Effectiveness of the Integration of ICT Tools and Activities to Foster Awareness at UNICA's First Level of English as the First Stage to Reach Learning Autonomy

Andrea Ariza

Mario A. Suárez

Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana ÚNICA

Abstract

The present dialectic action research study reports on a pedagogical intervention in the attempt of integrating activities within two core subjects during one academic semester at UNICA with first semester students. The students were guided through deciding and having independent language practice as well as developing metacognitive processes. They were expected to actively engage in developing their awareness which is considered to be key to self-regulated learning as the basis for autonomous attitudes and behaviors. Data was gathered through students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the activities, reflections and students performances in their English Class. The outcomes reveal that integrating the use of metacognitive control strategies, independent activities which are enhanced by the use of technology ICT, within the context of language learning for beginners, has a positive impact on students' performances. It does not only contribute to the development of student's language proficiency, but also provides them with insights of themselves as learners, and so at the same time can be transferred to other situations of their academic life and are key to lifelong learning. The approach undertaken during this experience is shown to enhance student understanding in a way consistent with sociocultural theories of learning.

Keywords: metacognition, awareness, ICT tools, linguistic proficiency

Introduction

When reflecting on and designing the syllabus for a language course at a bilingual education program, there are two issues at stake where the teacher is clearly struggling in the middle. On the one hand, the faculty vision that indicates that the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) (Echevarria, Vogt & Short 2008) is key to enhance the learning experience of its students and the commitment of the Language Department to model SIOP sessions for the students at all times, so later on they can analyze and put it into practice because both instruction and experience in using SIOP are milestones in their professional profile. This entails a demanding endeavor to take the whole group and help them meet the expectations and requirements of the program. In addition, both the faculty and the teaching method make a strong emphasis on fostering learning strategies in order to successfully cope with the academic challenges that are set along the program in the first case, and the tasks that are proposed in the lessons in the latter.

On the other hand, it is clear that the faculty needs to take into account the learner at the other end. Experience suggests that addressing individual learning processes and concrete issues in them help to trigger students' performance and thus their own action taking with respect to their attitudinal, behavioral, and motivational concerns. The teacher's experience and commitment is to address students' particular learning experiences and engage them favorably in the enterprise of meeting, as stated above, the faculty expectations.

The experience of observing students final preparation stages where they take facultative courses on pedagogy with SIOP and carry out their teaching practicum also shed important light on the reasons behind undertaking this research. The first experience indicated that students were skillful and thoughtful with respect to the principles behind SIOP and the way they are reflected in actual teaching. These courses are aimed at providing students with the opportunity to reflect on the impact of SIOP in school science courses as they observe, carry out, and assess micro-teaching sessions so they feel more comfortable fulfilling the requirements of their practicum later on. This micro-teaching experience allowed important concerns to emerge, namely, students struggled to elaborate on their linguistic objective as lessons took place, and linguistic proficiency issues were identified and discussed as feedback was provided. The first one indicated that at some points, it was evidenced that the lesson delivery to accomplish the linguistic objective was likely to be cumbersome for some as explanations were not entirely clear or appropriate for the students who were envisioned at the moment of lesson planning. Even though this may be attributed to a normal students lack of experience and the nervousness entailed, it also indicated there was little reflection on their behalf when acquiring linguistic competence in the English language; that is, an approach to what was affected each lesson, not only in terms of communicative or linguistic skills but also in terms of how the session has an effect on their perception of progress. The second one is pertaining their own competence at the time, where some of the lesson feedback was aimed at having students pay close attention to their use of English and the extent to which it became a barrier to get their ideas across when delivering. As they had to prepare for their new micro-teaching

experience, it was necessary to spend extra time offering assistance on various concrete linguistic points to help students be more accurate on pronunciation and grammar most of the times.

Furthermore, and later on when students have to face their practicum experience, we have noticed that reflecting on their performance comprises both formal and informal activities that transform their service experience into contextualized learning; it means that regular reflection on both components is central to achieving academic goals of higher education.

UNICA envisions autonomy as an important corner stone that deserves a great deal of attention throughout the curriculum diagram. It is reflected in the professors' teaching practices and in the nature of the courses that are offered. Consistent with the liberal arts education, deeply rooted in the institution's mission, UNICA is concerned about offering a wide and active understanding of knowledge, and any dynamics that help students examine, structure, judge, create, and transfer different informations will be fostered so the whole learning experience is enhanced. This way, the socialization of particular impressions, thoughts, beliefs, behaviors, and expectations about learning will enrich their experience in the program.

If students begin at early levels to develop habits of reflection and awareness regarding their learning process, it is believed that they will become more effective and reflective teachers with lesson planning and delivering. Planning requires future teachers to think of the class itself and their role in it. Furthermore, it is possible to acknowledge the student teachers' confidence and mastery of the language when delivering it.

Once students acknowledge the importance of autonomous actions and thinking, it is possible for students to transfer the skills and/or routines into the experience of taking content courses and the challenges they pose. In addition, their teaching practices will also reflect that autonomy so their own students benefit from such high levels of awareness. Therefore, not only UNICA's curriculum but the schools where they work will be affected by these behaviors.

Area of Focus

The following action research study is an interdisciplinary approach towards fostering the development of autonomy of first semester students at UNICA. In working with English students inside and outside the classroom the research team hopes to illuminate the process whereby raising awareness with the aid of self-monitoring practices aimed at improving their linguistic competence following the descriptor presented in the CEF. In other words, the team would like to identify how effective the integration of ICT tools and activities to foster students autonomous attitudes and behavior is at UNICA's first level of English for the development of awareness as the first stage towards reaching learning autonomy, and in this way, examine the applicability of awareness training using technology in order to help students develop their linguistic competence

Specific Objectives

While conducting the collection of data, the team is concerned about distinguishing the impact of the multidisciplinary approach designed for the project; specifically, the extent to which metacognition and technology affect students' level of awareness and English

learning process. In other words, the aims are also to identify which activities to foster awareness have a more positive impact on students' attainment of awareness, and at the same time, and which ICT routines have a more positive impact on students' attainment of language improvement.

Research Questions

There were three questions that were created in order to start the design of this multidisciplinary experience. They were critical in the selection of the instruments and the development of the data collection stages. At the end, it was decided to leave the following as the main one:

- How effective is the integration of ICT tools and activities to foster students' autonomous attitudes and behavior at UNICA's first level of English for the development of awareness as the first stage towards reaching learning autonomy?

The other two questions were regarded as secondary for the purposes of this experience; however, it was clear that they were really helpful to understand the extent to which this project could affect the nature of the classes and activities, and the dynamics amongst participants. The questions are the following:

1. Which activities to foster awareness have a more positive impact on students' attainment of awareness?
2. Which ICT routines have a more positive impact on students' attain for language improvement?

Theoretical Framework

The following section is divided in two parts. The first one accounts for the approaches to defining autonomy that best suit the purposes of this project, what metacognition represents and entails, and what technology represents in light of this research exercise; and on the other hand, the latter will offer a brief report on the recent research that addresses the core issues that this project is aimed at, namely, metacognition, autonomy, English learning, and technology.

The principles that ground this study are framed within what results of integrating constructivists and sociocultural learning theories. We have learned from constructivists theories that students actively build knowledge based on the relationship of previous knowledge and ongoing experience. " And to promote knowledge construction about learning, instructors need to (a) engage students in meaningful work, (b) surface student's existing knowledge and beliefs, (c) engage students in interactive discussions about learning processes, and (d) ask students to articulate revised and /or emerging understandings based on new experiences" (Butler, 2002). On the other hand, regarding the sociocultural theories, Vygotsky (1978) argued that children learn about meaning and social interpretations related to objects and social experiences by interacting with adults, for instance parents or teachers. Spoken and written language mediate between the situations they experience and what they mean. This is considered to be a social construction of meaning and represents a foundational concept in this theory. Besides this learning about meaning, its processing and internalization will allow children later on to start giving themselves instructions (that up until that moment came exclusively from adults) to guide their behavior. In other words,

and continuing with Vygotsky's insights as interpreted by Winsler and Naglieri (2003) this phenomenon is closely related to the evolution from an independent functioning to a coexisting that language and thought go through in small children; that is to say, what starts as *social speech* changes to *personal speech* and transforms lately into *inner speech*.

According to Vygotsky, human behavior is affected by culture, the context in which personal development takes place. In this sense, the cultural group provides cultural tools, both technical and psychological, that help children make sense of what they experience. One of the most important cultural tools is language, which can be used by children to undertake mental functions, such as regulating behavior, solving problems, and understanding surroundings. When children speak to themselves, language gives them the chance to reflect upon their own thoughts, and, according to Vygotsky (1978) this integration of language and action is the most important moment along their intellectual development.

What has been mentioned above lead us to say that to Vygotsky cognitive development derives from action. Action understood in the context of human and cultural communication and performed by using physical instruments that enhance performance and mental instruments that enhance understanding.

Another fundamental concept within Vygotskian thought is the one stemmed from the metaphor of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).To address this first, we have to refer to the interpretation we have on the relationship between the concepts of learning and development : development occurs when what one individual has

learned is internalized and becomes part of his/her identity , this occurs when what a student can do by himself and he can do with somebody's help interrelate. This idea is key to understand real and symbolic potentiality of interaction between teachers and students and students among themselves. There is a big difference between the tasks a student can accomplish by himself and the ones he can accomplish if somebody with more expertise participates. It means that the basis of cognitive development is social cooperation. Given this view, learning is necessary for development as one student has to become capable of performing a given part of an activity in order to latterly enact the whole for himself. At the same time, following Vygotsky (1978) development is stimulated by learning since learning occurs within the broad context of an activity whose different stages are internalized through students' meaningful participation (p.90).

Furthermore, It is acknowledged that what occurs when forms that were originally social become part of the student's background is also a source of metacognitive development.

In order to apply the above mentioned theory, it is mandatory for teachers to provide students with challenging tasks to accomplish which at the beginning of the process will require scaffolding and assistance so that students can move into their Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky's ideas tell us that during the process of completing tasks in well-structured learning conditions and explaining how and why they know , we will be able to observe significant cognitive changes in pupils.

Autonomy and Autonomous Learning

Although it can be said that the 'psychological type of learner autonomy, as defined by Benson (1997), can be related to this research project since it understands autonomy as a capacity "-a construct of attitudes and abilities – that allows learners to take more responsibility for their own learning;" this concept is believed to carry a broader meaning because it entails a wide range of individual and social dimensions of the learners, as it includes the ability to reflect on identifying one's desires, setting ends and plans, participating in groups, and thinking critically.

For the purpose of this study Little's (1991) definition of Learner Autonomy, as the "capacity students have for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action vis-a-vis their learning process" will be adopted . It means that students who are allowed to set their own learning goals and analyze their own progress are on the path to become autonomous once they objectively see the nature of their performance, foresee properly the challenges they need to face, and characterize the means and steps to take to continue succeeding. In this sense autonomous learning is the means as well as the as the aim for the development of learner autonomy .

Another attempt to define Learner autonomy that is worth considering here is provided by Dickinson (1987, p 106). Here, four issues are addressed considering the instructional framework; namely, the independence provided to students in order to determine her/his own learning goals, the path to achieve the goal, the learning pace, and the measurement of success. In the light of this research the first one depicts students taking control (Benson 2001) of the learning circumstances in which s/he is in

regarding both interests and needs. Then, this control taking supposes a student who acknowledges the how in the learning process path to success; and that involves not only the use of the tools at hand but also the mechanics and strategies behind their effective implementation. This also entails the envisioning of appropriate and insightful accounts for the experience that takes place at every step.

Metacognition and Self-Awareness

Although the term metacognition has been given different assertions by different authors, most of them agree on approaching three core aspects, namely knowledge about knowledge, knowledge on how we are thinking at the moment, and control over our thinking (Kilpatrick 1985). Metacognition, as defined by John Flavell (1976), is "one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them." In this sense, the metacognitive process takes place as the thinking processes occurs; this means, the mind becomes aware of itself. It refers to the processes that allow people to realize what they know and how they know it, that is to say , the acknowledgment of the learning process. In other words, metacognition refers to learners' views and beliefs about learning as well as to the active regulation of their learning process**.** Metacognition has to do with students' awareness of their own cognitive processes, and the regulation of these processes in order to reach a specific goal and so that reasonable assessment can be made about present and future performance.

John Flavell, (1993) the first who used the term, divided metacognitive knowledge into three variables: person variables, task variables and strategy variables .Person

variables as one is able to recognize his own strengths and weaknesses and the effort needed to accomplish certain tasks ; tasks variables when we understand the nature of the task and what it entails and strategy variables when we have acquired and can, at the right moment, use or adapt the required strategies to solve certain problem .

Activities such as planning, setting goals , thinking about and describe procedures, monitoring and controlling performances, solving problems, monitoring and assessing our own thought processes and decisions are metacognitive in nature and are considered to be part of the ones used to help students reach high-order thinking skills. These skills are thought to be general in their utility and relatively age independent which help students become self-regulated learners and in the long run, critical thinkers.

It is assumed that there is a close relationship between metacognition, self-awareness and self-regulation as metacognition seems to imply conscious control of how we deal with information and how we take flexible control in taking the perspective of others or of oneself in specific circumstances . Self-awareness as defined by the Oxford dictionary is conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives, and desires: it means we have knowledge or realization about ourselves, recognition of something about ourselves and our surroundings. Following the sociocultural learning theories the concept is addressed by means of what is beneath the operations and actions we undertake; the operations deal with contextual conditions that underlie a task and the actions are believed to be directed by an individual's objectives. After an action has been internalized it works as an automatic operation unless the individual realizes that challenges are present, if that happens the individual will shift to

functioning at a “goal directed action level”. It means that when individuals are presented with a task and have routinized the process to accomplish it , they perform it automatically - naturally , and it tis just when a problem arises that they go back to find the ways to solve the problem. Vygotsky (1978) argued that a similar shift occurs during learner’s transition from external to inner speech, egocentric speech increases when students encounter difficulties and that egocentric speech is a manifestation of becoming aware, Zimmerman (1989). In this sense the essential process in self-regulating is egocentric speech formerly acquired from interaction with adults, in this case ,teachers as it has a self -regulating function. What has been stated above suggests that teachers should engage students in demanding activities and promote self-evaluation and self-monitoring to “know themselves” as learners.so that academic development will actually happen.

More specifically, in the area of Language teaching and learning, it is believed and research has shown that the teaching and use of metacognitive strategies that focus in learners awareness on the learning process helps to the improvement of students’ language skills, Nakatani (2005).

Reflections.

We understand the concept of reflection based on the notion of ‘Self-Regulated Learning’ proposed by Zimmerman (1989). Self-regulated learning is defined in terms of a process in which students are considered to be “proactive” and whose actions are drawn from self-determined thoughts rather than from teacher instruction. Later on, McCaslin (1989) elaborated on the concept from a Vygotskian perspective. She calls

Comentario [1]: mariosuarezsanchez: Reference

her conception '*Adaptive Learning'* in the sense that students have to cope with frustration or success to maintain their intention to learn, assuming that a learning event is always related to former experience and to what students do; that is to say, decisions students make in the present are connected to previous and ongoing interpersonal experiences.

Furthermore, the necessary abilities to cope with different situations ,and the belief personal capacity and the ability to self-regulate ourselves are mainly derived from experiences and can be improved with training .It is believed that students frequently think about themselves and their performances , they measure their actions by means of the results they obtain ;and according to Bandura (1997) the most important of all of them is the judgment people make on their own capacity to accomplish certain activities.

in this sense, when students go through the process of self-reflection, they are also going through a process of self-evaluation in which they explain the causes of failure or success and relate them to their beliefs, personal traits, and social background. They are expected to react in a positive way that entails *'Adaptive Reactions'* (Zimmerman) 2000 that denote appropriate modifications in their actions with the aim of feeling self-fulfillment as language learners. This way, the self-reflection process turns out to be cyclical, so once students have evaluated their performances, they establish new goals and new performances to attain them, or they just simply keep the ones they consider suitable.

This means that what we wanted students to do during their reflections was to account for their inner speech explaining first the objectives they had in mind, the steps they undertook, and the reasons why they accomplished or omitted certain actions. We expected them to go beyond the intrapersonal speech discourse to integrate their personal and academic experiences in their language, and make connections between the subjects they are studying, the academic language, learning strategies and concepts studied in both classes.

Technology

Technology is intended to help individuals interrelate with their environment and accomplish a wide range of tasks. The computer, in the context of teaching and learning, has played a critical role not only in the development of linguistic skills but in other fields affecting learning like autonomy. Beatty (2010) indicated that Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has made room for students to both work on their own and direct their learning; however, it fails to widen their opportunities to personalize materials or activities to fit their needs. This task appears to fall on the teacher, who is according to (Chapelle 2003), required to indicate how learners, teaching practices, and education are amplified and constrained by technology and the activities intended to make use of it. Authors coincide in the idea that it is through a clear establishing of both objectives and skills to be addressed in these activities that CALL tools can make a difference in the learning of English since their “empowering and limiting features” will come to surface (Levy & Stockwell 2006). This is also linked to another determining factor in a successful implementation of technology for learning, namely, the teacher’s

clear understanding of the wide range of alternatives that CALL displays to allow students focus on achieving the objectives rather than the tool.

For the purposes of this research, however, it is probably more important to point out that CALL also seems to demand more responsibility on behalf of the students. Beetham and Oliver (2010) talk about a new paradigm where the management of digital forms of information require everyone "to be independent, self-motivated and self-evaluating, … (and) learning for life is no longer a policy buzzword but a requirement," and this should be seen as a phenomenon that is co-existing in the social, cultural, and educational spheres of the individuals. Educational institutions are being confronted by the learners' interest in the massive availability of resources provided by open content creators and online networks, and at the same time, there is an increasing need on behalf of learners to reflect on their practices and their management of technologies and sources; nevertheless, both institutions and learners fail to account for the latter's ability to cope with information. The role of the teacher is then critical in order to offer accompaniment, specifically, provide them with enough support, preparation, and adjustment to guarantee the challenge can be taken. According to Hubbard (in Levy & Stockwell 2006) this implies being aware of what is to be done, the reason behind it, and how to make it happen (p. 194).

In relation to how important clarity on the definition of the objectives is when dealing with tasks, Beatty (2010) has also indicated that currently CALL poses a 'central' pedagogical concern in the excessive amount of available materials to explore before students complete them. This requires then to keep a balance to avoid losing focus or, more importantly, motivation to engage in the tasks and their technological component.

Even though this concern was introduced while discussing group dynamics in technology-enhanced tasks, the same observation can be made to highlight how delicate motivation can be for the student, and how important it is for teachers to make technological materials play in their favor in order to foster engagement, as they result an effective way to address students' particular needs while they offer valuable support to meet the curricular requirements. Materials and the selection of materials, in other words, help to enhance the student's individual learning experience and the institution's expectations on the language program and the course (Dudeney & Hockly 2007).

The impact of having clear objectives and well defined activities and materials is evident when output is to be addressed and assessed. Swain & Lapkin (in Chapelle 2003) emphasize the importance of awareness underlying the presentation of input as it is an opportunity for the learners to look for an upgrade in their performance. Again, accuracy and enhancement, according to Pelletieri (in Chapelle 2003), in the linguistic competence are favored by structured tasks where information is encouraged to be both produced and reflected upon.

In brief, it is possible to claim that this research is consistent with Rubin's (1975) vision of a good learner, that is, "one who sets his or her own direction and takes responsibility for his or her own learning;" while at the same time calling for developing metacognitive skills oriented to addressing progress, both tracking and assessing, and identifying styles for learning. On the other hand, the role CALL plays is to allow students to engage in the exploration of the plethora of resources that are available on the Internet and thus, multiply and maximize the alternatives to identify an appropriate use of web tools taking into account their learning styles and preferences, and if there is

appropriate training and engagement, it will also help to construct effective, solid, and consistent study habits.

Literature Review

When brainstorming about the key issues this research is concerned about, it is necessary to call attention on autonomy, metacognition, awareness, English learning, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and the relevant recent research addressing one or more of them. With this idea in mind, the research carried out by King (2011) on self-directed learning and metacognition through guided tasks and learner reflection, Chuck (2003) and Nakatani (2005) on metacognition and awareness, Dafei (2007) on autonomy and proficiency in English, Kurek (2002) on ESL college course designing taking into account proficiency in English and technology, Healey (2002) on CALL and a view of Individualized Directed Learning, and Gonzalez and St. Louis (2008) on the creation of online course and autonomy, helped to refine the preparation and direction of this research experience. The following is a brief account of what they accomplished to find out in their field.

Research on self-access centers has provided a great deal of data regarding experiences with autonomous practices. King (2011) accounts for the use of portfolios to collect students' outcomes and reflections during a set of pre-designed tasks to be carried out independently in a self-access center over a period of fourteen weeks. The research first collected students' perception of their learning needs and attitudes in front of working independently outside the classroom. Then, after each task, they were prompted to answer some questions directed towards reflecting on the activity and once

again on their needs. All the seventeen students who voluntarily accepted to participate responded positively to the experience. In fact, King dares to indicate that the “portfolio project appeared to have a positive impact on both the attitudes that learners held and on the behavior in which the learners engaged regarding language learning beyond the classroom” (p 265); actually, they all stated they would continue working independently.

During the inaugural conference of the Independent Learning Association, Chuk (2003) socialized a research project on metacognition carried out through exploratory practice focusing on a group of EFL students of diploma one drama at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. Lessons were adapted and designed with the aim of encouraging conscious reflection on learning so metacognitive awareness was raised through group discussions, oral presentations, diary writing, and other common activities that helped to explicitly address in an ongoing basis three areas of metacognitive awareness; namely, learning process awareness, social awareness, and subject matter awareness. She evaluated her students engagement following Sinclair’s (in Chuk 2003) framework to measure and characterize awareness and positive evidence at different levels was obtained. Even though Chuk made it clear there was a concern about the possible effect of ‘pleasing the teacher, she also claimed it was minimized with the time devoted in class to overtly discuss the learning and reflecting experience with students.

In 2007, a research that explored the relation between learner autonomy and proficiency in the English language (Dafei, 2007) indicated that after analyzing proficiency tests, questionnaires, and interviews administered to 129 students at a teacher college in China, it was possible to acknowledge a linear correlation between students autonomy and proficiency when the latter does not evidence a significant

difference. This research highlights the need to regard autonomy as a key factor when accounting for effective language learning as many scholars have advocated for (Benson & Voller, 1997), (Cotterall, 1995), (Dickinson, 1987), (Little, 1991). Dafei found out that the more autonomous a learners becomes, the more likely s/he achieves high language proficiency; in addition, these findings were consistent with the teachers perception about high-proficient students who “had a strong awareness of self-planning, self-management, self-monitoring and self-evaluation” in contrast with the low-proficient students who were “less confident, passively involved in the classroom activities and lacked control over learning.”

Benson (2000) distinguishes the relevance of lifelong learning and the role autonomy plays there in order to cope with the changing needs of the new century and the global economy and changing needs it poses. In the same way, Kurek (2002) aims the design of a linguistically-oriented syllabus in an ESL college setting with and the enhancement of technology at providing its students with the proficiency in English while there is a development of the autonomy and the literacies required in an information-driven environment of the 21st Century. Her ‘Web Project’ course focuses on locating and evaluating information rather than declaring it, developing and making use of critical thinking skills, and fostering multiliteracies that comprise functional, academic, and electronic skills. It offers a language learning experience framed in tasks that progressively inquire about current technology and learning issues. Kurek proved that “infusing technology in the classroom may significantly contribute to the growth in learners' motivation, autonomy and thinking skills.”

Healey (2002) designed a course called Individualized Directed Learning with the aid of computers, videos, books, assistants, and speaking groups offered at the English Language Institute Learning Center at the Oregon State University. She wanted “to find ways to make self-study more effective -or at least help learners stick with it long enough to show some benefit” taking into consideration Rubin’s (1979) view of the good learner. She concluded that even though technology is not a solution on its own, it does provide a great deal of resources and potential in order to create a good autonomous learning environment considering the need to constantly adjust to address learners’ needs.

In 2008, Gonzalez and St. Louis described their experience in promoting learner autonomy with the use of web 2.0 tools at the Simon Bolivar University in Caracas, Venezuela in the creation of online courses. They addressed the four skills of the language by means of wikis, blogs, forums, chats, podcasts, videos, webcasts, screencasts, among other authentic resources and activities that allowed them to enhance student-centeredness, accessibility, and flexibility in the learning experience. Students gave evidence of decision making, self-esteem growth, satisfaction, and achievement after years of implementation.

Continuing with the research on the relation between C.A.L.L. and learner autonomy, Jones (2001) takes a step beyond when he highlights the key role played by the teacher in the fostering of autonomous behavior on behalf of the student. Even though many scholars identify the need of training to elicit a change of attitude on the learner (Scharle & Szabo 2000), he claims that apart from setting the assignment, the teacher’s responsibility behind achieving success in a CALL project is not regarded “as an

important consideration;" acknowledging at the same time that an inclination on the teacher may compromise learner autonomy. He goes on to depict four major constraints on the using of CALL to promote autonomy; namely, the lack of technical competence, interest, disinclination to be autonomous, and poor interaction on the side of the learner, and the way it is key that there is a 'CALL pedagogy' training for the teacher aimed at anticipating learners needs and creating a comfortable and open experience for them to reach the objectives set.

Additionally and related to what has been mentioned before, it has been stated that combining cognitive and appropriate training on using metacognitive strategies could contribute to improve students' strategic thinking, (Nakatani, 2005) as we believe that meta-cognitive processes belong to high order executive-thinking processes.

Among meta cognitive processes reflection is considered to be crucial; Bringle and Hatcher (1999) explain that effective reflection activities link experience to learning objectives, are guided, occur regularly, allow feedback and assessment, and include the clarification of values. Since it requires direction and guidance from the instructor for the student to most benefit from their experience, students may acknowledge that reflection on academic courses will allow for the contextualization and connection between academic learning and practical experience.

There is a direct relationship between the learners' awareness process and the degree of linguistic competence they reach. Golonka (2005) described the experience American students had in a six-month immersion program in Russia in order to improve their performance in the Russian language. The study indicates that all students took

proficiency tests prior to embarking in the program and had a speaking proficiency level of *Intermediate High*; however, it was only those students who developed metalinguistic skills by implementing self-monitoring strategies at the level of correction and repair, the ones who actually were able to evidence a “gain” in their performance so they could be located in an *Advanced* level as they got better grammar scores, used more word types, made less mistakes, and made an important number of sentence repairs and self-corrections. The results also reveal that there is an important level of grammatical knowledge and control that is required in order to reach that Advanced level of proficiency as those students who evidenced them before the program seemed to improve their speaking skills during the immersion program. Golonka also concludes that “the more self-corrections and repairs that were used by the learner, the greater the gain he or she achieved” since it appears to be positive behavior of executive-thinking processes that should be looked for in language acquisition programs.

Research Design

Setting and Participants

As to the institution where the project took place, it was developed with the commitment to forming professionals in the area of bilingual education in order to help and improve the socioeconomic conditions of the community. The faculty focuses on a high school graduates who are not likely to access high quality education due to their socioeconomic background, so it enrolls students who mostly come from the public schools in Colombia. There is, in order to support the idea of making high-standard

education in Colombia accessible, an important endorsement coming from the private sector to make sure the faculty and its students keep the mission tangible.

The participants were a 13 group of students in first semester pursuing a BA in bilingual education at the Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana ÚNICA in Bogota, Colombia. However, almost everyone started in an introductory semester designed for students who lack enough linguistic proficiency in English to face the challenge of taking classes in English and succeed with all the requirements such endeavor entail. The Intro course is an intensive course of eighteen hours a week designed to help prepare for the challenge as it focuses on basic communication skills and vocabulary that are expected to take them to a consistent CEF A1 profile. Although grammar is also regarded as important, there is an exclusive focus on the three basic tenses to make room for extensive practice. The gaps and deficiencies noticed when they start taking English classes, evidence a lack of appropriate training in language learning strategies and study habits that do not seem to weigh on the idea of becoming a language teacher.

In relation to the project, it was already tried out for a year in the English I class before joining efforts and trying a multidisciplinary approach with the practice of autonomous learning program. Several reasons can be pointed out to support the change in direction. In the first attempt, it was noticed a poor understanding of the project in terms of identifying objectives of practice, creating and evaluating evidence, and more importantly, reflecting on the whole experience. Students acknowledged they lacked commitment and consistency, but some of them also confessed they did not see any relevance since the idea did not affect their grades. Later on, there were more sessions

devoted to eliciting the features of language objectives and outcomes in any language practice, and a small percentage of the grade was assigned to the exercise. Nevertheless, the students did not experience a supportive environment as they realized there was general feedback at instances in which particular necessities were needed to be addressed; for instance, when it came to revise outcomes or when new objectives of practice were attempted to be designed, students felt there was no consistent follow-up. This little consistency was most felt considering the time of the semester dedicated to the project due to the tight schedule that resulted to cope with the usual course objectives and contents. On the other hand, in the practice of autonomous learning class, there was a feeling of unconnectedness since students felt there was little relation to the program other than English, where most of the efforts were oriented. The class required them to think about an area they felt interested in and devote moments of their schedule to deepen their knowledge about it; at the same time, they sharpened their skills on different areas critical to their learning process, mainly managing time, characterizing themselves as learners, discussing their learning process and self-assessing it, and writing a reflection. However, being English their main concern, they ended up exploring and socializing their different interests around the language.

Regarding the impact of technology, it was decided to use Internet tools as a means to support students experience because of a course offered for first semesters called ‘Informática Educativa,’ which is intended to offer some training on basic IT skills. There, they learned about web browsing, online multimedia, flash and java applications, HTML editing, widgets, and basic web design in order to make use of technology to

personalize their learning processes, with a focus on their English one. This way, it was possible to count on students focusing on their necessities and objectives rather than the means to accomplish linguistic competence.

Research Methodology

Considering the dynamics that encompass this research project and its objectives, the selection of the study guidelines depicted in the action research resulted very handy as it regards problem solving and reflection as key factors to enhance the experience. Firstly, Mills (2007) defines it as a "systematic inquiry (…) to gather information about how schools operate, how they teach, and how well their students learn" (p. 5). The research team in the institution is concerned about carrying out projects with the aim of enlightening the scientific and teaching field in the country as it nurtures from its own experiences in the classroom.

Secondly, Cohen and Manion (in Rodriguez 2007) highlight that "action research takes into account situational, collaborative, participatory, and self-evaluative aspects" (p. 236), so it gives validity to the all the stages of the project, as described below in the pedagogical intervention section, that required the team to constantly observe students behaviors and attitudes in order to make decisions on the class activities and teaching practices to ensure the students got the most out of it. This view is also shared by Bell (in Rodriguez 2007) when she states that action research becomes "attractive to educators" due to its practicality in this regard (p. 237).

On the other hand, those aspects listed by Cohen and Manion also imply there is an important value given to self-observation in order to attain the objectives set for any

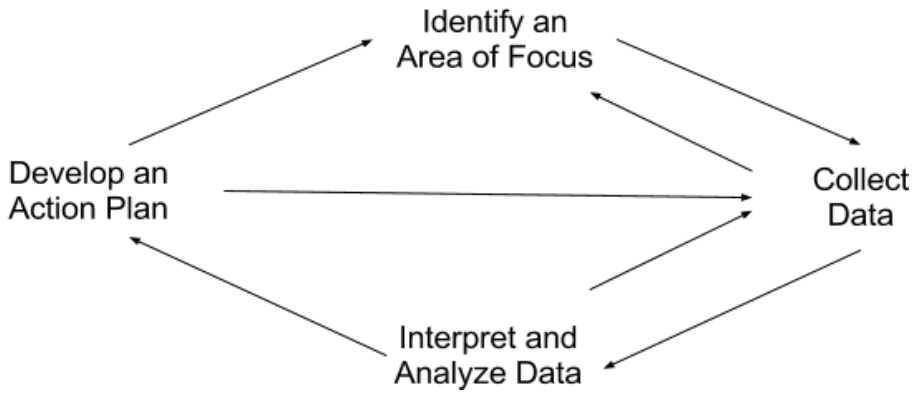

Figure 1. Diagram of the way the dialectic action research operates (Mills 2007).

research enterprise. Due to the fact it is deeply rooted in the dynamics established in the team, the encouragement to make a careful and structured reflection to air and discuss (Wallace 1998) the steps to take facilitated the smooth implementation of activities in the classes to gather more reliable and comprehensive data. In sum, as Mills (2007) puts it, the data are collected "with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effective positive changes in the school environment (and on educational practices in general), and improving student outcomes and the lives of those involved." Figure 1 explains more concretely the way the dialectic action research followed works.

Data Collection Instruments

When deciding on instruments that could enlighten the way to answer the research questions that were posed in the beginning of the project, and knowing about the necessity to get students insights about the experience, it became critical to think of surveys and field notes as two key and optimal sources of data, since they allowed to

get both the rigor and flexibility necessary to be as comprehensive as possible throughout the experience.

Two surveys were administered at different stages of the project. First, the institution designed a questionnaire type of survey format with open-ended questions in order to collect students' perception of the classes offered in the middle of the semester. The survey requires students to account for what they find useful, what they like best, and what they would like to suggest the instructor change about the course; an additional space is offered for students to include any other comments they find useful to share with the instructor about the experience. At the end of the process, students were asked to take another survey; this time, it was a semi-structured format designed to specifically address the multidisciplinary experience. It included questions about the nature and impact of the activities carried out, their linguistic skills in the language, and the perception about the use of technology and the experience as a whole.

As it was described above, students were asked to e-mail weekly files to collect all the evidence of their practice sessions as well as their impressions during and after them. As their skills were getting sharper, there was a growing of the evidence provided by students in the 'My thoughts' column that was described above as the semester went by. At the end, students were asked to write a reflection that condensed in a more elaborated way what the project meant for them. Finally, the nature of the class discussions that took place in the practice of autonomous learning class gave room to collect some informal field notes that attempted to gather students' comments and conclusions that may have resulted valuable for the purpose of the research project at the time.

Table 1

Correlation between the Research Questions and the Data- Collection Instruments

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	MATRIX	FIELD NOTES	MIDTERM SURVEY	FINAL SURVEY	REFLECTIONS
How effective is the integration of ICT tools and activities to foster students autonomous attitudes and behavior at UNICA's first level of English for the development of awareness as the first stage towards reaching learning autonomy?	X	X	X	X	X
Which activities to foster awareness have a more positive impact on students' attainment of awareness?	X	X	X	X	X
Which ICT routines have a more positive impact on students' attain for language improvement?	X	X	X	X	X

At the end, it was possible to find that all the instruments were equally important to shed light on how the process was going and more importantly, how to answer the questions devised. Table 1 below describes the correlation between them.

Pedagogical Intervention

This was a multidisciplinary project devised to be implemented in two separate environments where students were able to experience the connection and the aim of reflecting on their English learning process. First, students were introduced to the Common European Framework of Reference self-assessment grid (Council of Europe, n.d.) in the English I class in order to highlight the areas they both struggled with and became interested in. This also helped the group to acknowledge the purpose of the project and what it required them to do all along. At the same time, the reference website was introduced. The website Learning Environment (Suarez 2011) was created in Weebly with the objective of making room for all the dynamics taking place in the

project. Weebly offers a user-friendly interface and plenty of features to develop a reference site with all the support and information students may require all along. Students found a blog as well as other resources that could support the tasks they decided to undertake. The blog entries contain a short description of websites to study English with their respective forwarding links to visit them. To facilitate exploration and decision making, the entries were organized by tags that indicate the skill or the area of focus each of the websites has. On the other hand, during the weekly two hour Practice of Autonomous Learning class sessions students took part in activities aimed at helping them develop their sense of responsibility towards their learning process, specifically and following Scharle and Szabó's (2000) ideas on raising awareness as the first stage that should be undertaken to accomplish this purpose. The activities were directed to helping students discover more about themselves as learners, recognizing the individual strengths and weaknesses they bring to the learning process, and exploring some of the skills likely to lead them to succeed as English student teachers by supporting the use of learning strategies, mainly setting objectives, planning, self-evaluating, cooperating, understanding the hidden intentions of the tasks teachers propose as they made use of strategies they had already acquired on their own. One of the first activities was to provide instruction on how to personalize the descriptors and make them objectives of practice. Students then, were asked to select a website that would support their effort of accomplishing the objectives they set. In both classes, the need for students to acknowledge the importance of learning to observe one's performance was highlighted. It is worth mentioning that the fact that the students are undertaking a BA in bilingual education allowed to make this process a lot smoother since it was connected to their

future careers. There were sessions in which discussion and reflection were encouraged to address some document samples that illustrated the way the websites and the autonomous work project were connected. The samples were a series of routines that depict a way of both working on the websites and resources referenced and evaluating that work in two ways; by observing what can be done to put into practice the area that was addressed and by reflecting on how the work and the resources actually helped students to address their linguistic needs and interests. Since it was the first time students went through an experience like this, it was necessary to take into account what Scharle and Szabó (2000) indicate about fostering responsibility as a first stage to raise awareness. They point out that it is necessary for students to acknowledge that they can take control over their own learning, but initially it is more important to set a more structured and controlled range of activities because it is assumed that they are not very responsible (p. 9). As a parallel exercise, in the practice of autonomous class students were given instruction on how to write a reflection, they were asked to account for their inner speech explaining first the objectives they had in mind, the steps they undertook, and the reasons why they accomplished or omitted certain actions. They were expected to go beyond the intrapersonal speech discourse to integrate their personal and academic experiences in their language and make connections between the subjects they are studying, the academic language, learning strategies, and concepts studied in both classes.

In order to help them prepare for the reflection, that is to initiate students in their metacognitive process, the teacher asked students for ideas on how to unify criteria that would help them report what they had been doing during the individual sessions, so

students and teacher together decided on a format. The form was divided into four columns, on the first they had to state the learning objectives derived from the previous activity mentioned above; on the second, the description - step by step of what they had done during the week or two weeks when they intended to reach their objectives; on the third they had to show evidence or certain kind of outcome derived from their individual practice, and on the last they had to write their perceptions on the activity in a separate column called 'My thoughts.' Reporting what they had done in a systematic way was the first step to guide them through reflection. According to Kuhn and Dean (2004) encouraging students to reflect on and evaluate their activities is a way to promote metacognitive development.

Three weeks later there was a session specifically directed to talk about the process of reflecting. The teacher focused students attention on the formats they had handed in to start the discussion by asking them why they thought the "My thoughts" column was important with the purpose of guiding them to attempt defining what an academic reflection was. Then students were presented three different definitions for an academic reflection and they decided on the one provided by Moon (2001). Once they had made the decision, on the following session, students were provided with actual instruction and directions on how to write an academic reflection.

The students were also suggested to consider continuity rather than extensiveness when addressing their objectives in order to maximize the time they dedicated to using the websites and resources. Following Souza (2006), it is necessary to offer the brain opportunities to make sense of the new information and retain by creating moments for mass and distributed practice, the latter being "key to retention" (p. 99). Moreover, in

terms of the design behind the use of the websites and the practice itself, Souza (2006, p. 91) also states that effectivity is more likely to arrive when the time for practice is kept "short and, of course, meaningful." Consistently, the samples aforementioned suggest no more than 20 minutes of practice in order to make sure the down-time, that is the time during learning "when it is more difficult for retention to occur" (Souza, p. 89), is close to 10 percent of the time devoted to practice.

As it was mentioned above, a major component of students' independent work relied on the need to make sure there was something observable at the end of every moment of practice. The fact that the sequences of work suggested the need to take the new input to an external level where they could make use of it, or think about the sense of progress achieved, resulted a way to help students make the transition towards a more independent decision-making process. They were suggested for instance to create evidence of their work by creating sentences, paragraphs, summaries in both text or audio where it was possible for them to see the way they interpreted and made use of the information in a different and bigger context. As a parallel activity, it was also important for them to describe how comfortable the practice was everyday so they could acknowledge the extent to which they struggled dealing with the new input. For eight weeks, the group sent files on a weekly basis where this evidence was articulated, but during the last two weeks of the project, they used their own experience to come up with their own decisions regarding a new series of objectives, websites, resources, sequences of work, evidence, and reflection. In the meantime, suggestions were made to maximize their practice time to guarantee students acknowledged the range of activities they could have at hand and the way they could maximize their practice time in

relation to what they were interested in. It was thus an opportunity to notice how they had understood the process behind the project and the direction their English learning process can take.

Data Interpretation and Analysis

First of all, it is worth indicating the way the data is going to be approached and the nature of the impact the activities underlying the project had amongst students. The criteria used to assess the impact of the activities was mainly based on students preferences, students self-assessment, the sensation of progress derived from practicing the activities for ten weeks, and students performance during the English class, as well as the times in which they made explicit their understanding of the purpose of the activities and their willingness to continue using them or transferring them to other learning processes and beyond. On the other hand, the information gathered throughout this study unveils that the aforementioned activities have a positive impact on the students taking the first course of English at the faculty's bilingual education program. This impact can be seen in both operational and attitudinal aspects; operational in the sense of the practical actions they carried out and attitudinal as they guide their actions. In the following paragraphs, there is going to be detailed descriptions and support from students experience to evidence this two-folded experience.

Students acknowledge the importance of having routines and acquiring good habits as they benefit from them. The realization that with a more strict observation of their free-time activities it made it possible to achieve what they had in mind when setting

objectives became an achievement in itself. One student claims, “This work is based in your responsibility. The next time I want to be more commitment with my autonomous learning (..) I will be more demanding with myself.” When asked about what had been learned in the course, one student stated that the “different methods to study” was just as important as “grammar to improve my writing” or “to relax.” In sum, they not only develop their linguistic abilities, but there is also a transfer of the experience to their daily life.

Being able to manage their time resulted a critical factor evidenced in their reflections at the end of the process and probably the most important one for some of them; for instance, one students states that “I can improve every day if I practice; or if I effort myself, I’m going to continue have good results as now.” This may also be related to practical purposes: in one of the reflections, another one indicates that with the thinking about time to study English, “I had to leave some TV programs. It was hard but now I can see the reward, it is my knowledge and nobody can take it away from me.” This means that as students are mainly interested in improving their language proficiency, they also think they have to be organized with their time so they can look for different opportunities to practice; as one student puts it, in this experience “students use very well the time to study (so) I learn to take control of my time and take control of (my study).” Figure 2 lists those activities from the Practice of Autonomous Learning class that had a more positive impact amongst students.

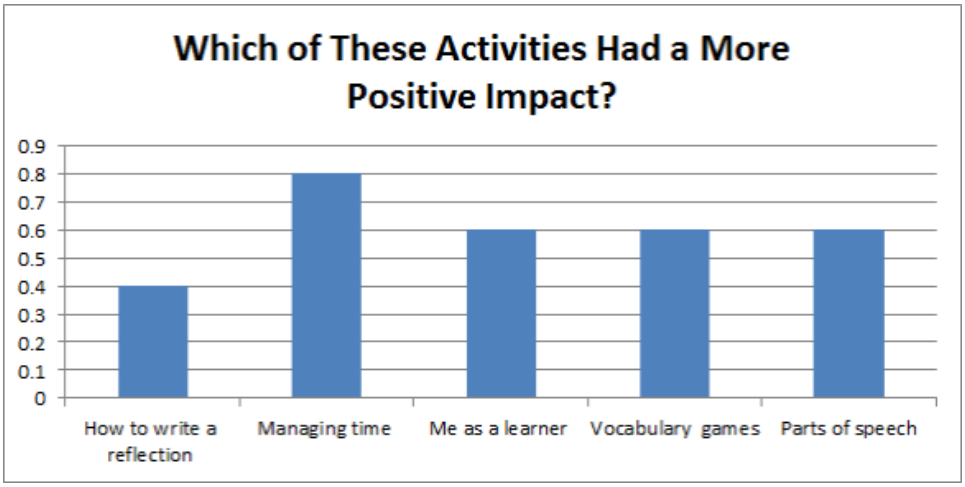

Figure 2. Activities from the Practice of Autonomous Learning class that had a more positive impact amongst students.

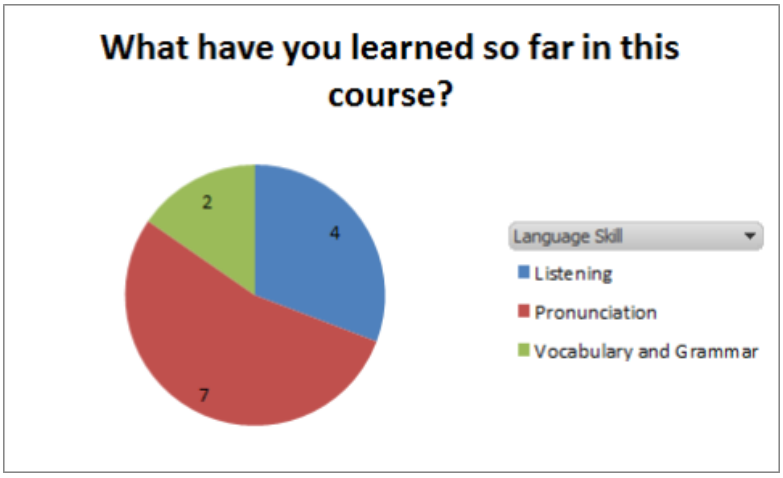

Figure 3. Linguistic variables that were regarded as valuable amongst students in the midterm feedback form for the English I class.

Although students were offered a variety of possibilities to choose from to practice their language skills, they leaned towards doing activities to improve their pronunciation and listening abilities; figure 3 describes what they have learned in the English I class in the

by the middle of the semester considering the work carried out in the development of their competences in the language. They think that if they can understand ideas and make themselves understood knowing when to use the vocabulary and expressions they have learned, there is a certain evidence of progress in their learning of a language. All in all students see their progress in terms of the completeness of their understanding and the effectiveness in expressing ideas, they are looking for accuracy. This becomes clear evidence of what has been established by Zimmerman in terms of the attributes of self-regulated learners. According to Zimmerman, self-regulated students can be identified by their awareness of performance outcomes and by their adjustment of their performance to changing conditions before getting feedback from their teacher (Zimmerman 1988).

Regarding the reflecting processes carried out by students, we find a discrepancy in students perceptions since they recognize reflecting is vital to help them focus, evaluate their learning process, and make decisions, but surprisingly less than the half of them considered instruction on how to write a reflection the most useful activity at the end of the project. Students think the ability to think about themselves is inherent to human beings and they take it for granted. This suggests that students were more interested in activities which could have a concrete and immediate application. It also suggests that teachers should think of, and implement, other ways to address this issue.

Students consider activities to promote linguistic awareness, such as vocabulary games, learning parts of the speech, prefixes, suffixes, and guessing meaning from context, very useful since they can “develop the ability to think faster”, look for different possibilities to convey meaning, play with the language, go beyond translation and fixed

structures, and see the language from a more realistic perspective; it is “learning vocabulary and some grammar and being able to communicate with other classmates, making yourself understood.” They acknowledge that knowing some specialized terms (linguistic) makes them more independent as they can look for information by themselves, know what to ask for, and even start approaching the language form a future teacher’s perspective. Evidence to this was the gradual acquisition and use of metalanguage by students. They used similar terms to the ones teachers used to refer to their activities or the aspects they had to improve. “I think that now I can differentiate between if a sentence is fused or splice.”

They also keep in view that being able to monitor their mistakes, self-assess, and have control over their actions, all of these metacognitive dynamics, help them to progress in their attainment of language proficiency and their learning process. One student indicates that the activities carried out allowed “Students (to) give feedback on the new topics. You think of your mistakes, or mistakes others have, because you can have the control of the learning and the speed with which” progress is seen. What is more, they ponder how they can make use of these skills in other scenarios. For instance, one student said “I think that I’m going to continue work in those skills in my vacations because I want to prove if I can work autonomously without any teacher in the two months that we have;” while another one, when being asked about the possibility of continuing working in this way, s/he wondered if the use of these dynamics in other courses (including English) could bring the same “unimprovable results, well then welcome this method to the other courses.”

It is worth mentioning that when asked about what they had learned from the experience the participants in this study made explicit that they have given a lot of value to making an effort and being responsible and consistent as they want to achieve the desired results. At the end of the process one student stated the following: “I have to say that there were cases where the exercises were difficult, but I also have to say that those were the exercise more useful and interesting for me.” Another one student highlights for instance, “My process have been very productive. I can speak more naturally.” Although this might seem obvious to some adults and almost every teacher that effort pays off, the majority of them (being 16 to 20 years old) asserted that they are aware of the connection between effort, consistency, and achievement. After asking about what was learned aside from English during the project, one student indicated that independent work was necessary to improve any skill; actually, that commitment was necessary to see good results. Another one concludes the following: “I realize how important is to be focused and motivated...and practice -but real practice- because when you talk you say that to learn a language you need to practice. You really have to do it.” Furthermore, they claim that during this experience they have started to question their own performances and procedures since they note their self-assessment is more informed and objective (“Well I think that now I can differentiate if a sentence is fused or splice(...) I think that my job was not good or bad. I need to do a better job if I want to do a good writers”), which can be linked to having certain control of their learning process. At the end of the process, one student claimed that the experienced helped to be one’s own monitor, finding mistakes and “more relevant” giving a solution to them. However,

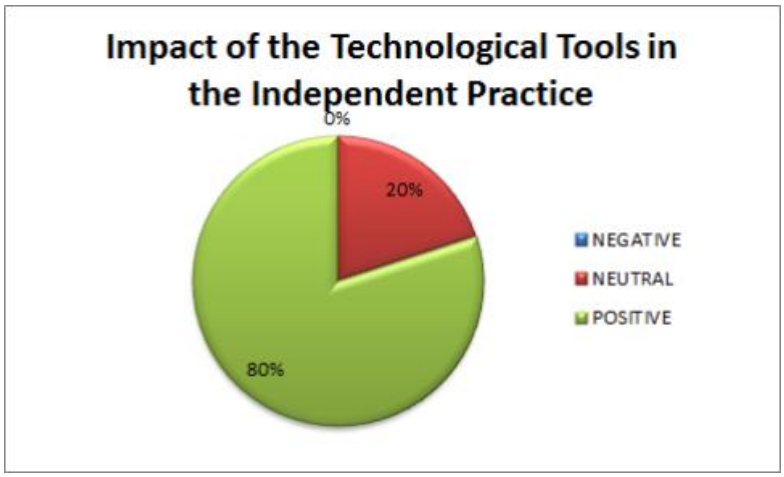

Figure 4. Impact of the technological tools in the students independent practice.

beyond that, what the evidence reveals is that the feeling of reward and self-satisfaction may be a key aspect to the maintenance and continuity of their actions.

The role that played technological tools throughout the project, and the impact it caused amongst students was in general terms positive. Consistent with the findings from Kurec's research (2002), the merging of technology in the routines contributed significantly to the growth of the group's motivation. At the end of the process, there were no participants who indicated they had a negative perception of the implementation of technological tools; figure 4 indicates how neutral or positive was this impact.

Finally, another aspect that emerged was students' appraisal of the teacher's performance; first they appreciated it in the sense that they received good explanations about the topics and the teacher tried many strategies to help them reach understanding. One student stated that he liked that "The teacher wants us to be

independent (and) gives tips to monitor ourselves." Second, they recognized teacher's feedback and comments on what was accurate or inaccurate as being very effective: "I like the way the teacher explains something with stupid (silly) things so I can remember." They also found that more than looking for information about students' performance, the teacher was really concerned about their progress. Finally, they used the advice provided to continue, complement, enhance, or change the activities they had chosen. "At the beginning I didn't really know what to do but I asked the teacher for more help and I received more practice exercises to practice easier sounds... (and) then I understood the position of the lips. You need to know that to pronounce well. You listen and you don't pronounce well. I think that Mario's comments are very important; he gives good ideas on what I can do."

Concerning what was mentioned above, students made their decisions at the beginning of the process mainly to meet the challenges posed by the teacher, but the answers they provided in the middle of the process and at the end show that some students, besides keeping the idea of meeting these challenges, were concerned about their own improvement and started to adapt their actions based on what they considered to be useful and rewarding. As intended at the end of the intervention, some students proposed their own new activities, some of them kept the same objectives but came up with new ways to achieve them; others tried new ways to make their processes more dynamic and enjoying. What is common to this is that students based their decisions on the effectiveness or variety of the activities, none of them discarded the procedures as being useless. The aforementioned shows clear evidence of this to be the beginning of becoming independent , sharing responsibilities in their learning process Schrale and

Szabó (2000) and transferring roles which lead us to think that students are functioning at the first stage of developing autonomy.

Conclusions

Integrating the use of metacognitive control strategies, independent activities which are enhanced by the use of technology ICT, within the context of language learning for beginners not only contributes to the development of student's language proficiency, but also provides them with insights of themselves as learners which can be transferred to other situations of their academic life and is key to long life learning. The processes undertaken during this experience provides a basis for the internalization of the set of practices proposed to address learning challenges as a metacognitive approach that may well help some of our students (not all) become self-regulated learners

The appropriate interaction between students and the contextual elements is crucial, (Vygotsky, 1978) The cultural tools, both technical and psychological, namely the cognitive, metacognitive and technological tools provided and the teacher as a mediator trigger students development.

Becoming aware is not only a matter of exhortation. It is also guiding students through real consistent significant experiences "doing" that will lead them to progress in their commitment and self-direction. Students who are aware of what their learning process entails have realized that their academic success mainly depends on their active contribution to achieving their own learning goals, which implies that awareness can become a criterion that guides student's actions.

An important aspect that was observed throughout the intervention is that even though all the students showed improvement in their second language acquisition level, not all of them reached the stage of awareness at the same degree. We may assert then, that there are stages within the stage of awareness that are closely related to students' sense of responsibility, commitment consistency, and good performance. Further study will be required to characterize what is actually needed to maximize the benefits of the process.

Being aware of one's learning process is all in all, a sign of being a self-regulated learner who has started to naturally undertake autonomous attitudes and behaviors.

Limitations in the Study

Due to the parallel activity in both classes during the project, the time participants had in the English I class to get familiar with the dynamics, and the later implementation of the suggested sequences of work in the websites, did not consistently correspond to the time students spent developing their skills to be both attentive and descriptive when observing their own performance. As it was aforementioned, there were exercises that were designed to approach and foster perception and awareness amongst students in an scaffolded way; nevertheless, the nature of some sequences invited to notice changes in perception and behavior from the very beginning, and the few sentences they created to describe that perception were little informative. As this was the first attempt to combine efforts in the program with a group of students in the faculty, the experience also suggested an evaluation in the dynamics proposed in both environments. It was observed that some activities and stages of the project can be

affected in their structuring to ensure students go through a smoother experience as they focus on their language learning process while the benefit of metacognition is elicited and prompted. This way, it is possible to consistently reach a significant level of awareness in order to step into a real changing of habits and behaviors (Scharle & Szabó 2000) in favor of a development of learning responsibility.

Another issue that may have interfered in the nature of the data collected and the whole experience of the participants during the project is the fact that they were working towards grades in both classes. It is clear that students care about getting at least a passing grade; however, as it was evidenced by Sekiguchi (2011) in his study, students were also required to submit reports and take surveys as part of the requirements of the English course, and at the same time, evidenced an ability to self-regulate their own learning.

On the other hand, the project was originally designed and set in a free social network to create a sense of closeness, comfort, and belonging amongst participants, but service providers usually stop offering the free plan so contents usually need to be migrated. This inconvenience required to look for other options, and Weebly.com resulted a convenient tool to set the whole project even though users actually create a weebsite. It is advised to look for a CMS like Moodle if a similar effort is to be undertaken at an institution since it offers the possibility to carry out all the stages and establish a smooth communication with the participants, and integrate at the same time all the components and resources the project entails.

Finally, It is not possible to state that students have already internalized processes; however, there is strong evidence that this project allowed the team to be on the right track as students are likely to evidence a natural exercise of autonomous behaviors and attitudes. This leads to pose the need for an extension of the project in terms of the nature of the program proposed in the remaining English courses of the institution's program.

Action Plan

First, this research project makes it possible to design an article for its dissemination in the academic community, and thus contribute to the discussion in the field of technology-enhanced teaching practice taking into account the actual characteristics of students, and education itself, in the Colombian setting. Even though it was possible to find plethora of projects and research articles, almost all of them fail to account for conditions that can be closely related to the experience teachers had in Bogota or Colombia's average classroom (including those at college level).

As it was mentioned above in the limitations discovered during the experience, the evidence suggests that it is necessary to create more opportunities to extend the impact of the exercise in the whole English program at the institution; however, it is equally important to refine the process in all its stages in a new pedagogical intervention. A more systematic, and thus more effective (and probably demanding), approach will make it attainable then to expect students involvement in the design of their own routines at an earlier stage. As a consequence, it is possible to come up with a more reliable set of syllabi for both Practice of Autonomous Learning and English I courses.

This research project will also provide a starting discussion point in the English department to reflect on the objectives and nature of the curriculum with the aim of gaining consistency amongst the teaching staff. In addition, this dialogue will also aid the fostering of autonomous behavior in their own teaching practices; this will in turn, permeate and help consolidating awareness amongst their students as the modeling on behalf of teachers is highly desired and looked in the institution.

This refinement of the stages will also allow the research team to address those students who are regarded as low achievers, so that it is possible to take a more personalized and supportive action in order to narrow gaps and have a more even group of experiences.

An effective implementation will facilitate, as mentioned above, a characterization that will in turn, likely give way to answer the following tentative secondary question that was posed in the beginning of the project: which procedure is it necessary to follow when implementing multidisciplinary work and ICT tools?

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