learner autonomy as a social construct. In doing so it is divided into two parts, each presenting an aspect of an online ethnographic study carried out in March-May 2015. The article opens with a description of *Italki*, a social-networking language learning website, designed for formal and informal tandem learning of various world languages. This description is based on the outcomes of Part 1 of the study, carried out by means of participatory observation as well as based on user experience of the functionality of the site and its affordances. These research results are then analysed with reference to the three dimensions of autonomy as a social construct (Murray, 2014): emotional, political, and spatial. The aim of this part of the research was to investigate the context and to determine its potential for interdependent learning in its three different dimensions. As the research was planned as a thought experiment, this is done in relation to the concept of learner autonomy as a social construct and *not* vis-à-vis research to date. Afterwards, the article presents the results of Part 2 of the study: the qualitative research into the routines, motivation and partner selection criteria of 10 *Italki* users as autonomous learners of different languages. In this part, data were gathered by means of semi-structured open-ended interviews. As one of the interviewees agreed for a more in-depth study, a more thorough insight into the personal

context of this user is also presented. His interaction networks are examined, mapped onto collaboration graphs and subjected to social network analysis (SNA). During this part, the study focuses on learner agendas, motives, and attitudes. Similarly to Part 1, the subsequent data analysis pertains more to these factors, seen as connected to learner autonomy as a social construct, than to learning *per se*; as such, it is not examined in the context of previous research efforts. The article closes with conclusions drawn based on the study as well as teaching implications pertaining to language learner autonomy as a social construct.

2. The study

2.1. The aims of the research

The study of *Italki*, a social networking site for tandem learning of different world languages, was carried out for three months, in March-May 2015. It consisted of two parts, each of which had its own objectives:

(1) to investigate the functionality of the portal together with the language learning opportunities it offers;

(2) to examine the routines as well as agendas, motives and attitudes of *Italki* users, including the quantity and quality of personal connections created by such users.

Related to these objectives are, respectively, two research questions:

(1) Does *Italki* have the potential for developing / exercising social learner autonomy in its three dimensions: emotional, political, and spatial (Murray, 2014)?

(2) Can the shift from independence to interdependence be seen in the routines as well as agendas, motives and attitudes of *Italki* users?

While the research as a whole was carried out from the perspective of online ethnography, each of its parts had its own data collection techniques and tools.

Part 1 was based on online participatory observation and collection of digital artifacts (notes and their corrections, chat samples, etc.). Over a period of three months, 100+ hours were spent on different *Italki* activities (text and voice interaction, in-chat peer correction, note writing, note correction, reflecting on the note portfolio, browsing of site and its user profiles, etc.). During this exploratory period 50+ different artifacts were collected and stored in the form of researcher notes and screenshots (six of the latter are presented in Figures 1-6); additionally, a user interaction journal was kept (its contents were analysed and mapped into the collaboration graph presented in Figure 7).

Part 2 was based on semi-structured open-ended interviews with 10 *Italki* users. The questions of the interviews revolved around two basic issues of why the interviewees used

Italki and what their criteria for partnering were. One of the interviews revolved into a case study in which the user's social interaction patterns were examined and mapped onto collaboration graphs regarding both his learning networks as well as elements of his lifestyle. As such, this part of the study utilized some elements of social network analysis (SNA). This was an attempt to place the motivation of an individual user in his own unique context, an approach advocated by Ushioda (2011). Additionally, the detailed description of such an individual context served the purpose of a deeper insight into the emotional, political, and spatial aspects of autonomous learning (Murray, 2014).

As for its scope, the two-partite study was a small-scale investigation for a number of reasons. As a learning environment, *Italki* is rather elusive to a researcher. This, in particular, has consequences for research sampling procedures. First of all, the total number of *active* users is virtually impossible to determine without admin-level insight. As a result, the size of the population, which is a factor in selecting a statistically valid sample, cannot be known. Additionally, users tend to protect their privacy, which, in turn, makes in-depth interviews very difficult to carry out unless trust has been earned as a result of long-term language partnering based on regular interaction. A solution to these two problems was recruiting respondents from among the *Italki* contacts of the researcher (who chose to be a tandem language learner for three months). The main selection criterion was whether or not the respondents were autonomous learners, which posed another problem. The character of *Italki*-like tandem language learning – extracurricular, self-initiated, self-regulated – makes it justified to assume that learner autonomy in each user is a given. This is why the criterion was refined based on Little's (2002) definition of learner autonomy. As Little (2002) notes, "there is a consensus that the practice of learner autonomy requires insight, a positive attitude, a capacity for reflection, and *a readiness to be proactive* in self-management and *in interaction with others*" (emphasis added). Consequently, the study sample was selected from among the researcher's network based on the subjects' proactive behaviour as regards interaction: the fact that they actively initiated and sustained contact on *Italki*.

2.2. Research context: introducing *Italki*

Italki – along with *lang8*, *Buusu*, *MyLanguageExchange*, *eToM* (electronic Tandem on Moodle), *Speaky* and many others – is a social networking site designed for tandem language learning. Such learning is based on one-to-one exchanges between speakers of different languages, who partner up to teach each other their mother tongue (or a language in which they are proficient) and to learn the target language from one another (Cziko, 2004). Apart

from such language-for-language barter exchanges, portals like *Italki* offer their users an opportunity to learn with professional teachers for a tuition fee.

A registered user of italki.com has his/her own dashboard, where different actions can be initiated (Figure 1; with description of individual aspects of the site functionality 1-10); and a profile (Figure 2), which can be personalized (photo; description – 4, Figure 2). Importantly, the profile serves as a learner portfolio in which the learner can keep all notes (including their corrections offered by other *Italki* users – 5, Figure 2) and which can be used for revision purposes and, in time, for insight into one's language development.

Upon a newcomer's first login, the *Italki* profile is randomly shown to other users, which may result in the first text-chat contacts (Figure 3). It is also possible to get in touch with fellow *Italkers*, channeling the search through one's target languages or by publishing notes in the languages learned – they are likely to attract the speakers or teachers who can make corrections or add comments (Figure 4). These are potential tandem partners with whom the user can subsequently initiate one-to-one contacts or schedule sessions. There will also be system-generated suggestions in the *Do you want more help* area (Figure 5), based on the notes published as well as the user's profile info.

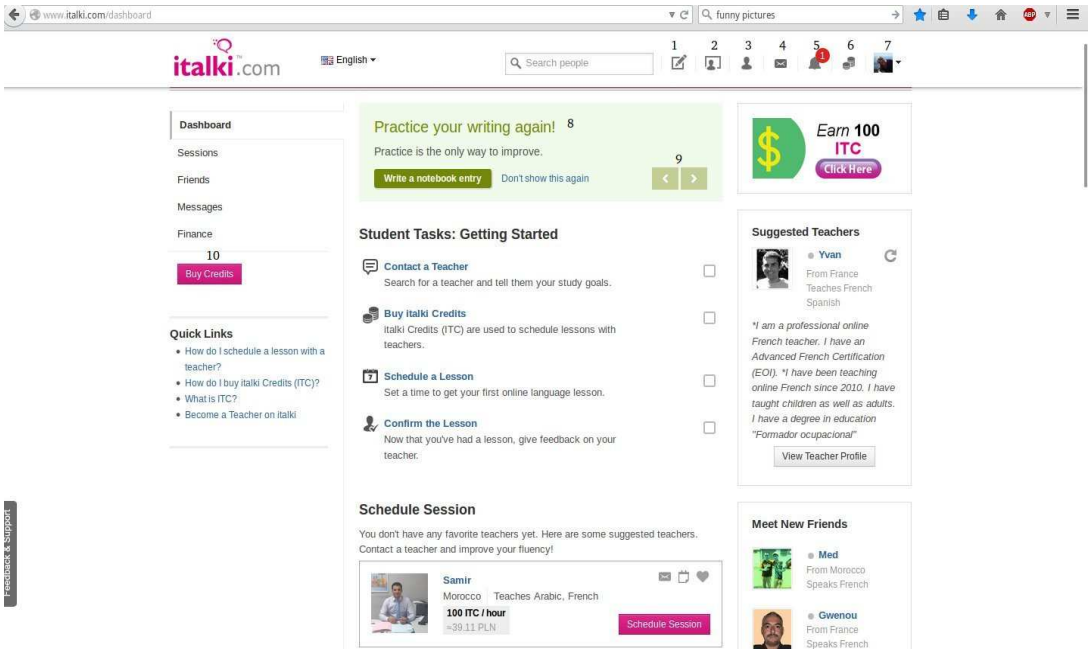

Figure 1. Italki dashboard

1. notes written to-date; 2. scheduled sessions with teachers; 3. friends; 4. messages; 5. notifications (of new followers or friends requests); 6. current *Italki* savings (ITC = *Italki* credits, bought with real money – used to pay for lessons with teachers); 7. profile; 8. quick access to various functions (slideshow); 9. important information (incl. introduction to *Italki*); 10.where you buy ITC

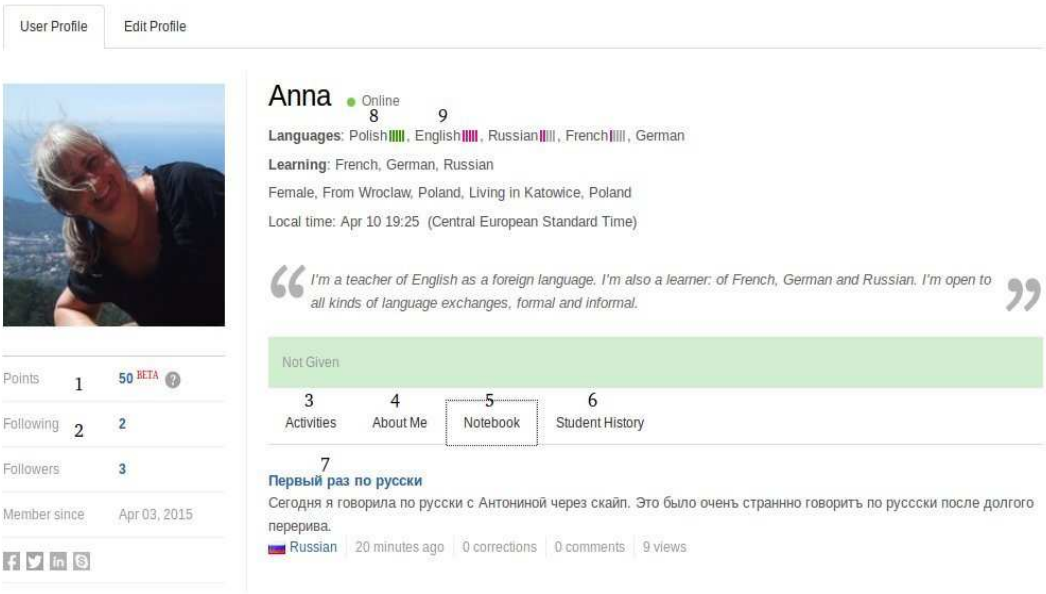

Figure 2. User profile

1. points scored (can be exchanged for ICTs); 2. contacts; 3. past *Italki* activity of the user; 4. personal info; 5. notes written to date with history of corrections; 6. past sessions; 7. a note (the most recent one); 8. mother tongue; 9. languages learned (with level marked).

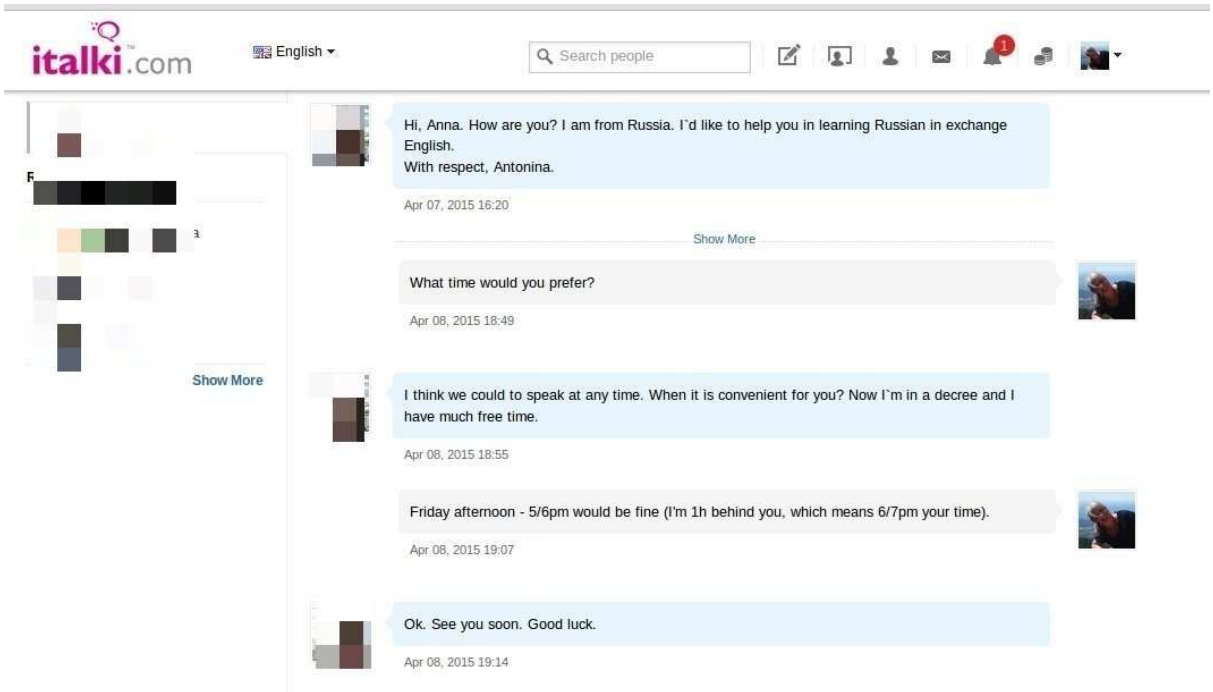

Figure 3. First contacts on Italki

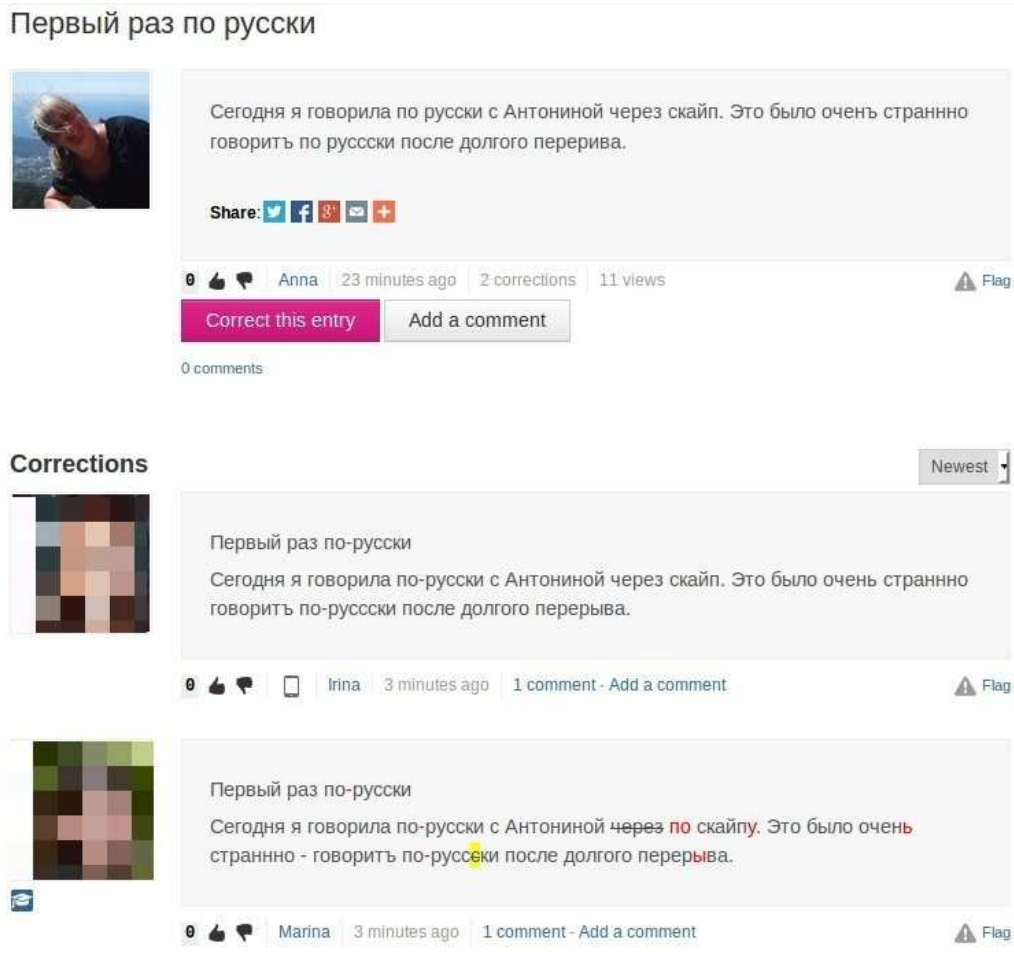

Figure 4. Other users' reactions to a note published

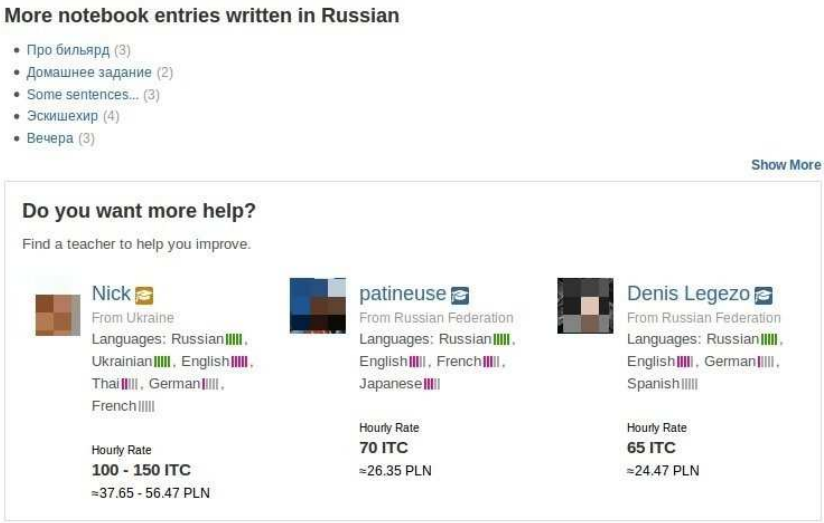

Figure 5. System activity upon a note published

After the first contact, which can be carried out in the *lingua franca* (Figure 3) or in both languages simultaneously (Figure 6), the *Italki* users who are ready to partner up may agree to have a voice chat via one of the popular CMC tools (Skype), as italki.com itself does not include voicechat functions.

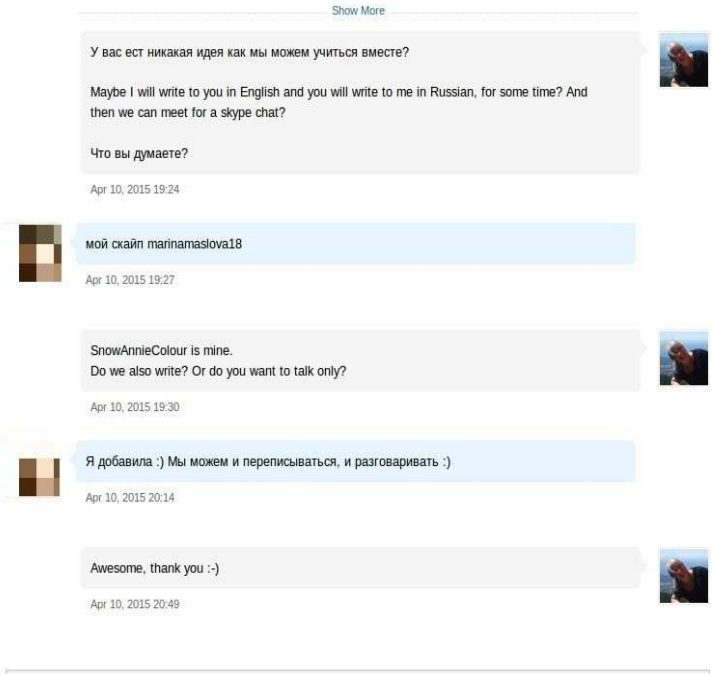

Figure 6. The bilingual text chat on *Italki*

As the number of contacts on *Italki* grows with use, after a time one is likely to become a node in a network (Figure 7), in which one is a node: (i) in relation to other nodes, creating and maintaining ties which may be stronger or weaker; (ii) engaging in voice, text or voice-or-text exchanges; or (iii) free not to sustain the unwanted edges (=relations with nodes).

Italki is an informal service in the sense that it is not part of any institutionalized schooling system. Enrolment and participation are a matter of choice for any user and so is the agenda, which may range from mere exploration through socializing in a foreign language to informal (peer-to-peer) or formal (tutored) language education.

Figure 7. Italki user as a node in the web of contacts

(color blue indicates the regular ones; lang**a**4lang**b** indicates a proficient speaker of language a learning language b; T=teacher)

2.3. *Italki* as a scheme for learner interdependence – discussion 1

Considering all its characteristics described in the previous section – the non-institutional character of education; self-direction; opportunities for self-reflection (portfolio); choice as the basis for all user actions – *Italki* can be seen as what Little (2002) calls a self-access language learning scheme. As such, the portal is a context in which autonomy can be developed and exercised based on the resources the self-access scheme offers. These resources are by all means social rather than material, which makes *Italki* different from the self-access centers of the past. These centers were designed for language learning which was individual-cognitive rather than social-interactive, based on one's capacity for taking on the responsibility for (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991) or assuming the control of one's own learning (Benson, 2011). *Italki*, in turn, with its architecture and dynamics of a social network, offers its users a chance to develop and exercise learner autonomy in interaction; autonomy seen as a function of interdependence as well as independence in more recent literature on the subject (Little, 2004; Palfreyman, 2006; Murray et al., 2014; Murray, 2014). This section looks at *Italki* vis-à-vis the three aspects of language learner autonomy as a social construct: the emotional, the spatial and the political.

According to Huang and Benson (2013), the capacity to control one's own learning is based on three mainstays: the ability to take on the responsibility and to manage one's education; the desire to do so; and the freedom to take action. The *I can – I want to – I'm free to* triad is translated by Murray (2014) into three different aspects of learner autonomy as a social construct. In the first place, these aspects include the emotional (*I want to*) and the political (*I'm free to*) facets of being responsible / in control. However, as Murray (2014) notes, all the three components of autonomy proposed by Huang and Benson (2013) – the ability, the desire and the freedom – should always be considered in the context in which abilities are developed, desires are formed, and freedom is granted. Such a context is the third, the spatial, aspect of learner autonomy.

In order to evaluate *Italki* as a self-access scheme, it is important to answer the question of how well the portal accommodates the three aspects of learner autonomy as a social construct: the emotional, the political, and the spatial. This will be done by analysing the affordances of the site described in Section 1 in the light of relevant literature to-date.

2.3.1. The emotional aspect of learning a language on *Italki*

There are numerous links between the cognitive and metacognitive aspects of learner autonomy (the *I can* facet) and motivation (*I want*). What is important is that the cause-effect relation of *I can therefore I want to* may be as strong as the one of *I want to therefore I can* (Turula 2006). On the one hand, self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 2002) is a powerful internal drive which encourages learners to make effort in spite of their limitations. On the other hand, self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997) are an important factor in deciding to undertake and persevere with education. The social learning possible on *Italki* can be a powerful motivator as well as create and reinforce self-efficacy beliefs in several ways. These ways can be explained based on the three principles formulated by Little (2004) as a result of his observation of Dam's (1995) successful and highly motivating way of developing learner autonomy through interdependence. These principles include learner empowerment, learner reflection and the appreciation of the target language use.

Learner empowerment, as Little (2004) points out, is closely related to the feeling of being in charge / in control. As Murray (2014) argues, in autonomy-promoting contexts, this feeling has an equivalent: a sense of freedom. This is the case of *Italki*, where the user entertains freedom in many different spheres: to join the network; to initiate language contact; to choose his/her language partners and / or tutors; to respond to invites from other users; to

select the functions s/he wants to use; to decide how much self s/he is ready to disclose / invest. This gives a sense of power which adds to motivation (*I can therefore I want to*).

Self-efficacy can also be formed / reinforced through self-reflection. As Little (2004) observes, it is impossible to accept responsibility for learning without thinking about it. In addition to exercising control / freedom, setting goals and making choices, autonomous learners need to reflect upon the outcomes, evaluate their progress, identify their strengths and weaknesses. *Italki* affordances – with special regard to the repository of notes which serves as a learner portfolio – enable such reflection. The repository of notes can be a source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction which emerge during the self-reflection phase and take the form of emotional self-reaction (Zimmerman, 2013). Considering the fact that the *Italki* notes are public and interactive (other users can comment and correct), such emotions are social in nature (Damasio, 2003).

Last but not least, based on his already-mentioned observations of Dam's class, Little (1999, 2004) emphasizes the importance of putting together school knowledge and action knowledge. The latter is activated in authentic language use characteristic for autonomous learning contexts (but is rarely found in more traditional settings – cf. Legenhausen, 1999). *Italki* is an interactional context which gives numerous opportunities for the appreciation of the target language authentic use. It is likely to occur during less formal peer-to-peer exchanges as a result of interaction in which referential (=real, meaning seeking) rather than display (seeking to practice a language function) questions are likely to be asked. In response to such questions, users are socially coerced to "speak as themselves" (Legenhausen, 1999), as people rather than as language learners, ready to "engage their own motivations, identities and personal interests in their conversations" (Ushioda, 2011: 15). What is important, in the very context of *Italki* – largely informal, out-of-class, freedom-based – the identities engaged will be the transportable ones (who the person really is) rather than situated (who the person is in the classroom) or discourse (what the person is supposed to say) (Richards 2006). All this is a powerful social motivator underlying autonomous language learning.

Finally, there is a word to be said for one more type of socially grounded emotional investment of the autonomous learning on *Italki*: motivation as an experience of belonging rather than a motivational trait, "the desire to belong to multiple communities of practice" (Sade, 2011: 53), which *Italki* has a potential to satisfy. Apart from being a place to learn languages in tandem setting, the portal is also part of sharing economy. The question will be discussed in more detail in the subsection devoted to the political aspects of *Italki* as a self-access scheme. At this point, however, it needs to be pointed out that the social architecture

(community) and the interaction dynamics (language for language) of the portal may attract all these who like to think of themselves as independent from the traditional market mechanisms and forces; those who incline towards goods-for-goods or service-for-service exchanges based on experience they may have in other forms of community-based sharing (car pooling, couch surfing, etc.). This brings us to integrative motivation in its new understanding: seeking group membership based on motives that are very personal and linked to one's internal identification with one's self concept (here: a participant in sharing economy) rather than a certain external force (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Learner autonomy developed with such motivation will be both "situated in terms of the institutional and cultural context and dependent on learner goals and personality traits. The interaction of these internal and situational factors will determine the degree of autonomy demonstrated by the learner." (Leary, 2014: 17).

2.3.2. The political aspect of learning a language on *Italki*

Promoting learner autonomy always happens in a cultural context. No matter whether we understand culture as national, institutional or a shared way of life (Palfreyman, 2003), efforts aimed at proposing, developing, and sustaining learner independence and self-regulation will need to take into account the specificity of this context.

> In the case of the national and institutional contexts, as Murray (2014: 334) points out,
>
> [w]e need learning spaces that facilitate activities that promote the development of learner autonomy and self-regulation. These learning spaces will need to be equipped with digital and material resources, while at the same time enabling students to move around and work with each other. The creation of these spaces is going to take political will and imagination.

Such political will and imagination have to be particularly strong in educational cultures that favor hierarchical organization of and in schooling, value control and coordination over trust and collaboration, and prefer teacher-fronted to learner-centered classrooms. This refers to both national schooling systems as well as micro-contexts of individual institutions, with their ideas of what should happen in the classroom as regards the roles teachers and learners, the routines of communicating, asking and answering questions and other aspects of education, which Jin and Cortazzi (1998: 37) call "key elements in cultures of learning".

Learning a language in a tandem on sites like *Italki* is a potential challenge to such systems. It is extracurricular and teacher-independent; it crosses the boundaries of traditional education in many different ways, bringing together the real and the virtual realms, the school and the active knowledge (Little, 2004), the worlds inside and outside the classroom

(Legenhausen, 1999). By making the language class so thin-walled (Richardson and Mancabelli, 2011), it requires a change in education which goes beyond minor improvements into the realm of a paradigm shift. Opening a language class to social networking does not require an educational re*form*, it requires trans*form*ation (Richardson and Mancabelli, 2011). And transformative changes can be of great, sometimes unwelcome proportions, resulting in:

(i) hierarchy flattening – most exchanges on *Italki*, including student-teacher interactions, are rather informal in terms of language;

(ii) authority distribution – *the* teacher is replaced by *numerous* teachers, and the learner moves from predetermined classroom setting to the freedom of choice *Italki* grants;

(iii) control loosening – on *Italki* the user is self- and peer- rather than teacher-regulated.

In educational cultures – national or institutional – where hierarchy flattening and authority distribution are seen as undermining the teacher's position, and control loosening is perceived as a threat to both the system and the learner, making the language classroom walls thin by encouraging *Italki*-like tandem language learning may indeed require political will to acknowledge the agency of the learner. It will also take the imagination to think out of the current educational *status quo* with its practices, assigned roles and institutions. This does not imply that *Italki* users will always have political agendas when undertaking tandem learning on the site. However, their decisions to do so have political meaning (even if unintended) and consequences (even if yet to be seen).

Italki-like tandem learning will also be political when understood as a way of living. With their community-based, language-for-language, peer-to-peer mode of operation, such portals are strongly embedded in sharing economy. Rooted in the changing attitudes to consumption and facilitated by the Internet, sharing economy is also referred to as Collaborative Consumption (CC) and defined as (Hamari et al., 2015) "the peer-to-peer-based activity of obtaining, giving, or sharing the access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based online services." There is a general tendency to relate these practices to Web 2.0 and its defining characteristics, such as user-generated content, sharing practices (social media), collaborative online projects (e.g., *Wikipedia*), all of which are associated with the following motivations (Oh & Syn 2015: 2045): enjoyment, self-efficacy, learning, personal gain, altruism, empathy, social engagement, community, interest, reciprocity, and reputation. Importantly for the present line of argument, most of these motivations are social in nature. Like the use of social media as well as practices such as car pooling, couch surfing

and other forms of collaborative consumption, *Italki* tandem learning is not only an aspect of contemporary lifestyle but also a challenge to traditional consumption and redistribution patterns, which, in the case of language learning, are organized private and public schooling. As a result, exercising this kind of autonomy in education is a political action (once again – even if unintended or yet seemingly inconsequential).

2.3.3. The spatial aspect of learning a language on *Italki*

When thinking about *Italki* from the user perspective, it is only natural to describe it as "a place where one can learn languages in tandems". Considering the fact that this place is a virtual *space*, based on architecture which is primarily human (its coding being of lesser importance here), it seems right to see this space – based on the general consensus among theorists on human geography (cf. Murray, 2014: 330) – as a social construction. As such, *Italki* has a number of autonomy-related spatial characteristics: its networked structure, its flexible boundaries and its multidimensionality.

Engaging in the different forms of tandem language learning on *Italki*, the user gradually builds his own web of relations – with language partners, teachers, correctors – which, as every personal learning network, is highly individual, in terms of numbers (how many contacts), intensity (how often) and selectivity (who with) of interaction, as well as formal variety (which activities). The networked structure has consequences for the two other spatial factors: boundaries and dimensions.

The issue of *Italki* boundaries is associated with the idea of autonomy as control (Benson, 2011). Murray (2014: 331) questions this conceptualization in relation to the spatial dimension, proposing "in this social learning space autonomy primarily manifests itself as the possibility for learners to exercise their agency within the environment rather than their control over the environment". This is very much the case of *Italki* tandem language learning. With the open, networked structure of interactions, full control seems impossible and gives way to the freedom of choice. In this area, the *Italki* user can exercise his/her agency as to the shape of his/her network, the range of activities, as well as the personal and financial investments s/he is willing to make. In practice, this will translate into the user making their choice of: potential language partners based on the freedom to favor the preferred interlocutors and ignore those with whom learning is less effective or unenjoyable (or even ban unwelcome contacts); teachers, following from learner styles, preferences or agendas; activities, which can cover a number of skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking; words, grammar and spelling) or be limited to just one of them; and of the extent to which s/he is

willing to make personal investments: disclose the name, face, communicator IDs, etc. In this sense, by empowering its user with the freedom of choice, *Italki* is a space with thin boundaries which allows setting personal boundaries: social, formal, organizational, temporary, etc.

This freedom of choice is closely related to the multidimensionality of *Italki* as a space. The user's involvement may be deep or superficial, long-ranging or temporary, comprehensive or channeled. S/he can broaden his/her network or deepen the existing relations; buy lessons with different teachers for variety or in search of the one(s) that suit(s) him/her. The learner may practice all language skills in a balanced way or decide one of them (speaking? writing?) is his/her priority and concentrate on it. And s/he may pursue learning goals, learning and social goals, or purely social goals, treating *Italki* as a language class or a social network, and the target language – as a system (subsystem?) to master or as a means of communication. *Italki* as a space understood as a social construction grants its user the autonomy in all these areas of decision making and learning management.

Overall, developing and reinforcing learner autonomy on *Italki* is definitely social by way of the emotional, political and spatial character of actions taken on the website. As a result, as it has been shown in this section, autonomous tandem language learning is likely to generate emotions most of which will be of social origin, because, as Ushioda (2011) puts it, they will be expressed in the social setting destined for autonomous learning as well as the social setting will give raise to them. Learner autonomy on sites like *Italki* is also political: its users, even if unaware of the fact, challenge the existing educational practices, roles and institutions as well as consumption patterns. By enabling this, the site is likely to promote – as well as to cater for – new attitudes, beliefs and lifestyles. Finally, autonomous education in the form of tandem learning is social through its spatial properties: a learning place understood as a social construction, thin-walled and based on freedom, and multidimensional in its human geography. In this sense, the answer to Research Question 1 is affirmative.

What is important to note here is that the above considerations – the synthesis of learner autonomy as a social construct and *Italki* affordances – are rather theoretical and speculative. What is interesting is how *real* users of *Italki* employ this potential. The answers to this question are presented and discussed in Section 2.2, presenting Part 2 of the study.

2.4. The learner: introducing *Italki* users

The insights into user routines, agendas, motives, and attitudes were gained in two different ways. First, a group of 10 *Italki* users were interviewed as regards their motives for learning

on *Italki* and their partner selection criteria as well as rationale. This sample included 3 men and 7 women, aged between 15 and 51, coming from Russia (2), Poland (2), Japan (2), Ukraine (1), Morocco (1), Great Britain (1) and France (1).

After a series of semi-structured interviews, the ten *Italki* users were asked to take part in a follow-up study aimed at seeing their motives in a unique, personalized context. The only person who agreed was U7. He was a 24 male from Poland, where he had lived all his life with the exception of the last 12 months, spent in the United Kingdom (7 months, student) and the United States (5 months, participant of work-and-travel programme). He is a native speaker of Polish, a proficient user of English (ESOL Cambridge certificate, 2010, level C2) and a learner of Japanese. He holds an M.Sc. in digital signal processing – a joint diploma from two universities, Polish and British. His interests include artificial intelligence, natural and artificial languages, literature, cinema and travelling.

2.4.1. The interviews

All ten interviews were carried out in May 2015. They lasted between 15 and 30 minutes each. The CMC channel used was a synchronous text chat. As mentioned above, the interview was semi-structured, in the sense that all its questions revolved around the two main issues: the user's motivation for using *Italki* and his / her partnering criteria. The answers of the 10 respondents are summarized in Table 1.

As it is shown in Table 1, the motives for tandem learning on *Italki* can be ascribed to two basic orientations: instrumental and integrative. The former is manifested by some respondents in their linking *Italki* practice with present or future jobs or study prospects (U1, U2, U5); the latter – understood as an experience of belonging, the desire "to belong to multiple communities of practice" (Sade 2014: 53) or simply to affiliate with likeminded individuals – seems to be behind the interest in other cultures and people a number of the respondents express (U6, U7, U8, U9). These two user drives are confirmed by the partnering criteria reported: they range from goal-oriented (the choice of proficient / native speakers only – U1, U4) to people-oriented (nice; the need to 'click' – U7, U8, U9). Yet, the individual motivations of the ten respondents need to be placed on an instrumental-integrative continuum rather than considered in terms of an instrumental-integrative dichotomy.

Table 1. 10 Italki users' motivation for language learning and partnering criteria

Who [sex] (proficient or native user of ... / learning ...)	**Why**	**Who with**
U1 [f] (rus/eng)	I want to learn English to be a teacher of this language.	I'm ready to learn with any proficient user English. But I check their profile first.
U2 [f] (rus/eng)	I want to pass my entrance exams to university. I also want to communicate with other users of English.	I learn with everybody who speaks good English as long as they are female and know a little about language teaching.
U3 [m] (fr/eng)	I want to talk in English. I want to check if I can be understood by a proficient user of the language.	I partner with anybody who knows English and can teach it.
U4 [f] (fr/eng)	I want to practice speaking English.	I only interact with native speakers of English.
U5 [m] (eng/ger)	I need German in my job.	I'll learn with anybody.
U6 [f] (eng/rus)	I'm interested in other cultures. English is just a means of communication, a lingua franca.	I partner with anybody as long as they want to learn. I'm not interested in flirting
U7 [m] (eng/jap)	I want to learn Japanese – the laguage and its culture.	I'll learn with anybody as long as we "click" (and it's not about flirting). It is also important that we understand each other (I exclude users who speak English poorly – with my only basic Japanese we cannot communicate.
U8 [f] (jap/eng)	I want to speak better English, to learn about foreign cultures and to meet new people.	I partner with anybody who is a nice person.
U9 [f] (jap/eng)	I want to polish my English. And to meet new people.	I choose my partners based on their profile (they have to declare the will to learn Japanese) and on the first-contact impression: if they use my name when they write to me.
U10 (f) (rus/ang)	Learning English is a hobby (I'm a stay-at-home mum and I want to kill time). Plus I want to talk in a foreign language and see somebody understands me.	I'm ready to learn with anybody.

This is because the motives of most of them – with the possible exception of three persons reporting exclusively instrumental orientation (U1, U4 and U5) – are a combination of different shades and degrees of both types of motivation. Another important observation is that the motives are connected with the self: the *perceived* one as well as the *ideal* and the *ought-to* selves (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). The users state where they want to see themselves as a result of tandem learning (the ought-to or the ideal self; U1, U2 and U5); and they are people with identities: what and how they learn, as Little (2004) puts it, is part of who they are

(matter-of-fact: U2, U5; nice, people-oriented: U8, U9). Finally, as shown especially by the partnering criteria, *Italki* as a learning context is characterized by the user's freedom of choice which, based on very individual criteria (learning as a goal – U1, U3, U4; social preferences – U2, U6, U7, U8, U9, personal safety – U2), is exercised by the users.

2.4.2. The case study

The data obtained in the in-depth interview with U7 have been mapped into three different collaboration graphs in which U7 is the central node: his *Italki* web of contacts (Figure 8) as well as two other networks accommodating *Itaki*: his personal learning network (Figure 9) and his collaborative consumption experience (Figure 10).

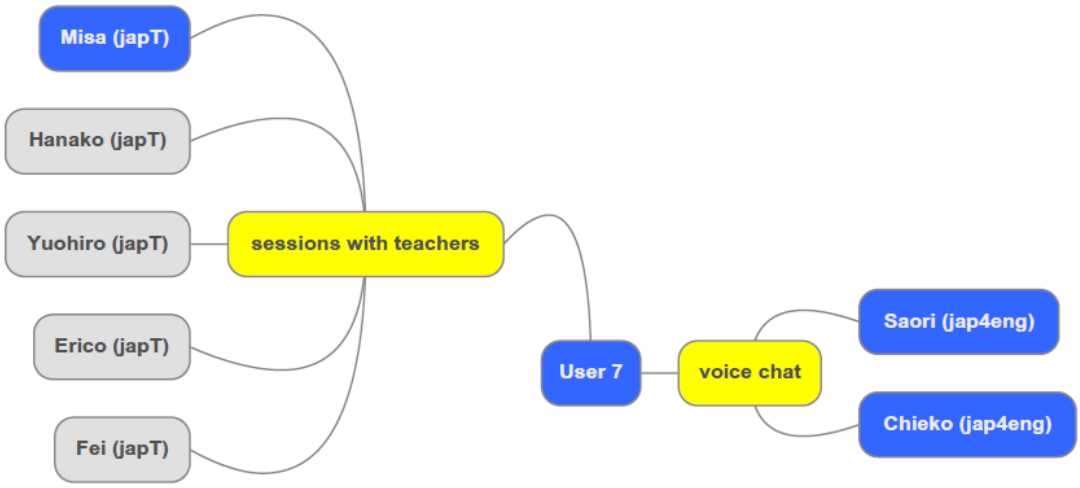

Figure 8. User 7 as a node in the Italki network

As it can be seen in Figure 8, the *Italki* network of User 7 is not too vast – it is limited in three different ways. First of all, even though the user has tried lessons with different teachers, his sessions are now regularly held only with Misa (whom he chose for her teaching style and her interest in culture). He is similarly selective in his choice of *Italki* tandem learning: he has two regular partners, and he did not choose to report his one-time experiences dismissing them as inconsequential. Finally, his *Italki* activities are restricted to speaking. The reason for this can be noted in Figure 9: User 7 has his own ways of practising vocabulary, grammar and writing and does not have to rely on *Italki* peer correction of notes.

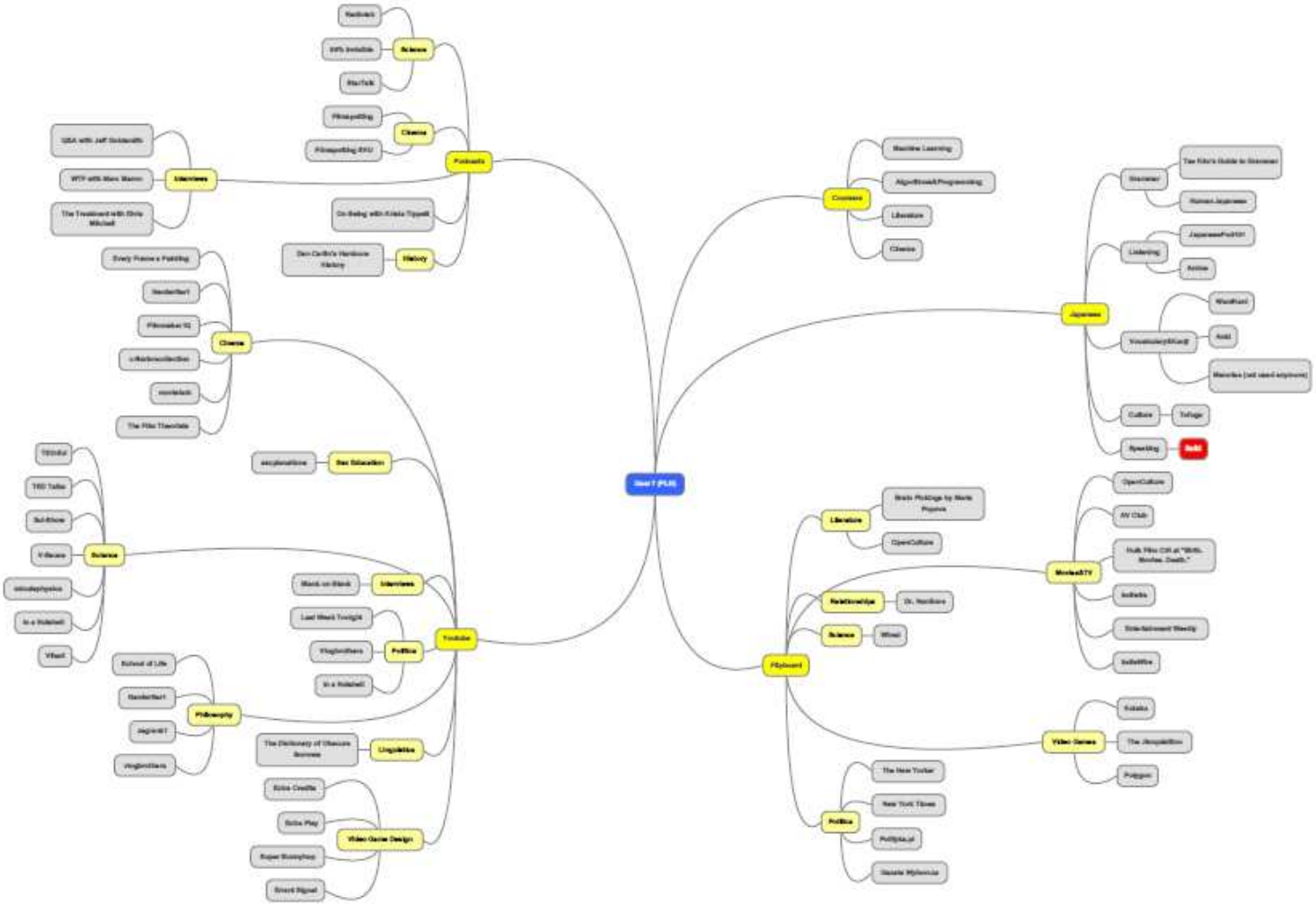

Figure 9. User 7's online personal learning network ((The image is illegible and enclosed only to show the scale; the complete PLN can be seen here)

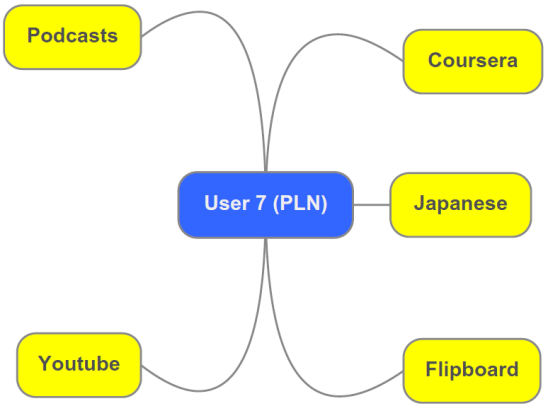

Figure 9a. The superordinate nodes

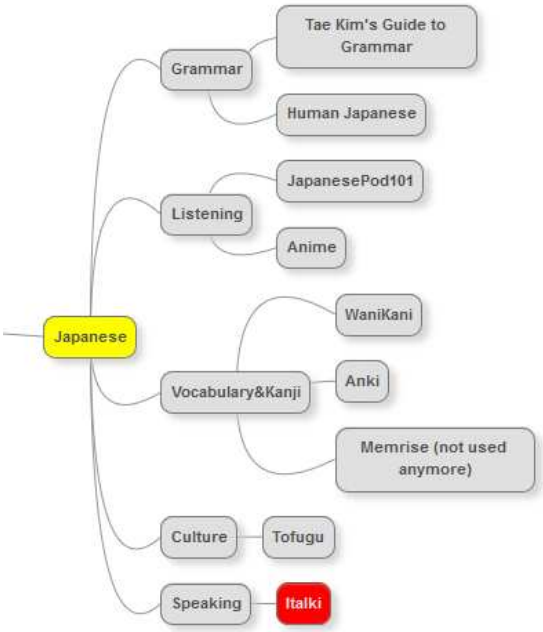

Figure 9b. The Japanese node

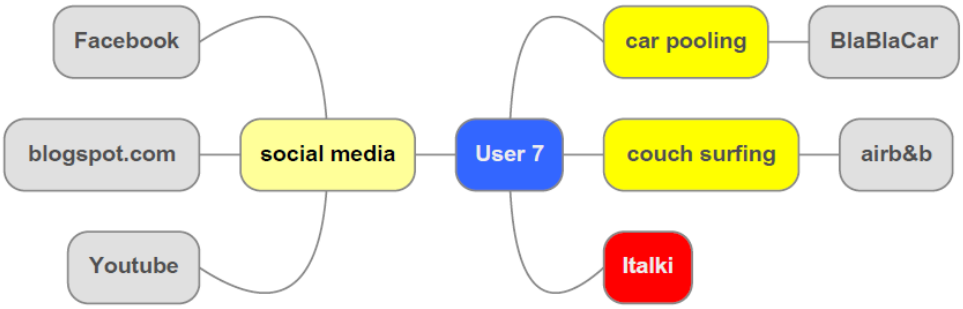

Figure 10. User 7's collaborative consumption (CC) experience

What can also be seen in Figures 8-10, is that

- the scale of the personal learning network of User 7, which is vast and diverse, his areas of interests range across sciences and humanities, from linguistics through philosophy and politics to computer science; and are realized by means of an array of new media;
- User 7 has experience in various forms of sharing, including social networking as well as three different areas of the CC economy;
- *Italki* is the common node of the PLN and CC networks, this is where the learning routines and collaborative consumption meet (Figures 9 and 10);

- for User 7 the *Italki* experience has the-context-within-context quality – it is embedded into two much vaster networks of who the person is, in terms of cognitive and affective needs, interests and lifestyle.

2.5. Between independence and interdependence – discussion 2

Similar to *Discussion 1*, the analysis of the data is carried out in relation to the three aspects of social learning autonomy: the emotional, the political, and the spatial. However, the focus – especially as regards the emotional aspect – is on the cognitive-individual vs. social-interactive, in an attempt to answer Research Question 2 – *Can the shift from independence to interdependence be seen in the routines as well as agendas, motives and attitudes of Italki users?*

When it comes to the emotional aspect of learner autonomy, the responses given by the ten users show that *Italki* learners have a sense of empowerment, undertake self-efficient actions based on reflexivity, and enjoy the authentic use of language. The results (Table 1; in-depth interview with User 7) demonstrate that the ten users have well-defined expectations of the portal as regards language learning as well as – in most cases – their partnering criteria. They also exercise the freedom to only use the functions of the portal that help them meet the expectations; as well as select the teachers and peers with whom to learn in relation to their agenda. Additionally, the integrative motives reported by most show that they enjoy the experience of using the target language. They treat it as:

(i) a way to talk *as themselves* (Legenhausen, 1999; Ushioda, 2011) and hear others do the same (*to learn about foreign cultures and to meet new people* – U8);

(ii) a challenge of the sort commonly not offered in the traditional language (*to check if I can be understood by a proficient user of the language* – U3);

(iii) authentic in the sense that it meets current goals, short- and long-term (*I'm a stay-at-home mum and I want to kill time*; *I want to learn English to be a teacher of this language* –U10).

An important point in the discussion of the results pertaining to the emotional aspect of autonomy as a social construct is the question of the integrative and instrumental orientations noted in the study. On the one hand, the fact that some users (U1, U4 and U5) demonstrate the exclusively instrumental drive may indicate that, in their case, other people (and portals, like *Italki*, where they can be found) are self-access centers in their pre-Web 2.0 understanding. For such people *Italki* may not go far beyond a place where individual agendas can be implemented and not a community of practice where one can learn not only *from* other

people but also *about* them and *with* them. Oxford (2003) differentiates between these two type of socio-cultural learning describing them as: (i) individual learning in a group, the socio-cultural aspect of learning limited to its being situated in space and time, in context; and (ii) group learning, carried out in communities of practice. If we adopt this division as the basis for classifying user motives underlying autonomous learning on *Italki*, it needs to be said that a shift in the learning model / new contexts of autonomous learning (cf. *Discussion 1*) is not necessarily followed by a similar change in every learner. In the research sample described there are users whose autonomy can be defined in the individual / (meta) cognitive rather than socio-interactive terms. Their social learning is socially motivated only when it comes to learning *from* (the self-access model) and not necessarily *about* or, more importantly, *with* others.

At the same time, such an interpretation can be subject to two major reservations. The first follows from the new understanding of the integrative language learner motivation in the globalized world (Dörnyei 2005 and 2009; Ushioda, 2011; Ushioda and Dörnyei, 2012). Since such motivation is seen as a very personal construct, a link to one's internal identification with one's self concept rather than with some kind of external force (Ushioda 2006 and 2011), it seems appropriate to expand integrativeness to refer to "a generalized international outlook or attitudes to the international community at large." (Ushioda, 2006: 150). This goes hand in hand with Yashima's (2002: 57) concept of "international posture," defined as "interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners, and [...] openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures". As such, the concept includes both the intercultural friendship and vocational interests, thus combining aspects of the integrative and instrumental orientations. An attitude of this kind is manifested by all of the 10 respondents, and in each of the cases it can be seen as an experience of belonging (Sade, 2011): partaking, through language, in various cultures; being a member of a professional community; belonging as opposed the loneliness of a stay-at-home mother; etc. This can also be seen in the personal learning and experience networks of User 7 – learning on *Italki* makes him a part of a number of communities of practice: speakers of other languages; self-directed learners; collaborative consumers. In the light of this, it seems a bit farfetched to classify some learners as independent-rather-than-interdependent, based on their instrumental – as opposed to integrative – motives alone.

The second reservation to be made vis-à-vis the distinction between the cognitive-individual and the social-interactive autonomy on *Italki* is the one commonly expressed in the

context of motivation research. As Ushioda (2009) argues, in general the conclusions in research into motivation are drawn based on statistical averages rather on insights into unique characteristics of particular individuals. As a result, ironically, despite the focus on how people differ (from each other or from a standard), this research "concerns itself ... with the shared characteristics of particular types of individuals" (Ushioda, 2009: 12). The alternative she proposes is a "person-in-context relational view" of motivation: focus on real persons rather than learner abstractions; focus on "the agency of a person as a thinking and feeling human being, with an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, with goals, motives and intentions" (12-13). The case study presented in this study shows that a similar approach may be desirable in autonomy studies. This transpires from the complexity and contextuality of User 7's autonomous behaviors. More importantly, though, it also indicates that before classifying users U1, U4 and U5 as independent-rather-than-interdependent in terms of their agendas, motives and attitudes, we should consider them in a broader and – inevitably – dynamic context of their interactions, on *Italki* and beyond. This being outside the scope of the present study, no definite conclusions as regards their beliefs and attitudes are justifiable.

When it comes to the other aspects of learner autonomy as a social construct – the political and the spatial – the results of Part 2 of the study seem to endorse the assumptions presented in Sections 2.2 and 2.3.

As regards the political aspect of autonomy, it is manifested, first of all, in the composition of the research sample. It is – most probably like *Italki* population overall – multinational. This means that learner autonomy manifesting itself in the decision to learn on *Italki* is political in the sense that the tandem language education happens across borders, ignoring the administrative divisions in the contemporary world. Other borders the study participants cross are institutional: all of them chose to learn outside their own educational systems. This transpires from the answers of all ten *Italki* users but is most clearly visible in the personal learning network of User 7 (Figure 8). The amount of knowledge he seeks and finds out of his university shows how thin-walled he decided to make it. It also brings up the question of proportions and an observation that if such PLN-based education prevails in others like himself, the schooling systems worldwide could soon be facing a major revolution. Finally, based on User 7's CC experience network (Figure 10), we can note that exercising one's right to autonomous learning on *Italki* goes hand-in-hand with a new model of consumption: sharing economy; not to mention a manifestation of one's lifestyle. In this sense autonomous learning of this kind has political meaning and consequences, even if neither

User 7 nor any other of the *Italkers* studied admitted having a political agenda when undertaking tandem learning on the site.

When it comes to the spatial aspect of *Italki* learner autonomy, both the criteria of partnering of the 10 users and the "Japanese" node of User 7's PLN prove that the site is a place characterized by the freedom of choice rather than control. This freedom – to choose who you want to learn with; to come and go; to protect your privacy; to invest your identity (or not) – can be exercised because the social context under investigation is a truly thin-walled classroom.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be said that tandem language learning sites, like *Italki*, have a considerable potential to develop and reinforce learner autonomy. The results show that for some users autonomy may be more about learning *from* others, which coincides with pre-Web 2.0 construct of learner autonomy based on independence rather than interdependence. However, as it was admitted earlier in the text, based on a study as limited in terms of scope and depth as the present one, it is difficult to decide how social the autonomy of individual *Italki* users really is. This is why the study offers only some insights into the problem and delineates areas for further research rather than aspiring to any conclusions.

On a practical level, the pedagogical implications based on the present study will result in two recommendations. First of all, considering all its advantages as regards developing and reinforcing learner autonomy in its all three aspects, it seems advisable to encourage tandem language learning in the language classroom as an activity extracurricular to mainstream education. Secondly, sites like *Italki* should attract language teachers. If teachers are facing an inevitable paradigm change in education – or if they think it proper to induce such a change – the experience of the teacher as a learner in the thin-walled educational context (strongly advocated in Richardson and Mancabelli, 2011) is likely to give them a better insight into both the advantages of the interactive learning of languages as well as learner autonomy understood as a social construct.

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THE EFFECT OF MALL-BASED TASKS ON EFL LEARNERS' GRAMMAR LEARNING

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Abstract

Many studies have confirmed the importance of tasks on language learning. Nowadays, many teachers apply different kinds of tasks in their classrooms. The current study investigated the effect of mobile assisted language learning tasks (MALL) on participants' English grammar learning. The researcher administered a pre-validated grammar test to 90 junior high school participants aged between 14 to 16 with the mean age 15. The researcher taught grammar to both groups inductively and asked the participants to do their assignments according to their group's tasks. Based on the post-test results, it can be concluded that the experimental groups had better results than the control group. The study supports the hypothesis that sharing tasks in virtual networks can have positive results for language learning, specifically grammar learning.

Keywords: grammar learning; Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL); photocopied questions; social networks; tasks

1. Introduction

In the past twenty years in Foreign Language (FL) learning, there have been many studies about the effects of tasks on language learning. Task refers to a "work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed" (Ellis, 2003, p. 16). Nowadays, most language teachers use tasks in their classes to teach English. Task-based instruction refers to the activities such as solving problems or completing projects in order to get learners involved in meaningful and goal-oriented communication (Syyedi, 2012).

There are many studies that have confirmed the importance of tasks on language skills (e.g. Beglar & Hunt, 2002; Kim, 2009; Robinson, 2007; Salimi & Dadashpour, 2010). There is a clear relationship between all language learning skills (speaking, listening, reading, &

writing) and as Linse (2005) states, progress in one skill can be a precondition and prerequisite towards progress in other skills.

Many researchers have confirmed that learners learn foreign language skills better if teaching focuses explicitly on grammatical or lexical forms (Norris & Ortega, 2006). Based on recent studies, grammar instruction helps learners to reach the high level of proficiency in accuracy and fluency (Ellis & Celce-Murcia, 2002, as cited in Ellis, 2003). Unfortunately, uninteresting lessons about grammar have had a discouraging effect on its learning among learners in the last decades (Wang, 2010). When the content in a coursebook is presented in a boring way, it becomes very difficult to stimulate the interest of learners (Ruso, 2007).

As such, lack of sufficient research into the effects of tasks on grammar learning creates a need to study the effects of some motivating tasks on grammar learning. These situations can be seen as an opportunity for a new study that focuses on combining interesting tasks and grammar learning.

Nowadays participants in some institutions learn English through smart phones. Trifanova, Knapp, Ronchetti, and Gamper (2004) define mobile devices as “any device that is small, autonomous, and unobtrusive enough to accompany use at every moment” (p. 3). Prensky (2005) states that a mobile phone is one of the instruments which can be used by students to learn in technology era. Zhao (2005) indicates that smart phones prepare the best situation for foreign language learning. In addition, mobiles can be used in numerous forms such as face-to-face or distant modes. Unfortunately, research into the effect of mobile assisted language learning-based tasks (MALL) on grammar learning is still rather rare. To fill this gap, the current study investigates the effect of MALL-based tasks on EFL participants' grammar.

2. Literature review on MALL

There have been a lot of studies about the effects of task-based teaching approach on learning a foreign language. For example, O’Brien (1996) proved the positive effects of using tasks to improve participants’ oral proficiency, while Bygate (1999) indicated the efficacy of communicative tasks on participants’ grammatical competence. Similarly, McDonough and Mackey (2000) reported the effectiveness of using tasks in enhancing participants’ focus on language communication. In another study, Shehadeh (2001) indicated that using tasks helps learners to practise initiation of a communication activity. Mann (2006) and Torky (2006) reported that applying tasks was remarkably beneficial in developing oral performance of learners. At the same time, Karimi (2010) stated that using tasks effectively expanded the

participants' knowledge of words, while Korkgöz (2011) found that the participants had positive attitudes towards tasks when combined with technology. Hasan (2014) maintained that task-based classrooms provided the opportunity for the learners to speak without hesitation. According to Choo and Too (2012), the use of task-based teaching motivates learners toward language learning. Beglar and Hunt (2002) revealed that working collaboratively on tasks motivate learners. Rogers and Medley (1988) showed that the grammar of learners proved to develop through exposure to tasks. Fotos and Ellis (1991) revealed that teaching grammar communicatively through tasks helped participants improve their understanding of difficult grammatical forms.

There are quite a few studies about the effect of mobile phones on language learning. For instance, Thornton and Houser (2005) examined the use of mobile devices by Japanese university participants in a language learning context and the results confirmed the positive effect of mobile devices. Basoglu (2010) compared traditional flash cards on paper with digital flash cards and mobile phones. His findings confirmed that the participants who had used the mobile application obtained better results. In another study by Sole, Calic, and Neijmann (2010), participants who reported working through mobile phones showed a better engagement in learning. Baleghzadeh and Oladrostam (2011) investigated the effect of MALL on grammatical accuracy of EFL participants. The results showed that the participants in the experimental group displayed better performance than the participants who were in the control group. Begum (2011) made an attempt to investigate the possibility of using cell phone in the EFL classroom of Bangladesh as an instructional tool. After analyzing the data, it was revealed that despite some challenges, cell phone has great potential as an instructional tool. In 2011, Motallebzadeh, Beh-Afarin, and Daliry Rad proved that SMS has a positive influence on the retention of collocations among Iranian lower intermediate EFL learners and that participants have a positive attitude toward learning collocations through SMS.

3. Study

3.1. Aim of the research

All of the studies summarized above considered MALL as a method of learning, not a task. In addition, little is said about the effect of MALL tasks on EFL learners' grammar learning. In the current study, the researcher investigates a mixture of MALL and tasks to see its effects on EFL learners' grammar learning to verify the following hypotheses:

1. MALL-based tasks have no effects on EFL learners' grammar learning.

2. There are no differences between the MALL group and the control group.

3.2. Participants

In the current project, 60 Iranian junior high school participants from Qom province, Iran were selected out of 160 students. The homogeneity of the participants was checked before starting the data collection procedures. In so doing, they were pre-tested through a test which contained 30 multiple-choice items related to structure and written expression and 10 items related to reading comprehension. The selected participants were those with intermediate level of language proficiency. The mean and the standard deviation of the participants' test scores (M=34.18, SD=2.20) were used as the criterion for their selection. Based on the pre-test results, 60 participants whose mean scores in grammar knowledge were one standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen. All the participants were male and native speakers of Persian. The researcher briefed the participants about the mechanism of the research and randomly divided them into two groups of 30 participantss.

3.3. Design and procedure

The effect of MALL tasks versus traditional ones on Iranian junior high school students was investigated through a quasi-experimental design. The participants were randomly selected and assigned to the control and experimental groups. The researcher conducted a pre-test and at the end of the research, a post-test was administered.

In the current study the researcher used the following instruments:

1. **Tests**. The researcher used three tests, one for homogenising the participants, one pre-test and one post-test.
2. **Smart phones**. In the MALL-based task group, the participants did their assignments in their sub-groups with the use of applications of their smart phones such as Movie Maker and Google Photos and shared them on a defined telegram group.
3. **Marker and whiteboard**. To teach grammar inductively, the researcher used marker and whiteboard. The researcher wrote the examples on the whiteboard and the participants had to discover the rules.

The current study was conducted over 12 sessions which was enough time for teaching the grammatical rules of the course (Present Simple tense, Present Continuous tense, possessive 's and of, possessive adjectives, adverbs of frequency).

The researcher first homogenised the subjects. 60 participants were chosen according to their mean scores on the test. They were randomly divided into two groups in two different classrooms. In each group, there were 30 participants. In both groups, the researcher divided the participants into six sub-groups. There were five participants in each sub-group. Then the pre-test was administered to both the control and the experimental groups before the treatment. The researcher taught grammar inductively to both groups. The difference between the groups was their tasks. As an assignment of the control group, the researcher asked them to do their workbooks and for their tasks, the researcher gave them photocopied questions which were related to the grammar lessons.

The researcher taught grammar rules inductively to both groups as follows:

1) The researcher presented the participants with a variety of examples for a given concept without giving any explanations about how the rule is used and formed.
2) The participants drilled and practised the examples. For instance, the learners applied their speculations to find out the grammatical rule.
3) As a conclusion to the activity, the researcher asked the participants to make new sentences and find out the rule of the examples and explain the grammatical rule.
4) As an assignment, the participants of both groups had to do their course work book.

Beside that, the researcher gave the participants some assignments according to their groups. The control group's participants had to do the photocopied exercises given by the teacher. They included doing multiple-choice questions, unscrambling sentences, filling the blanks and finding errors. The participants had to answer those written questions. In the following session, each of the participants had to come to the front of the class and answer the photocopied questions on the whiteboard.

On the other hand, like the control group, the experimental group comprised 30 participants and 6 sub-groups. The researcher administered the Telegram instant messaging system to the participants of the experimental group. On the first day of the experiment, the researcher created a Telegram and asked the participants to join the group. The teacher did not give them the photocopied questions, they had to find extra materials which were related to the grammar rules of their lesson and share them on the Telegram group. For example, one sub-group made some pictures that illustrated the specified rule and shared it on the Telegram group. For 12 weeks, the participants performed the grammar tasks and shared them on the group.

During the last session the researcher took a pre-validated post-test to find out the effects of the tasks on participants' grammar knowledge. The post-test consisted of 40 multiple-choice items, with each item accounting for 0.5 points. There was no negative score; therefore, the maximum score was 20.

To assess validity and reliability of the current study, both tests (pre-test and post-test) were given to a jury of three English language instructors to elicit their views about the accuracy, clarity, and appropriateness of the instruments. Then, the researcher reviewed and modified the tests according to their recommendations. The usability of the tests was tested through a pilot study of 30 participants that the researcher had excluded from the sample. In the current study, the researcher used Cronbach's alpha to calculate the reliability of the study.

3.4. Results and findings

One of the null hypotheses of this study was that MALL-based tasks did not have any effect on EFL learners' grammar learning. In order to analyse the data to test the null hypothesis, first the descriptive statistics of the pre-test were computed. Afterwards, the independent samples t-test was used to compare the scores between the control and experimental groups.

Descriptive statistics of the pre-test indicate the mean of the control (7.87) and the experimental group (7.97). In addition, the distribution of the data was normal for each group, because the degree of skewness and kurtosis were between -2 and +2 (Appendix 1, Table 1).

Next, the researcher used the independent samples t-test on the pre-test results to find out the degree of significance difference between the control and the experimental groups (to test the second null hypothesis). The t-test results revealed that there was no significant difference in grammar knowledge between the control and experimental groups on the pre-tests ($t = .464$, $P = .644$, $P > \alpha$) in which the P value was more than .05, and the t-observed .644 was less than the t-critical, 2.04. Therefore, it can be concluded that the two groups were homogenous at the pre-test (Appendix 1, Table 2).

Before calculating the statistics of the post-test results, it was necessary to investigate the reliability and validity of the post-tests. The researcher used Cronbach's alpha to obtain the reliability calculation. Cronbach's alpha was 0.81, therefore, the test can be assessed as reliable (Appendix 1, Table 3). Next, the researcher calculated the descriptive statistics of the post-test results. The means of the experimental and control groups were 18.43 and 10.48 respectively (Appendix 1, Table 4).

The researcher used Shapiro-Wilk test to investigate the normality of the distribution in two groups based on the post-test results. The Normality Test revealed P values of .208 and .152 for the grammar post-test in the control and the experimental groups respectively. P values for both groups were more than selected significance, i.e. .05 for this study ($P > \alpha$); consequently, it can be claimed that two sets of scores are normally distributed (Appendix 1, Table 5). Thus, the parametric independent samples t-test was applied to compare the results of two groups based on the post-tests. The test detected significant difference in grammar learning between the two groups on the post-test ($t = 33.462$, $P = .000$, $P < \alpha$); consequently, the null hypothesis of this study was rejected (Appendix 1, Table 6).

4. Discussion

Task-based language teaching is an interesting topic in FL classes (Skehan, 1996). Many previous researchers believed that there is a positive relationship between using tasks and language learning, such as O'Brien (1996), Bygate (1999), McDonough and Mackey (2000), Shehadeh (2001), Mann (2006), Torky (2006), Karimi (2010), Korkgöz (2011), Hasan (2014), Choo and Too (2012), Beglar and Hunt (2002), Rogers and Medley (1988), Fotos and Ellis (1991).

Based on the research findings, it is disclosed that the MALL-based-task group achieved better results than the control group. The findings of this research are in line with Thornton and Houser (2006), Sole et al. (2010), Mitchell et al. (2010), Bryson and Cai (2004), as well as Baleghzadeh and Oladrostam (2012), who indicated a positive relationship between using mobile devices and language learning. In addition, based on the researchers' observations, it can be concluded that the participants who took part in the mobile-based task group had a higher motivation to learn grammar than the control group. The findings of this study also showed that the motivated participants also performed better in the post-test. The present study is in line with Lochana and Deb's (2006) research, who suggested that task-based instruction helps learners not only in terms of proficiency development but also in terms of motivation. Richards and Rodgers (2001) also reported that learners' success in achieving the goals of tasks increases their motivation.

In addition, it was proven that using mobile phones helps learners have better interaction and better engagement with their peers. Findings of this study are in congruence with Zhao (2005), who declares that smart phones create the best situation for learning that can hardly be found. The study results also corroborate those of Lopez (2004), who indicated that the learners who perform tasks which are related to their language course learn English

more effectively and collaboratively. The findings of his study confirmed the principle of the sociocultural perspective that stated social interaction facilitates learning through the process of scaffolding.

In the control group, the participants' task was to answer the written questions prepared by the teacher. The results showed that the participants in the control group obtained lower scores. It is consistent with Wang's (2010) belief that lessons about grammar that are not interesting and motivating have a discouraging effect on learners' attitude towards grammar teaching and learning. As the results of the control group showed, using photocopied questions as the teacher did can have a negative effect on participants' language learning and motivation. Similarly to Ruso (2007), it can be stated that when the content of a coursebook is presented in a boring way it is not easy to stimulate the interest of the participants.

5. Pedagogical implications and final conclusions

The analysis of data indicated that the experimental group's participants were highly satisfied with sharing their tasks in the Telegram group. The findings revealed that the Telegram social network in this study was helpful in triggering students' learning and motivation. It encouraged the participants to present various tasks through it which increased their practice opportunities. According to the results of the present study, it can be concluded that students welcomed the idea of using tasks through social networks while learning English as a second language. In short, the findings of the control group revealed that the teacher's photocopied questions were not helpful as the social networks. The results clearly proved that the experimental group participants had greater interaction within the Telegram group which affected their learning positively.

Further research can investigate the effects of the participants' motivation in social networks on learning English. Furthermore, it would be worth comparing the participants' interaction within the social networks and classrooms. Besides, virtual discourse can be compared and contrasted with a traditional classroom.

The findings of this study have pedagogical implications for teachers and participants. Teachers should carefully select the materials of a coursebook and provide learners with interesting materials that trigger their interest. According to Allwright and Bailey (1991), learners can switch off because they do not like the way the content of their course is presented in the book. The results showed that the experimental groups outperformed the control group since the use of tasks on Telegram raised the motivation of the participants. It is

recommended that language teachers become familiar with Telegram, which is a very popular social network, and adopt it in language teaching. The experimental group's participants were quite receptive to using tasks in Telegram group. Teachers can ask their participants to use Telegram and ask them to provide a variety of enjoyable tasks. As Ruso (2007) states, serious consideration should be given to using enjoyable tasks in classes and language teachers should provide their participants with opportunities to make use of content learnt through tasks. Using social networks as a framework to execute tasks not only improves the participants' language skills but also expands their social knowledge of the world. Besides, this is how teachers can incorporate new methods and techniques in their skillset (Wallace, 1991).

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Appendix 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the pre-test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std .Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
							Statistic	Std .Error	Statistic	Std .Error
Control	30	7	9	7.87	.776	.602	.242	.427	-1.261	.833
Experimental	30	7	9	7.97	.890	.792	.068	.427	-1.780	.833

Table 2. Reliability statistics of the post-test

N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
40	.813

Table 3. Independent sample t-test between the control and experimental groups on the pre-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
									Lower	Upper
Score	Equal variances assumed	0.208	.060	54.335	78	.000	9.000	0.166	8.670	9.330
	Equal variances not assumed			54.335	77.830	.000	9.000	0.166	8.670	9.330

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the post-test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental group	30	17	20	18.43	.848
control group	30	9	12	10.48	.987

Table 5. Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality for two groups based on post-test results

	Statistic	df	Sig.
Experimental group	.953	30	.208
control group	.948	30	.152

Table 6. Independent sample test to compare the post-test results in control and experimental groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Score	Equal variances assumed	1.132	.292	33.462	58	.000	7.950	.238	7.474	8.426

USING THE SECOND LIFE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT FOR FL EDUCATION: A POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The aim of the present study was to raise awareness related to the postmodern educational philosophies, and to the opportunities provided by the emerging technologies and conditions of our era with regard to foreign language (FL) education. The main discussion was that educators and educational practices are not in complete harmony with the recent products of technology or with the needs, interests, and habits of the learners.

The current work proposed Second Life (SL) as a useful model to focus on and investigate in order to derive some theoretical and practical guidelines and conclusions that will be consistent with all philosophies, applications, stakeholders, instruments, and conditions in educational settings in the current age of technology and in the future.

The present study concluded that the administrative side of education has fallen far behind the progress in technology, and thus remains quite traditional and static, which creates a paradoxical situation suggesting that the teaching part has lost its power and efficiency, while the learning part continues to be innovative and creative.

Key words: Second Life; foreign language education; educational technologies; educational philosophies; postmodernism.

1. Introduction

Like many other fields in social sciences, education deals with highly qualitative and incalculable variables that urge us to refrain from stereotyping and generalizing. Therefore, the main mission of education should be guiding and helping people to be good learners by showing them effective ways and sources rather than pushing them to memorize, or automatizing them with homework or some predetermined methodologies and formulas. However, although sustainable examples of good practices in education have been proposed, the majority of work has followed the positivistic nature of the physical sciences, with a tradition to create fixed approaches and frameworks that were postulated to be applicable or used for everyone. This tendency should be open to discussion and criticism in the field of education, especially today when conditions for individualized and differentiated education are available more than ever before.

2. Background

2.1. Why does philosophy matter in education?

Philosophy, just like the foundation of a house, is the most basic and vital component- the backbone of anything, and therefore, the most essential and irreplaceable part of education (Uzun, 2015, pp. 14-15). All of the methodologies, approaches, techniques, teacher and student roles, the materials and procedures to be used, etc. are regulated by the philosophy at hand. If a country can be ruled peacefully without a constitution, or if judges can perform their tasks harmoniously without needing or holding to their book of law, then educators may do their jobs without philosophy. What would happen without a stable philosophy in education is quite similar to what would happen in a country or legal system without a constitution. Unfortunately, although the matter is that serious, the philosophy subject in education is often ignored or neglected (Uzun, 2012). Educators concentrate on the automatic applications on the surface without thinking of the basics that underlie these applications. This is most often the reason behind ineffective and unsustainable applications and decisions in education. The fact is that it is very easy to forget about the ultimate goal(s) and to stick just to the means that have been designed for the sake of the main goal(s) for longer than needed. The problem can be explained and exemplified by the help of the modern vs. postmodern distinction in the literature.

2.2. Why does philosophy matter in education?

Modernism and postmodernism have been hot discussion topics, particularly for the last thirty years. Although there is not a single and well-structured definition of these concepts, they have been compared and discussed within the evolution of mankind in history as well as the developments in the social and scientific aspects, and the tendencies and habits related to these aspects (see Uzun, 2015, pp. 26-33). When investigated from the educational point of view, it would be possible to describe at least the main differences as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Modern vs. postmodern education

Modern Education	**Postmodern Education**
Teaching-oriented	Learning-oriented
Mostly authoritative	Contributory and participatory
Fixed time, place, method	Anytime, anywhere, anyhow
Fixed materials and topics	Modular, modifiable, flexible materials and topics
Mass education	Individualized, differentiated education
Pen and paper	Digitalized
Physical environments	Online, blended
Local	Global

2.3. Educational technologies in the postmodern era

The noticeable progress in technology has enhanced educational technologies as well. Although it has been discussed that the innovations in the field of education have been outperformed by the improvements in other fields, this might be caused by the static habits and tendencies of the educational stakeholders rather than by the very technology.

Likewise, it would be possible to suggest that technology-based tools and materials are more than enough for the time being. However, they remain unexploited and therefore underdeveloped. There are thousands of websites and weblogs as well as hundreds of software programs and platforms that have not been intended for education, but which can be used for educational purposes with slight modifications. The fact is that the supply and demand relationship works not only for commerce but for any field.

One of the mentioned platforms that has not been initially intended and developed for education is Second Life (see Fig. 1). The SL three-dimensional 3D digital environment has been selected not only because it has been very popular recently, with over 1 million active users, but also because it has been used successfully with different purposes by a very serious number of educational institutions around the world. As a matter of fact, it stands to be a most flexible and versatile place with promises specifically for education, as it enables users to do everything and many more in the SL virtual world than can be done in traditional educational environments.

Figure 1. The SL platform

Moreover, the scientific literature on SL which is growing rapidly (e.g. Blasing, 2010; Peterson, 2010; Wehner et al., 2011; Jauregi et al., 2011; Wang and Vasques, 2012; Wang and Shao, 2012; Lan et al., 2013; Aydin, 2013; Berns et al., 2013; Wigham and Chanier, 2015; Garrido-Iñigo and Rodriguez-Moreno, 2015, etc.), proposes that when evaluated from the supply-demand theory, it seems that SL will enormously improve in the future. It is also possible that other platforms similar to SL may come out soon. The SL virtual environment allows us to carry out all of our educational practices, organize meetings and conferences, communicate synchronously as well as create collaboratively.

Explaining that virtual worlds are a type of reality in which students can meet and communicate with other learners in the target language, Kruk (2014) investigated the effectiveness of using online activities and a browser-based virtual world in teaching the second conditional in English. The results revealed positive effects on teaching and learning grammar. In another study, Jarmon et al. (2009) explored the nature and process of learning in SL in a graduate interdisciplinary communication course. They concluded that the SL learning environment was effectively used with the project-based approach to foster experiential development of interdisciplinary communication awareness and strategies. Similarly, Diehl and Prins (2008) argued that SL users participate in an activity system, engaging in myriad activities (e.g. language classes) which provide structured environments

that generate both intended and unintended outcomes. Their findings revealed that in many ways participation in SL enhanced participants' intercultural literacy – for example, by fostering use of multiple languages, cross-cultural encounters and friendships, greater awareness of insider cultural perspectives, and openness towards new viewpoints.

Additionally, Edirisingha et al. (2009) examined the pedagogical potential of SL related to socialisation and learning. They reported that the learning activities designed for SL, the artefacts and the 3-D immersive environment provided exploratory learning experience for the participants, and SL constituted an environment where the 'socialisation' stage occurred smoothly. Likewise, Wang et al. (2011) investigated student teachers' experience of teaching English in an experimental EFL program in SL, observing student teachers' overall positive perceptions of SL as an EFL learning platform. They concluded as follows:

> … the student teachers took a lot from this opportunity and felt confident about its future potential. Second Life is clearly a platform with much to offer to EFL/ ESL instruction. With the addition of technology support, clearly defined objectives and curriculum, and supporting resources such as blogs and lesson plans, SL is poised to become a great supplement to EFL learning and instruction. In the exact words of one teacher, "I see so much potential, it's so exciting." (p. 37)

Notwithstanding the potential, barriers may always arise when new and unusual things are to be employed. Warburton (2009) maintains that the complexity of immersive environments spans a range of technical and social intricacies, and presents a particular set of problems to educators and developers seeking to situate educational activities in a virtual space. However, the positive contributions of SL seem to be too serious and important to ignore or neglect. Evaluating their case study, Wang and Braman (2009) advocated that the implementation of SL results in improved learning experience as well as higher learning motivation and better performance. White and Le Cornu (2010) claimed that teachers wishing to take advantage of virtual worlds should approach them as an 'other' cultural space as well as a platform with given technical functionality, which will create an opportunity for experiential learning, or learning by doing, to take place. Furthermore, Iqbal et al. (2010) maintained that digital and online technology means could create solutions to help out the illiterate adults by bridging the gap between technology-based solutions and traditional learning theories through the use of virtual environments such as SL.

Therefore, we should confidently suggest that online and distance education in virtual environments has the potential to cover both the emotional and intellectual aspects of learning and teaching, despite the difficulties and incompatibility between the ideal educational philosophies and the common philosophy in the minds of the current generation.

3. Postmodern foreign language education in Second Life

3.1. Introductory remarks

According to Özen Baykent (2015), throughout their lives people acquire certain knowledge, skills and competence that they are not born with. Regarding the principles of the postmodern educational philosophies and the educational technologies that we have today, it would be possible to criticize the current traditional approaches to FL education, particularly in such countries as Turkey, which create people who know all of the grammatical rules of the FL (English in our case, but also other languages), but can hardly use it orally or in writing. When people in Turkey complain that they or their children have been learning English for ages, but that unlike their counterparts in many European countries they cannot speak or write, the responses coming from FL teachers tend to be that the Europeans have the opportunities to travel and practise what they learn in the classrooms, which might be a correct postulation, but if the problem in the Turkish educational system was that simple, it would be very easy to solve. Nevertheless, the problem seems to be deeply rooted in the educational philosophy of the country, which seems to be lacking in the teacher training programs in the faculties of education throughout the universities, and also in the minds of the teachers.

How should or could FL education be changed in the postmodern era of technology then? Below, a model that can be applied by the help of SL and some other educational technologies will be proposed. First, we should know and decide about our needs. Second, we should be willing to change or modify our habits in order to adapt to the new and emerging conditions of the age. Last but not least, we should be ready to modify our roles as teachers and abandon some of our powers that we are strictly and tightly woven in such areas as controlling, assessing, and managing our students. This does not mean that we will not do these at all, but that we will do our tasks in the style of an instructor and facilitator rather than in the authoritative manner of a teacher and punisher. This is possible when we realize that teachers exist for learners, and that learners are not there to satisfy their egos. We should comprehend and accept that we have already lost our dominance and power as teaching

bodies after the invention of the Internet and the improvements in all communication and dissemination software and hardware.

Education needs to be learner-centred and free of fixed and authoritative approaches as well as of strict timetables and place arrangements; it should be available to learners whenever they need it and in the most suitable form for each individual; and it should be modifiable and flexible in content and procedures. All of these prerequisites of the probable postmodern FL education might be met once the schools are transformed into a form resembling an online international conference where the environments are thematically organized and presented simultaneously in multiple ways that allow people to choose out of a variety of options supplied in the best suitable time and by the person(s) preferred for them. In other words, we need an online environment, which will be 24/7 active and well organized in terms of FL proficiency level, topics, activities, etc., so that it will meet not only the schedules but also the interests, needs, and intelligence types of as many individuals as possible. Certainly, it would be impossible to claim that an educational environment such as the one explained will solve every problem, but it will be as useful as the Internet is for each person in the world.

Figure 2. SL images

3D digital environments such as the one in Figure 2 (images captured in SL) create opportunities for people to navigate through different locations by teleporting with just one click. They are enabled to listen to a rich number of sources; to interact with many different types of people and materials both synchronously and asynchronously; to get assistance and provide help to others; to create and add their own language learning materials, strategies, suggestions, and so forth; and to learn and teach at the same time by being a learner and a teacher simultaneously. There is no authority; there is no gender, age, ethnicity, or any other kind of restriction or distinction. These environments are vivid and always active since there is no day and night on the Internet; there is always someone awake at different points of the world, which is really good for intercultural communication and globalization. Such environments also create opportunities to learn a FL from the native speakers of the language and to practise the language with them. That is to say, within SL a Turkish university student may participate in the classes of any respected university in the world, for example, communicating with university students from every part of the world, or talking to some famous professors whose books they have been reading but whom they have never had the chance to meet or speak to.

The two important things to consider and improve in this process of tech-schooling are the educational philosophies that need to be basically different from the modern philosophies, and the virtual reality environments such as SL that will provide the opportunities to practise the basic language skills and enable the activities that people do in classrooms. All other related issues such as adaptation of traditional habits, modification of the teacher and student roles, arrangement of testing and evaluation, development of FL software and hardware, etc. will follow just as e-commerce followed the trends of demand, which contributed a lot to the global economy. A similar model of e-schooling holds huge potential in this sense. Indeed, the present study is a preliminary philosophical and theoretical work to what has been realised successfully in local FL education settings and will be expanded internationally.

3.2. The learning setting

Based on the philosophical perspective discussed hereby, a scientific research project has been carried out at Uludag University with the cooperation of a state secondary school of the Ministry of National Education in Turkey to explore to what degree the SL virtual environment would allow to realise the theoretical hypotheses that underlie the idea of postmodern FL education.

The virtual campus of the Faculty of Education (see Figure 3) has been constructed and furnished with the necessary materials to provide the 3D version of the subjects included in the coursebook of the students and to support them with the most interesting, exciting, and realistic environment possible. The topics of all 10 units of the coursebook were covered in the different parts of the virtual campus, and were practised with the help of carefully constructed activities in the designated places. In addition to the researcher and 3 external experts, 13 third-year university students (teacher trainees) and 40 secondary school students (6^{th} grade) took part in the experiment. Each university student was made responsible for one of the 10 units/topics and located in the relevant place during the activity hours, which were made available to everyone in the schedule posted in the announcement timetable. The university students were asked to prepare their activities in line with the curriculum of the secondary school students, and to apply these during the predetermined activity hours. The whole process was realised under the supervision of the researcher.

Figure 3. The virtual campus of the Faculty of Education

The university students and the secondary school students did not know one another, and had not had any kind of contact before the experiment. As it is often criticised by the students that speaking to their classmates and teacher in L2 is not realistic in L1 settings, the project aimed at overcoming this issue by appointing different roles to play (i.e. a football player from Argentina, an Italian artist, a Swedish musician, an actress from the USA, etc.) to ten university students who acted as teachers in the digital campus. Thus, although everyone in the area was Turkish, virtually they pretended to be foreigners; and speaking in Turkish was prohibited on the campus, particularly for the university students. The remaining three university students acted as Turkish teachers of English as in the school of the secondary school students.

Each secondary school student was given a username and password with which they could log in to the digital campus and join the activities. They could also freely wander around and use all the language learning materials (i.e. vocabulary boards, grammar exercise boards, videos, reading texts, etc.) individually. The activities were 30 minutes each, and were repeated twice a week in the predetermined schedule. There were 10 different structured activities that were in line with the curriculum and the course book of the learners. They could communicate with the people in the campus both in written and spoken ways. The digital area was open 24/7 although the activities were carried out during the certain times. Therefore, the participants had plenty of free time to be involved in free activities and communication.

Fundamentally, everyone was a learner although the perspectives, aspects, and roles varied. The task of the teacher trainees was to learn how to teach online by creating and organising their activities as well as applying them smoothly, pretending to be a foreigner at the same time. On the other hand, the task of the secondary school students was to explore and enjoy the environment while completing the specific tasks given as homework by their teacher at school (1 task per week, over the period of 4 weeks) through attending the activities and communicating with the people in the virtual environment. The homework of the students required them to complete a series of tasks that consisted of talking with others or exploring the materials installed in the campus, and recording the information on specific templates to submit to their teachers at school.

3.3. Results and discussion

All of the logs and written communication data were recorded and saved. The recorded observations proved that the SL virtual environment holds an important potential for education, and especially for foreign language learning due to its multicultural character. The

learners preferred to contact the avatars that had foreign names rather than the avatars with Turkish names. This suggested that L2 communication in SL would be more realistic than it is in the local classroom settings. The learners tended to try to speak and know the people they did not know; and to use more English with the avatars that they thought were from other countries. The only moment they contacted the avatars that acted as Turkish teachers of English was when they needed some clarification related to the tasks they were trying to complete, or when they could not understand what an avatar said to them. They never attempted to create or initiate a genuine or authentic conversation with the three Turkish teachers. However, very interesting and long conversations were recorded between the learners and the Argentinian footballer, the American actress, and the Swedish musician as well as others.

Similarly, the observations with regard to the teacher trainees showed that people are more curious about the strangers. In the beginning, they wanted to know who their fellows were and exchanged information eagerly, reporting that getting to know new people is exciting. However, when they knew one another, and when everything was clear, the communication rate decreased. Additionally, they reported that at the very first stages of the project they did not have any idea about how they could teach or learn something in a virtual place like SL. Nevertheless, in time it became very clear and quite easy to adapt to the environment and its conditions. They stated that they could perform their profession through distance education once they were provided with the necessary environment and conditions; the rest could be found on the Internet.

It is claimed that the current study was based on the principles of postmodern education not only because it considered and reflected the principles proposed in Table 1 but also because although the project activities were based on topics covered in the national curriculum and the textbook used, the procedures and contents were flexibly developed and modified by the users according to their needs and wishes. The-four-A ideal of education was applied, that is, the ‘anytime, anywhere, anyone, anything’ learning, which takes education out of fixed time and place or other traditional approaches.

4. Conclusion

The future is now, that is to say, the future has already arrived. It can be very closely associated with technology, and the improvements in technology, especially in the last two decades which are remarkable. However, it seems that the administrative side of education has fallen far behind the progress in technology, and thus remains quite traditional and static

This creates a paradoxical situation suggesting that the teaching part has lost its power and efficiency but the learning part continues to be innovative and creative. The educational systems in different countries are shaped by the governments, a fact which directs us to the relation between education and politics (Özen Baykent, 2016). Therefore, the governments need to take the leading role and encourage blended and/or flipped education more often. Only then may the real postmodern philosophies and related applications be actually put into practice. Moreover, teachers and scholars who work in the field of education need to be awake to the changes in the history of mankind if they are to continue to be the aspirants for leading societies with their knowledge and experiences. Otherwise, it is very probable that what happened to postmen may happen to them.

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PROMOTING LEARNER AUTONOMY THROUGH SCHOOLOGY M-LEARNING PLATFORM IN AN EAP CLASS AT AN INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The advent of mobile learning platforms and Web 2.0 technologies is believed to provide an autonomous learning space that minimizes the power structure between the teacher and students in Indonesian EFL classes, accommodating the students to display their capacity to navigate their own learning. *Schoology* m-learning platform, a social networking learning management system, is one of potential platforms facilitating the exercise of autonomy in English language learning. This paper aims to report how *Schoology* m-learning platform facilitated the exercise of learner autonomy in an EAP class at an Indonesian higher education. The qualitative case study involved twenty one-students enrolled in an EAP course that adopted a blended learning method. The findings suggested that *Schoology* m-learning platform helped the students to exercise autonomy in EAP learning. The students exercised their control over learning management, cognitive process, and selection of learning materials. The exercise of autonomy is due to the affordance of *Schoology*. First, *Schoology*'s social networking interface facilitated interaction and communication among the students. Second, its mobile application enabled the students to learn English at their pace, time, and place. Third, the media-rich materials encouraged the students to further explore other materials online.

Key words: autonomy in language learning; *Schoology*; mobile learning; EAP

1. Introduction

The field of language education has witnessed the paradigm shift from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness so as to prepare learners to be learning agents in this rapidly changing world. This transformation requires educators to pay more attention to individual attributes of language learners. Among these, autonomy has gained a greater attention since Holec (1981, p. 3) and his pilot project to the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project, initially defining autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning." Autonomy needs to be fostered as it is an educational goal (Huang & Benson, 2013; Reinders & Balcikanli,

2011), which encompasses the relationship of the individual to the society (Benson, 2011). According to Raya & Vieira (2015), autonomy is a vital aspect for the development of lifelong learning in the society as learners will participate in a democratic society and become decision-makers after finishing their formal education. For that reason, the promotion of autonomy in language education is projected to prepare learners for social life in the society where they live.

In the Indonesian context, the promotion of autonomy in formal EFL classes becomes a crucial path to prepare students to actively take part in the democratic society. However, according to Dardjowidjojo (2001, 2006), implementing the concept of autonomy is a challenging task for EFL teachers in Indonesia mainly due to three existing cultural and philosophical values in its society. The first is the *manut-lan-miturut* (to agree and obey) philosophy, considering that good children are those obeying and agreeing with their parents, elders, or people in high positions. Complaints and different views are thus not allowed to be made by children. Another concept is the *ewuh-pekewuh* (uncomfortable and uneasy) philosophy, in which people are reluctant to give different opinions to the elders or people with higher authority. The third is the *sabda pendita ratu* (the words of a priestly king) philosophy, saying that the words of people with high positions in the society are regarded as god's truth. As a result, those words cannot be questioned by people with lower positions.

Those three forms of philosophy are manifested in the power relationship between teacher and students in EFL classroom practice. Most students consequently accept their teachers as an authority figure they should follow and obey. They will feel uncomfortable to challenge the authority of teacher as what the teacher says is the ultimate truth. This resonates Littlewood's (1999) argument that the communication patterns in Asian cultures reflects the high acceptance of power and authority. As a result, the teachers control all students' learning aspects. According to Chia (2007), a teacher-controlled learning environment inhibits the exercise and development of autonomy in language learning. This also explains why several studies on autonomy, according to Nakata (2011), report that Asian learners tend to be obedient, passive, and teacher-dependent. However, according to Benson (2011), those learners do innately possess autonomy but their autonomy is inhibited by the power structure in the classroom. For that reason, an autonomous learning space is needed to stimulate the exercise of autonomy in language learning.

The advent of recent Web 2.0 and mobile 2.0 technologies has brought a great deal of attention to shape the promotion of autonomy in English language learning as those technologies provide learners with more opportunities to take control over their English

learning. According to Villanueva, Ruiz-Madrid and Luzón (2010, p. 7), technologies help the development and exercise of autonomy by providing "multiplicity of access to authentic documents, multiplicity of access to interaction, the chance to reinforce metacognitive ability through experience with others, via dialogue and knowledge of other forms and ways of tackling problems and learning styles, other perceptions of texts and discursive genres, other criteria and uses of formality and courtesy." They can facilitate self-access and give the students opportunities to self-direct and navigate their language learning, providing them with environments for both independent and collaborative self-directed learning (Benson, 2011). The advent of recent mobile technologies which enable the installation of English language learning applications and mobile version of Web 2.0 (see Wang and Heffernan, 2009) also creates more flexible ways for students to manage their learning, allowing learners' mobility in learning. Teachers' intervention on students' learning is thus minimized, providing the learners with ample spaces to work on their own as well as to interact and collaborate with others, either within or beyond the language classroom.

Even though studies on mobile learning or mobile 2.0 to boost learner autonomy in Indonesia are still limited, the integration of Web 2.0 technologies into English language learning in the light of learner autonomy in Asia has been reported in the recent literature. Bhattacharya and Chauhan (2010, p. 383), for example, found out that blog-assisted language learning (BALL) fosters learner autonomy "by developing students' language and cognitive skills and helping them to make more informed choices about their decisions." The study also reported that students' skills to make independent decision and to take independent action were enhanced through blogging activities. Moreover, students' independence was advanced by their developed interdependence. When integrating a course management system called M@xLearn into a Thai traditional face-to-face English class, Sanprasert (2010, p 120) reported that the CMS is critical in the development of aspects of autonomy as it brought about "circumstances and structures that encouraged students to take control of their own learning." The study also documented the changes of autonomous behaviors among the students due to the experiences with CMS. Furthermore, Snodin (2013) found that CMS could initiate the development of reactive autonomy in Asian context.

Since those studies were conducted outside Indonesia, further research into the implementation of mobile learning system to promote learner autonomy in English language learning in Indonesia is needed. In this present study, *Schoology* mobile learning system is deliberately used to promote learner autonomy in English for Academic Purposes (EAP, henceforth) course at a private university in Indonesia. *Schoology* (www.*Schoology*.com) is

an online social networking learning management system that offers an interactive learning platform for interaction and collaboration between teacher and students as well as students and students. Its mobile application available at Android, Apple and Kindle Fire accelerates mobile learning experiences beyond the language classroom. Even though the technical quality aspects of *Schoology*'s software application system could instigate mobile learning experiences (see Sarrab, Elbasir, Alnaeli, 2016), the use of *Schoology* m-learning platform to foster learner autonomy in EFL learning has not been reported in the literature yet. To fill this gap, this study aims to describe how the *Schoology* m-learning platform facilitates the exercise of learner autonomy in EAP learning. The next section outlines the construct of autonomy in foreign language learning and mobile learning.

2. Literature review

2.1. Autonomy in foreign language teaching and learning

The construct of autonomy in foreign language teaching and learning has been articulated by autonomy scholars and its concepts can be found in the literature of language teaching and applied linguistics. The original and widely cited concept of autonomy in language education was echoed by Holec (1981, p. 3), who defined autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning." The definition entails that autonomous learners themselves are fully responsible for all learning decisions, such as identifying objectives and contents, selecting materials, monitoring and evaluating their progress. Learners' responsibility becomes the first step to autonomy (Little, 2004). Those learning decisions and their implementation occur in an independent language learning situation in which learners exercise their full responsibility for their language learning without the intervention of the teacher (Dickinson, 1987). Such a situation enables students to develop a psychological relation to the learning process and content (Little, 1991, 2007). In a nutshell, the concepts of autonomy in language learning encompass the components of learner responsibility, learning situation, and learner psychological state.

Benson (2011) argues that autonomy is a natural attribute of learners. He believes that learners naturally tend to have autonomy but the exercise of autonomy is inhibited by educational institution. Modifying Holec's (1981) definition, he formulates autonomy as "the capacity to take control of one's own learning" (p. 58). Two distinctive elements of this concept are capacity and control. The former indicates the potential within learners, which consists of three interrelated components:

1. *ability*, which has to do with the knowledge of the language and skills possessed by the students to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning;
2. *desire*, which signifies student's volition and willingness to learn the target language;
3. *freedom*, which indicates the level of control over learning (Huang and Benson, 2013).

While a capacity describes the learners' potential, control implies "having the power to make choices and decisions and acting on them" (p. 9). According to Benson (2011), the notion of 'control' is more observable to investigate than that of taking charge or being responsible.

The abovementioned definition accordingly implies that the promotion of autonomy should be carried out by giving an ample chance for learners to exercise their potentials to control language learning. There are three dimensions of control over language learning as articulated by Benson (2011). The first dimension, *control over learning management*, refers to students' observable language learning behaviors about where, when, and how to learn the target language (Huang and Benson, 2013). Another dimension, *control over cognitive process*, has to do with how to cognitively control psychological factors related to language learning, such as motivation, belief, and emotions (Benson, 2011). To facilitate control over cognitive process, learners are encouraged to think about and reflect on their language learning (Little, 2007) so that they take control of their learning experiences (Benson, 2011). The reflective process raises students' metacognitive awareness, which, in turn, leads to more systematic and effective learning management. Lastly, *control over learning content* suggests the decisions made by learners to select language learning materials which fit their learning purpose. Even though these three dimensions of autonomy are interdependent, learners might show a greater degree of autonomy in one dimension than in others (Benson, 2011; Nakata, 2011). This happens because autonomy could "take different forms for different individuals, and even for the same individual in different contexts or at different times" (Benson, 2011, p. 58). This leads to the conclusion that different cultural contexts bring about different forms of autonomy displayed by the learners.

As originated from the Western culture, the earlier concept of autonomy is often associated with independence, individualization, solo learning and self-instruction (Benson, 2011; Cooker, 2013), in which learners have full freedom to decide about all learning processes starting from setting the objectives to evaluating their learning (see Holec, 1981) without the presence of the teacher or outside formal language education (see Dickinson, 1987). This independent concept of autonomy embraces the individual choice and decision

rather than the collective ones. However, autonomy in language learning is more than learning on one's own in isolation without any support from the teacher and peers. Instead, autonomy is developed through interacting and collaborating with others in social settings (Benson, 2011; Cooker, 2013; Little, 2000, 2007, 2009; Murray, 2014). The interaction allows the learners to use the target language and socially construct knowledge by engaging and collaborating with peers and teacher, in which they undertake a collective decision-making process related to their learning. During the interaction, both teacher and learners share responsibilities to achieve the goal of learning, which implies interdependence (Benson, 2011). According to Cooker (2013, p. 31), the interdependence which is built through interaction has impact on the development of autonomy as "learners are able to fully interact with a world in which they have control." In this regard, they have more control over their learning process and content (Little, 2007).

The issue of culture leads to two distinctive forms of autonomy made by Littlewood (1999). The first form is proactive autonomy, which implies that learners themselves manage both the direction and learning activities. This form of autonomy resonates Holec's (1981) idea of autonomy. On the other hand, reactive autonomy is the form in which learners are to manage the learning activities and resources after the direction and objectives are determined by the teacher.

Accordingly, Asian learners that are generally seen as obedient, passive, and teacher-dependent (Nakata, 2011) could display autonomy in language learning. Littlewood (1999, pp. 87-88) conveys the following five proposals about the promotion of autonomy in foreign language learning in Asia:

1) Asian students have a high level of reactive autonomy. If the directions and objectives are set by teachers, the learners are able to manage their learning resources both individually and collaboratively.
2) Groups of learners can develop high levels of both reactive and proactive autonomy. Group work can enable learners to develop a high level of autonomy, both reactive and proactive, because they are able to enhance self-interdependence.
3) Learners will experience few learning contexts encouraging them to exercise individual proactive autonomy. This occurs because the high degree of authority and control makes learners have little chance to be active in learning.
4) East Asian learners have the same capacity for autonomy as other learners. Even though the cultural and educational traditions, past experiences, and learning

contexts are different, learners from Asia and the West are able to develop autonomy in language learning at the individual level.

5) Language classrooms can provide an environment suitable for developing the capacity for autonomy. If language classrooms provide learners with ample opportunities to use their freedom of choice, students are motivated to exercise proactive autonomy.

Littlewood's (1999) proposals imply that learner autonomy can be promoted in Asia. Nowadays, the development of autonomy in EFL learning in Asian contexts is inevitably shaped by the recent advent of mobile technologies. Portable devices facilitate a greater level of learner control over language learning. Benson (2011) contends that mobile technologies enhance learner autonomy by facilitating independent and self-directed language learning. Mobile technologies also extend EFL learning beyond the classroom in which learners exercise autonomy in out-of-class activities.

2.2. Mobile learning and its potential for learner autonomy

The proliferation of handheld portable devices connected to the Internet has brought about new learning opportunities for learners, which can foster mobile and ubiquitous learning experiences. The idea has driven a shift in the understanding of the learners from that in the traditional classroom to that in the mobile learning context. While in the traditional learning setting learners and learning are physically static in the classroom, mobile learning views the learners on the move and their learning as a mobile activity (Sharples, Taylor & Vavoula, 2007).

Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008, p. 273) define mobile learning as "formal or informal learning mediated via handheld devices which are potentially available for use anytime, anywhere" which can happen in both formal and informal settings. Such a form of learning occurs when learners are not at a fixed, predetermined location or when they take advantage of "the learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies" (O'Malley et al., 2003, as cited in Reychav, Dunaway, & Kobayashi, 2015, p. 142). Mobile learning is also supported by mobile 2.0, a label formulated by Wang and Heffernan (2009) to refer a mobile version of Web 2.0. The mobile technologies for mobile learning include mobile phones, tablets, laptops, and Personal Digital Assistants (PDA). This study considers mobile learning as mobile learning activities that occur within and/or beyond the language classroom by using mobile phones, laptops, and personal digital assistants.

Mobile devices and their application offer some unique features, bringing about learning experiences that cannot be found in the traditional classroom. Sung, Chang, and Yang (2015) mention four properties that make language learning via mobile devices different from that in the traditional language classroom. The first is mobility/portability, which enables language learning to take place anytime and anywhere. As a result, the mobile learning context accommodates students' new learning styles beyond the traditional classroom. The second property, social connectivity/interaction, assists learners in sharing information, collaborating and communicating with others. Another feature is context-sensitivity, in which learners can use the mobile devices for collecting specific data of a particular location, environment, and time. Learners can use the devices "to connect language learning across different settings, times, and locations" and access relevant learning resources (p. 70). The last feature is individuality, which means that learners can customize and personalize mobile devices according to their individual learning needs, styles, and interests.

Reflecting upon Sung, Chang, and Yang's (2015) features of mobile learning, it can be stated that the integration of a mobile learning platform into language learning has the efficacy to enhance learner autonomy. First, mobile learning facilitates learners' control over their learning. Learners could self-direct and personalize their learning and they can learn language at their pace, place and time. Second, mobile learning supports interaction and collaboration with peers and teacher. Interaction and collaboration could encourage and facilitate attention, reflection, and metacognition. Third, mobile learning enables learners to self-access the learning materials designed by the teacher or explore other materials by themselves. However, it is worth noting that mobile technology is only a tool and the mobile devices themselves do not automatically foster the development of autonomy. The teacher should choose appropriate mobile learning platform that could accommodate the underlying principles of learner autonomy.

2.3. Schoology as a mobile learning platform

Schoology is an online social learning network and interactive learning management system initiated by four college students named Jeremy Friedman, Ryan Hwang, Tim Trinidad, and Bill Kindler in 2007. Nowadays, more than seven million users from over 60,0000 K-12 schools and higher education institutions around the world use this learning platform in their classroom (Sarrab et al., 2016). This cloud-based platform is accessible via websites (www.*Schoology*.com) and compatible with Firefox, Internet Explorer, Safari and Google Chrome. *Schoology*'s mobile application, which is freely available on handy devices such as

Android, Apple and Kindle Fire, extends the traditional learning processes and fosters mobile learning experiences beyond the limitations of the classroom. The Software Information and Industry Association (SIIA) recognizes *Schoology* as the winner of CODiE awards in 2014 as the best education solution for K-12 and higher education, and learning management system categories and as the finalist of best K-12 course or learning management solution and best postsecondary learning management solution categories in 2015 (*Schoology*, 2015).

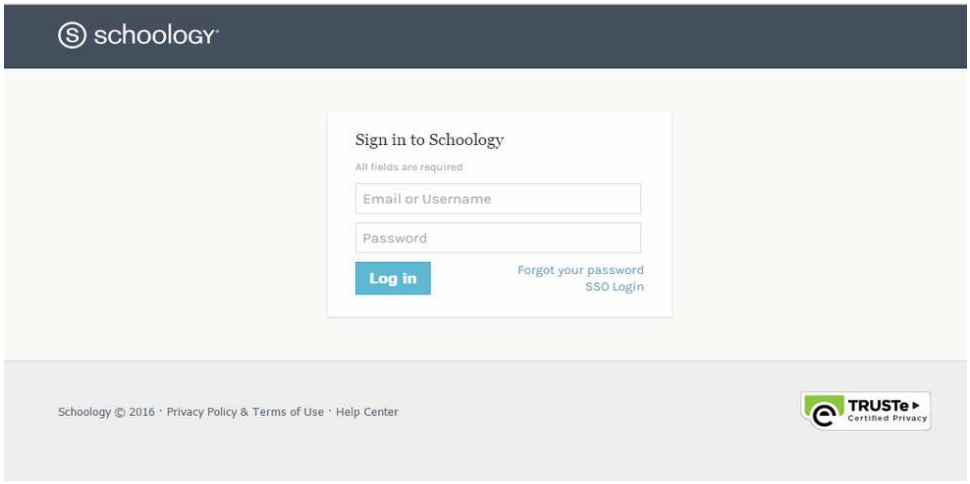


Figure 1. Screenshot of *Schoology* log in.

Schoology is a mobile social networking learning management system which facilitates pedagogically and socially sound mobile learning. Its features are the combination between those of social networking platform and learning management system. As a learning management system, *Schoology* provides various instructional tools, such as organisable lessons and self-paced learning, threaded discussions boards, micro-blogging, content migration and import (Sarrab et al., 2016). *Schoology* helps teachers to systematically manage media-rich learning materials into folders and create various dynamic assessments and assignments, followed by online grading and commenting. Teachers can prepare learning materials and assessment in advance and set their availability based on the allowed access time. Calendaring also helps to guide students' self-paced learning. Hence, *Schoology* manages classroom management tasks.

Schoology's social networking interface accelerates both student-to-student and student-to-teacher interaction, communication and collaboration within a classroom network (Sarrab et al., 2016). In this regard, learning is instigated through interaction and communication. The students and the teacher can update their statuses and share links,

pictures, or other media, while the other members can give comments upon or just like them. The students can also have discussions in small groups set by the teacher and private messages can be sent by both students and teacher. *Schoology* enables both the instructor and learners to actively stay engaged and interconnected. They all find it easy to share learning materials, collaborate, and get connected from any mobile device. To get alert, the *Schoology* account can be managed to receive notifications about new materials, comments and updates. Teachers are also provided with a professional learning network, which is intended to boost their professionalism by connecting and communicating with other educators and experts from over the world in various interest groups available on *Schoology* (for further discussion about Professional Learning Network, see Trust, Krutka, and Carpenter, 2016). Analytics is another important feature of *Schoology*. It allows the teacher to monitor and track students' use of *Schoology*. It reports students' last login, spent time in the course, number of posts and the accessed materials.

3. The study

3.1. Aims of the research

The present study followed the principles of a qualitative case study. A case study deeply explores "a bounded system comprised of an individual or entity and the context in which social action occurs" (Hood, 2009, p. 72). In the field of applied linguistics, an individual could refer to a learner or a teacher, while an entity could represent a classroom, a class, a school, or a language program. The data are collected from multiples sources of information (Creswell, 2007), followed by coding and triangulation in the process of analysis (Duff, 2008). However, the data triangulation process in this research is not intended to compare the data gained from one source to other sources to confirm internal validity but it is to enrich data from one source using the data from other sources to build "the broadest and deepest possible view of the issue from different perspectives" (Hood, 2009, p. 81).

As this study aims to describe how *Schoology* m-learning platform facilitates the exercise of autonomy in EAP learning, the entity in this study is a class of learners using *Schoology* m-learning system in their EAP learning. However, it is worth noting that "a class" here does not only refer to a physical space but also a social community of learners who also learns in spaces beyond the classroom.

3.2. Context of the study and participants

The study took place in a compulsory EAP course at a private university in Indonesia from August to December 2015. A blended learning method was used in this course, which consisted of face-to-face meetings and out-of-class online learning. The face-to-face meeting was twice a week for 75 minutes. Fourteen topics were discussed in this course during the whole semester. The course aimed at helping the students to acquire the advanced level of English by

1) writing essays, which encompassed strategies on writing outlines, thesis statement, and introductory, body, and concluding paragraphs;
2) reading academic texts to identify the main ideas and supporting details of the passages;
3) conducting and writing a research paper in groups;
4) presenting the results of the research by using advanced presentation skills.

Schoology m-learning platform was employed as the learning management system in the course. The students were asked to download and install *Schoology*'s mobile application on their mobile devices, to make an account and to join the researcher's EAP class on the platform. Besides, they were also encouraged to bring their mobile devices to the classroom and use the devices for their EAP learning activities both within and outside classroom. As the students had not experienced using *Schoology*, prior to the commencement of this study, *Schoology* training in how to use the platform was conducted.

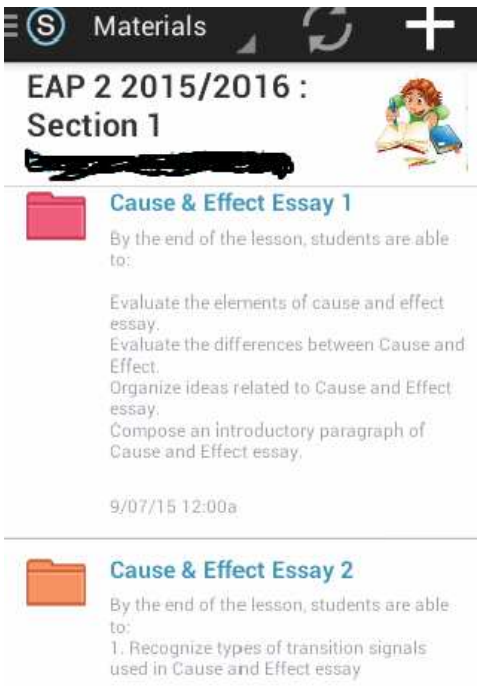


Figure 2. Screenshot of learning materials.

Various media-rich learning materials were provided in advance on *Schoology*'s folders before the class began. The folders were sequenced based on the topic of discussion. The access time for each folder was customized in which the students could access the materials one week before the discussion in the class. Besides, various learning activities were also designed to foster interaction and collaboration among the students both physically and virtually. The example of the materials is portrayed in Figure 2. The in-class activities included watching videos, discussing with partners, preparing presentations, taking online quizzes and playing online games. The out-of-class activities involved reading materials, writing essays, giving reciprocal online peer feedback, doing weekly projects, conducting small-scale research, having online discussion and writing reflection.

Twenty one students, aged between 18-23 years old, were enrolled in the course. They came from various majors, such as English language teaching, management, visual communication design, industrial engineering, mechanical engineering, and computer science. The average score of their Versant™ English Placement Test (VEPT) was 57.4 (equal to IELTS score of 6.5). The students possessed several kinds of mobile devices, such as laptops, iOS/android-based smartphones, tablet and iPad. Those mobile devices were part of their life. They were tech-savvy and familiar with social media, such as *Facebook*, *Line*, *Instagram*, and *Path*.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The data collection process was conducted as follows. First, students' online interactions and collaborations on the platform were observed to cater for students' out-of-class learning activities. *Schoology*'s analytics was checked on a weekly basis to monitor and track how the students used the platform. Second, the participants were encouraged to write reflection about their learning processes on *Schoology*'s updates. The reflection shared with the peers in the class was intended to transform their experiences into learning. Students' reflection posted on *Schoology* was used as the data for this research since it pictured how the students made sense of their learning processes via the platform. Third, personal messages were sent to several students to obtain deeper information about their reflection. The messages varied depending on the reflection that they wrote. Lastly, all online records available on *Schoology*, including students' posts and comments, threaded discussions, shared materials, and analytics, were also gauged to enrich data for this study.

The data were coded and corroborated from one source to another to build a thick description. The data were then categorized based on Benson's (2011) theoretical framework of autonomy in language learning.

3.4. Findings and discussion

Schoology proved to constitute a socially and pedagogically sound learning platform that is easy to be used by the students. Its user-friendly design resembling *Facebook* became an appeal to the students, triggering them to actively get into the course. Figure 3 depicts a one-month dynamic access to the EAP course, revealing that the students logged in the course on a daily basis.

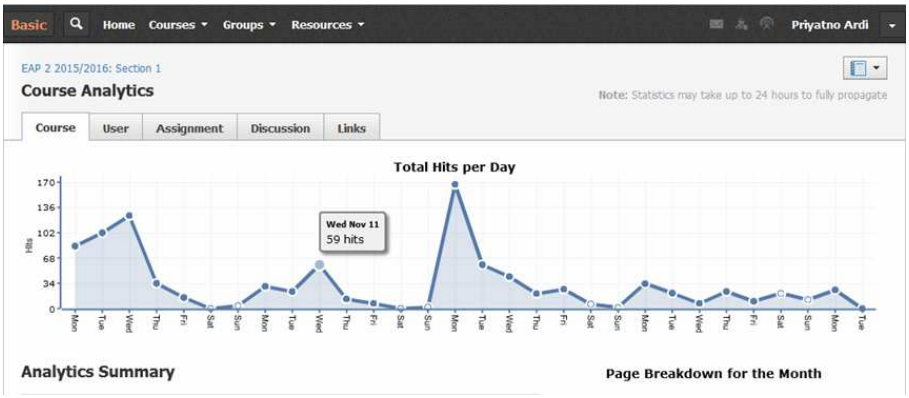


Figure 3. Screenshot of course analytics

Schoology's social networking interface leveraged on the affordance of interaction and collaboration, such as having discussions with peers, sharing thoughts, accessing additional learning materials, following links, viewing videos and pictures, posting essays, as well as giving comments and likes on others' posts. Figure 4 illustrates the interaction among the students in *Schoology*'s social virtual space. In addition to its social networking interface, *Schoology*'s instructional tools pedagogically accommodated media rich contents that allowed the students with different learning styles to personalize their learning. Hence, it can be concluded that the platform enabled the participants to display their active engagement in the EAP learning process.

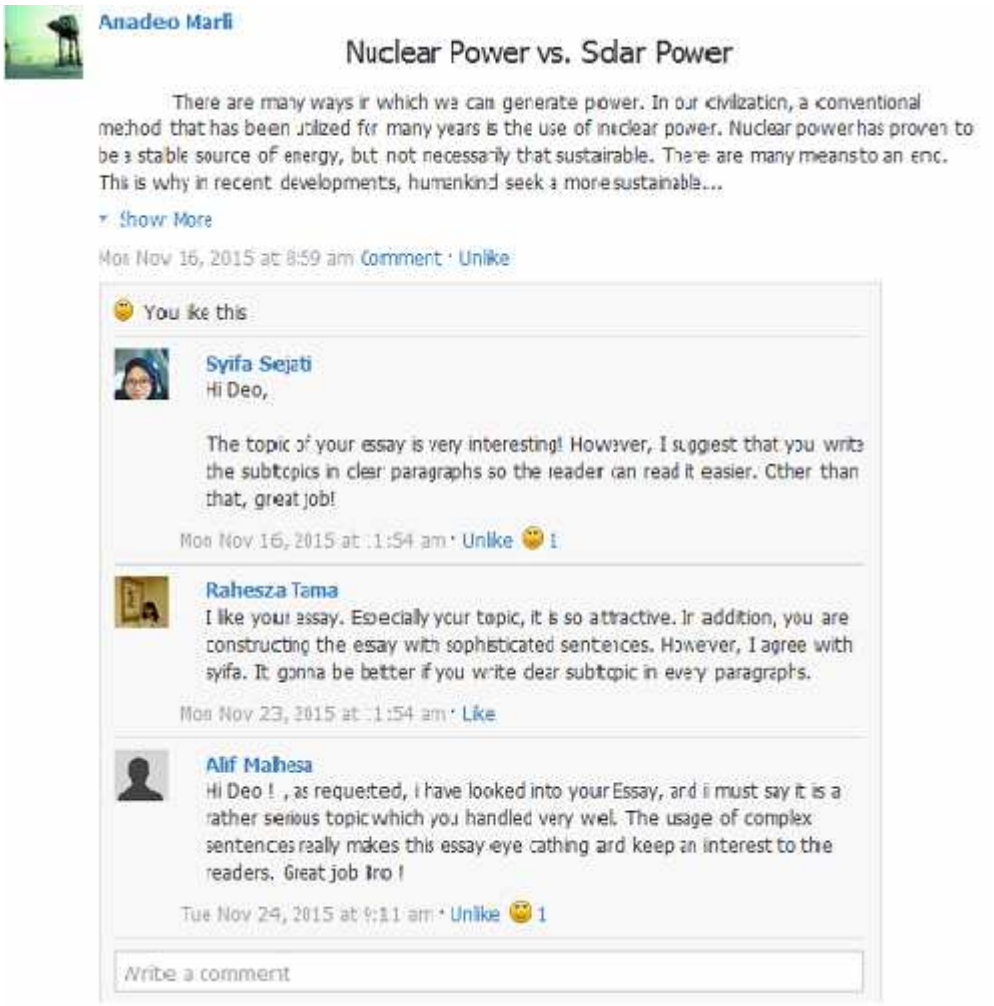


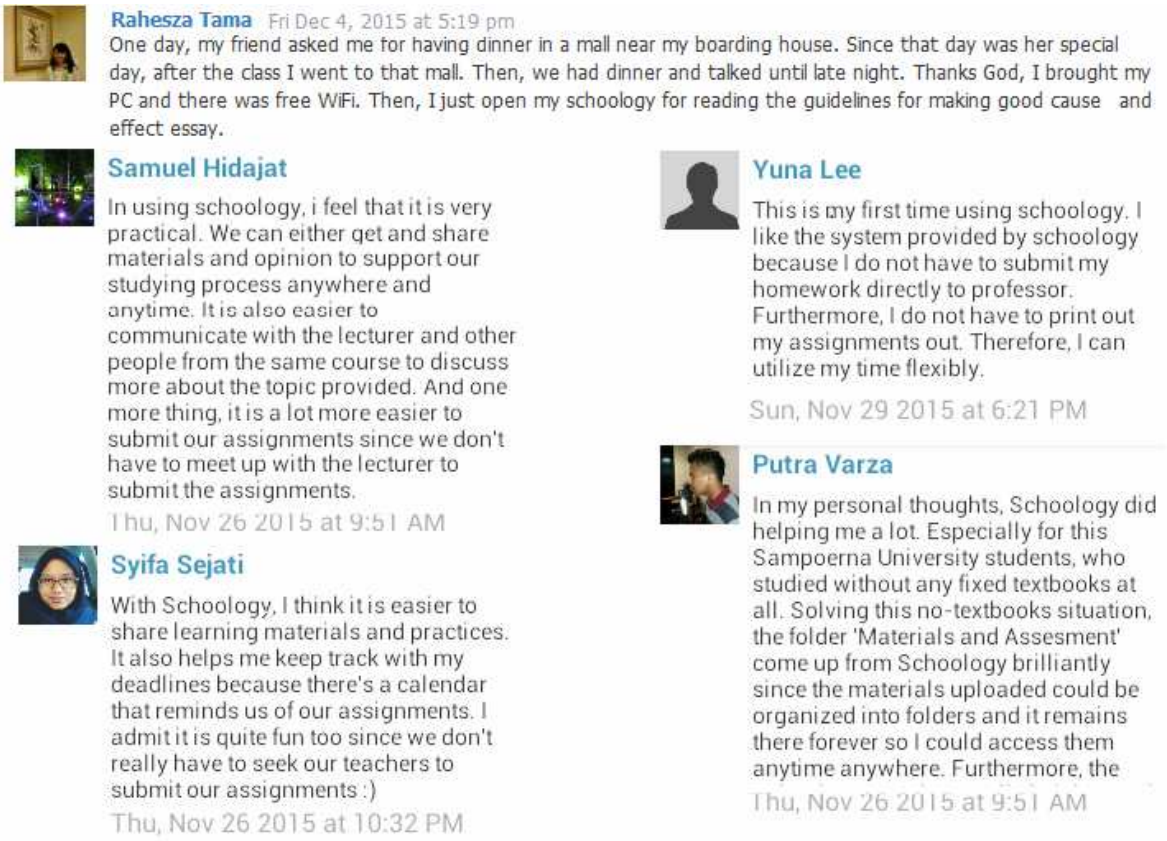
Figure 4. Screenshot of student interaction

Students' active engagement in the process of learning on *Schoology* is the basis of learner autonomy. The students were not dependent on the lecturer all the time, instead, they themselves took responsibility in the process of English learning and made choices related to their own learning. As Little (2004) states, taking responsibility is the first step to achieve autonomy. Accordingly, active engagement could raise the sense of ownership of learning in which the students took control over their learning processes. The findings of this study revealed that *Schoology* m-learning platform assisted the students in deployment of their capacities to take control over their learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content.

3.4.1 Students' control over learning management

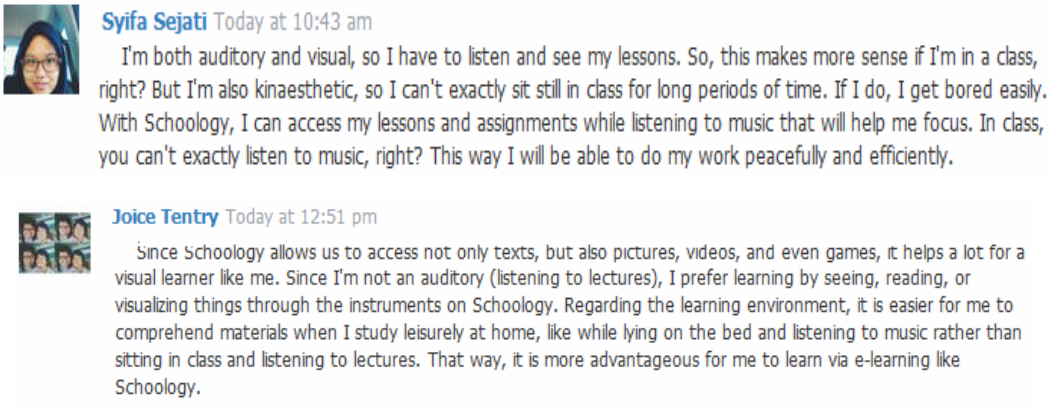
Schoology m-learning platform installed in handheld devices helped to facilitate the exercise of control over learning management. The system allowed the students to choose the place, pace and time of their EAP learning by themselves outside the classroom.

First of all, the findings revealed that *Schoology* m-learning system facilitated the participants to exercise their choice to access the course on an 'anytime-anywhere' basis. It was supported by the portability feature of mobile devices that brought about multiple-settings language learning without any spatial and temporal constraints (Sung et al., 2015). The students could individually open and access the learning materials on the platform and submit the assignments from their home, without going to campus. Therefore, *Schoology* m-learning platform facilitated students' self-direction of their own learning (cf. Benson, 2011). The students expressed their views as follows:

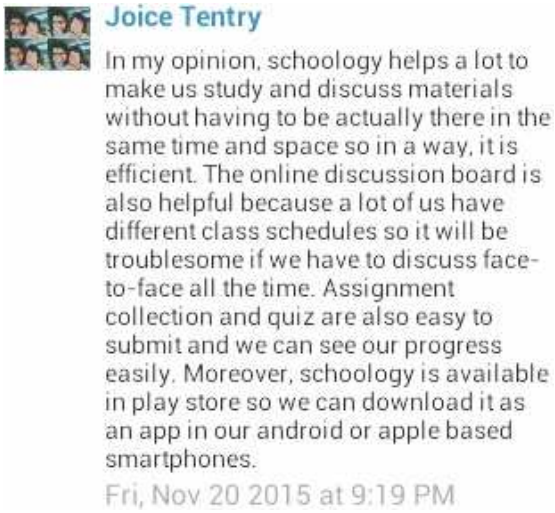


Second, *Schoology* m-learning platform provided the participants with ample chances to choose their own English learning modes. As their learning was not limited to the formal classroom learning, the students could choose their own paths of learning that fit best with their styles. Sung et al. (2015) mention that mobile devices and their application enable the

students to customize and personalize their language learning. In the current study, the freedom of choosing personal ways of learning led to meaningful and personal learning processes. This resonates with Huang and Benson's (2013, p. 10) idea that "a capacity to control learning also implies a capacity to make learning personally relevant." The findings of this research suggested that *Schoology* created conditions for students' exercise of their personal learning. The students admitted that



Third, as regards interaction and collaboration, *Schoology* m-learning system provided opportunities for the participants to exercise a greater control over interaction and collaboration during EAP learning. The mobile devices connected to the Internet made the students interconnected all the time, which facilitated online interaction and collaboration among the students without temporal and spatial constraints. The students could control their interaction and collaboration with their peers. Furthermore, many autonomy scholars (Benson, 2011; Cooker, 2013; Little, 2000, 2007, 2009; Murray, 2014) believe that autonomy is the result of interaction and collaboration with others. In this study, there were two major collaborative assignments conducted outside classrooms, namely peer feedback and research project. Since the students came from different departments and followed diverse schedules, the virtual discussion designed in the *Schoology* benefited them as it was not constrained by the time and place. A student supported this point as follows:



3.4.2. Control over cognitive processing

Schoology's social network interface gave ample spaces for the students to exercise their capacity to control their cognitive processing. Control over cognitive process includes control over attention, metacognition and reflection (Benson, 2011). The features of *Schoology* were critical for the students to exercise attention, metacognition and reflection during the EAP course.

The "updates" feature of *Schoology* enabled the participants to share their thoughts and give reciprocal peer feedback on their essays. As the posts that they shared could be seen by all members of the group, the students could give and receive comments and supports from their peers. During the process, the students directed their attention towards both linguistic and content aspects. Hence, the feature helped the students to reflect on their English learning processes and raise their metalinguistic awareness. The exercised metacognition and reflection led the students to revise their essays. Figure 5 depicts how the students gave reciprocal feedback on their essays.

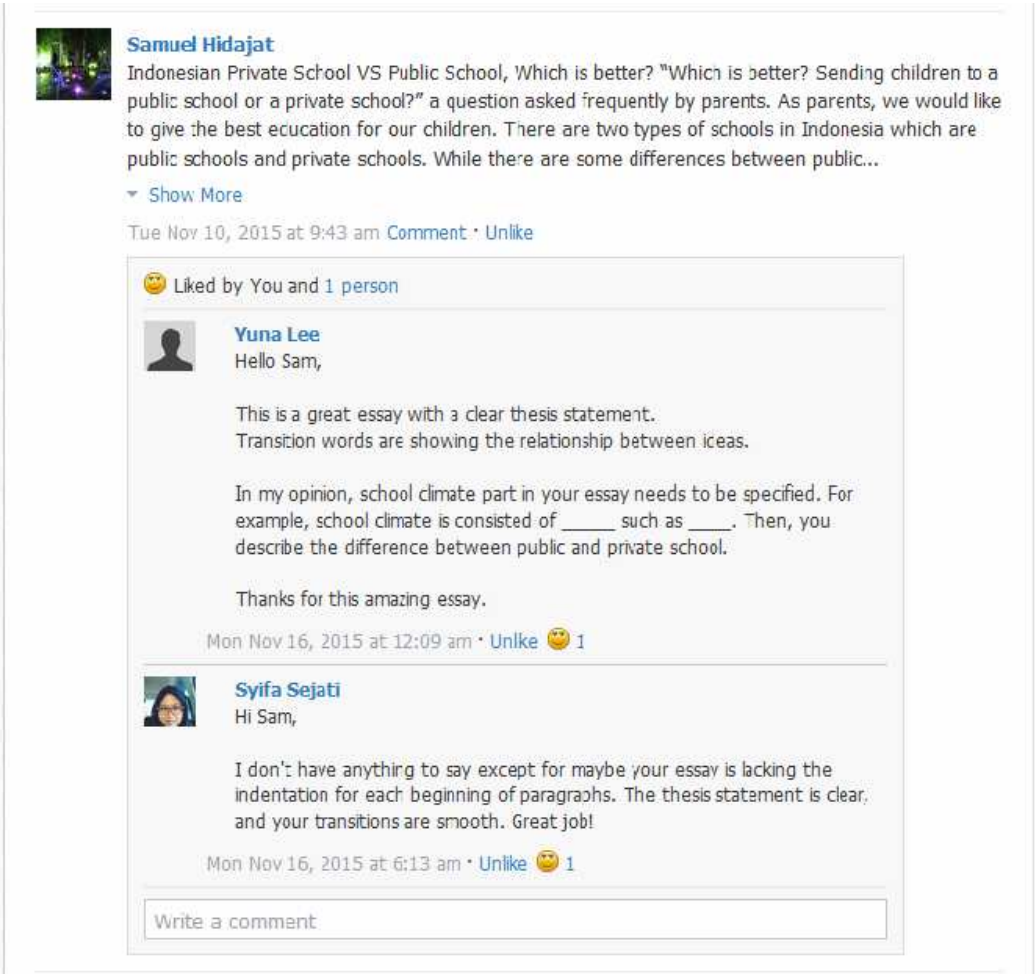


Figure 5. Screenshot of peer feedback

In addition to the "updates" feature, threaded discussion boards on *Schoology* made affordances for collaborative and interactive spaces for the students within the groups. As previously mentioned, the students worked in groups to accomplish the given projects. The feature of threaded discussion facilitated the students to interact, communicate and collaborate within the groups. Through personal message, a student admitted:

> *Schoology* makes us easy to identify each member's progress since we share the given tasks individually. *Schoology*'s discussion board helps us a lot because we can communicate and monitor one another. We can report and discuss our progress. And, we all feel responsible for our success as a group so that we need to help one another.

The quotation demonstrates how *Schoology*'s discussion board facilitated interaction, communication, and collaboration among the students. During interaction and discussions, the students developed and conveyed their own voices by using English. In this regard, the students possessed the sense of relatedness in their EAP learning, supporting one another to reach success. This supports Little's (2007) idea that relatedness is developed through interacting with others. Hence, the collaborative and interactive spaces of *Schoology*'s

discussion boards could enhance students' sense of relatedness. The sense of relatedness is critical to the development of autonomy (Ryan, 1991, as cited in Littlewood, 1999).

3.4.3 Control over the selection of learning content

Schoology m-learning system facilitated control over the selection of learning content. According to Benson (2011), control over learning content has to do with the freedom to select learning materials to attain the goals of foreign language learning. *Schoology* provided tools that accommodated media-rich learning materials connected to other materials available on the internet. Figure 6 depicts the example of learning materials sequenced on *Schoology*.

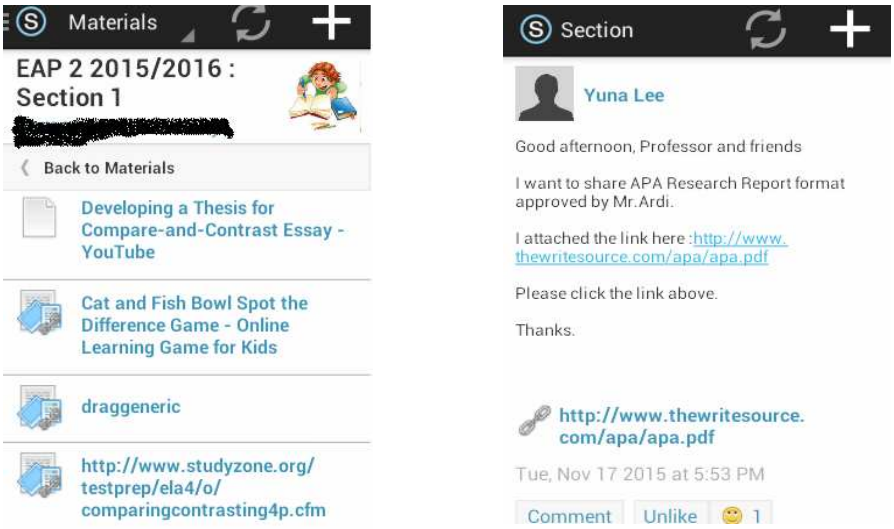


Figure 6. Screenshot of materials and an additional material shared by a student

The materials provided on *Schoology* m-learning platform led the students to self-access other authentic materials on the Internet to achieve the determined learning goals. The students, consequently, had more control over the content of their learning (cf. Little, 2007). In the process of accomplishing the research report, for example, a student found a research report format online, which she offered to her classmates. After the discussion, all of the class members agreed to use the format for reporting the research. Since *Schoology* provided tools that enabled the students to share learning materials, the format was then shared to other students on *Schoology*. Hence, this confirms Sung et al.'s (2015) idea that the learners can use mobile devices to search for relevant learning materials, as well as Villanueva et al.'s (2010) argument that technologies help to develop autonomy by providing multiple access to authentic materials.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

This article reports a study that investigates how *Schoology* m-learning platform facilitates the exercise of learner autonomy in an EAP class at an Indonesian higher education. The findings of this study proved that *Schoology* m-learning platform installed in mobile devices provided the students with greater control over their EAP learning beyond the classroom, both in terms of the process and content of their learning.

The affordances of *Schoology* were a critical factor that supported the exercise of learner autonomy. First, *Schoology* offered a social environment that facilitated interaction and communication among the students. The social networking interface of *Schoology* enabling reflection and sharing is critical to the development of autonomy. At the heart of learner autonomy, autonomy is developed through interacting and collaborating with others (Benson, 2011; Cooker, 2013; Little, 2000, 2007, 2009; Murray, 2014). Second, *Schoology*'s application installed in mobile devices brought about mobile learning experiences transcending spatial and temporal limitations. The students had freedom to learn at their pace, place, and time (Sung et al., 2015). The mobile learning application hence enabled them to exercise control over learning management (see Benson, 2011; Huang and Benson, 2013). Third, media-rich learning materials encouraged the students to the further exploration of other materials on websites. This confirms Littlewood's (1999) and Snodin's (2013) findings that Asian learners tend to display reactive autonomy in language learning.

With regard to the Asian culture, the implementation of *Schoology* m-learning platform could minimize the power relationship in the traditional classroom. However, communication, interaction and collaboration among the class members were still maintained through its social networking interface. As Murray (2014) points out, autonomy is developed through interdependence and collaboration in a social setting.

This study recommends that *Schoology* be incorporated in English language learning and teaching. Further research is also needed to scrutinize the issue of engagement on *Schoology*. Engagement is a critical issue in the implementation of social networking learning management system in English language teaching and learning. Abas' (2015) engagement framework, consisting of teacher engagement, student engagement, cognitive engagement, and social engagement, could be used to describe how *Schoology* can provide students with meaningful and relevant English learning experiences in the 21st century.

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EXPLORING THE USE OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY IN EFL TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH REGION OF ECUADOR

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Abstract

This study explores the use of educational technology for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) at 10 state schools in the South of Ecuador. It aims to find out the current state of the use of technology in English classrooms. The research combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather information about the use of technology in the teaching-learning process. The main instruments applied were teachers' and students' surveys and observation sheets. One hundred and fifty students and fifteen teachers took part in the surveys and were observed once a week during a period of four months.

The findings confirm that technology is not commonly used in state schools of the south region of Ecuador or, if used, it is not adequately applied. For this reason, in order to develop students' performance of all four language skills it is necessary to integrate technology tools combined with appropriate teaching strategies in EFL classrooms.

Key words: EFL teaching; educational technology; Ecuadorian primary education.

1. Introduction

The development of new technologies has extended many opportunities in assisting language learning at all levels of education, especially through the use of Web 2.0, which implies that information is meant to be shared (Pelet, 2014). In fact, technology is widely used nowadays in order to improve the education system at all levels, which means that its effective use, combined with professional learning, can promote and enhance collaboration in foreign language teaching. However, in some developing countries such as Ecuador, the use of educational technology still needs to be explored in order to take advantage of the enormous benefits that it provides in the teaching-learning process.

Considering the great importance of English learning worldwide, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (2014) established new regulations for teaching English as a compulsory subject in the curriculum of public and private schools starting in 2016. In addition, technology plays an important role in the educational field; hence, it is indispensable to conduct research into the quality of English language teaching at this level, especially into the use of technological tools to be applied in the classroom.

This study will explore the use of educational technology in EFL teaching, particularly YouTube videos, Padlet, podcasts and Prezi, which are commonly applied by English teachers in order to develop students' language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) because of their free access and the facilities they provide to users. According to Kasapoglu-Akyol (2010), the use of technological tools is very important because EFL students who use the Internet for searching for information and communication purposes usually get better academic results.

In this concern, the purpose of this study is to find out the current situation of the use of technology in English classrooms to remark that a clear diagnosis about the use of technology will help educators become more familiar with the significant role it plays in the teaching-learning process. Additionally, the use of instructional technology will allow teachers to have more dynamic and interactive EFL classes as well as students to be better prepared for this ever-changing world that we live in.

2. Literature review

2.1. Integrating technology in education

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are very important in the field of education because they can change the environment of the classroom and allow the subject matter to become more accessible to the learner (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). For this reason, EFL teachers must decide how - and how not - to use technology in the classroom (Morgan, 2008). In this regard, integrating technology into classroom instruction involves more than just teaching computer skills, it demands that educators look for means of innovation in order to encourage students' engagement and build up their learning; therefore, one way to accomplish this important aim is the use of instructional technology in an effective way.

Some theoretical and empirical studies have been carried out to confirm that the use of ICTs in the teaching and learning process is crucial. It has been demonstrated that the use of technology motivates students' interest in the contents to be studied (Mayora, 2006, as cited

in Ilter, 2009). In this concern, Ilter (2009 p. 136) states that "technology might be one of the factors that affect students' attitude positively in the teaching-learning process". Furthermore, according to O'Dwyer, Russell, Bebell, and Tucker-Seeley (2005), technology allows students to develop critical thinking skills, high levels of understanding and solve problems.

Technology and English language education are very closely related (Singhal, 1997). If we go back to the past, various educational institutions used to provide classes in language laboratories that enabled learners to implement technology devices where teachers monitored students' interaction. Although the use of technology was very positive in the learning process, it slowly became unattractive and boring (Singhal, 1997). Currently, the use of technology in the classroom has opened up new possibilities for language education through the web generations that positively contribute to the teaching-learning process. The first one developed was Web 1.0, which was used to send messages through a unidirectional system (Ban & Summers, 2010). Later, Web 2.0 opened a platform that allowed interaction, collaboration and better communication. Nowadays, Web 3.0 offers the possibility to search for required information in an organized way; it also suggests other content related to the proposed topic (Miranda, Gualtieri & Coccia, 2010).

Different technological tools are applied to help English language students improve their learning skills. The tools that are worth mentioning comprise English language learning websites, Computer-Assisted Language Learning programs, presentation software, electronic dictionaries, chatting and email messaging programs, CD-players, and learning video-clips (Nomass, 2013). The positive outcomes of the tools listed above can only be possible with appropriate methodology and teachers' management applied in the classroom.

2.2. Advantages and disadvantages of the use of technology in EFL teaching

Nowadays, the use of technology in the classroom becomes a necessity in learning a foreign language because of the benefits that both teachers and students can obtain during the teaching and learning process. For that reason, teachers of English as a foreign language need to improve their way of teaching in order to catch students' attention. In this context, it can be said that for every advantage technology brings, it also shows some disadvantages at the same time (Riasati, Allahyar & Tan, 2012).

Through a variety of communicative and interactive activities, effective use of technology can help foreign language learners strengthen their linguistic skills and learning attitude, as well as build their self-instruction strategies and self-confidence (Lai & Kritsonis, 2006). In this concern, Dudeney and Hockly (2008) mention that technology is significant in

the EFL classroom because it provides new ways of practising language and endorses students' performance. In addition, Barani, Mazandarani, and Rezaie (2010) also explain that through the use of media teachers have the chance to expose students to multiple input sources and can enrich their language learning experience instead of becoming dependent on their teacher's dialect or idiolect.

On the other hand, Abunowara (2016) declares that there are some disadvantages teachers face when using technology in the EFL classroom. One of them is that it takes time and involves making a big effort to look for authentic materials since teachers need to spend time learning constantly, changing software programs and trying to find effective ways of using new technology. In addition, some students are unable to gain access to technology (Kruse, 2001b; as cited in O'Donoghue et al., 2004). For this reason, Lai and Kritsonis (2006) state that it is necessary that both teachers and students should have at least basic technological knowledge before using it in order to assist language teaching and learning.

Despite the advantages and disadvantages that the use of technology may generate, EFL teachers should know that they need technology in order to serve digital natives in a more meaningful and comprehensive way (Merç, 2015).

3. Study

3.1. Participants and methodology

The total number of participants involved were 150 students and 15 teachers; all Spanish native speakers from 10 state schools. The students involved in this study ranged in age from 10 to 12 years old, which denotes primary education in the Ecuadorian educational system. The participants were observed once a week over a period of four months. Students' English level was quite heterogeneous since some students had the opportunity to take extra hours.

The qualitative and quantitative approaches were applied to analyze teachers' and students' perceptions related to the use of technology in the EFL classroom as well as to determine the tool with the highest frequency of use. For this purpose, the main instruments were teachers and students' surveys and observation sheets that included open-ended and close-ended questions, which were used in order to collect data about the frequency of technology use in the teaching-learning process.

In addition, English classes were observed in order to explore the use of technological tools and see how they were applied by English teachers in their lessons as well as to find out the facilities available at the institutions that participated in this study.

After gathering the data, they were tabulated using Excel tables and then analyzed in order to obtain statistics about the real situation that Ecuador has been facing for the recent years regarding the use of technologies in EFL teaching.

3.2. Results and discussion

3.2.1. Teacher technology use

The results obtained from the teachers and students' surveys are shown and analyzed below.

Table 1. Use of technology for teaching English as a foreign language

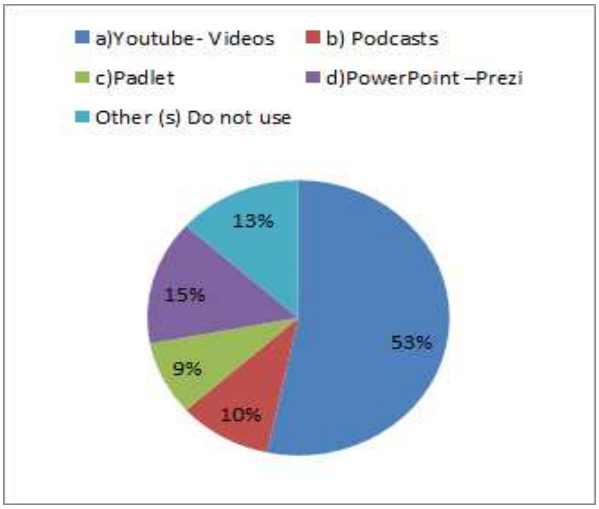
	Students	**%**	**Teachers**	**%**
YES	19	13%	5	33.3%
NO	131	87%	10	66.7%
TOTAL	**150**	**100%**	**15**	**100**

Table 1 indicates the percentage of the use of technology for teaching English as a foreign language according to the teachers and students' perceptions. It was found out that the majority of both students and teachers do not use technology in the classroom because the institution does not provide them with enough technological material and teachers are not sufficiently trained to use it on daily basis. This aspect may affect students' performance during the academic year, which demonstrates that teachers have been using traditional teaching approaches that may slow down the development of communicative competence in the target language.

Additionally, only a third of teachers mentioned that they use technology to teach English lessons once a week because they can see more effectiveness in the teaching-learning process and just a limited number of them indicated that they incorporate technology in their lessons with a frequency of two or three months. In this context, it was observed that teachers who applied technology in their lessons had to use an English lab that provided only basic technological programs with no Internet connection.

The aforementioned results significantly affect the quality of language learning because sound use of technology can increase and develop students' outcomes, self-esteem and attitude (Lei & Zhao, 2007). In addition, the educational process can be more productive if technology is effectively used in the classroom.

Figure 1. Technological tools used in the English classroom



As regards the types of technological tools used in the English classrooms, students mentioned that the most popular ones used with high frequency by teachers were YouTube-based videos (53.17%). Other tools that were commonly used were PowerPoint and Prezi presentations (15%), while podcasts and Padlet were far less popular. These results were corroborated by teachers' opinions, in which YouTube videos were the most popular tools used during the lessons because students considered them very motivating for learning English as a foreign language. According to Hamilton (2010), videos help to catch students' interest since the majority of EFL learners are featured by native speakers offering different dialects and accents that help students improve the listening and speaking skills.

The results mentioned above tend to demonstrate that teachers show poor knowledge of other types of technological tools or little enthusiasm about making the class more attractive for students. In addition, teachers are not aware of the benefits of using podcasts, Padlet or Prezi in the classroom. By extension, it implies that they are not trained in this field and they do not see the contribution of technology to make classes more interesting. Using podcasting in language education in both theory and practice provides many advantages because it can help teachers enhance students' English skills. In this regard, Rosell-Aguilar (2007) remarks that podcasting can support principles promoted by different theories of learning, such as the use of authentic materials, informal and lifelong learning, the use of learning objects and just-in-time teaching. Furthermore, students improve their pronunciation, listening and speaking abilities and become more aware of cross-cultural customs (Stanley, 2006; Lee, 2009, Powel, 2006). Another technological tool that can be used in the EFL

classroom is Padlet, which can help teachers provoke students to eager participation with authentic, stimulating, and motivating content (Baida, 2014). However, this important device has been underused as it is shown in Figure 1.

Table 2. Perception of effectiveness of the use of technology to improve English language knowledge

	Students	**%**
YES	134	89%
NO	16	11%
TOTAL	150	**100%**

When students were asked about their perception of effectiveness of the usage of technological tools to improve English language proficiency, almost 90% considered them really productive for their learning process; they also affirmed that through the use of technology they can achieve better academic results.

Teachers likewise confirm that the application of technology in the classroom is extremely important for students to improve their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills at a higher level. In fact, the use of technology also makes the lessons more efficient (Kasapoglu-Akyol, 2010).

3.2.2. Students' and teachers' perceptions of technology use

Most students claimed that they are not afraid of working with technology; in fact, they would welcome its usage. They also pointed out that technology allows them immediate access to information, which facilitates the learning process inside and outside the classroom.

When teachers were asked to express their feelings regarding this aspect, some of them mentioned that they avoid applying technological tools because they consider them difficult to use; this fact was confirmed while observing the English lessons, during which teachers were struggling with the basic devices that the institution provided. For this reason, they would like to be trained in the use of educational technological tools in order to feel more competent as educators. In order to do so, teachers need to deepen their knowledge on how to use technology in order to integrate it in the teaching process (Almerich et al., 2016), otherwise, they will not be able to implement it in their daily educational practice (BuabengAndoh, 2012; Guzman & Nussbaum, 2009; Kabakci Yurdakul & Coklar, 2014;

Markauskaite, 2007; Okojie, Olinzock, & Okojie-Boulder, 2006; Wastiau et al., 2013, as cited in Almerich et al., 2016).

4. Conclusions and recommendations for the future

This paper has attempted to present the current situation of the use of technology in English classrooms in the south region of Ecuador. The findings of this case study show that teachers do not use technological tools to teach English because they do not have enough facilities to incorporate them in the EFL classroom. As a consequence, they use traditional methods that do not have such great impact on students' performance.

Teachers show poor knowledge of other types of technological tools and little enthusiasm to make their English classes more attractive for students. In fact, the main resource used in the classroom is the student's textbook, which demonstrates their preference for traditional printed material.

YouTube-based videos, Power Point and Prezi presentations were the most common tools used by teachers in their English classes, while podcasts and Padlet were applied much less frequently even though they offer great opportunities in the teaching-learning process.

Students feel motivated and interested in using the technological tools in classrooms in general because they enable them to learn more effectively according to their individual needs in an interactive way and, therefore, students' curiosity arises. Additionally, technology provides teachers and students with a dynamic learning process; however, they do not take full advantage of it.

Technological tools are recommended to be used by teachers as supplementary resources because thanks to them students can learn the English language more easily; additionally, effective use of technology gives teachers the opportunity to show students how thousands of activities and games bring dynamics and fun into the classroom.

More training for teachers in how to use technological tools for teaching English as a foreign language is needed because in this way the traditional teaching process will be replaced by more dynamic, interactive and collaborative approaches.

Educational institutions should provide teachers with sufficient technological devices in order to get the expected academic results, which will inspire both students and teachers to participate more actively in the teaching-learning process.

When planning lessons based on technological tools, it is highly recommended that teachers consider students' level, age, contents, learning styles and teaching methods to develop their English skills. In this regard, free and user-friendly software programs such as

Padlet and Prezi are recommended for improving reading and writing skills, while podcasts and YouTube are suitable for development of listening and speaking skills in a fast, simple, and productive way.

Finally, more effective educational interventions are needed in the EFL classrooms because in this way the potential of educational technology to support the teaching learning process can be deeply researched.

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THE EFFECT OF DIGITAL VIDEO GAMES ON EFL STUDENTS' LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION

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Abstract

The study examined the effect of a commercial digital video game on high school students' language learning motivation. Participants were 241 male students randomly assigned to one of the following three treatments: Readers, who intensively read the game's story; Players, who played the digital video game; and Watchers, who watched two classmates play the digital video game. A language learning motivation scale was given to the participants as a pre- and post-test. Also, field notes were taken. Results indicated a significant language learning motivation increase over time. Only the Watchers, however, showed significantly higher motivation than the Readers in the end. Thus, the use of commercial digital video games can help enhance high school students' language learning motivation.

Keywords: digital video game; language learning motivation; game-based language learning

1. Introduction

1.1. Game-based and game-enhanced language learning

Digital Video Games (DVGs) have become a big industry with sales of over billions of dollars (Newzoo, 2015; Pham, 2009). It is estimated that the international industry will hit $113 billion by 2017, not to mention that there is a rapid growth in Asian markets (Newzoo, 2014). With over 1,909,447,000 gamers worldwide (Newzoo, 2015), DVGs affect the way people socialize, communicate, play, and learn, leading educators to investigate them as language learning instruments (Rama, Black, Van Es, & Warschauer, 2012).

Game-based learning is defined as "any initiative that combines or mixes video games and education" (Tsai & Fan, 2013, p. 115) with a game being "a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, which results in a quantifiable outcome" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 93). Reinhardt and Sykes (2012) conceptualized language learning through DVGs to involve two forms, namely, game-based and game-enhanced. The former involves using educational games-DVGs that focus on the direct representation of

educational materials (Kiili & Perttula, 2013). The latter refers to using commercial-off-the-shelf DVGs in educational settings. The primary goal of a commercial DVG is winning the match rather than learning a language, in this case English. English does play a secondary role when gamers are to obtain, create, use, or manipulate their items. It also comes into play if gamers are to understand their quests or effectively communicate with one another. Thus, English becomes a means to a greater end.

For example, gamers observe items with thumbnails, descriptions, and effects which help them learn English vocabulary. This conforms to Gee's (2007) third learning principle called the 'semiotic principle', which explains the relationship existent among several sign systems (e.g., images, color codes, words, etc.) employed in a DVG. Understanding these relationships greatly improves learning through DVGs. On the whole, Gee (2007) identified 36 learning principles at work in what he called *good games* (i.e., games that employ most or all of the principles).

Informal language learning instruments such as DVGs and movies have been found to result in higher learning outcomes compared to classroom practice (Cole & Vanderplank, 2016). Previous studies (e.g., Ebrahimzadeh, 2016, 2017; Ebrahimzadeh & Alavi, 2016) have examined DVGs in formal educational contexts indicating encouraging results. These researchers provide further evidence that the common formal classroom practice might not still be fit to be considered the prevalent language learning context (Sockett, 2014). Still, the classroom plays a crucial role and could benefit from informal language learning instruments (Cole & Vanderplank, 2016; Collins & Muñoz, 2016). Nation (2001) reasoned that to select a DVG as a form of software with higher vocabulary learning outcomes it should provide vocabulary learning conditions, namely, noticing, retrieval, and generative use. Noticing can be harnessed through colorization, text stylization, highlighting, etc. Retrieval can be achieved through the use and repeated use of vocabulary to acquire some other item. Generative use, finally, pertains to the presentation of vocabulary in different forms such as written, spoken, and pictorial.

1.2. The importance of motivation in language learning

Motivation is an important, pervasive behavior determinant (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2013) of students, teachers and administrators (Elliot & Covington, 2001). Research has shown that motivation affects human behavior in the "choice of a particular action, the persistence with it and the effort expended on it" (Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006, p. 9). Language Learning Motivation (LLM) theories have undergone dramatic changes since first

introduced. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) have categorized them into three phases: the social psychological period (1959-1990), the cognitive-situated period (1990s), and the process-oriented period (turn of the 20th century).

The first phase highlights the importance of language learners' attitudes toward the target language and language community. It includes several factors such as interest in foreign countries, instrumental motivation, and anxiety, to name just a few. The second phase coordinates motivation research with the cognitive revolution in psychology focusing on situated analysis of motivation (e.g., in the classroom). The third phase conceptualizes motivation as a process occurring over time. These two approaches, however, are criticized mainly on two fronts. Firstly, motivation is considered here as a linear phenomenon while it seems to be the result of a series of complex interactions. Secondly, theories presented during these two phases follow a reductionist approach toward motivation by defining a set of variables as significant contributors to motivation.

As recently proposed, the socio-dynamic phase seeks to remedy these criticisms. It considers "the situated complexity of the L2 motivation process and its organic development in dynamic interaction with a multiplicity of internal, social and contextual factors" and aims at taking "account of the broader complexities of language learning and use in the modern globalised world" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 72). For example, it is understood after Vygotsky (1978) that individuals have an active participatory role in construction of motivational goals and also in what they internalize as a result (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Therefore, while the context shapes an individual's level of motivation, it is itself formed by standards of the individual(s) participating to define it.

2. Theoretical background to the present research

2.1. Digital Video Games (DVGs) and language learning motivation (LLM)

It has been indicated that since many learners automatically assume educational games to be boring (Kinzie & Joseph, 2008), identifying and selecting a suitable commercial DVG may improve students' motivation (Dickey, 2011; Wu, Chiou, Kao, Hu, & Huang, 2012). There are six activity modes that appear to best reflect junior high school students' game-play preferences including active, explorative, problem-solving, strategic, social, and creative activities (Kinzie & Joseph, 2008). According to the authors, commercial DVGs are richer in said activities than educational DVGs. Thus, they propose that educational games be enriched

with such activities in order to lessen the strength of the 'boring' label that children attach to them.

A language learning software may provide substantial exposure to the content but fail to affect change since it does not motivate learner participation (Bodnar, Cucchiarini, Strik, & Van Hout, 2016). Since participation is closely related to motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), it becomes important to use a variety of instruments to help engage more learners. To this end, although the focus of their studies has not been particularly on LLM, researchers such as Gee (2007), Molins-Ruano et al. (2014), Schrader, Lawless, and Deniz (2010), and Van Eck (2009) have suggested the implementation of commercial DVGs in educational settings because of their abundance of motivational elements. DVGs may increase intrinsic and/or extrinsic motivation for replays (Kuo & Chuang, 2016), which are viewed as processes that ultimately result in acquisition and mastery of new knowledge (e.g., a second language) (Buckley and Anderson, 2006).

For language learning purposes, it is important to select a commercial DVG in which language plays a role in achieving the ultimate goal of the game, in victory, so that while enjoying playing the DVG gamers would be involved with language processing as well (Rosas et al., 2003). Also, while educational DVGs pay strict attention to the content, commercial DVGs focus on aesthetic elements (e.g., audiovisual features) that help the product sell in the market. Thus, an ideal game would be one which integrates these features to create an outcome appealing both in terms of content and appearance.

Malone and Lepper were the first to study motivation in educational games (as cited in Tzeng, 1999). They identified four factors including challenge, curiosity, control, and fantasy, constituting building blocks of intrinsic motivation in games. Malone and Lepper maintained that the challenge a game presents should be kept within the learners' abilities – their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) – to avoid frustration, anxiety, and boredom (see also Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Kiili, De Freitas, Arnab, & Lainema, 2012). Curiosity could be raised by means of audio-visual or sensory stimuli or appealing game-stories. Control refers to the idea that learners playing a game should feel a sense of control over it and understand that it is actually their actions and decisions which mould the outcomes. Lastly, fantasy should be present so that learners experience states, conditions, situations, jobs, etc. not currently present. For example, they could be a footballer, manager, warrior, etc. which in reality might not be possible – at least in the near future.

A study by Connolly, Stansfield, and Hainey (2011) evaluated the effects of an alternate reality game on motivation of secondary school students for learning modern foreign

languages across different European countries. Ninety-five language teachers and 328 students from 17 countries participated in the study. Students played the DVG at home or in the classroom for 10 days. Data collection involved a pre-test-post-test design (online administration). Results showed that the DVG raised the students' motivation and participants believed that the DVG provided them with skills regarding cooperation, collaboration, and teamwork. The DVG also offered opportunities for engagement with peers from different language backgrounds across different countries. The study concluded that gaming helps motivate students for second language learning and can be used as a means to move beyond the constraints of traditional classrooms.

Another study by Hanus and Fox (2015) aimed at measuring the effect of gamification on university students' motivation in a longitudinal perspective. The researchers administered two treatments and the gamified treatment involved a leaderboard and badges whereas the other treatment did not. Students were evaluated based on four measures distributed during the 16 weeks of the study. Results indicated less motivation among students who underwent gamified instruction.

A study by Cole and Vanderplank (2016) compared a group of autonomous (out-of-class) language learners with in-class learners, confronting an informal learning condition was compared against a formal learning environment. They concluded that learning a second language outside the classroom through informal means would result in superior outcomes regarding advanced learners. According to Cole and Vanderplank (2016), fossilization was observed among in-class learners but not autonomous learners. The researchers identified self-determined instrumental motivation as an important force helping autonomous learners achieve better results.

2.2. The role of teamwork in language learning, enhancing motivation and implementation of DVGs

Teamwork is a dimension added to an individual's consideration of success and failure (Newman, 1980). If members find their individual contribution to the team essential, they may have higher expectations of success in similar future situations. They might also feel less debilitated by failure in a group. Teamwork provides an opportunity for members to share their experiences for self-evaluation purposes and encourages effective social comparisons through interactions, collaboration and cooperation (Kessler, 1992; Oxford, 1997).

For example, a group of students working on a text could share their ideas, correct each other's mistakes or assign roles to speed up the process of evaluating the text (e.g., each

member doing a different pre- or post-reading exercise and then sharing the results). Being recognized as effective second language learning practice, teamwork has been employed in a number of language learning methods and teaching practices of the post-method era (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). For example, teamwork results in better second language vocabulary learning (Dobao, 2014).

Teamwork has also been shown to enhance LLM (Dörnyei, 1994, 1997). Dörnyei (1994) presented a model of LLM with group-related components, namely, classroom goal structures, group cohesion, goal-orientedness, and the norm and reward system. Put together, student collaboration results in superior learning gains since it can "generate a powerful motivational system to energise learning" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, pp. 27-28).

Multiplayer DVGs such as *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009) and *Defense of the Ancients* (IceFrog, 2015) tend to specify a role for each avatar. Through teamwork, these avatars can easily win the game. Understanding how these roles work is based on knowing the avatars and items they need which comes from first-hand experience, item/ability thumbnails, the provided guidelines, and the language used to describe these items/abilities/avatars. Thus, DVGs provide a suitable environment to promote teamwork (Connolly et al., 2011; Vegt, Visch, de Ridder, & Vermeeren, 2015).

3. The study

3.1. Focus and questions of the research

Motivation is a determining factor in successful second/foreign language learning since it provides the initial will and the driving force to stand the effortful process of learning another language (Dörnyei, 1994, 1998). Findings of the research on motivational effects of game-based learning are very limited (Girard, Ecalle, & Magnant, 2013; Tsai & Fan, 2013), and there is a lack of sufficient empirical evidence to encourage or discourage their use as educational instruments (Connolly, Boyle, MacArthur, Hainey, & Boyle, 2012). Additionally, Cole and Vanderplank (2016) conclude that a most important need in investigating informal educational instruments is how they work when implemented in formal contexts such as high schools.

For example, Hoffman and Nadelson (2010) conclude that motivational engagement resulting from recreational gaming is unlikely to transfer to educational settings since classrooms are competitive and evaluative. They define motivational engagement as individuals' conscious and willing approach toward a task to pursue a specific goal based on their interests, values, and affect. Accordingly, gamers play to fulfill recreational, social, and

esteem needs without focusing much on knowledge improvement. Therefore, the change of objective enforced by classroom-context would render the motivational engagement of DVGs null and void.

Iran is a country where the use of technology in education is in its early stages. Only a limited number of high schools have access to a computer lab and those that do mainly use it for teaching computer science. Therefore, game-enhanced language learning is not common in Iranian high schools. The present study, thus, sought to evaluate students' LLM resulting from the implementation of a commercial DVG in high school classrooms. The following research questions were put forward:

1. How does a commercial DVG affect high school EFL students' LLM?
2. How does playing individually affect LLM as compared to watching others play the DVG?

3.2. Participants

A total of 241 male Iranian high school students (aged 12-18) were selected through cluster sampling from one junior and two senior high schools. These students did not know anything about game-enhanced language learning. The majority only studied English at high school but some attended private language institutes as well. Based on the *Headway* placement test published by Oxford University Press in 2012, the majority of students (87.9 %) were categorized as A1 level according to guidelines of *The Common European Framework of Reference*. Twenty-seven students were removed from the study because they had either played the game at home, cheated during the exams, or missed more than one session.

Before starting the study, it was reviewed and approved by the research ethics committee of Shiraz University. Also, authorities in the Ministry of Education were contacted and written permission was obtained. Furthermore, participation was voluntarily. In each class, those who did not show consent to participate in the study were given handouts on their textbook material to practice.

As noted earlier, unfortunately, many high schools in Iran lack access to a computer lab. For this reason, the study was designed in a way to accommodate the lack of equipment by having the Players (those who personally played the game) and Watchers (those who watched the game being played) treatments.

3.3. Materials and instruments

3.3.1. Target vocabulary items

Twenty-one words (Appendix 1.1) were selected from the DVG *Defense of the Ancients* (IceFrog, 2015). They were unknown to the students as indicated through the pre-test. The test (Appendix 1.2) included 21 multiple choice items with four alternatives. Target vocabulary items were selected based on the criteria of time, avatars, and item association.

Regarding time, the target vocabulary items that Players were to obtain during a match had to require as few gold pieces (DVG's currency) as possible so that students could make enough money to buy them all during the given class time. They could make money by completing the objectives, killing enemies, or capturing certain locations. As regards the avatars, *Defense of the Ancients* (IceFrog, 2015) has 112 avatars categorized in three classes emphasizing different skills and play styles. An attempt was made to select the target vocabulary from among items usable by all three classes. Item association refers to certain vocabulary items that could be combined to create new and stronger items. The order by which these items were presented was mainly dictated by the DVG. The names of these items were used as the target vocabulary items to be presented through reading passages and the DVG.

3.3.2. Readings and worksheets

Five reading passages (Appendix 2), each consisting of 600-650 words, were written by the researchers to teach the target vocabulary items to Readers. They were based on the DVG's plot as excerpts telling the story. All passages were developed based on the Flyers' stage of the Cambridge English Readers syllabus (Cambridge English Language Assessment, 2013). Moreover, *The Common European Framework of Reference*'s A2 level was used in this study to keep the passages one level higher than the participants' proficiency level conforming to Krashen's (1982) i+1 Comprehensible Input hypothesis.

To prepare the readings, a word-list was developed according to the headwords introduced by the Cambridge English Language Assessment (2013) syllabus (the Flyers stage which conforms to the A2 level), based on which all passages were written. Using this word-list and a software called *Range* (Nation, 2002), all five readings were examined and analyzed for appropriateness. The software provided statistics on tokens, types, and word families. These statistics were compared against the Cambridge word-list by the software. Based on

this information, the texts were edited several times to achieve the desired statistics (e.g., controlling the number of words not included in the Cambridge word-list). The readings were then developed into worksheets with pre- and post-reading activities. Simplified English definitions were added in the right margin.

3.3.3. The motivation scale

To assess LLM, the scale by Carreira (2006) (see Appendix 3) was used which focuses on two dimensions of motivation for language learning: intrinsic and extrinsic. The former refers to doing something for its own sake, while the latter refers to doing something for the sake of achieving something else. This scale was originally made for children of similar age as the participants of the present study. It includes five factors (19 items), all answered on a four-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The scale was administered twice as a pre-test and a post-test (Cronbach's α = .66 and .68 respectively). It should be noted that scores on the anxiety subscale (three items) were reversed as they were originally negatively coded. A Persian version of the questionnaire prepared through back-translation procedures was given to the students.

3.3.4. The digital video game

Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne (Blizzard, 2003) is a Real-Time Strategy DVG, in which gamers use their units, structures, and resources to secure some areas of the map and/or destroy enemy assets (Rollings & Adams, 2003). This DVG was chosen based on the learning opportunities it offered, suitability, and technical implementation criteria (hardware, software, and game-play training requirements). According to Entertainment Software Rating Board and Pan European Game Information, the selected game is suitable for users of 12 years old and above. Additionally, according to ign.com and gamefaqs.com, the game enjoys a high popularity score (9 out of 10 and 88 out of 100 respectively).

Considering the learning opportunities, each vocabulary item had a thumbnail (a static image). Avatars' attributes such as damage, armor, strength, agility, and intelligence were affected by these items indicating their use or purpose. Also, the teacher occasionally asked leading questions. Students could buy these items and carry them around in their inventory; they could reexamine these items at will (hovering over them would prompt their features in a floating window). Finally, considering the above, students decided on Persian equivalents for the items. In other words, based on Nunan's (1999) Presentation-Practice-Production model, the items were first introduced by the game (presenting the items through textual and pictorial

means); next, students practised with them (examining or using them); and then, they combined them to produce superior items.

3.3.5. DVG pictures, cinematics, and cutscenes

Each worksheet included a number of relevant pictures from the DVG to help students visualize the items. These pictures were also used for the Players and Watchers with minor modifications such as highlighted areas to illustrate the steps for obtaining them (projected on a screen as slides). The pictures were shown on-demand to avoid anxiety resulting from lack of information. A cinematic and/or cutscene with Persian subtitles was also played for all the students at the beginning of each session to visually present a part of the story (projected on a screen). The Readers read that part in their worksheets afterward. For the Players and Watchers, the videos aimed at raising a sense of awareness and purpose.

3.3.6. Field notes

Both during and immediately after each session, notes were made of significant events, expressions, and student reactions such as distracting factors, comments, and interactions. These notes did not follow a pre-defined order but rather served as qualitative data to be used for triangulation purposes.

3.4. Procedure

Through random assignment, the seniors (N = 153) were designated to one of the three treatments, namely, Readers (N = 75), Players (N = 65), and Watchers (N = 74). For the juniors (N = 61), however, the choice was limited to either the Players' or Watchers' treatment because they did not qualify for language requirements set by the Cambridge English Language Assessment (2013) syllabus which was used as the base for developing the Readers' worksheets.

The proficiency test, the motivation scale, and the vocabulary pre-test were administered two weeks before the study. Then, the study went on for five consecutive sessions, one session a week, each lasting for about 50 minutes. During each session, 3-6 vocabulary items were introduced through the following treatments (if more items were included, they could not be repeated enough times in the Readers' worksheets). Finally, students took the motivation post-test a week after the study.

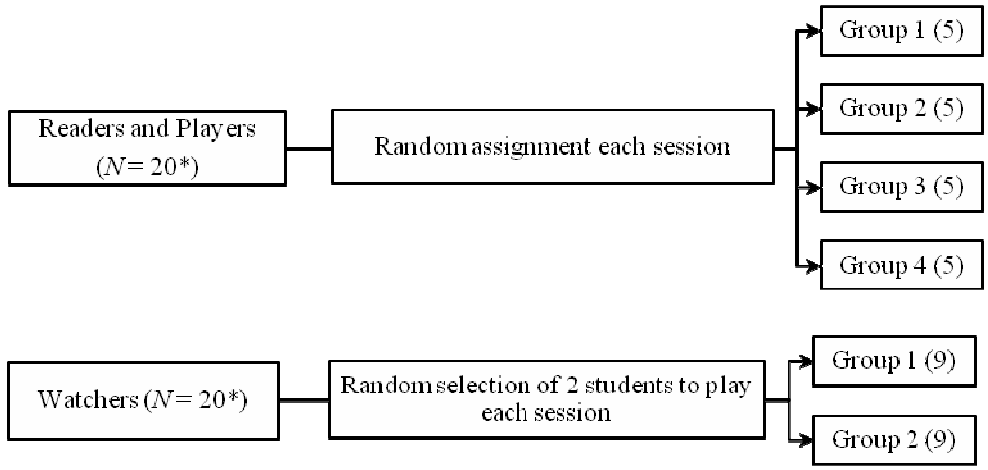
3.4.1. The Readers' treatment

During each session the Readers studied a worksheet (pen-and-paper) that included a reading passage with pre- and post-reading activities in English. Only in one post-reading activity, summary writing, were students allowed to use Persian since they were not proficient enough to carry out this task solely in English. First, they watched a video from the DVG that depicted the part of story they were going to read about. Next, each passage was read aloud in the classroom and translated into Persian. While reading, students were asked to try to guess the meaning of unknown words. Then, post-reading activities including multiple-choice, comprehension check, fill-in-the-blanks, matching exercises, summary writing, and a word puzzle were worked on in groups of four or five of students to complete these tasks. Group members in each classroom were randomized each session to prevent ordering effects.

3.4.2. The Players' and Watchers' treatment

These students received instruction in how to play the DVG prior to the treatment. During each session they watched a video from the DVG and information on the characters' whereabouts was explained to them. This was done to raise a sense of purpose and awareness. Through an overhead projector, each vocabulary item and instructions on how to find it in the game were illustrated on-demand. Students then played the game trying to obtain the target vocabulary items. Since the ultimate goal was to destroy the enemy base, students had to improve their avatars in terms of damage, strength, agility, armor, intelligence, hitpoints, and mana, all made possible by purchasing the items. To buy these items, students had to make money by killing enemies. They had to pay attention to their avatar's attributes (damage, armor, strength, hitpoints, mana, intelligence, and agility) since they were affected by each item they bought. This helped them guess the meanings.

The Players worked in teams of four or five (depending on the number of students in each class). Team members were randomized during each session to avoid ordering effects. The Watchers, however, only had two students playing and others were divided into two groups providing hints and encouragement for their player (Figure 1). Each team tried to destroy the enemy base and members had to interact to choose a plan of action. They also asked for guidance from both their teammates and the teacher on how to create certain items or where to locate them. Depending on the team members' skills and avatars, each game lasted for about 35 minutes.



*This total number is just for simplifying the description since each class differed regarding its total number of students.

Figure 1. Grouping of students in different treatments

Teams discussed and decided, with help from the teacher, on a Persian equivalent for each item during and at the end of each session. Leading questions were asked to help them guess the meanings only when a) the item thumbnails were not informative enough or b) students disagreed on the meaning.

3.5. Data analysis

Data analysis was done using SPSS v. 21. To lessen the effects of cooperative learning, which can violate the ANOVA assumption of having independent observations, and to improve the validity of the findings, a more stringent alpha level (p = .01) was used (Stevens, 2009). Pre-test-post-test scores of the motivation scale underwent a mixed between-within subjects ANOVA to see if the three groups differed in terms of their LLM and also to examine the effect of time on students' LLM. The conventions set by Cohen (1988) were used for interpreting the effect sizes. Field notes were viewed, reviewed, categorized, and analyzed to provide an understanding of the participants and instruments.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Preliminary analyses

A one-way between-groups ANOVA (Table 1) was run on the motivation pre-test scores which showed that the three groups (Readers: N = 73, M = 2.93, SD = .35; Players: N = 65, M

= 3.01, *SD* = .37; Watchers: *N* = 74, *M* = 3.09, *SD* = .33) had no statistically significant difference in the beginning of the study (*p* = .021).

Table 1. Examining homogeneity in the motivation pretest scores

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.961	2	.480	3.954	.021
Within Groups	25.395	209	.122		
Total	26.356	211			

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the scores each treatment yielded for the motivation pre- and post-test. As shown, all groups displayed an increase in the mean score from pre-test to post-test. The Players and Watchers showed almost similar increase (about .14). The Readers' mean score, however, showed the smallest increase (about .05). In sum, game-learners showed more increase in motivation scores than the pencil-and-paper learners throughout the study.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the motivation pre- and post-test scores

Variable	Group Name	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test	Readers	71	1.95	3.69	2.9377	.34914
	Players	63	1.99	3.71	3.0108	.36836
	Watchers	73	2.37	3.71	3.0932	.33494
Post-test	Readers	71	1.93	3.82	2.9871	.38207
	Players	63	2.47	3.81	3.1577	.34056
	Watchers	73	2.35	4.00	3.2290	.41692

4.2. Results of inferential processing

To answer the first question of this study which asked how DVGs affect high school EFL students' LLM, a mixed between-within subjects ANOVA was run on pre-test and post-test scores of the motivation scale. Results of the analysis (Table 3) demonstrated a statistically significant effect (*p* = .000) for time with a medium-large effect size (partial eta squared = .086). In sum, the students' LLM significantly increased throughout the study.

Table 3: The effect of time[a] on motivation

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta squared

Time	Wilks' Lambda	.914	19.202[b]	1.000	204.000	.000	.086

a. Design: Intercept + group
Within subjects design: Time
b. Exact statistic

As for the between groups' effects (Table 4), a significant statistical difference (p = .001) with a medium effect size (partial eta squared = .065) was observed. In other words, there was a significant difference between the three treatments.

Table 4: Effect of time on motivation between the three groups

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Intercept	3884.068	1	3884.068	19080.668	.000	.989
Group	2.881	2	1.440	7.076	.001	.065
Error	41.526	204	.204			

Post-hoc Tukey HSD tests (Table 5) were run to find out which groups differed. As shown, the Readers and Watchers were found to be significantly different (p = .001). There was no significant difference between the Players and Readers (p = .072). As regards the second question, no significant difference was observed between the Players and Watchers (p = .342).

Table 5: Post-hoc analysis of the difference between the three groups

(I) Group name	(J) Group name	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.
Readers	Players	-.1218	.05522	.072
	Watchers	-.1987*	.05318	.001
Players	Readers	.1218	.05522	.072
	Watchers	-.0768	.05486	.342
Watchers	Readers	.1987*	.05318	.001
	Players	.0768	.05486	.342

Based on observed means.
The error term is Mean Square (Error) = .102.
*. The mean difference is significant at the .01 level.

4.3. Discussion

Results showed a significant LLM increase throughout the study. However, only the Watchers showed a significantly higher mean than the Readers in the end. There was no other significant difference between the treatments. The results agree with previous studies in that the use of DVGs can increase LLM (e.g., Connolly et al., 2011; Wehner, Gump, & Downey, 2011). However, most of the previous studies used educational rather than commercial DVGs. The study also agrees with Cole and Vanderplank's (2016) speculation that informal learning instruments such as DVGs could be beneficial to formal learning contexts by motivating the learners. This indication supports Tragant, Muñoz, and Spada's (2016) finding that solely teacher-led instruction may not be the optimum practice. The increase in motivation could be attributed to higher outcomes observed among game learners, as reported by Ebrahimzadeh (2016, 2017).

The results of the present study contradict those of Hanus and Fox (2015), who found less motivation among the students who underwent gamified instruction. The findings also differ from those of Hoffman and Nadelson (2010), who concluded that the DVGs' motivational engagement could not be transferred to educational settings. It should be noted, however, that previous studies have mainly focused on educational DVGs, not commercial ones. On the contrary, the present study used a commercial DVG in which language learning was not the primary purpose. Since commercial DVGs tend to be richer in terms of aesthetic features (e.g., better graphics, audiovisual effects, compelling stories), they may have some advantage over educational DVGs when it comes to enhancing motivation. This notion, however, is in need of further investigation.

Similarly to Hoffman and Nadelson (2010), the participants of the present study perceived the game-mediated language learning environment as comfortable and relaxing and experienced the freedom they had never had in a formal classroom (e.g., freely talking to their classmates without asking for the teacher's permission), and comments such as 'please tell other teachers to teach like this' were heard frequently. Also, since the second half of the class time was allocated to the treatments, students would try to remind the teacher by saying 'sir, we will not have enough time if we don't start now.'

Multimedia presentation allowed for inclusion of several instruments such as a DVG, videos, pictures, and texts. This provided a more comprehensive ground for students to cultivate their interests and engage in activities (Clark & Mayer, 2011). Curiosity – a situation in which "the learner knows enough to have expectations about what will happen, but where these expectations are sometimes unmet" (Malone, 1980, p. 60) – induced from the videos

was notable in motivating participation. Some students would volunteer to predict what would happen next week. Sometimes, they even stayed longer to discuss the DVG after the class. Therefore, the game seems to have enhanced motivation since active participation is a sign of motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

A group of students who were strongly against the content at the beginning underwent a change of heart after the third or fourth session and became interested. This might be attributed to the DVGs' potential to change one's mood (Park, 2007). A few students mentioned that although they enjoyed the method, they preferred some other content. Readers and Players were more salient about their interests and presented ideas on alternative stories and/or DVGs. Watchers, however, were less concerned with it when pointing out their topics of interest, probably because they did not have to play or participate in a game they might not have liked very much. This could be an important point giving an edge to the Watchers in the end. Also, it highlights the importance of interest when engaging learners in such activities.

The Watchers may have experienced a more relaxed treatment from a cultural point of view as well. In the Iranian culture, modesty is encouraged and individuals are advised to refrain from being ostentatious. This can be discussed based on the study of national culture (Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Hofstede (2011) termed a national dimension of culture as 'Indulgence' versus 'Restraint'. An indulgent society "allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun" whereas a restraint society "controls gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms" (Hofstede, 2011, p. 15). As results of the present study suggest and also noted in Hofstede's (2011) categorization, Iran has a restraint society. The Watchers' treatment allowed participation but in a more subtle way where an individual would not be the center of attention, and participation or the lack of it was not judged. In other words, participation would not require frequent display or gratification of thoughts and emotions. Being more relaxed, therefore, the Watchers may have had more fun and may have been happier considering their cultural norms.

LLM and engagement did not appear to be exclusively dependent on the win/lose outcomes, which agrees with the findings of Hoffman and Nadelson (2010). Although winners appeared more energetic and happier, losers were not discouraged to play the next week. While losing or bad performance did result in instant psychological and physical reactions such as anger, discouragement, sadness, regret, and yelling, the condition was not strong enough to prevent them from participation the next week.

Students' LLM showed in their comments too. Many of them had bragged about going to an English class where they played games. They reported that their friends envied them saying, 'good for you' or, 'I wish I could come to your class too.' Parents, however, responded inconsistently commenting that 'whatever your teacher decides' or 'oh no; so games made their way into school too.' An interesting point was that some students said that they tried to defend the DVG course when their parents were against it. 'I told my mother I'm learning and she said I hope so', as expressed by one student.

5. Conclusion

The study investigated the effect of a commercial DVG on EFL students' LLM. Results indicated a significant change in motivation over time. However, only the Watchers showed a significantly higher score than the Readers in the end. Accordingly, it is suggested that DVGs can enhance LLM in high schools. Furthermore, the present study found that motivational engagement experienced through DVGs will transfer to educational settings meaning that using a DVG in the classroom positively affects student motivation. Altogether, the following points can be highlighted.

Firstly, some students had certain suggestions about which DVG(s) should have been used. Thus, it is suggested that student interest should be considered in DVG selection as far as being viable. This can be attributed to the unique feature of DVGs: students think they should have a say in DVG selection/use since they are familiar with them (many of them are gamers). Secondly, students should have the freedom whether to play or just watch the DVG (especially if only a single DVG is to be used) as some of them might not like the DVG itself but enjoy the comfortable environment and experience less anxiety, which seems to enhance LLM. Moreover, especially pertaining to the Iranian context, students seem to have liked the Watchers' treatment better probably since it gave them the chance to selectively participate or remain passive learners. Thirdly, DVGs should be used as a complementary activity not a replacement for textbooks since excessively using them would divert the original purpose (Reinhardt & Sykes, 2012). Fourthly, although the Readers did not play the game, it seems that the change of atmosphere through watching DVG videos, reading a DVG story, and working on activities targeting that story as a team improved their LLM though not as much as the Players and Watchers.

Lastly, this study was limited in certain ways. Basically, self-report measures face a potential problem of validity as they are highly sensitive to the respondents' comprehension and willingness to provide honest answers. Additionally, Hawthorne effect might have been

present as all groups knew they were taking part in a research project (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Razavieh, 2010). Moreover, an important ANOVA assumption (independence of observations) could not be met. Furthermore, since the target vocabulary items had to be repeated enough times each session in the Readers' treatment, no more vocabulary items could be included, which weakens the pedagogical value of the findings. Also, the target vocabulary may not have been immediately useful to the school context. In addition, since it was not possible to know how long a match would last, the time allocated to each session could not be exactly specified. Next, due to educational policies in Iran, female students could not be included. Lastly, since the classroom use of DVGs was new to the participants, part of the increase in motivation might have been due to the excitement of having a DVG in the classroom.

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Appendix 1.1. Target vocabulary items

No	Item	Session
1	Damage	1
2	Armor	1
3	Agility	1
4	Ally	1
5	Gauntlets of Strength	1
6	Healing Salve	1
7	Intelligence	2
8	Status	2
9	Mana	2
10	Ironwood Branch	2
11	Buckler	3
12	Chainmail	3
13	Boots of Speed	3
14	Robe of the Magi	3
15	Broadsword	4
16	Quarterstaff	4
17	Claymore	4
18	Gloves of Haste	4
19	Perseverance	5
20	Recipe	5
21	Power Treads	5

Appendix 1.2. The pretest

Pre-test (Screening Test) **به نام خدا**

نام و نام خانوادگی: **مدرسه:** **کلاس:**

معنی لغات و عبارات داده شده در سوالات ۱ تا ۲۱ را از بین گزینه های الف، ب، ج یا د انتخاب کرده و مطابق نمونه دور گزینه مورد نظر خط بکشید.

نمونه حل شده: معنی کلمه Trap :

الف. حلقه *ب. سریع* *ج. دام* *د. دور*

۱. معنی لغت Damage :

الف. شروع ب. آسیب ج. پرتاب د. نشان

۲. معنی لغت Armor :

الف. زره ب. لباس ج. نقاب د. سنگر

۳. معنی لغت Agility :

الف. صلابت ب. چابکی ج. زیرکی د. خشونت

۴. معنی لغت Intelligence :

الف. کاردانی ب. بینش ج. هوش د. زرنگی

۵. معنی لغت Ally :

الف. کاوش ب. عالی ج. متحد د. حمله

۶. معنی لغت Buckler :

الف. حامی ب. سپر کوچک ج. دشنه د. دسته بیل

۷. معنی لغت Status :

الف. گفته ب. نوع ج. تیر د. وضعیت

۸. معنی لغت Recipe :

الف. مطابق ب. بازرسی ج. دستورالعمل د. پیروی

۹. معنی لغت Chainmail :

الف. زره زنجیری ب. شمشیر سیاه ج. تیغ سپید د. سپر قرن

۱۰. معنی لغت Mana :

الف. نیروی باستانی ب. جادو ج. نیروی حیات د. فانی

صفحه: ۱

۱۱. معنی لغت Broadsword :

الف. شمشیر پهن ب. شمشیر آتشین ج. شمشیر سمّی د. کیوار

۱۲. معنی لغت Quarterstaff :

الف. تاج امپراتور ب. کمی پول ج. وسایل جزئی د. عصای جنگی

۱۳. معنی لغت Claymore :

الف. زره طلایی ب. شمشیر دو دم ج. زره شاهی د. شمشیر هندی

۱۴. معنی لغت Perseverance :

الف. شجاعت ب. پرستاری ج. استقامت د. جهانبینی

۱۵. معنی لغت Ironwood Branch :

الف. چوب ارکیده ب. چوب سپیدار ج. شاخه سرو د. شاخه آهنین

۱۶. معنی لغت Robe of the Magi :

الف. ردای حفاظت ب. ردای سرعت ج. ردای زرتشتی د. ردای پرواز

۱۷. معنی لغت Gauntlets of Strength :

الف. زره کوتاه چرمی ب. گوهر قدرت ج. دستکش کوتاه قدرت د. دستکش چرمی

۱۸. معنی لغت Boots of Speed :

الف. پوتین آزادی ب. معجون سرعت ج. پوتین سرعت د. معجون آزادی

۱۹. معنی لغت Healing Salve :

الف. معجون رهایی ب. داروی طاعون ج. آفت کش د. مرهم شفابخش

۲۰. معنی لغت Power Treads :

الف. گام‌های پرتوان ب. نیروی سه‌گانه ج. چکمه نبرد د. چکمه رهایی

۲۱. معنی لغت Gloves of Haste :

الف. دستکش نیرنگ ب. دستکش بلند شتاب ج. دستکش نیرو د. دستکش حامی

Appendix 2. A sample page of the worksheets used in the Readers' treatment

Season 2

Lesson 2

The Frozen Throne

Alliance Campaign: To the North

Pre-reading Activities:

Retelling

Try and remember what happened in the story last session. Present it to the class.

Predicting and Skimming

Look at the title, the pictures, and the phrases below. What do you think happens in the story today?

lord Illidan	you shall be my right hand	to kill Magtheridon	many different soldiers
there are two gates	travel with me to the north	to kill Lich King	to the icy north together

Now, skim the passage and check your predictions.

Prince Kael and the Naga finally found Illidan. The first thing Prince Kael asked Illidan was 'can you help us **solve** our magic problem?' 'There is no solution my young Prince; but I can give you a new **source**' answered Illidan. Prince Kael thought for a moment and then said: so be it; from now on, you can think of us as your allies lord Illidan! 'And you shall be my right hand,' Illidan went on 'our first **task** is to kill Magtheridon; he's the lord of this land and we need to take it from him.'

It took them a few days to make their camp. After that, Illidan sent a few **scouts** to Magtheridon's city. When they came back, they reported that a group of undead protect a very strange item; 'it's called the **gloves of haste**' they said. 'We should surely look into that; Kael, that is your first task; bring me the gloves and I shall tell you about your problem' said Illidan. 'Consider it done my lord.' said Kael. The Prince and his men left the camp and found the gloves. Prince Kael quickly returned and gave them to Illidan. He wore them and was surprised; the gloves made him much quicker!

The next morning, Illidan explained to Kael that he met a great **demon** lord named Jaeden; he said: Jaeden promised me strength; and in return, he asked me to kill the Lich King in the north; and he also promised me power beyond **imagination**; now, to kill the Lich King, I need an army; if you travel with me to the north and help me do it, I promise that I'll solve your magic problem. Prince Kael stepped forward and said: I know the legend of the ice **crown** and the frozen throne; my **claymore** is yours to command; we'll go to the icy north together.

Solve: to find the answer to a problem.

Source: a place, person or a thing that you sth from.

Task: a work that you must do.

Scout: a person sent ahead to find information about the enemy.

Gloves of haste: a covering for the hand that makes you act faster.

Demon: very evil.

Imagination: ability to think of new ideas.

Crown: a circle made of gold that kings wear on their head.

Claymore: a large sword with two sharp sides.

Appendix 3. The motivation scale

No	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	English lessons are great fun. (I really enjoy learning English)				
2.	I would like to go to various foreign countries.				
3.	I always look forward to the day when we have the English class.				
4.	I would like to make a lot of foreign friends.				
5.	I get worried when I am doing worse than my classmates in the English class.				
6.	I would like to try to use English which I have learned.				
7.	I study English in order to make English easier for me in junior high school.				
8.	I hope that we have more English lessons.				
9.	In my family, we all feel that it is very important to learn English.				
10.	I am somehow always anxious in the English class.				
11.	I study English because I think English will be necessary for me when I am an adult.				
12.	I would like to try and talk to foreigners when my English becomes proficient.				
13.	My parents hope that my English will be proficient.				
14.	I am studying English for a future job.				
15.	I would like to live abroad.				
16.	I get nervous when I answer or give a presentation in the English class.				
17.	I would like to know more about foreign countries.				
18.	My parents tell me to study English hard.				
19.	I am studying English in order to enter a high school or university.				

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