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STUDENTS' SELF-DIRECTED VIRTUAL LEARNING TARGET
LANGUAGE IV EXPERIENCES IN THE FALL 2021 PERIOD AT LEI
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**STUDENTS' SELF-DIRECTED VIRTUAL LEARNING TARGET LANGUAGE IV
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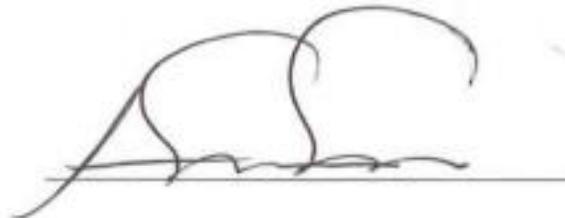
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INDEX

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	5
DEDICATIONS.....	6
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	7
1.1 Introduction.....	7
1.2 Justification.....	9
1.3 Research questions.....	10
1.4 General objective.....	10
1.5 Specific objectives.....	11
1.6 Premise.....	11
1.7 Methodology.....	11
1.8 Limitations.....	12
1.9 Implications.....	12
1.10 Research organization.....	13
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMWORK.....	14
2.1 Online learning.....	14
2.1.1 Definition.....	14
2.1.2 Advantages and disadvantages of Online learning.....	14
2.1.3 Online learning vs traditional learning.....	16
2.1.4 Online learning during the pandemic.....	17
2.1.5 Blended learning and its importance.....	18
2.2 Online language learning.....	22
2.3 Self-directed learning.....	23
2.3.1 Definition.....	23
2.3.2 Self-directed learning in the adults learning theory.....	24
2.3.3 Metacognitive awareness and SDL.....	25
2.3.4 Motivation in SLD.....	26
2.3.5 Interaction in language learning and SDL in online classes.....	27
2.3.6 The self-determination theory.....	28
2.3.7 Self-directed learning in University Students.....	29
2.3.8 Its relationship with online learning.....	30
2.3.9 Elements of SDL.....	31
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY.....	33

3.1 Setting	33
3.2 Methodology	33
3.3 Instruments	35
3.4 Procedures	38
3.5 Data analysis	38
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS	39
4.1 Online learning	39
4.2 Online learning vs traditional learning	42
4.3 Advantages and disadvantages of online learning	44
4.4 Synchronous and asynchronous learning	45
4.5 Self-directed learning	47
4.6 Interaction	50
4.7 Motivation	52
4.8 Conclusions	54
CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSIONS	56
5.1 Research context	56
5.2 Conclusions	58
5.3 Research questions	59
5.4 Implications	64
5.5 Limitations	64
5.6 Directions for further investigation	65
REFERENCES	67
APPENDIX 1	84
APPENDIX 2	86
APPENDIX 3	87

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The virus COVID-19 took an essential place in our society since the end of 2019 when it became a global "trend" claiming thousands of lives in Wuhan, China; it was not until 2020 that it gained more territory all around Europe and America, being officially declared global pandemic on march 11th of the same year by the World Health Organization (2020); having as victims people of all ages, bordering us to take control measures: the use of masks, antibacterial gel, disinfect every surface constantly, and the most significative: the lockdown. The educational institutions were forced to close their doors and look for an alternative to continue their programs as well as possible. This is the reason why online classes were needed, affecting more than one billion students worldwide (Colman, H. 2021).

Even though this modality was already employed in the most universities, 22 out of 25 only in the USA (Colman, H. 2021), the students who had never tried it seemed to have a hard time getting used to it, facing different types of hardships such as gadgets shortages and crashing systems which can edge them to frustration, connectivity issues that led them to lose the rhythm of the class, along with the fact that many teachers and even students were not acquainted with technology; also the psychological aspect was an essential factor since students were used to face-to-face interaction (Plitnichenko, L. 2021); and finally, online classes provided students with a more significant role and responsibility in the learning process, where they must be autonomous, they had to leave the traditional way and start managing their time and their learning, that is to say, make use of the self-directed learning.

Self-directed learning is a process where an individual takes the initiative with or without others' help to diagnose their learning needs, formulate the learning goal, identify the learning resources, choose and apply the learning strategy, and evaluate the learning outcome. (Knowles, 1975; 1990); this concept is usually taken along with self-regulated learning, which refers to students' ability to control themselves while trying to achieve specific goals during the learning process. It consists of many strategies, including goal setting, self-efficacy, goal orientation, metacognitive monitoring, and self-evaluation. (Zimmerman, 2008; Gibbons, 2002). Both are important in virtual classes because, according to Kauma, S., & Usa, I. (2016), this allows students to do a task while combining skills with bias of development and taking it along to their whole life; the problem appeared because most of the students were not familiar with these terms, which is extremely important in the new globalized world according to Taskin (2019) who pointed out that the individual that is not able to do so is going to be left behind.

Talking about language learning tends to be difficult since they cannot practice; learners access new knowledge, acquire, and develop new skills, identify problems, and establish and maintain relationships through language interaction (Walsh, 2011). For this reason, online language students not only have to look for ways to learn but also for ways to practice and not lose contact with their target language, so they must take their self-directed learning further; but what happens when students are not even aware of the term of self-directed learning?

In the case of the Language Faculty from BUAP, LEI students could perceive a big difference within their language learning process, mainly the ones that coursed one of the last target languages in the online modality. That is why, based on the previous information, the primary purpose of the

present research is to discover how online classes and the possibility that students do not know about self-directed learning have affected the language learning process in the fourth.

1.2 Justification

Because of the pandemic and lockdown situation, education had to be remastered since more than 1.2 billion people in 186 different countries found their classes affected, having to dabble in online learning (World Economic Forum, 2020). This modality brought both advantages and disadvantages; students could learn from home, avoid losing the course, or even save money since they did not have to transport and have meals out of home. However, since they were responsible for their learning process, the results could vary depending on the individual, mainly because students seemed to need a structured environment to avoid distractors. Since e-learning provides freedom to them, they must be autonomous (Kauma, S., & USA, I., 2016). Talking about learning a language within this modality, students must also organize a period to practice what they learn, otherwise, it is easily forgotten. Language classroom interaction is viewed as a central point of language learning and teaching (Walsh, 2011). Since the type of interaction has been affected, and students have had to lead their learning process due to the modality, it seems crucial to discover what English students experience managing their learning and language practice time.

This research surged from the desire to discover how the sudden change of modality affected students' language learning process based on their experiences and having as focus the use of self-directed learning by students, to bright to light if they organized their time to keep practicing and learning even out of their classes, and if they did not, how it affected their proficiency English level.

This research is expected to generalize statements about the consequences of the new change within language learning along with showing how the fact that students are not aware of self-directed learning, since it was a new way of acquiring the language, led them to perceive a decrease in their English level.

Since, as has been mentioned before, this is a new situation due to what the world is going through, this research is essential to identify the possible deficiencies when students do not know how to manage and organize their learning since they find it necessary to have a previously organized environment, so, in the future, it can be corrected by teachers, trying to lead more autonomous learning even if the classes come back to be presential; mainly when learning a language since practice is a priority.

1.3 Research questions

- What were the main difficulties that students faced coursing Target Language IV in online modality according to their experiences?
- How were students familiar with self-directed learning related to their virtual English classes?
- How did not being familiar with self-directed learning intervene in the student's language learning process?

1.4 General objective

Explain the challenges students faced when unfamiliar with self-directed learning during the online learning process in Target Language IV classes.

1.5 Specific objectives

- Analyze the main difficulties students faced according to their experiences coursing Target Language IV online.
- Identify if students were familiar with self-directed learning related to their virtual English classes.
- Describe how needing to become more familiar with self-directed learning played an essential role in the student's learning process.

1.6 Premise

Target Language IV students faced self-directed learning difficulties during their online English classes at LEI BUAP due to low motivation.

1.7 Methodology

This study will employ a case-study method since only a small group of students will be analyzed since it has the purpose of explaining what students' experiences were; this is why a cross-trend design will be used to explain how the learning process was affected, looking for trends in the students' experiences, having as result a qualitative focus data to be analyzed to generate statements about the issues at taking online Target Language IV and not being aware of self-directed learning.

A semi-structured interview is the instrument for collecting the data; this interview is made in Spanish, the student's native language, to know students' perceptions and avoid misunderstandings. Because of the situation, conducting a face-to-face interview will not be possible, so it will be recorded through the Zoom platform (with the participant's permission). This interview will be applied to 10 students from Language Faculty BUAP who have coursed online Target Language IV in the Fall 2021 period..

1.8 Limitations

This research focuses on determining the difficulties that students have faced since the learning modality was changed. However, this only considers the language difficulties, as in the psychological field, are lightly mentioned but not deeply analyzed since the focus is the linguistic root. In the same way, the purpose of the paper is to discover whether students have knowledge about self-directed learning and how they applied it to their English lessons, having this concept itself as the main characteristic that led students to perceive a decrease or a lack of learning in the Target Language IV, so other characteristics as economic and geographical students' conditions are introduced but do not have a particular importance.

Therefore, the other subjects involved in this college degree were not considered. In the same way, this paper is only to analyze data from students who cursed Target Language IV during the Fall 2021 period, so this research should not consider the rest of the target language levels and the other periods before and after the one mentioned.

1.9 Implications

Since the pandemic made the online modality more popular, it seems that in the future, this type of learning will become more and more common, which is why this research can help both students and teachers be aware of the importance of knowing how to make use of self-directed learning, as well as the early involvement of students in their learning process in order to find strategies that help to improve the said process and obtain more satisfactory results, especially in the language branch. Even this research can be helpful for parents who want to lead their kids to be more autonomous, as was mentioned before, since it is a very early stage of learning and makes it easier for them to manage self-directed learning in future stages.

1.10 Research organization

This research is composed of five chapters; the first chapter talks about the pandemic situation and how it influenced the change of modality in the whole world, focusing on the English Teaching degree at BUAP, and in this way, introduces the main topic of the paper, which is the usage of Self-directed learning within the online English lessons. Also, the general and specific objectives, as well as the intention, the methodology, the limitations, and the implications, are included.

For the second chapter, the theoretical framework introduces the term Online Learning and its definition, advantages, and disadvantages; the main differences with traditional learning are also mentioned, along with its relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some other definitions are Blended learning, Synchronous, Asynchronous, and Hybrid learning, and the methodologies employed within them, leading them all to Online Language Learning to introduce the primary term, Self-directed Learning, and the Knowles theory about adult learning.

In Chapter III, the explanation of the method, instruments, participants, and setting is shown to obtain data for generating statements that help to understand students' difficulties during online language learning with the use of Self-directed learning. As well the modifications of the instrument in order to make it more accurate are explained. Finally, for chapters IV and V, the results of the instrument and the conclusions of the research are exposed.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Online learning

Online learning started being popular since people needed more time to get into a classroom to take classes, so universities worldwide offered open modalities. This education involves using different digital tools to learn with the help of electronic devices in long-distance communication, which is different from traditional face-to-face education.

2.1.1 Definition

Online learning, or e-learning, is a relatively new learning modality that uses technology. It is seen as an evolution of distance learning when using the most modern digital tools, even though some authors have pointed out that it is more than just an improvement of distance learning. Even Garrison and Anderson (2003) have said that it is not "more of the same" but different, and both had been split into two different concepts. Since the concept of e-learning can change depending on the discipline and type of learning that is required to achieve a goal, Sangrà, A., Vlachopoulos, D., & Cabrera, N. (2012) decided to look for an adequate general definition, where they concluded that it is a teaching-learning approach that has as base the use of electronic devices and media as tools to improve Interaction and communication in order to improve learning.

In conclusion, online learning has emerged from the necessity of learning from a distance. However, it has improved, taking more and more advantage of the technologies that also improve as society's necessities change. The most specific learning online definition in the language learning process will be seen later in this chapter.

2.1.2 Advantages and disadvantages of Online learning

As mentioned before, online learning can bring different benefits to the learners, but in the same way, some disadvantages can be perceived. According to Paepe, Zhu, & Depryck (2017), both advantages and disadvantages can be classified as personal and institutional, and technological issues include communication and economy, as White pointed out (cited by Paepe, Zhu, & Deprvck, 2017). Learners claimed numerous advantages, such as developing knowledge and skills when learning a language, engagement, and the development of autonomy. Koutsoupidou (2014) also mentions as an advantage that learners are not limited by their environment but can also connect with other cultures. However, on the other side, and contradictory, it is mentioned as a disadvantage that learners have to deal with isolation.

Talking in a more particular way, when referring to the change due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the disadvantages tended to increase, as mentioned by Khoueiry Zgheib, Ali, & Sabra (2021) found after research that it was easier for learners to procrastinate and lose focus and motivation mainly owing to a bad internet connection leading to higher costs. Also, the lack of Interaction and the home environment were pointed out as inadequate for learning and help to find a learning model was needed. Nevertheless, of course, the satisfaction for both students and teachers cannot be ignored when online learning allows them more time flexibility with the help of asynchronous learning.

In short, numerous advantages and disadvantages can be mentioned when talking about online learning, from the acquisition of autonomy to the issues that internet connection or economy can lead to when they are not optimal. However, in the times that are being lived right now, learners find more disadvantages, such as outcome, lack of motivation and procrastination due to the absence of Interaction and sudden change of modality.

2.1.3 Online learning vs traditional learning

It is known that there are multiple differences between both learning styles, both in outcome and process. Stack (2015) mentioned cheating as an example of how different both are; cheating is four times more common in online learning than in the traditional, leading to achieve students' goals more frequently in the online modality. Along with this, students sometimes perceive less charge of duties when learning online, which is why they prefer it, but on the other side, they dislike it since they cannot receive immediate attention from their instructors (Jaggars, 2014).

In a study made by Abney (2020), it was shown that in both modalities, students could understand the curriculum objectives as well as knowledge. However, in the online modality, the biggest gain could be perceived. For some people, traditional (face-to-face) learning is seen as the only acceptable way of teaching, and the online modality needs to be more credible. However, as expected, for others, online education seems like the future of learning and fully replaces face-to-face learning since students have shown better performance with e-learning (Roanne, A. 2010). According to research by Roanne (2010), the success of results of students in both modalities depends on the time an activity takes due to pedagogical techniques.

In conclusion, both modalities are effective, but online learning is currently taking over the world since people prefer to have time to their availability without being inside a classroom. Even so, before institutions enter this modality, they must evaluate learners' tools and access to achieve a satisfactory outcome. Moreover, even when the results are shown to be better with e-learning, those should be carefully interpreted since many aspects can influence them, just as was mentioned with cheating in tests. These comparisons might have numerous perspectives but need more research to determine which is better.

2.1.4 Online learning during the pandemic

As mentioned, one of the most significant repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the lockdown and the popularization of online learning. Students have been forced to take this modality even when they were not ready for it; even platforms such as Google seemed to improve what they had by combining different tools when talking about learning to have a better outcome (Al-Marroof & Al-Emran, 2018; Shaharane et al., 2016). However, even so, more was needed since students had to adapt to take responsibility for their learning to get used to the possible lack of Interaction they might face given that not meeting people face-to-face led students to feel isolated. Along with this, the need for more knowledge from teachers when using technology and the deficiency of feedback expected were other essential aspects since it can lead to students having bad experiences when learning online (Annamalai, 2021).

Due to connection problems, students seemed frustrated and demotivated, and asynchronous and synchronous sessions were required since only some students had internet service or even a device to have classes. In the same way, students were more susceptible to losing attention and discipline since there were more distractors at home, and teachers could not avoid them (Annamalai, N. 2021). Because of all these reasons, a significant point is self-motivation when using e-learning so they can find solutions to the difficulties they face, making it easier for them to participate and regulate their learning (Le et al., 2021).

Undoubtedly, online learning has been a good improvement in education; nevertheless, when it happens suddenly, as in the case of the worldwide pandemic, students seem disappointed. They need many essential areas to consider with e-learning, just like the teacher who was unfamiliar with technology, becoming passive in this process; these reasons lead students to frustration and lack of interest. As a result, there needs to be more efficiency in learning and outcome satisfaction.

2.1.5 Blended learning and its importance

Blended learning, also known as hybrid learning, is a focus of education that involves traditional and digital Interaction where students tend to be in control of time and place. According to Hofmann (2018), blended learning is when people learn not only what, how, or where but also define it as an organized and structured curriculum in a sequence of content blocks that involves what is learned outside formal modules. On the side, Das (2021) defines it as a learning process that is dependent on the context, leading to comfort due to the flexibility and a more comprehensive understanding in learners since it involves the use of digital tools forming an engagement with the contents and achieve goals easier, reducing stress and increasing satisfaction from students.

At present, it is crucial to employ blended learning because it allows students to evaluate themselves, it improves student and teacher interaction, the learning process is more enjoyable and can provide teachers with opportunities while increasing students' progress, but this process cannot be done if instructors do not keep it communicative, creative and practical (Das, 2021). Blended learning can help to develop numerous essential learning aspects, such as oral skills, critical thinking, and motivation. At the same time, it improves the quality of learning and the outcome and decreases costs. Technology allows students to have flexible lessons, and it has even been shown that online lessons are more effective than face-to-face ones (Sumarmi, Bachri, Irawan and Aliman, 2021) mention what was said in the previous section: since cheating is more accessible when learning online, those results should be carefully analyzed.

Blended learning has led learning to a new branch that allows the combination of physical and digital learning, where students can take control of the process with the accompaniment of a teacher while making use of technology and digital tools to make it easier and more enjoyable, increasing mainly Interaction and motivation having as result the satisfactory accomplishment of

the set goals. Of course, the success or failure of this method of teaching and learning has been shown to depend on students' attitudes towards it. When their attitude is positive, the outcome would be better; when negative, it could be hard to achieve objectives; the wrong attitude to this modality most of the time is because of the slow speed on the internet (Taghizadeh & Hajhosseini, 2021).

2.1.5.1 Synchronous, asynchronous and hybrid learning.

Since Blended learning combines face-to-face and online education, Synchronous and asynchronous learning are the main components of it. According to Özdal, Yükselir, and Akarsu (2021), synchronous learning means that the teacher and students share the same space and time in a digital environment, while asynchronous one does not require the same time and space to learn. The first one is explained as the digital version of a traditional classroom, given that Interaction is one of its main elements, but talking about language learning, this type of learning limits students' pronunciation development and, contrary, it improves their speaking and listening skills, as well as vocabulary acquisition (Kato et al., 2016).

Asynchronous learning represents a more flexible way for students to manage this process since the materials are always available, and learners are not forced to respond immediately. They can lead their pace this way, motivating them (Özdal et al., 2021). Nevertheless, it cannot benefit those who are not disciplined (Peerven, 2016). Students are independent, and teachers are the only instructors who accompany them. These two types of learning can be combined to form the hybrid model that combines modes and learning pace to solve the gaps found in both types, engaging students while increasing their confidence and, as a result, more class participation. Of course, it would also depend on some psychological factors that will not be deeply treated in this paper; the

hybrid model has proven that language learning can help improve writing skills (Tusino et al., 2021).

All three models have their benefits and lacks, but they offer opportunities for students to adapt their learning to their necessities. One offers flexibility while learning at peace, another can make them interact with peers and teachers and improve their vocabulary and writing skills, just like the last one that can combine the best of the previous two, resulting in a writing improvement. Nowadays, researchers and teachers keep looking for ways to improve the application of technology in the learning process. For this reason, neither can be perfect, but as has been demonstrated, they can be combined to get the best desirable outcome.

2.1.5.2 Methodologies employed in Blended learning (Microlearning, flipped classroom, mobile learning, and gamification)

Synchronous and Asynchronous learning are not the only methodologies that can be employed in blending learning. There are a few more to be slightly seen in this section. The first is microlearning, which consists of online learning divided into smaller particles within a specific period shorter than fifteen minutes. This learning methodology has been demonstrated to bring benefits such as confidence in participation and knowledge retention for a longer time (Palmon et al., 2021). Talking specifically about English learning can help learners increase interest and independent learning (Zheng, 2021).

Another critical component is the flipped classroom methodology, which involves inverting teaching and learning processes. That is to say. Students do not learn at school and practice at home with assignments but take their time at home to keep learning with the help of digital tools and platforms drawn by teachers, so afterward, they can apply it inside the classroom and since its focus is the student this strategy makes the learning process more enjoyable and at the same time

improves performance as has been demonstrated that when it is applied, tests scores tend to be higher; one of the deficiencies of the flipped classroom strategy affects teachers more, which is the need of working even out of their workday (Ali et al., 2021).

Mobile learning involves learning in different contexts while interacting with both content and society with the help of electronic devices such as mobile phones and tablets but not laptops or computers; this methodology leads students to get into their environment, which means an easier way to store evidence and increases Interaction, and has also been proved to increase literacy in childhood, even when technology is taking over the world there still are people with no access to technology, or economy does not allow them to own a mobile, this is why mobile learning cannot be employed in all backgrounds (Danielle Herro, 2018)

On the side, gamification, also known as gamified learning, looks to reinforce something learned through a game; this strategy also increases motivation and encourages innovative thinking while "transforming abstract concepts into concrete ones" in an easy way, calling their attention to the same time that motivates them; currently, one of the most common platforms used in designing this type of game is Kahoot, which provides different tools and question styles to create unique quizzes depending on the desired topic. The limitation of this strategy is the hardships that can be faced when looking for an appropriate game that fits the content (Ozcinar et al., 2021).

Finally, all these methodologies have been developed since technology is an active part of everybody's daily life. All of them are encouraged by blended learning to have more tools when employing digital learning. Each represents advantages and limitations, but generally, they aim to achieve content goals and motivate students while learning mainly independently and simultaneously, making this process enjoyable.

2.2 Online language learning

Language learning by itself represents a challenge for many people, but even when learning online can mean a new difficulty for language learners, isolating technology from language is indeed becoming unstoppable. According to Bjerg Petersen (2014), this modality has been familiar, even since 2006, and not only involves taking into account education but also second language acquisition theories because, according to them, it also involves educational theories.

Given that synchronous and asynchronous lessons play an important role; it has been pointed the different benefits that synchronous language lessons have, such as imitating face-to-face interaction, reducing anxiety, improving fluency and pronunciation (Hung & Higgins, 2016) and vocabulary acquisition (Lotfi & Pozveh, 2019). In the same way, asynchronous sessions improve other abilities like reading and writing, reducing the number of mistakes and making it easy for them to explain themselves (Perveen, 2016). According to a study conducted by Özdal, Yükselir, & Akarsu (2021)., students' opinions pointed out that even when the benefits previously mentioned were shown, they perceived the online language lessons as deficient not only due to the lack of face-to-face interaction but also to the connection issues. Said research also showed that instructors must be careful when choosing materials and content, but their role will be seen in this section.

Even when the possible benefits of learning a language in the online modality are evident, students need to be more comfortable to keep developing in this way. Due to the pandemic, they had only a limited option to get used to it. Definitely, in the future, technology will get over more backgrounds than education; right now, the tools are being developed and improved, so it is

about time more deficiencies can be found and keep looking for solutions, and we humans have to adapt to it.

2.3 Self-directed learning

The new learning modalities provide students with a prominent role within their learning process; therefore, students must know how to lead the process with or without others' help to achieve their goals successfully. Self-directed learning is necessary to help students better manage their knowledge acquisition.

2.3.1 Definition

Self-directed learning (SDL) is a strategy that allows students with the independence to take control over their learning process, and the teacher is only a facilitator. This concept was popular in the 1970s when Malcolm Knowles and Allen Tough made it gain recognition (Brookfield, 1985). Knowles (1975) defines self-directed learning as the phenomenon where the learner decides to determine what they need to learn and set their own goals, looking for their sources and then applying them to their learning without others' help. However, a special section in this chapter will be dedicated to Knowles's theory.

Another important aspect, according to Brookfield (1985), is that, even though this seems to be an independent process, self-directed learning is successful when learners can locate their learning within their social context, using the information and skills alone. However, other people within the process are seen as 'the most important learning resource'. In the same way, Tough (1967, 1979, cited in Brookfield, 1985) resalted the importance of both human and material sources, giving a significant role to the external context of the learning process.

In conclusion, self-directed learning involves autonomy where students are conscious of their necessities and act on them, looking for sources to be used within their learning process by themselves independently of others but not necessarily in isolation since to learn the needs of other humans, as well as being aware of their context to choose the most adequate ways to lead their learning. All the authors mentioned in this section are focused on the adult's self-directed learning since this paper is destined to analyze university students, and these definitions are the most accurate.

2.3.2 Self-directed learning in the adults learning theory

As mentioned in this chapter, Malcolm Knowles appointed one of the most precise definitions of self-directed learning. However, it went beyond defining it and created a theory called The Andragogy Theory, which is focused on the adults' learning process, where it is suggested that learners do not need a structured environment. However, they need to know why they are learning what they are learning. They need to do it through experience and problem-solving, and it is better if they can perceive results as soon as possible. Knowles claimed that motivation, participation, and where they can apply knowledge are essential (Manning, 2007).

Nevertheless, learners themselves turn out to be an essential resource in the learning process. That is why, according to Brookfield (1985), in his theory, Knowles emphasized the control that students have in planning and executing learning, that is, SDL, where he stated that self-directed learning is a more effective way of learning since they do not must wait for someone to instruct them. It also defines SDL as a more natural development and considers the concepts of transiting knowledge and associating learning with youth unrealistic. For Knowles, there are three reasons for a self-directed:

1. Individuals who take the initiative in learning more and better than those who sit at teachers' feet, possibly waiting to be taught.
2. Self-directed learning is more in tune with our natural processes of psychological development.
3. Many new educational developments put a heavy responsibility on the learners to take a good deal of initiative in their learning (Manning 2007).

Finally, in this theory, some crucial aspects that are involved in SDL are stated, such as human maturing, the experiences of learners as an essential resource, the way that learners take their knowledge into a real-life situation centered in a particular problem, as well as aspects as self-esteem are essential to motivate learners themselves in this learning process; and pointed out that even if in some situation it is indispensable to have the instruction of someone else, Knowles still marks as important the responsibility and critical thought of the learner (Manning, 2007).

In summary, for Knowles, self-directed learning is a primary component in humans that involves autonomy and takes experiences as a handy tool. Learners work better when they have a specific task or problem to solve within their daily lives, so they need to be deeply motivated mainly by themselves and what they can do with their knowledge to achieve their learning goals, taking responsibility for the process.

2.3.3 Metacognitive awareness and SDL

Metacognitive awareness means being conscious of how people think, talking more specifically about learning, that is, being aware of how people learn. According to Hargrove (2007), there are two dimensions: cognitive knowledge, which is, as was mentioned, being conscious of what the individual feels or thinks, and cognitive regulation, which controls that knowledge and determines

if the goals have been achieved. Individuals conscious of this can manage plans and strategies to execute learning (Bayındır, D., & Dağal, A. B. 2016). Its relationship with SDL surges since metacognitive awareness enlarges the control learners need because SDL is impossible to happen (Shunk and Ertmer 2005, cited in Bayındır, D., & Dağal, A. B. 2016).

Metacognitive awareness has been claimed as one of the most critical factors in the learning/teaching process. However, mainly in the first one (Young, 2010) and just as was mentioned by Shunk and Ertmer (2005), Melissa et al. (2017) stated that this is a fundamental skill for SDL success since it allows learners to regulate and monitor their learning process focusing on problem-solving (ÖRs et al.; O., 2018).

Ultimately, SDL can only be possible with the participation of metacognitive awareness. If learners need to be more conscious of their necessities and how they can attend to them, they need to know how to lead the learning process most effectively, following their requirements and looking for adequate resources. They need help to control their learning process or even set goals to be achieved.

2.3.4 Motivation in SLD

Motivation is an incentive for an individual to achieve something. As the word indicates, motivation motivates individuals to act to attain what they need. It explains why something is done and is described as a positive feeling that leads an individual to complete a task without paying particular attention to its difficulty (Gopalan et al.; R. C., 2017). In the same way, according to Tanti, Maison, Syefrinando, Daryanto, and Salma (2020), motivation provides positive energy to be attentive and active when accomplishing an activity.

In learning, motivation is seen as one of the most critical factors for the student to regulate their skills, and said incentive can come from the individual themselves or an external outcome; therefore, in this way, they try to do better. Most motivated students have better results (Tanti et al., 2020). Additionally, Gopalan, Bakar, Zulkifli, Alwi, and Mat (2017) related motivation with student engagement and class participation. If they are motivated, they will be interested, and external rewards will not be needed. However, if they are required, there are different types to be used to raise interest, mentioned by the authors as challenge, curiosity, control, fantasy, competition, cooperation, and recognition.

Motivation is a way to make the learning process more accessible, making the students interested in what they are learning. Therefore, they can participate in achieving a specific goal; it does not matter if said motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic as long as it supports students' interest and participation.

2.3.5 Interaction in language learning and SDL in online classes

Interaction involves doing something with someone with reactions and contributions from both sides; in learning a second language, acquisition is even more critical since interacting with somebody else allows students to experiment with the language in context, whether it is with teachers, native speakers or even with other learners, including in this way feedback from the interlocutor and more effort to be understood from the speaker (Ballinger, Sato, 2016). In the same way, learners are more able to understand meaning and practice producing a more fluent speech within the classroom when learning with others (Sato, 2013). Following those ideas, Long (2016, cited in An & Thomas, 2021) points out that there is a strong relationship between learning and Interaction; in the same article, it is claimed that without the interpersonal interplay, the learning

process cannot start, since this guides to the internalization to later the knowledge can be employed to the individual when speaking.

When talking about self-directed learning, according to Lasfeto and Ulfa (2020), there is a strong relationship between SDL and Interaction during online seasons. Of said Interaction, the outcome is going to be shown. However, whether the learning successes or not depends on the most significant part of students' level of SDL; even if they have good Interaction, they will not achieve their goals if they cannot manage themselves well; teachers must encourage students to take control over the process. In closing, Interaction plays an important role when learning, but especially when learning a language, since it is necessary to know how that language works in context and to receive feedback from others to achieve a goal in said target; for SDL, it is not different, students must know how to handle their learning so they can manage Interaction within the process.

2.3.6 The self-determination theory

The self-determination theory (SDT) was created in 1985 by Deci and Ryan and has its focus on the human intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that involves needs and social context, for instance, how cultural factor can affect students' performance (Chiu, 2021); according to Chiu (2021), this theory purposes three dimensions, the first one where the individual controls themselves (autonomy), another one when they feel productive (competent). The last one involves feeling loved and included in Interaction (relatedness) with others; these three dimensions motivate them to do something or not, given that when a classroom apport the three needs, it evokes learners' engagement.

This theory has been popularly used in traditional classrooms; nevertheless, lately, it has been proved in the e-learning modality (Hsu et al., 2019). For Hagger and Hamilton (2021), this theory relates to persistence. At the same time, persistence involves external well-being, so when there is an absence of it, learners tend to desist, and when learners have controlled motivation, it can lead them to lose engagement more than when they are in control. The SDT has its relevance in this study since it claims that students need to be, as the name says, determined in order to learn; as has been shown before, motivation plays an important role when learning online; the reason why, if students are not motivated, they cannot be engaged to their learning process, and in this way, they can either achieve the learning goals.

2.3.7 Self-directed learning in University Students

Across the student life, numerous abilities are developed, such as self-organization and management. Otherwise, they can be considered immature; in the same way, they must demonstrate the desire to learn; nothing can be possible if students are not related to self-directed learning (Yakovleva et al., 2020). In this way, according to Boyer & Kelly (2005, cited in Khalid, Bashir, & Amin, 2020), if students can self-direct themselves, they can share their knowledge with others. A study by Khalid, Bashir, and Amin (2020) showed that online university students can better manage SDL than traditional university students, demonstrating a relationship between technology and self-directed learning.

When students attend conventional universities, they tend to wait for teachers' feedback to direct their learning, while online university allows students to be proactive since they do not have direct contact with their instructors, having better goal achievement (Khalid et al., 2020); for those reasons, these authors suggested that it is mandatory to introduce SDL strategies as soon as possible in their academic sessions so since the very beginning students can be able to organize

their activities and study times. From the point of view of students, including SDL in a structured learning environment represents a challenge, and the curriculum must focus on the development of skills more than memorizing content while paying particular attention to the relations between students and teachers (Nasri et al., 2020)

As shown in this section, SDL is a vital characteristic of university students, but the traditional classes need to allow them to develop this ability as desired. The reason why, when they suffer a change to an online modality that requires more of it since there is not enough contact with instructors, students can notice the lack of it, resulting in a deficient outcome that at the same time could lead to other types of problems when learning, such as anxiety and stress.

2.3.8 Its relationship with online learning

As mentioned in the section, there is a comprehensive relationship between self-directed learning and online learning since SDL tends to be more in demand within e-learning and highly depends on students' successful learning (Heo & Han, 2021). In research made by the same author, it was shown that teachers influence the development of self-directed learning in the online modality, helping students to develop the necessary skills, and it will be better if instructors focus on Interaction, feedback, and practical design of the curriculum evoking in this way students' engagement from motivation.

According to, the self-management, organization, and evaluation are a must in an online student, and at the same time, knowing how to employ the technologies in order to benefit their learning can influence their learning outcome and effectiveness, leading in this way to a more successful problem-solving skill, involving in the tasks assigned, set their own goals while motivating

themselves, identifying their deficiencies and try to eradicate them, when a student can direct themselves, then they are ready to online learning (Karatas, & Arpaci, 2021)

In conclusion, successful online learning can only be possible with self-directed learning. If students are not ready to manage their time and activities without having their instructor always present, they will not achieve their learning goals; motivation is another crucial factor. If students need to be more motivated to take over their learning process, it could not be easy for them to feel comfortable with online lessons. As was mentioned in the previous section, when traditional education students are forced to start learning within the e-learning modality, it would be even more challenging for them to get accustomed to suddenly directing themselves when they have never done it before.

2.3.9 Elements of SDL

According to Kerka (1994), self-directed learning is thought to be a natural human ability, but it can vary depending on the individual. The elements of SDL can also vary depending on the person. However, the main ones could be choice over their learning goals, objectives, the way they want to participate, the content they wish to learn, the method to be employed, and the type of assessment; as well, there is not a specific setting where SDL can be employed, for instance, it is more common believed only in solitary environments is when SDL appears, but it can be used whether in a traditional or informal setting and not just in isolation; of course, there are some characteristics that are necessary in order to achieve self-directed learning, such as self-management, autonomy, student control when learning within a classroom and look for tools when learning in informal settings.

Until now, there is not much research about the specific elements of self-directed learning, but as mentioned before, it depends on each individual to develop their SDL ability. It would depend on the context where they are involved, how their educational background has encouraged them to develop it, and how they know to keep employing it in order to improve it. This paper will focus on the main characteristics in the previous paragraph to qualify the SDL in the Target Language IV students.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, a detailed explanation of the method, instruments, participants, and setting is given; the analysis of the data collected through a structured interview with a small group of students from the English Teaching Degree of Language Faculty of BUAP in order to know what their thoughts are about Self-directed learning and its influence in their language learning process.

3.1 Setting

Since this study seeks to know how self-directed learning during online classes affected the English learning process, the English Faculty of BUAP was the host, having interviewed the students from the English Teaching degree that coursed the fourth out of the five mandatory Target Language subjects. At first, it was destined for the ones that coursed the fifth level because, as being the last, it tends to be more problematic as it is focused on the communicative use of English and could require more help from the instructor. However, since the tracing could have been difficult once they finished their English classes, the ones from the fourth semester in Target Language were chosen.

3.2 Methodology

When talking about qualitative research, it is essential to know that it focuses on human behavior, where the paths are not entirely linear, getting to know the motives for a group of people or an individual to behave in a certain way in a specific situation, it means, culture and society according with what people say and does (Kumar, R., 2010); as Hogan, Dolan, & Donnelly (2009) claimed “qualitative research is all about researching specific meanings, emotions, and practices that emerge through the interactions and interdependencies between people”, consequently, it is

essential to know that when applying the qualitative approach, the situation is subjective and follows opinions and attitudes.

Therefore, in this research, the qualitative approach was used since the perceptions of students based on their own experiences told why they felt a decrease in their English level if it was so related to having little or no knowledge about self-directed learning through the Target Language IV course in the online modality.

A case study is a method employed to analyze patterns in behavior and their possible causes, but there is no specific definition. In this type of method, the group, person, or subgroup is taken as a whole, no matter the quantity, where the topics to be treated must be well delimited; in the same way, it is useful when not looking for quantifying but for understanding, where the raised information can help to other groups' behavior with similar characteristics. As this method tends to be subjective, it is not recommended for use in large groups since generalizing statements can be challenging (Kumar, R., 2010). This method is applicable when the researcher has no control over the, in this case, behavior or when the case and the context where it is developed cannot be separated (Mary et al., 2017).

The case study method was used in this research since the group analyzed is three people to determine through students' experiences what the main factors when not knowing how to make use of self-directed learning affected their learning, specifically with students from the English degree of BUAP.

Only some students representing their whole groups were interviewed, considering self-directed learning factors within a particular period, such as the Fall of 2021 semester. A cross-sectional design determines patterns (Cohen et al.; K., 2000). The descriptive design seeks to describe

something as it is happening right now, where the researcher does not have control over the situation and can only detail what is going on. For these endings, with this type of design, the survey methods are the most usable (Kothari et al.,2004); this is why, in this paper, the experiences of students were collected in order to describe their experiences about self-directed learning in the English learning process.

3.3 Instruments.

An interview implies seeing different points of view about a specific topic from different people. Mainly, the research interview has been denominated as a conversation initiated by the interviewer, and, as the interviewee is involved in the dialogue, they can allow more information. Within the process, it is essential to know that each individual has a different perception of the context being studied; this technique also considers emotional needs and interpersonal aspects that are considered non-rational. Of course, some factors can lead to a problematic situation when doing research through an interview, one of them being that the interviewee does not feel like answering a question; this is why the interview is said to be used for unexpected results (Cohen et al.; K., 2000).

In this case, a semi-structured interview was used, with questions about the experiences they had had. The instrument consists of 14 questions divided into two dimensions: self-directed learning and online learning where the influence of interaction, metacognitive awareness, differences between traditional and virtual learning and synchronous and asynchronous lessons are involved to know how their English was affected by the absence or presence of those factors shown in the following chart:

Dimesions.	Category	Operational Definition.
Self-directed learning.	A) Self-directed learning.	Knowles (1975) defines self-directed learning as the phenomenon where the learner decides to determine what they need to learn and set their own goals, looking for sources to apply to their learning without others' help within their context.
	B) Metacognitive awareness and SDL	Being conscious of what the individual feels or thinks and controlling that knowledge so they can determine if the goals have been achieved or not.
	C) Motivation	Motivation allows students to engage and participate in class since if they are motivated, they will be interested, and external rewards will not be needed.
	D) Interaction	Interaction with somebody else allows students to experiment with the language in context, whether it is with teachers, native speakers, or even with other learners, including in this way feedback from the interlocutor and more effort to be understood by the speaker.
Online education.	E) Online learning	A teaching-learning approach that has as base the use of electronic devices and media as tools to improve interaction and communication in order to improve learning.
	F) Online learning vs traditional learning.	Students can perceive less charge of duties when learning online, and that is why they tend to prefer it, but, on the other side, they dislike it since they cannot receive immediate attention from their instructors

	G) Online learning during the pandemic.	Students have been forced to take this modality even when unprepared for it.
	H) Synchronous and asynchronous.	Synchronous learning means that the teacher and students share the same space and time in a digital environment, while asynchronous learning does not require being at the same time and space to learn. Asynchronous learning represents a more flexible way for students to manage this process; since the materials are always available and learners are not forced to respond immediately, they can lead at their own pace.

Table 1. Dimensions and categories for research.

After a revision, it was decided to modify some of the reagents; the original instrument can be seen in Appendix 1. First, the term to talk about online learning was modified to virtual learning since it was more accurate in the first, second, and third questions; in the case of the fifth question, it was modified to get more information so students could explain how their teacher employed the asynchronous and synchronous lessons.

Question number seven seemed to be too theoretical for the interview, so the concepts were taken in order to employ them in two questions, where it can be known if students were aware of what they needed to learn or if they achieved their goals once they set them making use of their sources, these can be seen in questions nine and ten. In the same way in the last question, when talking about motivation, it was better to consider that virtual learning affected students' motivation in English learning and practicing, so, in this question, it was changed to ask how students perceived that it affected their motivation directly. The final instrument can be found in the Appendix 2.

3.4 Procedures

The first step was to establish contact with the teachers responsible for the groups now coursing Target Language V; for this purpose, it was necessary to send an email to the Facultad De Lenguas BUAP so they can provide the email addresses of said teachers. It required a trade signed by the thesis director in order to be able to acquire that information. Once the emails were provided, it was necessary to ask each teacher for permission to have some of their students interviewed, explaining the purpose so that, once they accepted, the interview date was scheduled. The students were asked to sign an informed consent to avoid future legal issues, this document can be seen in Appendix 3.

The interviews were done via Zoom platform since, due to the pandemic situation, it would be safer for both parties, as well as, taking into consideration the fact that some of the students are not from Puebla, where the research is done; in the same way, this platform allows the recording of both, video and audio, so the information provided could be a transcript and analyzed.

3.5 Data analysis

As was mentioned above, once the information was recorded, it was captured in an Excel document, so after that, it could be analyzed to find similarities and generalize statements.

In this chapter, different aspects of the methodology employed were explained, such like the instrument and the modification made to it in order to make it more accurate for the investigation, and the steps that were followed to get the interviews with the students and the analysis for what was collected. In the next chapter, a more detailed analysis of the raised information will be made to generalize what happened with students about self-directed learning during their Target Language IV course.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The results from the interviews are presented in this chapter in relation to the concepts mentioned in Chapter II, respecting those categories in every subtitle to analyze what students' experiences were in virtual education in relation to self-directed learning according to their answers.

4.1 Online learning

It is known that this learning modality is new. As its name indicates, it takes the help of technology, leading to an evolution of distance learning and even more than that (Garrison & Anderson, 2003); participants were aware of this and agreed.

P3: la verdad es que creo que es una gran herramienta el, el, el, la virtualidad

(The truth is that I think virtuality is a great tool)

However, of course, when students are not used to it, as in the case of the pandemic situation where they were forced to move into the virtuality, they found it hard to handle; in this first reactive, the focus was to know what students' feelings were about the sudden change to virtual education in general, mentioning some factors that students wanted to highlight, because, in general, as was mentioned before, students had to take responsibility for adapting to the new virtual environment, but not only them but teachers as well, learning how to provide feedback and the tools (Annamalai, 2021), in this way, causing insecurity because of the lack of knowledge or even because they lost some experiences proper of the university life:

P1: Amm... al principio super incómodo, este, después le agarré muchísimo más el hilo, pero, eh, no me siento seguro de los conocimientos que adquirí o debí haber adquirido.

(Amm... at the beginning it was very uncomfortable, after I understood much better, but, eh, I don't feel confident about the knowledge that I acquired o should have acquired)

P2: Pues, horrible, la verdad, no he aprendido gran cosa, yo terminé la preparatoria mientras estaba en línea, entonces no tuve graduación, no tuve un primer día de uni hace

dos años que ingresé, hasta apenas hace medio mes lo tuve, mi primer día después de dos años de estar estudiando en línea, no había conocido a mis compañeros, a mis profesores porque tienden a tener la cámara apagada y yo creo que es una experiencia bonita de la que no solo yo sino mi generación y las generaciones que vienen detrás de nosotros se perdieron, ¿no?, ehm, también te puedo decir que no he aprendido pues gran cosa, como te dije, terminé la prepa y recuerdo que mis últimos parciales fueron pues un desastre, yo pues siempre he sido, bueno, desde niña, una alumna de beca académica, y el momento de, de moverme a en línea, ehm, mis calificaciones bajaron considerablemente, bueno, yo tenía, ehm, 9.7 de promedio más o menos y pues sí empecé a tener pues 8, 8.3 de promedio, ¿no?, entonces pues sí me siento como que, se me movió todo, ¿no?

(Well, horrible, the truth is, I haven't learned much, I finished high school while I was online, so I didn't have graduation, I didn't have a first day of collage two years ago that I entered, until just half a month ago I had it, my first day after two years of studying online, I had not met my classmates or my teachers because they tend to have the camera turned off and I think it is a beautiful experience that not only me but my generation and the generations to come behind us lost, right? Ehm, I can also tell you that I haven't learned much, well, as I told you, I finished high school and I remember that my last midterms were a disaster, well, I've always been, well, ever since a little girl, a student on an academic scholarship, and when I moved online, ehm, my grades dropped considerably, well, I had, ehm, a 9.7 average more or less and well, yes, I began to have an 8, 8.3 average, right?, so yes, I feel like everything changed, you know?)

Also, students perceived that they were more susceptible to distractions since they felt comfortable in the space where they were learning, and the teacher could not do anything about it (Annamalai, N. 2021).

P3: Siento que sin duda le agregaron una dificultad interesante a aprender, creo que de por sí todos tenemos un déficit de atención en general a grandes rasgos, no es como que estemos siempre atentos a todo y menos cuando estás en un lugar que es muy familiar para ti, en donde te puedes sentir demasiado, extremadamente cómodo como es tu hogar (...)

(I feel that without a doubt they added an interesting difficulty to learning, I think that in itself we all have an attention deficit in general in broad strokes, it is not like we are always attentive to everything and less when you are in a place that is very familiar to you, where you can feel too much, extremely comfortable such as your home is (...))

More specifically, language online learning is a challenge itself; it involves not only the usage of technology for learning but also the language acquisition theories to have an effective process

(Bjerg Petersen, 2014). According to the study made by Özdal, Yükselir, & Akarsu (2021), it was shown that students see a deficiency in language learning online because of the interactional and connectivity issues. Teachers must look for adequate materials for the contents, and after the interviews, these opinions were also shown by the participants:

P1: creo que a muchos profesores se les hizo muy fácil el hecho de solo, este, dar muchas actividades para mantenernos ocupados y después de esas actividades solamente repasarlas en clase.

(I think that for many teachers it was easy to only give a lot of activities to keep us busy and after those activities, only review them in class.)

P1(...) que tengas que esperar cuantos segundos para recibir una respuesta, o no sólo eso, sino las fa- las dificultades con el internet o las aplicaciones, lo hacen muchísimo más difícil.

(That you must wait some seconds to get an answer, or not only that, but the difficulties with the internet or the apps, they make it even harder)

P2: Ok, bueno, mmh, cuando, siento que cuando estoy en línea y los profesores no logran captar mi atención como me gustaría que lo hicieran, ¿sabes?, sí realizan actividades, pero no, vamos, no es tan interesante como estar en línea, digo, estar en presencial (...)

(Ok, well, um, when, I feel like when I'm online and teachers don't get my attention like I'd like them to, you know, they do activities, but no, come on, it's not as interesting as being online, I mean, be in presential classes (...))

P2: Porque mi internet no es muy bueno, entonces, creo que también depende del tipo de internet que tengas y los tipos de equipos, de aparatos electrónicos para conectarte.

((...) because my internet connection is not very good, then, I think also depends on the type of internet that you have and the kind of equipment, of electronic devices to connect.)

Where students tended to give some solutions but not in a very realistic way:

P2: Ehm, este, tal vez no es para todos, pero creo que deberían, todos los profesores en línea, deberían realizar un examen a los chicos para saber (...) de qué parte forman sus conocimientos, ¿no? O sea, qué tipo de aprendizaje tienes, ah pues didáctico, ah pues visual, ah pues no sé qué, ¿sabes? Así, de esta forma, los maestros, creo que es aún más trabajo para ellos, pero sería una forma más, este, eficaz a la hora de enseñarles, ya que les estarías, pues haciendo como que un favor a los estudiantes, porque, si yo que soy

una persona visual me dan una clase más que nada como ponencia auditiva, creo que no retendría o captaría muchas de las cosas que me gustaría entender, ¿no? (...)

(Ehm, maybe it's not for everyone, but I think they should, all online teachers, should test the kids to know (...) what part of their knowledge is there, right? I mean, what kind of learning you have, oh well didactic, oh well visual, oh well I don't know, you know? So, in this way, the teachers, I think it's even more work for them, but it would be one more way, this, effective when it comes to teaching them, since you would be, well, doing the students a favor, because, If I am a visual person, they give me a class more like an auditive presentation, I think I would not retain or capture many of the things that I would like to understand, right? (...))

In conclusion, students at first did not feel comfortable having to move and change their learning modality because everything was new for them, but once they overpassed that situation, they felt so good in their environment; it was so familiar for them, and students could get more distractions, students knew what to do in order to pretend to pay attention; along with it, the connectivity problems that were always present at classes and the lack of interaction, make it easier for them not to be attentive, evoking that the outcome was not the expected, even if students could acquire some new knowledge, they are not sure about employing it. In the same way, students kept the idea that teachers were highly responsible for their lack of learning because the materials were not adequate for their necessities. They wanted to propose something to feel more like learning, but having seen the definition of SDL, it can be deduced that all that responsibility should not be put on teachers.

4.2 Online learning vs traditional learning

These two modalities are different in many ways. As mentioned before by Stack (2015) it can be more clearly seen in cheating, but it is not the only aspect where students could see the differences

in both, so they have mentioned that one of the most noticeable affections is feedback from the teacher or instructor just as Jaggars (2014) pointed out.

P3: De manera virtual yo creo que lo más difícil sin duda es poner una atención genuina a cada detalle y, o sea, tratar de enfocarse y pues que no haya un bloqueo de feedback, no sé si me explico, que en presencial estás hablándolo directamente y en ese mismo momento te pueden corregir porque pues te están escuchando, ¿no? Y de que pues sí, puedes pronunciarlo así, y así, ya te están dando el feedback inmediato y en cuanto en internet pues con las desventajas de que luego el audio se traba, o que es una calidad baja del micrófono y pues realmente pues no se puede percibir, entonces hay menos feedback porque cómo le corrijo si realmente no estoy cien por ciento seguro de si lo dijo bien, o lo dijo mal o es un problema con el internet o con el audio, etcétera.

(In a virtual way, I think that the most difficult thing without a doubt is to pay genuine attention to every detail and, that is, try to focus and, well, that there is no feedback block, I don't know if I'm explaining myself, that in person you are talking about it directly and at that very moment they can correct you because they are listening to you, right? And that yes, you can pronounce it like this, and like this, they are already giving you immediate feedback and as soon as on the internet, well with the disadvantages that sometimes the audio gets stuck, or that it is a low quality of the microphone and well, really, it cannot be perceived, so there is less feedback because how do I correct them if I'm really not one hundred percent sure if they said it right, or they said it wrong or it's a problem with the internet or with the audio, etc.)

P1: (...) sin ninguna clase de feedback, o, o, una, este, satisfactoria resolución de dudas, la verdad.

((...) With any kind of feedback, or a satisfactory doubt resolution)

Moreover, in the case of the charge of duties, students do not feel heavier but have more responsibility to take care of what they had to do, where the teacher only provided materials and students had to give them the usage.

In closing, it is clear that the feedback was mentioned certain times by the interviewees pointed out as the main problem that online learning has in comparison with traditional learning, where they can have an immediate response, where the internet connection is not an obstacle for teachers.

They have more than a guide because it seemed to be hard for them. The fact is that teachers are

not the ones always directing them, but in the virtuality, they are only providers of materials and sources.

4.3 Advantages and disadvantages of online learning

A lot can be said when talking about the benefits that online learning represents, but advantages are also disadvantages in different fields, just as Paepe, Zhu, & Depryck (2017) pointed out, the most remarkable ones are the development of autonomy, procrastination, and depression respectively; in this research, it seemed like students tend to focus on the negative part of online learning, referring it to the decrease of their grades.

P2: (...) creo que me deprimí, soy una persona muy sociable, interactiva, entonces el estar aislada en casa, eh, a veces ni siquiera convivio con mis papas mucho, eh, porque ellos están en sus rollos, yo sí quiero estar platicando y eso, ehm, pues, creo que me hizo sentir abandonada, sola y hasta cierto punto como que me afecto psicológicamente bastante, entonces, pues sí me puse a pensar de que para qué estudio, esas cosas, no? (...)

((...)) I think I got depressed, I'm a very sociable person, interactive, so being isolated at home, uh, sometimes I don't even spend much time with my parents, uh, because they're on their own world, I do want to be talking And that, erm, well, I think it made me feel abandoned, alone and to a certain extent it kind of affected me psychologically, so, yes, I started thinking why do I study, those kind of things, right? (...)

P2: (...) pero para llevarlo a cabo necesitas ser una persona responsable porque sino, ehm, pues se te va a olvidar y vas a decir, ay no qué flojera, lo hago, y lo hago después, y lo hago después, procrastinas y al final terminas no entregándolo, ¿no?

((...)) but to carry it out you need to be a responsible person because if not, um, well, you're going to forget and you're going to say, oh no what laziness, I'll do it, and I'll do it later, and I'll do it later, you procrastinate and, in the end, you end up not delivering it, right?)

When talking about the advantages and disadvantages of online learning, much can be said in both parts, but in this case, as students found it difficult, the negative points seemed to take more relevance for them. They did recognize what is good about learning from home, put more emphasis

on what they did not like, they did not care about the chance of their autonomy development, but in the procrastination facility, the decrease in their grades and the emotional damage that not being in direct contact with another human can cause.

4.4 Synchronous and asynchronous learning

At first, it was necessary to know if students were aware of the concept, where the majority said "no," or even that they had heard about it before but could not remember, so they could not say if their teachers had worked with it and how it helped to improve their English level. According to Kato et al . (2016), synchronous learning, which involves students and teacher sharing the same space and time when learning, limits students' pronunciation. One of the students agreed with this, saying that:

P3: (...) lo único que creo que se me quedó a desear respecto a en línea es que pues es difícil crear un ambiente en cual puedas estar dialogando fluidamente sin problemas y creo que una de las dificultades que yo personalmente tengo con el Inglés no es tanto que no lo entienda o que no lo pueda hablar o algo así, sino que es la práctica, el tener que estarlo usando como loco y no usarlo casi nada es una gran diferencia y es lo que único que es como que me hubiera encantado tener un poquito más de eso, a lo mejor grupos para poder dialogar y cositas así.

((...) the only thing that I think I was left to wish for online classes is that it is difficult to create an environment in which you can converse fluently without problems and I think that one of the difficulties that I personally face with English is not so much that I don't understand it or that I can't speak it or something like that, but it's the practice, having to be using it like crazy and not using it almost at all is a big difference and it's the only thing that is like I would have loved to have a little more of that, maybe groups to be able to talk and little things like that.)

And even though Kato mentioned that it can helped to improve other skills, such as speaking and listening, they do not see it that way since it makes them shy to be the center of attention.

Talking more specifically about the benefits that students could perceive in the use of these lessons, it was said that asynchronous was more valuable since it allows students to follow their own pace

because it is more flexible when talking about time management and independence (Peerven, 2016)

P2: Mm, sí pero no en el nivel en el que me gustaría creo que es mejor y más fácil en las asíncronas porque como me explicaste, los, los, bueno, los ritmos de aprendizaje son (...) personalizados, sí, eso era lo que estaba buscando, ¿personalizados por qué? Porque a la hora de que tú te sientas en un escritorio, ¿no? Y te decidas que vas a, no sé, realizar una actividad, ehm, pues tú dices “ah, la realizo pues de aquí a dentro de veinte minutos ya debo haber terminado” o “la realizo de aquí a dentro de tres horas porque tengo tiempo”, no lo sé, tú pones tu horario, entonces siento que eso es mejor (...)

(Mm, yes, but not to the level that I would like, I think it is better and easier in the asynchronous ones because as you explained to me, the, the, well, the learning rhythms are (...) personalized, yes, that was what I was looking for, personalized why? Because when you sit at a desk, right? And you decide that you're going to, I don't know, carry out an activity, ehm, well, you say “ah, I'll do it in twenty minutes, I should have finished”, or “I'll do it in three hours because I have time”, I don't know, you set your schedule, so I feel that this is better (...))

All three models have their benefits and lacks, but they offer opportunities for students to adapt their learning to their necessities. One offers flexibility while learning at their pace; another can make them interact with peers and teachers and improve their vocabulary and writing skills, just like the last one that can combine the best of the previous two to improve writing. Nowadays, researchers and teachers keep looking for ways to keep improving the application of technology in the learning process; for this reason, neither can be perfect, but as has been demonstrated, they can be combined to get the best desirable outcome.

For the interviewees, those models did not provide the benefits mentioned by the authors. However, they brought them more insecurities, mainly in the synchronous lessons where they could not participate without fear of being observed. Being asynchronous gave them more benefits since it allowed them to manage their time and progress.

4.5 Self-directed learning

As in the previous concept, in this one, first, it was necessary to know if students had any perception about self-directed learning, where only one of them could say what it is the clearest. As mentioned before, self-directed learning involves students' autonomy to direct their learning process, determine their goals, and set the materials to achieve them. It is all only by themselves, but they can also receive help from others (Knowles, 1975). However, according to Tough (1976) and Brookfield (1985), it cannot always be successful without taking into account the background of the process, in this case, could be personal conditions, lack of knowledge of the concept, interest, or just not being aware of what they needed to learn (Metacognitive awareness).

P1: (...) creo que se me salió un poco de las manos el hecho de que, o sea, por cuestiones personales mas que nada, el hecho de tener muchas cosas en las que pensar, este, hicieron que perdiera un poco el hilo de la carrea, este, más que nada en otras clases que no sentía tan esenciales para mi futuro (...) pero en otras clases sí era como dejar cosas para después y, y así.

((...) I think the fact that, I mean, for personal reasons mainly, the fact of having many things to think about, made me lose the thread of the career a bit, mainly in other classes that I didn't feel so essential for my future (...) but in other classes it was like leaving things for later and, and so on.)

P2: (...) si hubiese sabido autodirigirlo, yo misma hubiera tomado la, cómo se dice, pues la batuta, (...) ponerme a investigar aún más cosas porque si yo estaba consciente de que mi maestra pues no me daba las clases como yo desearía, pues yo tendría que haber hecho algo por mí, por mi autoaprendizaje, ¿no? O sea, debí haberme informado más, no sé, debí de haberme interesado un poco más.

((...) if I had known how to direct it myself, I myself would have taken the, how do you say it?, the baton, (...) start investigating even more things because if I was aware that my teacher did not give me the classes as I would like to, well, I should have done something for myself, for my self-learning, right? I mean, I should have been more informed, I don't know, I should have been a little more interested.)

Another important aspect is the necessity of participation or employment of what is being learned (Manning, 2007), where students must apply it in order to see a result, but it seemed to turn out

difficult when the setting of a class is the virtuality, because even if students cannot see each other's faces, they feel observed, limiting in this way their chances or desires to be actively participating in classes.

P3: (...) en un ambiente virtual de repente hasta el más social se vuelve introvertido y es algo que incluso es sorprendente como hay personas que ---- lo intentaron, intentaron ser extrovertidos, sin embargo, la modalidad en línea los derrotó y a ese extrovertido de vez en cuando lo escuchabas y participar era como difícil porque te ponen un spot light, no es como en un salón de clases en donde si lo dices o alguien se ríe o algo así o, o, hay más voces, sino que ya está en silencio total y tú estás en el spot light y tienes que decirlo bien o sientes que hay una presión social de que, no, lo dijo mal, esto no era, sí se notaba eso --- el terror a equivocarse.

((...) in a virtual environment suddenly even the most social becomes introverted and it is something that is even surprising as there are people who ---- tried, tried to be extroverted, however, the online modality already defeated that extrovert from time to time you listened to, and participating was kind of difficult because they put a spotlight on you, it's not like in a classroom where if you say something or someone laughs or something like that or, or, there are more voices, but it's already in total silence and you are in the spotlight and you have to say it right or you feel that there is a social pressure that, no, you said it wrong, this was not it, yes you could tell that --- the terror of making mistakes.)

Not only that, Brookfield (1985) pointed out that it is also essential for students to plan by themselves how they are going to execute their learning, which can be helpful since students do not have to wait for someone to instruct them, but they must look for their results, which, depending on the context, it can also be a problem, like in this case, as Khalid, Bashir, & Amin (2020) mentioned, it is crucial to introduce SDL to people since they are children so they can be capable of organize their activities from the very beginning of their academic life.

P1: (...) me parece que vivimos en un país en el que estamos acostumbrados a que los profesores nos presionen todo el tiempo con que tienes que entregar las tareas, tienes que hacer esto, o sino no tienes esta nota y estás reprobado y eso al final de cuentas, nos mal acostumbra a que sino están encima de nosotros los profesores, entonces no, no, no tenemos que trabajar (...)

(...) it seems to me that we live in a country in which we are used to teachers pressuring us all the time that you have to hand in homework, you have to do this, or otherwise you don't have this grade and you fail and that in the end After all, we get used to the fact that if the teachers aren't over us, then no, no, we don't have to work (...)

Nevertheless, students seemed to be active when talking about looking for their own materials or ways to keep learning, not only because they feel that the material provided are not enough, but because of fun using their leisure time for keep improving their English skills and practicing.

P1: (...) al final de cuentas es un recurso el hecho de tratar de verme más inmerso en el idioma, en plan, hablando, este, con nativos, este, al momento de realizar otras actividades, por ejemplo, al momento de jugar, el hecho de buscar, este, hablantes nativos para poder jugar y tener esa charla más fluida, más cotidiana, o incluso el, no sé, ver series, en, en el idioma, en plan, para, este, para practicar el listening y cosas así (...), incluso conmigo mismo, en plan, plantearme situaciones hipotéticas y cómo respondería ante esas situaciones.

(...) at the end of the day it is a resource to try to see myself more immersed in the language, in plan, speaking, with natives, when doing other activities, for example, when playing, the fact of looking for, um, native speakers to be able to play and have that more fluid, more everyday chat, or even the, I don't know, watch series, in, in the language, in plan, for, um, to practice listening and things like this (...), even with myself, in plan, consider hypothetical situations and how I would respond to those situations.)

P2: (...) yo me contraté unos cursos de inglés particulares por mi cuenta, sí ahorita que me acuerdo, porque la verdad es que no estaba aprendiendo nada (...) De ver las series y películas, escuchar música, esas cosas, ¿no? ¿Sabes?

(...) I hired some private English courses on my own, yes, now that I remember, because the truth is that I wasn't learning anything (...) Watching series and movies, listening to music, those things, right? You know?)

P3: (...) tratar de que yo que puedo hacer para mejorar y tratar de yo por mi cuenta estar como ok, si ya vi que el problema es que no lo he usado --- pues igual con el uso del internet era algún lugar donde pudiera hablar con otras personas, que pues están estos como chats virtuales como el omegle y esto que son para hablar con personas random. (...) como a mí me agradan los videojuegos, encontré un como videojuego, pero no es realidad virtual, se llama abr chat, que está diseñado para realidad virtual pero también lo puedes usar con la computadora y ahí pues es solamente grupos donde, salas virtuales donde puedes platicar.

((...) try to find out what I can do for the better and try to be like ok on my own, if I already saw that the problem is that I have not used it --- well, just like with the use of the internet, there were some place where I could talk to other people, because these are like virtual chats like omegle and these are for talking with random people. (...) since I like video games, I found a video game but it's not virtual reality, it's called abr chat, which is designed for virtual reality but you can also use it with the computer and they are only groups where, virtual rooms where you can talk)

As mentioned in the section before, there is a comprehensive relationship between self-directed learning and online learning since SDL tends to be more in demand within e-learning and highly depends on students' successful learning (Heo & Han, 2021). In research made by the same author, it was shown that teachers influence the development of self-directed learning in the online modality, helping students to develop the necessary skills, and it would be better if instructors focus on interaction, feedback, and effective design of the curriculum evoking in this way students' engagement from motivation.

In conclusion, successful online learning cannot be possible without self-directed learning; if students are not ready to manage their time, and activities without having their instructor always present, then they will not achieve their learning goals; of course, motivation is another crucial factor, if students are not motivated enough to take over their learning process, it could not be easy for them to feel comfortable with online lessons. As was mentioned in the previous section, when traditional education students are forced to start learning within the e-learning modality, it would be even more challenging for them to get accustomed to suddenly directing themselves when they have never done it before.

4.6 Interaction

As mentioned before, one of the main factors why virtual education and traditional learning are different is the type of interaction. The lack of face-to-face interaction can be an essential aspect

of why students lose motivation since they do not receive reactions from the other side; language involves an exchange of dialogue to acquire it so they can experience the language in context (Ballinger, Sato, 2016). It has been shown that when interpersonal interplay is lacking, the learning process can be affected (Long, 2016, cited in An & Thomas, 2021), and even in those cases, students notice a better acquisition of knowledge and they can feel more relaxed when talking with a human directly.

P1: (...) ayer precisamente que estaba resolviendo unos exámenes, este, en la plataforma, este, me di cuenta que los mejores resultados los tuve en los temas que había visto en plan cara a cara con el profesor en clases presenciales en comparación a resultados no tan inferiores, (...) pero al final de cuentas sí inferiores en temas que, que vi en la virtualidad.

(Yesterday, I was solving some tests in the platform and I realized that the better results I had were from topics that I had seen face-to-face with the teacher in presential classes in comparison to the lowest results (...) but at the end, are lower in topics that I saw in the virtuality)

P3: (...) Te dan ese dinamismo, cosa que en internet no se podía porque no era un intercambio, de nuevo por el hecho de que pues muteados para que no hiciéramos ruido no deseado o que las cámaras apagadas y no, no había un feedback, entonces, me imagino un poco a los profesores como comediantes, que pues constantemente están viendo al público, ¿no? a ver si, si un chiste pegó bien para seguirse con ese estilo o a lo mejor cambiarlo un poco y todo eso y ya no tenían ese feedback, entonces ya era como de pus, ni modos, igual, con los ojos cerrados y esperar por lo mejor, y pues también se convertía en como tedioso inclusive verlo, ¿no? Entiendo el sufrimiento de los profes(...)

((...)They give you that dynamism, something that you couldn't do on the internet because it wasn't an exchange, again, due to the fact that we were muted so that we didn't make unwanted noise or the cameras were turned off and no, there was no feedback, so, I I imagine teachers a bit as comedians, who are constantly looking at the public, right? Let's see if, if a joke hit well to continue with that style or maybe change it a bit and all that and they no longer had that feedback, then it was like ok, anyway, with my eyes closed and wait for the best, and then it also became kind of tedious to even watch it, right? I understand the suffering of the professors(...))

P3: Sí, hay un beneficio al verse cara a cara, yo siento que es parte de la humanidad y ya es el hecho de cuando ves a una persona a la cara, te relaja en automático, o sea, no estás, por qué, porque no estás viendo como que un cuadro, no estás viendo algo a lo

que, incluso no estás viendo nada, entonces como que con ese pensamiento de quien podrá ser o qué estará pensando, o sea, el ver a alguien a la cara ya te refleja incluso en automático su respuestas, puedes notar como alguien está como, le da igual, o se está enojando o algo así y eso es algo que no podías--- esto y de nuevo es como que ir con los ojos vendados a cualquier lado te va a dar miedo porque sientes que vas a pisar donde no debes y es lo mismo con estar en línea, no sabes por dónde ver.

(Yes, there is a benefit to seeing each other face to face, I feel that it is part of humanity and it is already the fact that when you see a person face to face, it automatically relaxes you, that is, you are not there, why, because you are not looking like a painting, you are not seeing something to which, you are not even seeing anything, so with that thought of who could it be or what are they thinking, that is, seeing someone in the face already reflects you even in automatic their answers, you can notice how someone is like, doesn't care, or is getting angry or something like that and that's something you couldn't--- this and again it's like going blindfolded anywhere you go you will be scared because you feel like you're going to step where you shouldn't and it's the same with being online, you don't know where to look.)

In short, learners are more able to understand meaning and practice producing a more fluent speech within the classroom when learning with others (Sato, 2013). They feel like they are losing humanity when they do not feel this interaction. They also feel unsure of what they will say because they cannot see reactions from the interlocutors; not being able to listen to anybody, at least they turn their microphones or cameras have them perceiving loneliness, evoking a lack of motivation.

4.7 Motivation

Motivation is one of the pillars of an effective learning process, especially in the self-directed learning process, since they need an incentive to achieve their goals, why they do something, and why they keep looking for ways to learn (Gopalan et al.; R. C. 2017). When someone is lacking it, it can end up in the absence of learning; in this reactive, it was sought for students' experiences in their Target Language IV, when motivation was affected by the online modality in the case it was so because they were not engaged to participate in their classes.

P2: La motivación, pues, creo que me han bajado demasiado las ganas de estudiar desde que empezó la pandemia, como te dije, yo era una persona muy responsable, etcétera, etcétera, (...) pues realmente sí me afectó bastante en la motivación, creo que en este momento me encuentro un poco mejor pero no tengo la misma motivación que solía tener antes de la pandemia.

(Motivation, well, I think my desire to study has dropped too much since the pandemic began, as I told you, I was a very responsible person, etcetera, etcetera, (...) well, it really did affect my motivation a lot, I think that right now I feel a little better but I don't have the same motivation that I used to have before the pandemic.)

Talking specifically about the self-determination theory, which is a branch of motivation, when students are not autonomous, when they do not feel competent, or even when emotionally they are not all right, it can change their motivation level, mainly when their classroom does not apport these feeling to them their performance can be affected (Chiu, 2021), in this case, students could notice that the attitude from the instructor affected the mood and motivation for them to keep learning.

P1: (...) no todos los profesores (...) te transmiten la misma, las mismas ganas de seguir adelante con las clases, no todos los profesores tienen una buena actitud o al menos, este, no se lo dejo tanto la responsabilidad a ellos o a, o a su actitud, sino a la fal-, a la falta de experiencia ante dar clases así, porque después te encuentras a los profesores en clases presenciales y sacan todo el conocimiento y todo, ah, resuelven todas las dudas y son super dinámicos pero en las clases en línea se ven un poco reprimidos me parece.)

((...) not all teachers transmit you the same, the same energy to keep going with the classes, not all teacher have a good attitude, or at least, I don't give them the responsibility or to their attitude, but to the lack of experience teaching in this way, because, after you can meet them in presential classes and they take out all the knowledge and everything, they solve all the doubts and are super dynamic, but in online classes they seem a little repressed)

P3: (...)estoy viendo como la profesora se está rifando o el profesor está aplicándose y, de que venga chicos, y qué piensan de esto, en esto, esto y esto, y tal, ¿no? Te dan ese dinamismo, cosa que en internet no se podía porque no era un intercambio, de nuevo por

el hecho de que pues muteados para que no hiciéramos ruido no deseado o que las cámaras apagadas y no, no había un feedback (...)

((...)) I am seeing how the teacher is raffling off or the teacher is putting all the attitude, and, come on guys, and what do you think of this, this, this and this, and such, right? They give you that dynamism, something that you couldn't do on the internet because it wasn't an exchange, again due to the fact that they were muted so that we didn't make unwanted noise or the cameras were turned off and no, there was no feedback (...)

Finally, motivation has always been taken into account as one of the most critical aspects of learning; in this case, students could perceive the difference in how motivated they felt before and after the pandemic because when they are not autonomous or competent to set what they want or need to learn, plus the feeling of loneliness caused, as mentioned in the previous section, by the lack of human interaction, students cannot be able to keep their motivation levels, even, they mentioned teachers as an energizer to maintain their motivation and attention in classes in the virtuality.

4.8 Conclusions

After this research, it has been shown that online learning itself represents a challenge for students, but in the case of the pandemic, where everything was sudden and unexpected, students were uncomfortable, even disgusted, and the way their classes developed, in a completely different way from the one they were used to, represented a more significant difficulty for them, and once they could assimilate what was going on, students found out that they could do another thing while taking classes, which represented a more flexible way of university, but along with it, the fact that they did not know how to self-direct their learning, a very important aspect when learning online.

Students were always waiting for teacher to bring the answers and all the materials they would need in order to keep learning, and in this case, to improve their English, even when they looked for their own sources once they noticed the outcome was not the expected, students needed to first

set goals, so they could start looking for what they needed but with an objective in mind; since they do not have idea of what SDL is, then it is impossible for them to assimilate the responsibility that is on them, so they could not ultimately see the advantages that this modality could provide them.

Finally, interaction and connectivity problems were the leading causes of students losing their motivation while learning online. From students' perspective, teachers must motivate them being dynamic, so they can have the desire to keep learning and attending classes, but if the motivation does not start from them, it would be impossible for the teacher to keep their attention.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Research context

At the beginning of this research, it was mentioned that at the end of 2019, COVID-19 became a global pandemic starting in Wuhan, China, leading us to some health measures to avoid infections. One of those measures that affected students the most was the lockdown, which did not allow schools to be open, so virtuality was the best option to keep going with the learning process. This method of teaching and learning had been used before for many other institutions worldwide, but it seemed to be different when the background conditions were different. In this case, everything was forced and unplanned; in this way, developing some issues, whether psychological or technological, turned out expected in the new modality, such as frustration, anxiety, connectivity issues, and loss of interest. Students were also provided with a more considerable responsibility to manage their learning process, which means to self-direct their learning.

The self-directed learning concept is not very well known in general education because most students do not have the necessary skills to manage their learning, diagnose what they must learn, set goals, create a strategy, look for materials, and evaluate themselves. Those aspects are important when learning online since teachers cannot be attentive to every student as it would be in the presential modality for many reasons. In the case of language learning, the most significant difficulty is the lack of practice. Students can acquire it, but if they do not apply it, there is no way they can keep it. Doing this adds more strain to their management since they can look for more than just knowledge but also ways to use it.

In the Language Faculty of BUAP, the English level was perceived to not have the expected outcome from students' perspective, more specifically for those that were coursing the penultimate

Target Language in the virtuality, so the purpose of the present research was to know what students' perceptions are about the English learning process during the online modality focusing in the usage of self-directed learning and how it benefited or affected their English acquisition during Target Language IV in the Fall 2021 period.

One of the most significant advantages that can be found in the virtuality is the flexibility of time, learning from home in a more comfortable way which could lead students to also economize since they did not have to spend money in transportation or food, but, in the same way, those benefits can turn into disadvantages, because they are responsible to lead their own pace when learning, basically because students were used to learn in a more structured environment with as less distractors as possible and, because of the type of interactions has been modified, it is essential to know what are students' thoughts about it, having this research covering the necessity to know how the self-directed learning during a forced virtuality affected the language learning process generalizing statements, in order to notice the possible deficiencies that represents for students have no a clear idea on how to organize their learning so future teachers can attend to those problematics trying to encourage autonomy in students whether in person or in the virtuality.

For those endings, this research sought to answer the questions: What were the main difficulties students faced coursing Target Language IV in online modality according to their experiences? How were students familiar with self-directed learning during their English course, and how were they not aware of that concept intervening in their language learning process? With those answers, it is possible to explain students' challenges when they did not employ self-directed learning and analyze those difficulties in the online modality.

In order to accomplish these endings, a case-study method was employed, in this way interviewing only three students, one from a different section that coursed Target Language IV in the Fall 2021

period at LEI BUAP, using a cross-trend design to explain the affectations that they perceived seeking for trends within their experiences, looking for qualitative data generating statements about said difficulties. As instruments, a semi-structured interview was needed, made in Spanish to avoid any kind of misunderstanding, doing them through a video call platform so interviewees nor interviewer can result affected for the current pandemic situation.

This research only partially explains all the elements that can affect the e-learning process since the focus is on language proficiency. Psychological aspects are lightly mentioned since anxiety and depression seem to play an important role, but it is not deepened. In the same way, economic and geographical conditions do not have significant importance in this paper.

One of the most important implications of this research is to motivate parents and teachers to implement self-directed learning from the early academic life of children so they can get accustomed to it, and in similar situations as this one, they are not affected.

5.2 Conclusions

The modality represented a necessity to adapt in the middle of a catastrophic situation, making students uncomfortable and losing their interest and motivation to keep learning, in this case, to improve their English skills. It did not seem to be serious once they got used to it and found the bunch of possibilities that studying online could provide them, such as doing other things at home while listening to classes; the problem came out when they had to show the results in an exam or evaluation that they could notice the lack of learning. Along with the poor attention, students were always exposed to technical issues, connectivity, and electric service.

Not only the technical issues but also teachers, students said that teachers are responsible for keeping their attention and motivation up with materials and dynamic classes, even though part of

the responsibility is on the teacher, following the principles of SDL, students are more responsible for how their learning process is made, and teachers are only a guide. A factor that without doubt played an important role was feedback; the time that receiving observations can take in the modality represented a problem for students; they wanted to practice, but they were alone in the process since there was no human interaction.

Students were not able to see the advantages of virtuality but only the disadvantages. The benefits presented before about synchronous and asynchronous lessons were not seen by them, where they could not practice enough, and once again when asynchronous was the best for them since they could manage their time as they would like to.

Self-directed learning involves much more than knowing how to manage time and how to manage what you want to learn. As mentioned before, to be aware of your learning necessities, look for the materials and sources that focus on a specific achievement. Students look for ways to keep learning without knowing themselves and what they need or want to improve. SDL is demanding and involves both teachers and students to achieve goals, and successful online learning can only be accessed with self-directed learning.

In the case of motivation, it is known that it is an essential factor in satisfactorily accomplishing goals in all branches. It is not the exception when talking about learning, mainly English online learning. The pre and post-pandemic motivation can be seen by students, evocating a decrease in their desire to keep learning and paying attention to classes, so they are not motivated to take a class, they are not motivated for analyzing what they want to accomplish, and look for the necessary sources to do it by themselves.

5.3 Research questions

When this research started, three questions were formulated to be answered through the investigation, which responses are presented below:

What were the main difficulties students faced coursing Target Language IV in online modality according to their experiences?

According to the interviews, students found the main difficulty at the beginning of the pandemic was not being familiar with the modality; it felt uncomfortable for them, but once they were over that, they could handle the classes, but it made them feel insecure about the knowledge they were supposed to acquire. In the case of the more extroverted students, the main challenge for them in order to get accustomed was the lack of interaction, not being able to see other's faces, making it hard for them to conserve good grades, as well as the feeling of losing experiences, causing in somehow emotional damaged leading to the lack of interest in learning; of course, this situation did not seem to be that important for all students, they did mention the fact of not having a graduation party or ceremony, but when talking with the ones that cared, the feeling of sadness could be perceived.

In the same way, another essential difficulty mentioned by students was the fact that they feel so comfortable in their own spaces, their bedroom, their living room, that it was easier to get distracted, including the aspect that sometimes it is not mandatory for them turning the camera on, allowing them to do any other activity while taking class, it became a kind of podcast that students listen to while cleaning their house, eating, or even doing other's subjects homework.

These aspects can be reflected in their outcome, not only at the end of the course but during the lesson, where they found the attention received from the teacher, where the feedback was not as

fast as they would have liked, or they were used to; also, the charge of work sometimes seemed to be less, and sometimes they had the perception that teacher left everything to them, asking for homework and exercises that, for them, seemed not to be worthy or good enough for keep improving their learning, even blaming the activities that teacher made, saying that could not catch their attention as it would be in traditional learning.

Of course, technology plays a vital role in the difficulties of learning online. If the connection is less optimal than wished, it could lead to students losing the pace of the class. Suppose they are already distracted doing something else, unable to properly listen to the activities or contents. In that case, it makes it harder for them to genuinely pay attention to the class. Along with all of these factors, it is essential to return to the motivational aspect, where, again, because students were not able to see reactions to listen to the other's responses clearly, it caused in students the feeling of being abandoned and lacking motivation.

In conclusion, human interaction seemed to be very necessary for those who, since the beginning of their academic life, were linked to always having a teacher with them, their classmate interactions, and especially, having a fluent conversation with the people they are learning with, emotionally, academically and economically, they were not ready to move to the virtuality, in the case of learning English, not being able to practice and use the language as much as they would like to "inside" the classroom, was where they could perceived a more significant repercussion.

How were students familiar with self-directed learning related to their virtual English classes?

Following the answer that students gave, one of them mentioned that the virtuality was made for people who are very responsible; it can be laziness to keep trying to understand particular topics,

causing students to postpone doing their activities until the deadline arrives and they end up not delivering it. In the case of self-directed learning, the fact of having external situations, such as personal issues, caused students to not pay special attention to what they needed to learn.

Students agreed that most of the time, they did not direct their learning. Otherwise, they would have looked for more sources and ways to learn what they felt they were lacking because they were conscious about teachers not providing them with the information and materials they were expecting but either do anything about it; even they mentioned that, as a culture, in Mexico it can be seen that students are used to always being directed by someone else, in this case, teachers, always telling what activities to do, so students are not accustomed to look for their ways to keep improving, if teachers are not always behind of them constantly repeating what they must do, they do not feel the necessity of doing it.

Practicing is another essential aspect of self-directed learning, which, in this case, only occurred during the virtual lessons, but this also limited students since they needed to feel more confident to answer questions. They felt observed even though they could not see their classmates and sometimes not even the teacher; they limited their study time for classes, but in classes, were not able to participate.

In short, students needed to become more familiar with self-directed learning. They may know the concept or deduce it, but they need to learn how to employ it during their learning process, mainly because they are not used to it. They have always waited for the teacher to tell them what to do and the timing, so they are incapable of setting their goals, determining a period for doing activities dedicated to improving their learning, or just looking for ways to keep practicing out of the school time.

How did needing to be more familiar with self-directed learning play intervene in the student's language learning process?

In the case of English learning, students argued that they did look for more ways to keep learning, mainly being immersed in the language interacting with natives of the language through activities that they like to do, such as playing video games online, chatting with people in apps destined to this endings and so on, looking for having a more natural conversation and acquisition of the language, but, of course, this cannot show them how grammar works, because not all people are used to talk correctly. Another essential source employed to keep practicing was students talking to themselves, using imaginary scenarios where they could practice their speaking. However, it is not the same as sharing a dialogue with somebody else.

Even students got into English courses outside of the faculty because they were not happy with the improvement they perceived while using other activities that are always recommended when learning a language, such as listening to music, podcasts, and watching content in the target language.

Although all those resources and techniques students employed were beneficial, they were only worth it if students knew what they needed to learn. They perceived the lack of learning and practice but needed help determining what specific area they tried to improve their foreign language abilities. However, without any organization, even if they could put effort into it, they could not see the results because they did not even know what abilities they were looking to enrich; they were not familiar with self-directed learning, so they could not direct their English learning process even if they tried.

5.4 Implications

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the pandemic was the leading cause that provoked the implementation of virtuality within academic life in society. Even though the pandemic seems to have started, online education looks like it will stay for a long since it has changed the vision that students have about learning and, at the same time, has presented some facilities for them in different aspects, such as time, economy and even comfort. Therefore, the importance of this research lies in the fact that students and teachers are attentive to the application of self-directed learning, not only in higher education but, once again, since the lower levels of education, and, in the same way, not only for English or language learning but in every subject.

This can be helpful for students to get to know their learning style. Thus, they can look for sources and strategies that, along with their necessities, result in a better outcome and achievement of the set goals. Of course, this responsibility involves parents, so this research can also be useful for them to learn the possible consequences of not bringing up kids with these autonomy skills, mainly in this context where technology and self-learning are taking over different areas.

5.5 Limitations

Since the focus of the research was self-directed learning with students from language teaching degrees, many opportunity areas can be found; the first can be the fact that only the English learning area is being taken as the focus, leaving aside the other subjects of the degree, which, of course, must have been affected by the pandemic and sudden virtual situation. In the same way, the level of the study, since not only college students could perceive an affection in their learning process dealing with adapting to a new learning modality, and at the same time students of all ages might have different perceptions.

Other aspects that can harm students' performance are economic and technological, such as economical, including technological, as not having suitable devices to take classes and internet connection, along with the emotional aspects, such as the negative feelings of losing connectivity with others and the absence of face-to-face conversations also represented a difficulty for students, those aspects are superficially mentioned, but the investigation was not deeper on that.

Additionally, only students from the higher levels were considered for this research, not caring about the lower where the answer to the change of modality could have been different since they did not have the opportunity to experience university presential classes, so they did not have previous expectation on how their English learning process would be.

5.6 Directions for further investigation

For further investigation, it is recommended, as mentioned in the section before, to consider the psychological factors and problems that students had to face, going deeper on, emotionally, what factor caused a more significant decrease in their performance. In the same way, geographical and economic aspects needed to be more extensive, and for the answers obtained in the interviews, those features also had a significant impact.

Much research can be made taking as a point self-directed learning, moving from talking about English development to another subject, not only from the English Teaching degree of BUAP, but in other levels, subjects, and institutions, looking for how the repercussions differed depending on the context. Finally, another critical aspect that was also mentioned is the role of teachers when teaching online; perhaps it can also be an opportunity area to research how emotionally, economically, and academically the pandemic affected them and their performance, having a

repercussion on students, their motivation, and their lack of interest in determining their goals, necessities, and pace when learning in the virtuality.

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APPENDIX 1

STUDENTS' SELF-DIRECTED ONLINE LEARNING TARGET LANGUAGE IV EXPERIENCES IN THE FALL 2021 PERIOD AT LEI BUAP

Instrumento de investigación.

- 1.- ¿Cómo te sientes en cuanto a las clases **en línea** ocasionadas por la pandemia?
- 2.- ¿Cómo percibes que es diferente la educación **en línea** a la **educación** presencial o tradicional en cuanto a carga de trabajo y atención por parte del docente?
- 3.- ¿Cuáles consideras que han sido las mayores dificultades que has enfrentado estudiando inglés **en línea**?
- 4.- ¿Sabes qué son las sesiones síncronas y asíncronas? ¿Podrías explicar qué son?

El aprendizaje síncrono significa que el profesor y los estudiantes comparten el mismo espacio y tiempo en un ambiente digital, mientras que en el asíncrono no requiere de estar en el mismo tiempo y espacio para aprender; representa una forma más sencilla para que los estudiantes controlen el proceso de aprendizaje ya que los materiales siempre están disponibles y los estudiantes no están forzado a responder inmediatamente, siguen su propio ritmo.

- 5.- ¿Tu profesor de lengua meta hizo uso de este tipo de sesiones? ¿De cuál específicamente **y como la implementó**?
- 6.- ¿Consideras que este tipo de sesiones ayudan a tu aprendizaje de inglés? ¿Por qué?
- 7.- ¿Sabes lo que es el aprendizaje auto dirigido? Explícalo.

*De acuerdo con Knowles (1975), el aprendizaje autodirigido es el fenómeno donde el estudiante decide determinar **qué es lo que necesita aprender y fijar sus propias metas** buscando sus **propios recursos** y aplicándolo a su aprendizaje con o sin ayuda de alguien más.*

- 8.- Ahora que conoces el concepto, ¿crees que supiste autodirigir tu aprendizaje de inglés durante el semestre pasado?
- 9.- ¿Consideras que fuiste consiente de lo que necesitabas aprender durante tu curso de Lengua Meta IV? ¿Por qué?
- 10.- ¿Buscaste tus propios recursos de aprendizaje más allá de los que el profesor te facilitó?
- 11.- ¿Practicabas inglés fuera del horario de clase? **¿Cómo** y por qué?
- 12.- ¿Cómo consideras que estos factores afectaron tu aprendizaje de inglés?
- 13.- ¿Crees que la falta de interacción cara a cara fue un factor que afectó tu aprendizaje de inglés? ¿Por qué? (cómo la interacción cara a cara)

14.- ¿Consideras que las clases en línea han provocado una falta de motivación para aprender y seguir mejorando tu inglés? Explica por qué. (como las clases en línea)

APPENDIX 2.

STUDENTS' SELF-DIRECTED VIRTUAL LEARNING TARGET LANGUAGE IV EXPERIENCES IN THE FALL 2021 PERIOD AT LEI BUAP

Instrumento de investigación.

- 1.- ¿Cómo te sientes en cuanto a las clases virtuales ocasionadas por la pandemia?
- 2.- ¿Cómo percibes que es diferente la educación virtual a la educación presencial o tradicional en cuanto a carga de trabajo y atención por parte del docente?
- 3.- ¿Cuáles consideras que han sido las mayores dificultades que has enfrentado estudiando inglés de manera virtual?
- 4.- ¿Sabes qué son las sesiones síncronas y asíncronas? ¿Podrías explicar qué son?
El aprendizaje síncrono significa que el profesor y los estudiantes comparten el mismo espacio y tiempo en un ambiente digital, mientras que en el asíncrono no requiere de estar en el mismo tiempo y espacio para aprender; representa una forma más sencilla para que los estudiantes controlen el proceso de aprendizaje ya que los materiales siempre están disponibles y los estudiantes no están forzado a responder inmediatamente, siguen su propio ritmo.
- 5.- ¿Tu profesor de lengua meta hizo uso de este tipo de sesiones? ¿De cuál específicamente y cómo lo implementó?
- 6.- ¿Consideras que este tipo de sesiones ayudan a tu aprendizaje de inglés? ¿Por qué?
- 7.- ¿Sabes lo que es el aprendizaje auto dirigido? Explícalo.
- 8.- Ahora que conoces el concepto, ¿crees que supiste autodirigir tu aprendizaje de inglés durante el semestre pasado?
- 9.- ¿Consideras que fuiste consiente de lo que necesitabas aprender durante tu curso de Lengua Meta IV? ¿Por qué?
- 10.- ¿Buscaste tus propios recursos de aprendizaje más allá de los que el profesor te facilitó?
- 11.- ¿Practicabas inglés fuera del horario de clase? ¿Cómo y por qué?
- 12.- ¿Cómo consideras que estos factores afectaron tu aprendizaje de inglés?
- 13.- ¿Cómo la interacción cara a cara fue un factor que afectó tu aprendizaje de inglés? ¿Por qué?
- 14.- ¿Cómo las clases virtuales han provocado una falta de motivación para aprender y seguir mejorando tu inglés? Explica por qué.

APPENDIX 3.

Consentimiento Informado

Yo Ángela Vega Arias _____

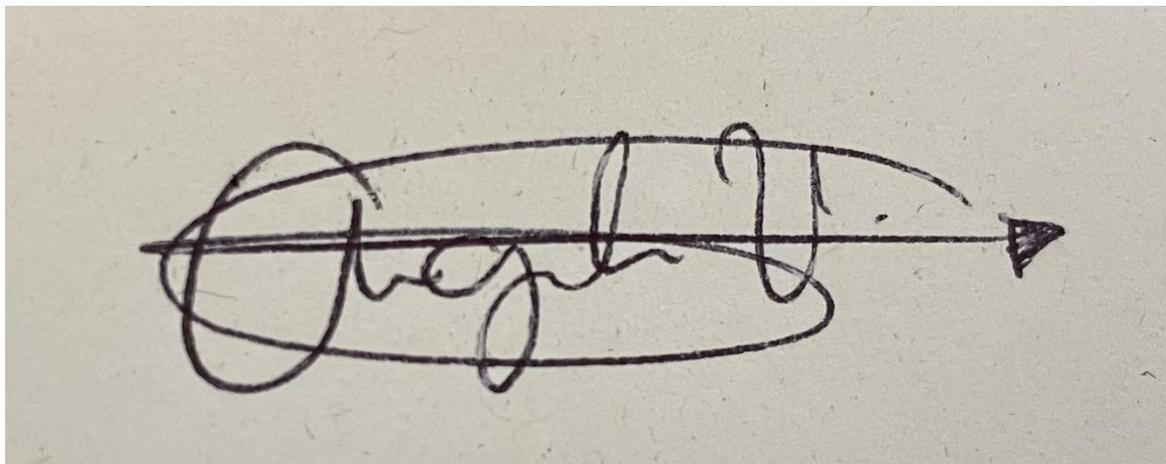
_____ declaro que he sido informado invitado a participar en una investigación denominada "**STUDENTS' SELF-DIRECTED ONLINE LEARNING TARGET LANGUAGE IV EXPERIENCES IN THE FALL 2021 PERIOD AT LEI BUAP**", este es un proyecto de investigación que tiene como finalidad recabar información para el desarrollo de un proyecto de tesis, y que, además, cuenta con el respaldo de la Facultad de Lenguas BUAP.

Entiendo que este estudio busca conocer las experiencias de los estudiantes en el uso del aprendizaje autodirigido durante el aprendizaje del idioma inglés y consistirá en una entrevista virtual con un total de 14 reactivos, la información obtenida será de manera confidencial y para propósitos exclusivamente académicos, por lo que la identidad y la información será de tipo anónima. Los nombres de los participantes serán asociados a un número de serie, esto significa que las respuestas podrán ser conocidas por otras personas y ser identificadas en la fase de publicación de resultados obviando la identidad de los participantes.

Estoy en conocimiento que los datos no me serán entregados y que no habrá retribución económica por la participación en este estudio, esta información podrá beneficiar de manera indirecta y por lo tanto tiene un beneficio para la sociedad dada la investigación que se está llevando a cabo.

Sí. Acepto voluntariamente participar en este estudio y he recibido una copia del presente documento.

Firma participante:



Fecha:

28 Febrero 2022.