



The Influence of Media in Autonomous English Learners

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to know the impact that the media have had on the learning of English, taking into account factors such as linguistic globalization and the influence that the media have had on the spreading of the language. It is important to highlight that the media have been very present in the daily life of recent generations of individuals and although they can be perceived as a means to perform recreational activities, they have also functioned as a tool to learn or develop skills, including among them the learning of English. Nevertheless, several questions arise regarding the outcomes of an autonomous English learning process. This study intends to explore to what extent social media is a useful tool for people to learn a language autonomously through the experiences of several individuals that happen to learn English using media as an instrument.

Keywords: English language, media, influence, autonomous English learners.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, there are an infinite number of possibilities for learning and entertainment, many times the media serve as a tool to stimulate learning, while interacting with elements of personal interest that are not necessarily related to the person's environment. As Ezeh (2021) mentioned, active learning means that the mind is actively engaged. Visual and audio-visual resources could be very useful and easy to access for autonomous learners.

“Autonomous learners take advantage of the linguistic affordances in their environment and act by engaging themselves in second language social practices” (Shakouri, 2012: 839). This study explores how a group of autonomous learners has developed their language skills by using tools such as T.V. shows or series, music, platforms to watch videos, video games and Facebook and Instagram for self-directed English learning.

Autonomous learners have the advantage of choosing what content to interact with as well as how they will manage their time to learn the language which could result in them looking for resources that add to their learning style as well as the most convenient time for them to practice their language skills. This study aims to answer the following questions: To what extent does media exposure benefit autonomous learners of a foreign language learning? What are some of the challenges that autonomous learners face? Is it possible to achieve proficiency in a language through self-directed learning using media and social media as resources?

2. Literature review

2.1 *The role of motivation in autonomous language learning*

Human beings have the inherent capacity to develop many things autonomously, and it is even easier for them to do so if there are stimuli related to the skill to be developed in their daily lives. In order for an individual to develop a skill there must first be an interest in it. An individual must have an intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is understood as the desire that an individual has to perform an activity due his/her personal interests and not motivated by a type of retribution. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation refers to the performance of an activity that is motivated by a person's interest in what he or she will obtain as a result of doing it.

Llamen-Nucamendi (2014) defines autonomy as the self-regulation of will, that is, the control individuals exercise over a set of propensities which gives general shape to the individual self. Therefore, motivation plays an important role in autonomy when learning an L2.

To determine the parameters for self-regulation an individual must have settled a goal to learn the target language. This goal may be determined by the intrinsic or extrinsic motivation of the individual to acquire the language, and may have an impact on the frequency with which he or she will study it, the vocabulary or grammatical structures he or she wishes to learn, and the contexts in which he or she wishes to apply the knowledge acquired.

Legault (2016) states that in order for intrinsic motivation to flourish, the social environment must nurture it. As mentioned before, the context of the individual can favor or detract from his motivation and therefore his learning experience. The individual needs to have the necessary resources to learn a language in an autonomous manner, which may seem challenging. This is another reason why motivation plays an important role when learning a second language in an autonomous way, as this will influence whether the person seeks the necessary resources to have a continuous progress in their learning.

2.2 *Media as a resource for autonomous learning*

As discussed previously, the social context is a major factor that influences the permanence of motivation in autonomous second language learners. Media has had a strong presence in the lives of the participants in this study since childhood and has served as a means to have contact with the target language even though it is not the dominant language of their country. Currently, the general public has access to various resources such as movies, videos, songs, series and even some social networks that allow them to listen, read, speak and write a language foreign to their own.

As stated by Aschroft (2018) incidental vocabulary learning can be contrasted with deliberate vocabulary learning, where students target specific lists of words and phrases to study, using flashcards for example. This translates to the fact that the individuals participating in this study were continuously exposed to a foreign language through visual and auditory stimuli may have had an impact on their eventual proficiency in L2.

2.3 *Incidental vocabulary learning through media*

The autonomous learners who participated in this study state that their first contact with the language happened at an early age and that it was mainly through music and movies. The media has an important role currently and it has become a vehicle by which individuals are able to be in constant contact with the language. As it is stated by Aschroft, Garner and Handicham

(2018) It is essential for learners to maximize their opportunities of learning new words and a good strategy to achieve it is to expose learners to as much L2 input as possible.

Features such as movies and music in an early stage of life seem to work as a vehicle for individuals to be exposed to the language and to start developing their abilities in the language. It also seems to be a vehicle for learners to feel motivated to work in their language skills at an older age. Having contact with the language at an early age happens as an incidental occurrence, however doing it more consciously at a later age could result in something more meaningful for the learner. "Imitating good speech models; like a competent teacher or speakers on the BBC can improve one's spoken English" (Anidi, Ezech & Nwokolo, 2021: 97).

Constant repetition of a song or dialogues can greatly enhance the listening comprehension of an autonomous learner, broaden his or her linguistic repertoire and also work as a main for them to develop their pronunciation skills in the target language.

Contact with the language through media also gives students the opportunity to hear the language in an authentic way that will allow them to know specifically which words to use in the various situations you may encounter in the future. Therefore, exposure to the language through these media should not be discarded in a learning process, as it is not only entertaining for learners of all ages, but also allows them to develop their listening and interpreting skills.

3. Methodology

3.1 *Research design*

The research approach was a mixed one. Next, the features that correspond to qualitative research will be described. Firstly, the data was collected by using a survey to find out which platforms were the most common for learning the language among self-employed learners. The survey was made employing Google Forms in which learners answered a set of questions regarding how the exposition to T.V. shows or series, music, platforms to watch videos, video games, Facebook, Instagram and learning apps influenced their autonomous learning experience since the beginning of their language learning process and how has it added to their current proficiency and confidence when communicating in the language. The questionnaire has as a purpose to recognize specifically what is the impact that media has had though all of their learning experience.

In the following paragraph the elements that correspond to quantitative research will be presented briefly. Circular and bar graphics were used to present the results in a concise manner. Numerical data was required in order to measure and contrast what was the specific media that was used the most through their autonomous learning process of the target language and to revise the frequency with which each learner used it in order to learn the language.

3.2 *Participants and context*

There were six participants in this research. They have an age range that goes from 23 to 32 years old. Five of them are female and one is male. All of them started to learn English consciously and autonomously during their adolescence, at a time when the media began to broadcast content related to communities where English was spoken as a first language and they currently possess the ability not only to comprehend English widely but also to communicate in it with other language learners or speakers.

All participants live in contexts where they have constant contact with native speakers of the language at the present time. The following table indicates the way in which English is part

of their current daily life, which provides the study with veracity that participants can engage in conversations with other English speakers as a result of their autonomous learning.

Participant	Occupation
Participant 1	Independent business interacting with foreign suppliers using English for communication
Participant 2	Currently has a couple from Holland and they live together, English is the second language of both.
Participant 3	Works as an English teacher and is the coordinator of the English department at the school where she works.
Participant 4	He has a C1 level certificate in English and studies at a university that receives students from foreign countries, with whom he communicates through the language.
Participant 5	Works as an English teacher
Participant 6	Studies at a university that receives students from foreign countries, with whom she communicates through English.

3.3 Data collection instruments

Participants responded to a survey in which they were interviewed on which media-related tools they used the most during their autonomous learning process. They were also questioned about how much they felt these tools had influenced their language performance and their confidence when having contact with native speakers through them. The survey was conducted using www.googleforms.com as a tool, in which participants were allowed to type paragraphs that explicitly narrated their second language learning experiences as well as the tools they used during their self-directed learning process.

4. Results

Two points emerged as a result of the survey outcomes. The first main result indicates that the participants' first contact with the language was mainly through movies or music and later they began to use social networks as tools to continue their learning process. The second outcome indicates that students consider the use of media as a key factor for the development of their language skills in their autonomous learning process.

4.1 Linguistic globalization

All the group of participants commented that they had their first contact with the language through television and music, therefore it can be assumed that the linguistic globalization of English has made it easier to have access to audio-visual content in the language. As stated by Lukač-Zoranić and Fijuljanin (2013) globalization enables interference of populations, cultures, languages within international borders as a result of the intensifying economic, social and cultural exchanges within different societies.

The linguistic globalization of English and the increased consumption of audio-visual content by individuals through mobile devices or television has favored individuals to have contact with the language. One of the participants stated the following comment “From a very young age I watched subtitled movies and in high school I became interested in listening to and understanding music in English.” At the beginning his contact with language was for recreational purposes and it was incidental, later his interest in language grew and he began to look for resources to learn it autonomously.

4.2 Media and motivation in autonomous second language learning

As in many learning processes, motivation is crucial to maintain continuity in learning English as a second language. As stated by Nguyen (2019) learning and motivation have the same importance in order to achieve something. Learning helps students gain new knowledge and skills, and motivation pushes them or encourages them to go through the learning process.

Motivation in the learning field is divided into two types: Intrinsic and extrinsic. A second language learner inside a classroom could be driven by the achievement of a good grade or the obtaining of a certificate, reasons that are linked to an extrinsic motivation. On the other hand, a learner could be motivated due to a personal interest in interacting with people from other countries, moving abroad, understanding audio-visual material of interest to them or an appreciation of the culture linked to the language.

Here are some of the participants’ responses to the following question: Do you think that being able to find content related to something you like in another language has motivated you to continue learning? How?

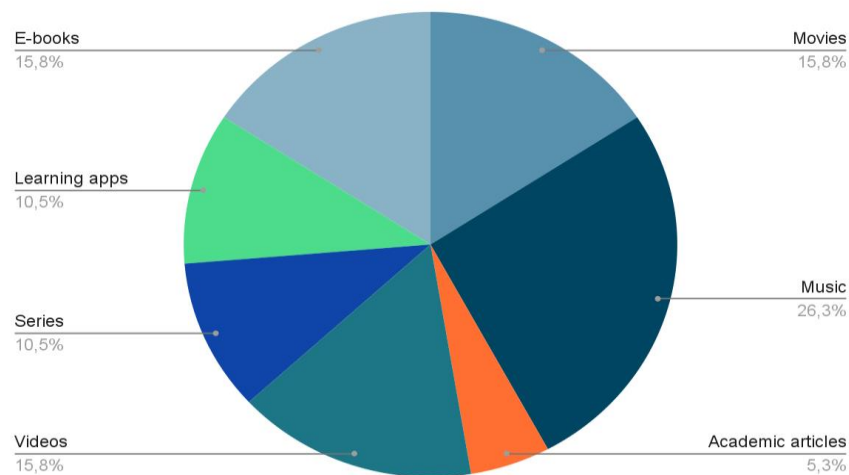
Participant 1	“Of course, it has been one of the most important factors for my autonomous learning. The need to understand 100% of the information that interests me.”
Participant 2	“Yes, there are some topics of my interest in which there is more information in English than in Spanish, so it is very useful.”
Participant 3	“Yes, it helps me to keep practicing in a "relaxed" way without having to keep an eye on my grade.”
Participant 4	“Yes, directly or indirectly learning and sharing about these topics has helped me to keep expanding my vocabulary and grammar.”
Participant 5	“Of course, I continue to develop and improve the way I communicate and to inquire more about the topics of my interest, because the more interest I have, the more I learn.”
Participant 6	“Yes, it has served me well that, by having a subject of interest the goal is not as such to learn English, but as a secondary gain.”

The apprentices who participated in this research coincided in being motivated by extrinsic motives. All the participants mentioned that their first contact with the language was through audio-visual material such as movies, music, series or books and that it was these events that motivated them to continue being in contact with the language, since they were linked to their interests.

Participant number three reports that in addition to feeling motivated to learn through the media, he does not feel pressured to get a good grade. Autonomous learners can self-manage the amount of time they practice and the manner in which they practice, unlike in a classroom where the teacher teaches the content, decides what materials will be used, and conducts assessments. Additionally, media is useful to keep students from giving up on the learning process. As pointed out by participant number five, the more interest he feels, the more he wants to

continue learning. These are tools that are available to them all the time, as we currently have contact with devices such as television, cell phone, radio and computer in domains such as the home, public places and at work.

The following chart indicates the means by which students had most frequent exposure to the language in the initial stage of their learning process. Students continue to use media to develop their language skills, although they have changed over time the presence of media in their learning process has always been existing, constant and significant for their motivation in their learning process.

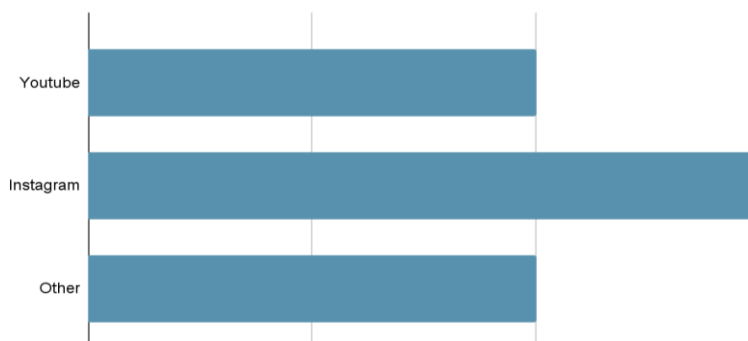


4.3 Language skills development through media

The results of the participants' survey indicated that they have a preference for consuming content in English through movies, series, E-books, videos, music, academic articles and language learning apps. As illustrated in the graph, individuals who participated in this study have had more contact with English mainly by listening to music and watching videos and movies in the target language. As a result of exposure to the language through these media the receptive skills of the participants (reading and listening) have been developed. This raises the question of whether only the participants' receptive skills are developed while their productive language skills are not enhanced to any extent.

Hence, for the purposes of the study, it was necessary to also analyze the way in which the students developed their productive language skills in an autonomous manner. The apprentices were asked about their interaction with other speakers of the language through social networks. Social media such as Instagram, Facebook, Tik Tok, Twitter, YouTube allow autonomous learners not only to view content in the language, but also to interact with other Internet users through comments. Some of the participants claim to use apps different to the ones mentioned above through which they can develop their productive language skills (speaking and writing), among them are <https://www.penpalworld.com/>, <https://www.tandem.net/es> and <https://twitter.com/?lang=es>.

The outcomes of this study indicate that autonomous learners use the Internet as a resource to find tools in social media to develop skills such as speaking and writing. Therefore, it is possible for autonomous language learners to use the media to complement their learning with activities that enable them to build their perceptive and productive capabilities in the target language.



Another question arises when talking about autonomous learning: how can students measure their level of language learning and ensure that they are making progress? For this reason, students were asked about the skills they have to communicate in the target language. It was also considered that through social networks they can interact with people from other nations where English is predominant. Participant 1 states the following: “I speak with native speakers, write business emails, and understand scientific articles almost completely.” The use of social networking is helpful for independent English learners to interact with other English learners or speakers of English in a comfortable way and to develop self-confidence in feeling that they are understood or that they are able to understand others.

5. Conclusion

The media have been part of the daily lives of individuals for several generations, which has had a direct or indirect impact on their lives. In the case of the participants in this study it influenced their second language learning process starting with incidental events and then transforming into a conscious autonomous learning process, in which the learners used the media as the main support tool.

Autonomous learning involves many questions regarding whether it is possible to achieve proficiency in all language skills. Through this study it was proven that autonomous learners have the ability to develop these skills using various media and social networks. It was found that they even seek apps that are focused on learning English as a resource to measure their level of learning and continue learning.

It was also observed that self-management in autonomous students allows them to feel the freedom to learn in contexts in which they do not feel pressured to get a grade or meet a class schedule, which allows them to be more relaxed when learning and even to do so through activities that are everyday occurrences, such as watching television, listening to music or reading.

While the media serves as a means for recreational activities, it should not be underestimated as a tool for learning to develop new skills, such as speaking a second language. All of the study participants claim to have enjoyed their learning process from the beginning and to be satisfied with their language skills.

This study is not intended to discourage language learning in the classroom, but to encourage both teachers and people who do not have access to private language classes not to discard the media as a useful means for learning and to make them aware that there are tools at our disposal that allow us to develop our skills on a daily basis if we look for what can be most useful to us.

As English teachers, I believe that there are tools in the context in which our students live that we can use to motivate them to learn the language through elements that are of interest to them.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - [Google forms survey](#)

Appendix 2 - [Google forms survey responses](#)

Appendix 3 - [Signed consent letters of the participants](#)

