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## **Mixed-Modality: Combining language classes and autonomous learning in CAADI**

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### **Introduction**

This research study looks at ways to expand language learning, encourage the development of learners' engagement, offer different learning modalities, take advantage of existing resources, offer expanded scheduling opportunities, and adapt learning to students needs. Our study combined two language learning modalities: autonomous learning in the Self-Access Center (SAC) (here referred to as Centro de Auto Aprendizaje de Idiomas - CAADI) along with traditional classes at the Language Department of the University of Guanajuato. The program showed overall improvement on students' language learning experiences, fostered students' motivation, and offered innovative, more flexible and individualized learning by empowering students' learning. The results of this mixed modality project showed a positive impact on language learning including a change in participants' attitude who became more confident and willing to take responsibility.

In this article, we will present the context of the study, introduce some definitions regarding autonomous learning, the theoretical framework, our research methodology, the data collection instruments, part of our results and data analysis, as well as the educational implication and conclusions.

### **Learning Context: The Language Department of the *Universidad de Guanajuato***

Language learning has become an essential tool in today's world of communication, business and travel. Many modalities exist to learn languages, the most common one being traditional lessons in a classroom with a teacher following a curriculum program with specific objectives. As stated by Cebollada, Vite and Castillo (2011), Zarco, Villanueva and Monleón (2010) and Noguchi & McCarthy (2010) the concept of combining different types of learning modalities such as classroom learning and autonomous learning outside the classroom is being developed in different parts of the world such as Mexico and parts of Asia. With the establishment of Self-Access Centers by the British Council in Mexico, new ways of learning languages have been developed.

At the Language Department of the University of Guanajuato, language learners registered in language courses normally attend language classes five hours per week. Furthermore, the CAADI for autonomous language learning is made available on a voluntary basis as a space

where students are free to learn at their pace and level at a time of their choosing. The center for autonomous language learning provides a variety of practical and authentic activities, material and resources, individual language counselling services, guided conversation practice through conversation clubs, environments suited to different learners' needs, and special workshops for users to develop different language skills (pronunciation, spelling, reading, etc.), exam preparation and the use of multimedia activities to foster the individual and autonomous language learning.

One unique aspect of the center that is highly valued by our members, is its conversation workshops run by teachers, international and local volunteers from the community and other students. Learning happening in the CAADI has been by users' interest and has no credited curricular value recognized by the institution. Students from language classes have had to pay an extra fee to become a member (presently \$265.00 pesos per semester for university students). In the last ten years, the University of Guanajuato has established a dozen new Self-Access Centers for autonomous language learning at different sites in the states of Guanajuato. Therefore, our mixed modality language learning project could be transferred and applied to other campuses.

As a learning innovation, we looked to synergize our existing language programs and services to offer more choices to learners. A group of language teachers from three language areas decided to combine autonomous activities in the CAADI with their traditional language classes. The two learning modalities were joint to offer an alternative solution to learning: traditional classroom lessons within a set curriculum complemented with individualized activities for autonomous learning. The program offers innovative, flexible and personalized learning alternatives. The goal of the study was to monitor learners' motivation, autonomy and skills development in order to evaluate the impact of the mix-modality option; in other words, our regular program in the classroom combined with autonomous learning in a Self-Access Center. It offered a wider variety of activities, material and resources to its users than solely traditional classes. We hoped that this would lead to greater recognition of the value of independent and autonomous learning within an academic context. This was anticipated to be attractive especially for students who are struggling with complicated timetables, lack of freedom in class, wanting to tackle special learning needs, etc.

### **Definitions and Theoretical Framework**

Holec's (1981) defined autonomy as 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning' (p. 3), while Dickinson (1987) spoke of autonomy as "the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions" (p. 11). In his definition, Holec gives power to the learner. Dickinson, on the other hand, gives no attention to the learning context by putting the entire responsibility on the learner. We believe that there must be a balance between these two extremes. Some authors recognize the relationship between autonomy, culture and learning contexts (Pennycook, 2013; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Benson, 2007; Holliday, 2003; Benson, Chik & Lim, 2003). Closely related to the concept of autonomous learning, is self-determination theory in which the individual's ability to choose how to satisfy their needs and perform actions that need some degree of self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1985; Jenő & Diseth, 2014).

Our theoretical framework is based on constructivist perspectives which places students at the heart of their learning process (Bruner, 1983; Vygotskiĭ & Cole 1978), the role of learning

styles and metacognition (Doly, 2006, Delvolvé, 2006), development of autonomous learning (Benson 2001, 2007, 2013; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Hedge, 2000; Gardner & Miller, 1999) and offering complementary tools and techniques through language counseling (Nunan, 2009), and developing language learning strategies (Oxford, 1989; Rubin, 1975) to foster language learning and critical knowledge about one's own learning for deeper individual growth. Gregorio-Godeo (2005) makes references to the fact that for some teachers, this type of approach implies relying on learners' responsibility far too much.

It is important to recognise the learning opportunities available outside the language classrooms. As Richards (2015) says, "the curriculum of teacher-education courses needs to acknowledge that good teaching means preparing learners for learning both inside and outside of the classroom and that preparing teachers for this new reality is an important aspect of teacher education today" (p. 21).

### **Research Intervention and Data Collection**

This action research involved two phases: in phase 1, the pilot study, seven teachers worked with students taking classes in French, German and English. The pilot study was carried over two semesters. In phase 2, a second mix-modality project was developed by one French teacher with five groups (32 students) at three different levels (A1 to B1). In this paper, we are presenting the results from phase one of this research project involving classes in French, German and English with seven teachers and groups of learners at different levels.

The two phases of the program shared the same objectives, including three hypotheses:

- the existence of a link between the CAADI material and the pedagogical orientation gave by the personal with the students' learning styles;
- the tasks students achieved participate in the new skills' self-analysis;
- the topics taught in the classroom influence the material and the tasks carried out in the CAADI.
- 

Data collection instruments included learning styles and strategies questionnaires, online survey, interviews, students' learning logs and teachers' journals, individual registry of autonomous activities in a learning log, and students and teachers' journals. Moreover, participation in "learn how to learn" workshops was provided to the learners. At the end of the second semester, fifty of the 102 participating students completed an online survey of their experience.

Participating students were asked to keep learning journals of their experience, to complete two surveys, to fill out questionnaires on learning styles and strategies. When participating in activities in the CAADI, they were asked to register their arrival and departure times as well as briefly describe any activities they carried out as well as enlisting the materiel used. Participating language learners developed their skills, confidence, and abilities while learning at their own pace, setting learning goals according to their personal needs, and selecting their material and study schedule.

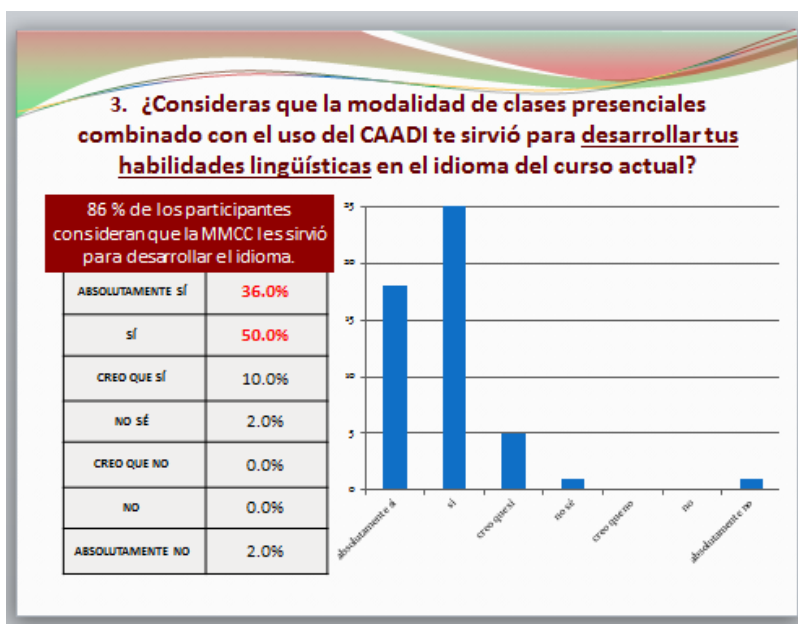
Participating teachers offered counseling in the CAADI for one hour a week as part of their teaching hours. Teachers in the traditional language programs integrated new and autonomous activities into their curriculum and they also became more involved in the CAADI.

They were also available to offer help to their own students as well as any other language users in the center.

### Presentation and Analysis of Results

The participants were asked to comment on whether or not their level of autonomy and their learning outcome had changed during the period of this study. Their responses were encouraging as they reported having a very positive experience in the combined classes-CAADI learning approach.

The survey results indicated that 90% considered that the mix-modality had been a positive or very positive experience for them, 86% said that it helped them develop their linguistics ability, and 88% indicated that they wanted to repeat this language learning experience in the future. 50% of the respondents revealed that they had not been CAADI users before participating in the project and were therefore new users of the CAADI. Overall, students indicated that participating in the autonomous activities complemented and fostered their language learning and improved their motivation.



A proportion of 96% of the participants indicated that they would “definitely or most probably” want to continue their language learning through the Mixed-Modality program which was a significant result. Furthermore, they majorly reported that their learning was richer through participating in this project, that they were able to develop their autonomy, that they had more freedom to choose their schedule, that they felt more involved in their learning, had more motivation, and found learning language more interesting that way. A student commented the following: “The fact that it was mixed, worked perfectly well. It’s an extra that perhaps the two modalities together could not achieve separately” (*“El hecho de que sea mixto funciona a la perfección. Es un extra, que a lo mejor las dos cosas por separado, no podrían lograr.”*)

**2. ¿Crees que hubo beneficios y inconvenientes al participar en este proyecto?**

	Si
MI APRENDIZAJE FUE MÁS ENRIQUECEDOR	96.0% (48)
PUDE DESARROLLAR MI AUTONOMÍA	92.0% (46)
TUVE MÁS LIBERTAD DE HORARIOS	86.0% (43)
ME SENTÍ MÁS INVOLUCRADO EN MI APRENDIZAJE	96.0% (48)
TUVE MÁS MOTIVACIÓN PARA APRENDER	82.0% (41)
FUE MÁS INTERESANTE PARA MI	90.0% (45)

In terms of the materials and activities used during the project, students indicated that the preferred activities were: completing class homework, listening to songs, using audio-books, asking help and guidance from a language counsellor, and participating in conversation groups. Chats and emails were the least interesting activities for their language learning.

**8. ¿Qué tanto usaste los siguientes materiales y servicios del CAADI?**

	mucho	algo	nada
Libros de gramática	16.0% (8)	28.0% (14)	14.0% (7)
Libros de texto	6.0% (3)	36.0% (18)	10.0% (5)
Audio-libros	22.0% (11)	34.0% (17)	14.0% (7)
Revistas y Periódicos	2.0% (1)	18.0% (9)	38.0% (19)
TOEFL y otros exámenes	6.0% (3)	34.0% (17)	28.0% (14)
Ejercicios de pronunciación	10.0% (5)	40.0% (20)	14.0% (7)
Ejercicios de vocabulario	8.0% (4)	52.0% (26)	10.0% (5)
Materiales en Internet	12.0% (6)	16.0% (8)	32.0% (16)
Chat y correos	2.0% (1)	12.0% (6)	64.0% (32)
Cursos audio-visuales	8.0% (4)	12.0% (6)	48.0% (24)
Películas	16.0% (8)	32.0% (16)	18.0% (9)
Música	26.0% (13)	24.0% (12)	14.0% (7)
Juegos interactivos	8.0% (4)	12.0% (6)	46.0% (23)
Talleres de Lectura	2.0% (1)	18.0% (9)	46.0% (23)
Talleres de Escritura	6.0% (3)	14.0% (7)	44.0% (22)
Talleres de conversación	18.0% (9)	28.0% (14)	24.0% (12)
Tareas del curso	28.0% (14)	38.0% (19)	16.0% (8)
Apoyo de asesores	20.0% (10)	34.0% (17)	14.0% (7)

The participants' responses to question five of the online survey showed that students enjoyed the freedom to choose their schedule to complete activities in the CAADI, the availability and variety of the learning material, the students' willingness to learn in an autonomous way, the support of the language counselors, and the support that the University of Guanajuato, through the *Division de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades* supported the project through a reduced fee for participating classes to register in the CAADI.

**5. De los siguientes aspectos de la MMCC  
¿qué tan importante te parece cada uno  
para que el programa funcione de forma óptima?**

	<b>Más importante</b>
Libertad de horarios para asistir al CAADI	74.0% (37)
Disponibilidad y acceso a materiales en CAADI	86.0% (43)
Disposición del estudiante para aprender por sí mismo	92.0% (46)
Participación en el taller de Aprender a Aprender	54.0% (27)
Tour guiado del CAADI a principio del semestre	38.0% (19)
Apoyo de mi profesor en clase para fomentar la autonomía	66.0% (33)
Apoyo de asesores en el CAADI	78.0% (39)
Apoyo y participación de mi profesor en el CAADI	66.0% (33)
Cuota de inscripción al CAADI incluida en el costo del curso	48.0% (24)
Apoyo de la institución para nuevas modalidades de aprendizaje	72.0% (36)
Darle valor curricular (créditos) al aprendizaje autónomo en el CAADI	44.0% (22)

Results indicated that students developed abilities to evaluate new learning materials, combine activities according to their learning preferences, recognize their personal achievements, and set objectives in their language acquisition process. Taking part in this study greatly improved language learning experience and fostered students' motivation. The research showed positive results on language learning including a change in the participants' attitude who became more confident and willing to take responsibility. Students developed abilities to evaluate new learning material, to combine activities according to their learning preferences, to recognize their personal achievements, and to set objectives in their language acquisition process.

- 1b) ¿De qué forma impactado en tu aprendizaje tu participación en el proyecto de Modalidad Mixta?**
- 44 Respuestas
1. He podido reforzar los conocimientos adquiridos en clase. Ha sido un semestre más productivo a comparación a otros.
  2. Es una forma más dinámica e interesante de aprender inglés, te da la oportunidad de realizar actividades distintas.
  3. Logre identificar de manera personal algunas de las fallas que estaba teniendo y que pude mejorar en ese aspecto.
  4. Logre ser también mas autodidacta y eso creo que fue estupendo.
  5. Aprendo un poco mas de lo expuesto en clase a mi propio ritmo, y enfocándome en mis deficiencias respecto al idioma.

The study also indicated that students consider themselves competent in evaluating the material according to the way of learning; the importance for the participants of a more natural contact with the foreign language they are learning; the needs for them to organize and

prepare their visit to the CAADI; the opportunity of taking their own decisions in term of choosing the material or determine a learning goal; the presence of the teacher is less notorious throughout the study. For two more years, the project continued with the help of different teachers and up to 20 groups participate to this mix-modality program. Although each teacher decided to use data collection and surveys, the students' interest of being part of the project was vivid.

### **Educational Implication and Conclusion**

In this research study, the benefits of the mix-modality program were mostly positive. The participating students reported an overall improvement in their language skills and indicated that taking part in this study enhanced their language learning experience and fostered their motivation. The CAADI benefited by gaining more language counselors, which is greatly needed in this age of severe job cuts. Most of the teachers and counselors in the CAADI are working under short term contract hours with no social benefits or permanent positions. Hence, our institution could greatly benefit administratively from promoting the mixed-modality project to gain teachers hours for the CAADI, to gain more students' registration each semester by offering a reduced fee to students. Most importantly, of course, were the various educational gains reported by the participating students who saw the value of combining autonomous learning with traditional classroom learning.

For this research, two existing programs were combined by offering a mix-modality alternative to regular classroom lessons complemented with autonomous activities, hence leading to recognition for independent learning within an academic context while offering an innovative, flexible and individualized language learning alternative. The aim was to support learners' initiatives, monitor their activities, offer personal language counselling, develop learners' autonomy regarding the use of the CAADI and the progress in applying new skills, recognize the material corresponding to their specific needs and learning style and, increase language learning motivation and development.

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# **44th International MEXTESOL Convention Proceedings**

## **Strengthening Learning Communities**

**León, Guanajuato, México  
November 9-12, 2017**



MEXTESOL, the Mexican Association of Teachers of English, A.C. is pleased to make available summaries of selected academic presentations given at this year's Convention. MEXTESOL offers this non-profit compilation as an alternative for accessing information given at the sessions for those convention-goers who were unable to attend. It is also our interest that those colleagues who were unable to attend this year's convention have an opportunity to see a sampling of what ELT professionals are pursuing.

As always, articles included in this year's proceedings cover a variety of topics: classroom activities, teacher leadership, working with technology and inclusion. There is also research into topics that affect the English language teaching community.

Authors come from across the country of Mexico, as well as from different countries. The different viewpoints provide us with the clear idea that we have more in common with each other than we have differences.

I'd like to thank Uli Schrader in the MEXTESOL offices for keeping the Proceedings on track. The Proceedings, as the Convention itself, only happen with the collaborative effort of everyone who takes part and with that in mind, thank you to everyone who sent in articles.

We hope that many English language professionals benefit from the ideas presented in this document and that in years to come, other Convention speakers participate as authors in the Proceedings. Thank you for your interest and participation in our organization, MEXTESOL.

Guadalupe Pineda  
Editor

*Note: The speakers / authors submitted their articles according to the guidelines that were provided. These were subsequently formatted in order to provide uniformity in the presentation of the articles. MEXTESOL is not responsible for the contents of the summaries, nor for inaccuracies or omissions in the information, presentation or bibliographical references contained therein. In the table of contents, summaries are listed in alphabetical order of the speaker / author's last name, as listed in the submitted files. The names in the articles appear as written.*

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