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The Role of Blogs and Web Resources in Students' Autonomous Learning Awareness

El papel de los "blogs" y de otros recursos de la Internet en la comprensión que los estudiantes tienen acerca del aprendizaje autónomo*

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This article focuses on the way in which technology-based activities may shape and characterize students' awareness of their own learning processes and their understanding of autonomy. The study was carried out at a public university in Colombia. Data collection was done through the implementation of class observations, a survey, and some focus groups. Two categories emerged from data analysis which supported the preliminary finding that technology-based activities can be conceived of as a starting point in students' autonomous decisions about their learning.

Key words: Autonomy, learning processes awareness, technology in language education

Este artículo se centra en la manera en que las actividades basadas en tecnología pueden ayudar a los estudiantes a tomar conciencia de sus propios procesos de aprendizaje y de su comprensión del concepto de autonomía. El estudio se llevó a cabo en una universidad pública en Colombia y la recolección de datos se realizó a través de varias observaciones de clase, una encuesta y algunos grupos focales. Hallazgos preliminares constatan que las actividades basadas en recursos tecnológicos pueden ser concebidas como un punto de partida en las decisiones autónomas que los estudiantes toman sobre su propio aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: autonomía, conciencia de los procesos de aprendizaje, tecnología en la enseñanza de idiomas

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Introduction

Engaging students with Web 2.0 technologies helps them develop a set of abilities that are directly associated with 21st century learning skills such as collaboration, interaction, innovation, leadership, and technology proficiency. Trilling and Fadel (2009) define critical thinking as the ability to analyze, interpret, evaluate, summarize, and synthesize information. What gives these perhaps traditional, critical thinking skills a twist in the 21st century is the availability of advanced technologies for accessing, manipulating, creating, analyzing, managing, storing, and communicating information. The main objective of this research project is to analyze students' insights towards the use of technology in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Specifically, the way in which technology-based activities may shape and characterize students' awareness of their own learning processes and their understanding of autonomy is explored.

Literature Review

Technology in Education

Educational technology has been found to have positive effects on students' attitudes toward learning and on students' identities. In Sivin-Kachala and Bialo's (2000) words, "students felt more successful in school, were more motivated to learn and had increased self-confidence and self-esteem when using computer-based instruction" (p. 135).

Hopson, Simms, and Knezek (2001) examined the effect of a technology-enriched classroom on students' development of higher-order thinking skills and on their attitudes toward computers. Samples of 80 sixth-grade and 86 fifth-grade students were tested using the Ross Test of Higher Cognitive Processes in order to judge the effectiveness of each group's curriculum in its ability to teach the higher-order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The Computer Attitude Questionnaire was utilized to determine student attitudes toward the computer. This research has shown that a class enriched with technology proves to have a minimal, yet positive effect upon student acquisition of higher-order thinking skills.

Other studies have shown that educational quality can be raised by means of an appropriate use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This use of technology has been proven effective in the language classroom, producing a positive impact such as connecting learning to real-life situations (Lowther, Inan, Strahl, & Ross, 2008; Weert & Tatnall, 2005).

On the other hand, apart from traditional approaches, Weert and Tatnall (2005) claim that learning is a lifelong activity where learners change their expectations to seek further

knowledge. Therefore, as time progresses, these learners will feel the need to explore new sources of knowledge which will be easily accessed providing they make effective use of ICT tools.

McDougald (2009) states that there is an important element of joy that technology provides, fostering effective learning and increasing students' motivation. Additionally, ICT provides a variety of different learning styles that give an advantage to the material presented in other formats.

Technology and the Concept of "Language Learning Process"

Learning processes are all the procedures and strategies that students use to acquire new information. They are also the result of the decisions that are made by the student who is planning and carrying out learning in a deliberative way. More specifically, in relation to language learning, the learning process is the process of integrating linguistic and pragmatic knowledge in order to learn a language. According to Holec (as cited in Wenden, 1987, p. 43), "language learning [a process distinct from, though related to, the process of acquisition] refers to the active involvement of an individual in a variety of activities the outcome of which is expected to be the acquisition of the knowledge and know-how which confer competence in the target language." Language learning processes can also be conceived under the scope of the constructivist theory, in which knowledge is represented as the construction of meaning. Social constructivism, strongly influenced by Vygotsky's (1987) work, suggests that knowledge is first constructed in a social context and is then taken up by individuals (Cole & Wertsch, 2004).

In relation to the impact of technological tools on students' learning processes, Brush, Glazewski, and Hew (2008) have claimed that ICT offers students possible solutions to the problems in their learning processes, presenting them with opportunities to grasp knowledge and providing them with learning concepts in more accessible ways.

Furthermore, Lu, Hou, and Huang (2010) suggest that students are prompted to apply individual decision-making techniques as a result of being actively involved in ICT learning experiences. Castro Sánchez and Chirino Alemán (2011) support this idea by suggesting that ICT contributes to transforming a teaching environment into a more student-oriented one.

Authors who have conducted research studies locally, namely, Castellanos (2009); Clavijo, Hine, and Quintero (2008); and Rojas (2007), suggest that technology can foster language learning through the effective use of these technological tools. However, they emphasize the importance of considering the needs of teachers, students and the whole institution.

Barrios (2008), who has conducted research in the context of the ALEX Virtual Program[1] specifically favors the use of technological tools to support language learning processes. He claims that "the implementation of asynchronous activities is a key element in the construction of participants' networks because of the collaboration that takes place in order to get common goals" (Barrios, 2008, p. 42 [trans.]).

Technology and the Idea of Autonomy in the EFL Classroom

Learner autonomy has been claimed to be an ultimate goal of education for a long time (Benson, 2001, 2009; Waterhouse, 1990). Particularly in second language learning, the concept has been argued to be very complex (Little, 2003) and socially driven (Smith & Ushioda, 2009). As educational ideology and philosophy have been interpreted differently, depending on particular social and political situations, learner autonomy has also been understood and put into practice in various ways.

One of these interpretations involves the development of learner autonomy, not only at school, but also as a great impact on society (Dickinson, 1987; Holec, 1981). Driven by the concept of freedom and autonomy in philosophy, the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project initiated the construct of learner autonomy in the early 1980s. It was defined as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec, 1981, p. 3), and this becomes the most cited definition in the literature of the field (Benson, 2009). This ability was further explained not to be "inborn but must be acquired" mostly by formal education practices (Holec, 1981, p. 3).

Another widely quoted description of autonomy refers to it as a capacity for "detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (Little, 1991, p. 56). Little also argues that these qualities "will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts" (Little, 1991, p. 57). In other words, the construct of autonomy in learning implies learner control over the content and process of learning as a prerequisite for the development of autonomous individuals in educational contexts. Autonomous individuals are not simply the product of supportive teaching and learning methods and arrangements. They are the outcome of learners' exercise of their developing capacities for autonomy within the context of education itself.

As Lowther et al. (2008) have stated there are three important characteristics that are needed to develop good quality teaching and learning with ICT: autonomy, capability, and

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[1] The ALEX program (*Aprendizaje Autónomo de Lenguas Extranjeras* [Foreign Language Autonomous Learning Program]) is offered in two modalities: Workshop Modality (face-to-face sessions) and ALEX Virtual which is exclusively offered through the implementation of a Learning Management System (Moodle Virtual Platform).

creativity. Autonomy means that students take control of their learning through their use of ICT. In this way, they become more capable of working by themselves and with others. Teachers can also authorize students to complete certain tasks with peers or in groups. Through collaborative learning with ICT, students have more opportunity to add the new knowledge onto their background knowledge and become more confident to take risks and learn from their mistakes.

Further, Serhan (2009) concluded that ICT fosters autonomy by allowing educators to create their own material, thus providing more control over course content than is possible in a traditional classroom setting. With regard to capability, once students are more confident in learning processes, they can develop the capability to apply and transfer knowledge while using new technology with efficiency and effectiveness. On the other hand, by using ICT, students' creativity can be optimized. They may discover new multimedia tools and create materials in the styles readily available to them through games (Gee, 2007; Gee & Hayes, 2011), CDs, and television. With a combination of students' autonomy, capability, and creativity, the use of ICT can improve both teaching and learning quality.

Previous research done in the field of autonomy in the ALEX program specifically suggests that the origins of this program came from the need to develop the communicative competence in a foreign language in all the university students. As Medina (2009) stated: "ALEX . . . set the purpose to develop the communicative competence in a foreign language, emphasizing reading comprehension through intensive pedagogy, semi-autonomous learning, and the use of new educational technologies" (p. 14). Consequently, the principles and methodology of the program were formulated with autonomy being the main goal of the program. The role of autonomy in the program was based on Scharle and Szabó's (2000) ideas. In Medina's words:

> Autonomy implied learning to learn, decision making, critical thinking, and responsibility. In the ALEX Program, autonomy did not refer to a new learning methodology in which the students learn on their own, but to a slow process of learning awareness. This process develops in three stages: awareness awakening, change of attitudes, transfer of roles, and finally autonomy. (p. 15)

Type of Study

This research follows a *case type design* which, according to Yin (2003), is a qualitative research strategy whereby a phenomenon is investigated in its real life context through empirical enquiry. Marshall and Rossman (1999) explain that qualitative researchers typically rely on four methods for gathering information: participation in the setting, direct observation, in-depth interviews, and analysis of documents.

In qualitative research, where the data have been collected through observations, interviews, or any other qualitative procedure, the information is gathered in written reports

or recordings. Quite often, categories emerge from the data, without the researcher having to apply a fixed taxonomy for analysis. In this particular research, a system of categories or taxonomy was applied to the data collected.

Falk and Blumenreich (2005) highlight the value of organizing the evidence into categories, analyzing emergent topics, coding the data, developing category systems and, finally, applying triangulation to demonstrate validity and reliability. This process of triangulation is described by Hopkins as the action of "contrasting perceptions of one actor in a specific situation against other actors in the same situation" (as cited in Koshy, 2005, p. 29) to obtain insight in order to find emerging patterns. Ideas considered to be associated in significant ways were clustered together, as Stringer (2007) suggests.

In short, since the analysis of qualitative data is not rigid, the main procedures used were comparison, a search for likenesses and differences. To do so, data were summarized and condensed. Frequencies were used to indicate how often a phenomenon occurred. As a result, some classifications of categories emerged.

Data Collection Instruments

To develop this case-type research and collect the data, three different methods were used. Several class observations were carried out, a survey of students was implemented (Appendix 1), and some focus groups were set up (Appendix 2). These instruments were useful to collect students' perceptions, opinions, and beliefs towards technology-based activities and the way in which they observed the concept of autonomy after engaging in technology-based practices.

Profile of Participants and Setting

The project was carried out at Universidad Nacional de Colombia, located in the city of Medellín. The Department of Foreign Languages of the university (Bogotá D.C. campus) designed the ALEX Program with the idea of offering educational opportunities in foreign languages to all undergraduates who need to pass four levels of a foreign language class as a requirement for graduation. Class observations and other data collection activities were carried out during the second semester of 2012. Participants were in the fourth level of the ALEX Program. They were a group of 35 students enrolled in the workshop modality. Twenty of them were chosen to participate in the project. Their average age was from 18 to 21 years old.

Pedagogical Procedure

A variety of technology-based activities was designed with the idea of accompanying students in the development of a project called "Weblog: Studying Abroad." At the very beginning of the project, the instructor had to explain in detail what the project was going to be about and its different stages. The project consisted of creating a blog and publishing information about one country where students would like to study, choosing a university and learning how to apply for a scholarship. Students were expected to design, prepare, and present a blog to the community.[2] Table 1 shows the steps followed to carry out the project:

Table 1. Steps Followed to Carry Out Our Project "Weblog: Studying Abroad"

Project Stages (Based on Fried-Booth, 1986)	**Tasks**
Stimulus	**Task 1**: The idea of the project was presented to the students. Students were expected to design, prepare, and present a blog to the community. These mini-blogs were part of the main class blog that was administrated by the instructor.
Definition of the project objective	**Task 2**: Students interviewed each other to find out about each other's universities and country preferences. Students were asked to activate their mini-blogs and to give a short introduction of the work they were going to do there. To do so, they registered in www.voki.com. *Voki* is a very imaginative tool for students to create and customize a speaking character and get to practice their pronunciation (See images of the web resources used throughout the project in Appendix 3).
Practice of language skills	**Task 3**: Students chose a university and a tentative program they might be interested in studying. They researched the country where the university is located by visiting different links. They were asked to collect information in a chart and to post it on their mini-blog.
Design of written materials	**Task 4**: Students took a look at the university in detail, researched the history, programs, financial aids, living conditions, and the application process. Students designed a graphic organizer in www.mindomo.com and posted it on their mini-blogs.

[2] The main class blog can be accessed at http: //level4unal10.blogspot.com/ and can be visited freely at any time.

Project Stages (Based on Fried-Booth, 1986)	Tasks
Group activities	**Task 5**: Students got prepared for an interview. They researched the practical issues regarding interviews and reviewed the information they had collected so far about the country and the university. Students visited www.intervue.me to rehearse the type of answers they would give in the face-to-face interview with the instructor.
Final presentation	**Task 6**: Students present the blog they have designed during the whole semester, the technology tools they have used. Products are shared with another class. Students reflect upon the use of technology in the English class by means of a technology-use rubric.

Findings

The preliminary findings obtained during the process of analysis were classified as shown in Figure 1.

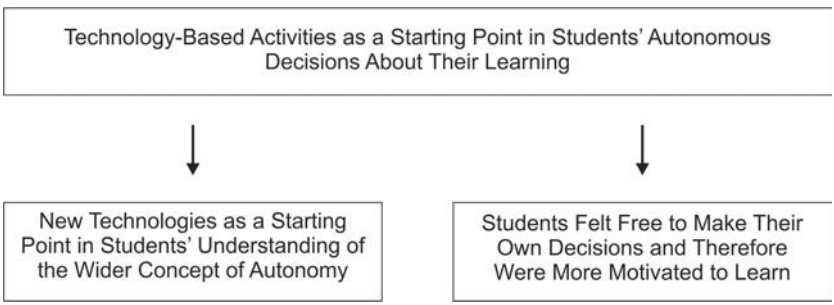

Figure 1. Preliminary Findings

New Technologies as a Starting Point in Students' Understanding of the Wider Concept of Autonomy

Throughout the project, students showed a positive attitude towards using new technologies. They also perceived new technologies as tools that could be used as a starting point in their understanding of the wider concept of *autonomy*. Students were able to analyze

the impact of technological tools in their own learning process and to identify different ways they could study the language on their own. This relationship was found by analyzing carefully the responses to questions number one and two posed in the survey:

> What I like the most about the class was using the blog. Links, resources, and different types of information were all found at just one place. The information and the news posted in the blog helped us to be updated with the recent activities and with the homework assigned, specially, in cases when we could not attend a class session. I had never used a resource like this. I found it very interesting because I learned how to create my own blog. (Survey, Q1, P7)[3]

When asked about their most memorable experiences using technology in the English class (Survey, Q1), 85% referred to the blog of the class as the most memorable tool they had used. The other 15% of the students expressed that the mind mapping tool (Mindomo) was their favorite. The majority of the students benefited from the experience and from the variety of technology resources that were embedded in the blog of the class. As one participant pointed out:

> [The experience] was successful because it was possible to start using a huge variety of technology resources to learn English. I did not know there were so many things available for free. I got the feeling that there are so many things that can make a positive impact on the way you are learning a foreign language, things that do not require a teacher at your side but that allow you to work on your own. (Survey, Q2, P21)

All the students expressed positive feelings regarding the experience of being exposed to technology tools in the English class. Regarding the third question of the survey, 65% of the students expressed that the technology-based activities developed in class had contributed to their learning because they had felt more motivated to learn. The other 35% of the students, on the other hand, said the experience had been positive since they had become more autonomous learners.

Moreover, students demonstrated a thorough understanding of the idea of transferring the knowledge acquired throughout the technology-based project into wider academic contexts. They were able to recognize that some technological tools were useful not only for the learning of English but also as more general learning tools that can be further used in other areas and subjects. When asked about the way technology-based activities developed in class have contributed to their learning (Survey, Q4), 90% of the students gave answers related to the way tools had helped them to both learn English and implement technology in other areas and subjects. The other participants said they had discovered new ways of studying by themselves which ultimately contributed to their learning.

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[3] The excerpts have been translated into English. The original ones are in Spanish. Codes used: Q = Question, P = Participant.

Regarding autonomy as a capacity that allows learners to utilize acquired knowledge in new contexts (Little, 1991), the following excerpts are a good illustration:

> I think that the most interesting resource that we used was Mindomo because it is useful not only for this subject but for other subjects as well. With this tool you can search for keywords, be creative, and organize your ideas. (Survey, Q4, P11)

> These are tools that we will definitely use in the future. This is not only for the English class. For example, the Mindomo tool, this is something that you will have to use for the rest of your life; you will always need to do a mind map, and there you can get it easily. You just have to click on a chart and everything just comes out automatically. These are great tools you know you will be using in the future, in your working life. (Focus Group 2, P13)

Students Felt Free to Make Their Own Decisions and Therefore Were More Motivated to Learn

There was also evidence of learner-control over both the content and the process of learning and an increase of students' motivation as a result of being offered freedom of choice.[4] Students showed themselves as more autonomous and motivated individuals, feeling free to make their own decisions to respond to their own learning needs.[5]

Students felt they were free to work the way they preferred at the most convenient time for them as being part of a technology-based project. This freedom and the very nature of the activities in which technology was present motivated them to work on their own, and increased their awareness of their own autonomy. It was also evident in the categorization process that students showed a constant concern about the way in which they could use technological resources to improve their study of the language and to become autonomous learners. Students were guided towards some content to be studied by themselves; additionally, they were given sufficient assistance to develop the abilities they needed to take advantage of the technological opportunities. In other words, they were given a considerable degree of control over the curriculum and classroom activities, plus assistance in developing skills, specifically if we consider that ICT cannot foster autonomy independently of the students' control over their own learning.

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4 A relative freedom nonetheless since they still had to compose mini-blogs about a specific topic and containing certain pre-arranged parts.

5 It is important to clarify that learners were the ones who proposed to work on a project, and in that sense, they were given the freedom to propose a variety of projects. At the end of the day, the project was shaped and structured in a way that each one of the members of each project group was assigned a different role and a different responsibility within the group. There were also other activities done in class apart from the blog which required the use of ICT tools. Students also used their cell phones, tablets, and laptop computers in class with the purpose of learning.

All students agreed that working with technological tools had changed their perception of learning (Survey, Q7). The different ways in which their perception of learning changed were as follows: 78% said they felt more motivated to learn because they felt free to choose what to do and how to do it, 12% expressed that learning was more interesting and motivating because technology gave them the freedom to use it anywhere at any time, while the other 10% gave a variety of other "minor" reasons.

All in all, students could monitor their learning and demonstrated a clear understanding of their freedom. Apart from showing a positive attitude towards the use of new technologies and analyzing the impact of technological tools in their own learning process and the way in which they could "transfer what they learn into wider contexts," students were able to monitor their learning in the sense that they acknowledged the fact that they could have access to the different technological tools whenever they considered them convenient. This versatile nature of technology-based resources that could be accessed and used whenever the learner needed them, rather than being something imposed on them at a certain time, was highly appreciated by the learners who preferred to work rather independently, as the following quotations show:

> I used all these aids to organize ideas, to search for information in an effective way and to do other things. The good thing about it is that all aids can be accessed easily, I mean, I like being able to access these resources from anywhere and at any time. (Survey, Q7, 5)

> The experience with the project was positive I must say. It made the class interactive. It was not only about attending a class and doing things in class, it was also about you, by yourself, working with these tools outside the classroom. (Survey, Q7, P9)

Students demonstrated a clear understanding of their freedom to make decisions to work on their learning of the language. When students were asked question number eight of the survey, it was evident that the role of technological tools throughout the project and the impact they caused amongst students were in general terms positive. It could be stated that the incorporation of technology in the routines contributed significantly to the growth of the group's motivation. At the end of the process, all participants indicated they had a positive perception of the implementation of technological tools. In the words of one of the participants:

> I used some of these technological tools to learn English outside the classroom. I did homework there, used the different tools there, and checked what has been done in class there. Pretty much everything I needed was there in just one place. This experience outside the classroom was very positive. We were free to study and go over what we considered relevant at some point. (Survey, Q8, P13)

Nevertheless, it needs to be stated that students must already have a certain level of intrinsic motivation to make the necessary effort to learn the language. This intrinsic motivation may or may not be directly related to the implementation of technological tools in

the classrooms. But, although it is hard to establish a clear connection between technology and autonomy, it is evident that students, while being engaged in educational practices in which technology played a role, felt free to make their own decisions and were more motivated to learn independently, which consequently means that they showed a sufficient level of autonomous learning awareness.

They also demonstrated a clear understanding of their freedom to make decisions to work on their learning of the language during the focus-group sessions, giving special value to the usefulness of the technological tools they were exposed to, as shown in the following answers:

> In my opinion, autonomy is deciding if you want to learn or not. If that is the case, then you will start doing things to make the effort to learn. This class gave us enough freedom to do the things that we liked the most, to choose. The activities are designed for you to choose what you like the best. Then, it is you the one who decides to do things, which is more motivating, in my opinion. (Focus Group 3, P16)

> I really liked the methodology of the teacher. She used the internet to give us autonomy and freedom. Each student had the chance to learn at his pace. So, if you are having problems understanding something, then, you can go back, listen to it again, read it again if you need it. On the other hand, if you have a higher level, it is not a problem, you can do things much quicker, go at your own pace. (Focus Group 1, P7)

> I think that in the early levels of the ALEX courses, teachers will assign more specific activities for the students to do, specific things to read, for example. This is not as motivating as having the freedom to read what you want. In this level, the methodology was different, I mean, more freedom is given to the student. (Focus Group 3, P17)

It is worth mentioning, however, that the pressure arising from technological change that teachers and students face nowadays includes the pressure to make sense of educational policies that are increasingly concerned with the ways in which classrooms are organized and the ways in which curricula are designed. The idea of autonomy cannot merely be understood as an economic imperative in the education policy discourse or as an economic imperative for learners too, but rather as a way of allowing learners to have a voice in their own decisions about their own learning.

We were also conscious of the fact that the autonomous awareness students were shown to possess in the data collected could be partly considered to be the result of their being engaged in a technological project where they had enough freedom to learn at their pace. However, it also reflected the students' previous learning experiences in the study of the language, which could have positively influenced the type of learners they currently were and their own current personal level of autonomy. It is true that learners, to a certain extent, became more autonomous after being engaged in technology-based practices. We cannot, however, claim that the implementation of these technology-based practices was the only reason why they demonstrated their understanding of autonomy and autonomous practices per se. We believe

that autonomy is a difficult construct to measure and that it is nonsense to say that autonomy can be, and should be, fostered exclusively by means of technological tools.

However, although autonomy is not fostered only by means of technological tools, it was evident, throughout this research project, that students were guided to identify ways for them to study on their own. Question five of the survey, stated as "How do you use technology tools at home to learn the language? Which tools?" allowed students to identify different ways they can study the language by themselves, without the teacher's immediate influence. Those technology-based tools that had the most positive impact amongst students were summarized as follows: 56% of the students reported using the blog of the class to "keep informed" with information about the class whereas only 10% used games "to practice the language." Eight percent of the students claimed to use chatting applications to keep in contact with other students. Seven percent of the students reported using online dictionaries at home and 6% claimed to use the mind mapping tool to organize information. Instructional videos were also identified as tools to use at home by 4% of the students. Other popular tools amongst the participants were presentations and slideshows, reported by 4%, and pronunciation and voice editing tools, reported by 3%. There were 2% of the participants remaining that reported other not so popular tools.

Another important issue to highlight here is that although some students already evidenced a certain level of autonomy which they had probably gained from previous learning experiences, the technology-based educational practices of this project motivated them to continue working on their autonomous learning awareness. Moreover, we also expressed that this autonomous learning awareness, which appeared to be a constant pattern in data analysis, is only one step towards the big and complex ideas of autonomy in language learning. Finally, it is also worth mentioning that, although the curriculum in the ALEX Program includes statements that are mainly for helping with decisions in the interests of the students, it is worthwhile to recognize that what is actually happening in the classroom can be guided towards the importance of students themselves making decisions about their own learning. In real classroom practice it is evident that autonomy can be developed within a framework of more flexible practices, such as project work, for instance, and through less teacher control, which are both central teaching practices within the ALEX Program principles.

Conclusions

Throughout the project, students showed a positive attitude towards using new technologies. They also perceived new technologies as tools that could be used as a starting point in their understanding of the wider concept of autonomy. Students were able to analyze the impact of technological tools in their own learning process and to identify different ways they can study the language on their own. They also demonstrated a thorough understanding

of the idea of transferring the knowledge acquired throughout the technology-based project into wider academic contexts.

On the other hand, there was evidence of learner-control over both the content and the process of learning as a prerequisite for the development of more autonomous individuals in educational contexts. Regarding this issue of students feeling free to make their own decisions to respond to their own learning needs, it can be concluded that students feel more motivated to learn a foreign language if they are given this freedom of choice. Moreover, although some students demonstrated having a certain level of autonomy, showing interest in the use of technological resources to improve their study of the language, the technology-based educational practices of this project motivated them to continue working on their construction of autonomous learning awareness.

Pedagogical Implications

For administrative reasons, ALEX Virtual was designed as a response to financial constraints, lack of space, and the ever-increasing number of students needing a foreign language to fulfill the requirement for graduating. However, despite these administrative problems, it would be beneficial for the ALEX Program (Workshop Modality) to implement Open Access Media resources (such as blogs) inside classroom practices, considering that Learning Management Systems (Moodle/Blackboard Platforms) are exclusively used for ALEX Virtual on both Medellín and Bogotá campuses respectively.

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Appendix 1: Survey That Was Implemented Within the Institution

Objectives:

- Find out about students' perceptions towards technologically-based activities.
- Explore the role of technology-based practices in students' awareness of their own learning processes.

1. Write about the most memorable experience you have had using technology in your English class.
2. Why do you think it was successful/not successful?
3. How did it help you to learn? (If applicable)
4. Do you think the technology-based activities developed in class have contributed to your learning? If so, in what ways?
5. How do you use technology tools at home to learn the language? Which tools?
6. From your experience using the tools, which dynamic objects promoted more interactivity?
7. After working with technology tools, has your perception of learning changed? If so, in what ways?
8. Does the use of the technological tools keep you motivated? If so, how?
9. Do you think that a virtual platform would facilitate communication between teachers and students? What about communication among students?

Appendix 2: Focus Groups Workshop

Objective: Explore in detail the way in which technology-based practices engage students to become more aware of the concept of autonomy.

Warm Up

Participants are organized into two small groups of approximately 4-5 members who are going to discuss what they understand as *autonomy*.

What do you understand by *autonomy*? Moderator asks the participants.

Development of the Discussion

Participants are given the points to be discussed and the guidelines to do it in the right way. Moderator hands out a piece of paper with the questions to be discussed and gives some time for the participants to think about what they would answer (5 minutes):

1. Tell me about your personal goals as a student of English.
2. What are you doing to accomplish them?
3. How is the use of technology helping you to accomplish your goals?
4. After using the tools, do you think they allow autonomous learning? If so, how? (The moderator asks participants to be clear on this part and state specifically what those autonomous practices obtained by using new technologies are.)

If necessary, the moderator will have a set of extra questions just in case the ones above do not work as expected.

1. Have your attitudes towards the use of technology changed after being involved in technology-based practices?
2. What can you do now in comparison to what you previously knew, involving the use of technology?

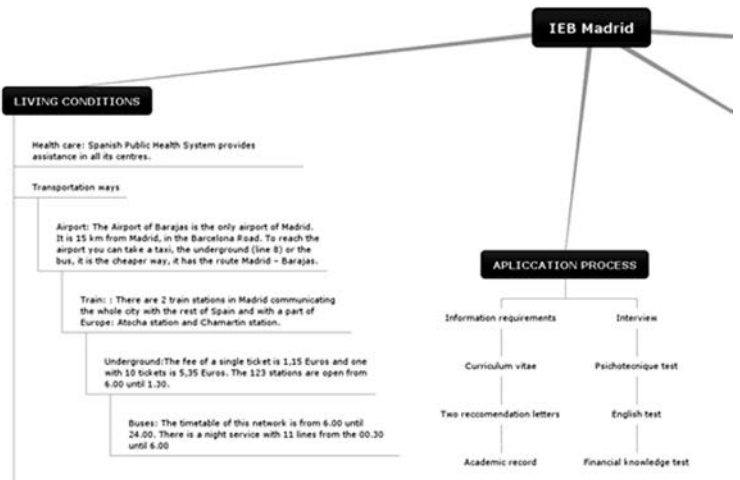
Appendix 3: Web Resources Used Throughout the Project

Students Created and Customized a Speaking Character (http: //www.voki.com/)

Publish in comments what you investigate about your country so that I can make the corrections and then you can publish it in your blogs!		
Name of the country		
Location		Where is it located? What's its capital?
Population Currency		How many people live there? Is it crowded? Quiet? Busy? What is its currency?
Landscape Weather		Are there mountains, hills, forests, lakes, rivers, beaches? What is its landscape like? What is its weather like?
Government		What kind of government does the country have?

Tourist attractions		Is the country famous? Are there any famous sights, places, buildings, museums?
Food		What kind of food do people eat in this country? What is its typical food?
Music		What kind of music do people listen to? Who are the most famous singers in the country?
Sports		What are the main sports practiced?
Festivals		What do people celebrate? How do people celebrate?
Art Religion		What kind of art does the country have? What is or are their religions?
History		Important facts in its history

Chart Published in the Main Class Blog



Designing the Mind Map in Mindomo

Students Answered Comprehension Questions Orally Using Video