

THE ENGLISH TEACHING VIA INTERNET AND THE LEARNER AUTONOMY

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Glenda Valim de MELO*

Abstract: *This study aims at contributing to the investigation on the English learner autonomy. It analyzes how learners deal with autonomy in the process of using the Internet during English classes mediated by computer. The methodology used was a qualitative case study of an extension course offered by a Public University in the State of Minas Gerais. Data were collected using online diaries, field notes of the researcher and two questionnaires administered among the five participants. Results suggested that most of the learners were able to deal with autonomy in the context of learning English mediated by computer.*

Key-words: *Teaching English; Internet; learner autonomy.*

Introduction

In recent years, there have been some researches on learner autonomy (Benson, 1997; Cotterall, 1995; Dickinson, 1992; Lee, 1998). We found several papers that discuss Distance Education and learner autonomy (Barcelos, 1998; Warschauer, 1995; Smith, 1998; Edge & Wharton, 1998), but few empirical researches that investigate the relationship between them. Thus, we found the necessity of researching on the learner autonomy in the classroom, using an approach from Distance Education. So, this research aimed to know how the English learner deals with the autonomy that the Teaching of a Foreign Language via Internet requires¹.

The learner autonomy

In the field of the Applied Linguistics (AL), some researchers began to discuss autonomy in the 80s (Holec, 1981, 1985, 1988; Riley, 1985). In the area of teaching and learning of foreign languages, this has been strengthened with the appearance of the communicative method, once it changed the role of

* Doutorando PUCSP - Docente Universidade de Franca. E-mail: glendamelo@terra.com.br.

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the student, subject to his/her learning (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). In the 90s, the applied linguists (Benson 1997, Cotterall 1995, Dickinson 1992, Lee 1998, Pemberton 1995, Pennycook 1997 and Wenden 1991) introduced several concepts of autonomy related to the ability of the students to take responsibility for their learning.

For Holec (1981, *apud* Lee, 1998:283), autonomy is the ability to control one's own learning. Pemberton (1996, *apud* Lee, 1998:282) asserts that autonomy is the capacity directed to the organization of learning. For Aoki (1996, *apud* Santos, 1999:333), learner autonomy can be defined as the ability to control one's own learning to construct one's own knowledge. autonomy, thus, is more an educational goal than a procedure or a method.

One of the issues that most related to autonomy is the responsibility. For Cotterall (1995), the main characteristic of autonomy is that students become responsible for their own learning. Autonomous students acquire this responsibility when establishing goals, planning practice opportunities or realizing their progress. Holec (1984 *apud* Cotterall, 1995:220) says that the responsibility of learning can be achieved even with the assistance from others and that autonomy should be a continuous process, offering the learner a deepening in his/her learning, since, through this, he/she will be able to decide on it and on the choices that he/she will make in life.

As we have seen until this moment, autonomy is the ability of students to take responsibility for their learning in order to build their knowledge. One of its characteristics is the learner makes choices for his/her learning, whereas he/she is the responsible to reconcile his/her goals with the teacher, to set his/her own goals, to plan his/her learning according to his/her needs and expectations

Benson's Autonomy

According to Benson (1997), autonomy is a malleable concept that can be adapted to different contexts and situations. He also completes that for AL, autonomy is a learner-oriented approach, and is anti-authoritarian. It has two sides: the first, between responsibility and freedom; and the second, between individual and social (political version).

The political version has a more social character and is associated with Critical Theory (Benson, 1997). Autonomy grows as the apprentice is aware of the social context of his/her learning and what this means. From this perspective, there is the possibility to adapt to the growing autonomy, in order to know the social context in which language is being learned.

Benson (1997) suggests a series of actions that lead to the exercise of autonomy. These actions area related to students:

- authentic interaction with the target language and its speakers;

- participation in group work and collective decisions;
- participation in defined tasks with no answers;
- learning about the language in its context;
- exploitation of goals critical to learning and social criticism of materials and tasks in learning;
- student's production of materials and tasks;
- control over the administration of learning, control over the content of learning, control of resources;
- discussion and criticism of the target language.

Benson (1997) is the first researcher to propose a categorization of autonomy, defining it as a kind of control of both the context, as the student's own learning. We should also say that the author innovates when he addresses the social, showing that the interaction between the speakers of a language, with the use of authentic materials and the production of materials by the apprentice are categories that offer the construction of autonomy.

It, however, as well as important to clarify that the autonomy is seen not only as a technique, an ability or a right. Autonomy is one of the ways in which the student can learn, and learning another language and another culture. We can not forget, that in the learning process, it is the student who must learn to distinguish the contexts of use of a foreign language. To this end, the teacher is essential, since it is through his/her first guidelines that the learners can walk alone and then engage in groups in society.

Autonomy and Culture

For learner autonomy, culture is a relevant issue to be considered. According to Pennycook (1997), autonomy is linked to culture. On that basis, the cultural issue is important to understand autonomy, because in some countries people are educated to a more autonomous life, while in others, it does not occur, meaning that we're in a world with different cultures and values. Pennycook (1997) complements that we must adapt the concept of autonomy to the cultures in the world. The vision of an autonomous person is a cultural and historic product.

According to Guibert (1999)², Brazilian citizens comes from a paternalistic culture. Being protected since birth at home or at school, Brazilians have been educated to be heteronomous and not autonomous. Santos (1999) complements this issue exemplifying that, many teachers educate their students holding the hands of these children so that they can learn the first syllables. The development of autonomy depends on the rupture of this aspect.

² Lecture called "Tecnologia Aplicada à Educação" (Technology Applied to Education), presented at the Distance Education Workshop on 09th and 10th December, 1999 at the Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, MG, Brazil.

Research Methodology

This investigation was a case study, according to Nunan (1992). Seeking the validity of this research, we decided for triangulation. The data were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed.

Data were collected on a face-to-face English course, that is, in the presence of the teacher-researcher, with all classes taught inside the computer laboratory and all teaching materials taken from the Internet. Classes were carried out twice a week by the teacher-researcher.

The data collecting instruments used were: the learners' online diary, questionnaires and teacher-researcher's field notes. Five learners participated in this research. The names of the learners are fictitious, to preserve their identity. Fabricio, third year of Economics course, 20 years old: he had studied in general English courses, but he did not know how to deal with the computer or the Internet. Giovana, final year of the Language course, 24 years old: she had studied in general English courses, however, she did not know how to deal with the Internet. Denise, also at the final year of the Language course, 23 years old: she had studied in general English courses but she did not know how to deal with the computer or the Internet. Laura, graduated in Language course, 22 years old: she had studied in general English courses and she knew how to deal with computers, but not with the Internet. She was starting to teach English Classes in public schools. Poliana, first year of high school, 15 years old: she had not studied English before and she had no experience with computer or the Internet.

We can see that the group of students showed a heterogeneous level of English Language but a homogenous level about the absence of practical knowledge about Internet. None of them knew how to handle the mouse or even turn on the computer. However, this unfamiliarity was not an obstacle for them to surf on the Internet, and to visiting several sites, first, monitored by the teacher-researcher and then alone.

Analysis of Data

The collected data were analyzed according to the categories proposed by Benson (1997:33). For this, we adopted the following procedure: taking a copy of the online diaries, we intended to identify evidence of actions by the participants which empirically confirmed Benson's categories. It is relevant to expose that the excerpts presented in this article have been kept exactly as the original, without any kind of correction.

The first category refers to the "authentic interaction with the target language and its users". We tried to find evidence in the diaries which showed the interaction with the English Language, either through exercises, sites of music, short stories or even from the interaction with users of English language in chats.

The second deals with “collaborative group work and collective decision making”. In this study, we have considered as evidence of this action the group work report prepared by the students and also the collective decisions on various activities.

The third, which concerns “participation in open-ended learning tasks”, we have consider as evidence of autonomy the reports on tasks that do not require a determined answer, i.e., where the learner had the opportunity to choose the answer for what he/she accomplished. The fourth category is “learning about the target language and its social contexts of use”. As evidence of autonomous actions, we tried to identify actions in which the language in general was being learned, such as the use of the word “browser” by the students.

The fifth category refers to the “exploration of personal learning goals”. Through this category, we analyzed if in the online diaries the student reconciled his/her goals with the class goals and also if there was creation of others that were not related. The sixth category allows the “criticism of learning tasks and materials”. We observed if the learners criticized or commented the tasks, the pedagogical material or the Internet.

The seventh category that demonstrates autonomy refers to the “self-production of tasks and materials”. In this case, we observed in the online diaries if the learners reported the production of tasks and materials without the teacher’s interference or suggestion. The eighth category the “control over the management of learning”. Thus, we examined in the data if the student had control over his/her learning while performing a task proposed by the teacher-researcher, the student being responsible for outlining how it would be carried out.

The ninth action refers to the “control over the content of learning”. Reports where the learner introduced some new content outside the classroom programming were recorded as evidence of this action. For the tenth category, “control over learning resources” we have considered the reports in the online diaries related to the use of computers or the Internet, that is, when the learner refers to any action that was connected to the computer.

For the last category, “discussion and criticism of target language norms”, we have considered, in this study, any mention that criticize the rules of English Language and questions about the language usage.

Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

After the identification of actions that confirmed Benson’s categories (*ibid.*), they were calculated, providing a record of number of actions carried out by each participant. Analyzing the data, we could determine the different levels of autonomy of the English Language students via Internet.

Then, we executed the qualitative analysis of the data. A reading of the students' online diaries was carried out. This reading aimed at a selection of registered actions that could illustrate Benson's categories (1997) as evidence of learner autonomy. Moreover, a reading of the teacher-researcher's field notes was done. Later, we accomplish the selection of excerpts of these notes which complemented the comments on the participants' development or which corroborated the evidence of autonomous actions by them.

According to attached Table 1, when performing a horizontal reading, we noticed that the most evidenced category in the analyzed data was "authentic interaction with the target language and its users" (20). The categories that had an equivalence in the data were: "participation in open-ended learning tasks" (12), "self-production of tasks and materials" (12), "control over the management of learning" and "control over the content of learning" (12). We also observed that the category that was the least presented in the students' diaries was "discussion and criticism of target language norms" (01). The only one among Benson's category (1997) not-evidenced was "collaborative group work and collective decision making".

Through a vertical reading of the data in Table 1, we observed that four of five learners - Denise, Fabrício, Giovana and Laura - have displayed most of the categories that evidenced autonomous actions. We also noticed that in the participants' online diaries actions that correspond to all of Benson's categories were not registered.

We also noticed that Laura was the participant that mostly displayed all the categories: "authentic interaction with the target language and its users" (4); "criticism of learning tasks and materials" (4); "control over the management of learning" (4); and "control over the content of learning" (4). Giovana and Fabrício, despite the same results were in the second place in using the categories. The autonomy action most highlighted by Giovana was "control over the management of learning" (4) while by Fabrício was "authentic interaction with the target language and its users" (9). In the third place was Denise, using, more frequently, the category "authentic interaction with the target language and its users" (4); "participation in open-ended learning tasks" (3); "control over the management of learning" (3); and "control over the content of learning" (3).

On the other hand, Poliana performed only one of Benson's categories that evidence autonomy: "control over the management of learning" (1) - no other action that empirically evidenced other categories was recorded in her online diary. In fact, Poliana showed several difficulties throughout the course. She refused to surf in English Language websites, and even her homepage was built in her Mother Tongue (Portuguese). This issue will be discussed again during this article.

From the achieved data, we can say that Laura was the participant that most successfully developed autonomous actions in the English Language course via the Internet. In the second place of achievement, we can place Giovana and Fabrício. In the third we can place Denise, who questioned and

searched a lot from the teacher-researcher. These four participants demonstrated capacity in dealing with the autonomy that the English Language course via Internet requires. Their actions evidenced most of the categories proposed by Benson.

Analyzing the data, we noticed that the “authentic interaction with the target language and its users” category was largely used by all learners, because, during all the classes, they were in contact with the English Language through websites, exercises, chats and even in their communication with the teacher-researcher. This can be identified when a learner wrote about a search that she conducted on music.

Celine Dion is a talented singer. I think that it is one of the greatest singers of this century. I searched for your music 'Because you loved me' and yours concerts and I saw some photos. She is a singer very busy. (Denise, 1999). Original text in English.

To construct this paragraph, she surfed researched on the singer’s websites, saw some pictures and also searched for a song. The student interacted with the English Language. Other learners used the English Language to explain that they were absent in certain classes, their questions and opinions.

Sorry but I don't remember the days when I was absent of the class. So, I will try to tell you what I really remember. I remember that I was not in the classroom when you explained how to build a homepage... (Laura, 1999). Original text in English.

Analyzing the second category, “collaborative group work and collective decision making”, we noticed that only some students used this category frequently. They helped each other when they did not know how to do something or when they wanted another person’s opinion. This was evident in the classroom when the learners were developing their homepages.

Em alguns momentos Giovana estava conversando com Denise sobre a página. Denise dizia que gostaria da opinião de Giovana sobre as cores. (diário da professora-pesquisadora, 1999). Original text in Portuguese.

Sometimes Giovana was talking with Denise about the webpage. Denise said that she would like Giovana's opinion about the colors. (Teacher-researcher's diary, 1999). Translated text.

We observed that only Giovana and Denise performed some tasks collaboratively, such as the creation of their websites. They requested one another’s opinion in some activities that were being done. The other students talked to each other but each one of them performed his/her task alone and sometimes exchanged ideas about the activity. However, in the online diary,

they did not mention collaborative group work or collective decisions. Neither Giovana nor Denise recorded the tasks they carried out together in their online diaries. However, in the teacher-researcher's diary some passages reporting this aspect were found.

Em alguns momentos, fiquei apenas sentada, observando-os caminhar sozinhos e se deparar com um problema com o computador, tentando resolvê-lo sem me chamar. Se o problema não era resolvido, então me chamavam. Os alunos trocam idéias sobre as páginas.. (diário da professora-pesquisadora, 1999). Original text in Portuguese.

“Sometimes, I was just sitting, watching them perform their tasks alone, and when facing a problem with the computer, trying to resolve it without my help. If the problem was not resolved, then they called me. Students changed ideas about the webpages...” (Teacher-researcher's diary, 1999. Translated text.

The “participation in open-ended learning tasks” category can be found in all of the proposed activities. Students performed their tasks, which were always inclusive and allowed learner autonomy.

Hello, Joseny. How are you? I'm fine, thanks. My name is Denise and I am 23 years old. I am a student and you? I am Guaíra-SP, but I live in Uberlândia. I study languages (um course is Letras). I'm sorry! I don't know how to write in english, ok? I like to dance and read a book, because it's are very good! However, I don't like to wake up early and eat onion (cebola). Howabout you?(Denise, 1999). Original text in English.

In this task, in which the learner should introduce herself to the others, Denise chose which aspects she would like to talk about herself and then wrote the text. Fabrício, in turn, introduced himself and mentioned even the soccer team that he hates. We could notice that each learner performed the same task exposing data he/she considers relevant. Some of them introduced themselves by giving several details of their personal lives and others reported as little as possible. Fabrício reported the soccer team that he does not appreciate and used the exclamation mark, excessively performing the task the way he thinks it is better.

Hi!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! How are you? My name is Fabrício and I'm a 20 years old, I'm a student, I'm from Itumbiara-GO, and i don't like wrench of Palmeiras. Ok!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Good night. (Fabrício, 1999). Original text in English.

In the “learning about the target language and its social contexts of use” category, we observed that during all classes, the students were learning about the English Language. This occurred throughout texts, chats, English

activities websites, during the interaction with native users of the English language, in the online diaries and teacher-researcher's e-mails.

... primeiro entramos no endereço: www.aol.com, demos uma olhada nas homepages e cada aluno digitou um nome para descobrir se achava homepages de pessoas com os nomes que escolheram...cada um escolheu um nome... Peter, Michael, Lisa... teve um aluno que disse que escolheria um nome feminino porque estava 'cansado de homens', já que no curso dele só há homens... (diário da professora-pesquisadora, 1999). Original text in Portuguese.

...First, we entered in the URL www.aol.com. Then, we took a look at the homepages and each student typed a name to find out if he/she found homepages with the names they chose ... each student chose a name ... Peter, Michael, Lisa... One student said that he would choose a female name because he was "tired of men", because in his course there are only men.. (Teacher-researcher's diary, 1999). Translated text.

In another moment, we noticed that the learners chose the content and the objectives for each class. Fabrício, for example, did some exercises involving the geography of the United States of America. We should mention that this learner sometimes wrote his online diary in English and sometimes in Portuguese, his Mother Tongue.

...Eu também fiz alguns exercícios do grupo de inglês com por exemplo a Geografia dos Estados Unidos... (Fabrício, 1999). Original text in Portuguese.

...I also did some exercises of the English group, for example, the geography of the United States... (Fabrício, 1999). Translated text.

According to the "exploration of societal and personal learning goals" category, which evaluates the ability to reconcile the students' goals with the classes goals and also the creation of new ones, we saw that this was constantly done. We noticed that in the online diaries, learners demonstrated control over the content they intended to search, connected his/her goals with the class and course goals, created new goals, interacted with the English Language, and learned about the context of the target language. Another example can be found in Giovana's online diary.

Today I searched something about Cruz e Souza, I spent much time doing this... I saw my messages ... I intent to look my homepage and after look for a lyric of some piece of music. (Giovana, 1999). Original text in English.

We found out that the class was built according to when the moment needs. Even when searching about a Brazilian Literature writer, Giovana

reconciled the activities of the classroom with her own goals, demonstrating control over the content, as in the example below.

Today class was very interesting, because I practised a lot my English and I started to make my searches on Internet. I was looking for informations about Boston city I intend to go there next year and I need to know a little bit about the city, its population, its religion, and mainly, its cost of living. I liked the news I found.(Laura, 1999). Original text in English.

In the “criticism of learning tasks and materials” category, the students began to criticize in a positive or negative way the activities and the learning material available on the Internet. However, the criticisms were addressed to the Internet access, because, in some classes, it was not possible to access any website. From the collected data, we noticed that the learners often expressed their opinion about the tasks.

Last class I was completely out of what was happening in the class. Because I had a problem with my password and I couldn't acess our site. In spite of it I enjoyed the class...(Laura, 1999). Original text in English.

Laura criticized the class by the inability to do an activity due to the problem of a password. We noticed that this problem did not prevent her from conveying issuing an opinion in the classroom either. In the example below, another learner made some comments on the Internet.

...today the computers were slow... I went to my homepage, but I can't open it. (Giovana, 1999. Original text in English.

Another student emphasized that she could not open her homepage. We noticed that this is one of the problems with distance education via internet which neither the teacher nor the learner can solve, because it depends on technical support.

The “self-production of tasks and materials” category concerns the learner creating and developing his/her own tasks. We noted that in the analyzed corpus the learners were always developing their own materials and tasks. Building a homepage is an example of this, as well as the sending of cards to the teacher-researcher and other students. Below, an example of a message sent to a student from another English Language class via Internet.

Hello! How are you? I'm fine! My name is Fabrício. I'm 20 years old, i'm student, i'm from Itaú GO, but I live in Uberaba I like to watch TV, and i like to listen music becase is very exciting. But I don't like to wake up morning. Good night!(Fabrício, 1999)³. Original text in English.

³ The information that could identify the student was changed.

After deciding to talk about certain aspects of his life, Fabrício is introducing himself. Another student, Laura, did the same task, but she talked about more details of her life than Fabrício did and expressed **more than him**.

Hello, Ana. How have you been ? I hope you're ok. You don't know me, so let me introduce myself: my name is Laura and I'm 22 years old. I'm a student and I was born in Uberlândia. In my days off I like to watch tv, because I think it's really wonderful to 'visite' many places and to know many people without going out my home. It is really great, isn't it? But I like to travel too, because sometimes we need to see and talk to different people...(Laura, 1999). Original text in English.

In the “control over the management of learning” category, we observed if the learner knew how to manage his/her learning. According to Benson (1997), this control indicates that the student is conscious and careful about his/her learning process. Taking control of his/her learning, students can choose the content of learning.

In the first diaries sent by the students, there were no actions showing this category. However, in the following classes, we observed that the students began to register the management of learning in the diaries. These actions were identified as the learner described how he/she was conducting the proposed activity for that class. Some of them said that they had first read the e-mail, others that they had started with the proposed activity, while others had created their activities for a given class, in addition to the activities requested by the teacher-researcher.

Today I searched something about Cruz e Sousa I spent much itme doing this. I forgot that at the the begining (I just looked up how to write this word, because I didn't remember it) i saw my messages. Now I intend to look my homepage and after to look for a lyric of some piece of music. I answered the questionnaire that you gave to me. Bye. (Giovana, 1999). Original text in English.

In the first diaries, the learners gave their opinion about the class. Subsequently, they started to report what they did and even to say what they had done when they could not access the website, changing their purposes and adapting themselves to the conditions offered by the network at that time. Some tasks, such as the paragraph that the learners had written in order to communicate with other students, requested each one of them to manage what would be written. The cards that were sent also demanded the control of their learning, because they should be chosen according to the learners' preferences and also to their English Language level.

After I send cards to my friends. (Giovana, 1999). Original text in English.

Below is another example of management of learning.

Algumas tarefas que você me pediu, deixei de fazer porque não entendi o enunciado das afirmativas. Espero que você me compreenda e tenha paciência comigo, porque apesar de tudo ainda tentei. I'M sorry!!! See you next class (Denise, 1999). Original text in Portuguese.

Some tasks you have asked me, I did not do because I did not understand the statements. I hope you understand and have patience with me, because, despite everything I still tried. I'm Sorry!!! See you next class. (Denise , 1999). Translated text.

We noticed that the learners lead their activities, selecting what tasks would be done, which websites and contents would be searched. We saw that the learners, after being familiarized with the Internet and knowing the variety of its information, began to manage their learning according to their needs at that time.

Evidence of the “control over the content of learning” category was perceived as the students reported in their diaries the contents that were proposed by themselves and not by the course. For example, they accessed a website with grammar exercises and then they chose the content in which they would like to work and the level of the exercise: basic, intermediate or advanced. In the online diary below, we noticed that learners had chosen its content, adapting it to the course.

After I searched something about Radaun Nassar, a writer that I was reading his book. Then I went to my homepage. (Giovana, 1999). Original text in English.

The learner gave her opinion about the class and attributed the fact that this was interesting because she had practiced the English Language. She also mentioned that she started searching on the Internet, deciding the contents that would be relevant to her learning.

I like to search many books, literature, my beloved song, musics and to correspond with many people by Internet. (Denise, 1999). Original text in English.

Denise expressed her most worked contents. We noticed that she included literature, a discipline related to her Graduation Language Course.

With the “discussion and criticism of target language norms” category, we looked for evidence that the learners had registered comments on the target language norms. We found out that only one learner, Laura, explained in her online diary a question about it.

I never had browsen (is it correct?). (Laura, 1999). Original text in English.

In the teacher-researcher diary we found some evidence.

...observei que alguns aumentaram o nível do exercício passando do básico para o intermediário e outros o diminuíram. A correção foi feita pela própria página. Eles me chamaram para explicar o porquê daquela resposta e não de outra... outros não me chamaram, trocavam idéias com os colegas. (diário da professora-pesquisadora, 1999). Original text in Portuguese.

... I noticed that some learners changed the exercise level from basic to intermediate and others, on the contrary, from intermediate to basic. The correction was made by the page. They called me to explain why an answer and not other... Others did not call me, they exchanged ideas with other learner. (Teacher-researcher's diary, 1999). Translated text.

We observed that this category was slightly mentioned by learners. There are few examples of discussion or criticism of the target language norms in the teacher-researcher's diary. We can say that the focus of the course was on reading and writing and we did not find sufficient data for a more comprehensive analysis.

The Poliana's Case

In contrast to the four participants, one student gave one only evidence of autonomous action and this occurred at the end of the course. Poliana wrote an online diary where she gave her opinion about the lessons, in which she expressed that the classes were good. It is important to emphasize that this was the only online diary Poliana wrote and that was sent at the end of the course.

As aulas têm sido uma beauty, but I have difficulty inglês... you have been very friendly, thank. It was interesting to access a page of music informations, bye. (Poliana, 1999). Original text in Portuguese and English.

The classes has been a beauty, but I have difficulty english ... you have been very friendly, thank. It was interesting to access the page of music information, bye. (Poliana, 1999). Translated text⁴.

We found out that Poliana, despite her linguistic difficulties, had expressed her opinion about the lessons and also explained the difficulties she had during the course. It is imperative to say that this research may not offer data to know the reason why a learner does not know how to deal with the

⁴ The errors committed by the students were kept in the translation.

autonomy required by the Internet. Nevertheless, we theorized that this fact may have occurred because she was starting high school, where the teacher is the center of learning and autonomy almost does not exist or, even the fact that she does not have a prior knowledge on the handling of the computer and the Internet.

Based on Poliana's experience, we identified a first limitation of this study: that we did not require a basic knowledge of computers and Internet as a prerequisite or did not to include some practical lessons that would focus on the handling of the computer and the Internet, before starting the course. We concluded that an English Course via Internet should be offered to students who can deal with the computer or have some knowledge of English Language, so this variable might be controlled.

Final considerations

By the achieved results, we observed that some autonomy categories proposed by Benson (1997) are more productive than others, namely: authentic interaction with the target language and its users; participation in open-ended learning tasks; self-production of tasks and materials; control over the management of learning; control over the content of learning; criticism of learning tasks and materials. We believe that these categories were more evidenced because the students were engaged in a kind of course that demands actions like these. The Internet requires autonomous actions from the users such as those in Benson's categories (1997).

Otherwise, we observed that two categories were not evidenced as the ones mentioned above, namely: discussion and criticism of target language norms and collaborative group work and collective decision making. Regarding the former, discussion and criticism of target language norms, the identification of only one action in this category can be justified by the fact that some participants had English Language basic knowledge, leading them not to question its norms. Regarding the latter, collaborative group work and collective decision making, action evidences were not found by the fact that in an English Language course via Internet, the student works alone, being unlikely involved in a group activity. We believe that this category may show autonomy, but does not apply to the learning of English Language via Internet. These speculations are due to the fact that these two categories were not evidenced as the others.

Concerning the participants of this research, four of them were able to deal with the autonomy required by the Internet. We noticed that, among them, some showed more autonomous actions than others. This is the case of Laura, Giovana and Fabrício. They developed more autonomy than Denise.

We observed that, as quoted by Barcelos (1999), students acquire knowledge in learning via the Internet, in addition to developing their autonomy during the learning process. At the beginning of the course, students were

insecure about the decisions to be made but with the feedback from both the teacher and other students and from the exercises, they began to feel safer and to select the websites they wanted to search, to choose the content they wanted to learn, to interact with the English Language and its users, and to manage their learning.

From this research, we could detect some practical implications. The first is that through autonomy development, the student becomes subject of his/her learning. However, we must not confuse autonomy with leaving the student without guidance or direction to follow. Many teachers still consider autonomy as leaving the student free in order to learn alone.

Due to the implication above, another implication is that, in a course mediated by the computer, there is a necessity to ensure the orientation held by the teacher. A student must know that when he/she requests for teacher's support, he/she will be answered, even if the teacher is absent. We must emphasize that this does not mean to make become the student dependent on the teacher, but that teacher will be available for student when necessary. In an English Course via Internet, sometimes, it is impossible to connect the network or access a website, and also, the machine could not work. Teacher and student must learn how to deal with such contingencies and to solve these problems.

A final implication that we believe that must be mentioned, based on the experience of teaching in an English Course using the Internet as a tool, refers to the necessity for keeping teachers up-to-date because in this area technology tends to move in large steps. The teacher who is not updated could receive questions from his/her students which he/she could not respond.

In conclusion, we believe that the autonomy of the student can be developed because it is through autonomy that he/she builds his/her identity, determine his/her objectives, linking them to the classroom and to the course, mainly, a student starts to see the world with his/her own eyes, learning from mistakes and triumphs that the autonomous actions can provide.

MELO, G.C.V. O ENSINO DE LÍNGUA INGLESA PELA INTERNET E A AUTONOMIA DO APRENDIZ

Resumo: *Este estudo visa contribuir com a investigação da autonomia do aprendiz de Língua Inglesa. Ele analisa como os aprendizes lidam com a autonomia que a Internet lhes exige durante as aulas de Língua Inglesa mediada pelo computador. Utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa, esta pesquisa é um estudo de caso de um curso de extensão de Inglês pela Internet oferecido por uma universidade. Os instrumentos de coleta dos dados foram: diário on line, diários da professora/pesquisadora e dois questionários. Os resultados evidenciaram que a maioria dos alunos soube lidar com a autonomia que a Internet lhes exigia.*

Palavras-chave: *Ensino de Língua Inglesa; Ensino Mediado pelo Computador; Autonomia do Aprendiz.*

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Attachment: Table 1 - Autonomy Actions Evidences

Autonomy Actions Evidences	Denise	Fabício	Giovana	Laura	Poliana	Total
Authentic interaction with the target language and its users	4	9	3	4	0	20
Participation in open-ended learning tasks	3	4	3	2	0	12
Self-production of tasks and materials	2	4	3	3	0	12
Control over the management of learning	3	1	4	4	0	12
Control over the content of learning	3	1	3	4	1	12
Criticism of learning tasks and materials	1	1	3	4	0	10
Exploration of societal and personal learning goals	0	2	2	2	0	6
Learning about the target language and its social contexts of use	1	1	1	2	0	5
Control over learning resources	1	1	1	1	0	4
Discussion and criticism of target language norms	0	0	0	1	0	10
Collaborative group work and collective decision making	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	20	24	24	29	1	94