

English and French Undergraduate Students' Development of Learner Autonomy

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San Juan de Pasto 2018

Nota de Responsabilidad

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Nota de Aceptación

Aprobado por el Comité Curricular y de Investigaciones del Departamento de Lingüística e Idiomas en cumplimiento de los requisitos exigidos por la Universidad de Nariño para optar al título de Licenciatura en Inglés-Francés.

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Agradecimientos

*Agradecemos a nuestro profesor y asesor, el Doctor
Jesús Alirio Bastidas, por sus enseñanzas y su guía
en la realización de este proyecto de investigación.*

*Sus palabras nos dieron la motivación
para emprender el camino investigativo
con integridad, responsabilidad y dedicación.*

Resumen

Este proyecto de investigación estudia dos conceptos asociados al aprendizaje de un idioma, los cuales son: la autonomía del aprendiz y la cultura colectivista. El objetivo de este estudio etnográfico es entender el proceso por el cual algunos estudiantes de la Licenciatura en Inglés – Francés de la Universidad de Nariño, desarrollan su autonomía de aprendizaje en el contexto sociocultural de Pasto, Colombia. Para llevar a cabo este proyecto investigativo, se usarán dos técnicas cualitativas para recolectar datos: una entrevista y observaciones participativas. Esto, para lograr una mayor objetividad en los resultados.

Abstract

This research project studies two concepts that are associated with language learning, which are: learner autonomy and collectivist culture. The purpose of this ethnographic study is to understand the process by which some students of English from the English and French program at the University of Nariño develop learner autonomy in the sociocultural context of Pasto, Colombia. To carry out this research project, two qualitative techniques, such as an interview and a participant observation, will be used to achieve more objectivity in the results.

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English and French Undergraduate Students' Development of Learner Autonomy

*“Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day.
Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.”
Ancient proverb*

Introduction

Independence and self-sufficiency are the key concepts conveyed in this adage's message. Learner autonomy in language learning can be seen as a great means to have a gratifying learning experience and to better perform in the language. However, there is a key aspect that is perhaps overlooked and that might have a great impact in the development of autonomy: the sociocultural context.

Some studies on learner autonomy have stated that the context is an affecting factor (Inomata, 2008; Xhaferi & Xhaferi, 2011), but that it can be overcome with the willingness of the students and the fostering of teachers through training programs (Ghout-Khenoune, 2014; Ramírez Espinosa, 2015). Now, even though there is important research done in the field, there are no studies that refer to both learner autonomy and culture in the city of Pasto, Colombia.

This study is important because it deals with a topic that has not been studied in our region: the role of culture in the development of learner autonomy. In addition, the findings of this research project could be relevant to researchers and teachers interested in understanding learner autonomy, so that they can help students improve their language learning performance. The purpose of this ethnographic study is to understand the process through which some students of the English and French program develop learner autonomy in the sociocultural city of Pasto.

Chapter I: The Research Problem

In every research study, stating the problem with clarity is essential. This chapter will focus on doing so with the problem description, the statement of the problem, the objectives, the significance, and the limitations of the study. Below, we report the description of the problem.

The Problem Statement

Learner autonomy is a concept that has been perceived by most western cultures as the ability to take control over one's own learning (Benson, 2001). Since learner autonomy originated and has been developed among cultures that are mainly individualist (European and North-American countries) (Hofstede, 2001), it is important to keep in mind that the perception and development of this term may vary from one sociocultural context to another. In Latin America, for example, most cultures are known to be collectivist. In such cultures, most values, objectives and development are intrinsically shared or connected within a group of people (Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, the concept of learner autonomy may be understood under different criteria.

_____What motivated this type of study was our observation of realizing that some of our classmates were autonomous learners and worked on their own, while many others were still dependant on the teachers' work in class. Also, this work can be a starting point in the research field of learner autonomy and its relationship with culture in the city of Pasto or in Colombia, as there have not been many studies that focus on such topic.

Significance

Autonomy is essential for a successful and satisfying learning experience. Even though there are many different theories and techniques that promote such kind of learning, there is little research focused on comprehending the role society plays in learner autonomy. Hence, by doing more local research on the topic, researchers, teachers, and students can have a better understanding and can contribute by testing the viability of such theories and techniques in the context. This study can have contributions at the practical and administrative levels:

Practically, the relevance of this study lies on the awareness it can evoke in teachers and students on learner autonomy, which may get ideas to help them be aware of the sociocultural influence when learning a second language. Moreover, the students who participate in this study will be aware of the concept of learner autonomy and how it is implemented in our university.

Administratively, this study is important because it promotes research on a topic that concerns language learning and teaching education, and in the sociocultural context we inhabit. The results of this type of study will provide information about the process some learners carry out to be autonomous, as well as information from learners who do not, so that the administrators of the English and French Program understand and make decisions about ways to promote and increase autonomous learning in some or all of the courses.

Also, this study is important for the state of art as it is a basis for future research on the field, especially in Pasto, where there has been little research on learner autonomy. And finally, in the Decree 2566 of September 2003 the National Ministry of Education states that universities must promote flexibility in curriculum, so that student formation be based on more independent work than classroom work. Therefore, students need to be guided in learner autonomy to take advantage of such flexibility (Viáfara González & Ariza Ariza, 2008).

Research Question

How do some students of the English and French program at the University of Nariño develop learner autonomy in the sociocultural context of Pasto, Colombia?

Subsiding questions:

- What are the notions some of these students of the English and French program have about autonomy and dependency in language learning?
- What are the ways in which they achieve learner autonomy while others are still dependant on the teachers' guidance?

Purpose and Objectives of the Study**Purpose**

To understand the process by which some students of English from the English and French program at the University of Nariño develop learner autonomy in the sociocultural context of Pasto, Colombia.

Specific objectives

To explore the notions some students of English from the English and French program have about autonomy and dependency in language learning.

To describe the ways in which some students of English from the English and French program achieve learner autonomy while others are still dependant on the teachers' guidance.

Limitations

Since the selection of interviewees will take place during academic activities in the university, a possible limitation for this study would be that students do not show interest in participating or think that it will affect their academic performance. Another limitation could occur after collecting the data, as the interpretation given to such information may not be accurate. To overcome this, students will be appropriately and respectfully asked to participate voluntarily, remarking that it will not affect them in any way. Also, after collecting the data, member check will take place in order to have an accurate interpretation and understanding of the answers provided.

Chapter II: The Theoretical Framework

Every research project needs to be supported by a theoretical framework. The first section of this chapter focuses on the key concepts for the understanding of this research project: learner autonomy and collectivist culture; and in the second section, the antecedents are presented and organized by relevance to the research objectives of the study.

Learner Autonomy.

Various authors have provided definitions of learner autonomy. Holec, for example, (1981, p.3) expresses: *“To say of a learner that he is autonomous is therefore to say that he is capable of taking charge of his own learning and nothing more”*. Later, Little defined autonomy as *“a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning”* (1991, p.4). But a simple and straightforward definition is provided by Benson who states that *“Autonomy can be broadly defined as the capacity to take control over one’s own learning”* (2001, p.2). However, Sheerin (1997) stated that *Autonomous Learning* is not a process that learners must make on their own. Teachers can play an important role when it comes to guide learners into the process of becoming autonomous language learners. On the whole, it can be said that learner autonomy is the characteristic of a person who, while being taught in an educational environment, is able to continue learning independently.

Origin of the concept. The idea of learner autonomy emerged in the late 1960s and the concept was established in 1971 when the Council of Europe’s Modern Languages Project was developed. Yves Châlon founded CRAPEL (*Centre de Recherche et d’Application en Langues*)

at the University of Nancy in France, which was a product from the project, and he was considered the father of autonomy in language learning. After his death in 1972, Henri Holec became the new leader of CRAPEL. In 1982, he contributed with a key project report for the field (Benson, 2001).

Importance of autonomous learning. Though there are some social and economic arguments that favor autonomous language learning (Benson, 2001), the main reason is still pedagogical and learner-centered. In like manner, Benson states that “*the development of autonomy implies better language learning*” (p.2). When language learners become autonomous, they define the path in which they use the tools gained in autonomous learning to achieve their own personal or academic purposes and development. (Argüelles Pabón & Nagles García, 2004)

Characteristics of autonomous language learners. Outstanding autonomous language learners have a personal style or learning strategy, state objectives to accomplish in the language actively, completely enroll in the target language process, guess the meaning and usage of the target language, monitor their learning process by taking into account form and content, take into account the language rules and system to avoid or correct errors, and take the native speaker role (Omaggio, 1978, cited in Wenden, 1991).

Littlewood (1999) contributes to the field of learner autonomy by distinguishing between proactive and reactive autonomy. Proactive autonomy is directed by the learner where he/she is able to manage the content to be learned (along with objectives, methods, and evaluation), while reactive autonomy is encouraged by others. In both types of autonomy the learner is able to intrinsically achieve his/her goals, only that in the latter he/she needs initiative or guidance in the content.

Learner autonomy and related concepts. Some concepts concerning out-of-class learning are gaining popularity nowadays, therefore it is pertinent to differentiate them from this study which has been based upon learner autonomy. These concepts are Self-regulated learning, Self-directed learning, Self-instruction, and Self-access.

Self-regulated learning is a term that originated in the educational psychology field and Zimmerman (1989) stated that self-regulated students are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in learning. When self-regulated learning and learner autonomy are compared, it can be seen that they do not differ as much since both take into account active engagement, goal-directed behavior, metacognitive skills, intrinsic motivation, learner characteristics, and learning environment (Murray, 2014). Despite this, there are few differences that cannot be overlooked: first, Benson says that “the concept of self-regulation is somewhat narrower than the concept of autonomy” (2001, p.41), and may be due to the fact that self-regulated learning has its roots in educational psychology research carried out in the 1960s focusing on strategies and cognitive and metacognitive learning. And learner autonomy was developed in Europe in the late 1970s, becoming a different approach for language learning that focused on learners’ intrinsic values and motivation according to Murray. Second, because of the different origins and perspectives they were conceived in, Murray (2014) suggests that differences may be seen in a social dimension. Thus, for Zimmerman, self-regulatory development “appears to take root in socially supportive environments” (1998, p.11 cited in Benson, 2001, p.41), and Murray supports this idea stating that “in SRL there seems to be a general tendency for the teacher to set the learning task” (p.323), meanwhile, learner autonomy is open to have guidance from teachers or peers, but it also expects the learners to assume responsibility for determining the learning task.

Self-directed learning is a term that was used in adult education, initially it refers to the “learner’s desire or preference for assuming responsibility for learning” (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, p.22-3 cited in Benson, 2001, p.33). This learning approach implies that people are not only intrinsically responsible but also know their objectives, content, methods, and evaluation. They also manage a non-institutional learning process (only under his/her own direction). Although this view of self-directed learning matches with Littlewood’s idea of proactive autonomy, learner autonomy in general can be perceived as the global capacity to intrinsically be aware and be an active participant of their own learning process that is open to work under any kind of guidance or collaboration without developing dependence.

In *self-instruction*, learners “*study independently of direct contact with teachers [...] they study languages on their own, primarily with the aid of ‘teach yourself’ materials.*” Little (1990, p.7 cited in Benson, 2001, p.48) clarifies the misconception from the two concepts by saying that “*Autonomy is not a synonym for self-instruction; in other words, autonomy is not limited to learning without a teacher.*”

Self-access is defined by Sheerin (1991) as the process of describing materials that are organized so that students can select and work by themselves. Gardner & Miller (1999) clarify that self-access learning can be better seen as the integration of a number of elements in order to get a unique learning environment, rather than as a mere materials collection or organization system. Therefore, self-access can be taken as a means to develop learner autonomy, self-instruction, or as a unique approach of language learning in self-access centres.

Promoting learner autonomy.

There are three important aspects the learner can use to foster autonomy. First, *self-reports* in which the learner collects information about his/her experience while learning a language through introspection, retrospection, and spoken report (Wenden, 1991). Second, *diaries and evaluation sheets* “which offer students the possibility to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning, identifying any problems they run into and suggesting solutions” (Thanasoulas, 2000). Third, *persuasive communication* which aims to change learner’s attitudes, evaluations, and beliefs of a situation.

Learner autonomy can be applied effectively if the teacher is willing to change his classroom environment for a more learner-centered one where students can actually control their learning process, entirely or partially. According to Ramírez Espinosa (2015), learner autonomy can be a syllabus itself and, as he proved in his study, task-based learning is a good basis for its development.

Learner autonomy and Metacognitive strategies. Language learning strategies are seen as the instruments by which learners are aware of how they learn, and with which they strengthen their learning. There are many learning strategies (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies), but it is important to remark that metacognitive strategies are considered to be the most suitable because they allow students to directly take control over their own learning process. As a matter of fact, metacognitive strategies are the ones used by language learners to regulate their learning including aspects such as planning (setting objectives), monitoring (becoming aware of the learning process), and evaluating (focusing on results) (Wenden, 1991).

As stated in Dang (2010) when referring to a psychological perspective that considers behavioral and metacognitive elements to be the main components of learner autonomy, metacognitive strategies have the capacity to make learners aware of how they learn, leading them to take advantage of such event by controlling the process. In other words, metacognitive strategies relate to learner autonomy as they share a main goal: to allow learners to manage their own language learning.

As language learning strategies focus on the process within students' minds, learner autonomy provides the theoretical and procedural basis to establish a plan for an autonomous learning practice. This plan would be based on metacognitive strategies as they provide self-cognitive awareness and self-directed learning process. According to Oxford (1990), learner strategies encourage self-direction which allows learners to be autonomous and independent from teachers or tutors.

The previous review of the literature shows that the concept of learner autonomy was originated in Europe and developed in the US as well. Therefore, this concept is supported by an individualist cultural perspective. Since our study will be conducted in a Latin American country, it is important to refer to its culture, which tends to be collectivist.

Individualist and Collectivist cultures.

Hofstede (2001) talks about 'mental programming' (p.1) that can be observed in human behavior (words and deeds). Such 'mental programs' can be categorized in: universal, collective, and individual. The first referring to the instinctive behavior, the second to the traits shared among a group of people, and the third to the personal qualities that are intrinsic to a singular person. When we allude to an individualist culture, on the one hand, we address the society

characterized by its individualist mental programming, where personal goals are prioritized over collective goals. People look for independency from family, colleagues, and community to achieve their unique identity. On the other hand, a collectivist culture uses the collective mental programming, which can be seen in communities where people work together to achieve a common goal. People share and value traditions, and may be dependant to one another (Hofstede, 2001).

The influence these concepts have on learning is confirmed by Hofstede (2001) when he says that: *“The relationship between the individual and the collectivity in human society is not only a matter of ways of living together, [...] it affects [...] the structure and functioning of many institutions aside from the family: educational, religious, political, and utilitarian.”* (p.210)

Learner autonomy and Culture. The sociocultural perspective, according to Dang (2010) construes learner autonomy as a socially-shaped variable which is constructed during people’s negotiation with their own living environment.

Autonomy in language learning is conditioned by two important aspects: the first one known as “personal practice” which refers to the personal action an individual takes to become a responsible learner; the second one known as “situational practice” which refers to the environment in which the learning process takes places, its limitations, and its influence in the learner’s behavior towards the language being learnt. It could be said that autonomy is developed taking into account the impact personal and situational (cultural) practices have on the learner. (Dang, 2010).

Learner autonomy and Collectivist culture.

The cultural background influences significantly the students' performance in the language as well as their learning styles. Ho, Holmes, and Cooper (2004) state that students from collectivist cultures are expected to learn "how to do" something from one single right perspective. Also, they would not give their opinions openly if the teacher has not authorized to do so, but they would cooperate and support the teacher most of the time. This characteristic represents a major step backwards in language learning as it inhibits students from taking active part in their own learning process.

In that sense, when students are not encouraged enough to take action in their own language learning process, developing autonomy is a mandatory task that requires not only the students but also the teachers to overcome their sociocultural boundaries and to take active part of the process effectively. To sum up, students should not be limited to learn from the teacher and the teacher should not be static when imparting knowledge.

Research Antecedents

The following is a compilation of some studies carried out in different countries which focus on language learner autonomy and provide some background to understand and support research on this topic.

In 2008, Inomata held a qualitative study named "*Japanese Students' Autonomy in Learning English as a Foreign Language in Out-of-School Settings*". Its purpose was to explore Japanese students' autonomy in EFL learning in out-of-school settings with an emphasis on

social contexts. To achieve this, the researcher tutored, observed, and interviewed three middle class, high school students (two male, one female). All three students reported that they encountered English learning at school for the first time, and had practiced it solely in-class due to the heavy academic work they had to accomplish. Inomata's findings suggested that educators and researchers should consider both in-school and out-of-school settings to understand learner autonomy development. When promoting such capacity, teachers should: give importance to critical thinking about the social structure and cultural context in relation to language learning; not assume that students lack autonomy, so, instead of fostering learner autonomy, educators should negotiate their poorly or well-developed autonomy within and beyond their communities and educational environment; consider that the process of fostering autonomy can be most effective through the involvement of others (teacher guidance and collaborative learning). As a conclusion the author suggests that *"Providing informal spaces where students can escape from school values has strong potential to develop their proactive autonomy. Instead of establishing other systems within school contexts, policy makers should explore ways to support community-based activities."* (p.138)

The study is relevant to this research because it entails the importance sociocultural background has on learner autonomy. Also, the study was based on a qualitative approach using interviews and observation, which is similar to the method of our project. Finally, the setting where the researcher took action (Japan) can be defined as a collectivist culture (Hofstede, 2001).

Xhaferi & Xhaferi (2011) carried out a study named *"Developing Learner Autonomy in Higher Education in Macedonia"* with the objective of identifying the kinds of learning strategies used by South East European University students. Additionally, they wanted to know the teaching techniques that can promote learner autonomy to establish a level of autonomy

among language learners. To develop the research, 80 students and 20 language teachers of English, German, Albanian and Macedonian participated. The students' ages ranged from 18-23 years old, and they were both male and female with varying ethnic backgrounds such as Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish and Roman. A students' questionnaire was given to the participants on the first stage of the study which was aimed to figure out their attitude towards autonomous learning and the strategies they used. On the second stage, a learner diary was provided to 30 students as a tool to monitor their own learning. On the final stage, a teacher questionnaire was given to all teachers to find out what teaching techniques could promote learner autonomy. The results of the students' questionnaire showed that though all the students thought autonomy in learning was an important matter, they still believed that they should follow the teacher's instructions. In the same way, most of the students revealed that grammar and vocabulary are difficult to learn and they expressed that good learners are autonomous learners. The learner diaries showed that students were highly motivated to learn English but to do so, they required help from the teacher. The teacher questionnaire revealed that teachers consider portfolios, learner diaries, and vocabulary notebooks as techniques to promote autonomy in language students. As a final conclusion it could be said that teachers need to implement autonomy in their daily lessons. Traditional methodologies such as Macedonia's, serve as an example of how it is important to break the boundaries of culture and explore new possibilities of learning languages.

The study contributes to our research because it explains that even though students are aware of the importance of learner autonomy, there is a cultural factor that makes them rely on a teacher in order to learn successfully. This study also suggests that the context affects the

students' behavior towards autonomous language learning, and it also provides with valuable information about the influence collectivist cultures have on learner autonomy.

In 2014, Researcher Linda Ghout-Khenoune presented a paper called "*Learner Autonomy and EFL Learning: A Study of Algerian Learners' Readiness for Autonomous Learning*" in the Learners and Teachers as Companions on the Road to Autonomy conference (Istanbul, Turkey). The problem focused on answering the following question: Are 3rd year students of EFL at the University Abderrahmane Mira of Béjaïa ready to be involved in autonomous learning? In order to do this, she used a survey based on a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree) to measure students attitudes towards the development of autonomy in language learning in the students' motivation level, the use of learning strategies, and the perceptions of their own and their teachers' responsibilities in language learning. One hundred and ten (110) BA students of English from the Department of English at University Abderrahmane Mira of Béjaïa (Algeria) were asked to participate in the project, and 68 of them accepted. The results proved that claims about Algerian EFL students being less autonomous than other learners were true, stating that they are passive, dependent, and unmotivated. The researchers suggest that in order to enhance learner autonomy, a step-by-step learner training program is required.

This study contributes to this research because it makes a connection between the social characteristics of a specific group of people and the performance in autonomous language learning. It also specifies that to foster learner autonomy in collectivist contexts, it is necessary to implement special programs or syllabi to prepare students in learning strategies to become independent language learners.

Finally, Alexánder Ramírez Espinosa (2015), published a research named “*Fostering Autonomy Through Syllabus Design: A Step-by-Step Guide for Success*” in the Colombian HOW journal. Its problem focused on the development of a step-by-step guide for designing syllabi based on the development of language learner autonomy. It was carried out through action-research with the participation of 20 freshmen from the undergraduate program of Foreign Languages: English and French, at Escuela de Ciencias del Lenguaje in the Universidad del Valle. The syllabus design was based on Cotterall’s elements (1995) and principles (2000), and authentic material and evaluation were implemented. The author suggests that for a successful autonomy-promoting plan, it is important the association and cooperation from the host institution, the willingness of the teacher to empower students in their learning process, and the readiness of learners to be active and independent.

This article is helpful for this study because it demonstrates that learner autonomy can be successfully applied when using approaches such as task-based learning, which “proved to be a great ally of autonomous classrooms” (2015, p.123). The article is also relevant to this study because it was carried out in Colombia, which establishes a starting point on future research in contexts alike.

As a summary of the results of the previous antecedents, we restate that the sociocultural context has a significant influence on the development of learner autonomy. We highlight the importance of creating a curriculum or a syllabus that takes into account the context to use the appropriate learning strategies to foster learner autonomy. It is also important to say that there was no evidence of local research on *language learner autonomy*. For this reason, it is considered pertinent to carry out this study in order to provide a wider overview on the topic in our context.

In this chapter, we have reviewed the most relevant concepts involving the research problem of this investigation, not only by giving details about them, but also by illustrating their connection and relevance to the field of language learning in a context such as Pasto. Also, we have presented some research studies which contribute to the field and support the ideas of this research project. In the following chapter, the research method will be explained.

Chapter III: The Research Method

After reviewing the theoretical framework in Chapter II, we now focus on the research method. This chapter will include the research paradigm, method and techniques; the population, sample and setting; the procedure; the validation of the study, and the ethical issues.

Research Paradigm

According to Kuhn (cited in Rodríguez Sosa, 2014), a paradigm is “*a set of beliefs and attitudes as a shared worldview by a group of researchers that specifically implies a certain methodology in the practice of investigation*” (p. 23). Since this study seeks to understand the process by which learner autonomy is developed in a collectivist culture, it will be developed upon the naturalistic or interpretative paradigm through a qualitative approach to data analysis.

The naturalistic or interpretative paradigm was chosen because its principles are seen as guiding points that are meant to comprehend or understand a research problem. Reality, through this paradigm, is perceived subjectively. Furthermore, the qualitative approach to data analysis was selected to understand human actions and motives in a sympathetic and holistic way (Rodríguez Sosa, 2014). In addition, the following qualitative assumptions will be taken into account in order to get a better understanding of the problem (Creswell, 1994):

1. Qualitative research occurs in natural settings, where human behavior and events occur.
2. It is based on the assumptions. Theory and hypotheses are not established a priori.
3. The researcher is the primary instrument in data collection instead of a mechanism.
4. Emerging data is descriptive. It uses words and pictures more than numbers.
5. It focuses on the different participants' perceptions and experiences.
6. Researchers are interested in understanding how events take place.

7. Interpretations are made upon particulars of a case, rather than generalizations.
8. Meanings and interpretations are unpredictable as they are constructed during the human data collection.
9. Data is not quantifiable as it is based on tacit knowledge.
10. It uses trustworthiness rather than validity and reliability to achieve believability in the research process.

Research Method

The study will be based on an ethnographic method. Such method allows the description and interpretation of behavior, customs, and ways of life in a sociocultural group (Harris, 1968 cited in Creswell, 1998). This method is suitable for this research study as its main purpose is to understand how students from a collectivist culture achieve learner autonomy and to describe such process. Besides, Benson (2001) stated that any research on learner autonomy “*should include an ‘ethnographic’ dimension in which researchers should gather as much contextual information as possible*” (p.187)

Research Techniques

In order to achieve reliable and trustful results in this research, two qualitative techniques will be used: an interview and a participant observation.

Interviews “aim to make a series of questions between the teacher and the students, between an observer and an student, between students, and between the teacher and an observer” (Bastidas, 1994, p. 128). The interview’s objective is to obtain rich information, useful for the ongoing research from participants. Interviews can take place in a face-to-face encounter, in an online meeting or by a telephone call. The interviewer jots down or records the obtained information for later analysis.

A face-to-face interview will take place as the first technique. It is called “Autonomous English Learning Interview” which is divided into two parts. The first part seeks to acknowledge the notions of learner autonomy and the second seeks to understand how the process of autonomy in language learning takes place. It is based on the questionnaire adapted by Yan (2007) from Cotterall’s study about learner beliefs and attitudes in 1995, and from Xu et al’s (2004) Non-English Major Undergraduates’ Autonomous English Learning Investigation Questionnaire, which is derived from Dickinson’s (1993). This technique helps the study to obtain detailed qualitative responses about the students’ feelings and opinions freely and focused on the research topic. Such responses will be rich in content as they provide a deep outlook on the notions, definitions, assumptions and doubts on learner autonomy.

Participant observation is a technique that enables the researcher to engage actively in a social situation. The observer can make use of all of his/her senses and be reflective at all times. It includes paying careful attention to the details, events, and interactions in a specific community (Sampieri et al, 2014). Some of the objectives of this technique include exploration and description of settings, cultures, communities, and aspects of life (Eddy, 2008; Patton, 2001; Grinnell, 1997 cited in Sampieri et al, 2014). It was chosen as a second technique to develop this study because it allows the researcher to be involved in the setting and to become an insider in the process of collecting data (Creswell, 1998).

With this technique, the study will have rich data concerning the participants’ behavior, motivation, and strategies towards learning in and out-of-class settings within the university campus. Such information will be of great relevance to understand the process of learning, the role of learner autonomy in language learning, and the role sociocultural context has on both.

Population, Sample, and Setting

This section describes the characteristics of the population, participants, and the place where the study will be held.

Population. The research is going to be carried out in the University of Nariño, which is a public university located in Pasto, Colombia. There are approximately 14,000 male and female students and their ages oscillate between 16 and 25 years old. They belong to an average of low social status (1 and 2 strata). They come from varied Latin American ethnicities. Most students are exclusively enrolled in the university but some others work and study at the same time. In addition, in the English and French program, there are 400 students approximately.

Purposeful Sampling. This study will be conducted with students of the English and French program because the phenomenon we have observed occurs within this context. Ten students, two from each of the semesters first, third, fifth, seventh, and ninth, will participate. The ages of the sample groups oscillate between 16 and 26 years old. They belong to an average of low and medium social status (1, 2, and 3 strata). Most of these students do not have a job additional to their studies. Some students come from public high schools and they have a varied Latin American ethnicity. In addition, two courses will be observed with the permission of the teachers.

Setting. The study will be held in the Acacias seat of the University of Nariño, which is located by the Panamericana Avenue. The Acacias seat is a small location. It holds the faculties of Education and Human Sciences, home of the English and Spanish, and English and French programs. Additionally, students from other faculties come to the Acacias seat to take English classes as it is one of the requirements to fulfill their degrees. The Linguistics and Languages Department also offers English, French, Portuguese, and Italian courses to the public in general.

Many high school students also take English classes in The Acacias seat before enrolling in the university.

Data Collection

The research will be carried out in different stages. First, permission will be asked to the teachers and the students of the first, third, fifth, seventh, and ninth semester of the English and French program to make the participant observations and interviews. These techniques will be used by both researchers to assure triangulation of data collection. Once permission is granted and students agree to voluntarily participate, the first part of the '*Autonomous English Learning Interview*' will be carried out to explore the notions students have on learner autonomy. The researchers will act as interviewers with each of the participants for no longer that 30 minutes. Such interviews will be audio-recorded to facilitate the data analysis. Then, the participant observations will take place. We will observe how students interact, learn, share, and practice the language inside and outside the classroom in the university context. The observation will be done by one or both researchers taking notes on the activities done by the participants, which may or may not be developed under the influence of autonomy or the culture. Later, the second part of the interview will take place to get to know about how the participants' learning process occurs, and how they become autonomous.

Validity of the Study

Triangulation

Triangulation is defined as “cross--checking of data using multiple data sources or multiple data collection procedures” (Leung, 2015). Triangulation is important because it

guarantees the obtention of trustful data through the use of different techniques. It also refers to the use of different types of data and researches to strengthen the quality of the findings.

Member Check

It can be described as a research criterion where “the provisional report (case) is taken back to the site and subjected to the scrutiny of the persons who provided information” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 236). Member check is important to have a greater quality on the data gathered from participants; it makes possible the correction of misunderstandings and the accuracy of the answers. Feedback will be delivered to each participant after the analysis of the interviews to make sure that the information provided and the interpretation are correct.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, it is a group of criteria by which a study can be trustful and reliable. Guba (1981) proposes 4 criteria to be considered: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Trustworthiness is important for this study because it represents the qualitative research form of validation and reliability of the research work.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the interview and observations will be analyzed following the steps that were synthesized and explained by Bastidas (2002): organization of data, identification of preliminary ideas, generation of categories, topics or patterns, categorization (Coding), testing of emerging hypotheses (Marshall & Rossman, 1995), interpretation of data, and reporting the results. Also we will make use of constant comparison, as a method used to simultaneously collect and analyze data on every stage of the research to develop quality concepts that can serve as a good basis for further investigation (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). It is important for this study because it allows us to compare and review previous collected data with the new one to make

sure that there is a consolidation of the concepts, categories, and theory and a good interpretation of them.

_____The data obtained from the interviews will be extracted, interpreted, and checked through feedback with each participant to make sure that the collected information and latter interpretations match up. After each observation, the data obtained will be analyzed, interpreted, and compared to assure the information is clear. Finally, the analysis of all the data will be synthesized and the member check of all interpretations made will be applied.

In the organization of data, these will be assembled and organized chronologically and classified by specific techniques. In the identification of the preliminary ideas, these will be extracted, reflected, coded initially, and will serve to generate partial qualitative assumptions. Also, as part of the constant comparison process, we will look for recurring ideas, topics or patterns and code them in the form of phrases or questions to facilitate the generation of categories, topics or patterns. Next, we will conceptualize the previous phrases or questions for a better understanding. The resulting categories will be organized and explained to avoid confusion. In the testing of emerging hypotheses (Marshall & Rossman, 1995) or qualitative assumptions, we will look for information that contradicts the established patterns or the assumptions made, so that there is coherence and feasibility in the theorization process. We will reevaluate the data, the categorization, and the qualitative assumptions to reassure they are credible, accurate, and trustful. Afterwards, we will relate and compare the data between the different participants, taking into account the theory surrounding the research topic, so that we will be able to generate doubts and questions for the reader. Our interpretations will be based on connections, inferences, and the member check of the interpretations. Metaphors and visual aids will be used to understand complex matters. Finally, we will write a report of results from the

data gathered in the interviews and observations along with the interpretation focused on the participants' points of view and the conclusions we come to.

Ethical Issues

This section provides information that supports the concern of ethical issues that will be respected during the research process. First, copyright will not be infringed and it will be respected by making the respective quotations, citations and bibliographic references. Second, proper and required permissions or solicitations for the research project development will be asked to the University of Nariño. Third, the identity of the participants and the Institution will remain anonymous unless there is permission to use their names. Fourth, only voluntary participation will be taken into account for the study. A report containing such approval will be attached to make evidence of this. Fifth, we will make sure that the study will not cause any psychological or physical injury to the participants, the institution will not be harmed either.

Finally, at the end of the study, a written report of the research will be handed in to the institution along with a gratitude letter.

In this chapter we have presented the research design which included the research paradigm, method and techniques; the population, purposeful sample, and setting; data collection; validation criteria; data analysis, and the ethical issues. After collecting the data, they will be analyzed, reported, and discussed in the next chapter.

Administrative Aspects

——— **Timetable**

The study will be carried out between February of 2019 and May of 2019 as it is indicated in the following table:

Activities	Time	February	March	April	May
1. Application and interpretation of the first part of the interview on learner autonomy		***			
2. Improvement of research plan			***		
3. Participant observation and constant analysis and comparison in groups of first, third, fifth, seventh, and ninth semester.				***	
4. Application and interpretation of the second part of interview				***	
5. Analysis of obtained data and member check				***	
6. Report of results					***

Budget

ITEM	COST
Flashdrive to keep the collected information	\$ 25,000 COP
Transportation (from researchers' residences to the University of Nariño)	\$ 30,000 COP
Printing of reports	\$ 10,000 COP

	TOTAL	\$ 65,000 COP
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Annexes

Data Gathering Instruments

There are two instruments to be used for data gathering in order to accomplish triangulation: an interview and a participant observation.

“Autonomous English Learning Interview”

Good morning, we selected you to help us answering some questions about learner autonomy. Is it okay if we record your answers? (If not: Is it okay if my partner writes your answers down?) Don't worry about your name because this interview is anonymous and it is for a research study. So we can start. Please respond to each question as detailed as you can, and if you have any doubts, let us know and we'll clarify the question.

PART 1

1. What do you understand by 'Learner Autonomy'? What does an 'autonomous learner' do?
2. How would you develop learner autonomy?
3. What could be the benefits of having learner autonomy?

PART 2

4. What do you think the teacher should do to teach well?
5. What strategies or activities do you use to learn English?
6. How do you monitor what you have learned in the language?
7. Do you set objectives to enhance your English learning? How?
8. Do you monitor your learning strategies or activities to check if they work? How?
9. Do you take into account the objectives proposed by the teacher in your learning process outside the classroom?

We really appreciate your support. We will contact you again to make sure that we understood your responses. We thank you for your help and your time.

Participant observation

Date: _____ **Place:** _____ **Observer:**

Starting time: _____ **Finishing time:** _____

Observed people:

Episode:

Description:

Notes: