

Chapter 9

Social Media Support and the Need of Counselling From Experts in Autonomous Language Learning: Challenges and Strategies for the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Autonomous language learning is a hot topic in the scientific community as the omnipresence of ICT has increased its importance since the '90s. This chapter discusses the role of social media to increase learners' autonomy in 21st century society, and how it problematizes the situations in which learners are completely autonomous (e.g., language learning through free-access websites). The autonomous learner needs to develop certain skills connected to digital competence, learning how to learn, motivation, responsibility, and perseverance. For this purpose, a SWOT analysis has been carried out to help the authors clarify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, which derived from ICT, impact on language learners' autonomy. In this light, the research project PRY 208/17 aims at fostering autonomous language learning by using technology. The initial results bore out that specific abilities on autonomous learning, and personality traits benefit highly from language expert counselling and coaching, which have proved to improve the results.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of digital technologies has transformed autonomous language learning, and nowadays there are umpteen online resources and spaces with an enormous potential for learning. Practices and methodologies are continuously evolving with the emergence of social media and instant communications in a firmly interconnected, multilingual, intercultural and social World Wide Web. For learners, the use of educational technology is a factor that fosters their motivation, especially as it enhances autonomous learning, interaction and collaboration, and it may easily accommodate multiple learning styles.

Current online resources and spaces are multimodal, multilingual and multipurpose, which entails an almost unmanageable choice (Stockwell, 2012) for the learners. In this context, autonomous language learners need a series of new skills to use the online resources that fit best with their needs, in terms of either level or skill. Among these skills, the importance of digital competence, learning how to learn, motivation, responsibility and perseverance are undeniable. Nevertheless, the transformation of these online resources into usable and useful language learning spaces is not an easy task, especially when learners are completely autonomous (e.g. language learning through free-access websites).

This paper addresses the role of social media to increase learners' autonomy in 21st century society, and how it problematizes the situations in which learners are completely autonomous. For this purpose, and after a review of the literature on language learning methodologies, learner autonomy and their relation to digital competence, special attention is paid to analyze language expert counselling and coaching in this autonomous process. This is the main goal of *LinguApp: Ensuring Universal and Inclusive Access to Second Language Learning*, a research project granted by the Centro de Estudios Andaluces (PRY 208/17), whose initial results bore out that autonomous language learners can actually improve their results by using digital resources when they can benefit from expert counselling and coaching.

BACKGROUND

Language Learning Methodologies, Styles and Strategies in the 21st Century

Learning a language is basically learning to communicate with people from different linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds. It is widely accepted that effective language acquisition must be based and focused on the communicative approach, so that the main aim of language learning should deal with the ability to express oneself and exchange ideas in a target language (different from the main language/mother tongue) in real situations (Widdowson, 1978; Brown, 1987; Yang & Chen, 2007). It is not always easy, however, to access real situations where the target language is used naturally. In this light, the arrival of technology, and more specifically of the Internet, to education resulted in a change of paradigm in language teaching and learning methodologies (Ganderton, 1998; Lee, 2000; Román, 2002).

In this context, it is necessary to address Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), which Beatty (2003, p. 7) defines as "any progress in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language." Since CALL was coined by Davies and Steel in 1981, different terms have appeared in the literature of applications of technology in education, including Computer-Aided Instruction (CAI), Computer-Assisted Learning (CAL), Computer-Assisted Language Instruction (CALI), Computer-Assisted Language Teaching (CALT), and Computer-Based Training (CBT), among others.

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