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University of Southampton

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF AUTONOMY IN THE SELF-ACCESS CENTRE

by

Julieta Carrillo Acosta

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

Doctor of Philosophy

The Social Development of Autonomy in the Self- Access Centre (SAC)

by

Juliet Carrillo Acosta

Being an autonomous learner has been of great interest to researchers. Recently, there has been an increased interest to understand how students as agents of their learning process can develop autonomy in social settings. The Social-Cultural Theory has some answers because particular attention is given to the learner's active role and the social context where learning occurs. Thus, autonomy from this social approach is conceived as a result of the social learning process that contributes to developing it. Therefore, this qualitative study is guided by the Socio-Cultural theoretical approach, and it focuses on how students develop autonomy in social contexts like the Self- Access Centre. By this means, it can be that there is a complex interaction, a non-linear non-directional interaction between various social processes that lead students to create and shape different learning networks using elements such as agency, interaction, scaffolding, activities, and the learning environment that contribute to the development of their language learning autonomy.

Questionnaires were distributed amongst SAC students to investigate these processes. The respondents were from all the undergraduate university programs. These students attended the facility to improve or to practice their English communicative language skills. Additional research instruments such as videos, recordings, interviews, and observations were used. During a period of five months, the participants were observed working at the SAC. Their actions were video recorded to gain some insight while carrying out the activities in the SAC. Counsellors, part-time teachers, English assistants also responded to questionnaires, interviews explicitly designed for them.

Data was analysed using the NVivo 12 and Gephi software. The study results show that, to a certain extent, the learning networks emerge from learners' interactions that contribute to the development of learning autonomy through a dialogical process of meaning construction with others. The findings corroborated that several elements as agency, scaffolding, interaction, and others are intertwined to build up a structure that acts out as a framework within the activities they carry out exercising their agency. The activities facilitate the interaction between learners enabling them to adapt their learning themselves. Nevertheless, further studies are needed to disclose how learning networks emerge in the interaction process that enables learner autonomy to take place.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: JULIETA CARRILLO ACOSTA

Title of thesis: THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF AUTONOMY IN THE SELF-ACCESS CENTRE

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University.
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated.
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed.
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work.
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself.
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signature:

Date: May 15 , 2022

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Definitions and Abbreviations

Autonomy	The capacity to take control of one's learning.
Activity	Something that is done as work or for a particular purpose.
Attitude	The way you think and feel about someone or something.
Interaction	Mutual or reciprocal action or influence.
Learning environment	What the learning context is like in the SAC, as perceived by the learners.
Motivation	A force or influence that causes someone to do something.
Scaffolding	Provide contextual support for meaning through the use of simplified language, teacher modelling, visuals and graphics, cooperative learning, and hands-on learning.
Self-Access Centre	A social learning environment in which students can develop and practice different skill to become autonomous language learners.
Topics	A subject of conversation or discussion
A1 to B2	Levels of English in the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR).
CEDIM	Centre for Studies on Design
CEFR	Common European Framework for Languages
CLES	Constructivist Learning Environment Survey
EFL	English as a Foreign language
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes

L2	Second Language
NLE's	New Learning Environments
OCD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SAC	Self-Access Centre
SCT	Socio Cultural Theory
SLL	Second Language Learning
SNA	Social Network Analysis
SRL	Self-regulated learning
UNESCO	Acronym for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ZDP	Zone of Proximal Development

Chapter 1 Introduction

"A learning environment has to be an embryonic community life, active with the types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society, and permeated throughout with the spirit of art, history, and science. When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious."

(Dewey, 1997)

This study draws on the Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT) that acknowledges that learners have an active role as agents of their learning processes. This theoretical view gives attention to several elements as agency (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001), interaction (Benson, 2001), self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2000), scaffolding (Walqui, 2006), the learning environment (Dewey, 1997; Cottarel and Reinders, 2001) and networking (Wasserman & Faust, 1994) which all together contribute to the development of learning autonomy. Nevertheless, to be in charge of their learning processes and become autonomous means that the learning environments have to change from traditional controlled learning contexts into more socio constructivists, allowing them to exercise their agency. Then, learners can be encouraged and engaged in social learning to achieve their learning goals.

As a result of the theoretical turn which acknowledges the learner's active role in social contexts, there has been a need in this study to understand how language learners transform the learning environments such as the Self- Access Centre (SAC hereafter). For this purpose, some concepts will be defined to understand how they contribute to fostering language learners' autonomy. These concepts are agency, interaction, self-regulation, scaffolding and the learning environment.

This research uses an ethnographic approach to seek empirical evidence concerning how learners develop learning autonomy in social contexts: how, where and with whom they use the target language in the SAC. The study advocates that there is a complex interaction. In other words, a non-linear and non-directional interaction between various

social processes leads students to create and shape different learning networks built up through the intertwined elements that act out as promoters of autonomy.

This study took place at a government-funded university in Cancun, Mexico. Participants were twenty enrolled undergraduate students chosen randomly from all the English courses offered in the university programs. All the students use the Self Access Centre as a “social space” for using and practicing English (Murray,2014)

1.1 Rationale of the study

This research paper was motivated by my strong interest in knowing more about how students develop language learning autonomy in social contexts as the SAC. My role as a counsellor has allowed me to observe and interact with undergraduate students who attend the SAC to practice or learn English. To meet these needs, the university has provided the academic community a facility where the students can achieve their language learning goals through a variety of learning resources. The learners have to study English compulsory in each academic program to reach at least CEFR B2. As a part of the English program, they have to work independently for certain SAC hours. Hence, to cover the working hours at the SAC, they have the opportunity to organize themselves and decide how to do it. They meet with their peers, counsellors, part-time teachers in conversation sessions, collaborative activities as playing language board games, watching movies, using the computers, or doing homework.

An increasing number of students regularly attends the Sac since it opened in 2005. It started with an audience of 35 students, but today 150 students currently attend the SAC simultaneously daily. What lies beneath the SAC that makes it very popular among students and makes them come back and forth, again and again, to learn or practice English while they are university students and even when they finished the language credit?

It seems that learners exercising their agency, attending to the SAC, and helping each other through complex social processes to develop language learning autonomy within the activities they choose to do can be the key to this successful participation. Also, the interactions between learners, counsellors, and staff, among other intertwined elements

such as interaction, self-regulation, scaffolding, and the learning environment, motivate learners to participate in collaborative activities allowing them to create various interrelationships between the students where learning networks emerge.

Therefore, I started to reflect on the extent to which the learning networks contribute to the development of autonomy in a social context, the choices the learners make to use the SAC to learn, the role of the activities they choose to do, the way in which learners use the SAC to support their learning and the interrelations that emerge from their interactions.

Consequently, this study is carried out under the Socio-Cultural Theory that views the learner as an agent of their learning and builds knowledge with the help of others in social learning environments. The activity is characterized by interactions established in collaborative activities and the usage of educational resources that they choose to achieve their learning objectives and thereby achieve autonomy.

The Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT) has recently made a significant impact in the academic language learning settings. Language is considered a social phenomenon rather than an isolated cognitive phenomenon, and the learning context is a crucial factor that contributes to meaningful language learning through social interaction.

As a result, studies highlighting the social and cultural contexts of learning as in the Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory, Language Socialization, Social Theory, among others, view language use in real-world situations as fundamental not subordinated to learning. Hence, special attention is given to different elements as agency (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001), interaction (Benson, 2001), self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2000), scaffolding (Walqui, 2006), the learning environment (Dewey, 1997; Cottarel and Reinders, 2001) and networking (Wasserman& Faust,1994).

Mercer (2012) explains that because of the arrival of communicative language teaching and learner-centred approaches, there has been a growing interest in learners as active learners, so research has started focusing on learners' needs, goals, opinions, and beliefs.

1.2 Aims of the present study and research questions

This qualitative research seeks to offer empirical evidence concerning how learners develop learning autonomy in social contexts. The study advocates that there is a complex interaction and a non-linear non-directional interaction between various social processes that lead students to create and shape different learning networks using elements such as agency, interaction, scaffolding, activities, and the learning environment that contribute to the development of their language learning autonomy. That is, from learners' interactions various interrelationships emerge within the communities of learning through social processes that take place in the activities that they choose to do. Exercising their agency students are able to work efficiently and help each other to build up autonomy in a social context.

The aims formulated in the research questions examine how language learners' choices contribute to their process of becoming autonomous learners when given the opportunity to organize themselves as agents of their learning process. In other words, they exercise their agency by making choices to shape the learning environment using all the resources available in the facility.

Therefore, the lens of the qualitative research methodology allows to look at the learners as a whole bearing in mind their beliefs, opinions and needs. Considering that learners use the resources available in the facility to generate different kinds of learning environments. Students always learning together towards the development of their language learning autonomy in the social context in which they want to achieve their learning goals.

This enquiry research gives rise to the following research questions:

- 1. How do students learn in the Self-Access Centre?**
- 2. What enables students to learn in the SAC?**

And the sub questions:

- 1a. What kind of interrelations emerge from learners' interaction in the SAC?**
- 1b. What elements in the SAC contribute to the development of social autonomy?**

1c. What kind of interactions are established while students participate in different activities within the SAC?

The real interest at the heart of this research is the central question, which seeks to understand how allowing the learners to organize themselves and to make choices as agents of their learning processes can achieve their language learning autonomy with the help others within the Self Access Centre.

To answer this question, sub-questions 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d look at different elements.

The research question 1a is based on the perspective that learners' beliefs, opinions, needs, and choices influence their decisions in language learning, which might be familiar to individuals engaged in similar activities in similar settings. Cotterall (2000) states that the concept of choice is fundamental to learner autonomy because autonomous learners can make choices in all aspects of their learning, and this includes when to be dependent on the teacher or when to be free from teacher direction. Therefore, this question aims to find out how learners decide to organize within the Sac, to whom they want to work and the activities they want to do.

Research question 1b is aimed at knowing the kinds of interactions that the learners establish in the centre along with the activities they choose to practice the target language according to their learning needs and preferences. Taking always into account that students are the agents of their learning.

Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) clearly state, "learners are people or agents who actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their learning". It means that they use their agency to build up their language learning pathways in the facility. Also, Lantolf & Poehner (2014) explain how learners help each other to co-construct new knowledge and skills through mediation and internalization. In other words, students are creators of language learning pathways that lead them to the development of language learning autonomy.

Research question 1c stems from the understanding that students' interactions emerge from a wide range of interrelations among the participants and the learning resources available for them. The learners' interrelationships create learning networks that can be

understood from the paradigm of the social network. In this paradigm, Scott, J (2017) says, "social networks are a particular form of social capital that individuals can employ to enhance their advantages and opportunities".

The Social Network Analysis is linked to the theory of social capital, which was first mentioned by Putnam (2000).

Research question 1 d focuses on the elements that contribute to the social character of autonomy. This question is sought from the perspective of the socio-cultural paradigm that strongly emphasizes the role of the symbols and signs of the culture which are actively intertwined as a whole contributing to the development of language learner's autonomy within social learning contexts. Ushioda (2011), Lantoff (2006) and Benson (1996) state that there is a shift regarding the importance of the role that social interaction plays in the development of students' autonomy since the social activity is crucial to internalize new knowledge.

It is expected that by providing answers to these questions, this research study may contribute to a better understanding of the extent to which learning autonomy is a process developed by social interaction within learning communities. Considering the interrelationships emerged between the learners' interaction and various elements involved in the process as factors that contribute to the social nature of autonomy.

1.3 Research context

1.3.1 The city of Cancun

Cancun is one of the most important tourist destinations located in the Yucatan Peninsula to southeast of the Mexican Republic in the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico. It was planned by the Federal government after a study of the Tourist market along the Mexican coasts. The Pacific Coast, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean. So, in 1970 a well master-planned resort for tourists with a high- income who could afford the luxurious services of the newest destination emerged. It was chosen because its geographical location close to other touristic attractions in the Caribbean. The main project Cancun was divided into three sectors: Cancun Island where the hotel zone was settled on the 20Kms narrow island which was connected on both sides by wooden bridges to get access by car or by bus to the continental area. Cancun city was developed

in the northern continental area where the engineers and their families lived. In the first stage the city was planned to give services to almost 70,000 habitants. The construction workers were settled in special campsites along the first main avenue and then moved to other areas of the new city with their families. The project had a great impact on the region specially in the closest towns of Puerto Juarez (a fishermen village) and Colonia Puerto Juarez where in the 70s, 117 people lived there. Because of the demographic explosion the city grew enormously so people from other southern states like Yucatan, Campeche, Tabasco, and the capital city Distrito Federal came to work to fulfilling the hotel zone working demand. Today 50 years later almost one million people live in the City of Cancun which is a very cosmopolitan city because people from the Mexico and other places around the world who speak other languages came to live and to work in the tourism industry.

Tourists from abroad arrived to know more about the place that offers the beauty of the white sand beaches, the biodiversity of the reefs, islands, lagoons, cenotes, estuaries and the local flora and fauna (Fonatur, 2012) among other tourist attractions as the Mayas archeological sites. Travelers can enjoy different water sports and activities like scuba diving, golf, tennis, and others. The nightlife offers a great variety of shows, discos, and restaurants.

The Hotel zone has its own dynamic life where people from all over the world gather to enjoy and to have fun so initially the local people tried to communicate with them. The result was that they felt the need to learn to speak English mainly just for “the purpose to fulfilling tourist desires” (Prebles 2010:40). Today speaking English is a must if you want to get a job in the tourist industry in Cancun. Locals mention that visiting the hotel zone is being in “Gringolandia” because English is seen in the business and road signs. Fernandez de Lara (2009:198) says that “When one walks through the hotel zone, one feels as if one were in any city or amusement park in the United States, such as Las Vegas or Disneyland”

Nowadays Cancun is one of the most important tourist destinations in the country. It has 48,874 hotel rooms in 1,109 hotels and in 2019 before the covid blackout 3,610,506 of tourists from USA, Canada, Europe and Brazil, arrived at the destination (SEDETUR, 2019).

Then because of the growing tourism industry the workers had to learn to speak different languages. So, few language schools opened at the beginning to teach them how to speak foreign languages like English, French and German. Also, the private schools taught English mainly but nowadays lots of languages are taught to cover the needs of the Tourism industry.

Great interest in learning a language has grown among the people who work in the field of tourism either in hotels, travel agencies, transport, tour operators, gastronomy or water sports facilities.

Regarding to the education sector and seeing the need to provide students with a better training in the professional field several universities in the government and private sectors have designing language programs. Then, the students who attend to their facilities have the opportunity to learn English among other foreign languages requested by the Tourism industry. This argument has had a great impact so the Universidad del Caribe facing the challenge to provide good language quality programs so the students can develop their communicative skills which can make them efficient speakers they have to take four levels of general English and two topics levels that will take them to B2 level and also to attend to the Self- Access Centre where they can do many activities related to learning English as a part of their academic programs. Consequently, this last argument greatly influenced my study to research about how the students given the chance to make choices can learn a foreign language independently in a social centre as the Self- Access Centre.

1.3.2 The University

This research study is set at a government university in Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico. The university is a federal educational institution that emerges as an effort to meet the great needs of the higher education in the northern part of the state. It was designed by the Federal government in Mexico on September the 29th, and it opened in February 2001.

The mission of the University is to develop professionals with the knowledge, skills, competencies and meaningful social values that will allow them to participate in their environment. They will be able to apply their knowledge and culture for human development and also conduct relevant institutional research and university extension, to contribute to the social, economic and cultural life of the state and the progress of the country.

The educational model of the university is sustained on the 3rd Article of the Mexican Constitution, the Cognitivist psychology, and the Socio-Cultural Theory. Based on this model, the student at the university has an active role in the learning process, the

teacher's role is to be a guide of the process and the contents are considered as scaffolders to develop the skills and knowledge in meaningful learning environments.

The university offers eight different programs: Sustainable Tourism, Gastronomy, Innovation, International Business, Logistics, Telematics and Environmental Engineering; programs that students have to complete a minimum of 8 semesters (4 years) and a maximum of 8 years. So, students are allowed to choose the pace in which they want to finish their major especially those who are part of the working field.

Due to the flexibility of the programs, students can decide freely, the teachers, the timetables and the subjects they want to study for each semester besides the mandatory ones according to their needs and interests. They can choose between nine and four subjects each semester to complete their curricula if they are full time students. Each of the programs includes learning English as a co-curricular subject. Thus, the students have to take four semesters of general English and two semesters of ESP in their areas.

Every year students are invited to enter the university, so they have to register in the month of April to become candidates. As soon as they are accepted, they must have a computer placement test and an oral interview to be placed in the correct level of English according to their results. The university offers them four levels of English: Elementary (L1), Pre-intermediate (L2), Intermediate (L3), and Upper -Intermediate (L4), Topics I and Topics II (ESP). Each of the general English courses is covered in 96 hours of face-to-face classes and 20 hours of independent practice in the Self-Access Centre. The objective is that students at the end of their English program, they have reached the B1 level according to the Common European Framework.

One important point to mention is that even though English is not awarded or graded, the students have to cover the English program to get their degree. If they do not finish on time, they must stay until it is finished or if it is failed three times in a row they are automatically expelled from the university.

The English program has been developed according to the working field needs. At the beginning it was mainly focused on developing the oral communicative skill but

nowadays, this situation has changed because the internationalization of the education, the students need to achieve the academic skills to be able to participate in the international students exchange program at different universities abroad.

1.3.3 The students

The community of students entering the university comes from various educational institutions in the country, both public and private. Most of the students are from the General Baccalaureate government schools, and a smaller number of them are from private schools. Each year, an average of 1,500 applications are opened to enter the university. About 1,000 students join to study one of the eight educational programs offered by the university. The largest number of students is enrolled in the International Business program, followed in descending order by Tourism, Gastronomy, Business Innovation, and Engineering. To enter the university, all students take the CENEVAL exam (EXANI II), a government exam that measures critical thinking, mathematical thinking, language structure, and reading comprehension. Once the students passed, students are accepted into each of the educational programs.

As soon as their university life begins, students take a compulsory introductory course which objective is to learn about the mission, vision, and philosophy of the educational model that guides the academic life. And the development of learning strategies requested that will facilitate their stay as university students. The propaedeutic course is oriented towards developing mathematical thinking, writing, and reading comprehension in their native language, critical thinking skills, and collaborative work. The purpose of learning to work in teams is that the educational learning model is based on the Socio-Cultural Theory model in which the students have a relevant role in learning through scaffolding and a great variety of learning materials to foster autonomous learning from a social context.

Depending on the student's needs the educational programs can be studied in four years, extending up to 8 years. They can choose their academic subjects starting from the second semester because of the university's flexible model allows them to do it. This learning possibility enables them to design their career profile through optional subjects

and those required for each program. They also can choose their exit as Professional Technicians once they have completed the first two years of their studies. This educational level qualifies them for the practical work of their careers; however, they can return later to finish the other two years and obtain a bachelor's degree. They may also have the opportunity to withdraw temporarily due to their academic needs, but they may not exceed the time required to complete their studies. Another possibility they have is to change their studies program once they have completed the first semester in which they initially registered.

The foreign language being studied at the university is English, which is considered the lingua franca for science and general knowledge. So, students must take four levels of general English and two topics courses in their areas of knowledge to reach level B1 of the Common European Framework and cover the language credit to obtain their degree. To support the study and development of the English language, the university implemented a Self-Access Centre, which opened in 2000 as a result of a project between the Mexican government and the British Council for the establishment of Self Access Centres to develop autonomous learning of English as a complement to regular classes (Grounds, 2002).

In its beginnings, the SAC had 35 users; currently, it has an average of 150 students at the same time from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and on Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The centre is staffed by a centre coordinator, 10 English counsellors with masters and doctoral degrees in English language teaching. Also, English subject teachers who are assigned hours according to the total hours they work at the university and who belong to the different programs of the university: International Business, Business Innovation, Gastronomy, Sustainable Tourism, and the four Engineering programs, participate in the centre, as well as the social service scholarship holders and the language exchange assistants.

At the university, all students must cover certain hours of independent work within the SAC as part of the regular English program; others voluntarily attend to practice the four communicative language skills according to their learning preferences or to help others. All of them freely choose the print, audio, and multimedia resources that are available for

them. Within the SAC, the tutors, advisors, and assistants help, support, and guide the students to get the most out of the resources and activities they carry out in the SAC.

The Self-Access Centre is a social learning environment that adapts to the learning needs of English language learners. So, the students have the opportunity to develop their communication skills regardless of the educational program and semester they are in and their level of English because of the social dimension of the SAC. As soon as they arrive at the facility, they can freely organize themselves by choosing where to work, with whom to work, how to work, and what elements to work on individually or collaboratively. In the collaborative model, students can work in pairs, trios, small groups, or larger groups with or without the help of an advisor at the SAC open stations. They can also work with a subject teacher, a SAC assistant, an English foreign exchange student, or a student from the university covering their social service. Either to integrate work teams or to have conversation sessions.

It is essential to mention that their social activity and interaction with material such as television to watch movies and videos, computers, tape recorders, readers, board games, magazines, and visuals create learning networks. These learning networks allow them to exchange, opinions, knowledge, both personal and general information. And at the same time, because of their different profiles, backgrounds and learning needs, they develop and practice social skills such as tolerance, patience, active listening, among others within the learning communities they work. They exchange opinions on various topics that will help them in the professional field they would develop.

1.3.4 The nature of self-access centres

The predecessors of the self-access centres were the language laboratories that were implemented in schools around 1950 (Kenji, 1995) to learn English individually through a wide variety of audio and audio-visual material in the aim to experiment self-directed learning. This language learning model was based on Behaviourism theory by Skinner where the student has a passive role that learns from a model through repetition. The learning material was focused mainly on phonetics and listening. The language laboratories were mostly used as extensions of classes where students were supervised

by the teacher using timecards. So, few disadvantages arose because some of the language courses would not contribute much to learning English, and some students had problems on pronouncing the words correctly. Some schools in America such as the Harvard University, the University of Cambridge in Europe among others around the world, adopted this language learning model (Grounds,2002).

In the 21st century has been a theoretical learning shift from Behaviourism (Skinner,1968) to Constructivism (1974) which has influenced the way learning is conceived. Then, the students' passive role changes into an active role. It means that they become agents of their learning process. Consequently, this premise is relevant because all the elements involved in the learning process such as the teachers, resources and the learning environment must change. Therefore, as Gremmo and Riley (1995) say

"The self-access centres were created as a result of dissatisfaction with the service and effectiveness provided by the language laboratories".

Since the 1990s there has been a proliferation of self-access centres. Cotterall and Reinders (2001) describe how interest in Self-Access Language Learning (SALL) was manifested as a component in language teaching. They say that the materials and activities are designed to cater for different levels, styles, goals, and interests, with the aim of developing learners' autonomy.

For their part, Gardner, and Miller (1999) claim that SALL is an approach to language learning and define it in terms of the development of autonomy that it should promote. Both researchers point out that every so often the self-access is understood as a collection of resources, but that it is more a combination of elements to provide a learning environment, where each student interacts in a unique way.

1.3.5 Self-Access Centres as social learning spaces

Since the first Access Centres (SACs) opened in the 70's, the main objective has always been to help students to become independent learners. At the beginning the centres were controlled learning environments (Murray, 2014) centred mainly on providing the students the learning tools as books, printed materials, tape recorders to achieve their

learning autonomy. The activities were focused on developing autonomy individually. The term self-access centre is defined by Sturridge (1992) as,

"System which makes materials available to language learners so that they can choose to work as they wish, usually without a teacher or with very limited teacher support"

Recently a great shift took place from the behaviourist (Skinner, 1968) learning perspective to a more sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978) learning approach where the SAC is viewed as an active learning space (Murray, 2014) and in which the centre of the learning process is the student interacting with others in a social learning space. Williamson and Nodder (2002) cite Oldenberg's (2002) definition of social learning space,

"a physical and/or virtual area that is not predominantly identified with either social or work/study perspectives but transcends both and facilitates both formal and informal student-centred collaborative learning"

Therefore, because of these theoretical turn, new forms of learning spaces are being designed, aimed in the purpose, and functioning of the social space. In these learning spaces the students are allowed to speak English, to meet friends, to get and give help, to take risks, to be heard, to learn about the world, to get information and something relevant to mention is that they are capable to exercise agency (Murray, 2018). For Van Lier (2010) agency is

'The person deciding to, wanting to, insisting to, agreeing to, negotiating to, act'.

Through the videos, photographs, and data from the questionnaires I came to see how students exercise their agency in the SAC and also how the facility is viewed as a social learning space at the university where users can gather in collaborative activities that keep them engaged and motivated to learn the target language that in this case is English. Lantolf (2000) says, "that not only do language and learning matter, but so do place, time, others, goals and motives". Therefore, it can be said that the social learning space become a crucial element because this is where the students develop social learning networks that emerge from the social activity in the small communities of learners around the SAC (Murray, Fujishima, and Uzuka, 2014). Through interaction and

scaffolding the students participate in developing their communicative skills among the others by sharing information, opinions, beliefs, knowledge, skills.

Then, as a result of this Sociocultural approach, the universities around the world have created social learning spaces which encourage active, social, and experiential learning (Oblinger 2006). In Murray's words

“a social learning space has the potential to offer a wide variety of affordances for all kinds of learning. By embodying the potential for the emergence of these affordances, the social learning space can be self-enriching”.

1.3.6 The organization of the Self -Access Centre in Cancun

The Mission of the university is to provide all students the human resources, infrastructure, materials, and financial support to achieve it. Hence one of the most important areas in its facilities is the Self Access Centre. Its main purpose is to develop the students' communication skills (Ellis, 1998) in the foreign language and to become autonomous learners in a social constructivist environment (Vygotsky, 1976).

On the basis of the model Auto Centre Access converge two relevant theories: the Socio-Cultural Theory of Leontiev Vygotsky, who argues that learning a language is a social event where people interact to give meaning to the signs and symbols of the culture and also the theory of Rowland (1999) who says that the Self- Access Centre can be seen as a system in which converge three axes: the academic, the infrastructure and the administrative one. He also argues that there are common properties in all systems, such as the communication and the hierarchy to promote their existence.

The Self Access centre was opened in 2005 and has evolved from a controlled learning environment guided by teachers to a social learning context where more attention is given to the students' language learning needs. Therefore, in 2008 because of this great shift, the space, resources, staff and systems for management and learning (Gardener and Miller 1999) are integrated to develop students' autonomy in a social learning context. Thus, today after 15 years the Self-Access Centre (SAC) at the university is a social

learning space which encourages active, social, and experiential learning (Oblinger, 2006 cited in Murray 2014) for all the active users in the university.

The facility started in a regular classroom of 210 m² adapted for the SAC. It had 4 open stations for teachers, a reading section, a conversation section, a listening area, and a television section altogether could give service to 35 students from all the academic programs, simultaneously. Nowadays, the SAC is in a two-story building that covers a total of 472 square meters for capacity to serve 150 students in the facility. Each floor has the same services for all the students: a reading area with sofas, a computer section where students can work simultaneously, a conversation section in the middle with round tables for small groups or two big tables for bigger groups that can be moved at convenience of the users and four counsellors' open stations in each level. In the upper level, there are also three offices, one for the head of the English department, one for the Chinese program and another for the French program. There is a multimedia room which is also used as meeting room. There are 10 counsellors, English part-time teachers, foreign language assistants and students from the last semesters of their majors doing social service hours helping their peers.

A great variety of different materials for all the majors are kept in bookcases around the SAC and equipment (photos) are organized so that the learners can use them as scaffolders to learn either with peers or independently (photos) according to their needs and wants. The rationale behind the facility can be considered consistent with the ZDP from Vygotsky (1978) because the learners are engaged in collaborative activities such as the conversation sessions or playing a board game as the students report in the research. They participate in challenging tasks with assistance of those who are more advanced either peers, counsellors, language assistants or teachers who work at the SAC. This temporary assistance allows language learners to internalize gradually the tasks and the strategies that the most advanced peers use to learn so that they can achieve their language learning goals. Then, as a result of this social interaction, the intra and the internalization learning processes take place while learning collaboratively (Vygotsky, 1978). The internalization is a semiotic process in which the students get across with the meaning collaboratively and, therefore, they full "appropriate of meaning". As in the intra-process each leaner gets the meaning through a personal process. Hence, the social

interactions allow both intra and the internalization parallel learning processes to take place while learning in a social context. Thus, starting from the point that language is a social construct the SAC provides students with social language learning environments to promote interactions needed to accomplish their language learning goals.

When the students arrive at the SAC, they register themselves in the computer in the main entrance. After that, they decide what to do in the facility. There is a conversation chart where they can check who is available to give conversations or they can simply join the groups already have the conversations sessions. They can also take a look around the place to choose the activities they want to do either upstairs or downstairs.

The students from the research report that they like to be in the SAC (questionnaires) because it provides a positive social ambience, and they feel happy. Also, is the place in the university where they can freely exchange opinions, information, study and learn. Then, the SAC offers students the chance to set up social language learning environments to promote interactions needed to accomplish their language learning goals. Consequently, the SAC learning environment gives students the opportunity to develop their autonomy by providing them the best learning conditions using different scaffolders such as magazines, books, televisions, computers to help them construct knowledge and practice the communicative skills among their peers or individually at their own pace. Hence, the dynamic activity within the SAC, involves new roles, behaviours, and strategies to create rich, meaningful, and active learning environments in which the main aim is to foster learners' motivation to create their language learning paths as agents of their learning process. In other words, students have freedom to decide how to learn so that they can develop their language learning autonomy based on their language learning needs within a social context.

In the SAC, counsellors, part-time teachers, staff, and language assistants can help them to create opportunities to learn either in groups or independently always taking in mind the learners' needs to develop their self-management skills and also to help them establish positive relationships between learners because they have different backgrounds from the different cultural contexts (Murray,G. Fujishima,N. and Uzuka,M. 2014) , they have lived in.

It is also worth mention that to support the students' language learning process the SAC provides the opportunity to adapt the physical learning environment by changing the setting according to their learning needs. They can work in pairs, small or big groups. Thus, this opportunity to adapt the learning context allows them to organize the activities and to choose the material they want to use. Another important issue is that the social interaction is the key element where social learning networks emerge in the communities that language learners decide to work. Therefore, given the opportunity to choose what to do, how to do it, which material to use, to whom they want to work in the flexible learning context of the SAC, they can develop language learning autonomy with the help of all the intertwined elements as the motivation, learning environment, scaffolders, and interaction.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 presents the structure of this thesis.

Chapter 2 is concerned with a theoretical review of the literature regarding the Socio-Cultural Theory and defines agency, motivation, self-regulation, strategies, and autonomy, underpinning this research. It is also explained that learning is a dialogical process within different learning community contexts using potentially learning material that fosters different kinds of interactions guided by their peers, teachers, or both creating learning networks to develop autonomy. The chapter ends by addressing why this framework is considered suitable for the study.

Chapter 3 This chapter addresses the research methodology and data collection used in this study. It presents the rationale and justification for choosing the qualitative method as a research design and the research instruments used to collect data: learner's interviews, observations, questionnaires, recordings, and videos. Finally, the research questions that guide this investigation are presented, followed by data analysis methods using Excel, NVivo12, and Gephi software.

Chapter 4 shows the results drawn from data analysis. They display a complex interaction where a non-linear non-directional interaction between various social processes leads students to create and shape different learning environments where learning networks

emerge using elements such as agency, interaction, scaffolding, activities, and the learning environment that contribute to the development of their language learning autonomy.

Chapter 5 answers the questions that guided this qualitative research. It includes the answers to the main research questions focused on how students learn in the Self-Access Centre (SAC) as well as the elements that enable students to learn within the facility to achieve their language learning autonomy. The other three research sub-questions deal with the interactions that students create to learn, the interrelationships that emerge from these interactions and finally the elements that contribute to the development of learners' autonomy in the Self-Access Centre (SAC) and highlights the contributions of the study.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusions drawn from the study and addresses the key findings from the interpretation and explanation of my data in relation to my research questions (see 1.2) and further discusses the central issue of the study in relation to the broad question: how is autonomy developed from social context? It also offers the limitations of the study, future research, and the implications for the development of self-learning centres.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the elements that emerged in this research at Self Access in the university so that language learners can develop their learning autonomy. Learning is a process that enables people to know about the world so entering to the language learners setting is to come into a world where different learning elements such as agency, motivation, self-regulation, scaffolding, autonomy, and the learning environment are intertwined. Together these interdependent elements build up a learning framework meaning that language learners construct knowledge schemes either individually or interacting with others in a social learning environment. Then it is relevant to understand that the learning process can take place within different learning communities and contexts using potentially learning material and resources, guided by peers, teachers, or both. As a consequence of the interaction among all the actors and elements emerge potentially learning networks. As Kelly (2010) say, ‘Learning is largely a social process, which is enriched when students are able to conceptualize and critically think about academic problems with others (Hunter, Laursen, & Seymour, 2007).

The literature review chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, elements such as motivation, agency, self-regulation, and autonomy explain the elements that belong to the learners’ internal world which drive them to exercise their agency given the opportunity to achieve their language learning objective in a friendly learning context. The first element is the motivation that drives the learner to make choices. This motivation is vital so that students can exercise their agency and make their language learning decisions. Schraw (2006) describes motivation from the metacognitive context as

“Beliefs and attitudes that affect the use and development of cognitive and metacognitive skills.”

Understanding metacognition as “thinking about thinking.” For Dornyei (2006), motivation has three components: Ideal L2 self, Ought- to L2 self, and the L2 learning

experience, part of the L2 Motivational Self System which enables students achieve the language learning target.

The second element considered in this research is agency. Gao (2013:227) defines it from the sociocultural perspective 'as an attribute of agents that places them in the position of being subjects who can think, desire, and act,' which is the root of autonomy (see Benson 2007, p.30). He sees it as a precondition to learners' effort to take charge of the learning process. Following the same line of the sociocultural approach, Lantoff and Pavlenko (2001: 148) define agency as a 'relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with society at large.' They agree on considering language learners as 'agents' who 'actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their own learning' (2001) and not only 'processing devices.'

This agency helps students in the Self- Access Centre to build their learning pathways through self-regulation. Researchers like Maes & Karoly (2005) define the term as the multi-component, iterative, self-steering process that targets one's cognitions, feelings, and actions, as well as features of the environment for modulation in the service of one's goals. All these elements interact in the learner cognitive structure simultaneously, and together, they help to develop autonomy in a complex and dynamic learning process, understanding autonomy as "the capacity to take control of one's learning" (Benson, 2011).

The second section deals with the external learner's elements such as the tools and the artifacts (Vygotsky,1978) that learners choose to use to learn within the activities they wish to do through peer interaction. Interaction that is seen as the main activity within the learning process since the action acts out as a link between the world and the learners (Vygotsky, 1978); through mediation, the learners support one another to work. For Well (2003), the students' interaction is a powerful activity to develop the learners' Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP). Even though most of the scaffolding research has been done in classroom settings, this notion could be used in other educational contexts so language learners can support one another to work and to help each other along the learning process. At the same time, they develop their language learning autonomy.

The SAC learner in this research is seen as an active agent in the learning process and the roots come from the Socio-Cultural approach. Researchers like Vygotsky (1979), Piaget (1975), Brunner (1980), Hamilton & Ghatala (1994), Bandura (1986), and Schunk (2004) agreed on the new role of the learner as an active agent of the learning process.

The third section deals with the learning environment where the learning process and learning networks emerge from the different kinds of interactions take place. Students in the SAC at the university have the opportunity to exercise their agency adapting the learning environment with their peers regarding their language learning needs and wants. This social learning setting created among their peers provides different opportunities to interact between peers and material resources. The activities that take place within the facility are relevant because they help to guide, to motivate, to keep them engaged and to support learners along the learning process. So, this last section focuses on the social dimension of space (Murray,2017) to explain the social learning environment of the SAC from the Socio-Cultural Approach.

2.2 Language learners' internal elements

In this research, language learning is understood as a complex and dynamic activity which involves several elements that are intertwined to allow learners achieve their language learning goal. So, this section will address some learners' internal elements such as agency, motivation, self-regulation, and autonomy which are involved in the process of English language learning.

2.2.1 Agency

The recent theoretical shift from the traditional cognitive approach of language learning to a more sociocultural approach has impacted in the field of applied linguistics and Second Language Acquisition. Thus, language learning has moved from an individualistic perspective to a more complex embedded phenomenon due to the emphasis on the social aspect of learning. Current research under the sociocultural approach claims that Second Language Learning (SLL) is a socially mediated process. Therefore, language learning should be studied in the contexts where learners interact and negotiate

meanings instead of focusing only on individual differences and motivation. Then, as a result of this sociocultural shift, concepts as agency, identity, and the self, have received more attention from socio-cultural approaches (Vitanova et al. 2015).

She suggests that although agency started to be a focus of attention some decades ago, there are diverse understandings of learner's agency and approaches that seem impossible to agree with a single definition. Norton (Norton Pierce, 1995 cited in Norton and Toohey, 2011:420) explains how language learners frequently reconstruct their social world through language, which is considered a sign of agency.

Several researchers have given different definitions to the concept of agency. For Huang (2009) learners can act in response to the opportunities and constraints they face every day and says that agency entails action that arises from learners' deliberation and choice. Gao (2013) defines agency from the sociocultural perspective 'as an attribute of agents that places them in the position of being subjects who can think, desire, and act' which is the root of autonomy (see Benson 2007) because he sees it as a precondition to learners' effort to take charge of the learning process. For him agency is associated with individual agents' self-consciousness, reflexivity, intentionality, cognition, and emotionality (Giddens, 1984; Sealey and Carter, 2004) and connected with power (Giddens, 1984).

Through theorization of activity, human activities, namely learners' learning activities are at three levels of abstraction: (1) the level of activity, related to human behaviour linked to motives; (2) the level of action that is goal oriented; and (3) the level of conditions, in which a goal-oriented action is carried out (Lantolf, 2000; McCafferty et al., 2001). So, the concept of agency depending on the students' aspirations the same activity may mean something different to them.

Following the same line of the sociocultural approach, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001), defines agency as a 'relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with society at large'. Both researchers agree on considering language learners as 'agents' who 'actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their own learning' (2001:162) and not only 'processing devices'. Later, Lantolf and Thome (2006:142-145) claim that agency 'is about more than voluntary

control over behaviour', that it also 'entails the ability to assign relevance and significance to things and events', and it 'can be exercised by individuals as well as by communities.

So far, it is perceived that researchers share some arguments in common. They all view the learner from the sociocultural perspective as an active agent who can make choices and is in charge of the language learning process. Their agency can be individually or co-constructed within the social context in which they act out. Likewise, they agree on recognizing the social nature of language learning because of the multiple ways they can learn and get engaged through the activities they choose to perform. So, agency is then the convergence of various elements: consciousness, goals, intentions, needs, motives, and context. Research findings have also contributed to the understanding the nature of learners' agency by considering their beliefs system, motivation, self-regulation, and affect, which are also part of their self.

Related to this agency concept, Gao (2010) defines it as the will and capacity to act and highlights the relevance of the context. In his investigations, he found the learners' belief system as the most critical because it involves how they select and use learning strategies to exercise their agency within a sociocultural framework in different real contexts.

On the same line of the belief system and attitudes, Harré and Gillet (1994 cited in Lantolf and Pavlenko, 1995) declare 'dispositions arise from motives culturally constructed and discourses that organize their world according to certain meanings and no others'.

Agency is constructed and renegotiated in a specific social context, among others, so it is influenced by individual traits or activities they perform together.

Regarding sociocultural and contextual factors, SLA research is focusing on individual agency and multifaceted identities as Swain and Deters (2007) claim. Both researchers emphasize that the sociocultural theory of mind, situated learning, dialogism and post-structural theories are the present trends which guide SLA research. They also conclude by saying that L2 learning is an extraordinarily complex activity. It seems that various elements are intertwined acting out together. They say that human cognition and agency develop through interaction, the self and multiple identities are co-constructed among others using the cultural artifacts of the context.

Concerning to complexity, Mercer (2011) analyses agency from the complexity theory. This theory undertakes that several components operate as a dynamic complex system. For her, the abilities and affordances, belief systems, motivation, affect, and self-regulatory skills are the components that shape learners' agency. She also reassures the latent potential of agency in self-directed behaviour which depends on the learners' sense of agency. Consequently, language learners are deemed as language learners' agents who use mediation means to co-construct agency.

Relevantly, Miller (2012, 2014) draws attention to Vygotsky's notion of semiotic mediation and Bakhtin's concept of dialogic mediation to adopt the mediated and relational aspect of learner agency. That is, she considers agency as a result of language and interaction. Vitanova (2013) remarks that agency is exemplified as creative, responsive, and even ethical understanding of one's socio-cultural realities' following Bakhtin's (1981) dialogical perspective to explore how agency is shaped in everyday contexts. She indicates that learner's agency is regarded as an essential construct in language learning processes, so she demonstrates a change of view to conceiving learners as complex individuals who use L2 as a mediator in their social and cultural worlds.

Duff's (2012) definition suggests that agency "refers to people's ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals leading, potentially, to personal or social transformation". She cites Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000), who assert that SLL is dependent on agency. That is, the learners have full responsibility for their learning process, which empowers them to achieve their goals and to have control over their lives and choices needed to succeed.

At this point in the literature review, what is clear is that these authors concede to agency a crucial role in language learning. However, Van Lier (2008) highlights the problem of 'locating agency' in naturally occurring talk within socio-cultural contexts. An example of this is Canagarajah (1999), who reports that students decided not to participate actively as a form of resistance. Nevertheless, Vitanova explains that agency can be shown in different ways and not only in active participation. In real life, some students exercise their agency by making choices and taking active roles in the activities they want to perform while others can refuse to participate, meaning that they are free to make

choices. According to Duff, learners' language resistance is lack of agency. Then more research is needed to identify in what contexts can agency be identified. Joseph (2006) proposal is to identify who has it or lacks it to devise ways of restoring it to those most deprived of it.

Particular attention is given in this study to the fact that students exercise their free will to work within the Self- Access Centre by choosing with whom to work, with what learning resources, when and how to organise themselves to achieve their language learning objective focusing on their learning needs, wants and motivation. By exercising their agency, learners are capable to build up learning networks through interaction. These learning networks can help them to develop learning autonomy.

2.2.2 Motivation

One important attitude of language learners is the motivation. Some researchers have stated recently that it is a vital element to gain knowledge, to understand the purpose of studying and learning a second language. Due of its importance within the learning process, it is essential to comprehend what motivation is.

The concept of motivation is strongly linked to Maslow, (1954). He developed one of the most relevant humanistic theories related to this concept. His approach is based on hierarchical humans' needs system is represented on a pyramid. He says that these needs must be satisfied to be able to reach the top of the five levels of the pyramid.

Another theory is the behavioural theory of motivation described by Pavlov, I. (1927). In his Classical Conditioning theory, the motivation is caused by a conditioned stimulus to get a response and because of this, the behaviour is rewarded or not. Later on, Skinner (1953) in his Operant Conditioning theory introduces reinforcement as a way to build up motivation or to punish unwanted behaviours. Both theories were used for a long time in the design and implementation of second language learning methods. Vroom V. (1964) in his expectancy theory proposes that "motivation = expectancy (perceived probability of success) multiplied by instrumentality (connection of success and reward) multiplied by valance (value of obtaining goal)." He says that if the multiplication results in a low value on any of the three factors or the lack of one the motivation will be affected. Therefore,

the learners have to develop a sense of positive commitment to be successful otherwise the lack of motivation will force the learner to abandon the task.

Different authors have defined the concept of motivation from their theoretical backgrounds. Bandura, A (1986) mentions two important concepts: self-efficacy and self-regulation in his social cognition theory. He sustains that a particular action is possible and that the individuals can accomplish it (self-efficacy) by choosing the goals to accomplish and designing a plan to attain those goals through reflection to modify or to redirect the plan to achieve the goals (self-regulation).

Myers, D (1996) says that motivation is “a need or desire that serves to energize behaviour and to direct it towards a goal”. For Hawkins, F (1993) motivation is “what drives or induces a person to behave in a particular fashion [...] the internal force that

initiates, directs, sustains, and terminates all relevant activities. It influences the level of performance, the efficiency achieved, and the time spent on an activity”.

Jones, G; George, J and Hill, Ch. (2000) declare motivation as “psychological forces that determine the direction of a person’s behaviour [...], a person’s level of effort, a person’s level of persistence in the face of obstacles”.

Recently a theoretical shift has been looking at the learners as agents of their learning processes, so the concept of motivation is linked to the social context in which they interact among their peers or other people while learning. So, the argument “Motivation and learning might be social in nature as learning and thinking” has recently emerged since motivation has been seen lately as a factor that is developed through the interaction among people in different social contexts.

This idea first arose after the Russian psychologist Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory (1968). Sivan (1986) mentioned it twenty years ago for the first time, but it was strongly advocated eleven years later by Hickey (1997). Since that time, the social nature of motivation has been included recently in many journals and articles due to its relevance in the sociocultural approach to learning (Meyer, 2006). Even though sociocultural

learning theorists did not ignore motivation in their research, they did see its importance as a factor that might contribute to the students' learning process. An exception of this is Litowitz's work (1993) who analysed the motivation factor from the sociocultural learning point of view regarding the creation of zones of proximal within the classroom and how these zones promoted the internalization of knowledge and high order cognitive skills. However, his analysis was more concerned with the psychoanalytic concept of the motivation rather than the current motivational concepts. Sivan's (1986) work provided the first evidence of analysing the concept of motivation based on the sociocultural Vygotskyan ideas. He presented motivation as a social construct that is build up from the teachers' and students' expectations and judgments which are displayed as motivated behaviour to demonstrate interest and willingness to engage in learning activities.

Argument which can explain how the students who attend to the Self-Access Centre to learn or practice the target language can develop their communicative skills within the socio-cultural activities they choose to participate in.

Learning that could be internalized in their previous schemata to expand their knowledge through the creation of zones of proximal development (ZDP). Hickey's (1997) and Goodenow (1992) perspective was oriented towards the role of the context in motivation. They both agree on Vygotsky's idea of understanding that the social world and the world of the individual are interdependent in many ways. A group of theorists like Walker, Pressick-Kilborn, Arnold and Sainsbury (2004) stated that the contextual nature of motivation it is not new. This concept had been used since the 1930's when Kurt Lewin first emphasized it. They all agree on giving the recognition of the social nature and origins of motivation because motivation, like learning, is considered to be a consequence of the interaction, first among others in a social context and then as a result of individual processes.

Gardner (2001:4) in his Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition says that people learn a second language because they want to come closer to the other language community so they would use their integrative motivation as a driving force to learn the target language. He states that in order achieve the target language we need three main constituents: integrativeness, attitudes toward the learning situation and motivations

among the language aptitude, support and other factors that might contribute to reach the goal.

Elliot, A. (2005) in his achievement motivation theory states that people are motivated to succeed or to avoid failure. He explains that being successful is related with mastery goals (learning goals) in which individuals are focused on gaining competences or mastering new knowledge or skills and avoiding failure is associated to performance/normative goals (ego-involvement goals) focus on doing better than others, or doing well effortlessly, and lastly social goals which have to deal with the way individuals interact, among others. Schraw (2006) describes motivation from the metacognitive context as "beliefs and attitudes that affect the use and deployment of cognitive and metacognitive skills". Understanding metacognition as "thinking about thinking"

I observed in this study that students are highly motivated when they use the Self-Access Centre (SAC). They enjoy participating in the activities and the conversation sessions and whenever they are invited to play a board game, they gladly accept it. Ryan and Deci defined this activity as "*the relatedness of a group*" which enhances them to come over and over to the SAC. It is well known that individuals are social beings always looking for love and acceptance among different groups in order to fulfil the affective dimension so gathering together at the SAC is a way to nurture the humanistic dimension of the self.

At this point, some questions arise: To what extent the SAC learning conditions might contribute to the students' willingness to learn English? Why do they come back? What are their motivations for staying in the SAC?

Dornyei (2006), proposal establishes his L2 Motivational Self System. In this model he explains that there are three motivation components: Ideal L2 self, Ought- to L2 self and the L2 learning experience. The Ideal self has to deal with the persons we would like to become as soon as we learn how to communicate in L2., the Ought-to L2 Self is the attributes that learners possess to meet expectations and to avoid negative outcomes and finally the L2 Learning Experience which has to deal with all the external motivations that might contribute L2 (peers, experience of success, the curriculum, the impact of the teacher, etc). Although, Zetner an Reanud (2007) agreed that this might not be valid for pre-secondary students due to the fact that the stable ideal-self representations do not

emerge before adolescence, and neither can younger children consider multiple perspectives on the self. As Oyserman (2006) states, “the social psychological conceptualization of the self as motivational resource is the real power”.

Therefore, it can be said from different researchers’ perspectives, that motivation is not an endless state but rather a relevant condition which might affect the learning process because of the oscillating patterns of change in the individual’s self-structure.

This study is focused on higher education students who attend the Self-Access Centre at the university. The Self–Access Centre has become a safe and motivating learning environment because of its social setting which allows students to make choices. This means that students are given the opportunity to get engaged through collaborative activities and by using a variety of scaffolders along their learning process they can develop the communicative skills through interaction and the learning networks that emerge as a result of this interaction. Consequently, learners’ motivation is enhanced, and it contributes to the development of language learners’ autonomy.

2.2.3 Self- regulation

Being an autonomous learner entails to develop self-regulation in such a way as to exercise control over one's thoughts and behaviours in order to be an efficient and successful learner. Self-regulated learning (SRL) refers to learners' proactive control over their thoughts and behaviours and involves active use of self-regulatory strategies to achieve goals strategically. Zimmerman (2011) defines self-regulated learning as a proactive control over thoughts and behaviours that learners have, and which involves the active use of self-regulatory strategies to acquire goals.

Then, acquiring the self- regulation stage is demanding because it is a process in which students will need peer support until they learn to work independently. In socio-constructivists learning contexts, the teacher’s role is to encourage students to develop their own objectives and to learn how to self - evaluate what they have already achieved and what still needs to be improved, modify or change. In this research the teachers’ role can be exercised either by the counsellors, the part-time teachers, peers, or the academic English staff who work in the SAC.

Researchers like Maes, & Karoly (2005) define the term as the multi-component, iterative, self-steering process that targets one's cognitions, feelings, and actions, as well as features of environment for modulation in the service of one's goals. Because of this, students should be able and willing to regulate their cognitions and motivations.

Boakaerts (2010), states that self-regulation has an essential role in human functioning in learning and at school. Strategies like orienting, planning, executing the action plan, monitoring and control, and evaluation (Brown, 1987) would help them learn effectively. They also mention that learners have to adapt to the social to achieve learning.

Most theorists agree on saying that in the self-regulation activity, comprises multiple processes and components that interact in complex ways rather than being an all-or-none process nor a property of the learning system. However, to guide and direct their learning, students need to be aware of the metacognitive strategies to develop their self-regulated learning strategies. Moreover, students need to use their metacognitive knowledge to organize and direct their learning in different contexts.

In South Australia, at the Australian Science and Mathematics School students are encouraged to self-direct learning where they can negotiate within the topics, choose their assessment instruments and materials. So, learning is focused on personalization and independence. The goal is to raise awareness among students to "understand themselves as learners and sharing learning with others; being autonomous and self-directing; valuing the beliefs of others and working in groups and independently; using their own experiences to construct and add meaning; identifying and critically evaluating resources and creating meaningful learning products for real world situations and audiences".

Zimmerman (2000) viewed self-regulation as a social process considering observation, emulation, self-control, and self-regulation. His model comprises the following elements:

- a) a forethought stage in which prior experiences and motivational beliefs are activated so students can set up proximal goals and develop an action plan,
- b) a performance stage in which the forethought stage outcomes are used to experiment and to observe them, and
- c) a self-reflection stage in which students evaluate their performance, experience affect,

and attribute outcomes, seek feedback and review and adjust their goals in which this information is used to build up the next self-regulation cycle.

In Switzerland in the Institut Beatenberg, the learning system is focused on the development of the learners' autonomy, using a broad range of cognitive and metacognitive tools and personal coaches that have regular interviews with them to reflect on their own process of learning (metacognition). They state that the concept of "self-directed learning" becomes most visible in the learning team where the learners assume total responsibility for their own learning.

Butler and Winne's (1995) model of self –regulation stated that students should set a learning goal and activate strategies whenever they get a learning task. The objective is to monitor their activities to assess their progress toward the goal and to adapt or modify their strategies according to the given task. Nevertheless, some students are not able to carry out the metacognitive monitoring and control because of their self-efficacy judgements. So, students who have well-calibrated judgements are better in defining the learning outcomes, the time and the effort needed to accomplish the task. Winne (1995) also says that,

"Metacognitive strategies use a lot of cognitive resources, specifically memory capacity and attentional resources, so students who have not yet proceduralized the declarative knowledge that is necessary for doing a task will not be in a position to devote conscious attention to the goal-setting and monitoring process because it exceeds their limited processing capacity".

Boakaerts proposal includes a structural and a process approach to self-regulated learning which includes: (1) conceptual knowledge, (2) cognitive strategies, (3) cognitive self-regulation strategies, (4) conditional knowledge, including metacognitive and metamotivational knowledge, (5) motivation strategies, and (6) motivational self-regulation. Boakaerts mentions that "teachers must be able to differentiate between self-regulation strategies in the service of regulating the learning goals and self-regulation strategies that protect the learning from competing action tendencies". Additionally, this model should be complemented with the dual processing self- regulation model (Boakerts& Corno, 2005) to understand the when, why, and how students self-regulate

their learning in the classroom and what is more important to conceptualize, why some students are not capable to self – regulate in all the subject-matter domains and why self-regulation is not successful in certain learning conditions.

The dual processing self -regulation model deals with two main goal priorities: to expand their personal resources and to keep their well-being within reasonable bounds. Students then try to maintain a balance between these priorities. If they want to expand their personal resources, then they initiate activities towards mastering the task, but they need to feel competent to do so otherwise they will not get involved in the task and they will move to the well-being pathway to restore their level of motivation. This is explained by Boakerts and Corno (2005) they said that students can switch back from the well-being pathway to the mastery pathway using their emotion and motivation (volitional control) regulation strategies. Likewise, Wolters (2003) describes some motivation regulation strategies that might help students to increase, sustain, and modify their level of motivation (e.g., interest enhancement, social reinforcement, task structuring, self-consequating, raising self-efficacy, and dealing with distractors).

An important issue to consider is that if students realize that the learning environment does not promote favourable learning conditions and they see obstacles and drawbacks, then automatically they switch from the mastery pathway to the well-being pathway. Moreover, today students not only strive for achievement goals, but they want to attain many other many goals (Sheldon and Elliot, 1998). Consequently, teachers and researchers need to understand that self-regulation is energized from top down, based on students' own values, needs goals, and aspirations. Boakerts (2009) states,

"Motivational self-regulation critically depends on having access to a well-integrated goal hierarchy so that consistent choices can be made salient goals".

She mentions that adolescents' goal hierarchy is made of ego goals, task goals, and well-being goals in which students' ego goals (material gain goal, individuality, and superiority goals) are separated from all the other goals. She establishes that they can differentiate between social goals (equity, social support, belongingness, and social responsibility goals), task goals (mastery and management goals), and well-being goals (safety goals, positive self-evaluation, entertainment, and tranquillity goals).

Smith, Boakerts and Busing (2009) conducted a study at Leiden University with adolescents in vocational schools to analyse the importance of some goals and they found that adolescents give more importance to positive self-evaluation goals and equity goals rather than ego goals (material gain goals, individuality, and superiority goals). Social responsibility goals, tranquillity goals, and wanting to be happy and have fun goals come next in their order of priorities. Unfortunately, the study corroborated that mastery goals did not have a high priority in their hierarchy system. Within the SAC, the counsellors ask the learners about their level of English, what they want to achieve, the material they would use and with whom they would like to use it to identify their goals. I have noticed that the counsellors' guidance is crucial in early learning stages because they raise students' awareness about the importance of achieving the mastery goals suggesting the appropriate material to achieve their language learning objectives.

Elliot and Sheldon (1998) declare that persons who are aware of their goal preferences and know their goal system functions are in better position to self-regulate their motivation and effort.

Even though the research and results are set in classrooms contexts where self-regulation is developed, they all consider that self-regulation is a skill which is developed along the whole learning process. So, learners can develop their self-regulation within a social learning environment using different resources and materials. The objective is to foster engagement (O'Leary, 2013) and commitment among learners with the help of a more knowledgeable peer.

Hopefully, the findings in this research can raise awareness to understand how learners achieve the self-regulation stage as a result of a developmental process in which students set up their learning context and where learning networks emerge from social interaction as a learning framework allowing them to reach the stage of how to work independently towards learning autonomy.

2.2.4 Autonomy

An essential element in the language learning processes is autonomy. This concept has to deal with the idea of being an autonomous learner and that it might contribute to the willingness for lifelong learning. But what is autonomy?

The concept of learner autonomy has evolved, and it has been defined from different perspectives, so theorists are still discussing how to define the concept of autonomy. Liberal philosophers defined it as “being capable of reflecting upon the reasons for our actions” then autonomy is understood as the “free choice of goals and relations as an essential ingredient of individual well-being” (Razz, 1986). In 1981, Holec (cited in Murray 2014) defined the concept as “the ability to take charge of one’s learning” which assumes that the student is responsible for the aspects of the learning process as setting goals, selecting materials, deciding on activities and strategies, monitoring progress, and assessing outcomes.

On the same line, Young (1986) explains that each person should “freely direct the course of her life” So from his perspective, to be autonomous, people must grow in democratic contexts in which they are encouraged to make free choices; but to what extent does each person internalizes what autonomy is? For his part, Riley (1988) says that autonomy cannot be created in the classroom but maybe nurtured or encouraged because it is elsewhere within the world in which students grow. Breen and Mann (1997) define it “as a way of being in the world: a position from which to engage with the world”. They propose it as a way of being in the world and that it has to be discovered rather than an ability to be learnt.

For Walls (2003) autonomy is a distinctive ideal because each charts his course through life by choosing projects and assuming commitments from a wide range of alternatives in a self-conscious way. He states that people need to have the capacity to form complex intentions and to sustain commitments and to achieve independence through life to develop one’s understanding of what is valuable and worth doing. Also, it is important to arise self-consciousness awareness and the vigour necessary to take control of one’s affairs and access to find an environment that provides the opportunities of valuable options.

Few years later, Benson (2011) after realizing that Holec's definition explains what autonomous learners can do rather than how can they do it, since it is more focused on the operational learner autonomy than its functional aspect. So, he modified his original definition to "the capacity to take control of one's learning". Definition that is virtually identical to Holec's unless they establish a difference between taking control and taking charge. For Benson (2011) autonomy entitles two basic kinds of constraints: the internal and the external. From the internal constraints, people must have certain psychological capacities like forming - complex intentions, to sustain commitments, self –consciousness and vigour to take control of one's affairs. About the external constraints, he says that there has to be some degree of freedom to understand what is valuable and worth doing to chart one's course through life. But if it is taken for granted in real life the idea of the external constraints it is hard to achieve the level of autonomy he mentions because it is a fact that people come from different cultures which might affect the perception of what autonomy is, since people live in different social contexts where the control of learning could possibly discourage some people to become autonomous learners.

So far, the term autonomy has been defined as an individualistic achievement but recently a remarkable conceptual shift has taken place. This conceptual shift has turned some attention to define the concept of autonomy from the constructivist approach. In this theoretical framework autonomy is defined as an outcome of a social learning process rather than an isolated output of the cognitive approach. So, greater interest is given to the dynamic role of the student in an enriched social context mediated by the tools of the culture to acquire meaning through interaction. In this new social approach to understand what autonomy is, Ushioda (2010) analyses the term of autonomy by highlighting the processes of social interaction and participation as promoters of autonomy. Her approach is based on more dynamic perspectives integrating internal, social, and contextual processes shaping motivation (Lantolf ,2013).

The roots of this new approach come from Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT). this theoretical frame explains how language learning autonomy is developed. The theory sustains that the social context, scaffolding, motivation, the social interaction and the active roles of the language learners and peers are considered as crucial to develop language learning autonomy. All these elements are dynamically intertwined allowing

learners to achieve learning autonomy. Thus, the Socio-Cultural approach has recently made a significant impact in the autonomy, agency and language learning theories giving to the learning context a relevant role because it contributes to meaningful language learning through social interaction. Something that needs to be understood is that the Socio-Cultural Theory has not ruled out the cognitive side of learning because it recognizes the need of a cognitive structure (Piaget, 1967) to learn in a social context. The SCT theory sustains that the brain develops higher order thinking (strategies) by interacting with others in the Zone of Proximal Development using the language among other scaffolders as mediation.

2.2.5 The Zone of Proximal Development

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP) is considered the “site” where the social form of mediation takes place. It does not have a physical place, but it is an abstract concept of the social learning process. Researchers interested in the ZDP like Mondada and Doehler (2004), Ohta (2001,2000, 1997, 1995), de Guerrero and Villamil (2000), Swain and Lapkin (1998), ALjaafreh and Lantolf (1994) have discussed the concept trying to find the relationship between social interaction and L2 learning and how ZDP is developed in social contexts. Nevertheless, few studies have been done in the field to follow the immediate impact of the interaction within the learning process.

An example of this Vygostian ZDP can be observed within the language learners who come to the Self Access Centre (SAC) as they freely choose either to play with the materials available for them or just to practice the target language (English). The primary objective of the activities at the SAC is to promote social interaction among students but there is just a rule to speak English in order to give them self-confidence and control over their learning and also to foster their learning autonomy based in social interactions. The ZDP according to Vygotsky's (1978, p. 86) is,

“The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-

solving under adult guidance (counsellors, teachers), or in collaboration with more capable peers"

The capable peers can be SAC helpers and foreign students or other fellow students with more proficient level in English. The social interaction seems to be crucial because it allows students to exchange valuable information in heterogeneous learning communities to achieve their language learning objectives. So, in this study, particular attention is given to the language that is produced as a result of the social interaction among students from different levels of English who gather together in the SAC.

Therefore, in this research the discourse among language learners is analysed to find out of how social interaction can help students to control their production towards the development of language learning autonomy in a social learning environment. Wells (1999) claims that the interaction created among the students is a powerful activity to develop the Zone of Potential Development, the ZDP is the primary activity space in which learning occurs within each of the learners. Each learner has its own ZPD, but it can be developed if they are motivated by challenging activities in peer collaborative settings. Vygotsky (1978) also argues that learning a language is a social event where people interact to give meaning to the signs and symbols of the culture. He states that this activity is possible because two parallel processes take place together while learning: the intra (cognitive) and the internalization (social) processes. Processes that can be fostered with collaborative activities in social learning environments. I must say that Vygotsky talked about L1 learning at that time in a social context. McCafferty (1992) has applied his ideas to L2 learning. Also Related to this, Lantolf (2014), Thorpe and Ushioda (2011) share with him the importance of the social aspects of language. But to what extent the intra and internalization processes help to develop language learners' autonomy?

2.2.6 Intra and internalization processes

Even though few research has been done in the field of the internalization process in second language learning it is possible to observe this process in the discourse analysis of the intrapersonal communication among students who participate in collaborative activities within the language classroom (Ushioda ,2011; Lantolf ,2007; Otah ,2001).

After working for many years as a counsellor in the Self- Access Centre (SAC) and based on my experience as an English teacher at the university level, I have monitored and taken part in students' interactions while they are participating in collaborative activities within the SAC. Students from all the university programs who have different levels of English get together either to talk, to play, to do their homework or to make presentations for their L2 language classes. It is pertinent to mention that while they are in the collaborative activities, they negotiate meaning using L2 strategies as clarifying, requesting, repetition, comprehension and confirmation checks regardless of their level.

This kind of communicative exchanges as Vygotsky (1978) states, help students to internalize meaning together to achieve the objective of the tasks. So, for this research is important to analyse the communicative exchanges to comprehend how students internalize knowledge and skills in collaborative settings.

In the Socio-Cultural Theory the internalization process has a special place because it is the genesis of higher mental functions. Vygotsky refers to "internalization" as a semiotic process in which the students get across the meaning, and, therefore, they fully "appropriate meaning", whereas in the intrapersonal process, the signs and symbols of the culture are internalized through social interactions while learning takes place. Lantolf & Thorne (2006) state that the internalization of symbolic systems (e.g., language) enables us to "voluntarily organize and control mental activity and bring it to the fore in carrying practical activity in the material world". Also, Kozulin (1990) says that the internalization process is a key element in which the higher mental functions are formed. They give a significant role to the internalization process in second language learning because they all agree that the concept is linked to private speech.

This kind of speech allows learners to hear themselves internally as they appropriate meaning while interacting with others. Frawley (1997) defines private speech as a private dialogue for thinking. My experience as a counsellor allowed me to observe how language learners gather together trying to convey meaning within the activities they choose to participate at the Self -Access Centre social learning environment.

In research studies like McCafferty (1992) examined the relationship between L2 proficiency level and the use of private speech to find a link between Vygotsky's observations of the use of private speech by children and its mediational role while acquiring a second language. He concluded that more research is needed in the field, but he provided evidence that students with lower levels of proficiency used more forms of private speech than those who had more advanced levels of L2. This study allowed him to offer general support for the Vygotskian theoretical framework of self- regulation. De Courcy (1993) in his study carried on a 12 to 15 -year-old middle school, French immersion children in Australia, focused on what students said loudly but also observed what learners said privately. In the interviews she found four reasons they had to use private speech: 1) positively reinforcing one's answer, 2) saving face, by avoiding an incorrect answer, 3) making sense of the question asked by the teacher and 4) getting practice in using L2.

Ohta (2001) recorded Japanese students between four and seven times throughout one academic semester (15 weeks) to register the frequency of private speech produced by the learners. She detected that learner used three different patterns in the private speech: repetition of other's utterances, manipulation of other's patterns and indirect response in which a learner responded privately to an external question or problem posed by the teacher or other learners. She reported that the most used pattern was the repetition of lexical items. The second one was a vicarious response, and the last one was pattern manipulation. As it is observed in these studies, the analysis of the learner's private speech while the language learners participate in the learning activities provides real evidence. Lantolf (2007) studies how students operate these features as they attempt to internalize them. So, in this research project, I intend to analyse the dialogues that students have while they participate in the activities within the Self- Access Centre in

the university to raise awareness on how learning autonomy is developed from the internalization process in social context language learning.

Researchers like Lantolf (2007), Young and Miller (2004), Grabois (2004), Ohta (2001, 2000, 1995), Lantolf and Aljaafreh (1995), and Donato (1994) agree on saying that the internalization process determines the relationship between learning and development because more attention is given now to the dynamic role of the social context in the frame of the Socio-Cultural Theory approach.

Even though, researchers like Van der Veer (2007), Hedegaard (2007), Steiner (2007), Kozulin (2005,2007), Werstch (2007) have written about the internalization notion of Vygotsky, according to Damanova (2001) there is a lack of interest in his ideas because not so many publications have incorporated them into ESL/EFL studies. And this happens because in the Russian school the notion of internalization is considered as an integral part of the sociocultural framework but in the Western World Vygotsky's ideas are not well comprehended (Damanova, 2011). According to Damanova (2011) learners transform the social into private speech and then to inner speech through semiotic mediation which all together build up Vygotsky's human sociocultural praxis.

So far both the intra and internalization processes have been described to give a glimpse of the importance of considering them while attempting to understand the implications of both processes in the development of learners' autonomy through interaction.

Social interaction from this theoretical approach seems to be a central element between the learners so both the intra and internalization processes can take place to achieve learning autonomy. The interaction provides the opportunities to engage with others in collaborative activities. Vygotsky states that providing, meaningful learning collaborative activities in teams or peers in social learning contexts can allow students to develop their learning autonomy with the assistance of more advanced peers, teachers, language assistants or counsellors. This argument is relevant from the Socio-Constructivist theoretical frame because it endorses that meaningful learning takes place using challenging collaborative learning activities within language learning communities with the help of a more advanced student, a counsellor, or a language assistant. Then, the

social interaction among language learners is a vital element to foster and to develop learners' autonomy from a social context.

Then, if the social interaction among L2 learners provides the framework to internalize individual learning autonomy, it is possible to suggest that autonomy, at least partially, emerges from a social learning environment. In my 30 years of experience as a language teacher I have witnessed in the social learning setting of the SAC, the importance of the social aspects in the language learning process. Therefore, this study will follow the socio-cultural principles to link the theory with the practical aspects of it. Hence, I can propose in this research that language learning autonomy is developed through social interaction based on principles of the Socio-Cultural Theory and will proceed to demonstrate to what extent this happens.

2.3 Language learners' external elements

This section addresses the external elements that enable students to learn, practice or reinforce English through peer mediation using a variety of learning resources or educational technology by developing learning networks in the communities in which they choose to work.

2.3.1 Learning Strategies

After 30 years of research, theorists have not yet reached a consensus to explain what a strategy is. They have defined it from various perspectives. The controversy arises from the theoretical question whether a strategy is an observable behaviour, a mental activity, or a neurological process. Moreover, there are conceptual problems for the attributes that a strategy has. Stevick (1990), argues that there is a dilemma about the degree of abstraction that the strategy presents, which leads into the following question: Are there strategies that have a greater degree of abstraction than others and that if this could happen what factor of imprecision and confusion would we needed in order to define them? He also tells us that there is a relationship problem from where the strategy takes place. It seems to be that there is no clear evidence to show the relationship between

internal and external ambiences that could give us a clear correlation between external events or mental constructs generated in students' minds.

So, there is a need to define the concept of strategy from the theoretical approach to understand what a strategy is. Then it can be defined from two different approaches: the cognitive and the constructivism perspective. Commencing with the cognitive psychology, strategies are defined as mental processes and structures that constitute the field of cognitive science (Wenden ,1987). Cognitive theorists like Weinstein described them as "behaviours and thoughts that the learner engages in during learning, and which are intended to influence the learner's encoding process". For his apart, Mayer (1988) explains that learning strategies have to be defined as "behaviours of a learner that could affect how the learner processes information" definition that is shared by O'Malley. Unlike Chamot (2004) which defines the learning strategies as conscious thoughts and actions that learners take to achieve a learning goal.

They all agree on saying that strategies are mental procedures that assist learning, but Phakiti (2003) argues that researchers have to focus on the underlying goal and motivations that students must use different strategies. In like manner, Macaro (1990) states that goals and motivations give the strategy its nature itself. So far, the strategies were defined from the cognitive science as a behaviour because is the way in which humans process and learn information so different researchers proposed a variety of models of strategies from the instrumental perspective. Boekaerts (2000), Zimmerman and Schunk (2001) include strategies for setting and adjusting goals, planning, evaluating progress, assessing the utility of the strategies, to control the physical and social environments using analysis and synthesis and finally, applying inferences and dealing with motivation and emotions. In the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA), O'Malley and Chamot (1990) explained that the declarative knowledge about strategies is taught, practiced, transferred, and evaluated so it gradually becomes procedural knowledge. This implies that the strategies might lead students to be strategic learners through self-regulation, emphasizing the cognitive information processing. They both agree on strategies to control and processing of L1 information., metacognitive strategies for L2 in general, strategies managing emotions and motivations and learning with others. Cohen (1998) explains that whenever a strategy is procedural or

automatized by the students they are known as processes. Oxford (1996,2006), proposal is to choose the strategies based on student's needs. Also, she says that strategies must be explained and demonstrated in the classroom. It is clearly stated with the arguments aforementioned it is perceived that strategies are merely instrumental procedures given to the learners in which the will, needs and learning preferences are not considered at all. Despite the large amount of research and cognitive models provided to explain what learning strategies there are also a need to understand how the social context participates in the learning process.

Currently a great interest in knowing how learners become agents of their own learning process has arisen so there has been a 'socio-cultural' epistemological and theoretical turn trying to explain the concept from the constructivism approach.

The Constructivism approach considers the student as a responsible, active learner who is in charge of his/her learning process (Loyens, 2007; Loyens and Gijbels, 2008). This means that learners become agents of their learning process because they are using their will to act out making use of their agency to learn rather than memorizing a list of things to do as it is in the cognitivist approach. In this approach Piaget (1975) explains that students build up their own strategy system along their learning process. He sustained that they are always integrating knowledge to their previous schemata in the activities they do through two processes: assimilation and accommodation. In the assimilation process learners integrate new information to previous schemes and in the accommodation process they create new ones or transform the previous ones. So then from the previous argument the strategies must be understood as a natural system that develops from the interaction with others within the learning environment.

Contemporary to Piaget is Vygotsky (1978, 1979) who considered a strategy as a high order mental function which is developed by the learner with the help of a more skilful peer in a sociocultural context. The analysis, synthesis, planning, monitoring, and evaluation are some examples of this high order functions. Oxford (1999) calls the two last ones as metacognition. The Sociocultural approach argues that these functions are internalized when the students participate in social interaction activities within the classroom, activities which are highly mediated by the target language. Then this

interaction allows students to adopt their own learning strategies among their peers while they participate in the activities, they choose to do to achieve their learning purposes in meaningful learning environments. The strategies in this particular approach would enhance the way in which they control their emotion and motivation through collaborative activities.

Kozulin (2003) agrees on Vygotsky's ideas about how the language mediates the activities in the Zone of Proximal Development Zone (ZDP). In the ZDP, students are capable to internalize and transform their dialogues through different stages with a 'more capable other' that could be either a teacher, parent, or an advanced peer. In this interaction, meaningful learning takes place because two parallel processes take place: the interpersonal and the intrapersonal. On the one hand, the interpersonal process deals with the development of the social speech that becomes internalized while students exchange meanings in different activities they do and on the other hand, they also develop the egocentric speech which then, it is transformed into the internal speech. This internal speech will promote later the development of the self-regulation needed to internalize the learning strategies needed to become independent learners to achieve their autonomy.

Several models have been designed from the Socio-Cultural Theoretical approach. McCaslin and Hickey (2001) explain that there are four categories in Vygotsky's models as follows: a) task-involved strategies, including cognitive and metacognitive; b) self-involved strategies which include volitional-motivational and emotion-control strategies. c) other involved strategies, which they call social strategies; and setting-involved strategies (environment and organizing) which they view as a segment of metacognitive strategies. Graham and Harris (1996) say that self-regulation strategy development model, emphasizes kid's self-regulation through social interaction with L1. In this model, the teacher explains and models specific strategies that students generally use in a group. Brow, Collins and Duguid (1989) state that students can learn in communities of practice in which the main objective is to focus on specific practices in particular areas of life and learning.

In Holliday's (2003) Social autonomy model, students share their strategies among their peers and teacher for academic purposes and as a consequence of this, they are able to understand, support and strengthen each other's versions of autonomy. It is relevant to mention that the teachers do not judge the student's strategies based on their own background. He strongly criticized the imperialistic strategy induction, but he also criticized those who refused to teach any strategies at all. Holliday clearly explains that in order to be a successful learner the teacher must consider the learner's motivation and volition while teaching different strategies and to help them to develop their self-regulation process. Bandura (1986,1997) in his Social Cognitive Model, centres on self-efficacy and three aspects: self-regulation, environment, and behaviour. He also mentions three phases: forethought (goals), performance and self- reflection (self-monitoring, recording, giving feedback, self- evaluation, and self-reward). Consequently, what they all share is that learning takes place in a sociocultural context and that a strategy is the result of the interaction among a variety of factors such as the cognitive activity, a goal, and a task in a specific context either in teams, in groups or individualized. This means that there is no opposition between the cognitive and the social processes but on the contrary, one needs the other to develop the autonomy of the learner in social learning environments.

In this research, special attention is given to how students develop language learning strategies through different kinds of interactions that take place among their peers and learning resources available in the SAC. These interactions create different learning networks that emerge within the activities that learners freely choose to do either to learn, to reinforce or to practice English in the learning communities in which they decide to work. In the SAC learning communities, learners help each other to achieve their learning goal through scaffolding.

2.3.2 Scaffolding

Scaffolding has its roots in Vygotsky's (1978) term of mediation. For him, mediation is the central activity within the learning process since the action acts out as a link between the world and the learners. He developed the Sociocultural Theory (SCT) in which is emphasized the influence of the culture, peers, and adults on the children and other

learners' linguistic and cognitive development mediated by the language. This mediation enables a person with a higher level of knowledge to help a lower learner to reach their learning objective to master it and use it later independently. His SCT theory contributed to the notion of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to develop the concept of scaffolding.

Later, Brunner (1983) recognized the importance of the teachers' and students' roles in learning. He proposed the term scaffolding based on the Vygotskian idea of mediation to explain that people must obtain the skills and knowledge with the help of a more experienced person to provide temporary assistance until the learner can complete the task. He defined the term as "a process of setting up the situation to make a child's entry easy and successful and then gradually pull back and hand the role to the child as he becomes skilled enough to manage it" (Brunner, 1983). Nowadays, there is a growing interest among educators and researchers in exploring the notion of scaffolding in the process of students' language learning.

The term scaffolding has evolved from the concept of mediation to a broader notion in which many external agents could help students to learn in a meaningful way. Ovando and Collier & Combs 2003 agree on defining the terms as:

"Scaffolding refers to providing contextual supports for meaning through the use of simplified language, teacher modelling, visuals and graphics, cooperative learning and hands-on learning."

In this case, the term scaffolding is perceived as a process in which someone supports another to work. Moreover, Well (2003) points out that the students' interaction is a powerful activity to develop The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Even though most of the scaffolding research has been done in classroom settings, this notion could be used in other educational contexts like the Self -Access Centre (SAC) at the University level so language learners can support each other. At the same time, they develop their language learning autonomy. The Self- Access Centre opened in the university to help the students fully practice English using different tools in a socio-constructivist learning environment. Hammond (2001) says that students are actively engaged when they are involved in social constructivists learning models. Researchers

like Wood, Bruner, Ross (1976); Wood & Middletown (1975) have observed that in constructivists learning environments; the most skilled learners help the others carry out the task to achieve the learning goal through scaffolding. They state that in the English language learning settings, the students are provided with various verbal and academic supports from advanced students and the teacher to acquire the necessary language and academic skills.

Walqui's (2006) studies focused on adolescents' studies. She emphasizes the interactive social nature of learning and examines specific scaffolding types to promote linguistic and academic development. She considers scaffolding as a tool to negotiate meaning through interaction. Her studies are drawn on the Social Cultural theory and a vast number of empirical research on effective practices in L2 learners that gave her the evidence to conceive scaffolding as a structure and a process in which several levels of pedagogical support present as she states,

“...from macro-level planning of curricula over time to micro-level moment-to-moment scaffolding and the contingent variation of support responsive to interactions as they unfold.”

In the same line, structures like SCT, ZPD, and scaffolding are considered important frames in learning environments, especially in L2 studies (Chaiklin, 2003; Cross, 2006; Johnson, 2006, 2009; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf, 2004; and Lantolf & Poehner, 2000) but Clark and Graves (2004, pp. 571-572) say that special attention has to be given to their implementation because as they claim,

“The way that scaffolding is implemented in the classroom depends on students' abilities. Varying levels of support are possible, and the more complex a task is, the more support students will need to accomplish it”.

Consequently, effective scaffolding must include a wide range of components to provide continuity in the classroom. The teacher has to present the task within interconnected instructional sequences. Then, the teacher's role is to provide support from context so that students can explore the learning resources in a risk-free learning environment. Students must also be encouraged to participate in different learning contexts to gain

confidence as they meet the learning goals and objectives. Finally, the scaffolding aim is to increase students' learning autonomy as they become independent learners.

2.3.2.1 Scaffolding and language

In the second language learners' field, three effective kinds of scaffolding have been identified: a) simplifying the language by shortening selections in which educators avoid using idioms so that students can understand easily; b) asking for completion, not generation. Students are asked to complete a partially finished outline or paragraph and c) using visuals so students can respond using graphic organizers, tables, charts, outlines, or graphs. Something worth mentioning is that researchers agree on saying:

"These scaffolds are temporary, and the process of constructing them and then removing them when they are no longer needed is what makes them a valuable tool in the education of ELLs."

2.3.2.2 Scaffolding and content areas

Scaffolding has been studied within different content areas. Riazi& Riazi (2011), Brooks and Swain (2009), Cotteral and Cohen (2003), and Hammond (2002) focused on L2 writing studies. Riazi& Riazi (2011) conducted a study to determine if teacher or peer- scaffolding was more successful in helping students' writings. They found that teacher scaffolding is more effective at the university level with students taking general English courses. De Guerrero and Villamil's (2000) study showed the effects of peer scaffolding in ESL writing classrooms. They found that students co-construct their system, exchanging information while getting meaning through social interaction. This study was focused mainly on observing how students work together in their own ZPD's to shape and develop strategies to interact in the interpsychological space. Storch's (2007) research concentrated on teacher students' interactions. He states that scaffolding occurs when learners work in small groups or pairs, and this is what is strongly observed when students come to the SAC to work together. Donnato (1994) was interested in "mutual scaffolding." He explains that intervention among peers can be as effective as the intervention among teachers and students. However, researchers like Russell (1982) found in his study that peer-

scaffolding among students of the same level was unsuccessful on the part of the learners in need of help.

Sharpe (2001) recommends some scaffolding techniques to build on technical vocabulary: repetition of students' remarks, restating, and appropriation. Land and Zembal-Saul (2003) explained that making learning explicit does not necessarily imply that students use the support meaningfully since they have different background knowledge and skills. So, it is essential to understand how people are using the tools and whether they can work independently when the tools are removed.

Therefore, if it is assumed that the students' self has three different dimensions: the biological, the psychological, and the social, and that they are always interacting to get a meaningful understanding of what the world is, then the perception of the world is unique in each person because their schemata are structured through their personal experiences within social interactions and mediated by the language (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky believed that "*the ideal knowledge is not only universal but abstract and decontextualized.*" That is, after new knowledge has been scaffolded, abstract thought may be required to transfer it to a different context. So, scaffolding is the central activity that acts out as a link between the world and the learners (Vygotsky, 1978). It enables students to access high order thinking skills through interaction within the intrapersonal (individually) and interpersonal (socially) learning processes in the activities they choose to do, as the Socio-Cultural Theory sustains.

Therefore, in this research SAC students are interviewed and observed in situ to find out the types of mediation they use to gain knowledge in the social context of learning with the help of their peers or the English staff within the learning environment they decide to organize. Relevant role gets the scaffolding activity because it fosters learners' motivation and keeps them engaged using the learning resources. In the photographs and videos is observed that the learning environment they decide to organize fosters the creation of learning networks so that students can achieve their language learning goal.

2.4 Learning environments

Since special attention has been given to the social aspect of learning, a theoretical turn has happened towards more learner-centred learning contexts such as collaborative learning and community learning. Both pedagogies consider the active role of the learners in social contexts along their learning process. So, some educational institutions are changing the traditional learning contexts into more active ones to allow learners to become agents of their learning process through interaction and participation in engaging activities towards developing autonomy in social contexts.

These new ideas of social learning have their roots in the Constructivist theory, which emphasizes the learner's active role in meaning construct knowledge, among others. The Socio-Cultural Theory embedded within the Constructivism approach sustains that to create an optimal learning environment learners must be engaged and motivated through stimulating materials and collaborative learning activities. The purpose is to guide, to motivate, and to support students' interactions all the way through the language learning process. Researchers like Vygotsky (1979), Piaget (1975), Brunner (1980), Hamilton & Ghatala (1994), Bandura (1986), and Schunk (2004), to mention a few, agreed on the new role of the student who is viewed as an active agent of the learning process.

Different definitions have emerged trying to explain what a learning environment is. The UNESCO defines the term as a

“Complete physical, social and pedagogical context in which learning is intended to occur and the factor embedded within the shared physical and social learning environment” (UNESCO, 2012).

Dewey (1997) says that,

“A learning environment has to be an embryonic community life, active with the types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society, and permeated throughout with the spirit of art, history, and science. When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have

the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious."

The educational environment concept has its roots in his vision of democracy and his philosophical anthropology. He believes that the learning environment should promote a mode of life through the interaction between the teacher and the students. Dewey (1997) explicitly remarks that humans become what they do, think, attend to, feel, and so forth because they "lose" their selves in what they take interest in. However, at the same time, they "find" their selves in those very same interests (Dewey, 1997). Dewey's (1989) conception of the environment raises dynamic pedagogical questions about the meaning of a genuine educational stimulus. He affirms that the stimulus concept is "transactive" because there is a reciprocal exchange between what people are doing and the things, objects, and events in the environment "Stimuli from the environment."

But what kind of learning educational environment does Dewey propose? On the one hand, he says that the teacher must increase the learning opportunities that lead to several actions like thinking, experience, and growth, so the environment should be simplified, balanced, and steadyng (Dewey,1997). Understanding simplified as being fairly fundamental and capable of being responded to by the young because the students' actions allow them to think rather than just reading abstract lectures on a topic. In other words, students are mainly involved in doing more than just listening to the teacher impassively. A simplified learning environment is that which embodies respect to students' present capacities and current powers and, beyond that, to extend them.

A purified environment refers to call out participants' best thinking, feeling, and conduct so that students can be open-minded. They can also listen to others by developing understanding and being aware of the essential moral interest that Dewey (1997) conceives. An attitude necessary to foster the social skills needed to live and work within different social contexts. Then shaping a balanced educational environment upholds both individual and social development. This kind of learning environment can balance students' interests as well as the community-centred outlooks with the teacher's guidance and insight. Lastly, a steadyng environment is that which coordinates their

understandings and dispositions (Dewey, 1997), in Hansen (2002) words, "It invites students to harmonize their knowledge, insight, feelings, and viewpoints."

The arguments above agree with the constructivism approach, which considers the context an essential element of the learning process. The objective is to create meaningful learning environments to promote positive attitudes that enable them to develop long-life learning strategies to learn among others or independently. So, to achieve this goal, the learning environments must support formal and informal learning through a great variety of human and material resources and settings. In the 21st Century Learning Environments document (2006), a learning environment advocates a place and space. In fact, it could be a classroom, a library, or even a computer. In other words, any supporting system that enables students to learn either alone, with their peers online, or through face-to-face interactions must be considered as a learning environment. The socio-constructivist learning environments emphasize language learners' interactions within the collaborative activities. Therefore, the setting has to be well designed to encourage and to promote different kinds of interactions so that language learners are engaged and motivated to use the target language effectively (Wood, Brunner, Ross; Wood & Middletown (1975).

That is, the learning environment must give the students a net of meanings because, as Dewey (1997) argues, the learning environment in the classroom has to do with its physical features, with the materials employed in it, with the use of time. The most important are the innumerable interactions that take place among the people in the classroom. This research paper focuses on the learning environment within the Self-Access Centre (SAC) and how the counsellor's role or the language assistant in the SAC is like the teachers in the classroom. He gives particular attention to the teachers' role within the classroom learning environment. He states that the teacher is the person who is in charge of designing and articulating the activities, materials, and the setting in which the learning may occur. So, the teacher is one who embodies the "essential moral interest."

As Dewey state, the teacher must be, among other things, "knowledgeable in subject matter, mindful of the broad significance of education and committed to developing

students' soul-study." Consequently, two continuous processes emerge from learners' interactions within the classroom. On the one hand, students achieve their learning goals, and on the other hand, the teacher grows as a human being because the process raises awareness understanding on the importance of the guiding role that they have as a vital element within the learning environment and, they are continuously learning from their students and their interactions between the subject matter and with one another. In this research, counsellors, part-time teachers, and language assistants' role is to act out as helpers and to guide within the collaborative activities that students choose to do at the SAC. Dewey (1997) explains that the teacher's influence on the environment is not a thing that arises from the very beginning. Still, it is a gradual process that allows the teachers to develop good practices and to acquire good qualities through interaction within the environment, with students, with the subject matter, and other scaffolders they might use considering the human beings they are engaged. Hence, teachers (counsellors, part-time teachers, and language assistants in the SAC) must focus on giving students something to do rather than something to learn; and the doing must demand to think so students can make connections with previous knowledge always fostering natural learning because focusing on what Dewey asserts "Frontal attacks are even more wasteful in learning than in war." He strongly pays attention to the environment and how teachers can enhance students' learning environments.

Then, to help them become successful language learners, the learning environment must allow them to exercise their agency to fulfil students' learning needs and wants. Consequently, the learning environments should include flexible arrangements of space, time, technology, and people. All these elements are intertwined to create a learning network in which all the community can become a culture of mutual respect and support to develop their social, emotional, and physical health (ASCD, 2013)

For example, in Norway, the Breidablikk School is centred on giving pupils a great variety of learning opportunities to develop their different learning styles to be successful. They say that keeping pupils' motivation allowing them to meet the curriculum via their interest fields would build attractive identities in their school practice. They claim that "at this stage, they are in a formative phase."

Other examples of learning environments are the Self- Access–Centres. Many universities worldwide are using these kinds of facilities to help students develop their communicative skills regardless of the English level. They have become popular among university students because they can learn and practice the target language using a great variety of resources, either printed material or software, with the help of a counsellor, a language assistant, or their peers. Learners have the opportunity to use the TICs as a virtual self-access learning environment, so the major goal at the SACs environment is to foster students' autonomous language learning (Fisher et al., 2007; Gardner and Miller, 1997, 1999; Morrison, 2008; Sheerin, 1989, Cottarel and Reinders, 2001).

The arguments above are deep-rooted in the Socio-Cultural Theory, where the primary focus of the learning process is the student. This theory emphasizes “learner-centeredness” as core participants in whom they are actively engaged in various activities that make them aware of their dynamic role in learning and understand their activity as learners.

The Net School in Victoria, Australia, is an example of a learning environment that enhances engagement using different scaffolders as technology, projects, and open areas to provide positive learning experiences. They sustain that student who are not actively engaged in the activity, their learning possibilities are significantly reduced. This happened at CEIP Andalucía in Seville, Spain where students were disengaged before deciding to change their learning environment because they showed a lack of motivation and interest, uninterested teachers, lack of school habits, high absenteeism, and low academic results.

Another example in Monterrey, Mexico, is at the Centre for Studies on Design (CEDIM); the learning environment allows students to participate with others by exchanging ideas, expectations, goals, and objectives. They are then mainly engaged in projects that satisfy their needs and interests. This activity motivates students and institutions in which projects are developed.

In Dewey's words,

"Teachers can influence students, through the intermediary of the environment, life activities flourish or fail only in connection with changes in the environment; humans and the world are deeply interconnected, they are engaged with each other in a developing situation." (Dewey, 1997).

In this research, the Self-Access Centre learning environment at the university is an intermediary between the language learners, the resources, the counsellors, and staff who facilitate and promote learning opportunities through different activities and materials. Therefore, SAC students are engaged in meaningful learning situations that can foster their will to learn using all the scaffolders available at the Self- Access Centre.

Gijbels (2005) stated that in New Learning Environments (NLE's) centred in the Constructivist Theory, the learners could reach different goals while working collaboratively in different teams to communicate, think, and reason effectively.

In this case, the SAC's learning environment is led by the Socio-cultural approach, because it is viewed as a social learning environment. The facility is a kind of a society, a learning community of learners that gather to make choices as agents of their learning process to learn. This is a place where they can practice the target language as they develop their self - regulation steadily through interaction between others towards achieving language learning autonomy in a social context.

This argument is relevant because a constructivist learning environment is challenging to characterize. After all, all learning environments are constructivist since students and teachers construct knowledge even when they are drilling and practicing grammatical structures. Windschitl (2002) says,

"Different perspectives of constructivism emphasize either individual cognitive process, such as cognitive constructivism which is concerned with the knowledge of the individual or social co-constructions of knowledge, such as social constructivism which stresses the collaborative processes in knowledge building."

Additionally, Harris & Alexander (1998) and Tenenbaum (2001) state that the constructivist theory's instructional principles, which guide the nature and quality of the educational materials and learning environments, are still unclear. So, teachers and researchers need more concrete evidence when applying constructivism principles to

their educational practice to support their thoughts and actions. They have found it difficult to bridge the theory of constructivism and educational practice.

Some studies have been conducted to define constructivist learning environments' key features. Taylor et al. (1997) developed the new Constructivist Learning Environment Survey (CLES) based on the original CLES (Taylor & Fraser, 1991) to assess students' perceptions of their mathematics or science learning environment under the key dimensions of constructivism. They state that this instrument can be used

"To monitor the development of constructivist learning environments in school science in Western cultures."

For his part, Tenenbaum (2001) carried out a study at the university level to examine constructivist learning environments. In the first phase, they explored the concept of constructivism underlying constructivist learning and its facilitation. In the second phase, they asked about key constructivism features in the learning environment. They included seven factors of constructivist learning environments: 1) arguments, discussions, debates, 2) conceptual conflicts and dilemmas; 3) sharing ideas with others; 4) materials and measures targeted towards solutions; 5) reflections and concept investigation; meeting students' needs; and 7) making meaning, real-life examples. The results showed that the seven factors are not very strongly present in the learning environment according to the students' perceptions despite the beliefs of the constructivist learning environment designers. The meaningful difference was for the factors "sharing ideas with others" and "making meaning, real life examples". Something to consider is that knowing the students' perceptions seems to be critical because they affect how they cope with the learning environment and their learning results (Fraser ,1987; Entwistle& Tait ,1990; Brekelmans ,1997; Segers & Dochi ,2001).

Even though Dewey's environment definition is oriented mainly to the school setting, in this research paper, his definition is used to explain the interactions between all the ones who attend the Self -Access Centre at the University. The counsellors, part-time teachers, language assistants, and students' have continual interaction, so they are aware of their active role and that knowledge is not passively absorbed but actively constructed by them in this kind of social learning environment.

Related to this, Dewey states,

"This interaction fuels the growth of both individuals and society."

A premise that educationalists must consider when designing social learning environments driven by the Socio-Cultural Theory is that all students must be engaged in the learning process to make them “self-regulated learners.” They have to be able to monitor, evaluate and optimize their learning and regulate their emotions and motivation towards the development of autonomy in social contexts (OCD, 2013).

2.5 Social Learning Space

After the theoretical shift from the behavioural learning approach to a more constructivist learning approach, new social learning spaces have emerged. In these new settings, the learners’ interactions became innovative learning opportunities in which peers, language assistants, counsellors and all the learning materials, contribute to the learning process. Oldenburg (1991) defines the social learning space as

"A physical and or virtual area that is not predominantly identified with either social/work/study perspectives but transcends both and facilitates both formal and informal student-centred collaborative learning" (Williamson, Nodder, 2002).

Murray (2018) explains that the social learning space can have a wide variety of resources for all kinds of learning; therefore, the social learning space can be, as he said, self-enriching. So, due to this theoretical shift, many universities worldwide created social learning spaces as environments to encourage active, social, and experiential learning (Oblinger, 2006). The US and Scandinavia have been at the forefront of the development of social learning spaces. The UK has also made significant progress in the growth of these learning spaces, especially at the Glasgow Caledonian University, which *aims*

"To provide learners the opportunity to interact in a variety of different spaces from noisy social interaction areas; for group work, to places for silent study."

Meaning that these new spaces are being designed and developed to create social learning spaces. Other places around the world have developed social spaces. An example of this is at Okayama University. Murray (2018) says that the L-café is a social multilingual

learning space because the international students and Japanese students come together to relax, chat with friends, have lunch, or hang out and study or work on assignments. The facility has a variety of materials for language learning, but the L-café seems to be mainly a social place. Cresswell (2004) and Massey (2005) affirm that places are social constructions created through action. Meaning that learners choose to do things in a particular place, fulfilling their needs and wants. For Carter, Donald & Squires (1993), people are the ones who identify or define the space in which actions and activities are carried out.

Even though the research has been done in the classroom, the inquiry was expanded outside the classrooms in the last part of the previous century to investigate how spaces are transformed into places for language learning (Murray, 2018). Examples of these innovative social language learning contexts are the Self Access Centres opened to promote learning autonomy. Holec (1981) defined autonomy as ‘the ability to take charge of one’s own learning’ concept that Benson (2011) changed as ‘the capacity to take control of one’s learning.’

The SAC from this study shares this perspective as it is a social learning space that encourages active, social, and experiential learning. Hence, learners in the SAC have the freedom to decide what to do to meet their needs and fulfil their goals in a friendly atmosphere through peer support (Oblinger, 2006 cited in Murray et al., 2014). In other words, language learners in this social learning environment exercise their agency to design their language learning pathways. This social context in the SAC allows learners to develop their English skills at their own pace, prioritizing the self, what they think or feel they are capable of doing, towards achieving learning autonomy through social interaction.

Sturridge’s (1992) defines the term self-access centre as a

“System which makes materials available to language learners so that they can choose to work as they wish, usually without a teacher or with very limited teacher support.”

Booton & Benson (1996) say that the Self Access Centre may function as an instruction centre, as a practice centre, as a skill centre, or as a learning centre. All of them share the

characteristic of fostering autonomy and the skills of self-directed learning. In this respect, Sheerin (1989) says that,

"The essential prerequisite to self-access learning is the provision of self-access materials within an organized framework so that students can get what they need."

In the SAC, learners are involved in a process of reconstruction of their self, giving them a valuable role in the learning networks they create by helping others to learn. The learning networks which emerge from the activities that students choose to do in the facility promote different kinds of interactions among all the elements in the ZDP where learners can achieve their learning autonomy through social interaction in social learning spaces as the Self-Access Centre.

2.6 Self-Access Centres

According to Sturridge's words (1992) the term self-access centre refers to "a system which makes available to language learners so that they can choose to work as they wish, usually without the teacher or with very limited teacher support". Sheerin (1989); Booton & Benson (1996); McCafferty, n.d.; Dickinson (1993) have similar ideas by stating that the self-access centre (SAC) is an area specially designed in which a great variety of adapted or processed materials can be used by learners according to their learning needs (Alzahrani, & Wright, 2016) with or without help. In other words, the SAC has to deal with the way in which the learning materials and equipment are organized so that the learners can use them as scaffolders so that students can learn independently according to their needs and wants.

The roots of the self-access centres are grounded in the language laboratories which worked under the behaviouristics, lock-step approach to language learning. (Herrera, 2012) but even though Gremmo and Riley (1995) acknowledged their differences, both authors compare them to libraries because and declared that SACs are basic manifestations of autonomous and self-directed learning.

Important to mention is that establishing a self-access centre greatly depends on “the beliefs about learning which are held by those who set up the system” (Strurridge ,1992) Then, based on this argument it could be said that implementing a self-access centre is related to the ideology, the learning needs perceived among students and the educational institution. Therefore, the SAC may function either as an instruction centre; as a practice centre; as a skill centre or a learning centre but always taking in mind that they all share the characteristics of fostering autonomy and the skills of self-directed learning (Booton & Benson, 1996).

Consequently, there has been a great interest in higher education institutions lately to open Self-Access Centres (SAC) around the world particularly in Europe, South America, and South- East Asia. These countries have been concentrating on more learner- focused approach since 1990. They got greatly interested in developing lifelong learning skills among their students to become independent learners within the self- access centres (Sheerin ,1997) but besides that, Morrison (2008) says that there are three other aspects to be considered. Firstly, because of the globalization and the fact that English has been used as an international mean of communication and in technology development (Sturdrige,1997), the commercialization of the learning of English has increased worldwide. Secondly, because most of educational institutions have included a great variety of technological devices in their school curricula (McDevitt, 1996; Drew and Ottewill, 1998), there has been an informatics and electronic revolution (Toffler, 1970). Therefore, English nowadays is considered as a lingua franca and thirdly, in many institutions the self -access centres have been designed so students can develop their self-directed learning needed for life- long learning (Knowles, 1980).

According to Gremmo and Riley, the Centre de Recherches et de Applications Pédagogiques en Langues opened the first SAC Centre in France. Since that time, some universities in different places all over the world, included this facility within their campus. Other self-access centres were opened since then. Some examples of SAC centres around the world are Universities in Japan (Cooker, 2010; Thompson & Atkinson, 2010), Mexico (Valdivia, McLoughlin, & Mynard, 2011; Westwood, 2012), Canada (Westwood, 2012), New Zealand (King, 2011), Hong Kong (Morrison, 2011), and the United States (McMurry, Tanner, & Anderson, 2010), to mention a few. It is worth

mention that Gardner and Miller (1999) had a great influence in developing and establishing SAC centres in different countries (Cooker, 2010).

In the past 15 years these centres have evolved due to the technology, types of motivation, learning objectives, learning styles and effectiveness among other factors. Hence, each university has implemented different programs based on their students' needs in order to promote autonomy and self-study.

In the Cyprus University of Technology at Cyprus, Papadima-Sophocleous (2013) designed, developed, and implemented an English Language Voluntary Independent Catch-up Study (ELVIICS) at the Language Learning Centre to establish whether and to what extent the program would be effective in helping students fill in gaps in their English language learning to meet their required level of English.

Both Tassinari, M., (2013) from Freie Universität in Berlin, Germany and Lorraine, M. (2013) from Université de Lorraine in France, are focused on the affective dimension and the role of beliefs, self-efficacy, and learners' voices in language learning. They state that the cognitive, the metacognitive, the subjective and affective dimensions need to be considered in order to support students at the SAC centre to become autonomous learners. They also agree on the fact that there has been a 'social turn' in the learning process to recognize the sociocultural aspects that might affect the students' learning processes. Linard (2010) mentions that besides the materials and resources (Gardner & Miller, 1999), the SAC centres need to be perceived as self-directed learning facilities by giving the students, opportunities, and support to engage them into self-directed learning. King, C. (2011) from the Unitec Institute of Technology in Auckland, New Zealand states that learner autonomy is identified as crucial factor in the language-learning process (Benson, 2001; Nunan, 1996) basically because it allows students to take charge of their own learning (Chan, 2001; Little, 2007). He states that students who make use of the self-access centres, would develop effective strategies that might help develop their own programs of study (Littlewood, 1997; Sheerin, 1997). Due to this important issue King (2011) says that induction to the SAC is an important factor to consider if we want students to be successful.

In the annual JASAL forum held in Tokyo in 2011, Shibata, S. from Tokoha Gakuen University, mentioned that creating spaces to foster learners' independent learning is crucial. She says that there is a correlation between environmental factors and learners' behavioural patterns. This is interesting because students are highly motivated when they work in comfortable well-designed spaces plus an independent learning setting.

Clair Taylor, Keiko Omura, and Gerald Talandis Jr. from Toyo Gakuen University, Scott Crowe from Sojo University, Caleb Foale from Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University, and Daniel Sasaki, Kelly Kimura, and Yukiko Ishikawa from Soka University focused their research on how they can improve the accessibility of their SAC's. They designed a stamp card system to help learners became familiar with the facilities, resources, and systems that the universities provide. The objective as they said, "was to get a stamp every time they used the conversation lounge for communication practice, participated in events held in the lounge, had a learning advisory session with a teacher, borrowed learning materials, or accessed in-house online learning resources". They observed that the number of SAC users increased so they implemented the program in a bigger group. The results also showed that the mandatory system had better outcomes than the voluntary one; results that are strongly influenced by the cultural background of the Japanese people.

Serra (2000), Gardner and Miller (1999), and Sheerin (1989) have developed a typology of self-access centre systems so according to these researchers, the university is both a self-directed learning centre and a learning resource centre (Gardner and Miller, 1999, 54), with the presence of semi-structured and unstructured learning support patterns (Miller and Rogerson-Revell, 1993) for them SACs must be efficiently organized and supported by well-prepared staff.

The philosophy of the SAC at the university is based on the Social Cultural Theory from Vygotsky (1978) which states that the environmental context is a factor that contributes to meaningful learning through the social interaction through the Zone of Proximal Development. In Vygotsky's words (1978) the ZDP is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of

potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers".

The Self Access Centre at the university is comparable to the Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) because the learners are engaged through collaborative activities in which they participate in challenging tasks with assistance of those who are more advanced (peers, counsellors, language assistants or teachers). This temporary assistance allows language learners to internalize gradually the tasks and the strategies that the most advanced peers use to learn so that they can achieve their language learning goals. Accordingly, to Vygotsky's theory, the intra and the internalization processes are two parallel processes that take place while learning collaboratively. Vygotsky refers to "internalization" as a semiotic process in which the students get across with the meaning, and, therefore, they full "appropriate of meaning". Additionally, in the intra-process students also get the meaning, but the signs and symbols of the culture through social interactions take place while learning. Learning a language is a social construct so it is important to provide students with social language learning environments to promote interactions needed to accomplish their language learning goals.

So far, based on theory and the examples given by different educational institutions around the world, most of the SACs share the following ideas: The staff needs to create opportunities to learn independently always taking in mind the learners' needs to develop their self-management skills and also that there is a great need to establish positive relationships between learners because they all come from different cultural contexts. Moreover, the educational institutions have to provide the appropriate physical learning environments to support the students' learning process and finally, the authorities must be keen on staff training and development to succeed.

The Self-Access Centre in the university provides language learning conditions using different scaffolders to help them construct knowledge and skills individually or among their peers. Then, the activity within the SAC involves new roles, behaviours, and strategies to create a rich, meaningful active learning environment. The objective is to foster learners' motivation so that they come by themselves and create their language learning paths as agents of their learning process. In other words, students need to be

strategic learners to get most of the Self-Access Centre and to create social learning networks to develop their language learning autonomy through interaction.

2.7 Social Networks

The social network theory has been used for a long period in other disciplines but in the context of Applied Linguistics is still new. A rising number of studies have explored how learners' social networks impact SLA. These studies have examined different contexts of learning; most of them are mainly focus on the impact of social relations with native speakers on learners' oral proficiency development. (e.g., Dewey, Brown& Egget, 2012; Isabelli-Garcia,2006; Kurata 2004; Smith, 2002). Moreover, the studies with social networks in applied linguistics have acknowledged and understood relational ties as the invisible framework that supports language learning in classrooms and other social spaces.

The concept of the social network was first used in the field of social science, and it was defined by Wasserman& Faust (1994) as:

“A set or sets of actors and the relation or relations defined on them in which the actors are the learners in language learning contexts”

Hammer & Blanc (2000) state that the social networks are the “the sum of all the interpersonal relations one establishes with other over time” while Carolan (2014) refers to the social network perspective to explore the structure of the relationships between connected individuals and how these relationships influence people or groups in a network through the flow of information and resources. The social perspective mentioned by Carolan (2014) has been explored in various academic fields, including sociolinguistics in which the main goal is to examine the influence of social relations on linguistic behaviours within a community (Milroy, 1987). Several sociolinguistics studies have been focused on the effect of speakers' social network on linguistic variation and language change (e.g., Dodsworth&Benton,2020; Wei, 1994; Milroy, 1987; Sharma, 2017).

In Zappa- Hollman & Duff (2015) study is highlighted the role of the learners as:

“Very powerful agents of co-socialization and identity work”

That means that they are the ones in charge of their learning because of the choices they make when they decide what to do, what to do, how to do it and with whom they want to do it. This is a relevant matter for the learners' social network since all these elements are interdependent and intertwined through their interactions. It is relevant to point out that relational ties which emerge from social networks peer interactions create an invisible framework that supports language learning in classrooms and other social spaces as it was forementioned. This is well explained by Palfreyman (2021) when he says that “networks are not abstract but involve doing things together; participating in social practices (i.e., socially recognized kinds of activity such as studying for an exam, going to the cinema, or chatting) through which social ties are re-constituted”. He considers that social networks are opportunities for learners' engagement in which underlie “funds of knowledge” but to Mercer (2014), social networks are evolving complex dynamic systems in which are involved cognition, affect, contexts, interrelations and dynamic.

In the SAC these socially activities can be either playing board games, taking conversations, browsing for information in the computers together, watching movies or having conversations with their peers. All these activities are driven by interaction which is an important element in L2 learning. Interaction provides practice in integrating several aspects of language performance (Lightbown,2019) and as Ortega, Tyler, Park &Uno (2016) claim, it helps building the learners' developing language system. Another element to be considered in the learners' social network is co- regulation because it implies that they are gradually helping each other to regulate their behaviour, thought and emotions through interaction (Hadwin & Oshige, 2011). Co- regulation then involves the learner and some other peers supporting and building understanding In the ZDP (Vygotsky,1978), scaffolding (Donato, 1994), languaging (Swain,2206) and negotiating of meaning and form (Lyster &Ranta, 1997).

There are few examples to understand more about how social networks work in language learning settings because they are quite new in the educational field. Isabelli- Garcia (2006) in her study among Japanese learners studying in Australia, postulates that interaction in social networks act out as an intermediary between language development

and motivation. Zappa-Hollman and Duff (2015) study with students in a Gulf Arab community show how the social networks help learners to gain information and support while taking part in practices like studying together or socializing. They also found that learners see themselves as contributors as well as receivers of the benefits within the social networks. Another example on how networks help students to take charge of their learning are the Ohara (2017) studies that show how members of a class interact with each other in a language course. To understand more how the learning networks work within the learning communities, researchers have used the Social Network Analysis (SNA).

2.8 Social Network Analysis

Recently, a general view at social networks has been given as well as the impact they exert on student learning to understand how they work, however, to find out the pattern of relationships (network structure) at the micro and macro level and the interaction between the two (Stokman, 2001) and to analyse the structure of the network is required to use a methodological instrument as the Social Network Analysis (SNA).

The Social Network Analysis focuses on the types of relations that connect individuals to one another but also as Wasserman and Faust (1994) note, also in the individuals and their actions which are viewed as interdependent. This means that attention must be focused on several elements as the relational ties between people since they are opportunities of transmission of resources, the pattern of relationships among them (social structure) and the network models as enduring patterns of relations among actors. As Scott (2017) states,

"The total social field, therefore, is a field of forces acting on group members and shaping their actions and experiences".

Borgatti (2003) clearly explains the ties from nature of the relation as follows:

"Ties connect pairs of actors and can be directed (i.e., potentially one-directional, as in giving advice to someone) or undirected (as in being physically proximate) and can be dichotomous (present or absent, as in whether two people are friends or not) or valued (measured on a scale, as in strength of friendship). A set of ties of a given type (such as

(friendship ties) constitutes a binary social relation, and each relation defines a different network (e.g., the friendship network is distinct from the advice network, although empirically they might be correlated)".

To characterize the social structure and its patterns, the SNA has several measures to compare the network structures and positions in networks. The analysis can be focused on differences in centrality, on the investigation of strongly connected clusters of positions that are structurally equivalent in networks, or of unique positions.

The social structure is represented by a graph where the nodes (hubs, dots, or vertices) are assigned attributes such as names, categories, or continuous features as size or weight and can be connected between them (ties). However, the social network theory highlights the importance of “position” as it refers to an actor’s location within the social structure. The position is vital because it is determined by the outgoing and incoming social ties. Both Brass (1984) and Fredkin (2004) mention that occupying a central position may offer an individual potential in the form of status, power, and influence but as Balkundi & Harrison (2006) says too many ties might be disadvantageous because these relationships may drain an actor’s own resources. On the other hand, actors whose role is peripheral in the network might receive less interaction, so fewer resources they might have (Wasserman&Faust, 1998). Then to identify what happens in the network research is focused on various measurements as a) density which is the proportion of actually connected ties over all possible connections, b) clustering that focuses on how the nodes tend to cluster together, c) degree distribution that refers to the number of connections a node has with other nodes and d) centrality that is the number of ties it has.

The network analysis can be done using different kinds of software, but in this case, the research study was run using the Gephi open-source software. This software has been used in different fields as academic projects, in journalism to visualize the global connectivity, to examine network traffic and it is widely used in the field of digital humanities. Therefore, it has been a useful tool because it generates graphs and clusters to visualize and analyse network data.

2.9 Summary

This chapter has presented a review of the students' internal and external learning elements such as agency, motivation, self- regulation, learning strategies, scaffolding, learning environments, learning networks and autonomy which are strongly intertwined (figure 25) to build up the learning framework needed to construct knowledge schemes either interacting with others in a social environment or individually. Also, the literature review helped to understand how the dialogic learning process takes place within different learning communities that learners create given the opportunity to make choices. In this language learning process, the learners are considered agents of their learning process, so they are fully in charge on what to do and to whom they want to gather with and where. That is, learners exercise their agency which enables them to know about the world, choosing and designing their learning pathways, the resources, and the people they want to learn with. Then through interaction learners are able to construct learning networks among others which act out as learning frameworks in a social learning context to develop their autonomy.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the qualitative research methodology and data collection used in this study. Section 3.2 starts with a description of the research paradigm that leads the research approach. Section 3.3 describes the research design. Section 3.4 provides the research context. Section 3.5 explains the research instruments. Section 3.6 describes the software used in data analysis. Finally, Section 3.7 offers a summary of the chapter.

3.2 Research paradigm

This chapter addresses the philosophical assumptions, the research methodology, and data collection which guide the research design because of the nature of the concepts under investigation. It starts with the rationale and justification for choosing the research approach. Creswell (2014) says that the broad research is the plan or proposal to conduct research, so underlying the research work is the researcher's personal conception of how they understand the world's reality. To this end, there are different conceptions of what the world is.

Various definitions have been given to this conception of the world. For Guba (1990), it is a set of beliefs that guide action. Lincoln, Lynham & Guba (2011) and Martens (2010) call them paradigms, Crotty (1998) defines them as epistemologies, and finally, Neuman (2009) conceives them as research methodologies. Hence, different philosophical underpinnings guide the research design and process due to these philosophical orientations. Therefore, four positions emerge to approach research: Postpositivism, Constructivism, Transformative, and Pragmatism, each with its own way of interpreting the surrounding reality and from these ways of approaching the reality, quantitative, qualitative, or mixed research models have been generated understand the world where we live in.

The Postpositivist represents the traditional form of research. This philosophical paradigm is also called the scientific method based on careful observation, measurement, and

experimentation. It is reductionist because it intends to reduce the ideas to test them into variables that comprise hypotheses and research questions (Creswell, 2014). This paradigm sustains that some laws or theories rule the world, then quantitative data must be tested and verified. The role of the researcher in this paradigm is to collect data and to analyze it, avoiding bias because of the personal beliefs and values which may affect the research.

Opposing to the Postpositivism paradigm, the Constructivism or Social Constructivism philosophical underpinning sustains that the beings seek to understand the world where they live and work. These ideas came from different works such as Mannheim, Berger, and Luekmann's (1967). The Social Construction of Reality and Naturalistic Inquiry from Lincoln and Guba (1985). As Creswell (2014) says,

"The main goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views rather than narrowing meanings. The questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons."

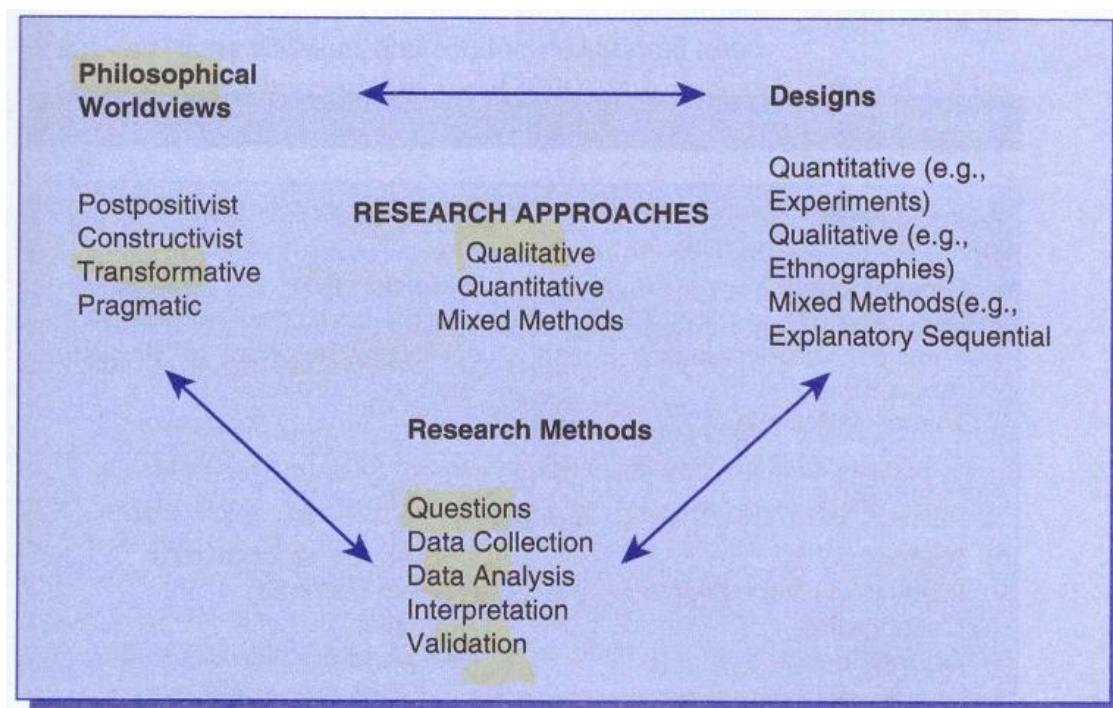
Therefore, the role of the researcher in this paradigm is to discover the interrelationships that emerge through the research process, to identify the key concepts and to code the variables from the empirical data. The objective is to interpret the participants' personal, cultural, and historical experiences that shape their world. So, the qualitative research approach allows generating or inductively developing a theory or pattern of meaning.

The Transformative philosophical assumption sustains that the Postpositivist does not include the marginalized individuals in the society or issues of power and social justice, discrimination, and oppression that need to be addressed. This philosophy is immersed in groups of researchers that are critical theorists or participatory action researchers (Creswell, 2014). They sustain that the constructivist perspective has not helped marginalized people because they are not included in their agenda. The transformative writers have followed the works of Marx, Habermas, Freire. Other theorists as Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) and Mertens (2009, 2010) are writers who have written following this perspective. The philosophical underpinning focuses on the needs of groups and

individuals based on gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class (Martens, 2010).

The Pragmatic paradigm emerges from actions, situations, and consequences rather than antecedent conditions (as in Postpositivism). This philosophical epistemology derives from the works of Pierce, James, Mead, and Dewey (Cherryholmes, 1992). Patton (1990). Murphy (1990) and Rorty are also considered pragmatists. Researchers emphasize the research problem instead of the methods and use all approaches available to understand the problem (Rossman & Wilson, 1985). The research method which best suits into this paradigm is the mixed method approach because it allows the researcher to use multiple methods, diverse worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as various forms of data collection and analysis (Cherryholmes, 1992; Morgan, 2007; Creswell, 2014).

In Creswell's (2014) Framework for Research is shown the intersection between the philosophical worldviews, the designs and the research methods.



He mentions that the researcher must consider the philosophical worldview to plan the study to choose the research design, the specific methods, or procedures of research to put them into practice. He sustains that even though these philosophical ideas are hidden in the study, they influence the practice.

Hence, the philosophical foundations of this research are framed in Constructivism which mainly focuses on the social interaction where individuals together seek understanding of the world through the signs and symbols of the culture in which they live and work.

Concerning to this philosophical view, Crotty (1998) acknowledges several assumptions:

1. Human beings construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting.
2. Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives- we are all born into a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture.
3. The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community.

Given the above reasons, this research follows the Constructivism philosophical underpinnings which are reflected within the SAC communities of learners, and within different activities they freely choose to do. The photos and videos recorded in situ show how students appropriate the social learning space to practice, reinforce or to learn the target language. The interaction among their peers, part-time teachers, counsellors, staff mediated by the technology and available materials is one of the key elements to create learning networks that help learners co-construct knowledge through scaffolding towards the development of learning autonomy.

3.2.1 Ethnography

The word ethnography implies the description of a culture from the point of view of its participants focused on the way of life of the community. Fetterman (1989) and Neuman (1994) define the terms as the art and science of describing a group or culture. Fielding (1996) studies in British colonial and American research, the origins of ethnography. For Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) explain that ethnography is a particular way of looking, listening, and thinking about social phenomena rather than just a set of research methods. Pole and Morrison (2003) focus on the complexities of the location, event or setting which are more important than generalizing.

In the field of applied linguistics Watson-Gegeo (1988) defines ethnography as,

"The study of people's behavior in naturally occurring ongoing settings with a focus on the cultural interpretation of behavior".

Then, this ethnographic approach can help the researcher to describe and to interpret what people do in a setting, namely classroom, neighborhood or community and in this study is the Self Access-Centre (SAC). Furthermore, Starfield (2010) declares that the popularity of the ethnographic approaches has increased as a result of the "social turn" in language learning research with the objective to develop in-depth understandings of language learning and teaching events in specific social contexts. This research approach allows data collection and long-term observation to understand participants' perspectives and meaning-making practices within the complex sociocultural worlds they live in. Wolcott (1988) a prominent educational ethnographer, describes the concept of ethnography as a 'a way of seeing' through the lens of culture.

Ethnography means, literally, a picture of the way of life of some identifiable group of people. Conceivably, those people could be any culture bearing group, in any time and place. In times past, the group was usually a small, intact, essentially self-sufficient social unit, and it was always a group notably strange to the observer. The anthropologist's purpose as ethnographer was to learn about, record, and ultimately portray the culture of this other group. Anthropologists always study human behavior in terms of cultural context. Particular individuals, customs, institutions, or events are of anthropological interest as they relate to a generalized description of the lifeway of a socially interacting group. Yet the culture itself is always an abstraction, regardless of whether one is referring to culture in general or the culture of a specific social group.

Thus, the ethnographic approach seems to be suitable to use in this study to understand how the students develop autonomy through interaction and social learning networks in the context of the Self- Access Centre (SAC).

3.2.2 Qualitative Research Method

This study is directed under the principles of the qualitative approach. This research method was selected because it gives a glimpse into why persons act the way they do especially in social contexts. Dörnyei (2007) claims, that

“Every aspect of language acquisition and use is determined or significantly shaped by social, cultural and situational factors and the qualitative research is ideal for providing insights into such contextual conditions and influences”.

It has an emergent research design because it arises from the needs of the researcher in order to gather data during the process of investigation in the real setting. He states that the qualitative data analysis is done with words so it could be re-designed in order to fit the researchers' needs due to the nature of data and its flexibility. Furthermore, the qualitative research method is a holistic process, which might lead the observer to go back and forth during the whole study. In Preissle's (2006) words:

“The qualitative research method provides an in-depth, intricate and detail understanding of meanings, actions, non-observable as well of observable phenomena, attitudes, intentions and behaviors: This approach gives voices to participants, and probes issues that lie beneath the surface of presenting behaviors and actions”.

This means that it is important to approach the phenomena with an open mind without preconceived hypotheses. Glaser and Strauss (1967) were the first to propose to ignore the literature before the investigation to avoid contamination of the categories in the study. Therefore, in this study I decided to follow their recommendation to be aware of the students' attitudes, intentions and behaviors while participating in the study without prior prejudices because the primary objective is to observe the students in their social context.

Another characteristic of the qualitative research method is the nature of qualitative data. This methodology deals with a wide range of research instruments. Researchers can work with recorded interviews, various types of texts (e.g., field notes, journal and diary entries, documents) and images (photos or videos). The main objective is to capture all the details that could explain the observed phenomena in rich detail. Then, data can be transformed later on into textual form, among others. Berg (2012) describes seven ways to collect qualitative data: ethnography, case studies, focus group, interviewing, sociometry, unobtrusive measures, and historiography.

3.2.3 Strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research

There has been frequent criticism towards the qualitative approach due to its nature but as everything in life, it has its advantages and disadvantages. The literature finds two types of criticisms. The first type deals with the quantitative method and the second type deals with the qualitative research. Firstly, from the quantitative researchers' point of view, the qualitative method has a lack of methodological rigor. There is no evidence of using standardized instruments and procedures and statistical analytical techniques that could affect the study validity. Secondly, the sample size is not enough to generalize the result as in the quantitative method. Thirdly, the researcher role might be influenced the results by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies (Berg, 2007). Then, in the quantitative research is sustained that there is a real danger either to build too narrow theories from individual cases (Eisenhardt, 1989) or to yield a theory that is complex.

This qualitative approach develops an understanding about its complexity and its context (Punch, 2009). However, one of the most important characteristics is the holistic focus, which allows us to understand the wholeness and unity of the Self-Access as a learning environment. Consequently, this is a qualitative study because it has to deal with the learner's real world. That means, it emerges from learners' opinions, beliefs and wants that exercise their agency to develop language learning autonomy within a social context.

3.2.4 Internal Validity

Internal validity refers to the description of the phenomena being described; its purpose is to demonstrate that the explanation of the events in the study is supported by the data. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) define the concept of internal validity as "the truth, value, applicability, the credibility of interpretations and conclusions within the underlying setting or group".

In the qualitative method, the internal validity can be addressed in several ways. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) affirms that the internal validity can be carried out when using: low-interference descriptors; multiple researchers; participant researchers; peer examination of data and mechanical means to record, store and retrieve data. In addition, Hammersley (1992) recommends focusing attention on plausibility and

credibility; the amounts of evidence required and clarity on the kinds of claim made from the research (e.g., definitional, descriptive, explanatory, theory generative). In the same way, Lincoln and Guba (1985) adduce that credibility in naturalistic enquiry can be addressed by prolonged engagement field, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis revising hypothesis retrospectively and member checking to find out if anything is needed to be added. Something that is important to mention is that due to the flexibility of the qualitative research, there is the possibility to eliminate rival explanations of events and situation by tracking and storing data clearly (Cohen, 2011).

However, these theoreticians give their positive comments, there are few threats to internal validity that must be considered. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) acknowledge twelve kinds of threat to internal validity in qualitative research: 1) Ironic legitimization which refers to the researchers' ability to work with multiple realities and a great variety of interpretations of the same situation even if they are contradictory; 2) Paralogical legitimization that has to deal with the researcher's ability to catch and address paradoxes to validate data; 3) Rhizomatic legitimization is the amount of data lost while mapping of data rather than describing the context itself; 4) Voluptuous legitimization that is related to the capacity that the researcher has to support all what is been said in the study; 5) Descriptive validity is associated with the accuracy of the interpretation given by the researcher; 6) Observational bias deals with the inappropriate sampling of words, observations and behaviors in the research study; 7) Researchers bias which is linked with researcher's personal vision about the world (beliefs, attitudes and paradigms); 8) Reactivity that is associated to how far the research could affect the reality of the object being observed or the participants involved in the study; 9) Confirmation bias is the tendency for a piece of research to confirm existing findings or hypothesis; 10) Illusory confirmation is the tendency to find relationships between events, behaviors, people, situations even if they do not exist; 11) Casual error refers to inferring causal relations when none exists or where there is no evidence; 12) Effect size will influence the interpretation of data if it is not taken into account.

3.2.5 External validity

External validity in research is given when the results can be generalized to a wider population, cases, settings, times or situations. However, the generalization term has a different connotation between qualitative and quantitative approaches. For quantitative researchers that follow the positivist paradigm, it is a sine qua non. On the contrary for qualitative researchers, the generalization says little about the context in which the research is taking place (Schofield, 1990). In the quantitative method, the variables must be isolated, controlled and samples randomized but in the qualitative method human behavior is infinitely complex irreducible, socially situated and unique. (Cohen, 2001)

In the quantitative research, the external validity is allotted to generalizability from a sample to a population. On the opposite side, the qualitative are more concerned about the settings, people and situations to which they might be generalizable.

So, it is relevant for the qualitative research to give enough rich data to determine whether transferability is possible. Lincoln and Guba (1985, 1994, and 2005) asseverate that there are several threats for the external validity to take into account when doing the research under the qualitative view: Selection effects (where constructs selected in fact are only relevant to certain group);Setting effects (where the results are largely a function of their context);History effects (where the situations have been arrived at by unique circumstances and, therefore, are not comparable); Construct effects (where the constructs being used are peculiar to a certain group). Likewise, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) acknowledge several threats which might include: a) Catalytic validity that points out to the effects of a piece of research or how far the community is empowered by the research. b) Action validity that the stakeholders and decision makers use the research findings. c) Investigation validity, which deals with the researcher's personality, the ethical rigor, expertise and quality control. d) Interpretative validity is related to the researcher's ability to get the participants' meanings and interpretations of the phenomena. e) Evaluative validity is associated with the application of the evaluation structure rather than the descriptive, interpretative or explanatory structures. f) Consensual validity concerns with the competent peers' agreement on the researcher's interpretations. g) Population generalizability/ecological generalizability/temporal

generalizability is about the way in which the researcher maintains their findings within generalizability/non-generalizability bounds. h) Researcher bias is linked with researcher's personal vision about the world (beliefs, attitudes and paradigms). i) Order bias is related to the order of questions posed in the research instruments that could affect the dependability of the results. j) Effect size will influence the interpretation of data if it is not considered.

After giving an explanation about the validity and the possible threats that I might address in the research study, it is important to reassured validity. Cohen (2011) states, "invalidity can enter at every stage of a piece of research ". Hence, it is a must to have confidence in all the elements of the research plan, collecting, data processing analysis and its consistent judgement.

Therefore, the researcher needs to be aware of the threats to validity (Cohen, 2011) in the research and may come out in different stages as follows:1) At the design state, they can be minimized by choosing an appropriate timescale; Ensuring that there are adequate resources the required research to be undertaken; Selecting an appropriate methodology for answering the research questions; Selecting appropriate instrumentation for gathering the type of data required; Demonstrating internal, external, content, concurrent and construct validity; operationalizing the constructs fairly; Ensuring reliability in terms of stability (consistency, equivalence, split-half analysis of test material); Selecting appropriate foci to answer the research questions; Devising and using appropriate instruments , avoiding any ambiguity of instructions, terms and questions, avoiding leading questions, ensuring that the level of the test is appropriate , avoiding making the instruments too short or too long , avoiding too many or too few items doe each issue; Avoiding a bias choice of researcher or research team.

2) At the stage of data gathering, they can be minimized by: Reducing the Hawthorne effect, which is related to the effect of the personal observation upon the object being observed; Minimizing reactivity effects on the participants; Trying to avoid participants drop- out rates; Taking steps to avoid non-return questionnaires; Avoiding having too long or too short interval between pre-tests and post-tests; Matching control and experimental groups fairly; Ensuring inter-rater reliability; Warranting standardized

procedures for gathering data or for administering; Building on the motivation of the respondents; Tailoring the instruments to the concentration span of the respondents and addressing other situational factors; Addressing factors regarding the researcher (e.g. attitude, behavior, questioning technique, etc.).

3) At the stage of data analysis, the invalidity could be minimized by: Using respondent validation; Avoiding subjective interpretation of data and lack of standardization and moderation of results; Reducing the halo effect in which the researchers could be influenced by prior knowledge about the participant; Using appropriate statistical treatments for the level of data without using incorrect statistics for the type, size, complexity.

3.2.6 Reliability

Reliability is a synonym of dependability, consistency and replicability over the time in the quantitative research because of the positivistic paradigm in which is sustained. It has to deal with both precision and accuracy that is given from the strict observance of the scientific methodology to study the object being observed. Then the objective under the view of the quantitate method, is to demonstrate that the results of one research can be found in another research with similar context and conditions (Cohen, 2011) On the other hand, some of them have agreed that reliability for the qualitative research, is synonym of credibility, neutrality, dependability, consistency, applicability, trustworthiness and transferability (Golafshani,2003;Stenbacka,2001;Winter, 2000; Lincoln and Guba,1985) so reliability for the qualitative research is a precondition or sine qua non of validity as it is for quantitative research.

Lincoln and Guba (1985,1994,2005) proposal is that in the qualitative (QUAN) research the key criteria to take into account are: credibility (replacing the QUAN concepts of internal validity); transferability (replacing the QUAN concept of external validity); dependability(replacing the QUAN concept of reliability); and confirmability (replacing the QUAN concept of objectivity). Both agree that rigor can be achieved by careful audit trails of evidence, member checking/respondent validation.

3.2.7 Triangulation

One of the relevant aspects of the qualitative research is the possibility to compare and contrast information using the triangulation technique since it helps to investigate different points of view from different resources about the phenomena currently studied. For these reasons, the triangulation is a powerful way to demonstrate concurrent validity, especially in the qualitative research. Something to consider is the fact that in qualitative studies, the information must be validated through data triangulation either by theories, researchers, methodologies, multiple data collection or a combination of these categories of research activities (Denzin, 1978). It is well known that researchers feel more confident when using a variety of methods to contrast with each other. Gorard and Taylor (2004) prove the value of combining qualitative and quantitative methods in the studies.

Triangulation was first used in the social science to describe a form of convergent validation or multiple operationalism (Campbell, 1956). The objective was to measure a single concept or construct (data triangulation). Denzin (1970) extended his view of triangulation beyond including time triangulation, space triangulation, combined levels of triangulation, theoretical triangulation, investigator triangulation and methodological triangulation. Denzin (1978) remarks that triangulation can represent varieties of theories, methods, data, investigators and theories. He also outlines four categories to be used in the triangulation procedure:

- (1) Data triangulation has three subtypes: time, space and person. Person analysis, in turn, has three levels: aggregate, interactive, and collectivity; (2) Investigator triangulation consists of using multiple rather than single observers of the same object;
- (3) Theory triangulation consists of using multiple rather than simple perspectives in relation to the same set of objects; (4) Methodological triangulation can entail within-method triangulation and between-method triangulation.

Currently, Cohen, (2011) states that “In the Social Studies field the triangulation technique is a way to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from one standpoint and, in so doing, by making use of both qualitative and quantitative data”. In the Educational field, it is commonly used four out of the six categories of Denzin’s classification: time triangulation in longitudinal and cross-sectional studies; space triangulation as in different schools from different places;

investigator triangulation as when the same classroom phenomena is being observed by several people; and methodological triangulation which is the most used.

In the Social Science area, a great number of research studies are conducted at one point only in time and a consequence of this, the social change and process within the context is not considered. Hence, to avoid this problem the time triangulation can rectify the omissions by making use of cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches. Likewise, the space triangulation could overcome the limitations of the studies conveyed in different cultures or subcultures. e.g., Piagetian and Vygotskian theories. (Smith, 1975)

However, some researchers have some critics towards triangulation. Silverman (1985) argues that the triangulation in all forms comes from the positivistic paradigm, which is clearly used in data triangulation. Patton (1980) says that even if they have multiple data sources that does not ensure consistency or replication. Fielding and Fielding (1986) sustain that “the methodological triangulation does not necessarily increase validity, reduce bias or brings objectivity to the research”.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) agreed on saying that the investigator triangulation is not possible because researchers cannot corroborate to one another. They argue that both theories will never come up with enough information of the object being observed particularly in the qualitative, reflexive inquiry.

Finally, Smith identifies six possible global levels of analysis: group analysis, organizational units of analysis, institutional analysis, ecological analysis, cultural analysis and societal analysis, and the aggregative or individual level to analyze the phenomena while others only use the individual, the groups and society. Some have agreed that using several levels of analysis is to be preferred.

3.3 Research design

This study is grounded on the Constructivism paradigm since the aim of this research is to answer the central question: How students develop language learning autonomy in the Self Access Centre? which seeks to understand how allowing the learners to organize

themselves and to make choices as agents of their learning processes can achieve their language learning autonomy with the help others within the Self Access Centre.

The qualitative method and the qualitative research instruments used in this study are particularly related to the ethnographic approach and were designed to collect data from the participants because they give a glimpse into why persons act the way they do especially in social contexts. As Dörnyei (2007) says,

“Every aspect of language acquisition and use is determined or significantly shaped by social, cultural and situational factors, and the qualitative research is ideal for providing insights into such contextual conditions and influences”.

He states that the qualitative data analysis is done with words so it could be re-designed to fit the researchers' needs due to the nature of data and its flexibility So, this research has also an emergent design because it arises from the needs of the researcher to gather data during the process of investigation in the real setting. In Preissle's (2006) words:

“The qualitative method provides an in-depth, intricate and detail understanding of meanings, actions, non-observable as well of observable phenomena, attitudes, intentions and behaviours: This approach gives voices to participants and probes issues that lie beneath the surface of presenting behaviours and actions”.

One of the relevant aspects of the qualitative research that guides this study, is the possibility to compare and contrast information using the triangulation technique to validate the research. It helps to investigate different points of view from various resources about the phenomena currently studied. Therefore, the triangulation seems to be a powerful way to demonstrate concurrent validity, especially in the qualitative research. Therefore, the validity and reliability of this study was addressed by triangulating data from the questionnaires, the interviews, videos, photos, recordings and the information collected through the observations in situ.

The instruments used in this study were:

- a) a qualitative semi-structured interview to collect data from the Self-Access Centre (SAC) staff. The objective was to know about the participants' perceptions and beliefs related to the learning environment.

- b) a qualitative structured questionnaire to get information about the learners' beliefs, opinions, needs and wants about the learning environment, the resources and materials available in the Self Access Centre (SAC) and also to identify the learning strategies they use to learn.
- c) The observations in situ were done to identify the scaffolding processes in the activities that learners choose to work in the learning communities in the SAC.
- d) Students' videos and photos in situ were taken as real evidence of the interactions that take place in the learning context in which they get together to do different activities.

The study was held among the SAC users at the university, so data was collected among the university community who were registered in the semester and daily attended to the facility. The learners were informed that a research study was run in the SAC, so they were invited randomly to participate. Then, before they accepted to participate, they were fully informed about the study. Ones who agreed, they were asked to sign and to answer a structured questionnaire basically to know what they thought about the resources, materials, infrastructure and the SAC environment. Secondly, the English part-time teachers, the full-time teachers that work as counsellors and the language assistant who comes from a British university as a part of a student's annual exchange program to help students in the facility participated in a semi-structured interview to collect data about their perceptions and beliefs related to the Self-Access learning environment. Thirdly, I made some observations, took photos and two videos along three weeks as a main observer in situ.

The ethical dimension of the research was considered because it had to deal with people. So following the ERGO standards, a consent letter Participant Information Sheet (PIS) was designed and then signed by the participants to fulfil the ethical issues during the study and to provide data protection and confidentiality always ensuring in the participant information sheet that they could withdraw at any time if they wish without any penalty. . The information about the project and procedures for this study were given to the participants in advance before deciding whether or not to participate. Nevertheless, some students refused to participate but they were persuaded not to do it by assuring

them that their personal information was handled and protected all the time. Also, I explained them that the project was vital to help the university authorities to improve the Self – Access Centre facilities to foster their learning autonomy. After collecting data from the participants, it was analyzed to report the results and to make some recommendations if needed.

The research was carried out during two phases to answer the research questions. In the first phase, the pre-study lasted from October 2014 to December 2014 and in the second phase the main study lasted from January 2015 to September 2016. To analyze data the second phase was divided in three stages.

Table: Outline of the study

Research	Research Methods	Participants	Remarks
Pre-study October 2014 to December 2014	Pilot questionnaire Interviews Excell spreadsheet	20 SAC students	Data from 20 students was selected for the analysis. Research instruments were added to triangulate data: Observations Interviews Videos Photos
Main study	Questionnaires	20 students	Data from 28 participant were

January 2015 to September 2015	Observations	3 full time teachers	collected and analyzed using NVivo and Gephi software
	Interviews	1 English assistant	
	Videos	2 Sac Assistants	
	Photos	2 part-time teachers	

In the first phase, several actions were carried out. First, some students participated in the pilot study to answer the qualitative questionnaire which was to be used later in the main study. The Self- Access Centre staff and part -time teachers were also invited to answer a semi-structured interview. All data collected from each of the ten questions from the questionnaires was registered in an Excell spreadsheet to use it later in the main study. Once data was revised, there was the need to corroborate and to validate it and to get more information, so more research instruments were added as follows: two videos from the SAC, several photos from different students' activities, some interviews from the research participants such as students, staff, counsellors, full time teachers, and also few observations were done in situ in the facility.

In the second stage of the research, data from the Excell spreadsheet was processed using the Gephi and NVivo to find out emerging patterns. First, data was coded using the NVivo software to find out emerging patterns. Once the patterns emerged from the NVivo, several codes as agency, scaffolding, learning environments, autonomy, motivation and interaction emerged. Then, data was loaded into the Gephi software to unveil interrelations among the underlying links that might be connecting the codes. After that, the literature from printed and electronic resources online was revised for the research categories that emerged from data to write the theoretical framework. Finally, in the third stage were reported the results, drawn the conclusions and recommendations were made.

3.3.1 Pilot Study

The pilot study was held in the Self- Access Centre at the university in October 2014. The objective was to refine the instruments and data collection procedures. The sample for the pilot study was taken from daily average active users that were enrolled in the University programs from different semesters and levels of English at that time. The students that participated in the study were chosen randomly from the morning and the afternoon shifts so that the researcher could have a wider number of students' opinions of various programs and semesters in which they were enrolled at that time also the teachers, counsellors and the language assistant were chosen randomly.

Some researchers agreed on the fact of piloting the research instruments before implementing them. Corbetta (2003) says that a pilot study is a fundamental step to take before the primary data collection takes place. Also, Balnaves and Caputti (2001) come to an agreement on saying that a pilot study is a preliminary test of the research instruments to assure their implementation with success and to be aware of any problems that might arise before the main data collection. Likewise, Sarakatos (2005) states that piloting is a pre-test to help them identify and solve any problems in their methodological design stage. Therefore, piloting emerges as one of the fundamental processes while doing research.

So, to design the questionnaire two instruments were adapted to gather information for the study. One is from Clemente (2000), "Teachers' attitudes within a self-directed language-learning scheme". Language Centre. Universidad Autónoma Benito Juarez. Oaxaca, Mexico and another from Koyalan (2009), "The evaluation of a self-access centre: A useful addition to class-based teaching". Clemente's instrument was piloted among students that were chosen randomly in the SAC and also among the teachers, counsellors and the language assistant to gather information about their attitudes and beliefs towards de Self-Access Centre.

3.3.2 Pilot study results

When the students were asked about the way that SAC has helped to improve their communicative skills, they all accepted to have an improvement in different ways. Some by

practicing, others through listening and helping others as some students reported in their answers:

S1: 'Yes, speaking, listening, conversations, helping others',

S2: 'Yes, because of the Sac as many different activities, movies, books, teachers',

S3: 'Yes, with the conversations. I can improve my speaking skills; with games I can improve and learn new vocabulary',

S4: 'Yes, speaking with friends, doing exercises in our book, practicing English',

S5: 'Yes, take conversation, watch a movie'.

The results showed that their perception is positive which makes them feel the need to succeed in their process of language learning. (see appendix A question 1)

About the activities they carry out at the SAC, the information shows that most of the learners agreed on saying that they choose the activities generally to talk and because of the free time available for it. It also shows that they like the facility because it is interesting, dynamic, nice and they can also play there. This means that they seem to participate in the activities because they enjoy the place and being with their peers while practicing the target language. Only one student wrote that he comes for help. (see appendix A question 2)

When they were asked about how the SAC have helped them to change their language learning approach, the students' answers accepted that in a great variety of ways. The highest number of students belongs to the students who answered, 'through learning and the vocabulary'. Other learners said that by doing homework and taking part in the conversations. Only one referred by explaining to others which seem to be the least favorite answer. (see appendix A question 3)

Although students must come once a week to the SAC as requested in their English program, they can come as many times as they want. In the questionnaire, most of them said that they come between seven or six times and very few said between four or once a week. This means that they are free to choose the number of times they want to visit the SAC. Some of their comments were:

S1: 'when I have time',

S2: 'not often but when I go,

S3: 'I do not want to leave', and

S4 'I go two hrs. in each visit'

(See appendix A question 4)

Regarding whether they come voluntarily or because they are told to do it, data shows that there is a slight difference between coming to the SAC voluntarily or because the teacher says so, and this might be part of the students' culture. Somehow some students are more independent than others because of their lifestyles background, but in terms of autonomy, they decide if they come or not depending on their learning needs and preferences. Some students' comments were:

S1: 'my teacher invites me',**S2: 'the teacher tells me to do so',****S3: 'to give conversations', 'to learn or watch movies',****S4: 'I like it', 'the SAC has helped me',****S5: 'teacher but I like it'**

(See appendix A question 5)

Other responses were those given when they were asked about the scaffolders (mediators) of learning, data shows that most of the students who come to the SAC are highly interested in playing with their peers while playing with the printed material and the question cards because they keep them engaged in the activity while learning. They also mentioned that they have lots of opportunities to practice English which shows that the scaffolders foster the communicative skills requested for language learning.

Some of their comments were: 'the games because I think they are a way of having fun and learning at the same time', and 'The really funny games and because I can play in English with my friends'. Others were also interested in reading, watching movies and giving or taking conversations among their peers. They said, 'The games (cards) because I can read and repeat and when there are more people (teachers)they help me in pronunciation.' Some like to read, to watch movies, to listen to music. It seems that they are not aware of the fact that they are also learning because only one student reported, 'to learn.'

Regarding to the relation between the SAC and their regular English classes, students' responses showed that there is a positive perception about it. Some students wrote: 'Is an important complement to improve my English', 'reinforce their grammar and pronunciation', 'is necessary to

'read more magazines in English', 'is helped everything has relation with the homework the topics'. Only one student mentioned that the material is old, and another disagreed because he said 'I don't think so. In the SAC I do things I can choose and, in the class, not. (Question 8)

Concerning with the idea of how their teachers respond about going to the SAC, most of the students reported that instructors had excellent comments, and this is basically because they act out in an amicable manner telling them what they need to improve or to practice which is a perfect way to motivate them and to keep them engaged. Some comments were: 'She encourages us to go so we can improve and practice', 'normal because we have to go for the activities and conversations', 'because we need the conversations and hrs. of the SAC for approving (pass) the signature'. One student answer 'I don't really know', and two students did not answer (see appendix A question10).

When they were asked about the possibility to have more material, they mentioned that some of it should be changed for ESP material as National Geographic magazine and Mechanics for their majors as well as more games and also to add more music and clubs for reading. These arguments are based on students' comments as: 'Yes, more software of different majors', 'more funny games', 'maybe new materials to change the monotony of the words', 'yes, maybe with clubs for read any books or magazine', 'yes, I would like to listen and more music 'and finally 'yes, I would like National Geographic, Mechanics (see appendix A question 11).

Regarding the factor of motivation, students reported that they feel motivated when going to the SAC because there is the need to use the facility either to practice, to improve or to learn English. They also mentioned that they come to do their homework and to have conversations sessions, an activity which seems to be the most popular among them. Some of their opinions were: 'To practice the level of English and help others to improve their', 'It's relaxing and to practice English', 'I like conversations.', 'I think that is one of the best things to learn English', 'I need to practice my speak English, and I need to do conversations and is a good place when I can do my English activities', 'Because I learn English to go abroad'. One student said 'I need to practice my speak English and I need to do conversations and is a good place when I can do my English activities' another mentioned that he needed to do conversations and hrs. but what he really likes is going to the SAC.

After collecting data, I was aware of the need to obtain more information about autonomy so there was the necessity to interview some more students about this matter. As a consequence of this, I invited some other SAC learners to participate in an

unstructured interview to elicit information about how they think the SAC is helping them to reach their learning autonomy. Fortunately, students were pleased to participate and gave relevant information to be used in the study.

3.3.3 Main Study

The main study took place from January 2015 to September 2016. The first three months involved inviting and selecting participants to participate in the study. The setting was the SAC where I had permission to do it. I started first with the questionnaire among the students who agreed to participate. Then, the group of full-time teachers and finally the group of the part-time teachers and language assistants. After collecting data from the research instruments (questionnaires, interviews, observations, audio visual material from photographs, videos and audio scripts) I proceeded to store data in files with backup copies in the computer using the Excell spread sheet and NVivo12 and Gephi software, in preparation for data analysis.

3.3.4 Research Questions

The overarching aim of this research was to seek how language learners develop learning autonomy in the Self Access Centre. So, the following question were written to guide this study:

- 3. How do students learn in the Self Access Centre?**
- 4. What enables students to learn in the SAC?**

And the sub questions:

- 1a. What kind of interrelations emerge from learners' interaction in the SAC?**
- 1b. What elements in the SAC contribute to the development of social autonomy?**
- 1c. What kind of interactions are established while students participate in different activities within the SAC?**

The research qualitative questions were drawn to direct this research in order to seek how language learners develop their autonomy given the opportunity to exercise their agency concerning to their learning objectives. The particular aims are to understand

better how their choices, interactions, activities and interrelations contribute to the development of autonomy. The answers to these questions will give a glimpse on the learning networks that emerge from students' role as agents of their learning processes which lead to the development of their language learning autonomy.

3.4 The research context

3.4.1 The University

This research study is set at a government funded university in Cancun, Quintana Roo, Mexico. The university is a federal educational institution that emerges as an effort to meet the great needs of the higher education in the northern part of the state. It was created by the Federal government in Mexico on September the 29th, and it opened in February 2001. The mission of the University is to develop professionals with the knowledge, skills, competencies and meaningful social values that will allow them to participate in their environment, able to apply their knowledge and culture development and also to contribute to the social, economic and cultural life of the state and the progress of the country.

The educational model of the university is informed in the Socio-Cultural Theory. Based on this model, students at the university have an active role in the learning process. The teacher's role is to be a guide of the process and the contents are considered as scaffolders to develop the skills and knowledge in meaningful learning environments.

The university offers eight different programs: Sustainable Tourism, Culinary arts Business Innovation, International Business, Logistics, Telematics and Environmental Engineering; programs that students have to complete a minimum of 8 semesters (4 years) and a maximum of 8 years. Students can decide freely, the teachers, the timetables and the subjects they want to study for each semester besides the mandatory ones according to their needs and interests. Each of the programs includes learning English as a co-curricular subject so students have to take four semesters of general English and two semesters of ESP in their areas.

New students take a placement test and an oral interview to be assigned in one of the four levels of general English placed in the correct level of English: Elementary (1), Pre-intermediate (2), Intermediate (3), and Upper -Intermediate (4). Two Topics courses cannot be exempted. In each of the general English courses students must do 20 extra hours of independent practice in the Self-Access Centre. The objective is to achieve the B1 (Common European Framework) at the end of their major.

The English program has been developed according to the working market needs. At the beginning, it was mainly focused on developing the oral communicative skill but nowadays, this situation has changed because the internationalization of the education, students need to achieve the academic skills to participate in the international exchange programs.

3.4.2 The Self-Access Centre

The Self-access centre was founded in 2003 by an agreement between the British Council and the Secretary of Education in Mexico City as a special program to promote autonomous language learning (Grounds, 2002). In 2004, the project was completed and opened its facilities in the same year. In the beginning the SAC was allotted two rooms with an area of 210 m² with capacity for 35 students. There have been several SAC premises since that time because of the growing learners' community. The first SAC was a regular classroom adapted with reading and listening resources, computers, tape recordings to practice listening and televisions with cable service for students to watch programs in English and. The autonomy at that time was conceived as a cognitive result of being exposed to different resources. Apart from the coordinator private office all the staff had open stations that facilitated interaction with the counsellors. Later on, in 2005 the centre had a new area for 50 students and because the SAC was run in one flat the students felt better to interact in a more 'friendly' space and free to organize by themselves different activities according to their learning needs. In 2008, the SAC moved its own building and currently the total capacity is 150 users. The interaction turned into a social learning activity because the roles of the counsellors, teachers, peers and language assistants changed to a more socio- constructivist construction meaning because the infrastructure of the Self-Access Centre (SAC) provides a physical space which

allows face to face interactions so that they can develop their communication skills in a second language according to their preferences and needs.

This particular point makes the SAC a space for social interaction because they can practice the target language in the conversation sessions (either among themselves or with the help of a tutor or a language assistant of the SAC). This particular activity has become more popular among students who find the SAC as a social space in which they can communicate their ideas and thoughts in English using different resources, such as: computers with the various programs in English, books of different levels to meet the needs of learners, audiobooks, magazines on different topics, games, educational materials, TVs, CDs, DVDs and posters with images from various topics such as daily activities, the seasons, modes of transport, etc..

In the beginning, the conversation sessions were very structured, and they were run by teachers/counsellors but nowadays they gather together independently in groups of no more than six to have a conversation session which can last up to an hour. They developed gradually from teacher/counsellor led to students self-organized. Moreover, some students in higher levels have gained a lot of confidence in organizing conversation circles and running the whole session.

At the moment, the staff is integrated by ten full-time counsellors/teachers who are distributed in open stations to foster interaction among the language learners, helping them when needed or just guiding them to the best use of the facility. All of them are available for the SAC users at different times. The students can use the facility at any time from 7 am to 8 pm. Besides the full-time teachers, there are part-time teachers, a British language assistant, two SAC helpers, and two administrative staff who can help the SAC users.

3.4.3 The selection of participants

In the present study the research sample consisted of twenty-eight members. Three participants were full-time teachers, two part-time teachers, two Mexican helpers, one British helper and twenty SAC students.

The sample of the selected students were SAC users currently attending to the Self Access Centre who belong to the eight academic programs given in the University. Their age ranged between 17 and 30 years and they were students from different semesters. Their level of English ranges from A1 to B2 in the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR). All of them were informed about the running study in the SAC and they were invited personally to participate in the study following the ERGO's procedure. The sample was taken randomly because it gives a wide span of coverage to know about their learning needs, preferences, feelings and opinions about the Self- Access Centre.

The second group of participants were from the full-time teachers who work as counsellors at the SAC. All of them have taken the training courses to work as counsellors to guide students in the facility. They hold a master's degree in different areas related to the education field and come from different countries and cities from Mexico. One teacher is from Nicaragua, another teacher, who is the English coordinator comes from the United Kingdom, two teachers are from the northern part of Mexico, three teachers are from Mexico City and two more are from the southern part of the Mexican Republic. So, there is a variety of counsellor styles that can help students in the SAC.

The three teachers selected belong to the regular language classes. They are experienced English language teachers who give General English and ESP in different majors, so it was relevant to know their beliefs and perceptions about their awareness and the SAC activities and materials available for the students, as a part of the study.

The third group belongs to the SAC staff part-time teachers who attend to the university and also help in the SAC. This group of teachers comes from different parts of the world and from Mexico. Some are American others are from Ireland and Canada and also, other teachers are Mexican. This group participates in the conversation circles that all students need to take every semester. Sometimes they also help students to do their homework or just explain some grammatical points that are not clear for them. Most of them have been working in the university for many years so students know them very well. Few of them are new teachers, but they adapted rapidly to the working style of the SAC. The two teachers selected belong to the regular language classes. They are experienced English language teachers who give General English and ESP in different majors, so it was relevant

to know their beliefs and perceptions about their awareness and the SAC activities and materials available for the students, as a part of the study. Two language assistants participated in the study. They are the ones who also help students to develop mainly their speaking skills, but they can also help them to work within the SAC. The foreign language assistant who participated in the research was a 22-year-old student that came from a university in the United Kingdom as a part of the English language exchange program with the state university. Her chore was to help students with the conversation sessions mainly, regardless the English language level and to guide language learners in the SAC to find out activities that could help them improve their language level. She also shared the British culture among the students and the university staff as a part of their cultural program.

3.4.4 The researcher role

The researcher has worked at the university for 15 years, so she has been an active participant in the setting and transformation of the Self -Access Centre along its different developing stages. The active role gives relevant background to nurture the study being held at the Self -Access Centre because she is well known as a member of the staff. She has given ESP classes mainly in Tourism and has taught the four levels of General English in all the majors at the University since the university opened in 2000. Also, the researcher who is a full-time teacher, has worked at the Self-Access Centre for the last eight years giving counselling and conversation sessions. She holds a bachelor's degree in education as a second language teacher in English, a master's degree in educational psychology and two counselling diplomas. One is from the Universidad Autónoma de Mexico and another from the British Council. She has also designed SAC material to help students to improve their English language level and their learning skills.

Consequently, being both a teacher and a researcher is difficult because the researcher has to keep her objectivity in order to maintain the validity and reliability of data (Nunan; cited in Dörnyei (2006) so some interferences may arise from the distance. However, considering that the background experience gotten from the teaching field, might contribute to bridge the gap between theory and practice. (McDonough and McDonough,

1997; Burns; 2010). Therefore, the observation role in this study depended on the activities chosen by the participants.

Thus, in this study the researcher' role had to adapt to the needs and conditions of the students being observed or interviewed. Sometimes being mainly a participant in the activities they performed and in others as a full observer to suit the needs of the research. As a participant in the conversation sessions using either a board game, question cards to elicit or to guide students' participation in the free topics chosen by the students' interest or needs. Other times, I was mainly an observer gathering information trying to identify the attitudes, gestures, feelings, scaffolding processes and social interactions styles among the participants involved in the SAC activities. Then, Gold's (1958) typology suits in this study because of the naturalistic setting in which the study took place. He has established a typology of naturalistic research roles in which he divides the role in two big groups: mainly participant and mainly observer. At the same time the mainly observer is divided in two subcategories: complete participant and participant observer and so is the mainly observer which is divided into observer as a participant and complete observer.

3.5 Research Instruments

In education, qualitative researchers study deeply spoken and written representations and record human experiences to try to explain the phenomena being studied. Then, multiple methods and sources are used to collect and interpret data (the interview, the questionnaire, raw notes, observation, diaries, biographies, etc.)

Thus, considering that this is a qualitative study, some of these research instruments being used in this study are : 1) semi structured interviews to gather information about the perceptions and beliefs that staff research participants have about the Self-Access Centre learning environment (Appendix A) , 2) a structured questionnaire to collect data to know what students think about the resources and material available and also to identify the learning strategies that students use at the SAC (Appendix A) , and 3) observations notes in situ to identify the scaffolding process that currently takes place in the SAC.

The pilot study was held in the Self-Access Centre (SAC) at the University. Students answered a structured questionnaire to know what they think about the resources, materials, infrastructure and the SAC environment. The questionnaire was adapted from Koyalan (2009): The evaluation of a self-access centre: A useful addition to class-based teaching?

Also, the teachers and the language assistant participated in a semi structured interview to collect data about their perceptions and beliefs related to the Self-Access Learning. The interview was adapted from Clemente (2000): Teachers attitudes within a self-directed language learning scheme environment and finally I took some observation notes for three weeks as the main observer in situ to observe the interactions that take place among SAC students and the scaffolders that they might use while using the resources available for them in the facility.

Some researchers as Gardner and Miller (1999) make some suggestions to evaluate the effectiveness of a self-access centre. They focus on asking learners which facilities they use most, and the reasons they use them. Likewise, asking the staff which services seem to be used and what they think the learners are doing at SAC. They also mention that it is important to conduct an observation of the facilities as well as counting attendance and identifying popular services. They both agree that these activities can be done by giving questionnaires to a random sample of users to find out why they use them.

3.5.1 Questionnaires

There is a wide variety of useful research tools to gather data. Among these research instruments is the questionnaire which can be used because of its versatility and flexibility so in this study a qualitative semi structured questionnaire was used because it allowed to collect learners data about their opinions, beliefs and attitudes to know students develop learning autonomy given the opportunity in social contexts as the Self Access Centre

As Dörnyei (2007) says, “it is a valuable tool when there is a need to collect and to process a large amount of information quickly”. Its popularity emerges because it is quite easy to construct them; they are flexible, and unique. The questionnaires are also known as

“inventories”, “tests”, “batteries”, “checklists”, “surveys”. He explains that questionnaires can get three types of relevant information: factual or demographic (who the interviewees are and their background/experiences); behavioral (what they do or did in the past) and attitudinal (attitudes, opinions, beliefs, interests and values). Also, they have been used in at least two broad senses: (a) interview schedules/guides; and (b) self-administered pencil-and-paper questionnaires.

Brown (2001:6) defines the self-administered pencil-and –paper questionnaires as: “...any written instruments that respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers” and Dörnyei (2007) explains that the main function of the interview schedule or interview guide is to help the interviewer to collect data from different areas : (a) by ensuring that the domain is properly covered and nothing important is left out by accident; (b) by suggesting appropriate question wordings;(c) by offering a list of useful probe questions to be used if needed; (d) by offering a template for the opening statement; and (e) by listing some comments to bear in mind.

Burns (2010) suggests that there are two types of items that could be used to design the questionnaire: close-ended and open- ended items. Some examples in the close-ended items type are the yes/no; rating scales; numerical scales; multiple choice; and ranking scales. This group of items is probably the most frequently used but the information collected is limited.

The yes/no (true/false) questionnaire, is used when the interviewee may have not advanced language abilities, is young, or where the researcher wants to reduce the risk that too many shades of judgements may be required. The rating scales are used when the participants are asked to give the degree to which they agree with something (e.g., Likert scales). A variation of this is the semantic scale in which the participants provide their evaluation along a continuum. (e.g., easy to difficult, good-bad, helpful-unhelpful, quiet-loud).

The numerical scales ask the participants to give a score to evaluate something. Usually, the scale scores out of five or ten (e.g., 1= not at all, 2= a little,3= fairly well, 4= very well and 5= extremely well). The multiple-choice items are used in tests or exams in which the

participants are frequently asked to mark one option or more than one depending on the request.

The rank order items are used to elicit information about their preferences, values or opinions from a list of possible alternatives (from the most important to the least important or vice versa). As opposed to the closed type, the open-ended items look for a free-form response. These kinds of items are helpful when the researcher wants to get information from a different perspective but considering that they are not easily captured numerically. The information collected is analyzed by describing the trends, themes or patterns that arise in them. The style of the open-ended questions ranges from completely open to guided or structured.

It is important to consider that the answers collected cannot be considered as good or bad because they are giving information about the participants in the study. Also, because their characteristics, the questionnaires need to elicit some sort of authentic data language they are considered structured language elicitation instruments (Dörnyei, 2007). Hence, after designing the questionnaire it is important to pilot the instrument to be aware of the changes that are needed to be done to get the correct information before using it for the study. Even though piloting is essential for the quantitative method, Richards (2005) remarks that in qualitative studies, "There is normally no real piloting stage in which the research tools are tested".

3.5.1.1 Strengths and weaknesses of questionnaires

The questionnaires in the study were chosen after considering the strengths and weaknesses of their usage. From the advantages side, it can be mentioned that they are efficient instruments to collect huge amounts of data in a short period of time, but it is important to consider that if the instrument is well constructed then the analysis and data processing is faster than interviewing someone. Additionally, because of their versatility, they can be used in a great variety of topics situations and contexts. Thus, because of these advantages the questionnaires are frequently used in the behavioral and social fields. However, besides their strengths, the questionnaires have some serious limitations (Dörnyei, 2007). It is quite easy to produce unreliable and invalid data if the questionnaire is not well constructed. The weakest part is that the items need to be

simple and straightforward so participants can understand the same thing due to their cultural background.

Researchers like Moser and Kalton (1971), sustain that these kind of research instruments, are inappropriate for probing deeply into an issue because they just give superficial data due to the short time needed to answer each item. Dörnyei (2007) refers that “questionnaire surveys, usually provide a rather thin description of the target phenomena that could affect the depth of the investigation”.

In the pilot study, the students answered a structured questionnaire to know what they think about the resources, materials, infrastructure and the SAC environment. The questionnaire was taken from Koyalan, Aylin (2009) “The evaluation of a self-access centre: A useful addition to class-based teaching”. It was chosen because it suited the University context in which the study took place. So, the questions were clustered into the following research categories: autonomy, scaffolding, interaction, learning strategies, motivation and learning environment to answer the research question: How do students develop language learning autonomy in the Self Access Centre?

The questionnaire was written mainly in English, but they were told to use Spanish to answer it if it was needed. To protect their identity students were asked not to write their names to minimize their reluctance to participate or give an honest opinion. At the very beginning, the students were afraid to answer it because of their level of English but later on, they felt confident when I told them to use Spanish while I was explaining the objective of the research study.

3.5.2 Interviews

I decided to use a qualitative semi-structure interview because this kind of research instrument gives access to the following issues: a) the setting, b) to understand the language and culture of participants, c) to establish rapport among the participants, d) to decide on how to present one, and e) to gain trust and to collect empirical material (Fontana and Frey) always taking into account that there is a need to be a very flexible when dealing with people.

Therefore, two part-time teachers and the language assistant were invited to participate in the semi structured interview (Appendix A) to collect data about their perceptions and beliefs related to the Self-Access learning environment. The interview (Appendix A) was adapted from Clemente (2000). "Teachers' attitudes within a self-directed language-learning scheme". Language Centre. Universidad Autónoma Benito Juarez. Oaxaca, Mexico. They were informed about the objective of the research, and they gladly accepted to participate. They felt comfortable after reading the questions previous to the interview. The interview was held in the SAC facility individually because it was easier to meet them due to their working hours and it lasted for 40 minutes.

According to Jones (1985), we can use the interview as a valuable resource to try to understand the personal constructions of reality, so we can get access to the thoughts, beliefs, meanings, perceptions and situations that people use to build and interpret their reality.

Patton (2002) mentions three main types of interviews: the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach and the standardized open-ended interview. On the other hand, Minichiello et al. (1990) offers a variety of interviewing methods, based on the degree of structure involved. Fielding (1996) categorizes the interviews into standardized, semi-standardized, and non-standardized. Likewise, Fontana and Frey (1994) use structure, semi structured and unstructured interviewing classification, which apply to individual or group interview.

In structured interviews the participant is asked a set of pre-established questions, with pre-set response categories. All participants receive in the same standardized order the questions being asked. The interviewer has no role to preserve a neutral role and manner while asking the participants. There is a stimulus-response nature which stresses the rational rather than emotional responses (Fontana and Frey, 1994).

The unstructured interviews are often called non-standardized, open-ended, in-depth interview and sometimes called the ethnographic interview. Thus, planning data collection may involve such aspects as Fontana and Frey discuss a) Accessing the setting, b) understanding the language and culture of participants, 3) deciding on how to present

oneself, 4) locating an informant, 5) gaining trust, 6) establishing rapport, and 7) collecting the empirical material.

These aspects could be adapted to the natural setting in which the study is developed. Considering that there is a need to be very flexible when dealing with oral history and life history projects. Once the type of interview is selected based on the research strategy, paradigms considerations, purposes and questions (Punch, 2009) the researcher has to include the participants' profile, managing the interview and recording.

At the same time, it is relevant to consider, who will be interviewed and why? How many will be interviewed, and how many times will each person be interviewed? When and for how long will each respondent be interviewed? How will access to the interview situation be organized? Moreover, always remembering the particular aspects of the setting and participants because whatever is done in it can affect all stages of the interviewer-interviewee relationship and beyond that the quality, reliability and validity could also be jeopardized.

After selecting the kind of interview, it is recommended to be prepared for the interview. In this case, it is important to plan to manage it effectively. This means that the interviewer has to think a priori about how to establish rapport with the interviewee(s), so the emotional setting is covered to accomplish the objective that in this case is to take as much information as possible for the study. In other words, planning ahead what is needed to succeed is vital for the sake of the research. Developing assertiveness and effectiveness through good communication and listening skills will allow all the participants to flow.

As Punch (2009) states, "*the more unstructured the interview, the more communication skills in general, and listening and follow-up questioning in particular are important*". Other authors like Woods (1986), Keas (1988) and Cracken (1988) have written about this particular topic. Minichiello et al (1990) recommends practicing intensively the sub-skills of listening to improve this competency.

However, another significant issue in the qualitative research interview is the question asking because it is the central core of the interview. Survey questionnaires are helpful

tools that can be used in many ways in the social and educational fields (Jaeger, 1988; Thomas, 1966; Converse and Presser, 1986; Moser and Kalton, 1979). They are useful when large sample sizes are involved especially when a big number of research questions are used. Questionnaires are easy to analyze using computer software packages. In addition, people are familiar with questionnaires because it is easier to complete them. Important relevance is given to the questions delivered, the wording that is used and the sequence and types of questions that can be asked (Punch, 2009). Patton (1990) categorized them into experience/behavior, opinion/belief, feeling, knowledge, sensory and demographic/background. Others like Sudman and Bradburn (1982) and Foddy (1993) have their own classification and finally Minichiello et al. (1990) gives a broad explanation about ways of closing an interview.

Nevertheless, what do questionnaires measure? From Denzin point of view, he says that questions can yield three types of data about the participants: a) Factual questions which objective is to find out facts about demographic characteristics as age, gender, gender. Also, residential location, marital and socio-economic status, level of education, occupation, language learning history, amount of time spent in an L2 environment, etc. b) Behavioral questions that are focused on actions, lifestyles, habits, and personal history that took place in the past or in the present. c) Attitudinal questions which are related to their thoughts, opinions, covering attitudes, beliefs, interests and values.

One important characteristic is that the items do not have bad or good answers; they just elicit information about the participants in a non-evaluative manner. Therefore, they differ from the achievement or aptitude tests because they are structured language elicitation instruments which goal is to evaluate the participants' competence in specific tasks. As it was mentioned before, all depends on the researching approach selected to design the best interview for a particular project. Therefore, the teachers and the language assistant participated in a semi-structured interview to collect data about their perceptions and beliefs related to the Self Access learning environment. The qualitative interview (APENDIX 1) was adapted from Clemente, Ma. "Teachers' attitudes within a self-directed language-learning scheme". Language Centre. Universidad Autónoma Benito Juarez. Oaxaca, Mexico (2000). This instrument was chosen because it is run in a Mexican University context and also it suits the needs for the study.

3.5.2.1Strengths and weaknesses of interviews

It is known that an acceptable way of collecting data in different social contexts is the interview because it can be used in a wide range of situations in which the researcher can focus on to yield in- depth data (Dörnyei,2007) and also since most people feel comfortable to participate in an interview. Thus, there is a need to know about several good interviewer models to be able to get valuable data from the very first interviews. Additionally, the interview is an instrument that allows having flexible approaches to obtain the data needed for the study.

Nevertheless, the interview's main weakness is that is time-consuming and entails good communication skills from the researcher or interviewer to set up and conduct the interview in a courteous atmosphere. Also, the interview might be threatening if the interviewees are shy because they may jeopardize the information and will not give enough data or too verbose that could generate less-than-useful data. Moreover, people may refuse to be interviewed so the interviewer has to overcome to the situation telling the participant the importance of the topic.

3.5.2.2 Interview Questions

The questions for the qualitative interview (Appendix A) were adapted from Clemente, Ma. "Teachers' attitudes within a self-directed language-learning scheme". This study was selected because she has driven research in a Mexican university about the teacher's perceptions in the Self-Access. So, to collect participants' information the questions were divided in two groups. The first group of questions was oriented to get information related to the teachers' and language assistant perceptions and the second group of questions was mainly oriented to get information about their beliefs towards the Self-Access learning environment.

3.5.3 Observations

Another helpful data collection technique is the observation that has been traditionally considered as a powerful researching tool through time. Cohen (2011) says, "*The observation is a widely used means of data collection and it takes many forms*". Others

agreed on saying that observation is to look around systematically and also looking systematically at people, events, behaviors, settings, routines and so on. (Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Simpson and Tuson, 2003). On the other hand, as a research process, the observation offers a great opportunity to gather data in situ from the real social context in which the actions take place. Bailey (1994:244) says that observational data might be helpful to gather data from non-verbal behavior in situ. This is why the observation has been used as an excellent researcher instrument in the social sciences field.

The observation as Cohen (2007) claims, can be of: a) facts e.g., number of teachers in a school or the number of students visiting the SAC in a month, b) events e.g., the number of conversation sessions, the number of collaborative activities or the counselling sessions given to the students in the SAC and 3) behaviors and qualities about the people being observed. (Aggressiveness, unsociable behavior among students, friendliness, etc.) However, as McDonough et.al (1997) established, “any form of observation is going to introduce some distortion from normality”. Therefore, it is important to consider that the background knowledge and whatever the researcher does or uses might invalidate data (tape recorder, video, camera, etc.). Thus, all the decision made to observe, should be planned ahead so it has to be decided in advance which might be the best places to observe the phenomena, so participants do not get distracted but even though there are disadvantages as distractions and distortions, Patton (1990:202) affirms that: “observational data should enable the researcher to enter and understand the situation that is being described”.

In fact, that happened when I observed the conversation sessions and approached them with the camera to take some photos. I asked first for permission and then explained the objective of taking pictures so as a consequence of this action, they got distracted from the activities they were doing. They were looking to the camera instead of focusing on their conversations. That also happened when the other circles of conversations in the SAC were monitored; they turned around to look at the observer, so I had to tell them politely to concentrate and to stop looking at me. Some students got nervous and stopped talking for the rest of the time. Moreover, when I recorded the session, they did not want to talk freely. This activity was difficult to do it because they felt that the

observer was trespassing their vital zone. Consequently, I had to decide in advance if it was going to be a live observation, a recorded one or both.

Some observation notes were taken for three weeks in situ as a part of the research. Every day I collected information in a research diary. However, a big problem arose in the middle of the study. The university decided to move the Self-Access Centre to a new facility within the Campus, so students stop coming to the new SAC for almost a week and a half, so I had to wait until everything was set up again to continue the study. This issue was difficult to handle because I had to motivate students to come back since they were used to the old SAC. They said that the old one was bigger, and everything was on the same floor. Nowadays the SAC is divided in a two-story building so students have to go up and down to get access to the SAC resources available for them.

The observation as a technique ranges from the structured to unstructured type as well as the reasons of using them. Moreover, the observer needs to know in advance what to look for (Cohen, 2007) in order to gather data that could answer the research questions design for the study. So based on these premises, the observations can be divided into highly structured, semi-structured and unstructured as Patton (1990) stated.

In the highly structured observation, it is established previously the categories to be observed along the study. This kind of observation is very rigorous in its structure and the observer adopts a passive, non-intrusive role just noting down exclusively the frequency of the factors being studied to test the prior hypothesis of the research. As in the semi-structured observation using an agenda is helpful due that the objective is to consider the issues to be observed in situ and to register data in an unsystematic manner to review observational data before suggesting an explanation for the phenomena being observed (Cohen, 2011). In contrast to the structured observation, the unstructured one has not a clear target to be observed since the context is directly observed before deciding on the significance of the study.

Dyer (1995) points out several principles that must be considered while designing their observation form: 1)The choice of the environment (availability and frequency of the behavior of interest); 2) The need for clear and ambiguous measures (latent characteristics or construct being operationalized); 3) A manageable number of variables

(a sufficient number for validity to be demonstrated, yet not so many to render data entry unreliable); 4) Overt or covert observation ; 6)Continuous, time –series or random observation; 6)The different categories of behavior to be observed; 7)The number of people to be observed. 8) The number of variables on which data must be gathered, and 9) the kind of observation schedule to be used.

Another characteristic to consider is the research setting because it has to be described the social phenomena since the actions, take place through an intense, prolonged contact with, or immersion in the natural research setting (Dörnyei, 2007). In other words, all the study observations and instruments designed and used, should be made in situ, so the researcher could gather data from first and hand insiders (Dörnyei, 2007). It is important to mention that the “insider perspective” concept is considered as a credo in the qualitative method because they are the key holders of the social phenomena being observed.

Hence, data from participants’ opinions, attitudes, thoughts, perspectives and behaviors has to be collected, so the sample size of the study has to be smaller than the ones used in the quantitative method because qualitative studies are very labor-intensive to conduct due to the interpretative nature of the researching procedures.

In this study the participants’ sample was chosen from the students coming to the Self-Access Centre. Thus, 28 participants and staff from all the educational programs were selected randomly from both morning and afternoon shifts. Even though the literature reports that the sample size has to be at least of 30 participants (Cohen, 2011), in this particular case, the sample size was smaller: 20 students, two part-time teachers, one full-time teacher, one language assistant and the English coordinator. The sample was not bigger because the study needed to be covered in a short time.

Following the qualitative method and after collecting the information, data was analyzed using NVivo12 and Gephi software to identify the patterns and interrelations among data. There was the need to make an interpretative analysis because at this stage of the study, there were a great variety of interpretations based on his or her personal history, culture, gender, values and age that became part of the inquiry process. The objective of this procedure as Miles and Huberman (1994) point out is “to seek formalization and distrust

it". Furthermore, Dörnyei (2007) says, "researcher has to develop and follow certain principled analytical sequences without being tied by constraints of the procedures and sacrificing the researcher's creative liberty of interpretation."

3.6 Data software

3.6.1 NVivo12 software

The qualitative analysis of the data in this research was carried out in three different stages. In the first stage, the information systematically recorded from the questionnaires, interviews, observations, videos and photographs taken in the Self-Access Centre were gathered as the object of analysis (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). The collected information is evidence of the students' attitudes, behaviors, experiences, motivations and opinions within the Auto Access Centre at the university. The information from the descriptions of the videos and photographs was registered through electronic records and the observations and interviews were made through handwritten notes.

All the information collected in the first stage was transcribed and scanned to encode it in the second stage using NVivo12 software. In this second stage, collected data from the research instruments was analyzed to encode so ideas, concepts and similar themes were clustered (Rubin and Rubin, 1995) to look for patterns and to be coded for the analysis. The following scheme exemplifies the process in which the qualitative analysis of the information was carried out in this stage:

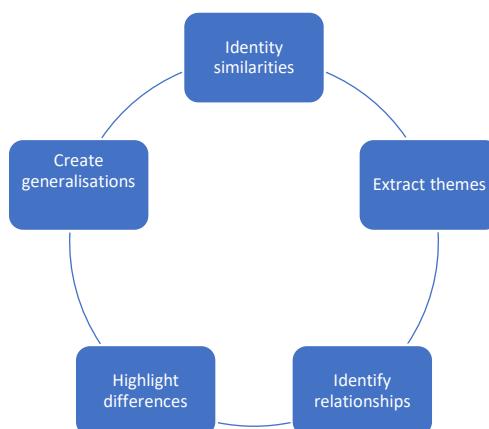


Figure 34. NVivo12 qualitative analysis

The information arose from 339 files as well as 947 references, information that was divided into units of meaning using the words and phrases for their coding. The derived codes that emerged were loaded as nodes in the NVivo12 software. The nodes were analyzed inductively and deductively from the thematic and analytical perspective to identify the patterns and relationships. From this action, 12 nodes emerged as follows: activities, autonomy, frequency, interaction, learning environment, motivation, SAC, scaffolding, teacher, topic, training and tutors.

Then the information was filtered conducting text searches through word frequency queries and visualizations to reveal the most representative ones (see appendix) . After that, the ideas, concepts and similar themes were clustered (Rubin and Rubin, 1995) and nine representative themes emerged. Therefore, these themes were encoded as central nodes. So, the main codes were defined (see appendix B) and used in this research were as follows: 1) scaffolding, 2) activities, 3) motivation, 4) interaction, 5) SAC, 6) learning environment 7) Topics 8) autonomy and 9) attitude.

From these central nodes emerged sub nodes. In the node activities emerged listening, reading, speaking, and writing; from the autonomy node, two sub-nodes were identified: extrinsic and intrinsic; from the interaction node came out: counsellor, peers, Sac helper, teacher and teams; from the learning environment node, emerged individual, teams and peers sub- nodes ; from the SAC node two sub-nodes were identified : advantages and disadvantages; from the scaffolding node emerged: boardgame, books, computer, conversations, counsellor, free topic, helper, peer, teacher, mobile, movies, multimedia, part-time teacher, question cards, real material tv. ; from the node communication strategies; clarifying, getting feedback, nonverbal, paraphrasing, repetition, stating and from the node topics were identified: grammar, homework, improve, practice, vocabulary. Once the nodes and sub nodes were totally identified, they were used as inputs for the Gephi software in the next stage.

The Hierarchy codes chart below shows the emerging main codes and sub-codes patterns:

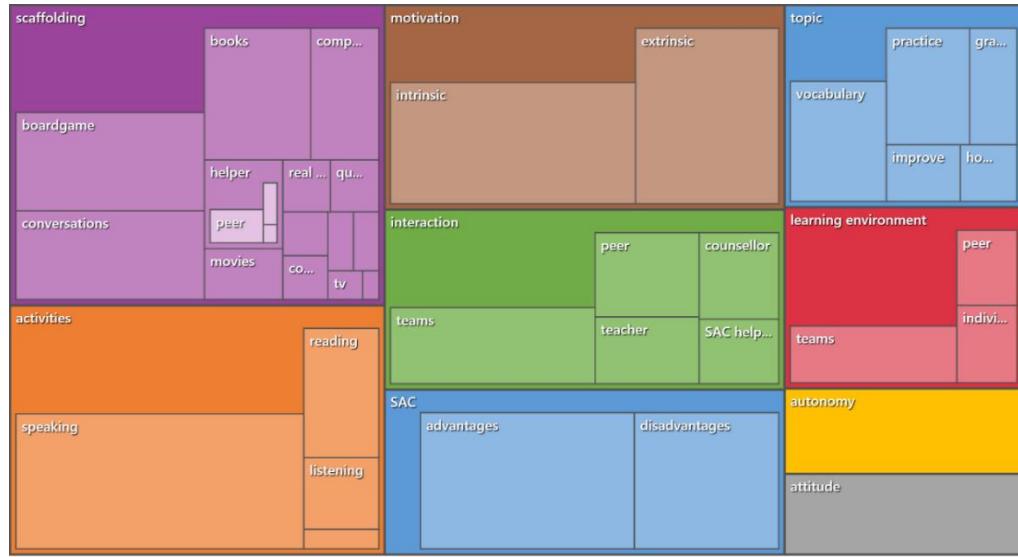


Figure 1. Hierarchy codes chart

3.6.2 Gephi open-source software

In the third stage of the study, data analysis was carried out using the Gephi software because it is a powerful social network analysis tool that allows researchers to visualize and analyze database so that patterns and trends can be found in real time. The analysis generates graphs and clusters that can help to understand research data. Therefore, it allowed to identify the interrelationships and patterns that emerged from the nodes obtained using the NVivo12 software which in this case unveiled and displayed how students develop social autonomy through the interaction of all the elements available in the SAC. So, after processing the information in the NVivo12 software to code the themes, data was used as the input for the Gephi open-source software to identify the underlying interrelationships and networks from the emerging the nodes.

To understand the visualization of a social network it is essential to know some concepts like graph density which is defined as the ratio of the number of edges (connections) in the analyzed graph to the number of edges in a complete graph with the same number of vertices. The network is characterized either by the number of paths of a given length or the number of edges which divides the graph into several parts and others.

The clustered hubs (nodes) shown in the visualization below represent all the interacting elements involved in the research and the edges displayed are the connections among

them. In the outer part of the circle can be observed that there are 8 strong interrelationships emerging from the patterns.

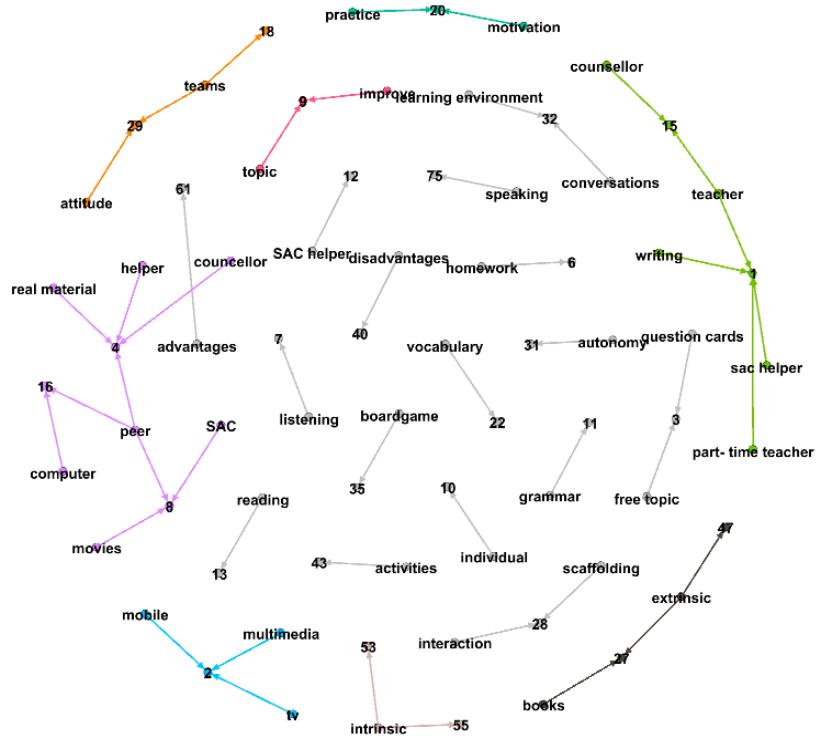


Figure 29. Networks Visual

This visual considers the force between any two nodes. In this algorithm, the nodes are represented by steel rings and the edges are springs between them so in this case it shows how students' learning communities are built through the interactions among them in which the hubs represent the actors and the lines or paths are the emerging connections between them.

In the outer part of the visualization are the colored nets which are the most robust communities; It does not mean that the grey ones are not important, but they act out as bridges that interconnect a dynamic net and keep the cohesion of the network that acts out like a system.

It is important to consider that when using the social network analysis, it is fundamental to understand the Key metrics concepts to be aware of data that emerges from the graph.

- a) Centrality which deals with the number of direct connections that individuals have with others in the group and measures at the individual node or group level.
- b) Cohesion which measures the group shortest path between each node pair at network level and reflects average distance.
- c) Density that measures the robustness of the network and the number of existing connections.
- d) Betweenness that measures the shortest paths between each node pair that a node is on at the individual level.

3.7 Summary

This Chapter has discussed the methodological issues involved in this study. The study is based on the Constructivist paradigm which sustains that individual together seek understanding of the world through the signs and symbols of the culture in which they live and work (Vygotsky, 1978) and the qualitative ethnographic approach (Wolcott ,1988) to explore how learners develop social autonomy in social contexts given the opportunity. It attempts to understand how language learners develop autonomy in social contexts as the Self- Access Centre using a variety of scaffolders. This research approach helped to explain how learners design their learning pathways given the opportunity and according to their language learning needs and preferences. The research instruments such as the qualitative questionnaire, observations, photographs, videos and interviews were key tools to gather relevant data which contributed to unveil the patterns and interrelationships creating social learning networks from learners' interactions. The pre-study was carried out from October to December 2014 and the main study was held from January to September 2015 as presented in the chapter. Twenty-eight core participants were selected and although the sample was small it is hoped that this research can contribute to the understanding of similar context where English is learned. In the next chapter, the analysis and findings of the study will be presented and discussed.

Chapter 4 Findings

4. 1 Introduction

This chapter provides evidence on how language learners in the Self Access- Centre (SAC) freely develop their autonomy through different intertwined elements in a social language learning context creating a social learning network. Qualitative data analysis using NVivo12 and Gephi free software show a learning network that students create and strongly contributes to the development of social autonomy among all the different interactions that emerge from dynamic activities that learners have in the SAC. Special attention is given to the learning network that arises because dynamic interaction among the intertwined elements as scaffolding, activities, motivation, interaction, SAC, learning environment, topics, autonomy, and attitude contribute to the development of the autonomy from a social context.

4.2 NVivo12 Analysis

For the qualitative analysis data from the research instruments designed for this study the NVivo12 software was used to code the themes and after that, the codes were used as an input to run the Gephi free software to make a social network analysis to find out the underlying dynamic net within the learners' activities and interactions that take place in the SAC.

The answers from each of the 10 questions in the student questionnaires were registered into the Excel platform and then analysed with the qualitative NVivo12 programme. In the same way, the interviews of the tutors, assistants and English staff, the description of the photos, the videos and the audio scripts of those who participated in the research were uploaded. Once the programme with the information was loaded to identify the most repeated concepts, twelve themes emerged from this action. From this first action, 12 nodes emerged as follows: activities, autonomy, frequency, interaction, learning environment, motivation, SAC, scaffolding, teacher, topic, and tutors. Then the information was filtered again using text searches through word frequency queries and visualizations to reveal the most representative ones (see appendix). After that, similar themes as teacher and tutors were clustered (Rubin and

Rubin, 1995) and nine representative nodes emerged which become the categories in this research. So, the main codes were defined (see appendix) and were displayed in a hierarchy chart as follows: 1) scaffolding, 2) activities, 3) motivation, 4) interaction, 5) SAC, 6) learning environment 7) Topics 8) autonomy and 9) attitude.

In the hierarchy chart also emerged some sub nodes. In the scaffolding node emerged: boardgame, books, computer, conversations, counsellor, free topic, helper, peer, teacher, mobile, movies, multimedia, part-time teacher, question cards, real material tv.; In the node activities emerged listening, reading, speaking, and writing; from the motivation node, two sub-nodes were identified: extrinsic and intrinsic. The interaction node has counsellor, peers, Sac helper, teacher, and teams; from the SAC node two sub-nodes were identified: advantages and disadvantages. In the learning environment node, emerged individual, teams and peer sub- nodes and from the node topics were identified: grammar, homework, improve, practice, vocabulary.

Once the nodes and sub nodes were coded, they were used as input for the Gephi software to make a social network analysis to find out the interrelationships among all the nodes. The nodes were label as hubs in the Gephi software so each of the nodes and sub nodes are represented by a hub that has connections among other hubs creating a learning network.

In the chart below are displayed the main codes and sub-codes for this study.

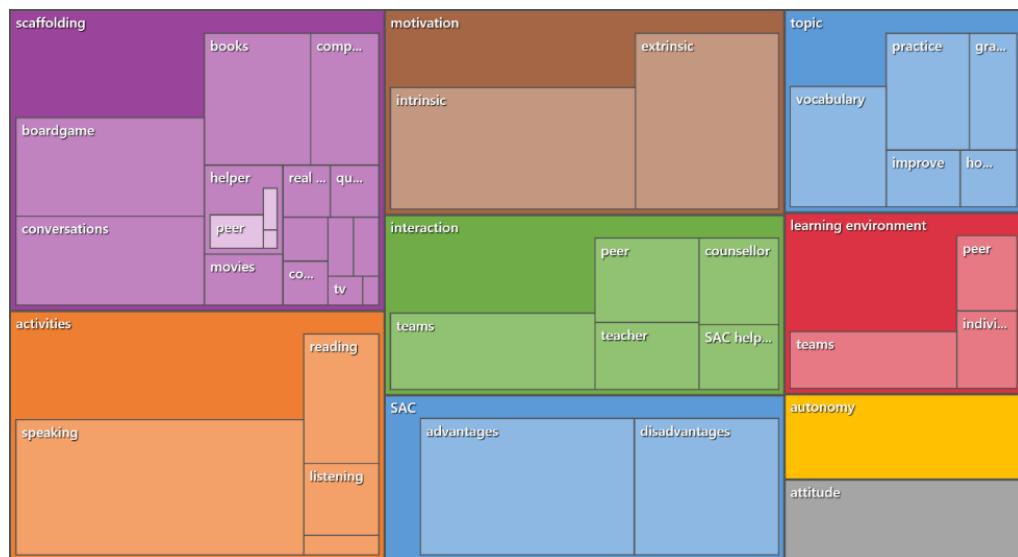


Figure 1. Hierarchy codes chart

4.2.1 Scaffolding code

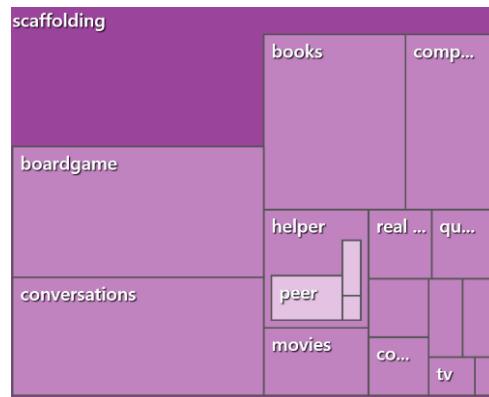


Figure 2: Scaffolding code chart

NVivo12 data results shows that the first main code is scaffolding, represented by the largest purple box in the diagram above. Ovando, Collier & Combs (2003) define scaffolding as providing contextual supports for meaning through the use of simplified language, teacher modelling, visuals and graphics, cooperative learning, and hands-on learning. The scaffolding activity in this study, allows participants to negotiate meaning using different activities like paraphrasing, check for understanding, modelling, asking, giving clues. Scaffolding helps students to share their experiences, to make suggestions or to get the meaning using scaffolders as pictures, charts, graphic organizers, or word cards in the SAC.



Figure 3. Scaffolding photo

The photo above is the evidence of scaffolding. Three students are sitting around the table, participating in a conversation session that lasts about 20 minutes. The SAC helper

with the pink shirt is leading the activity. She is eliciting information using the set of word cards (scaffolder) so students can make full sentences using the words in the cards. The helper encourages them through the activity by giving some clues (scaffolding) to help them make the sentences. Both students in black shirts seem to be interested in the activity because they are listening and looking at her. The facial expression of the student on the left side shows that she is trying to understand the word that the leader is showing them while the other is listening carefully. So, the face-to-face interaction is essential so that students can get the information from the body language and the attitude from the one who is guiding the activity. Likewise, they help each other by building up meaning along the scaffolding processes to get clues for the correct answer. Also, the design of the furniture allows the interaction to perform the activity successfully.

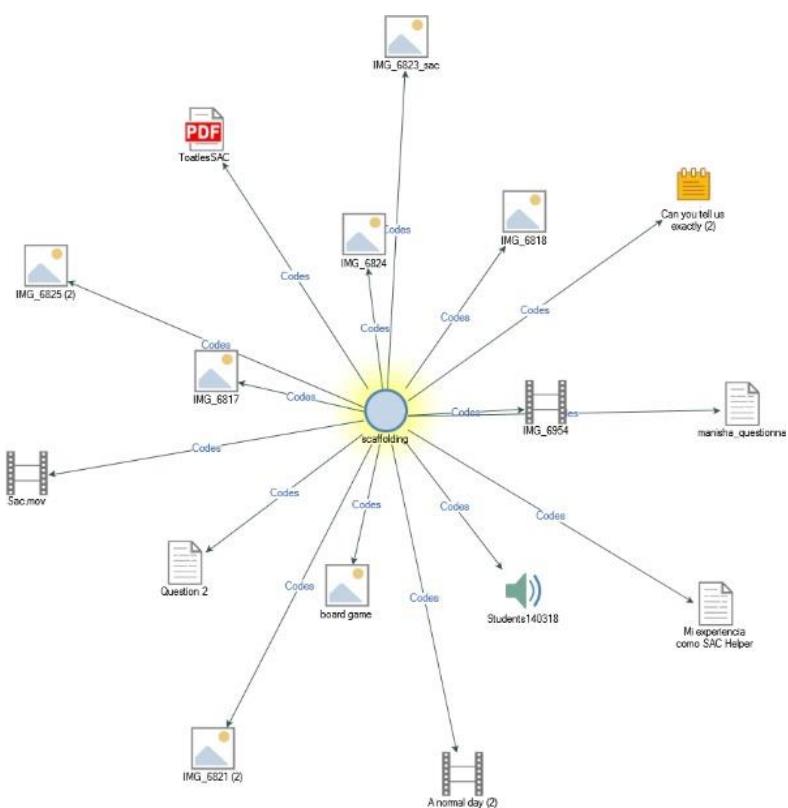


Figure 4. Scaffolding code diagram

In the purple main code are the board games and conversations subcodes showing the most frequent scaffolders learners use because of the highest preference reported in the users' questionnaires. The argument is that they can improve their communicative skills

while participating with others in the activities they freely choose to do in the SAC. They also use other scaffolders as books, movies, and others. Something relevant that emerged from the analysis is that peers, helpers, and assistants are used as scaffolders to achieve the learning task. It is observed in the videos and the photos that they can reach their language goal through the interaction between them.

The scaffolders in this study have a relevant role because they can foster students' interaction along the activity they have chosen to do in the SAC. Students have the opportunity to choose the material they want to use according to their needs and wants so that they can accomplish their language learning goals within a learning environment they freely shaped together.



Figure 5. Scaffolder photo

The Scaffolders photo above is an example of how the material can foster the interaction in the learning environment they shape together. When they get together, usually the student with the higher level of English becomes the leader of the group. In this case the student with the black shirt is the student with the higher level of English. When he was asked about his level of English, he said that he holds an intermediate level of English which helps him to guide and to motivate the other students to participate in the vocabulary activity. They decided to work with a set of pictures (scaffolder) to make sentences. In the activity each student gets a card from the pile and shows it to another

student to build up a sentence. There is also interaction between the learners that allows them to exchange their opinions and ideas to organize themselves. As a consequence of this, it is seen in this study that there is a relationship between the scaffolders and the interaction which allows them to exchange information while they organize themselves in the social context of the SAC.

Some responses given when they were asked about the scaffolders (mediators) they said that they use them in the SAC for language learning. So, most of the students are highly interested in playing with their peers using the printed material as the board games which seem to be the favourites. They also use charts, and the question cards because they keep them engaged in the activity while learning or practicing the target language.

Several learners' comments about the scaffolders they like to use were:

S1. 'The games because I think they are a way of having fun and learning at the same time',

S2. 'The really funny games and because I can play in English with my friends'.

S2. 'The games (cards) because I can read and repeat and when there are more people (teachers) they help me in pronunciation.'

Furthermore, they mentioned that they have lots of opportunities to practice English; argument that shows that the scaffolders are fostering the communicative skills requested for language learning in the SAC.

When they were asked about the possibility to have more material, they mentioned that some of it should be changed for ESP material as National Geographic magazine and Mechanics for their majors as well as more games and to add more music and clubs for reading. These arguments are based on students' comments as:

S1. 'Yes, more software of different majors',

S2. 'More funny games',

S3. 'Maybe new materials to change the monotony of the words',

S4. 'Yes, maybe with clubs for read any books or magazine',

S5. 'Yes, I would like to listen and more music ',

S6. 'Yes, I would like national geographic, mechanics".

(Appendix A)

About the link between the SAC and their regular English classes, students' responses showed that there is a positive perception about it because they reinforce what they have seen in their regular classes. Some students wrote in their questionnaires:

S1. 'Is an important complement to improve my English',

S2. 'Reinforce their grammar and pronunciation',

S3. 'Is necessary to read more magazines in English',

S4. 'Is helped everything has relation with the homework the topics'.

Only one student mentioned that the material is old, and another disagreed because he said 'I don't think so. In the SAC I do things I choose in the class not.' (Appendix A question 8)

4.2.2 Activities code

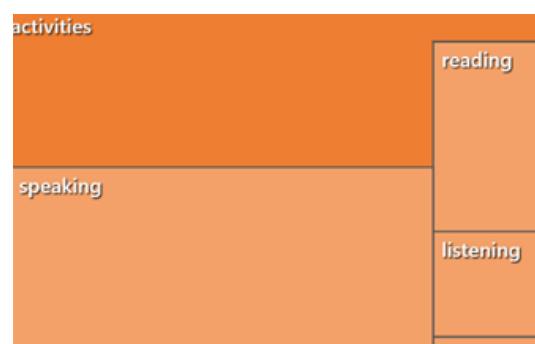


Figure 6. Activities code chart

The second main code displayed in the orange box are the activities that students choose to do at the Sac. Data from the learners' questionnaires shows that the activities they carry out in the SAC are reading, watching movies, and giving or taking conversations among their peers and listen to music. It seems that they are not aware of the fact that they are also learning because only one student reported, 'to learn.'

Most of the learners agree on saying that the most popular activity among them is speaking (sub code) because most of the time they choose the activities in which they can talk among them. Likewise, in the questionnaires students commented that this activity allows them to practice English while they play with the SAC material or participating in the conversation sessions. Another important activity for them is reading (sub code) and the last ones are listening and writing (sub codes). It is noteworthy to say that very few learners mentioned to have writing as their favourite activity.



Figure 7. Activities photo

The Activities photo is the evidence how students do different collaborative activities in the SAC. Vygotsky (1978) states that collaborative activities in teams or peers can allow students to develop the higher mental functions as a result of two parallel developmental processes which take place together in learning: the internalization which involves the social interaction among peers and the intrapersonal process that takes place within the person.

In the intrapersonal process, the students individually get across with the meaning so that they fully “appropriate meaning” while in the internalization process, students also get the meaning as well, but they also acquired the signs and the symbols of the culture through social interactions with the assistance of more advanced peers, teachers, language assistants or counsellors.

At the back of the photo is a group of five students who decided to play an adapted version of Jenga. They must ask each other the questions written on the wooden logs and to answer them correctly to continue playing. The target language is the scaffolder within their learning communities while doing their collaborative activities. They seemed to be highly motivated because they were laughing and noisy. In the middle of the SAC is another small team who decided to use a set of picture cards to describe them and in the front are students who chose to talk about a topic of their interest. Learners are encouraged and they are participating actively because of their attitude and body language and finally, on both sides of the photo are students using the computers practising their English individually with the software available for them. The diagram below depicts the research instruments that support the evidence in this study.

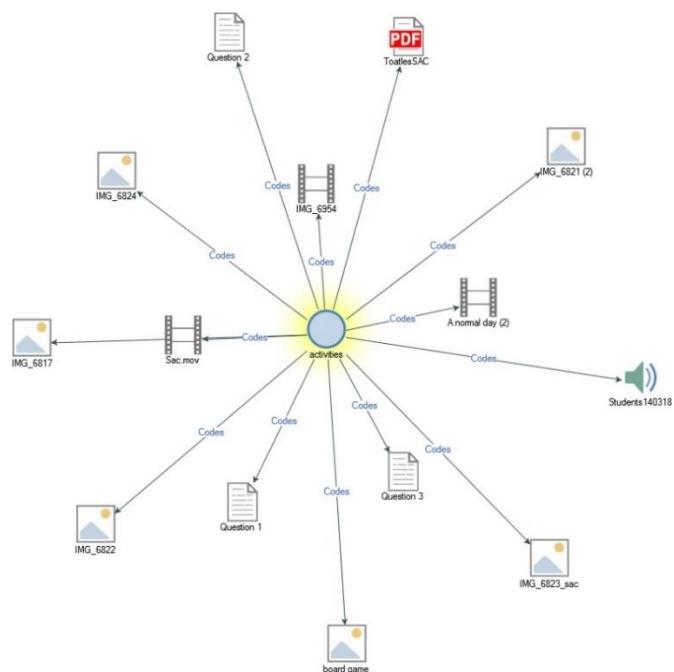


Figure 8. Activities code diagram

4.2.3 Motivation Code



Figure 9. Motivation code chart

The third brown main code is motivation, and it has two sub codes: intrinsic and extrinsic. The highest number of references belongs to the intrinsic sub code which represent the individual reasons they have to come to the Sac and the extrinsic motivation subcode is represented by all those external reasons that motivate students to come to the SAC.

They also enjoy the activity and feel motivated because the smile and laugh while they are paying attention to each other as it is shown in the photo below.



Figure 10. Motivation photo

The Motivation photo above is a real example of how students decide to get together to play or to practice the target language. They freely choose among themselves the one who has the highest level of English to be the leader and lead the activity. The leader

guides the activity through a scaffolding process to make sure they can understand how the activity is played or performed. It is observed that through giving instructions, questioning, and giving hints, they help each other to accomplish the task. Another important point to mention is that the setting of the social space allows them to maintain motivation and engagement while exchanging information in face-to-face interaction through speaking and body language.

Some students stated that they feel motivated when going to the SAC because there is the need to use the facility either to practice, to improve or to learn English. Most of the learners replied that they come mainly “to play cards and games” with their peers because that makes them feel comfortable and lowers down their anxiety if they make mistakes. A student said:

'I need to practice my speak English and I need to do conversations and is a good place when I can do my English activities.'

Most of them mentioned that they come to improve their skills while others said to learn better English. They also mentioned that they come to do their homework and to have conversations sessions (an activity which is the most popular among them). A student mentioned that he needed to do conversations and to work some hrs. in the facility but what he really likes is going to the SAC.

Some other opinions were:

S1. 'To practice the level of English and help others to improve their',

S2. 'It's relaxing and to practice English',

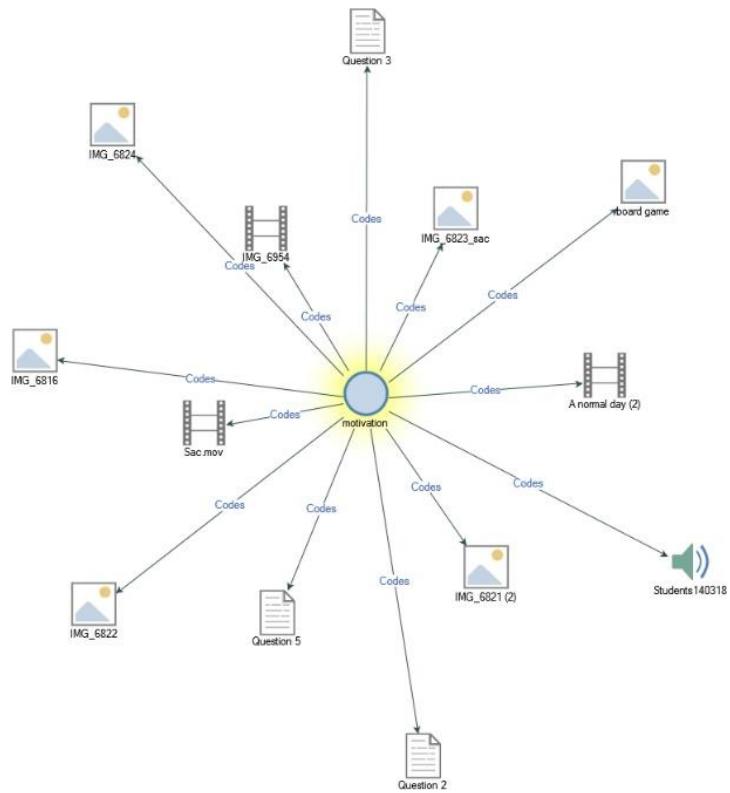
S3. 'I like conversations.',

S4. 'I think that is one of the best things to learn English',

S5. 'I need to practice my speak English, and I need to do conversations and is a good place when I can do my English activities',

S6. 'Because I learn English to go abroad'.

The diagram below shows the evidence from the research instruments (questions 2, 3 and 5, photos and videos and audio) used in this study to address the motivation issue.

**Figure 11. Motivation code diagram****4.2.4 Interaction code**

interaction		
	peer	counsellor
teams	teacher	SAC help...

Figure 12. Interaction code chart

The fourth main code is the interaction which has five sub codes as follows: teams, peers, teacher, counsellor, and SAC helpers. In the questionnaires the learners reported to have a high preference on working in teams because they said they can talk among them; they can be close to the people interacting face to face. Below is a diagram that shows different elements that back up the interaction node.

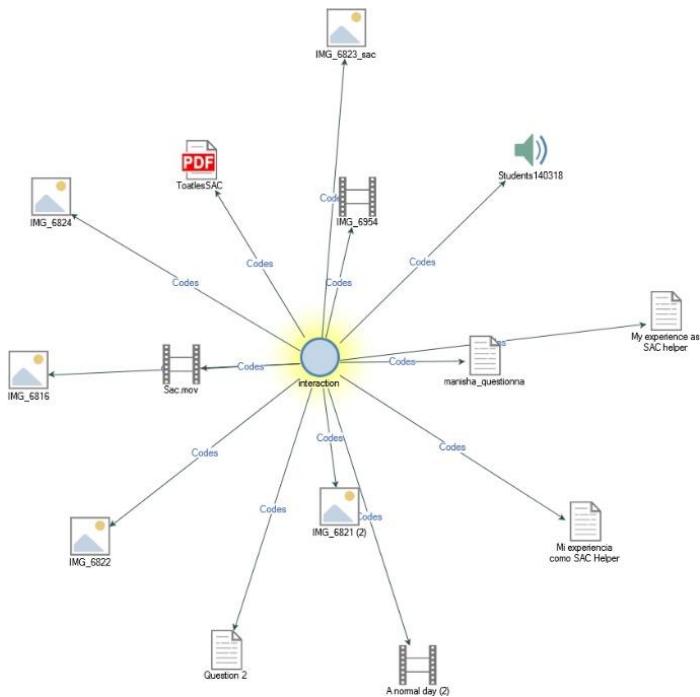


Figure 13. Interaction code diagram

The Interaction activity is an important element in the SAC because it bonds the learning communities through the activities that learners decide to do. The photo below taken in situ is the evidence of how the team of students interacting while they talk about topics related to their lives and school. The interaction among them is what keeps them engaged and interested in the activity. Wells (1999), claims that the interaction created among the students is a powerful activity to develop the Zone of Potential Development (ZPD). The body language suggests that they are relaxed and paying attention to what the student is telling them. Also, the gestures and the eye contact are the evidence of this interaction and somehow this is possible because students are working in a social motivating context which can promote the interaction and the participation in learning communities they choose to work while they develop their communicative skills in English using the target language as a scaffolder.



Figure 14. Interaction photo

The videos are also evidence of how different kinds of interactions take place in the SAC. The social learning environment is an essential element in this research because it promotes social interaction among students, counsellors, part-time teacher, and the English-speaking staff. The main objective is to foster and to develop language learning autonomy. The interaction is widely seen along the video. The counsellors who guide the activities have different styles, and some like to use scaffolders as board games or speaking cards to elicit the information to guide the conversation. At the beginning of the video (0:00-0:31) is seen that the students decided to play Scrabble so the first counsellor guides the activity by encouraging students to think about the word they can form with the token they have chosen. Besides that, the counsellor recommended them to use a Scrabble dictionary as an aid to make their words.

Others like to ask questions from free topics to promote language usage. As it is seen on the left side of the table in the video (1:21-1:41), the second counsellor is having a conversation with two students who are talking about movies, the teacher helps him by asking questions (scaffolding) to make him think about the theme while on the right side two students are also talking about another topic. Some other teachers (1:58-2:27) like to practice the vocabulary using real photos as the part-time teacher did. She gathered with the learners to practice and to reinforce their vocabulary about food using real photos. In

the video is also seen how the teacher encourages and motivates students to talk and to give more information about each picture beside the words.

Sometimes students organize themselves in a big team (2:45-3:04). The team who is usually led by a student with a higher level of English helps the students in the conversation using vocabulary cards. This activity is extremely popular among the students because they like to be together with their peers practicing and having fun as they reported in the questionnaires.

Some teachers like to work with big groups of learners as it is seen in the video (4:09-4:42). A part-time teacher leads a big group of students. He encourages students to talk by asking different questions and eliciting information until they understand and get engaged in the topic.

Another element which has great importance is that then learners' interaction is fostered through the effective distribution of furniture as it is shown along the whole the video. The layout of the furniture is essential because students can work in pairs or small groups and it provides students with the opportunity to have the face-to-face interaction either in pairs, teams, or small groups, with peers or with the speaking staff.

The interaction that emerges from the face-to-face activities helps students to develop their communicative skills, to learn and to practice their social skills and to form small learning communities as it is shown in the video. They can also learn how to negotiate the activities they want to do at the SAC according to their preferences and learning needs. Then, the activities involving mediation through language seem to have a high prevalence above the other communicative skills as learners reported in the questionnaires and seen in the video. They said they enjoy interacting with their peers because they have fun. The Vygotskyan Socio-Cultural Theory can explain how the environmental context is a factor that contributes to meaningful learning through the social interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The printed material at the SAC is another essential factor because besides helping students to develop other communicative skills such as reading and listening either in groups or individually, they are means of communication that foster social interaction to

negotiate meaning along with the activities. Most of the activities held in the SAC as it was mentioned before are focused mainly on developing students' language learning autonomy throughout the intra and internalization processes (activities seen in the students' interaction in the video). Both activities allow learners to get the meaning of the signs and the symbols of the culture as a result of the social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978) that takes place at the SAC.

In this study as a result of the interaction among the participants, the learning environment and the scaffolders different kinds of interactions emerged from the Gephi software analysis creating a social learning network.

4.2.4.1 Types of interactions

Data findings in the photos, videos, interviews and questionnaires are the evidence of how students work together to pursue their personal goals in terms of learning needs, preferences and motivation. Learners that get together are challenged to collaborate, to understand each other and to co-construct knowledge and to appropriate the meaning through social interaction. Students from different levels of English in heterogeneous teams as seen in the photographs can help each other to internalize the social and cultural conventions and norms of the target language.

Also, the photographs show how learners interact among them in different activities either in the face-to-face conversations, playing board games or using question cards. The two recorded videos show how the learners interact while they participate in different activities. The interaction, as it was mentioned above, can take place either among learners, SAC helpers, students, counsellors or part-time teachers. The main objective is to use the target language to communicate.

Since the language learners' needs, motivations and learning preferences and the social learning environment different kinds of interactions take place among learners within the SAC. Some examples are the following:

4.2.4.1.1 Learners/learners

Findings in the study reveal that most of the language learners who attend to the SAC have a high tendency to work with other learners. They said that they feel confident, motivated and relaxed while they exchange knowledge and skills without being judged regardless of the level of English they have. This learners' attitude allows them to interact either in small or big groups actively. Ushioda (2011:224) says that motivation has to deal with internalizing curriculum objectives and values so students can develop motivation from culturally valued goals and activities, including the learning and use of foreign language. She states that motivation has a strong relationship with autonomy since learners can experience their sense of personal agency and self-determination.

The evidence from the photos (6816 and 6822), show that learners gather to develop their communicative skills in teams through social interaction which contributes to the development of their learning autonomy. Meaning that students can internalize knowledge through peer interaction by negotiating meaning and skills that later will be used within other learning situations. Ohta, A.S. (2001) in her empirically longitudinal study of a university Japanese L2 class provides strong evidence that learners use private speech in the activities to help them internalize the target language, also in the study she states that in the collaborative activities, students are able to provide mediation in the ZDP. Some learners reported that they like to interact in big groups, but others prefer to work in small groups. It is relevant to say that regarding their level of English students always look for a group or someone to help them in the SAC. Something that I observed is that every time the learners decide to participate together in an activity, one of them takes the role of the leader to guide the activity (usually the one with the higher level of English) and explains the rules or how the game is played while the others listen carefully to understand the instructions.

The audio script below is the evidence of how the social learning environment at the SAC allows learners' interaction by participating actively while they feel free to take the risk to express their ideas without being judged. The friendly and encouraging attitude of the language helper invites them to participate while they perform the task. The interaction allows learners to use some communicative strategies described by Foster and Ohta

(2005) as the three C's: Comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and clarification checks.

Helper: ok (gets attention from the learners) ***Confirmation checks***

Students: oh no (**the helper shows a picture**)

Helper: ok, you really know this game but this time we are going to play it with a twist. (**adapting**). You know like something different. This card (**shows the card**) you have to guess the word for example: this is a barn (**he encourages and motivates learners while he adapts the game to their level of English**)

but this time you must make a sentence with the word to get a point (**encourages and motivates**)

Students: Ok (learners agreed) ***Confirmation checks***

Helper: Understood, everyone? (He confirms the instructions) ***Comprehension checks***

Students: yes, yes (they accept) ***Confirmation checks***

Everybody says: ahh (but one identifies the object in the picture) ***Clarification checks***.

Helper: she is going to win (**he motivates and recognizes her**)

(Everybody laughs) ***Confirmation checks***

Helper: ok then, first word, I am going to try to make them easy let's see (adapts to the situation) ***Confirmation checks***

Student: ice crew? (She guesses) ***Clarification checks***.

Student: ahmm, I like the chocolate ice cream (he activates his prior knowledge) ***Comprehension checks***

Helper: I like the chocolate ice cream (repeats and affirms the answer)

Confirmation checks

Helper: perfect, one-point ok, next ahhhhh, oh this one, what is this?

4.2.4.1.2 Learner/language assistant

The language learners who want a more personalized attention can ask the language assistants to help them in the SAC. They are an important part of the English staff. Some language assistants are students from other universities who have exchanging programs as the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom or the Fullbright scholarship from the United States. Learners can get help by asking them either to have a conversation session, to explain an English topic seen in their regular classes, to help with their homework or just to help them decide what to do in the SAC. The interviews allowed to know about the opinions that the language assistants (LA) have towards their role within the SAC while working with the students.

Some of their opinions are presented below:

LA.1 “the students have the opportunity to engage in conversations with a native speaker and you are able to learn more English than you know, new students can experience how fun the SAC is when they come here and see how many activities they can do here, meeting new people, making friends and who knows, making or starting a relationship with you someone you have a crush on ”.

LA.2 “Se pueden hacer conversaciones con los alumnos, darles tutorías privadas, jugar, ver películas, hacer nuevas amistades, entre otras cosas. También ayuda al alumno a crear dinámicas para poder desarrollar el idioma inglés, buscar temas de conversación para los que necesitan platicar y practicar”.

“You can make conversations with students, give them private tutorials, play games, watch movies, make new friends, among other things. It also helps the student to create dynamics to be able to develop the English language, look for conversation topics for those who need to talk and practice.”

4.2.4.1.3 Learner/part-time teacher/counsellors

Another kind of interaction that takes place in the SAC is between the part-time teachers, the counsellors, and the learners. The part-time teachers help in the SAC besides their regular English classes, so they are only available at certain times. The counsellors are full time teachers that cover the working hours of the SAC. Learners can ask them to have a personal conversation session, to help them if they have any questions about their homework, to practice vocabulary or pronunciation or to explain topics related to their regular English classes. Findings from the participants' questionnaire are the following:

S 1. "I speak with friends and teachers because I enjoy this type of activities."

S5. "I talk with the people that help me to try to try to express myself."

S11. "The games (cards) because I can read and repeat and when there are more people (teachers) they help me in pronunciation."

R.1 "me ayuda a desenvolverme a perder el miedo a hablar en público con personas que no conoces; muchos de los alumnos vienen con nuevas experiencias, conocimiento que no conocía y me retroalimentaba igual".

"It helps me to lose my fear of public speaking with people you don't know; many of the students come with new experiences, knowledge that I didn't know, and I get feedback the same way".

R. 2 "hacer cercanía con gente"

It helps me bond with people

R. 1 "the teachers in the SAC are very friendly, awesome, and you can share anything with them, they will always be here".

The videos for the study are evidence in real time how the learners, part-time teachers, counsellors, helpers and language assistants participate actively through different kinds of social interactions while they engage in the activities using the target language. According to their learning needs, preferences and motivation they can participate in small or big

groups, or they can ask for a more personalized attention with a counsellor or a language assistant. It is relevant to mention that they freely choose the material they want to use either board games, picture cards or question cards which main role is to act as scaffolders to foster learners' interaction and to use the target language.

4.2.4.1.4 Learners/technology

There is a group of learners that prefer to work on the computers independently using the software available for them. They use the technology to search for information that can help them do the homework for the English class or they just use the software to review what they have seen in the L2 class. Some others use their mobiles to play in teams, watch movies or sing a song.

4.2.4.1.5 Learners/printed material

The objective of the printed material is to trigger the social interaction between the language learners while they use it as a mean of communication to practice English. The printed material comprises different kinds of magazines, books, and brochures as seen in the photographs; also, in the bookcases they have original recipes for the culinary arts students to use them independently to practice reading comprehension or as a mean of interaction with their peers. Research findings show that language learners use different kinds of scaffolders (Walqui, 2006) such as printed resources, gameboards, charts, topic question cards, multimedia to improve, to learn or practice the target language either in a formal or informal setting.

4.2.5 Self-Access Centre (SAC) code



Figure 15. SAC code chart

The fifth main code belongs to the Self Access Centre (SAC) which has two subcodes: the advantages and disadvantages. In the advantages sub codes, the learners mentioned to have positive opinions and perceptions that they have got of the facility. When the learners were asked about the way that SAC has helped them to improve their English communicative skills, they all accepted to have a kind of improvement in different ways. Some by practicing, others through listening and another by helping others as some students mentioned:

S1. 'Yes, speaking, listening, conversations, helping others',

S2. 'Yes, because of the Sac as many different activities, movies, books, teachers',

S3. 'Yes, with the conversations. I can improve my speaking skills; with games I can improve and learn new vocabulary',

**S4. 'Yes, speaking with friends, doing exercises in our book, practicing English',
'Yes, take conversation, watch a movie'.**

Some opinions were:

S1. "The SAC is dynamic",

S2. "The SAC is an awesome tool for you to learn English and develop more skills when it comes to listening, writing, speaking, reading"

These results were highly motivating because the students' perception is positive and makes them feel the need to succeed in their process of language learning".

Even though, the great majority of the participants have a positive perception of the SAC, some of them do not have it as some students said,

S1. "También es monótono, mismo tipo de conversaciones, personas, juegos, no hay algo nuevo que incremente el número de alumnos visitantes."

"It is also monotonous, same kind of conversations, people, games, there is nothing new to increase the number of visiting students".

The photos and videos taken in situ are real time evidence of the variety of activities learners enjoy doing in the Self-Access Centre they show how students decide to organize themselves to design their learning pathways. (See photos appendix)

In the questionnaires students accepted that the SAC has helped them to change their language learning approach to English in a great variety of ways and also because of the free time they have available for it. Rowland (1999) says that the Self-Access Centre has to be seen as a system in which three axes converge: the academic, the infrastructure and the administrative organization to mutually promote their existence.

The highest number of students belongs to the students who answered: '**through learning and the vocabulary**' while others said that by doing homework and taking part of the conversations. Only one referred, '**explaining to others**', expression which seems to be the least favourite answer. It also shows that they like going to the facility because in their opinion it is interesting, dynamic, nice and they can play there which it means that they participate in the activities they enjoy, the place and being with their peers while practicing the target language. Only one student wrote that he comes for help (Appendix A question 7).

When the staff was asked about the most significant contributions given in the SAC, they said that participating in the conversations with students because they have given them the opportunity to help them to share and to interact with other students while working in teams, also to expose students to the language using different materials and learning activities. After this comment, they also reported that the counselling sessions done in

the SAC are working because the students said to be better classmates. However, they mentioned that there are students that have a lack of motivation and they do not understand what the facility is for, especially for new students.

In general, the staff evaluated the SAC as a learning space that encourages students to learn and to practice English developing their strengths and communicative skills. However, they made some recommendations to improve the services in the SAC. They also mentioned that the running time timetables need to be more flexible because sometimes there are no counsellors available for students. Additionally, they said that it would be good for students to have a T.V service in English and to have more updated materials. Lastly, the staff is aware of the importance of providing the students a language learning environment as the SAC in which they can find different resources to practice and to reinforce their English-speaking skills outside the class in a relaxing and friendly atmosphere.

In the next diagram are the research instruments which are the references where the SAC information was mentioned by the participants in this study.

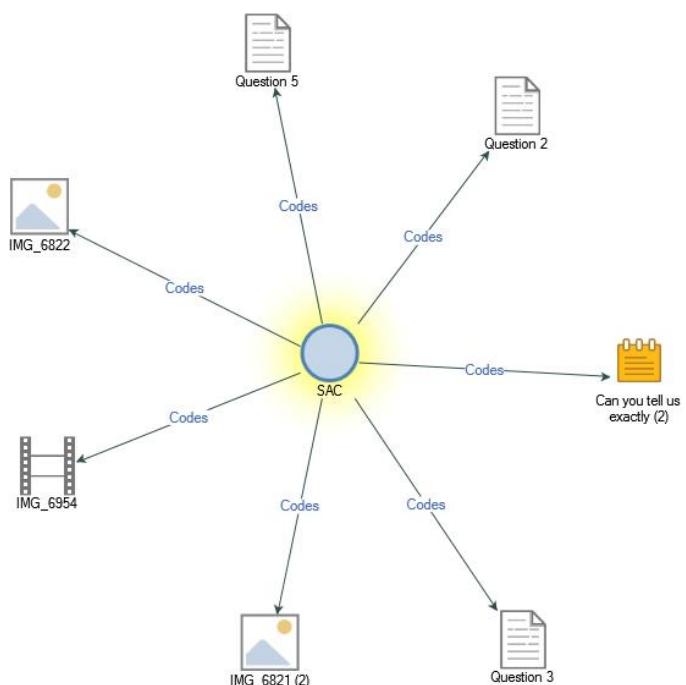


Figure 16. SAC code diagram

4.2.6 Topic code

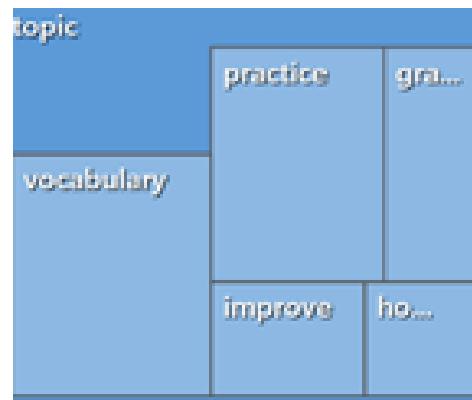


Figure 17. Topic code chart

In the Hierarchy codes chart (fig. 1) the Topics main code is represented in the small blue box where five sub codes emerged from data. The relevant topic among students is vocabulary which has the highest number of learners' references followed by grammar.

The evidence in their questionnaires shows that most of the learners like to practice vocabulary and grammar using different material as board games and picture cards because these kinds of challenging materials elicit their participation and keep them engaged due to the level of difficulty.



Figure 18. Topic photo

A real-life example of this activity is in the Topics photo above showing a group of students deciding to play a board game named “Which one would the world be better without...Why?”. The objective is to practice unreal conditionals with “would”. The leader of the game, usually the student with a higher level of English explains the rules of the game and organizes the activity. They also practice how to express their opinion using “I think” or “in my opinion”. To begin the game, they determine who starts the activity, and then each player rolls the dice taking turns. When a player lands on a space, they must choose one of the three items that they think the world would be better without it and give the arguments for their choice. The game ends when one player reaches the final space. This activity is a real example of how students develop their target language through the target language using the topic they freely chose to practice by doing.

When some students were asked about the reasons, they had to choose the topic to practice they answered:

S1. “Makes me learn new vocabulary so I can explain better to my classmates

whenever I give a conversation”

S2. “Because there I only speak in English, and it has done that I think in my vocabulary, my grammar, pronunciation, etc.”

After running the NVivo12 program with the information collected from the students in the research instruments, is evident that there is a strong learners' tendency to work in the SAC in topics such as vocabulary and grammar SAC as it can be seen in the videos, photos, and recordings. The following diagram displays the documents that were used for the Topic code.

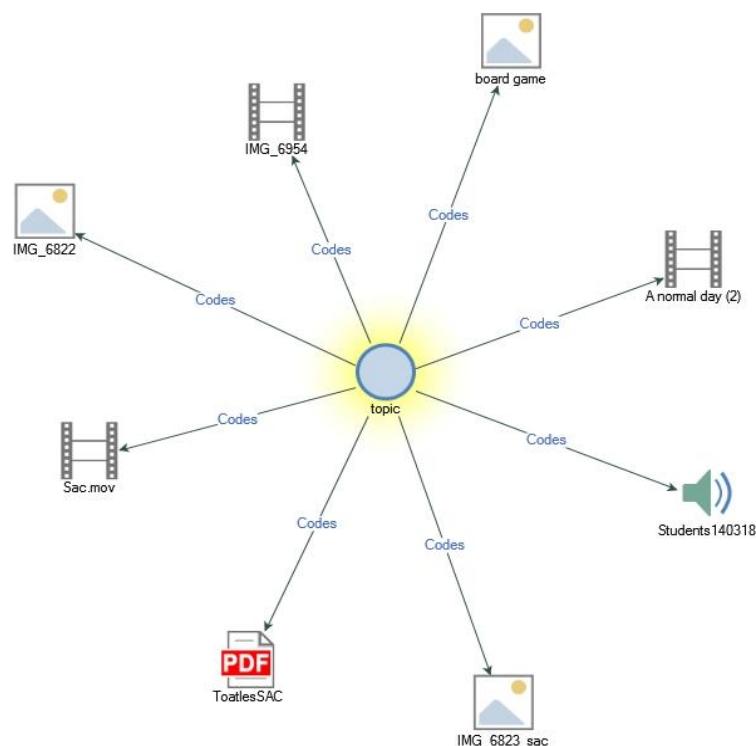


Figure 19. Topic code diagram

4.2.7 Agency code



Figure 20. Agency photo

Regarding agency as the capacity to act with a purpose (Vitanova, 2015), the interaction permits students to develop positive or negative beliefs and attitudes which can lead them to a personal and social transformation. The photo shows how the students exercise their agency by helping each other building communicative bridges to achieve the learning goal. They chose to work in a team to practice their speaking skills, so they had to decide what to do either to use a set of real food photos or a media game in their mobiles called charades to practice their English. After all of them agreed, they decided to use their mobiles, to answer the question given. What is clear in this research is that elements such as the learners' activity, the positive learning context, the scaffolder (the mobile), and the social interaction are intertwined, acting as a learning network to create a language learning community that contributes to the development of identity and the self towards achieving their learning autonomy from a social learning context.

4.2.8 Autonomy code



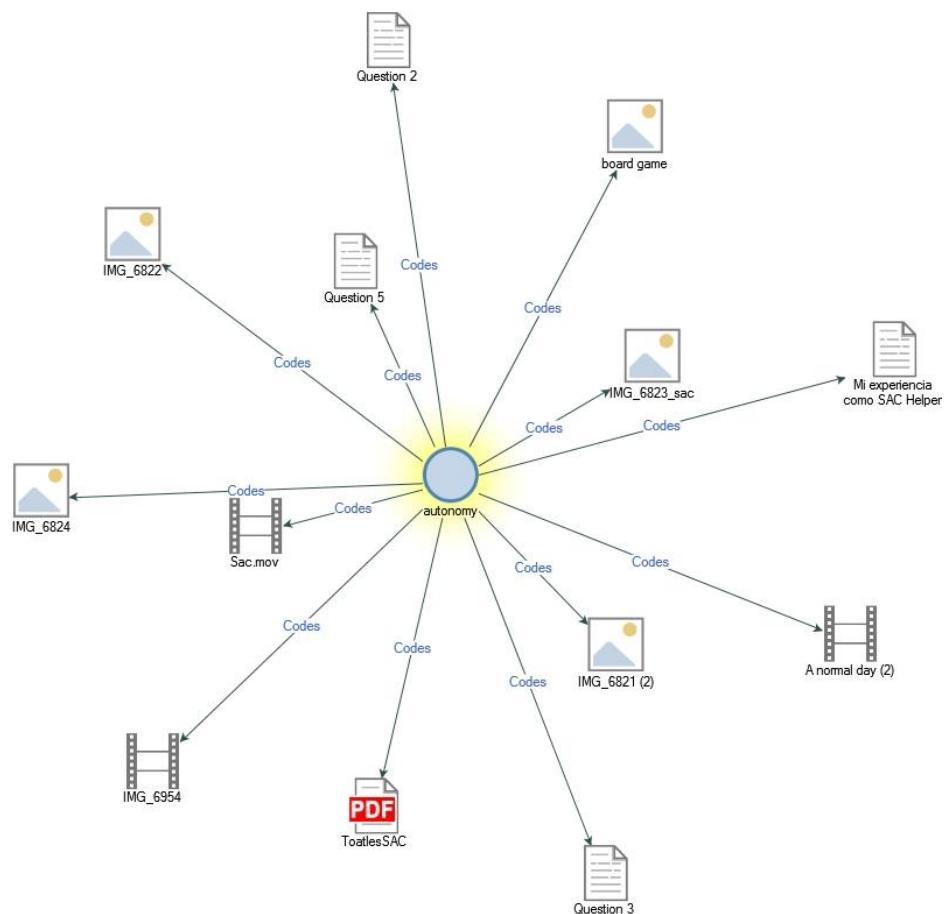
Figure 21. Autonomy code chart

The Autonomy photo above demonstrates how the students make their own choices either to work in small teams, big teams or individually. They are given the opportunity to organize themselves to set up the social learning environment needed to achieve their language learning goals. As it is seen in the photo the students decide how, where, what and with whom they want to work or to play to develop their ESL communicative skills according to their needs and wants. The evidence also shows that through peer interaction and integrating learning communities either in small teams or groups the furniture is displayed according to their needs. Likewise, the face-to-face interaction allows them to exchange information, opinions, and beliefs. Together they negotiate the activities to be done using the target language or their first language while others prefer to work independently using the Tics. Then learning environment created by the learners provides the opportunity to develop learning networks that contribute to the development of their language autonomy from a social context.



Figure 22. Autonomy photo

In terms of autonomy, students are able to design their own learning pathways. This can be observed on the left side are the computers stations in which students can work independently doing their homework or to do researching for information and on the right side are the stations with four computers in which they can work either independently or with other students. At the back of the photo is big bookcase which has different kinds of books or magazines(scaffolders) that students can read on the sofas available for them. In the centre of the SAC are round tables that learners can use in different activities such as conversation sessions, doing their homework in teams or just sitting around to talk among their peers or with the English-speaking staff.

**Figure 23. Autonomy diagram**

4.2.9 Learning environment code

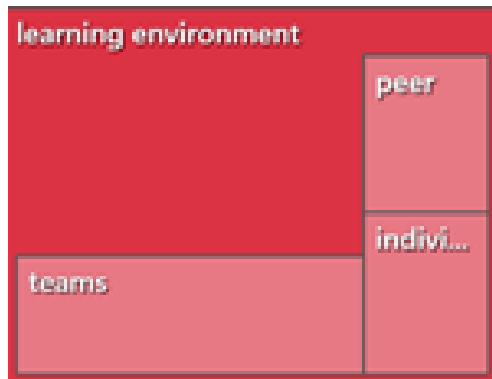


Figure 24. Learning environment code chart

The learning environment main code in red has three sub codes which show the learners' working preferences at the SAC are: teams, peer and individually. The setting is a relevant element in this research because it is set according to their language learning needs. The students are given the opportunity to organize themselves in the facility because of the constructivist learning model that shapes university life. Hammond (2001) says that students are actively engaged when they are involved in social constructivists models. Data from the videos and questionnaires show how the learning environment encourages students to participate in different activities as they wish. The highest number of students' references corresponds to team's environment. One student said:

"The really funny games and because I can play in English with my friends."

In the chart is viewed that there is a slightly difference between working with peer and working individually because sometimes they like to do it independently and others with their pairs as a student reported:

"The activities I use more is games, conversations and computers."



Figure 25. The learning environment photo

In the learning environment photo above is observed that some learners like to work in pairs or in small teams using the material available for them. Others prefer to work independently using the software available for them in the computers. In the photo is also shown a student searching for information to do her homework and the other student next to her is using the software to review what they have seen in the class. At the back to the right another group is talking about a free topic, and two students by the windows on the sofa are having a conversation in a friendly environment far away from the noisy and dynamic activities within the SAC. In this study the friendly social learning environment that students build up to do their activities is what keeps them engaged and

motivated to come over and over as learners and staff reported in their questionnaires and it is seen in the videos.

4.2.10 Attitude code



Figure 26. Attitude code chart

The grey block belongs to the attitude category. In the two videos taken in the SAC, the students show that the activities they choose create a positive learning atmosphere because they look engaged and interested. They smile a lot, and they like to participate. Also, when they need to do the homework in pairs, they brainstorm the answers and look for the words needed to make the conversation requested for the teacher. When the students decide to participate in teams they help each other, in this case; the video shows that they are writing a poem using direct and indirect speech. In another part of the video is shown that the learners' attitude is positive because they are enjoying the activity while playing a board game.

Likewise, it is pertinent to mention that the Sac Helpers attitude contributes to the friendly learning environment, so learners are motivated and encouraged to attend to the facility. One of the language helpers refers that the SAC is an invaluable space because students can find a wide range of resources that help them with their language learning. Another SAC helper thinks that the facility is a good place to develop his English, so he decided to give conversations, to watch movies, to play, tutoring students and why not to learn to become a teacher. Below is an excerpt of a Sac Helper's experience explaining how he feels working at the SAC:

... “you are able to learn more English than you know. New students can experience how fun the SAC is when they come here and see how many activities they can do here,

meeting new people, making friends and who knows, making or starting a relationship with you someone you have a crush on." The teachers in the SAC are very friendly, awesome, and you can share anything with them, they will always be here".

The learners as well, mentioned they like interacting with their peers because of the positive attitude as a result of the interactions that the others have in the activities they choose to do in the SAC. This attitude helps them to participate actively without making them feel threatened or ridiculed by the lack of knowledge but allows them to interact with the best of their ability regarding the level of English.

The part-time teachers and the counsellors who help at the SAC have an essential role because of their active participation. Their attitude towards the interaction between the learners makes the learning environment a pleasant one. In the interviews, their comments are highly motivating. One teacher says that she likes playing games that help students to improve their vocabulary and to practice grammar. She also mentions that learners get hooked, and their development is fantastic, and also, they lose the fear of speaking. Another teacher said that she likes making conversations and giving opportunities to practice the target language. She also said that SAC is a pleasant learning environment because you can watch students growing as ESL students.

In data analysis, the chart allowed me to get a general overview of the elements that contribute to the development of the learner autonomy within the SAC.

According to data these elements are linked and interrelated so that learners can help each other through different kinds of interactions. Therefore, there must be a learning structure in which several elements provide support related to the development of learner autonomy. The elements that emerged in this study are shown in the diagram below. The learning environment in red is where different interactions take place, scaffolding strategies in blue where learners get the meaning through interrelationships creating learning networks, scaffolders in purple which foster interaction, as well as motivation in brown that encourages participation and learners' activity in orange. It is crucial to clarify that no one is more important than the others, but all together create a

dynamic system that is interrelated through learning networks that contribute to the social development of autonomy.

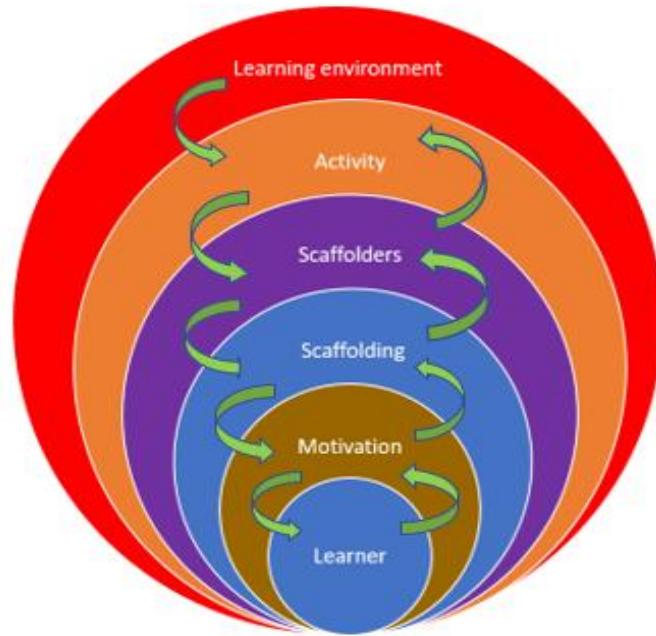


Figure 27. Elements visual

4.3 Gephi Software analysis

In the third stage of the analysis after using the NVivo12 software to code data, the visualization Gephi software was used to identify the underlying interrelationships and patterns between the research nodes (NVivo12 codes). So, as a result of the interaction among them, a strong learning network among the hubs (nodes and sub-nodes) emerged in this particular system. Therefore, the interaction between all the hubs is what keeps the cohesion of the net. This emerging learning network explains how it contributes to the developing of language learners' autonomy in a social context given the opportunity to exercise their agency concerning to their language learning objectives. In the visualization below all the hubs (dots) represent the codes and sub codes in the research and the edges are the connections among them. The edges are the numbers of relationships around the hub.

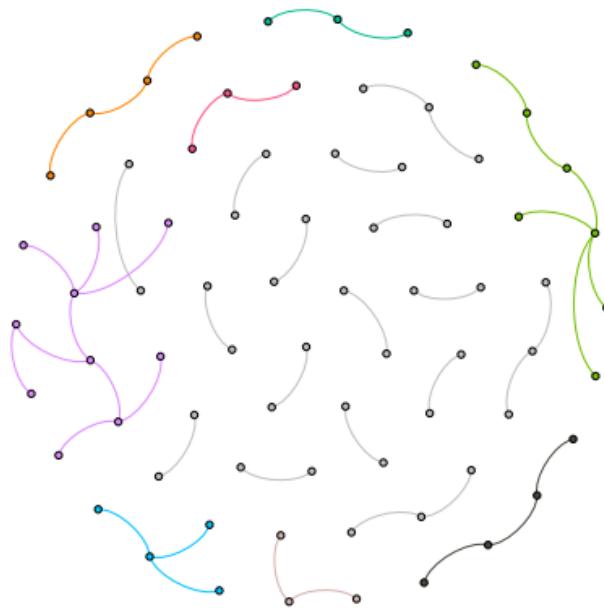


Figure 28. Learning network visual

It is important to consider that when using the social network analysis, it is fundamental to understand the Key metrics concepts to be aware of data that emerges from the graph. a) Centrality which deals with the number of direct connections that individuals have with others in the group and measures at the individual node or group level. b) Cohesion which measures the group shortest path between each node pair at network level and reflects average distance. c) Density that measures the robustness of the network and the number of existing connections and d) Betweenness that measures the shortest paths between each node pair that a node is on at the individual level.

To understand the visualization of a social network it is also essential to know some concepts like graph density which is defined as the ratio of the number of edges (connections) in the analysed graph to the number of edges in a complete graph with the same number of vertices. The network is characterized either by the number of paths of a given length or the number of edges which divides the graph into several parts and others.

After running the Gephi software the visualization below shows that there are 8 strong clusters located in the outer part of the circle. They are the emerging learning networks created by the interrelationships among the nodes (hubs).

This visual considers the force between any two nodes. In this algorithm, the nodes are represented by steel rings and the edges are springs between them so in this case it shows how students' learning communities are built through the interactions among them in which the hubs represent the actors and the lines or paths are the emerging connections between them.

In the outer part of the visualization are the most robust communities are coloured; It does not mean that the grey ones are not important, but they act out as bridges that interconnect a dynamic and keep the cohesion of the network that acts out like a system.

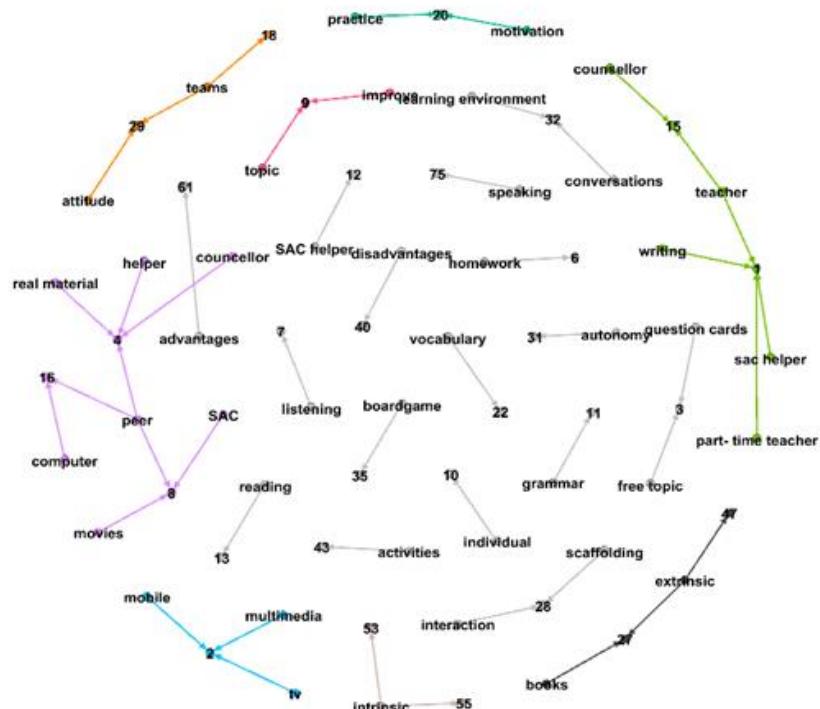


Figure 29. Clusters visual

In the table below are listed the clusters of nodes that emerged (communities) from data. They are classified in order of authority, that means that some communities are stronger than others because of the degree of connectivity to other nodes in the net so the more edges coming in or out the hubs the more important they are.

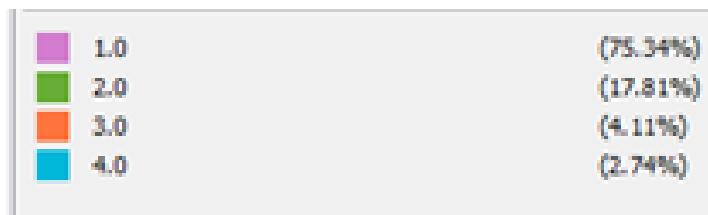
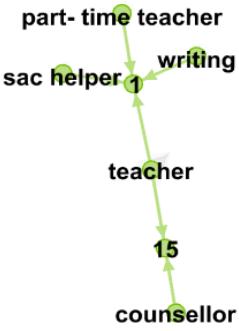
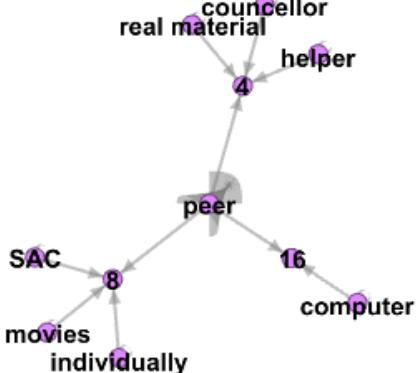
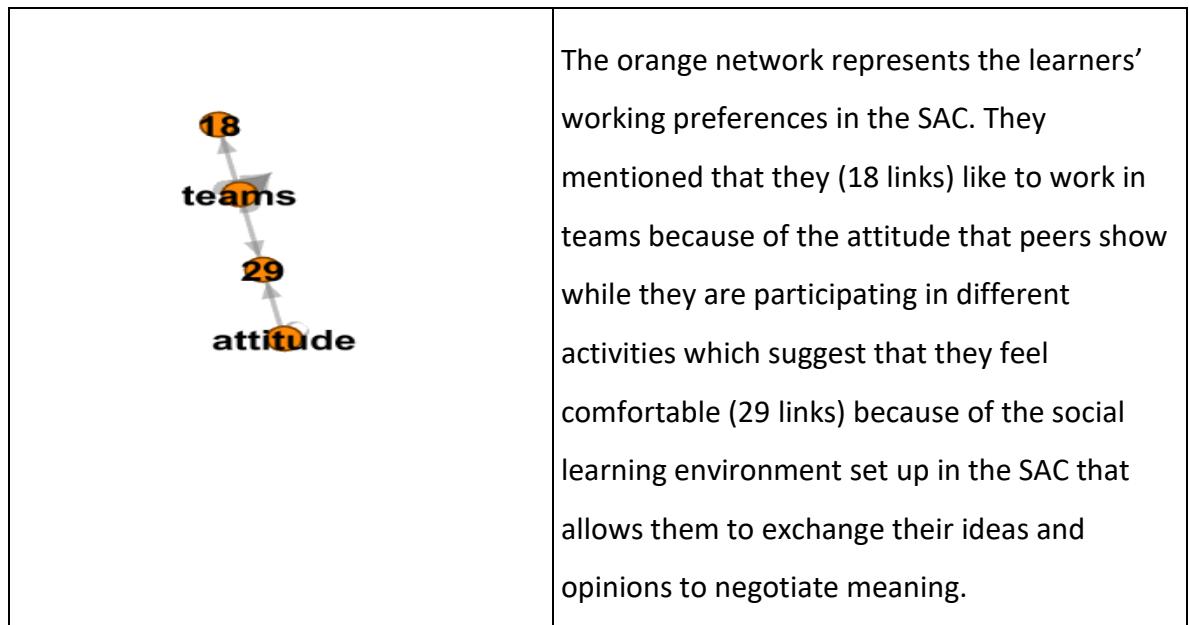


Figure 30. Centrality Chart

According to Centrality which deals with the number of direct connections that individuals have with others , the purple network has the highest degree of connectivity and it has direct connections to peer, computer, movies, sac, helper, counsellor and real material nodes ; The green network is the second of importance; it connects the staff, part-time teacher, sac helper, teacher and counsellor nodes ; The orange network is in the third place; it joins the teams and the attitude nodes ; The blue network connects different scaffolders: mobile, multimedia and tv. Even though the grey paths cannot be seen, they act out as bridges to connect other nodes then if a grey node is released from the net, it can affect the connectivity of the whole network. The numbers in the graph belong to the number of references linked to each of the nodes.

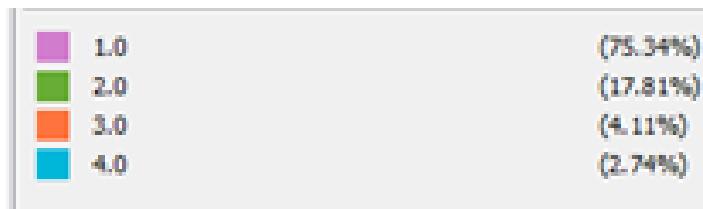
In the following table are explained the strongest hubs that emerged from the visualization network:

	<p>This green network it shows that most of the language learners like to interact among the teachers and the counsellors in the speaking sessions rather than the part-time teachers or sac helpers. It also shows that very few learners use writing as an activity to practice in the SAC.</p>
	<p>This purple cluster shows how the actors (nodes) establish relationships among them to work in the SAC. In the centre of the cluster is the peer node who represents the strongest node in the net (density) and belongs to the language learners who attend to the facility, and it has three directed edges. One path connects to the top hub which links the helper, the counsellor and the real material nodes which means that peers interact among them using the real material available for them. Another direct path connects to the left bottom in which individual learners watch movies to learn or to practice the target language in the SAC. Finally, other peers use computers to practice within the facility</p>

**Figure 31. Networks Table**

Then, special attention has to be given to the social network that emerges among the students' interactions in the SAC since data corroborates that all the elements are interacting together (human and material resources) to contribute actively to the development of the language learning autonomy in a social learning context.

In the table below are listed the clusters of nodes that emerged (communities) from data. They are classified in order of authority; it means that some communities are stronger than others because of the degree of connectivity among other nodes in the net so the more edges coming in or out the hubs the more important they are.

**Figure 33. Centrality Chart**

According to Centrality which deals with the number of direct connections that individuals have with others , the purple network has the highest degree of connectivity because it has direct connections to peer, computer, movies, sac, helper, counsellor and real material nodes ; As in the green network which is the second of importance connects the staff, part-time teacher, sac helper, teacher and counsellor nodes ; The orange network is in the third place; it joins the teams and the attitude nodes ; The blue network connects different scaffolders: mobile, multimedia and tv. Even though the grey paths cannot be seen, they act out as bridges to connect other nodes then if a grey node is released from the net, it can affect the connectivity of the whole network. The numbers in the graph belong to the number of references linked to each of the nodes.

4.3 Summary and conclusions

This chapter has examined the results from data using the NVivo12 to code the themes. The codes were used as an input to make a social network analysis using Gehpi free software to find out the underlying dynamic network within the learners' activities and interactions in the SAC. Both software provided evidence on how language learners in the Self Access- Centre (SAC) freely develop autonomy through different intertwined elements as scaffolding, activities, motivation, interaction, SAC, learning environment, topics, autonomy, and attitude creating a learning social network which strongly contributes to the development of social autonomy. Also is evident that students create a variety of learning environments among their peers, the SAC staff , the scaffolders, the topics and the activities they freely choose to do in the SAC. Finally the language learners exercise their agency and self throughout the collaborative activities that leads them toward their language learning autonomy from a social learning context.

Chapter 5 Research Questions

5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins answering the questions that guided this qualitative research. The first part includes the answers to the main research questions focused on how students learn in the Self-Access Centre (SAC) as the in the elements that enable student to learn within the facility to achieve their autonomy. The other three sub-questions have to deal with the interactions that students create to learn, the interrelationships that emerge from these interactions and finally in the elements that contribute to the development of learners' autonomy in the SAC and the second part addresses the contributions of the study.

5.2 Research Questions

This qualitative research arises from the interest in knowing how students develop autonomy in learning from a social context. Throughout the research, several elements emerged that together operate as a learning network that students build through interaction and mediated by different human, technological or printed tools in different activities that they carry out either individually or in groups

For this reason, the following questions were formulated to guide this investigation

- 1. How do students learn in the Self Access Centre?**
- 2. What enables students to learn in the SAC?**

And the sub questions:

- 1a. What kind of interrelations emerge from learners' interaction in the SAC?**
- 1b. What elements in the SAC contribute to the development of social autonomy?**
- 1c. What kind of interactions are established while students participate in different activities within the SAC?**

This qualitative research study was held in the Self Access Centre located at a public university in the Southeast of Mexico. All the participants were from the university community who attended to the Self Access Centre to improve their communication skills using English as the target language.

For this study two semi structured questionnaires designed data was collected to gather information about the perceptions, opinions, and attitudes that the participants have from the SAC. Also, some photos descriptions, interviews, scripts from the audios and videos taken in situ are the evidence of the activities and interactions that take place among the participants.

1a. What kind of interrelations emerge from learners' interaction in the SAC?

In the visualization from the Social Network Analysis (SNA) are identified the interrelationships that learners create while interacting in the activities they choose to do in the SAC. In the network analysis, each of the nodes from the NVivo12 categories have direct or indirect interconnections that together generate a social structure network. The connectivity between each of the hubs creates a dynamic social language learning structure that contributes to the development of social autonomy through interactions since all the research elements are engaged, are interdependent and unique for each system. So, based on data I can say that each of the research elements in the study contribute to help language learners to build up the social

structure in which they negotiate meaning, exchange knowledge, experiences, ideas and opinions and co-construct new selves to become autonomous learners.

Therefore, autonomy in this study can be understood as a result of a developmental process in which various elements are actively intertwined as a whole to contribute to the development of learners' autonomy because of the strong social component that promotes autonomy through a dialogical process of meaning construction with others. Then the social learning environment, the motivation, the scaffolders that foster learners' interactions and the interrelationships that emerge along the process are essential elements in the process.

Learners interact doing different activities since various interrelationships that emerge make strong learning bonds to help them to achieve learning autonomy. Elements such as the learning environment, motivation, interaction, and scaffolding, among others are intertwined and strongly interrelated in a dynamic learning network that contributes to the development of social learning autonomy.

Likewise, data collected from the research instruments in this study show that language learners develop different communicative skills through negotiating meanings and exchanging information related to their lifestyles along with the activities they do at the SAC; negotiation that will contribute to the co-construction of their self, exercising agency contributing to the development of the social learning autonomy in a social context.

The interdependence generates strong bonds between the learners which help them to create learning networks within language learning communities they build and that are represented by the networks that are shown in the clusters in the visualization. Students through these social networks can develop and achieve language learning autonomy through the different activities in which they participate.

1b. What elements in the SAC contribute to the development of social autonomy?

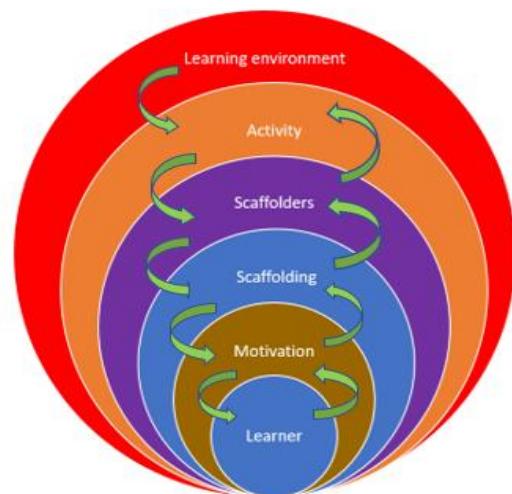


Figure 28. Elements

Data from the photos and videos show that in the SAC are joined various elements as the learner, the motivation, scaffolding, interaction, learning environment and the activities

which are all working together as a whole fostering interdependence among them through students' interaction.

The visual above shows that all the elements are intertwined to contribute to the development of the learners of social autonomy. These elements emerged from the research tools designed to collect data from the participants in this research. The visual represents all the elements which are connected among them to create a dynamic system that acts out as a learning network. Each of the elements are coloured according to the colours shown in the Hierarchy chart. The social learning environment of the SAC is where the learners exercise their agency by choosing the activities in which they want to participate either to learn or to practice the target language. This learners' participation is mediated by different scaffolders as the language, the printed materials, the technology, and the interaction between their peers or the English staff in the SAC. These scaffolders are used by the participants through scaffolding strategies as rehearsing, asking, paraphrasing, or checking for information. The scaffolding activity acts out as a framework to help the learners to get across with the meaning while participating in different activities as it is observed in the videos taken in situ. Through scaffolding the learners are motivated, engaged and interested in the activities while they internalize the information either in pairs, small teams or in bigger groups in the ZDP.

Data, from the Vivo chart, shows that scaffolding is the activity which has got a strong tendency because of the higher degree of learners' participation and collaboration doing different activities like playing with board games, doing the homework, or having conversation sessions. Vygotsky (1978) states that scaffolding fosters the intra and interpersonal learning processes within the ZDP. Both processes take place at the same time while students are actively exchanging information within the collaborative activities they do or interacting with others. Scaffolding among learners is what activates the interaction to create temporary bridges that help them to build up the language needed to communicate in the target language.

What is essential to mention is that the learners are the centre of all the activity within the SAC. All these elements act out together as a social learning network that contribute

to the development of their language learning autonomy from the interactions that emerge in a social context as the SAC.

1c. What kind of interactions are established while students participate in different activities within the SAC?

Throughout the research, data findings revealed that language students from different academic programs at the university who attend to the Self- Access Centre in the university create several social learning networks through interaction mediated by different human, technological or printed tools in the activities that they carry out either individually or in groups.

The learner's interaction deals with the way in which they like to work in the SAC. Some like to work in big groups, but others prefer small groups. From the photos and videos is shown that learners gather to develop their communicative skills in teams through social interaction which contributes to the development of their learning autonomy. In the script of the audio is also evidence of how the social learning environment at the SAC allows learners' interaction by participating actively taking the risk to express their ideas without being judge regarding their level of English. The friendly and encouraging attitude of the language helper invites them to participate while they perform the task. Students always look for a group or someone to help them in the SAC.

Data from questionnaires show that learners in the SAC, like to participate in the conversations because of the positive attitude that other learners have. Also, they said that they have fun while learning and this is it because the board games are the most popular scaffolders so they can interact face to face with their peers while practicing speaking in English. Learners at the Sac also mentioned that they use books and computers mainly to do their homework and watching movies on television with English subtitles to improve reading and listening skills.

In this study, data revealed that students exercise their agency because they are given the opportunity to decide what to do, with whom they want to work and to organize themselves in different learning settings (pairs, teams, groups) adapting the SAC according to their learning preferences to accomplish their language learning needs. In

this research students are given the opportunity to organize themselves in different kinds of learning communities; communities in which the interaction that takes place between them has a relevant role because it helps them to develop their communicative skills and their learning autonomy. So, different kind of interactions take place in the SAC and emerged from Gephi software data analysis as follows: learners/learners, learners/language assistant, learners /part-time teachers /counsellors, learners /technology, learners /printed materials.

Then, the interaction generated among the participants is significant because it is through interaction that people help each other to learn (Wood, Bruner, Ross, 1976; Wood & Middletown, 1975) by sharing opinions, beliefs, needs and knowledge.

Consequently, the activities that learners freely choose to do at the SAC foster learners' interaction and are mediated through scaffolding either by their peers or with the help of the English staff as shown in the visualization. In the network analysis learners like to interact the most among the teachers and the counsellors in the speaking sessions rather than the part-time teachers or SAC helpers. Information shown in Hierarchy chart reveals that very few learners use writing as an activity to practice in the SAC.

1. How do students learn in the Self Access Centre?

After having done the qualitative analysis through deductive and inductive analysis of the research data it can be said that students learn in the SAC through social learning networks that they create to exchange opinions, needs and information among several interdependent elements that emerged in the study which contribute as a whole to the development of their autonomy from a social learning context.

2. What enables students to learn in the SAC?

Mainly because of the possibility of being recognized as agents of their own learning and given the opportunity to organize their learning paths by themselves either in a collaboratively way or alone. Another aspect is the positive language-learning environment that makes them feel accepted, valued, and encouraged to develop their language learning potential. Moreover, students feel free to express themselves without being rejected nor criticized because the lack of knowledge or their level of English. Other

aspect is that peers and staff are involved in peer collaboration activities which promote their desire to learn the foreign language and encourages them to participate with others using the target language. Worth mentioning is the role of the counsellors, language assistants and peers, which is to assist the students as long as required according to their needs and learning preferences. Thus, this temporary scaffolding is supported by different resources until learners achieve learning autonomy at their own rhythm.

5.3 Contributions of the study

This study makes a novel contribution to applied linguistics research by offering a holistic approach to how students learn in SAC. So far researchers have studied elements as learning environment, scaffolding, motivation, interaction among others. These elements have been studied in isolation, but this Social Network Analysis (SNA) demonstrates that they all interact holistically creating a large integrated system of learning networks.

In this research is demonstrated that language learners create social learning networks through different interactions. Learning networks which emerge from interacting elements such as the learning environment, scaffolding, motivation, interaction, attitude. All these elements are actively intertwined as a whole contributing to the development of learners' autonomy through a dialogical process of meaning construction with others using the target language. Thus, for this to happen the learners have to be considered as agents of their own learning process. This study also shows in the Social Network Analysis (SNA) that different social learning networks emerge from the interrelationships that language learners create through interaction. They can interact with others creating learning networks through different collaborative activities, sharing knowledge according to their possibilities. Regarding to this, these networks have a certain level of complexity because each learner has a lifestyle background. However, through interaction and using the target language as a means of communication, learners can share interests, motivations, opinions, attitudes. Also, my study discovered that in the social learning environment in the SAC, different kinds of interactions take place at the same time as follows: (a) learners/learners, (b) learners/language assistant (c) learner/part-time teacher/counsellor, (d) learners/technology (e) learners/printed material. These interactions occur within the activities that learners choose to do at the SAC, creating ZDP. The learning networks in this research reveal that learners exchange knowledge, skills, opinions, beliefs, and preferences through scaffolders like board games, peers,

books, staff, and technology. So, the social role of the learning environment is vital because it promotes the development of social autonomy through peer collaboration. Therefore, the social environment has a crucial role in developing autonomy because it is the place where the elements which are intertwined helping learners to co-construct new knowledge and skills between others.

What is learnt from this research is that learner autonomy needs to be acknowledged as a social developmental process in which various elements as the learning environment, scaffolding, scaffolders, and learners' agency are actively working out as a whole contributing to the development of language learners' autonomy. This argument is well supported by the Socio-Cultural Theory that strongly emphasizes the importance of the society as a mediator of learning through students' interaction in learning communities (Gubels, 2005). Then, language learners who work collaboratively in learning environments under the Socio-Cultural Theory can better communicate, think, and reason effectively.

Hence, based in all the evidence of this research and the results of the qualitative analysis using NVivo12 and the Gephi visualization software, learning autonomy is both the result of a cognitive and a social developmental process within the learning networks that are shaped by the language learners' interactions and their agency. Therefore, this research study has demonstrated that learners can develop learning autonomy from both cognitive (intrapersonal) and social processes (interpersonal) within the activities they freely choose to do in the SAC. Consequently, I can affirm that the principles of the Social-Cultural Theory widely contribute to explain the social nature of learning autonomy.

To conclude, I can say that learner autonomy from a socio-constructivist perspective is based on the recognition of learners as agents of their learning, capable of designing their learning pathways using and adapting the resources available in the SAC. In this way, autonomy in language learning in this study is the result of a dialogic process of social development where all the dynamically interacting elements are interdependent, creating a learning framework through a variety of interactions and the learning networks that emerge from them, according to their interests and learning preferences.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has provided answers to the questions that guided the research. The answers were obtained from the analysis of the participants' data in the Self-Access Centre (SAC) at the university and it was found that students learn through social networks that emerge from different kinds of interactions in the activities they choose to do in the SAC. Also the interrelationships that are built between several elements as the learner, the motivation, scaffolding, interaction, learning environment and the activities in the learning networks are strong bonds that enables them to learn mainly because of the possibility of being recognized as agents of their own learning and also students have the opportunity to exercise their agency because they are given the chance to decide what to do, with whom they want to work and how to organize themselves in different learning settings (pairs, teams, groups) and adapting the SAC according to their learning preferences to accomplish their language learning needs.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I address the key findings from the interpretation and explanation of my data in relation to my research questions (see 1.2). I use my findings to approach my overarching research questions to provide explanations about how the students learn in the Self-Access Centre. I also offer the limitations of the study, future research, and implications for the development of self-learning centres.

6.2 Outcomes

The findings in this research revealed that given the opportunity, language learners who attend to the Self-Access Centre (SAC) at the university are capable of organizing and of setting up the learning environment and conditions needed to accomplish their language learning needs. Therefore, data in this research is the evidence that strongly supports that language learners are the agents of their learning process towards the achievement of their autonomy. Furthermore, students' agency acts out as a crucial element that motivates them to use the SAC as a language learning tool. Since each of them have their reasons to be in the facility as it is reported in the questionnaires, several elements as the learning environment, interaction, scaffolding, and motivation are intertwined working together as a whole to provide them with a language learning framework.

Another finding is that students use the resources available in the SAC as a learning tool, adapting and transforming the environment into a variety of social learning environments. Data in this study confirm how learners choose to use the facility. They report using the facility for different purposes, either to practice, to reinforce, to learn or to improve their communication skills using English when they get together. In the videos, is observed how students organize among their peers either in pairs, small or big groups or staff within the activities they choose to do and through the learning networks they create among the people, activities and resources involved in the process to become autonomous learners.

Cotterall (2000) states that the concept of choice is fundamental for the learner autonomy because autonomous learners can make choices in all aspects of their learning, and this includes when to be dependent on the teacher or when to be free from teacher direction. In this case, the figure of the teacher can be either the counsellor, the language assistant, or other peers in this research. Which is true in this research because data analysis from the NVivo12 software demonstrate that language learners are the ones who decide with whom they want to work as well as the resources they want to use. Likewise, the people with whom they wish to interact in the conversations, games, or other activities they carry out in the SAC. The results were highly motivating since the students' positive learning perception is what makes them come back and forth to the facility. The feeling to succeed in their process of language learning within the SAC as they reported is mostly because of the friendly learning environment set by them.

The process of becoming autonomous language learners at the SAC starts when they decide what to do and make choices about how to use the resources at the very beginning of each semester as they reported in their questionnaires. Students at the SAC are the ones who make plans on what to do and with whom they want to work within the facility using the target language as a mean of communication so that they can achieve their language learning goals based on their needs. They reported that they feel the need to succeed in the usage of the target language to communicate, among others.

Concerning this, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) claim,

"Learners are people or agents who actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their learning".

It means that learners make the most of their agency to build up language learning pathways which enables them to use the target language to share their thoughts, opinions, skills, and knowledge—understanding the concept of agency as the will and the capacity to act (Gao,2010).

Another vital element that emerges in the study is the learners' interaction that takes place thought the activities at the SAC. This mostly happens when the students decide to participate in collaborative activities as the conversations since they build up language learning communities through interaction, creating healthy relationships together, as shown in the Gephi visuals. Also, when they play language games like the board games, or

the question cards as seen in the photos showing learners engaged in these activities. The interaction among students helps them to internalize knowledge and skills mediated by the target language, creating language learning pathways within the activities they decide to participate. Lantolf & Poehner (2014) explain that learners help each other to co-construct new knowledge and skills through mediation and internalization.

What I also found is that the interactions in the SAC are not only with one specific person, but they can be among learners, the language assistants, a part-time teacher, or a counsellor, using technology or the printed material. As Johnson & Johnson (1989) said,

"Language learners co-construct new knowledge and communicative skills through interaction".

Under these circumstances, learners in the SAC build up strong relationships through interaction within a wide variety of activities they choose to do to enhance the English fluency and to improve their communicative skills as well (Figure 15). Research data in the photos, videos, observations, and questionnaires are vivid evidence on how the learners' interactions foster L2 language and lead them towards the development of learning autonomy.

These ideas of learning autonomy have their roots in the Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT) that gives a strong emphasis on learning in social contexts where the critical element is the learner who embraces the tools to internalize the symbols and signs of the culture through interaction (Vygotsky, 1978)

Therefore, I found in this study that the students in the SAC are immersed in a dialogical developmental process of social learning autonomy. A condition which fosters students' learning autonomy through a wide variety of learning material like books, magazines, board games and technological resources as computers and televisions that students held by according to their learning needs. The evidence of this learners' dialogical process of learning construction is registered in the learner's scripts key from the audios. In the activity, students participate in a speaking activity where they co-construct bridges of knowledge to achieve the objective of the activity, which in this case is to make sentences from a given picture.

The activity is led by a language assistant that gives clues to guide the activity so that they can help each other through different communicative strategies as repeating, clarifying,

paraphrasing until they reach the objective. The concept of dialogic learning has its roots in the Socratic method in which the learners have an active role in extending their thinking rather than receiving information, and the teacher is a learner guide through questioning without giving the answers. Nowadays, this dialogic approach is noted in Vygotsky Sociocultural approach theory, where learners through dialogic language can develop high order skills in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). In the same line, Bakhtin, M (1981) sees the language as a social practice in which students play an active role in developing a personal understanding through a dialogic interchange that leads them into more authentic exchanges.

The videos and the photos taken in situ for the study is the evidence on how students use communicative strategies to construct their understandings. Students use them for various purposes: to comprehend the meaning using the target language or to play in the sessions they have between SAC staff.

They also use them when they are helping each other doing the homework or in an exercise for their regular language classes.

Another important matter in this study is those language learners set up different kinds of learning environments at the same time using the resources available while they are in the SAC. This means that the learners hold the resources from their choices to organize their learning pathways within the facility. Moreover, what we have learnt from the observations is that learners use and adapt the SAC facility either in small groups, big groups or alone by rearranging the furniture according to their learning needs as seen in the photos. Therefore, the argument above can clearly explain the level of autonomy learners can accomplish in the SAC when they make decisions about organizing their learning settings given the opportunity.

Some of them assured in their answers that the SAC provides many learning opportunities through different activities like watching movies and reading books that they can use according to their needs and wants. They also cited that the staff and teachers who give conversations help them to improve their speaking skills. They pointed out that they can improve and learn new vocabulary using different kinds of games. They can speak English with friends, do exercises in their language books, practice English, take conversations with their peers and with the SAC staff.

Likewise, they reported being mainly interested in giving or taking conversations among their peers while others were focused on reading, watching movies, or just listening to music. Consequently, learners have lots of opportunities to practice English at the SAC as it is reported in data from learners' questionnaires and the interviews. Thus, the SAC is viewed as a learning tool which is transformed to best suit their learning needs so that they can get the knowledge and skills needed for their language learning throughout the process of being autonomous learners.

Furthermore, what it is essential to mention in this research is that students use all the emerging elements to create strong learning networks (Figure 28) to achieve their language learning needs. Therefore, the argument above can clearly explain the level of autonomy learners can accomplish when they make decisions about organizing their learning settings given the opportunity. Little (2002) asserts when he mentions "**the learner is perceived as a decision-maker and one who is connected to the process of learning**". He helped to see autonomy as "**a maximal self-development within human interdependence**" rather than giving the whole emphasis to the textbooks, the curriculum, or the teachers.

There is evidence of how students develop their learning autonomy through interaction in collaborative settings in the classroom around the world. So, their models have been adapted to open SAC centres either using face to face interaction as in Universidad del Caribe in Mexico or through e-learning communities as in the Tokyo University in Japan.

In the university, the SAC language learners use the social environment as a vital learning element because it allows them to develop their social autonomy through interaction. In this way, learners create learning communities where learning networks emerge. These underlying networks seen in the Gephi visual, encourage students to establish strong interactions between themselves, the staff and material resources in the SAC. Then, learners have the opportunity to share values, opinions, goals, identities and can co-construct new selves by using scaffolding strategies in a friendly learning environment. As evidence of this is the learners who are actively participating in conversation sessions, playing language games, or asking each other questions using question cards as shown in the photos for this research.

Consequently, the SAC students exchanging information using the target language among them create a dynamic setting that keeps them engaged. About this idea, Johnson & Johnson (1989) convey that the main goal is to keep them actively engaged in participating actively with others. Also, Dewey, J agrees on saying that the learning environment must be an embryonic community life to provide them with the instruments of effective self-direction. Then, the students at the SAC are free to share knowledge and learning goals in these social learning environments in which the main objective is to practice English in a friendly and encouraging environment. In this research, came to light that students help each other to achieve their learning goal regardless of their level of English. As Wood (1976) states "students who are the most skilled help others to carry out the task to achieve their learning goals". In like manner, Hammond (2001) claims that learners are actively engaged in a social constructivist learning model.

Something new was unveiled in this study, and it is that language learners create learning networks that contribute to the development of learning autonomy through a dialogical process of meaning construction with others. This activity can be seen within the Self-Access Centre when the students gather along with others to participate in collaborative activities using the target language as a mean of communication so that they can achieve their learning autonomy using the learning environment in the SAC, wherein this study, several elements are intertwined to provide the structure that helps learners in their development of autonomy.

The elements that emerged from the NVivo12 12 data, as the learning environment, scaffolding, agency, scaffolders, and interaction, happen to be all together intertwined working as different kinds learning networks where students develop learning autonomy in a social context. Consequently, the SAC learners' interactions and the learning structure built up by the intertwined elements building up different kinds of learning networks within the activities they choose to do using the target language. An example of this can be observed in the Gephi visuals where diverse learners' networks show how the students freely organize their learning pathways while they are in the SAC. It is relevant to mention that the interaction among the students and the resource within the SAC is crucial to create a dynamic system which is tied up by the learning networks that emerge from the learners' interaction as it is displayed in the Gephi visuals.

Therefore, the strong learning networks that emerge in this study are on the one hand from their decisions driven by their learning needs and wants as they reported in their questionnaires. On the other hand, from their interactions in the collaborative activities, they enjoy doing the SAC, which is the current strength that keeps them engaged and motivated to create learning communities to practice the target language. It can be inferred from the photos and videos that students working and learning within the learning communities generate a positive attitude towards language learning.

Each of them has their reasons to be in the facility as it is reported in the questionnaires. Also, the scaffolding strategies allow students to exchange the information needed to accomplish the learning objectives amongst the variety of relationships that emerge between the participants along the learning process in this study. As a result of the vast number of scaffolders that foster interaction and the social learning environment in which are used, provide flexible learning setting adapted to the learners' needs contributing to the language learning process (figure 28). So, all these intertwined elements are essential because all together build up a framework where students can develop autonomy in a social context.

Likewise, it is important to realize is that language students, as agents of their learning create Zones of Proximal Development (ZPDs) among their peers through interaction within the activities they choose to do in the learning communities. Indeed, Lantolf (2006) says that in socializing processes and through a dialogic mediation, the learners participate in practical-critical activities to construct knowledge. In the OCD document (2013) mentions that students must be engaged in the learning processes to make them "self-regulated learners" to monitor and evaluate their learning.

Thus, when the learners interact in the learning communities at the SAC (photos and video) what happens is that they negotiate the meaning through scaffolding, as Walqui (2006) states. For her, scaffolding is both a structure and a process. A structure because it gives the learners the steps and stages that enable the process from being executed and a process which refers to the work that is carried out while learners are provided with someone's assistance either an expert, an equal peer or a less-capable peer. In the SAC, this scaffolding process can be observed in the language learning communities while students are participating in a dialogical process of meaning construction with others. In the dialogic process, students help each other to convey meaning through different

communicative strategies, as clarifying, requesting, or repeating information. Then language learners create a dynamic learning environment where they feel accepted regarding their lack of communicative skills or level of English. In the SAC photos is seen how learners organize themselves in pairs or small groups either to play, to practice the functions of the language or just to have a conversation to share opinions, beliefs, information, or feelings in a common ground.

Students, according to their needs and learning preferences, choose the activities they want to do in the Sac interacting with different people. The videos and the audio scripts are the strong evidence in situ about how some learners participate actively by using the target language to communicate their ideas between their peers or to the SAC staff. Other groups of students prefer to work independently using computers, tape recorders, and televisions. Still, even though they work alone, they are interacting with the resources to achieve their language learning goals. Then, students' choices are examples of how they internalize symbolic systems at the same time but in a different context. What is relevant to realize is that learners are developing learning autonomy. Lantolf & Thorne (2006) and Kozulin (1990) claim that the internalization process in second language learning is a critical element in which higher mental functions are formed.

6.2 Limitations of the study

Given the characteristics of this qualitative research, the study has a number of limitations. Firstly, the study was carried out in the specific area of the Self-Access Centre of the university. Secondly, it is focused on a specific group of active students from different careers who regularly attend the SAC and thirdly, data collected corresponds only to this particular context, time period and a specific space.

Consequently, more research needs to be done in other educational contexts based on the fact that students and learning settings are different in each institution. Also, more research is needed to carry out to understand about the reasons that drive learners to use the Self-Access Centre as well as the materials, the people with whom they prefer to interact and especially the learning networks that emerge from the interrelationships between students, other people, and the learning materials available at the centre.

Moreover, it is necessary to inquire about the reasons, needs and learning preferences that students have to identify how students become autonomous learners based on the

interaction and different contexts in which students become autonomous learners of a second language giving more emphasis on how they develop their learning autonomy in social learning contexts.

6.3 Future research

This dissertation represents the first comprehensive study of how the Social Network Analysis (SNA) contributes to understand in what ways students learn in the SAC through interaction within the activities they freely choose to do. Although this study has contributed to understand the learning processes taken the Self-Access Centre from a holistic approach, further empirical research is needed to explore more about the student-manage learning communities they create while they learn the target language as well as the modes of interactions they prefer to work with. Another research field might be the evolution of the Self-Access Centres in the 21st from the Socio-Cultural Theory to determine which elements are interacting to promote learning autonomy from social contexts. Regarding to learner's social learning networks, studying them in depth, will give a glimpse to explore the theme of language learning from the learners' networks perspective. This could be a potential path to determine how given the learners the opportunity to exercise agency as agents of their learning and organizing the setting. they can fully achieve the language target learning autonomy from different social contexts.

6.4 Implications for the development of Self- Access Centres

This study has unveiled practical applications to be considered in the future if it is feasible to run Self- Access Centres from a social context view. The Sociocultural theory seems to be a much better approach to comprehend that achieving language learning autonomy is both a cognitive and social developmental process. So, the students must be considered as agents of their learning process thus they should be given the opportunity to make choices on how they want to organize themselves to learn according to their learning needs, preferences, and language target goals. Another element to be considered is the motivation of the language learner which is generated from potentially collaborative activities that maintain constant attention to internalize meaning. Therefore, social interaction among language learners has to be encouraged in collaborative activities using different kinds of scaffolders to promote both the inter (social) – intra (cognitive)

processes to negotiate meaning which leads to language learning autonomy from social contexts.

The language learning environment in the Self Access Centre needs to be a social learning setting in which the principles of learning environment, motivation, scaffolding, collaborative learning, and interaction are intertwined to contribute to the development of the social notion of autonomy as underpinned by the Sociocultural Theory approach.

Also, the centre has to be a positive language-learning environment in which they can feel accepted, valued, and encourage to develop their language learning potential. Moreover, students must feel free to express themselves without being rejected nor criticized because the lack of knowledge or their level of English. This means that peers and staff have to be involved in peer collaboration activities to promote desire to learn the foreign language and to encourage them to participate with others using the target language. Consequently, the role of the counsellors, language assistants and peers, is to assist as long as the students require it according to their needs and learning preferences. Thus, this temporary scaffolding must be supported by different resources until learners achieve learning autonomy at their own rhythm,

To conclude, I can say that learner autonomy from a socio-constructivist perspective is based on the recognition of learners as agents of their learning, capable of designing their learning pathways using and adapting the resources available in the SAC. In this way, autonomy in language learning in this study is the result of a dialogic process of social development where all the dynamically interacting elements are interdependent, creating a learning framework through a variety of interactions and the learning networks that emerge from them, according to their interests and learning preferences.

Appendix A Questionnaires

Student Self-Access Centre Questionnaire

1. Does the SAC help you to improve your English? In what way?
2. Which activities do you use more? Why?
3. Has Sac helped you to change your approach to learning? In what way?
4. How often do you come to SAC?
5. Do you come to SAC voluntarily or does your teacher tell you to do so?
6. Why do you come to the SAC?
7. How do you decide which activities to choose?
8. Is there a relationship between what is taught in the classroom and the activities /materials in the SAC?
9. Has your performance in the classroom changed? If yes, how?
10. How does your instructor react to your coming to SAC?
11. Would you like to be provided with other materials/activities? If yes, what are they?

*For basic students, the questions may be asked in Spanish.

* The questions will be adapted for the teachers and staff interviews.

Note: The questions are adapted from Koyalan, Aylin (2009) The evaluation of a self-access centre: A useful addition to class-based teaching?

Interview for teachers and SAC staff

The purpose of this questionnaire is to evaluate some aspects of the SAC project.

This instrument is only for teachers and SAC staff because it is considered that they are a valuable source of information. The information obtained in this interview will remain anonymous and will only be used for academic purposes. Thank you for your help.

1. Have you received any training for working in the SAC?
2. How valid was the information that you received (how useful was it in terms of applicability)?
3. How did you like it (well conveyed, user friendly, new and interesting)?
4. What do you think are your most important contributions to the SAC?
5. In which of the areas do you think that SAC counsellors (teachers) need more training?
6. According to your experience, do counselling sessions work?
7. Do you feel that we are helping SAC users through counselling sessions?
8. Do you think that users like counselling sessions?
9. Can we suggest another way of helping SAC users instead of the counselling sessions?
10. What do you like doing the best in the SAC?
11. What do you like doing the best as a language teacher? Why?
12. Evaluating the SAC in general terms, and according to your experience, is it working? Why?
13. What changes would you suggest in order to improve the services in the SAC?
15. Do you think that the SAC would work better if it was a practice centre (everybody taking classes in the Language Centre and going to the SAC to practise what they were taught)?
17. According to you, what was the reason for creating the SAC?
18. Do we actually need it? Why?

19. What do you think are your most important contributions to the SAC?

20. Would you like to add any other comment?

* Adapted from Clemente, Ma. Teachers' attitudes within a self-directed language learning scheme. Language Centre. Universidad Autonoma Benito Juarez. Oaxaca, México. (2000)

Students answers Question 1

I. Does the SAC help you improve your English? In what way?

1 Yes, speaking with friends, doing exercises in our book, practicing English.

2 Yes, teaching other students.

3 Yes, taking conversations .

4 Yes, forcing me to do English activities while there.

5 Yes, with books and computers, talk with people, to practice.

6 Yes, practice English with conversations, magazines, books.

7 Yes, many multimedia material and activities.

8 Yes, my vocabulary, practice pronunciation with other people.

9 Yes, take conversion, watch a movie.

10 Yes, the games and movies help me to learn English in a fun way.

11 Yes, has all the material necessary for me to learn , it help me in every moment.

Yes, with the conversations . I can improve my speaking skills, with games I can improve and learn
12 new vocabulary.

13 Yes, in the practice of the vocabulary.

14 Yes, speaking. I have to talk and practice in the conversation .

15 Yes, because is a good place to practice my English.

16 Yes, because the Sac has more things that help me practice English.

17 Yes, because the Sac has many different activities , movies, books, teachers.

18 Yes, the SAC help . I can speak more in English.

19 Yes, with different activities.

20 Yes, speaking, listening, conversations, helping others.

Question 2

II. Which activities do you use more? Why?

- 1 Speak with friends and teachers because I enjoy this type of activities.
- 2 I have to use conversations using cards and games.
- 3 The games , because they are more fun.
- 4 The really funny games and because I can play in english with my friends.
- 5 Talk wth the people that help me to try to try to express myself.
- 6 Playing the table games . Resd any book or magazine.
- 7 Movies, Cd's and books. It's more funny and interactive.
- 8 Conversation , reading a magazine, watch movies and games.
- 9 Reading and playing because are fast activities and funny.
- 10 Read books and magazines because I like to read.
The games (cards) because I can read and repeat and ehen there are more
- 11 people (teachers)they help me in pronunciation .
the table games because I think they are a way of having fun and to learn at
- 12 the same time.
- 13 Yes, the activities I use more is games, conversations and computers.
- 14 Conversation games and movies.
- 15 Conversations, games, book activities because is more easy to learn.
- 16 Listen music, watch movies, conversation , reading the book.
- 17 Watch movies, listen the conversation, reaing the book.
- 18 I use more conversations and play when I went to the SAC.
- 19 Play cards , dictionary and conversation
- 20 conversation, cards , readers and listening.

Question 3

III. Has SAC helped you to change your approach to learning? In what way?

- 1 Yes, because when I have a question about a topic I went to SAC to search or answer to the teachers.
- 2 Yes, it makes me look for my own learning. I choose what to learn and how.
- 3 Yes, because it shows that you can learn in many ways.
 - 4 Yes, makes me learn new vocabulary so I can explain better to my classmates whenever I give a conversation .
 - 5 Yes, what i learn in class I do it agein an over again in the SAC.
 - 6 Yes, because there I only speak in English and it has done that I think in my vocabulary, my grammar, pronunciation , etc.
 - 7 Yes, there are many forms for you to learn.
 - 8 Yes, because I learn more vocabulary.
 - 9 Yes, a little bit I don't have time to sit to read because I prefer to do my homework but I wish to do it.
 - 10 Yes, in the conversation.
 - 11 Yes, the SAC is dynamic.
 - 12 Yes, by learning new vocabulary.
 - 13 Yes, learning more vocabulary and conversation .
 - 14 Yes, learning more vocabulary.
 - 15 Of course because is more interactive to learn.
 - 16 Yes because I can practice my speak English and I do exercise , my homework.
 - 17 Yes, I'm practice my conversation.
 - 18 Yes, in vocabulary and speak.
 - 19 Yes, when I have time.
 - 20 Yes, homework, autonomy.

Question 4

IV. How often do you come to the SAC?

- 1 2 or 3 times a week.
- 2 3 or 4 times a week aroun 2 hrs each visit.
- 3 not often but when I go I don't want to leave.
- 4 3 or 4 per week.
- 5 every two days
- 6 3 times a week
- 7 once a week
- 8 2 or 3 times a week
- 9 once a week
- 10 twice a week
- 11 three times a week
- 12 3 or 4 times a week.
- 13 once a week
- 14 twice a week
- 15 2 days a week
- 16 2 or 3 times a week
- 17 1 hr a week
- 18 2 days a week
- 19 when I have time
- 20 2 or 3 a week

Question 5

- V. Do you come voluntarily or does the teacher tell you to do so?
- 1 voluntarily
- 2 myself
- 3 voluntarily
- 4 voluntarily
- 5 voluntarily
- 6 both
- 7 my teacher invites me
- 8 my teacher tells me to do so
- 9 my teacher tells me to do so
- 10 both to give conversations , to learn or watch movies.
- 11 teacher
- 12 both to do the homework and to see what's new.
- 13 both
- 14 teacher needs hrs.
- 15 teacher but I like it.
- 16 voluntarily
- 17 teacher
- 18 the SAC has helped me
- 19 teacher
- 20 voluntarily

Question 6

VI. Why do you come to the SAC?

1.To practice my English .

2.To practice the level of English and help others to improve theirs.

3.It's relaxing and to practice English.

4.To do my English homework and conversation.

5.Practice

6.I can do homework . I can learn more English.

7.Depends on my free time.

8.Need to do my homework and do conversations.

9.Need the conversations and hrs.

10.Sometimes I go to the SAC when I need conversations other days I just go.

11.I should have hrs. and I need conversations.

12.I like having conversations with other people and with my classmates too.

13.I go to the SAC for the SAC hrs and conversations.

14.I like conversations . I think that is one of the best things to learn English.

15.free time

16.I need to practice my speak English and I need to do conversations and is a good place when I can do my English activities.

17.Because I need to do conversations and hrs. but in really I like to go to the SAC

18.I need to do conversations and to learn vocabulary.

19.Because I tells me and because I want to learn.

20.Because I learn English to go abroad.

Question 7

- VII. How do you decide what activities to choose?
- 1 Depending how many free time I have.
 - 2 I ask the students what they like and actually find interesting.
 - 3 By choosing a fun one.
 - 4 I just choose an activity when I'm there.
 - 5 To practice.
 - 6 Conversations or movies , magazines, etc. These activities are nice.
 - 7 Depend on my free time.
 - 8 I decide the more I like it.
 - 9 With my friends because we need to practice.
 - 10 I just do the things I like.
 - 11 I choose the activities more dinamic and easy.
If I give a conversation I choose the ones that are funny or something in
which my conversation partners are interested.
 - 13 First the conversation and finish after book activities.
 - 14 First the conversation and then if I want to play or read a magazine.
 - 15 Depend on the exercise of a book or my homework.
 - 16 Depends the time.
 - 17 I decide and choose the activity.
 - 18 Play and talk helps me a lot.
 - 19 Depends
 - 20 Friday,Wednesday, Monday choose activity.

Question 8

VIII. Is there a relationship between what is taught in the classroom and the activities /materials in the SAC?

1.In topics levels not much but all the 4 , yes. They learn vocabulary reinforce their grammar and work in their pronunciation .

2.Yes

3.Yes, the vocab games and activities on the computer.

4.Yes

5.Yes

6.Yes, is an important complement to improve my English.

7.I don't think so. In the SAC I do things I choose in the class not.

8.Yes, there is.

9.I think that it is necessary more magazines in English and more. topics like business, tourism and more.

10.Yes, there are.

11.Yes, the e workbook is the same as the class activities.

12.Yes, there are games with different topics and for each level.

13.The materials in the SAC are old.

14.Yes, but I think that the materials have to renew

15.Yes, is helped everything has relation with the homework.

16.Yes, listening and magazines.

17.Yes,

18.Yes, in the class and SAC have a relationship.

19.Yes, is the topics.

20.English yes because of Engineering.

Question 9

IX. Has your performance in the classroom changed? If yes, how?

1.Yes, because I understand more thing of different topics.

2.Yes, I speak much more now and I help and explain to others what they don't understand.

3.Yes, I participate more.

4.Yes, I participate more .

5.Yes, sometimes I learn in class new words and If I use this in the bad way the teacher tells me.

6.Yes, I practice more in the classroom.

7.No,

8.Yes, because I am learning more the idiom.

9.Yes, I participate more.

10.Yes, I think my performance changed because now I understand more the conversations and reading.

11.No,

12.Yes, practising the vocabulary learnt . Using those new words to get used to them.

13.Yes, how to pronounce and conversation in class.

14.Yes, how can I speak more fluently.

15.*

16.No more

17.Yes, because I am learning English.

18.No, the class is very dynamic and funny.

19.Yes, in my learning.

20.Yes,

Question 10

X. How does your instructor react to your coming to the SAC?

1.Fine

2.She encourages us to go so we can improve and practice.

3.Normal because we have to go for activities and conversations.

4.I.D.K

5.Is OK I think

6.I put different activities to go to the SAC like conversation, homework, reading a book, etc.

7.When she said go to the SAC four hrs or when I need to do conversations.

8.Because we need the conversations and hrs of the SAC for aprove the asignature.

9.Fine I need my hours.

10.I think, fine.

11.They are nice when explain and they help us in everything.

12.I dont' really know.

13.Yes, fine in the SAC have the conversation.

14.Fine very well.

15.*

16.More flexible and friendly.

17.*

18.Fine very friendly.

19. *

20.Yes, friendly always.

Question 11

XI. Would you like to be provided with other materials /activities? If yes, what are they?

1 Yes, more software of different majors.

Not other but more. Example more question cards because we finish them really quickly and gets a little bit
2 boring to be doing them over and over again during 4 years.

3 Yes, songs and computer games.

4 More funny games.

5 Maybe new material to change the monotony of the words.

6 Yes, in my cellphone. I put a dictionary and a game like duolingo.

7 Yes, maybe with clubs for read any books or magazine.

8 No, I don't like.

9 Yes, more magazines or books.

10 No, it's Ok.

11 No, all material is good.

12 I think I'd provide some practical games.

13 Yes, games, news.

14 Yes, like problems that we have nowadays in Mexico.

15 *

16 Yes, more games.

17 I like teacher individually.

18 Yes, I would like listening and more music.

19 Yes, more games.

20 Yes, I would like national geographic, mechanics.

Teacher 1

Interview for teachers and SAC staff

The purpose of this questionnaire is to evaluate some aspects of the SAC project.

This instrument is only for teachers and SAC staff because it is considered that they are a very valuable source of information. The information obtained in this interview will remain anonymous and will only be used for academic purposes. Thank you for your help.

1. Have you received any training for working in the SAC?

No, I haven't.

2. How valid was the information that you received (how useful was it in terms of applicability)?

I didn't receive any, everything has been developing during sessions

3. How did you like it (well conveyed, user friendly, new and interesting)?

I like because it provides students to language and conversation exposure.

4 What do you think are your most important contributions to the SAC?

I have contributed with some cards with open questions, for the students to answer.

5. In which of the areas do you think that SAC counsellors (teachers) need more training?

Sometimes there isn't any kind of information on what to do, or how to do things with students, and teachers need to improvise.

6. According to your experience, do counselling sessions work?

Yes, I do.

7. Do you feel that we are helping SAC users through counselling sessions?

Yes, I do.

8. Do you think that users like counselling sessions?

Perhaps they don't, but sometimes they need them, and we have experienced their improvement.

9. Can we suggest another way of helping SAC users instead of the counselling sessions?

Well, on line we can find some tutoring, and games that may help them.

10 What do you like doing the best in the SAC?

Conversations, playing, and using games.

11. What do you like doing the best as a language teacher? Why?

I like playing games that can help them improve their vocabulary and practice grammar. I can see that students get hooked to the class and their development is fantastic.

12. Evaluating the SAC in general terms, and according to your experience, is it working? Why?

Yes, by looking to students improvement, and they lose fear of speaking.

13. What changes would you suggest in order to improve the services in the SAC?

Putting bathrooms, T. V., English Newspapers.

15. Do you think that the SAC would work better if it was a practice centre (everybody taking classes in the Language Centre and going to the SAC to practise what they were taught)?

No, unless they need it.

17. According to you, what was the reason for creating the SAC?

To be able to practice the language, and develop culture.

18. Do we actually need it? Why?

Definitely, to practice.

19. What do you think are your most important contributions to the SAC?

The exchange of ideas, and knowledge of students.

20. Would you like to add any other comment?

No, not really, I love SAC, and generally I have a good time with the students.

* Adapted from Clemente, Ma. Teachers attitudes within a self-directed language learning scheme. Language Centre. Universidad Autonoma Benito Juarez . Oaxaca, Mexico. (2000)

Interview for SAC staff

The purpose of this questionnaire is to evaluate some aspects of the SAC project.

This instrument is only for teachers and SAC staff because it is considered that they are a very valuable source of information. The information obtained in this interview will remain anonymous and will only be used for academic purposes. Thank you for your help.

1. Have you received any training for working in the SAC?

No

2. How valid was the information that you received (how useful was it in terms of applicability)?

-

3. How did you like it (well conveyed, user friendly, new and interesting)?

I enjoyed working and giving conversations in the SAC very much, however I received no training to comment on.

4. What do you think are your most important contributions to the SAC?

Giving the students an opportunity to engage in conversations with a native speaker.

5. In which of the areas do you think that SAC staff needs more training?

None

6. According to your experience, do counselling sessions work?

Yes

7. Do you feel that we are helping SAC users through counselling sessions?

Yes

8. Do you think that users like counselling sessions? Yes

9. Can we suggest another way of helping SAC users instead of the counselling sessions?

Extra classes based on specific areas of language learning e.g., grammar, listening, speaking

10 What do you like doing the best in the SAC?

Giving conversations

11. Evaluating the SAC in general terms, and according to your experience, is it working? Why?

Yes, I believe it is working, as it provides the students with an space to learn in a more informal, fun way which encourages students to use the facilities and learn at the same time.

12. What changes would you suggest in order to improve the services in the SAC?

A timetable between teachers so that moments when only one member of staff is present in the SAC are rare.

13. According to you, what was the reason for creating the SAC?

To have a centre specific ally dedicated to language learning in the university.

15. Do we actually need it? Why?

Yes, because it is invaluable space that is very useful for the students, especially for finding a wide range of resources to help them with their language learning.

19. What do you think are your most important contributions to the SAC?

Giving conversations.

20. Would you like to add any other comment? no

* Adapted from Clemente, Ma. Teachers' attitudes within a self-directed language learning scheme. Language Centre. Universidad Autonoma Benito Juarez. Oaxaca, Mexico. (2000)

Appendix B List of figures

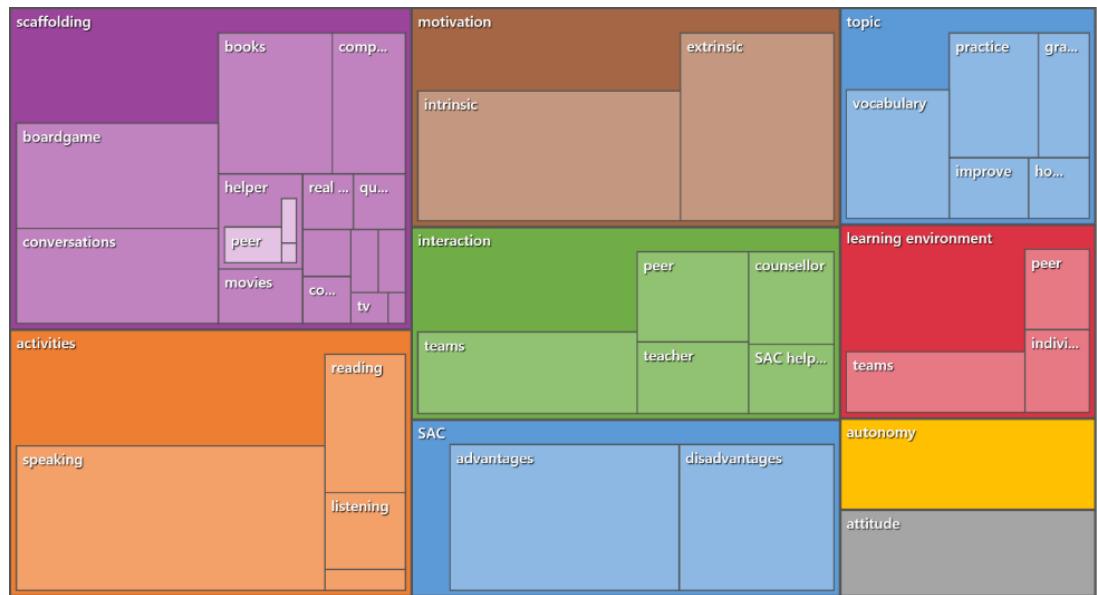


Figure 1. Hierarchy codes chart

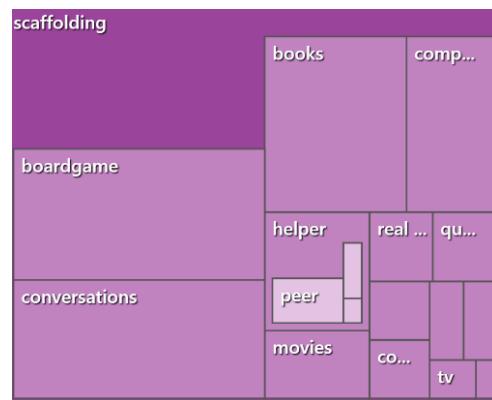


Figure 2: Scaffolding code chart



Figure 3. Scaffolding photo

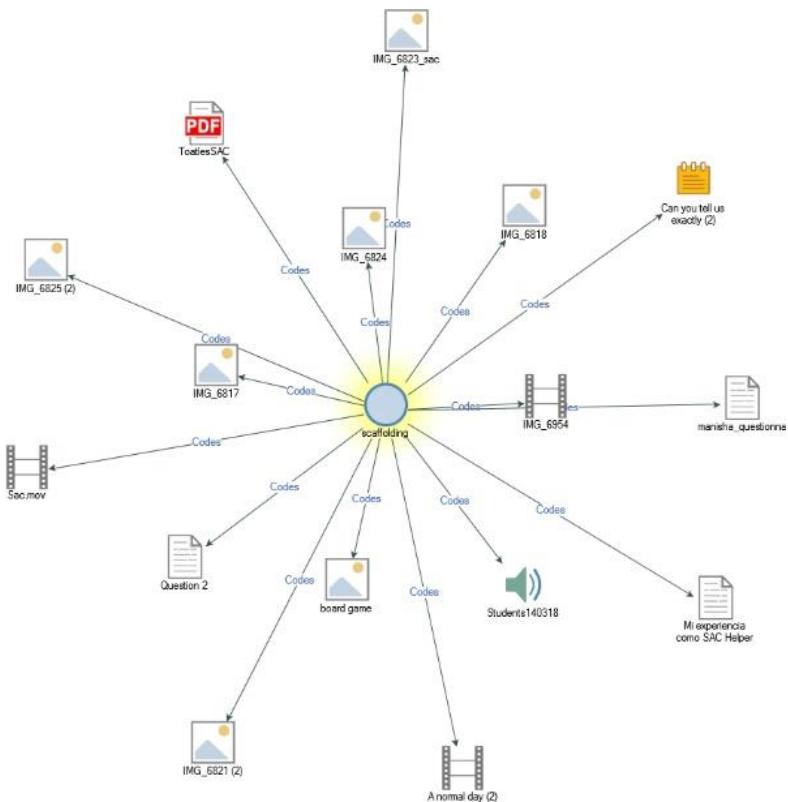


Figure 4. Scaffolding code diagram



Figure 5. Scaffolder photo

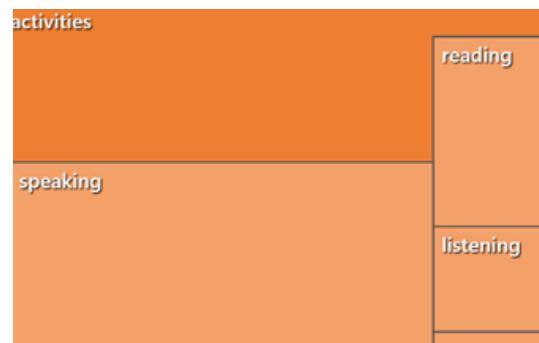


Figure 6. Activities code chart



Figure 7. Activities photo

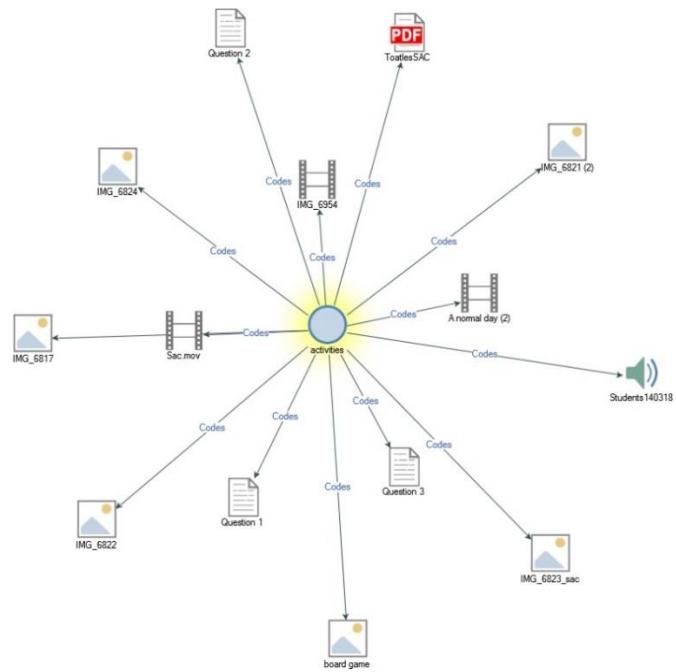


Figure 8. Activities code diagram

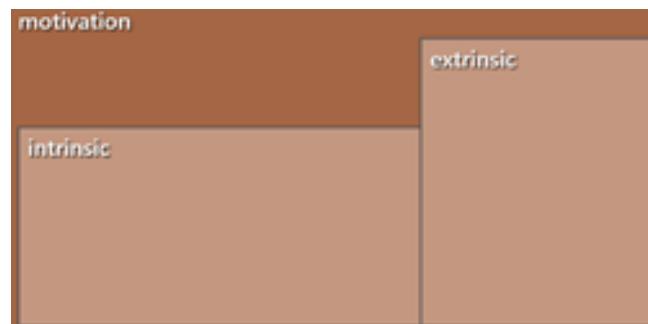


Figure 9. Motivation code chart



Figure 10. Motivation photo

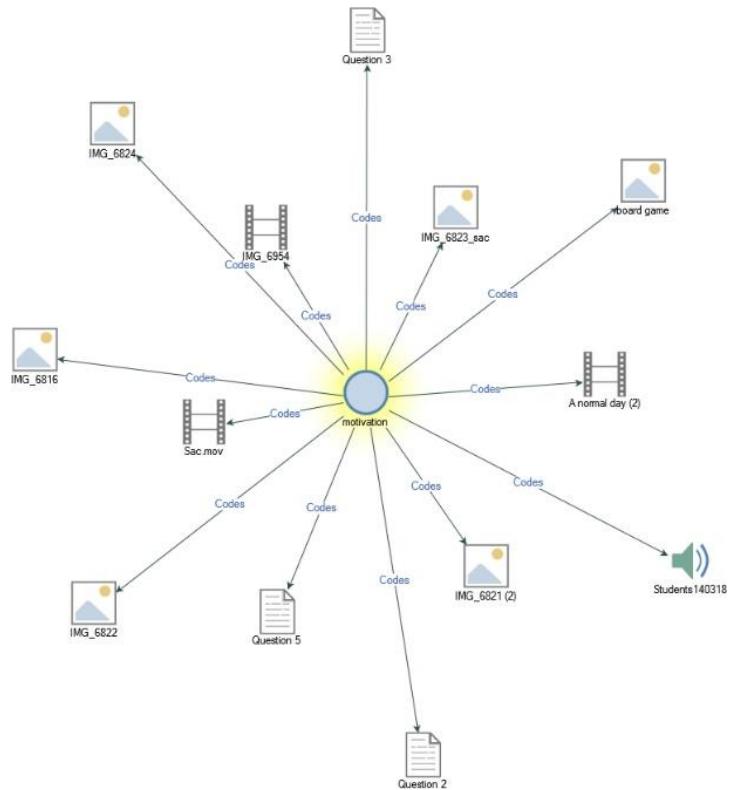


Figure 11. Motivation code diagram

Interaction		peer	counsellor
teams		teacher	SAC help...

Figure 12. Interaction code chart

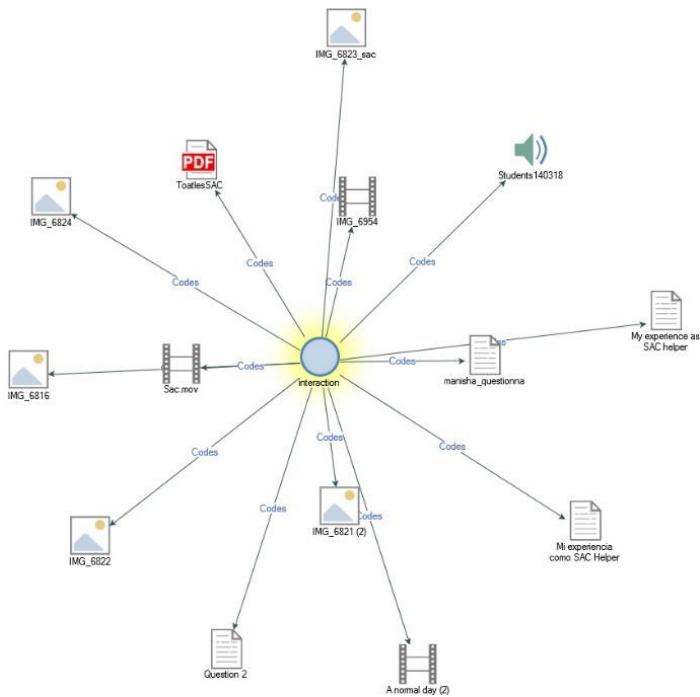


Figure 13. Interaction code diagram



Figure 14. Interaction photo

SAC	advantages	disadvantages

Figure 15. SAC code chart

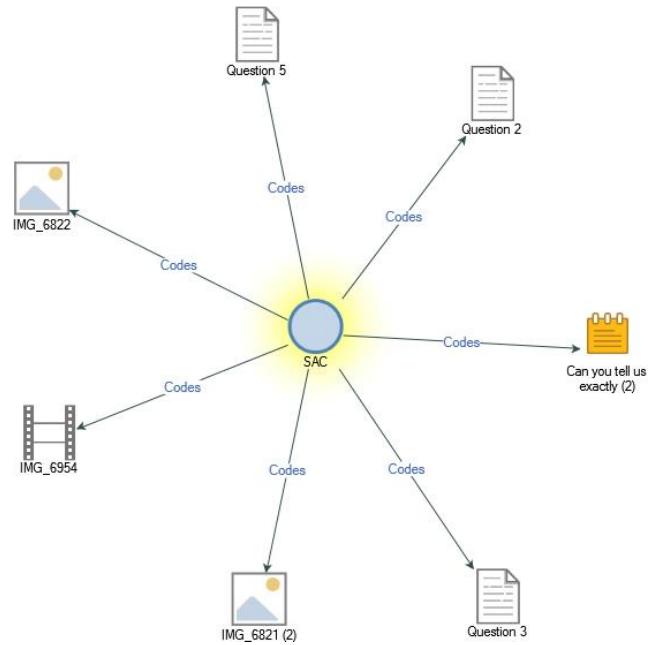


Figure 16. SAC code diagram

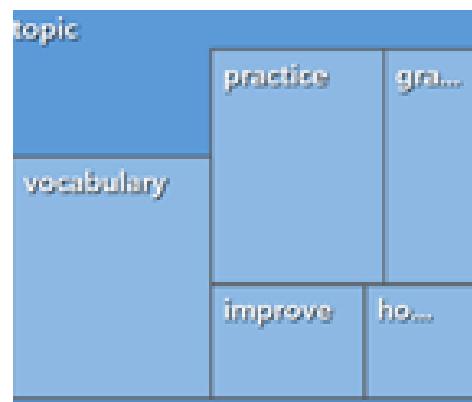


Figure 17. Topic code chart



Figure 18. Topic photo

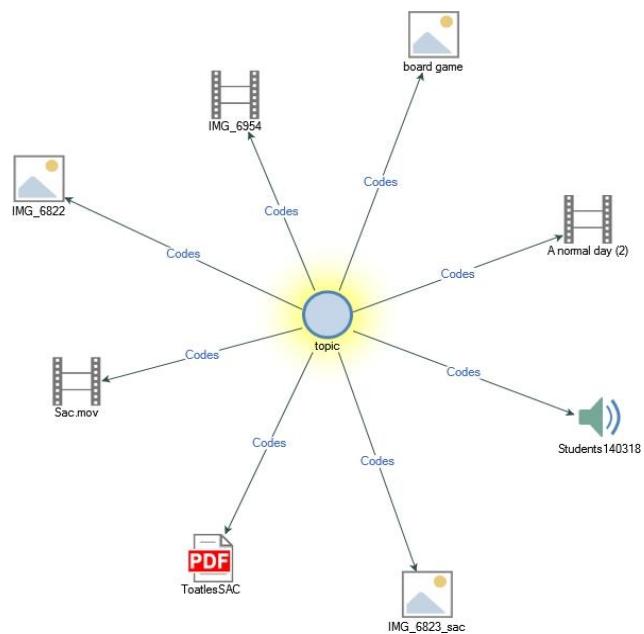


Figure 19. Topic code diagram



Figure 20. Agency photo



Figure 21. Autonomy code chart



Figure 22. Autonomy photo

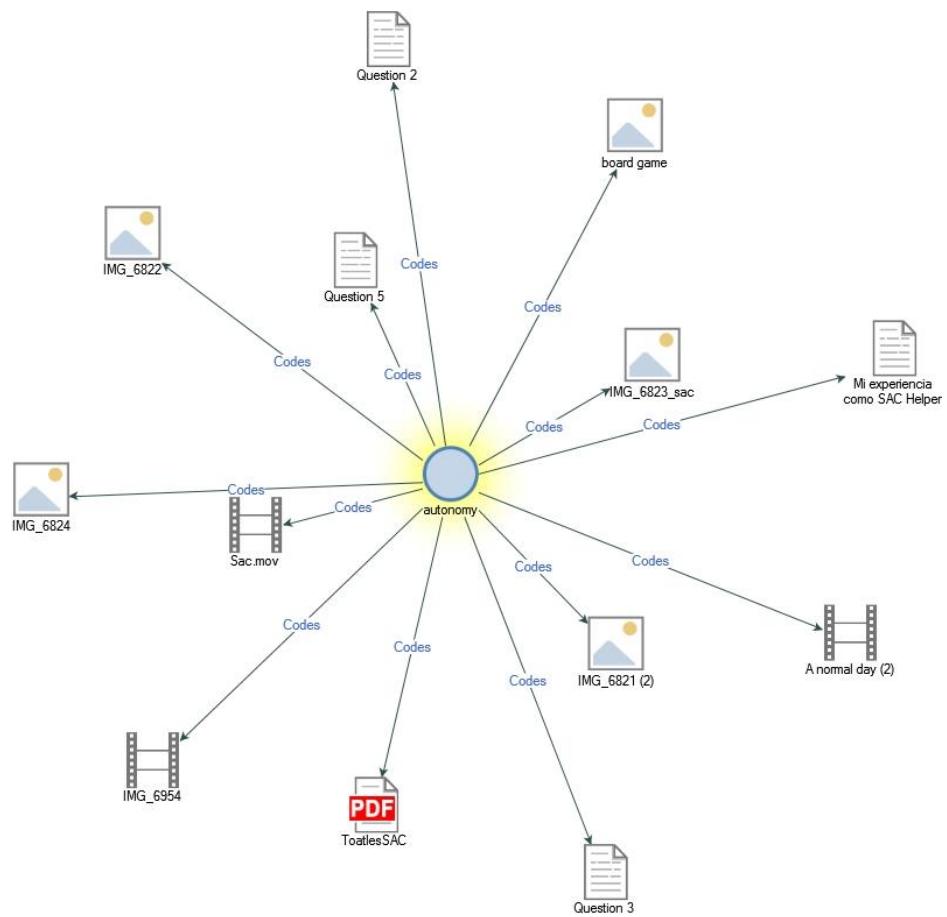


Figure 23. Autonomy diagram

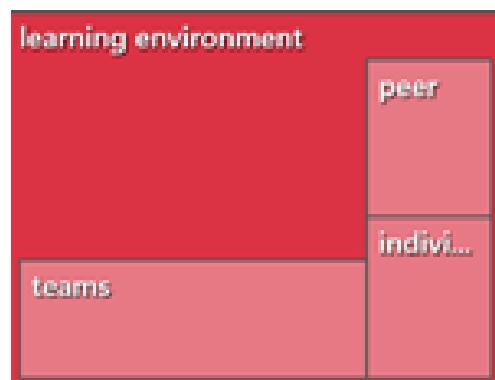


Figure 24. Learning environment code chart



Figure 25. The learning environment photo



Figure 26. Attitude code chart

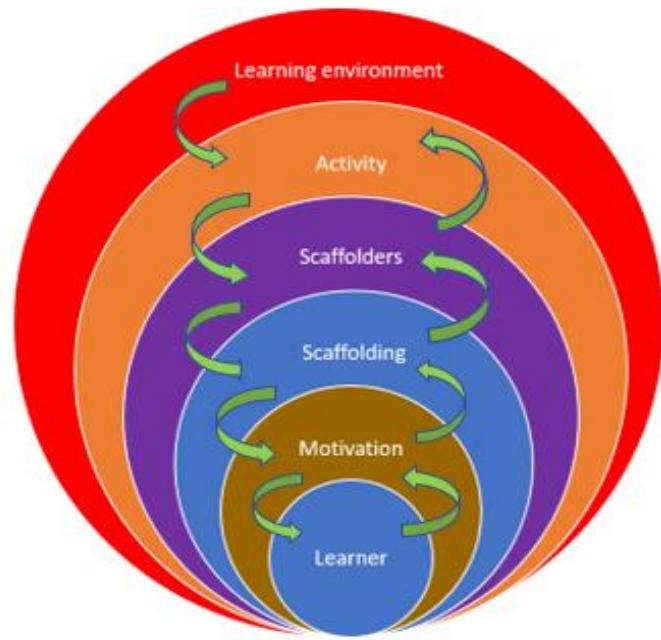


Figure 27. Elements visual

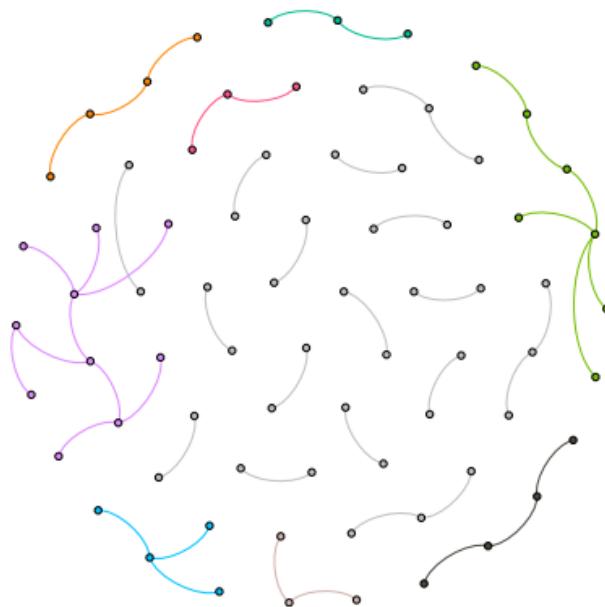


Figure 28. Learning network visual

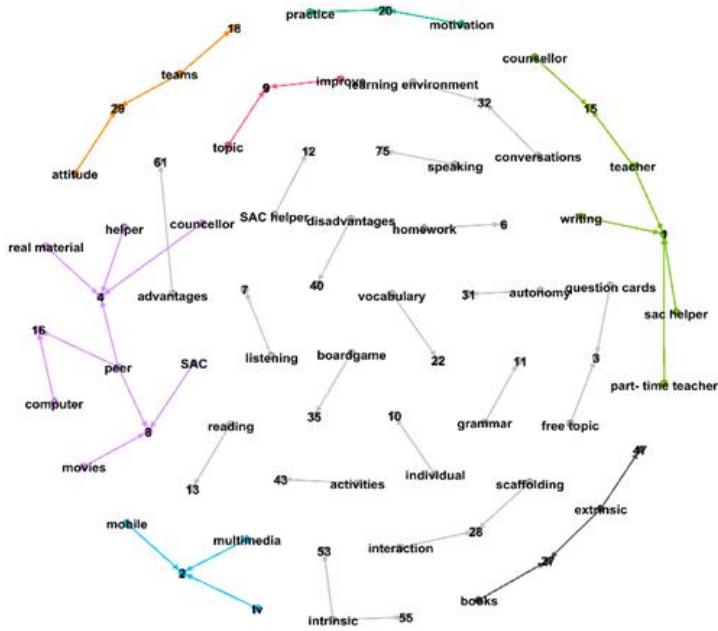


Figure 29. Clusters visual

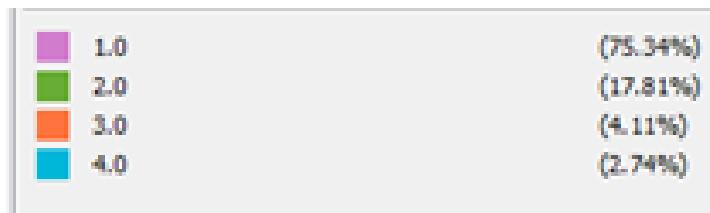
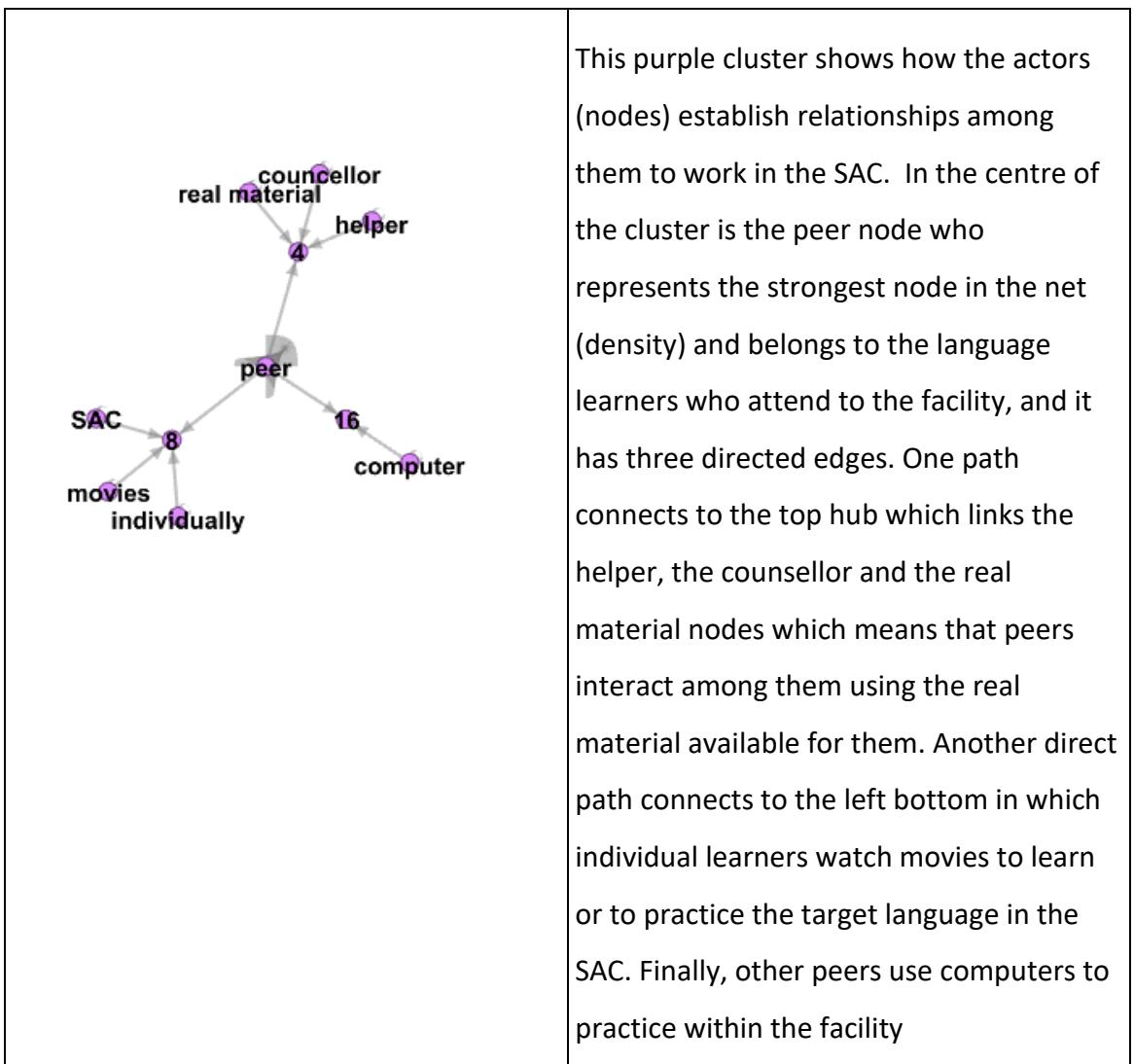
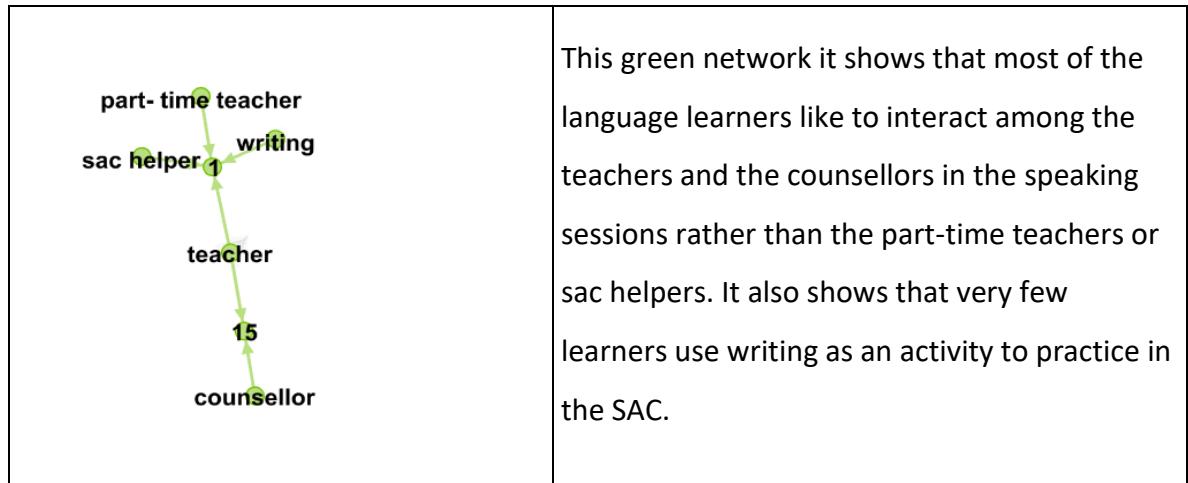
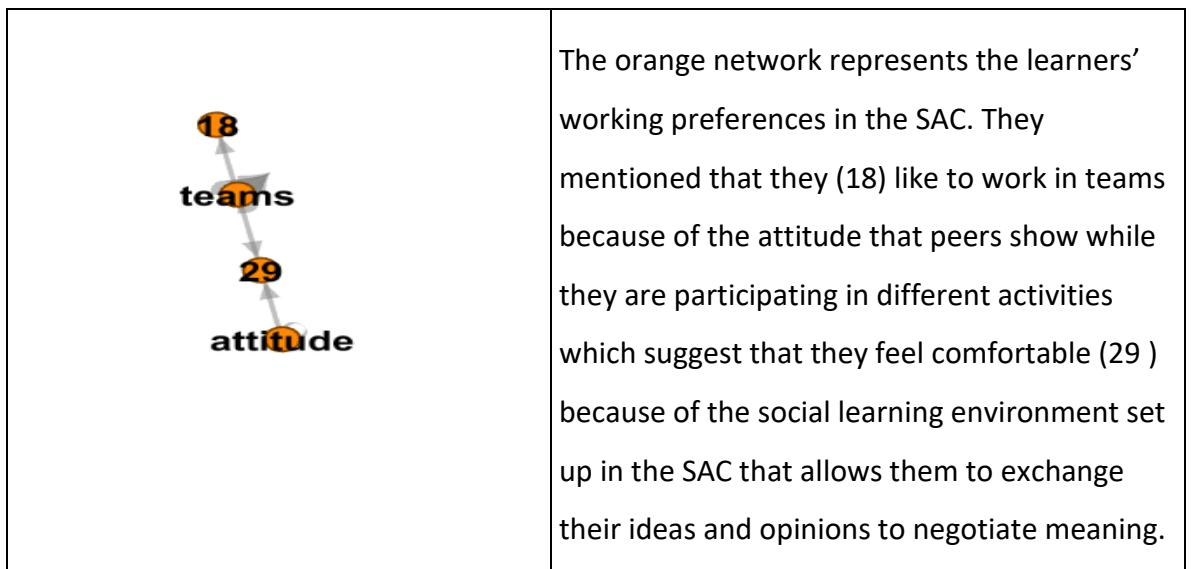
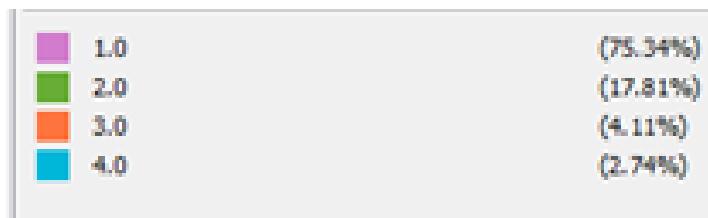


Figure 30. Centrality Chart



**Figure 31. Networks Chart****Figure 32. Centrality Chart**

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