



Students' Perceptions on Language Learning Construct from the Interaction on a Social
Networking Site

Edinson David Gamboa Toro
Nilsa Ximena Guerrero Beltrán

Universidad del Valle
Escuela de Ciencias del Lenguaje
Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras
2017



Students' Perceptions on Language Learning Construct from the Interaction on a Social
Networking Site

Edinson David Gamboa Toro
Nilsa Ximena Guerrero Beltrán

Director:

José Aldemar Álvarez Valencia

Universidad del Valle
Escuela de Ciencias del Lenguaje
Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras
2017

ABSTRACT

This research reports on a case study carried out with undergraduate students in a foreign language program using the SNSLL Livemocha in an English course. The study aimed to identify and analyze students' perceptions about how a foreign language is to be learnt, how the SNSLL Livemocha attempts to teach users a foreign language and the possible relationship between these two processes. Data were collected through a survey, a focus group and learning logs over a period of seven months. Drawing on qualitative data analysis techniques, data were analyzed and categorized in the light of four existing language learning theories. Results indicate that overall constructivist and cognitivist ideas prevail over ecological and behaviorist conceptions among student's perceptions about language learning. Furthermore, students identified aspects belonging to four learning theories in some way, although cognitivist and constructivist principles had a major degree of influence on Livemocha's pedagogical design.

RESUMEN

Esta investigación presenta un estudio de caso llevado a cabo con estudiantes de un pregrado en Lenguas Extranjeras al usar la Red Social para el Aprendizaje de Lenguas (RESAL) Livemocha en un curso de inglés. El estudio tenía como objetivos identificar y analizar las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre cómo se aprende una lengua extranjera, cómo la RESAL buscaba enseñarles una lengua extranjera y la posible relación entre ambos procesos. La información se recogió a través de una encuesta, un grupo focal y diarios de los participantes durante un periodo de siete meses. Con base en técnicas de análisis cualitativo, la información se analizó y se categorizó a la luz de cuatro teorías de aprendizaje de lenguas. Los resultados señalan que entre las percepciones sobre el aprendizaje de lenguas, las nociones constructivistas y cognitivas

prevalecen sobre las concepciones ecológicas y conductistas. Adicionalmente, los participantes identificaron aspectos pertenecientes a cuatro teorías de aprendizaje de lenguas en cierta medida, aunque los principios cognitivos y constructivistas tuvieron un mayor grado de influencia en el diseño pedagógico de Livemocha.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank God, my family, my friends, and my teachers.

Edinson Gamboa

I would like to thank Dr. Álvarez for his time and support throughout this thesis process. His valuable guidance provided us with the tools we needed to complete this paper. Additionally, I would like to thank my parents and brother for their encouragement throughout this period.

Ximena Guerrero

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	6
INTRODUCTION.....	8
JUSTIFICATION.....	10
OBJECTIVES.....	12
General Objective.....	12
Specific Objectives.....	12
RESEARCH QUESTION.....	13
Research sub-questions.....	13
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	18
Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL).....	18
From Web 1.0 to Web 2.0.....	20
Social Networking Sites for Language Learning (SNSLL).....	23
Language learning theories in second language acquisition.....	24
Behaviorism.....	25
Cognitivism.....	26
Constructivism.....	28
Ecological approach.....	30
METHOD.....	32
Selection of the SNSLL and Site Description.....	33
Participants and setting.....	34
Data collection techniques.....	36
Data Analysis.....	37
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	39
Students' perceptions about how a foreign language is learnt.....	39
Learning based on cognitive processes.....	42
Learning through social interaction and cultural exchange.....	47
Learning through grammar and vocabulary.....	53
Students' perceptions about the language learning views on <i>Livemocha</i>	56
Learning as a linear process that integrates the four skills.....	57
Learning through cooperation and social interaction.....	62
CONCLUSIONS.....	67
PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS.....	69
LIMITATIONS.....	70

REFERENCES.....	72
APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM.....	78
APPENDIX B: LEARNING LOG TEMPLATE.....	79
APPENDIX C: SURVEY ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING PERSPECTIVES.....	81
APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL.....	84

1. INTRODUCTION

With the arrival of the technological era, particularly in the second half of the 20th century and the early 21st century, the ways in which human beings communicate have experienced a series of significant changes. The emergence of new technologies have given rise to new ways and spaces for communication which, in turn, have had a relevant impact on the educational field regarding the use and application of technology in educational processes. The conceptions of learning and teaching have also evolved in line with the proposal of virtual spaces for teaching that have been progressively gaining ground over the traditional face-to-face teaching practices. Nowadays, it is relatively easier to access to any kind of information online through educational spaces offered by worldwide known websites that appear as an innovative alternative for learning.

The spread of the Internet and the emergence of computer systems gave rise to the development of a variety of mechanisms to get across meaning and take the users into a new experience of self-directed learning through discovery and interaction. At an early stage, the development of the Web 1.0 interface provided an opportunity to have a first approach to the building of websites with a set of tools for language learning. Recently, by the beginning of the 21st century, the concept Web 2.0 (O'reilly, 2005 in Conole & Alevizou, 2010) came on the scene, which stands for a new platform with outstanding characteristics that differs from those offered by the previous Web 1.0 such as novel ways of communicating, sharing and connecting people around the globe (Conole & Alevizou, 2010).

The teaching and learning of foreign languages has been no exception to the changes prompted by the rise of online learning spaces and Web 2.0. It is possible to identify new virtual spaces for educational purposes that show up as a result of the increasing expansion of the web

and the extensive benefits offered by them, in terms of handling and dissemination of information. An example of this is the emergence of Social Networking Sites for Language Learning (SNSLLs)¹. These operate under similar parameters to those that rule other social network sites such as Facebook or Myspace, but differ on their purpose and scope, being educational communities that allow social interaction among the participants and also provide tools for collaborative and autonomous language learning within a multimodal environment (Lin, 2012; Alvarez, 2014).

Initial research on these websites attempted to describe and model their technical and pedagogical structure (Loiseau., Potolia., & Zourou, 2011). More recent studies have focused on learners interaction within these websites aiming at getting a better understanding of the learning processes, the conceptions of language and learning reflected in the structure and design, and the diverse ways in which they can contribute to the improvement of teaching practices (Lin, 2012; Lloyd, 2012; Álvarez 2016). The present research aims to inquire about how students build perceptions about language learning based on the interaction within the SNSLL: *Livemocha*.

¹ The term social networking sites for language learning (SNSLL) arises among some scholars to make a distinction between these and social network sites (Álvarez, 2014; Stevenson & Liu, 2010), the terms are still used indistinctively in some research papers though.

2. JUSTIFICATION

The current study gains relevance since contemporary teaching processes are increasingly involving the use of ICT's (Information and communication technologies) within the curriculum, specially, for those of foreign language teaching. The inclusion of new virtual spaces such as Social Networking Sites for Language Learning is revolutionizing the conceptions of how to teach and how to learn, leaving aside the idea of a single proven method for teaching and integrating the concept of multimodality in the proposed activities. Given the fact that this networking sites are relatively new (the first dates back to 2007), few studies have been conducted in terms of the effect of the interaction of learners within this virtual spaces and how this is reflected in their perception about learning a language (Alvarez, 2014). Our study explores these new scenarios for language learning departing from the perspectives of higher education students, which could provide insights for significant changes in terms of existing methodologies or lead to the development of new methodologies for teaching English as a foreign language.

Currently in Colombia, a language policy known as *National Bilingual Program* is being implemented. One of the goals of this program is to guide the teaching and learning of English in our country towards a universal way of communication, linking the new technologies and media to this end (National Bilingual Program, 2014, MEN). With a similar aim in mind, our study seeks to contribute to the technological innovation with the study of a SNSLL, particularly, by providing information about how it tries to teach, as well as its acceptability among a learning community. Likewise, this study makes part of an inter-institutional research comprising two universities², whose main objective is to determine the relationship between SNSLL and teaching and learning processes within teacher training programs. In this sense, our study will

² Universidad Javeriana de Bogotá and Universidad del Valle.

provide relevant knowledge about how foreign language learners perceive language learning on these websites and as a result, other researchers could determine the appropriate techniques to integrate these online environments into Foreign Language programs.

Finally, as future educators, this study will help us to be aware of the new technological resources and their potential articulation with our future practices. In addition, it will shed light on how students conceive of the idea of learning, thus we could meet students' needs and expectations, in order to achieve the pedagogical objectives in a more efficient way. In the field of research, this study could be a starting point for future studies concerning CALL.

3. OBJECTIVES

3.1 General objective

To identify the perceptions on language learning that students of IV semester construct from their interaction on the SNSLL *Livemocha* and the learning theories underlying these websites.

3.2 Specific Objectives

- 1) To identify students' perceptions about how a foreign language is learnt.
- 2) To identify students' perceptions about how the SNSLL *Livemocha* attempts to teach them a foreign language.

4. RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the perceptions about language learning and the learning theories underlying websites that fourth semester students of the foreign language program at Universidad del Valle construct from the interaction on the Social Networking Site for Language Learning (SNSLL) *Livemocha* ?

4.1 Research Sub-questions

- 1) What are the students' perceptions about how a foreign language is learnt?
- 2) What are the students' perceptions about how the SNSLL *Livemocha* attempts to teach them a foreign language?

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of the pedagogical practices that involve multimodal environments and collaborative spaces for learning on the web have been gaining relevance in the field of education during the last years. Social Networking Sites for Language Learning (SNSLL), anchored on the Web 2.0 platform, first appeared in 2007, and since then, they have been a subject of research addressed from various disciplines following different purposes. This research seeks to carry out a descriptive study to account for the perceptions of fourth semester students of a Foreign Languages program at Universidad del Valle, on how a language is learned on the basis of the interaction on the SNSLL Livemocha. Previous research have accounted for diverse aspects of these websites such as their design and overall features (Ellison, 2007; Conole & Alevizou, 2010; Stevenson & Liu, 2010), the nature of the proposed activities and the theories of learning involved in them (Conole & Alevizou, 2010; Loiseau, Potolia & Zourou, 2011; Álvarez, 2014), the practical application in educational settings and the performance of the learners (Conole & Alevizou, 2010; Stevenson & Liu, 2010; Loiseau, Potolia & Zourou, 2011; Lin, 2012; Lloyd, 2012; Pineda, 2014; Álvarez, 2014) and the impact of these Social Networks on society (Ellison, 2007; Ellison, Lampe & Steinfield, 2009).

Studies have been carried out on the subject of Web 2.0 tools and, more specifically, social network sites to account for aspects such as possible benefits, general features and the impact in contexts of formal learning processes. Conole and Alevizou (2010) reviewed the literature in the field of web 2.0 applications in language learning highlighting benefits, features and challenges for teaching processes. Relevant information is provided regarding definition of concepts such as Web 2.0 and social network sites, as well as a description of the general structure of these tools including perspectives of learning underlying the platforms: associative

(learning as activity), cognitive (learning as understanding) and situative (learning as a social practice). Although personal perspectives from the participants regarding the websites are not included in this study, the review makes a valuable observation regarding how perceptions towards how to learn and how to teach are changing.

Other studies enquired more deeply on the pedagogical uses and benefits of social network sites. For example, Pineda (2014) conducted a study pointing out the effects of implementing a social networking site (SNS) as a web-based support for a face-to-face English reading comprehension course for undergraduate microbiology students. Pineda identified that SNS could be implemented as a medium to reinforce classroom management, as an academic support for the face-to-face classes that enables students and teachers to communicate beyond their direct contact. Finally, the study reported some limitations on orientation sessions to explain how the SNS worked and also a lack of strategies to solve technical difficulties.

Some research works have focused on the description of the general features of SNSLLs in terms of structure, and technical and pedagogical usability. Loiseau, Potolia and Zourou (2011) carried out an exploratory study aiming at determining the pedagogical and technical structure of three Web 2.0 language learning communities: Babbel, Busuu and Livemocha, as well as their communicative affordances. The cited study focused on the analysis of the content and structure, and the possible pedagogical approaches and language learning theories underpinning the platforms. Similarly, Stevenson and Liu (2010) conducted a study aiming at exploring and inquiring on how users are currently using the SNSLLs: Palabea, Babbel, and Livemocha, and their pedagogical and technical usability; however, in this case a different methodological approach was implemented taking into account user's activity and their impressions. Among other things, results show that learners preferred Livemocha over the

others, since it provided the opportunity of use a collaborative language learning space, as well as a traditional content. The study could be seen as an approach to find out how learners construct their perceptions about language learning.

Other studies have also inquired about users' impressions and activities within the website, but instead of describing the structure and content of the SNSLL under study, they focus their attention on the language learning process and interaction. Lloyd (2012) conducted a case study which provides information about how undergraduate students from different programs interact with other members of the community *Livemocha*, taking into account the influence of the learners' personality type and the willingness to communicate in those interactions. Results suggest that *Livemocha* can provide a context in which the formal and the informal learning can interact with each other, and bring benefits in communication. Lin (2012), in turn, aimed to explore the learning practices taking place on the website and how these practices affect learning based on the study of user's attitudes, practices, and interactions on *Livemocha*. The participants in this study were autonomous learners who were not necessarily enrolled in any formal language learning course. Lin states the positive potential of the SNSLL for language learning, but also shows possible limitations, such as the lack of long-term persistence and failure to contribute to learner accuracy.

A study by Álvarez (2014) differs from the previous ones in that it establishes the views of language, learning and learners that the SNSLL *Busuu* adopts, as well as the types of identities underlying the semiotic design of *Busuu*. These findings allow further comparisons with similar websites, such as *Livemocha*. Concerning language learning theories, they can be identified in the website activities or on the structural design of the website. Additionally, this study reports on the impact of the use of this tool in educational settings and, more precisely, the impact on the

participants' behaviors (how they construct and act) with respect to the proposed practices within the communicational and interactional approach inherent in the nature of the website.

In general, these studies address similar topics and share our same purpose, which is to broaden the language learning field by adopting new technologies. In this respect, each study provides relevant information for our objectives and research design. Concerning our objective about the learning theories underlying SNSLLs, researchers identified a pedagogical model that follows a linear progression within the lessons (Loiseau, Potolia & Zourou, 2011; Alvarez, 2016); thus, these findings set up our first insights into the objective in case. On the other hand, the methods implemented in previous studies let us to know how to use data collection techniques; for example, to differentiate what instruments are appropriate to gather information about participant's perceptions in a first approach, and what others complement or expand initial findings (Stevenson & Liu, 2010; Lin, 2012; Pineda, 2014).

Nonetheless, there is still a lack of information regarding the insights of the actors directly involved in the process of learning within the SNSLL; more precisely, we have found few studies addressing the issue of learner's perceptions towards learning in an online environment, and we have not found research of this kind involving students of a Foreign Language teaching program. Thus, this study constitutes a contribution because it focuses on a context and population that has not been studied before and tackles a topic which is in need of deeper exploration.

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

6.1 Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

The present research fits within the field of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Levy (1997) defined CALL as “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (p. 1); while a most recent reference from Beatty (2013) defined it as “(...) any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language” (p.7). This discipline is recognized as a specialized field of study that came out as a result of trying “(...) to find ways of using the computer for teaching or for instructional purposes across a wide variety of subject areas, with the weight of knowledge and breadth of application in language learning (...)” (Levy, 1997, p. 1). It is also an interdisciplinary field of study since it remains tied to other areas within applied linguistics (Levy, 1997; Beatty, 2013). CALL also focuses its studies on the creation of materials for language learning or the adaptation of computer-based materials for such purpose, technological advances, modes of instructions and pedagogical theories; and its methods include, among others, “(...) distance and network learning through the use of email, blogs, wikis, online social networking and other interactive WWW sites and services” (Beatty, 2013, p. 8). CALL gained relevance in the late 20th century with the emergence and spread of computers and materials designed through media, and it has been a common subject of research within the field of language learning since then. The field of action has expanded and the nature of CALL studies has been evolving since it depends on the development of technology (Levy, 1997; Beatty, 2013), pedagogy and computer literacy (Beatty, 2013). This becomes evident since the improvements in terms of accessibility and availability, and the advent and spreading of the internet worldwide have given way to the development of software, user-friendly interfaces (Levy, 1997), and computer-based language functions (Beatty,

2013) which results in new ways of interacting in computing environments, thus leading to new research and findings in the area.

According to Beatty (2013), studies on the need for computer in the classroom or its effectiveness compared to traditional learning views appear to be no longer of interest in the field; instead, research in the field “(...) is now directed into how computers should be best used and for what purposes” (p. 15). Our research was precisely intended to provide relevant information for this discussion. Although our main focus indeed is not to provide a detailed description of how the computer has been used (a SNSLL, in this case) or for what purposes, we intended to analyze its use in a given context and we focused on the user and his interaction with the website, particularly, the perceptions from the part of the learners about language learning in relation to what the website proposes. One of the goals is to examine the relevance of its use in a classroom, in the context of a foreign language program in higher education.

Furthermore, since SNSLLs provide materials for language learning designed by using computer technology, these might be considered as CALL materials. The term CALL materials might be understood as “(...) the wide range of CALL artifacts or products that language teachers and designers create using technological resources ...” as proposed by Levy and Stockwell (2013, p. 3). This is particularly relevant bearing in mind that the discipline seeks, among other goals, to determine how CALL materials are designed and the pedagogical theories underlying such materials. The studies carried out in this area shed light on the nature of CALL materials and their relationship with teaching and learning processes, as Levy (1997) points out:

By reviewing the motivations for CALL material design and by describing the CALL programs that have been produced, the relationship between theory and practice can be examined. By describing what CALL authors actually do, their conceptual framework

and working methods, their personal theory of language teaching and learning can be set against their CALL programs, many of which are now in circulation and can be described and evaluated in their contexts of use. (p. 6)

SNSLLs appeared “(...) as the manifestation of the particular happenings within any of the stages of CALL/CMC” (Alvarez, 2014, p. 76); and, according to Lin (2012), the emergence of SNSLL “(...) bridges the gap between traditional computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and new forms of online interaction” (p. 2). In this research, we focused on this Web 2.0 tool, but before going into the concept of SNSLL, it is necessary to provide a basic overview of the concepts Web 1.0 and Web 2.0.

6.2 From Web 1.0 to Web 2.0

The concept *Web 1.0* stands for an interface launched in the late 20th century, characterized by developing a read-only platform, static, and with a unidirectional flow of information; in which the main goal was the publishing of information, not allowing user interaction through the digital space (Aghaei, Nematbakhsh & Farsani, 2012). By the beginning of the 21st century, a new concept, *Web 2.0*, came on the scene in line with the technological changes that were occurring in the field, representing “(...) the evolution and maturation of the internet during the past decade” (O’Reilly & Musser, 2006, p. 10).

The concept Web 2.0 is attributed to Tim O’reilly in 2005, and since the appearance of the concept many definitions have been given. It has been considered as a read/write web unlike its predecessor (O’Reilly & Musser, 2006; Aghaei, Nematbakhsh & Farsani, 2012; Pineda, 2014). Walker, Davies and Hewer (2012) refer to it as “(...) an attempt to redefine what the Web is all about and how it is used” (p. 9); while Conole and Alevizou (2010) define it as a shift in web tools regarding functional features which leads to a more participatory and interactive

approach. Perhaps one of the most interesting definitions is provided by the creator of the concept: “Web 2.0 is a set of social, economic, and technology trends that collectively form the basis for the next generation of the Internet—a more mature, distinct medium characterized by user participation, openness, and network effects” (O’Reilly & Musser 2006, p. 10).

According to O’Reilly and Musser (2006), the following are attributes inherent in Web 2.0 technology: Massively connected (many-to-many connections), decentralized, user focused, open, lightweight, and emergent. The essential aspects of Web 2.0 with regards to Web 1.0 features include “(...) advancements in the technological infrastructure, increased internet and broadband adoption, and user-friendlier interfaces for navigating, achieving, communicating and collaborating on the web” (Conole & Alevizou, 2010, p. 11). Web 2.0 allows for a more effective integration between diverse online services and social networks, providing a platform for collaborative work and the inclusion of user-generated materials and content (O’Reilly & Musser, 2006; Conole & Alevizou, 2010). It allows interaction and active participation and leads to a more collaborative process of sharing knowledge and resources among online communities and, more specifically in our field, language learning communities (Conole & Alevizou, 2010; Loiseau, Potolia & Zourou, 2011).

The contributions of the Web 2.0 include the advent of social network sites, wikis, blogs, online games and virtual worlds, among others (Conole & Alevizou, 2010; Aghaei, Nematbakhsh & Farsani, 2012; Walker, Davies & Hewer, 2012). For language learning, in particular, contributions include the development of tools, innovative interaction modes, new types of tasks and ways to motivate the learners (Loiseau, Potolia & Zourou, 2011) including a wider set of features that promote user interaction and acculturation such as tagging, commenting, chatting, and development of online relationships (Conole & Alevizou, 2010).

Thanks to all these options, the role of users evolved significantly so that they can “(...) create content, comment, chat, upload, share, recommend, link, aggregate, filter, search, and interact online in myriad other ways” (O’Reilly & Musser, 2006, p. 13). In terms of possibilities in the teaching field, Web 2.0 has opened up a path to new ways for discussion, expression, reflection, creativity, co-creation and socialization; thus contributing to processes of learning. It allows the integration of different teaching and learning approaches, and the combination of different kinds of activities, providing opportunities for personalized learning, and fostering students’ autonomy through inquiry-based and exploratory learning. Furthermore, it provides tools to support associative pedagogies, and it promotes new ways to develop research for the academic community (Conole & Alevizou, 2010).

Conole and Alevizou (2010) identified ten categories of Web 2.0 tools derived from the categorization proposed by Crook et al. (2008). This categorization includes among its items Social Networking Sites (SNS). Each SNS has different characteristics and purposes; the most recognized around the world has allowed the creation of digital spaces for users to interact with each other, such as Facebook, Myspace, etc. Conole and Alevizou (2010) state that “(...) most of the mainstream social networking sites typically include education oriented friendship groups” (p. 50); nonetheless, if the SNS for social purposes can also work as educational spaces, they are not designed for such specific purpose. Eventually, SNS with educational purposes emerged adopting the principles of SNS for social purposes. Among these Social Networking Sites with educational purposes, a new category emerges composed by language learning websites previously anchored in Web 1.0 technology and now adopting Web 2.0 features. These were differentiated by using the name Social Networking Sites for Language Learning (SNSLLs) (Álvarez, 2014).

6.3 Social networking sites for language learning (SNSLL)

As mentioned before, social networking sites for language learning were created following the social network sites' principles, but aiming at a different purpose. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that while some authors make a distinction between “network” and “networking” (Álvarez, 2014; Liu et al., 2015), some others maintain the generic term “network” (Lin, 2012). For instance, Álvarez (2014) suggests that while social *network* sites entail communication between people who already belong to an offline social community, social *networking* sites imply that a social relationship starts from the immersion in an online community. Thus, connections on social network sites, such as Facebook, normally emerged from previous interactions; however, on the social networking sites, such as Livemocha, Busuu, Babbel, users interact with people they have never met before.

In regards to definitions about SNSLL, different authors have proposed their own concept focusing on different aspects. Liu et al. (2015) argue that “unlike generic social network sites [...], SNSLL are language learning sites that have social networking characteristics” (p. 3). Álvarez (2014) states that a SNSLL is a social networking website “designed with the purpose of language learning as the main goal” (p. 24). Lin (2012) indicates that “language learning social network sites (LLSNSs) are online communities aimed at encouraging collaboration between language learners” (p. 21). From these concepts, two aspects must be highlighted. The first one is the common idea that a SNSLL is a virtual space for learning a language; and the second one is the conception that the social component facilitates language practice and cooperative learning in real contexts.

These two elements are more evident in SNSLLs identified by some authors. Lin (2012) states that SNSLLs provide spaces for learning through structured contents, as well as

opportunities to interact with the target community in authentic situations and to find language exchange partners. Furthermore, these sites allow users to receive and provided feedback when submitting their oral or written exercises. Lin's features show two wide levels of SNSLLs, which are language learning contents and interaction. Nevertheless, other authors have established more specific features concerning SNSLL's structure and functions. For example, Liu et al. (2015), in their study aiming at examine the affordances of SNSLL, propose eight features that could be identified in those online environments. These features let users:

- (a) Create a profile, (b) add friends, (c) search for new friends, (d) create a circle of friends, (e) communicate with others in the network via multiple means, (f) receive feedback from friends in the network, (g) upload user-generated content, and (h) enhance peripheral awareness. (p. 9)

So far, we have presented relevant concepts in regards to language learning in the technology field. Now, it is necessary to explore the language learning theories underlying SNSLLs.

6.4 Language learning theories in second language acquisition

Among the second language theories that have emerged to explain the process of language learning, one after another have been a response to the previous ideas and concepts. On the one hand, the first learning theories applied to second languages acquisition focused their attention on reinforcing learner's behaviour as the core of learning. As a reaction to behaviorism, cognitive theories of language acquisition came to light. These theories concentrated on the internal processing of information in the mind of the learner. Sociocultural theories appeared as a reaction against cognitive conceptions, and focused their attention on the interaction between learners. The ecological view offers a new perspective regarding the concept of context. For the purposes of this paper, we will focus on these main theories that have had an important influence

in language learning: behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and ecology.

6.4.1 Behaviorism

Regarding behaviorism, its origins date back to 1940 and it had great influence on education to the year 1970 (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Behaviorists affirm that learning takes place when students absorb a predefined body of knowledge, which is transmitted by the teacher through repetition and positive reinforcement. Furthermore, in a classroom modeled by behaviorist principles, students are supposed to adopt a passive role -since their mind is considered a “black box” (Alzaghoul, 2012)-, while the teacher’s role is to model and shape correct behavioral responses.

Key to this approach is observable behaviors. Skinner (1974, as cited in Alzaghoul, 2012) argues that as inner processes are impossible to prove through any available scientific procedure, the focus must be on cause-and-effect relationships that can be observed. In other words, for Skinner what proves that somebody has learned something is his reaction to a particular stimulus, and not what is happening inside his mind.

Some common teaching strategies under this theory are mimicry-memorization (Blommfield 1942, as cited in Larsen-Freeman 2011), “skill and drill” exercises that provide consistent repetition, questions and answers frameworks in which difficulty is gradually increased, and pattern and dialogue practice (Fries 1945, as cited in Larsen-Freeman 2011). In terms of advantages and disadvantages, behaviorist methods have been successful in teaching structure materials, such as fixed structures and foreign language material; on the contrary, in teaching comprehension and composition, their efficacy has been questioned.

Concerning online environments, some authors have studied how language learning theories are integrated on CMC learning spaces (Alzaghoul, 2012; Lin, 2012; Álvarez, 2014).

For example, Alzaghoul (2012) establishes some implications for online learning with respect to the behaviourist school; among others, she lists that (a) learners must be tested to determine whether they have achieved the outcomes, (b) required procedures should be demonstrated and divided into parts with appropriate explanation, (c) proficiency is the result of frequent review, revision, practice and feedback.

6.4.2 Cognitivism

As a reaction to behaviorism, cognitive theories of language acquisition came to light (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). In this new perspective, learning as a result of an observable behavior was left behind and a new focus was established: individual's attention, memory and concept formation processes (Mayes & de Freitas, 2004). This new perspective was strongly influenced by the field of psychology and focused on how mental processes were involved in language learning. One of the most important tenets in cognitive theory is that the process of language learning does not differ from the process of learning other domains, such as learning chemistry or learning to drive a car, since the mental activity remains the same. In other words, "learning is learning" (Anderson 1976, as cited by Saville-Troike, 2006, p. 73).

In line with this conception, cognitivists propose two major approaches concerning learning processes. For some authors, the learning process is perceived as an abstraction of rules or principles, by passing stages of perception of new information, assimilation and accommodation of internal representations. This approach is known as Information processing (Saville-Troike, 2006; Cook, 2008). Some others consider the learning process to be more a "physical neurological development of associative networks and connections" (Saville-Troike, 2006, p. 94). This approach is known as Connectionism. According to this perspective, learners' brain has a network of units that are connected by pathways. When learners are exposed to

repeated patterns of units, they extract regularities in those patterns and form associations. Learning occurs when the strength of these connections increases (Saville-Troike, 2006).

Some of the principles guiding these approaches are (McLaughlin 1987, as cited by Saville-Troike, 2006; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Cook, 2008):

- Developing lower-order skills are required to learn higher-order skills, which means that learners need to understand basic units, such as words, before being exposed to more complex grammatical procedures, such as number agreement between subject and verb.

- Learning of a skill initially demands learner's attention and involves controlled processing. At first stages, learners control consciously their learning process -choosing words, thinking about pronunciation and paying attention to the appropriate grammatical structure.

- Learners go from controlled to automatic processing through practice. As mentioned above, learners start from a conscious process and gradually, they will access information quickly and even automatically through practice. For instance, at basic levels learners will make a greater effort to choose words but, as they are exposed to language features and comprehend them, they will produce, in speech or in writing, more easily.

- Language learning results are influenced by differences among learners, such as age, sex, aptitude, motivation, personality, learning styles and strategies.

In the matter of teaching practices, cognitivists implement activities such as explaining new material in the learner's own words, solving sets of questions to structure readings and keeping learning journals. In the field of online courses, some elements belonging to cognitivist principles have been identified. For an illustration, Alzaghoul (2012) states that:

- (a) Online learning materials include activities for the different learning styles, (b) the learning content should be chunked, (c) the teaching strategy should enhance the learning

process by facilitating all senses, focusing the learner's attention, and matching the cognitive level of the learner.

6.4.3 Constructivism

Constructivism focuses on learning as a collaborative process in which knowledge is constructed through social interaction and based on previous experiences (Alzaghouli, 2012). This major principle is central in Piaget's and Vygotsky's approaches. However, they differ in their views on how the social environment participates in the learning process. On the one hand, Piaget's theory states that learners' development passes through a series of stages, which allow them to assimilate new information and integrate it to the existing one. For Piaget, a social environment is relevant to this process, but it can occur without social interaction. On the other hand, Vygotsky's theory conceives of the social environment, as well as the social interaction, as key elements to learn, since humans can learn from others' experiences and structure the learning environment to their benefit (Schunk, 2012).

Vygotsky's theory is relevant in the field of second language acquisition, not only because of his contribution about the role of the socio-cultural contexts, but also because he introduced other key concepts: mediation, psychological tools and zone of proximal development (ZPD). Mediation is understood as the "creation and use of auxiliary means of acting" (Lantolf, 2011, p. 25). These means can be physical tools, such as notebooks, books, computers, etc., as well as psychological tools, such as language, symbols, signs, etc. Furthermore, a mediator helps learners to assume an active role in their learning process, instead of merely providing them with information to achieve their goals.

Concerning the Zone of Proximal Development, Vygotsky (1978) defines it as "the distance between the actual developmental level and the level of potential development as

determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). For this author, when a learner is in contact with a more capable peer, the former achieves their potential development and his inter-psychological functions become intra-psychological. As a result, what learners do with cooperation, they would be able to do it alone the following time. The concept of the ZPD inspired the concept *Scaffolding* which refers to a type of mediation by which one learner or more capable peer assists another learner in performing a function or a specific task that the latter cannot achieve alone. Although *Scaffolding* requires the direct intervention of another party, it assumes the learner as an active participant of his own learning process (Saville-Troike, 2006).

Based on Vygotsky's ideas, several authors have done a comprehensive review of literature and have proposed a summary of characteristics attributed to this learning theory (Murphy 1997, in Koohanf et al. 2009), to wit: (1) learners play a central role in mediating and controlling learning, (2) activities, tools and environments must encourage metacognition, regulation and awareness, (3) social negotiation, collaboration and experience are primary aspects to promote learning, (4) previous knowledge, beliefs and attitudes are considered in the learning process, and (5) resources and materials must ensure authenticity and real-world complexity. These characteristics provide us another perspective of constructivism in which autonomy and self-regulation are essential.

Concerning instructional methods adopted in constructivist learning environments, activities that foster discovery and peer-assisted learning represent the core of constructivist teaching. For instance, to promote discovery learning, teachers implement activities in which students can construct knowledge by themselves, such as problem-solving or research exercises. Peer-assisted learning refers to activities in which peers become active agents in the learning

process, including activities such peer-tutoring or work in collaborative groups. In addition, guiding students to understand multiple points of view is also important in constructivism, consequently, debates and discussion sessions are also useful (Schunk, 2012).

6.4.5 Ecological approach

So far, we can see that the focus and perspectives of each learning theory have shifted from observable behaviors through cognitive processes to social interactions. Järvinen (2010) explains this phenomenon as a shift from “the internal” to “the external” in which learner’s interaction with the context becomes the source of learning and it is precisely where the ecological approach takes place. To understand this approach, it is necessary to study the term *ecology*. In the scientific field, an ecology refers to “the totality of relationships of an organism with all other organisms with which it comes into contact” (Van Lier, 2004, p. 3). Based on this statement, we can understand the ecological approach and the relationship between learners and the world, their society, and all what is around them. The ecological approach observes the entire situation and questions what makes things happen the way they do and how learning takes place, which can be referred as the study of context. Furthermore, those things happen all the time and in different places (schools, classrooms, computers, etc), which means that the ecological approach also studies the movement, process and action (Van Lier, 2004).

It is worth mentioning that the concept of context is fundamental in this theory. According to Van Lier (2011), the concept of context is considered as the source of learning and not only a resource to provide input; he also argues that learners produce meaning in a specific context and that context results of the meanings that each person makes in that particular space and time.

As a result of this perception, the study of language learning becomes a complex task and that is why it is conceived as a “dynamic, non-linear, and unpredictable process” that occurs in specific contexts (Järvinen, 2010, p. 164). It is considered dynamic, since there is not a perfect version of the language; language follows a constant process of change, transformation and reorganization (Van Lier, 2011). Therefore each learner has different qualities, styles of learning and their own perception of the world, thus each experience of learning possess characteristics that makes the process of learning languages complex and unpredictable (Järvinen, 2010).

The Ecological approach emerged from the social principles, which means that it is closely linked to constructivism. In this respect, this approach employs similar teaching strategies that foster learners’ active participation, critical thinking and collaboration.

7. METHOD

The present research is a descriptive-interpretative study which follows principles of an ethnographic and a phenomenological approach and utilizes a case study design. According to Edmonds and Kennedy (2012) the ethnographic approach “(...) can be defined as research designed to describe and analyze the social life and culture of a particular social system, based on detailed observation of what people actually do” (p.122). They also point out that “(...) because this approach [ethnographic approach] is based on understanding anything associated with human behavior and beliefs, it is well-suited for the fields of education and the social and behavioral sciences” (p.122). Consistent with the above-mentioned, this study drew on ethnographic principles since it inquired about the beliefs and behavior of a community in a given context, particularly, a group of students’ construction of views about learning a language based on their interaction on a social networking site for language learning.

The research was also developed following phenomenological principles. According to Marshal and Rossman (2014), a phenomenological approach aims to analyze individual experiences and their meaning. The authors also point out that in phenomenological approaches, “(...) analysis proceeds from the central assumption that there is an essence to an experience that is shared with others who have also had that experience... the experiences of those participating in the study are analyzed as unique expressions and then compared to identify the essence” (p.20). In our research, we analyzed the performance of the students and their individual and collective experiences aiming at finding common patterns and categories that capture students’ constructions of beliefs and concepts.

As mentioned above, the current study utilizes a case study design. Merriam (1988) defines qualitative case study as “(...) an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single

instance, phenomenon or social unit” (p.21) while Yin (2009), mentioned by Edmonds and Kennedy (2012), defines it as an “(...) empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-world context (...) in which multiple data sources are used” (p.113). The case study design suits the research purpose since it allows to carry out detailed, real-time, or retrospective analysis with a limited number of participants, the focus remaining on finding a phenomenon within a specific case (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2012). These authors also mention that even though the emphasis in a case study is primarily the qualitative method, quantitative data are usually gathered as supplementary data. In this sense, it is important to clarify that the current study employed data collection methods associated with qualitative and quantitative methods.

7.1 Selection of the SNSLL and Site Description

Livemocha, a social networking site for language learning, was launched in September 2007 (Clark & Gruba, 2010). According to Livemocha³, in 2016 its community was composed of 16 million people, including teachers, polyglots, language experts and learners. Among its 35 languages, English was the most studied. Livemocha offered five English courses, titled “English Foundations”, each of them with 30 or 60 interactive lessons. Each lesson on Livemocha included 10 sections:

- *Introduction*, which contained a video with conversations between native speakers of the language taught as a way to introduce a topic.
- *Vocabulary* which consisted of a set of flashcards that included words or expressions, their definition, their pronunciation and examples.
- *Usage*, that presented the grammar aspects (i.e. rules, examples, etc.) and culture tips through flashcards.

³ Early in 2016 Rosetta Stone that had bought the Livemocha platform announced that Livemocha was closing in April.

- *Practice*, a set of interactive questions to practice the vocabulary and the concepts learned before.
- *Read/ write*, that had a prompt to write an answer.
- *Read/ speak*, a section that had a prompt and invited users to record their answer to a specific situation.
- *Listen/write* in which students had to listen to a prompt and then to write a response.
- *Listen/speak* in which students had to listen to a prompt and then to record a response.
- *Language exchange* (chat), the space to practice conversation with other speakers of the community. As stated on the website, this sequence is framed into the “Whole-Part-Whole methodology”, a skills-based training system. Users are supposed to learn by “observing a new concept, breaking it down to learn how it works, and then trying it out for themselves” (Livemocha, 2016).

This study focused on Livemocha, since it was one of the groundbreaking SNSLLs among its group and had stability since its creation. In addition, Livemocha has been the core of several studies in an attempt to find its contributions to Second Language Learning (Ellison, 2007; Conole & Alevizou, 2010; Stevenson & Liu, 2010; Loiseau, Potolia & Zourou, 2011; Lin, 2012; Lloyd, 2012; Álvarez, 2014; Pineda, 2014), which provides us with more options to compare our findings. However, as we have mentioned before, Livemocha has not been used in a context similar to ours, which is in a Foreign Language program and with students on their way to becoming teachers.

7.2 Participants and setting

This research project was conceived as part of an inter-institutional research comprising two universities, Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá and Universidad del Valle in Cali. The main

objective of the broader study was to determine the possibility of integrating Social Networking Sites for Language Learning in teaching and learning processes within teacher training programs. Therefore, our research question led us to inquire into how students perceived language learning and how the SNSLL *Livemocha* attempted to teach them a foreign language. As part of a “Semillero de Investigación,” we participated in the design of data collection instruments in cooperation with the other members of the research team. In some cases we designed instruments specifically for our own study, while in some other cases we adopted instruments constructed to explore questions posed within the general interinstitutional study.

The research was carried out with fourth semester students participating in an Integrated Skills in English course as part of the Foreign Language Program at Universidad del Valle in Cali. According to the institution’s curriculum (2006), this English course’s goal is to enable students to develop skills concerning language performance, such as adopting strategies to understand and produce written and oral texts, explaining relevant points about different topics and providing personal views. In addition, students are expected to assume an active role as English learners as a result of reflecting on their learning process and developing a critical view about their learning environment. The decision to work with the students of the class Integrated English Skills IV was determined by the fact that the main researchers of the interinstitutional project was the instructor assigned to the course for the semester. Although 17 students, ages 19-27 and socioeconomic strata ranging between lower and middle, decided to participate in the study upon signing consent form (see consent form, appendix A), for the data analysis only 11 were chosen on the basis of their participation in all the activities of data collection.

7.3 Data collection techniques

Data were collected over a period of seven months, from August 2015 to February 2016. The instruments to collect the data were learning logs, an online survey, and a focus group.

As a part of their course assignments, students were asked to write learning logs -on a weekly basis or after the work on the SNSLL- following a model provided by the professor (see template, Appendix B). According to Friesner and Hart (2005), learning logs are tools to gather data from reflection, learning and experience. They also suggest that learning logs are useful techniques, since data are recorded directly from the participants and over a period of time, which shows a longitudinal process. Participants wrote between three and twelve learning logs each throughout the study, 75 learning logs were collected and analyzed.

Students completed a survey half way through the study. With this data technique, we intended to find out information about participants' views about how a foreign language is learnt and how the SNSLL in which they worked conceives of language learning. To this end, we designed a 12-items questionnaire. Some of those questions were structured questions that required participants to answer using a Likert scale, a multiple choice or a rank order scale. The other ones were open ended questions that sought to gather specific information. One of the most relevant questions was a 20-statements chart using a Likert type scale based on a similar questionnaire used by Lightbown and Spada (2006). Using the scale, participants could strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree or express a neutral stance concerning a given statement. We wrote these statements taking into account principles of the language learning theories mentioned above. The survey was piloted with three professors of the Universidad del Valle and three Senior students. The purpose of this pilot was to refine the questions and also to be sure that we had understood the principles of the language learning theories. After that, we

uploaded the survey into e-encuestas.com- a system to create online surveys. It was available during a week for the students to respond (see questionnaire, Appendix C).

At the end of the semester, one focus group was conducted (see protocol, Appendix D). A focus group is a type of detailed interview conducted in a group that supplies information about how people think, feel, or act regarding a specific topic; it provides the advantages of individual questioning combined with the observation of the participants interactions (Freitas et al. 1998). In our particular case, this data collection technique was used to obtain more detailed information about what students thought about language learning and to triangulate information. Participants were divided in two groups, in order to have two sessions. The first session was held with eight participants and took place on February 12th 2016; it lasted 1h 46 minutes. The second one was carried out on February 19th 2016 and lasted 1h 45 minutes, in this session only 3 students participated. During the sessions, data-recording devices such as camera and voice recorders were used. In addition, the moderator and we, as non-participant observers, took notes.

7.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted following descriptive, interpretative and explanatory procedures that could account for the perspectives of the participants and aiming at providing insights in regards to the inquiries set for this study. For such a purpose, we decided to begin the data analysis starting from categories generated in advance derived from literature review on a theoretical framework. This was intended in order to ground the analysis; nonetheless, the study searched for emergent categories. According to Marshall and Rossman (2014), “(...) this early grounding and planning can be used to suggest several categories by which the data could be initially coded for subsequent analysis. These are theory-generated codes” (p. 209).

Marshall and Rossman (2014) suggest as well that “(...) in qualitative studies (...) the researcher is guided by initial concepts and developing understandings that she shifts or modifies as she collects and analyses data” (p. 209). Following this, we generated categories that emerged in the process and modified the existent ones. Matrixes were developed by the researchers and applied to learning logs and the focus group with the aim of establishing patterns. We also scrutinized the data using color coding technique and we organized it into general categories and subcategories. Data from the survey yielded results and statistics that were later compared and triangulated in order to ensure that findings were reviewed from different perspectives.

After that, we conducted researcher and data triangulation. Within the research group different researchers analyzed similar sets of data and then results were compared. Categories were compared to ensure that results were meaningful and valid across different data collection instruments. The following section addresses the findings that emerged from the data analysis.

8. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

8.1 Students' perceptions about how a foreign language is learnt

In this section, we will present the findings concerning our first objective: students' perceptions about how a foreign language is learnt. We defined three major categories (see table 1 below) that connect in different ways with the language learning theories discussed in our theoretical framework. We will discuss each of them and the analysis will be complemented by data⁴ taken from what participants expressed in the different instruments⁵.

Table 1

Main language learning perspectives

1. Learning based on cognitive processes	This category encompasses learning seen as a process going from basic elements to complex ones, as well as the result of practicing as a way to automatize knowledge.
2. Learning through social interaction and cultural exchange	This category refers to those cases in which interaction, peer work and cultural exchange play a relevant role when learning a foreign language.
3. Learning through grammar and vocabulary	This category includes the perceptions about the study of vocabulary and grammar as the core when learning a foreign language.

Among the data collection instruments, the survey was one of the most significant sources to get information about students' language learning perceptions. One of the reasons is that we asked participants to express directly if they agreed with certain statements related to principles of language learning theories. For example, for the cognitive view we presented the following statement: "Learning languages takes place when students organize, process and store

⁴ Participants' quotes were not modified by the researchers, so grammar mistakes may appear.

⁵ In order to protect participants' confidentiality, initials will be use as identifiers to report what each participant said.

information consciously.” Concerning the sociocultural view, one statement was: “To learn a language a person needs support by a peer who knows more about the target language.” According to the analysis, participants agreed to a greater extent with cognitive and constructivist statements (see table 2 and 3).

Table 2

Students’ answers about cognitive statements

Statements	Strongly Agree/Agree	Neutral	Disagree/Strongly disagree	Average
3. Learning a language follows a prescribed sequence in which contents are organized from easy to more complex.	12	2	0	4.1
6. Learning languages takes place when students organize, process and store information consciously.	10	3	1	3.9
13. Language development is not an accumulation of knowledge, but a process of transformation, growth, and reorganization of language experiences.	14	0	0	4.1
15. Learning a language involves categorization of the knowledge using cognitive instruments such as mind maps, charts, and so forth.	7	6	1	3.5
20. When foreign language students make oral errors, it is best to provide input, so they can analyse and correct them by themselves.	10	3	1	3.9

Table 3

Students’ answers about constructivist statements

Statements	Strongly Agree/Agree	Neutral	Disagree/Strongly disagree	Average
1. To learn a language a person needs support by a peer who knows more about the target language.	11	3	0	3.9
8. The teacher’s role is to be a mediator to promote language learning in a supportive environment rather than lecture or provide students with the answers without	8	4	2	3.6

demanding effort from them.				
11. Learners construct their knowledge and skills through their experiences and interactions with others and taking into account the sociocultural context.	13	0	1	4.4
16. It is necessary to know the foreign language culture in order to speak the foreign language.	11	2	1	3.9
18. Foreign language students learn better if teachers implement cooperative learning.	9	5	0	4

Ecological statements also had a broadly similar average result (see table 4); however, we did not find enough evidence of this view among students' responses in the focus group. They seemed to show some understanding of ecological principles, but their ideas were not well developed. Statements related to behaviorism, on the other hand, had the lowest frequency (see table 5).

Table 4

Students' answers about ecological statements

Statements	Strongly Agree/Agree	Neutral	Disagree/Strongly disagree	Average
9. Meaning only emerges in a particular context that is not static or pre-existed. Contexts emerge from the way users make meaning in a particular moment.	8	5	1	3.9
10. It is important to make language learning meaningful and to take into account learners' perceptions of themselves and how the meanings they make interconnect to other spaces of socialization such as the household, the school, the neighborhood and the broader community.	13	1	0	4.3
14. It is better to learn a language through content (learning about history, art, politics, technology etc.) rather than only focusing on the aspects of the language (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation etc.)	9	3	2	3.9
19. When developing a language, numerical grades are not necessary. Not everything you learn about the language can be measured.	9	4	1	3.9

4. There is not an appropriate "perfect" version of a language (grammar, pronunciation etc.). Languages are in constant change.	7	7	0	3.7
---	---	---	---	-----

Table 5

Students' answers about behaviorist statements

Statements	Strongly Agree/Agree	Neutral	Disagree/Strongly disagree	Average
2. Languages are learned through repetition.	6	8	0	3.7
5. Only teachers have the knowledge about the language. Their role is to model this knowledge to the learner through explanations and repetitive practice.	1	2	11	2.1
6. Students learn more when they are rewarded or punished when they produce correct or incorrect sentences in the target language.	4	4	6	3.9
12. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	2	7	5	2.7
17. Language can be thought of as a set of grammatical structures which are learned consciously and controlled by the learner.	5	6	3	3.1

In this next section, we discuss each of the categories presented above in connection to the statistics provided and the qualitative data obtained from the participants' voices.

8.1.2 Learning based on cognitive processes

Cognitive theories claim that learning comes from the different processes taking place on the learner's mind. These processes include perceiving, retaining, organizing, and retrieving information (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). The cognitive view also focuses on individual differences (age, sex, motivation, attitude, and personality) cognitive styles, and learning styles (Alzaghoul, 2012). With that in mind, we found that several participants' perspectives are closely related with cognitive principles. First of all, students showed support to the statements that

described a cognitive view in contrast with the other views. As a case in point, students strongly agreed with statements such as “learning a language follows a prescribed sequence in which contents are organized from easy to more complex” and “language development is not an accumulation of knowledge but a process of transformation, growth, and reorganization of language experiences.” Likewise, participants’ answers from the focus group also showed affinity with principles and models inspired by cognitivism, such as the information-processing model and the input hypothesis.

Some cognitivists propose an information-processing model to explain learning. Cook (2008) claims that in this model “learning starts from controlled processes, which gradually become automatic” (p. 214). This suggests that learners at first levels control consciously their learning process -choosing words, thinking about pronunciation, paying attention to the appropriate grammatical structure, and so on. Gradually, through practice they will be able to access that information quickly and even automatically (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). A clear example of this model is what participant ATG expresses about the role of practice:

Yo creo que no se aprende la lengua solo con con lo teórico. Yo creo que las dos cosas se complementan, ni la uno mucho, ni la otra sólo ésta, si nosotros aquí [en el aula de clase] lo aprendemos y hacemos nuestros ejercicios de gramática, de narración, etc. Y allá [en Livemocha] yo estoy viendo un vídeo en el que me está mostrando esa oración, la estoy comprendiendo, ya ahí estoy trabajando comprensión oral y la estoy practicando de diferentes maneras. (ATG, Focus Group)

Sí, porque es que es lo que uno dice, yo estoy aprendiendo una lengua, pero si yo no la práctico, sea interactuando, sea haciendo ejercicios, sea haciendo lo que sea, [...] yo no estoy ejerciendo lo que yo estoy aprendiendo, no lo estoy desarrollando. (ATG, Focus Group)

As can be observed, ATG notices the importance of practicing (“practicando”) the information to which she is exposed to, in order to develop proficiency in the language. In addition, practice is not perceived as something mechanical, since she refers to different situations in which she can

use the knowledge, such as interacting with other users and doing exercises. This is in accordance with Lightbown and Spada's (2006) definition of *Practice*. They argue that the kind of practice that we need to develop automaticity is not limited to written or oral exercises; it also includes exposure to, as well as comprehension of, a language feature. In other words, what matters is the cognitive effort on the part of the learner when practicing the language.

Other participants' perspectives that reflect this concept of conscious practice are:

Usualmente el método por el cual yo practicaba y pues aprendía, era viendo películas. Pero yo no iba más allá de ver la película y en mi mente retomar pues lo que estaba escuchando o viendo. Pero con Livemocha, entonces tomé en consideración que podía hacerme preguntas y mirar cómo hacían uso, pues de...de aspectos gramaticales y demás. Entonces cuando ya veía la película "ah sí, esto lo tiene que pronunciar en pasado", y hay veces...-y tomaba nota, ¿ya? (JDJ, Focus Group)

"I think now that the learning languages is not easy, it's necessary a prudent practice time." (JSM, Survey)

As stated by the students JDJ and JSM, language learning requires to practice what we already know, in order to make it automatic. Besides, as we already mentioned, practice includes comprehension of a language feature, which is exactly what the participant highlights in his example: when he watches a movie and he is able to identify the pronunciation of simple past. On the other hand, this answer also shows another aspect inspired by the cognitivist perspective: the noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 2001 as cited by Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Schmidt argues that nothing can be learnt, unless learners notice it. With this idea, he wanted to explain that learners can receive input in class or in a real context, but only when they become aware of the aspect -either because the aspect is different from what they expected or because it fills a gap- they will learn it (Gass, 1988, as cited by Lightbown & Spada, 2006). By linking this concept with JDJ's intervention, we can see that he had already received input about grammatical aspects

concerning simple past, but it made sense for him when he “noticed” the simple past pronunciation on a video, and he was also able to connect that information to the situations in which simple past is used.

Another key concept in cognitive views is that learning follows a linear, prescribed, stable and fixed process (Järvinen, 2010). In this respect, from a cognitive perspective, learning a language should start from the study of basic elements or contents to include gradually more complex ones. ATG affirms that “[...] *es importante obviamente, la manera en la que uno la aprender, bueno la estructura, la pronunciación...-o sea comenzando con lo básico así es muy importante*” (Focus Group). As can be noted, ATG recognizes the significance of learning basic units, such as pronunciation and grammar structures, before moving towards more difficult processes, for example, composition or discussion of more advanced topics.

Finally, cognitive perspectives have focused on the role of interaction, seen as a necessary condition to promote a linguistic exchange and to provide input to learners. MG illustrates this idea in her intervention:

O sea aprender bien, de saber que estoy aprendiendo lo que es y de la mejor manera posible, solamente se puede lograr con un profesor al lado de uno. Y pensar que uno...-bueno sí, uno digamos que empíricamente uno puede aprender una lengua...- yo aprendí español empíricamente, pero llegué a...-cuando pude entrar al colegio, a poner en práctica eso que había aprendido, [eh] pues me estrellé, yo perdí español la primera vez que entré...- yo perdí español, yo no sabía nada, y me tocó sentarme con un profesor a aprender. Yo ya lo había hecho, ya podía hablar pero yo no sabía realmente qué era lo que estaba haciendo. (MG, Focus Group)

On the one hand, MG describes learning as a process that needs a role model to provide comprehensible input, from her experience, a teacher. According to the interaction hypothesis, a role model is usually a native speaker who modifies language to make it comprehensible, provides feedback and in this way, promotes learning (Long 1983, as cited by Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Comparing this with MG’s answer, she claims that she started learning Spanish in

an autonomous way, but she realized that what she needed was someone to interact with and to understand the aspects of the language that she could produce. On the other hand, she also reveals an instrumentalist vision of learning when she says that she tried to “*poner en práctica lo que había aprendido*.” She seems to perceive knowledge as an object that can be taken and put into the brain to be used in a specific situation, which is in accordance with cognitivism.

Above, we have presented the results concerning a cognitive perspective. We can say that this perception about language learning is fostered by the background of the participants. As future teachers, they are supposed to deal with different dimensions: language users, experts of the language and educators. Therefore, being able to understand and use the foreign language is not enough, they must be able to understand how a learner, according to his/ her age, context and needs could learn better; or how to explain something in the most efficient way. These concerns can lead students to focus on their individual mental processes and also on looking strategies to strengthen learning.

Another reason to explain this students’ perception can be linked to the way they have been taught in primary and secondary education. As students have followed a routine starting from basic contents, with goals centered on understanding how language operates, they tend to keep these perceptions and look for similar ways of learning. Some researchers have also discussed how teachers conceptualized their beliefs about language learning, and they have found that “teachers usually teach the same way they were taught”, since they usually followed similar rules and routines making part of their learning experiences (Bailey, Curtis & Nunan 2001, as cited by Cota & Ruiz, 2013, p. 82).

8.2.2 Learning through social interaction and cultural exchange

The second common perception about language learning is learning through social interaction and cultural exchange. Data collected demonstrates a significant approach to constructivist ideas from the part of the students. This can be seen in the following constructivist statement which showed 4.4 general average of approval: “Learners construct their knowledge and skills through their experiences and interactions with others and taking into account the sociocultural context.”

If it is a fact that the general concept of Constructivism divides into more specific branches giving rise to different types of constructivist theories, it is also true that general constructivist principles rely on the same premise. Constructivist principles draw on the fact that knowledge is not merely perceived and retained by a process of acquisition but it is constructed and formed by the learner through achieving understanding, and on the basis of prior knowledge and through interaction. This major principle is central in Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s theories which make emphasis on the idea of knowledge construction and the role of the learner as an active participant of the learning process (Schunk, 2012; Mayes & de Freitas, 2004; Alzaghou, 2012). The students become active when they enroll in tasks such experimentation, problem solving, or discovering, which demand reflection from their part (Larsen-Freeman, 2011). By talking about her personal experience, JQ expresses how she faced learning a language at school in a passive way and how she faces it now in a more active way.

(...) antes a mí me enseñaban inglés con canciones y era escuchar la canción, ver la letra y ya. O copiar y pegar, y ya. Y eso se quedaba allí. Mientras que con Livemocha, uno puede tanto interactuar con otras personas, como escribir, tratar de integrar lo que uno está aprendiendo en su escrito, y más que todo hablarlo, pronunciarlo, eso que uno...- eso que uno está aprendiendo. (Focus Group)

Constructivist theories, just as information processing theories, make reference to the concept of *Interaction*; however, the latter assumes learning as a process that takes place within the mind disregarding the context in which it occurs (Schunk, 2012). Constructivism states that knowledge is not imposed but produced and formed on the basis of beliefs and experiences (Cobb & Bowers, 1999 cited by Schunk, 2012), in other words, the context of the learner. According to *Dialectical Constructivism*, ideas and interaction in situations would play an important role in learning, not because they are merely a source of language input for the learner as the interaction hypothesis claims (Lightbown & Spada, 2006), but because they confront prior knowledge, experiences and beliefs with the environment (other people's beliefs, situations, facts, culture) leading to mental contradictions and thus to the construction of new concepts (Schunk, 2012). Students in the research highlight the relevance of being confronted with other cultures and particularly with native speakers for the purpose of learning. As a case in point, ACh expresses in the survey that “(...) *the interaction with foreign people can make the difference in the process of learning a language...*” and supports this idea with the following response in which also highlights the importance of being exposed to the foreign culture:

Aprendiendo un idioma uno tiene que tener mucho en cuenta la cultura, entonces como decían las compañeras, también es importante como tener en cuenta algunas palabras que son como más apropiadas en determinada situación, que uno pues aquí pues como sabe más o menos, pero obviamente una persona que ya está en su cultura, en su país, le puede ayudar a uno y eso es, es, es crecimiento...-pues importante. (ACh, Focus Group)

MA, in turn, recognizes that working with people from another culture not only let her explore new cultural facts, but also enhanced her language skills and was motivating at the same time: “Yes. As I said, it helped me a lot in terms of all my English skills. The interactions with people from other countries is really amazing and it helps me to learn about their culture” (Survey).

Situated Cognition is another key strand of constructivism. It suggests that knowledge construction would be directly linked to the context of teaching and learning (Schunk, 2012). Following this principle, real learning would take place if the student is taken to interact in real conditions within a community of practice to get authentic experiences. This is known as *Situated Learning* (Alzaghoul, 2012). Some students involved in this research showed affiliation with this idea. For example, CS expresses in the survey a positive opinion about the media used for teaching purposes, through which the student can access real content: “(...) *I've always thought it is a good way to learn a language. Through media, interactions and interesting topics.*” CS's idea is complemented by an intervention during the focus group in which the student asserts having been involved in a community of practice online before this current experience:

Yo aprendí así, la verdad en el colegio, no sé porque en los colegios el nivel de inglés como que...-digamos que si yo me hubiera quedado solo con eso, seguramente no hubiera bastado pasar el examen y entrar a la carrera. Entonces siempre me tocó buscar como por mi cuenta y siempre lo hice por medio de redes sociales. (CS, Survey)

In contrast, some students commented the importance of learning a language by being in contact with real content or within a given context, for instance, reading a book or carrying out a project within a community of practice in the setting of a classroom, but see little or none advantage when working with a community of practice online within a website:

Para mí, es muy muy muy importante por ejemplo la interacción en un salón de clase, proyectos o todas esas actividades que se hacen. Yo, por ejemplo, aprendo muchísimo más interactuando que en una red social (...) es preferible para mí en una clase presencial, con un profesor, con dinámicas, actividades, [eh] es mejor para mí así. (ACH, Focus Group)

Yo por ejemplo en mi casa nunca me metería a una página a aprender un idioma, porque no es la manera en la que yo aprendo. Yo prefiero sentarme a leer todo un día un libro, que ponerme a chatear con alguien o entrar a una página a aprender inglés o francés o lo que sea. (MG, Focus Group)

The concept of *Situated Learning* goes in line with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory which stresses the importance of the social interaction of the learner with the environment in an inter and intrapersonal way in order to achieve developmental processes and cognitive development. The idea that social interaction affects learning experiences and higher order thinking is central in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which also stresses the relevance of peer work and mediation tools (language, symbols, etc.) for such a purpose (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2011; Schunk, 2012). The role of peer work is highlighted in constructivist ideas, asserting that the intervention of a more capable peer or mediator can scaffold the student to reach a higher level in his ZPD towards a more self-regulated state (Lantolf, 2011; Schunk, 2012). In this respect, participants claimed having gained awareness of the role of social interaction, peer work when learning a language, and the importance of autonomy and cooperative learning. Answering to the question in the survey about how they changed their thoughts about learning, EJ states: “*The aspect that learn a language needs of cooperative work,*” while ACh also recognizes the importance of the interaction with her partners and her teacher for the learning process: “*I learned because different works that teacher left in class and for the interaction with my companions (...)*” (Survey).

Students also expressed that they realized how important was to work with others when learning a language, particularly when the partner was a native speaker because they are supposed to know the target language better, thus being a more capable peer. ATG stated that “*el hecho de interactuar con otras personas, yo creo que eso es fundamental a la hora que uno quiera aprender una lengua, eso es fundamental interactuar con otra persona de esa lengua porque uno aprende mucho, muchísimo*” (Focus Group); in turn, she added “*aprender una lengua para mí es indispensable que haya interacción con otras personas que estén que tengan,*

o sea de la lengua materna que ya sepan bien cómo se usa la lengua, para mí eso es indispensable aprendiendo” (Focus Group).

MAG expresses that having the opportunity to check other people’s answers and being corrected was one the things she liked the most, which agrees with constructivist ideas of scaffolding and peer work. In turn, when asked about their competence to correct other people’s mistakes and the possibility of including the option of peer collaboration within the website, ATG agreed with the idea and expresses the benefits of peer work.

Sí, sí. Yo creo que sí, que eso sería muy bueno, porque de pronto hay errores que yo sepa que hay veces son muy básicos y que es una persona está aprendiendo inglés también, yo creo que ahí podríamos interactuar un poco entre los errores que comete y que yo también cometo, porque pues los dos estamos aprendiendo. (ATG, Focus Group)

Dos cosas para valorar que creo fueron las que más me gustaron, fue la parte de tener que calificar y que me calificaran porque en varias de las actividades que yo hacía, recibía excelentes calificaciones de los demás, o sea me decían de una forma, me explicaban tan bien mis errores, cómo decirlo (...) pues hacía...-yo también trataba de calificar a otra persona y eso me parecía espectacular. (MAG, Focus Group)

General constructivist ideas posit that the role of the teacher goes beyond providing instructions, lecturings, observing and assessing; it would consist of facilitating students’ approach to the learning goal by preparing scenarios for promoting active and autonomous learning, and social interaction (Schunk, 2012); thus leading the students to reasoning (Alzaghouli, 2012). In line with this, ACh points out the teacher’s responsibility when developing an activity, while JDJ highlights the importance of autonomy complemented by the feedback provided by the teacher as a more capable peer. The role of the teacher from his perspective would be that of a mediator who corrects rather than a lecturer who always provides the answers.

(...) la interacción es muy, muy importante, en un salón de clase se da mucho, no sólo con el profesor, y no solo porque el profesor da teoría, el profesor da muchísimo más que teoría, el profesor puede brindar por ejemplo en una actividad mucho y los estudiantes pueden dar mucho más de sí que en una página de internet. (ACh, Focus Group)

¿qué pasa? que cuando uno está estudiando sólo, uno quisiera tener como esa retroalimentación inmediata. Entonces...-pues algunas páginas lo ofrecen, algunas no. Y entonces... - pues sí, sí ha cambiado pero aún así se hace necesario tener el profesor, pues porque de inmediato le puede decir “no, mira la manera correcta”. Pero pienso que puede haber un balance así como hemos hecho este semestre, hemos estado estudiando el el...- autónomamente se puede decir, los miércoles y en caso si quedaba la duda después de haber hecho los ejercicios, nosotros acudíamos a usted. (JDJ, Focus Group)

As can be noted, students show a general concern about undertaking an active learning process in which they can reach a level of autonomy. They put in the balance the traditional practices at school and the opportunity to self-regulate their learning offered by the website showing, in some of the cases, a trend towards the latter. Nonetheless, some students also expressed their rejection arguing not to feel comfortable with a scenario that lacks of dynamism and face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, it is possible to identify in the students awareness about the connection between culture and learning a language. Stepp-Greanny (2002), on a study about students' perceptions on language learning in a technological environment, found that students perceived that they had learned more about culture on the technological environment, in contrast with a regular class. Students participating in the present study also demonstrated how the interaction with native speakers can contribute to this goal since they represent a source of new experiences related to the language.

Students recognize the importance of working with a more capable peer through the chat interactions and also using the tool for correcting and being corrected offered by the website which allowed them to perform as a more capable peer at the same time. This type of interaction evokes the Vygotskian concept of mediation according to which human learning is mediated by

tools or other more capable peers. In the case of Livemocha, when students work on its contents, Livemocha acts as a mediating tool, while when students interact with other users, those users become mediators in the learning process. Hawkey (2006) found out that, from a list of thirteen activities developed in class, students rated peer work eighth in terms of prominence; while in the present study, activities in the website involving peer work and its relevance for language learning seem to be much more recognized by the students. This not only reinforces the idea of autonomy but also redefines the role of the teacher who, in words of the students, is not only lecturing but is there to provide feedback and to help when the student cannot do something on their own.

8.2.3 Learning through grammar and vocabulary

So far, we have explained two of the students' perceptions on how to learn a language. Principles, activities and strategies were the focus on these perceptions; thus, we could link them with some of the major language learning theories. However, the third common perception was that learning a language means to learn grammar and vocabulary.

Participants pointed out that the aspects they focused on when working on Livemocha were: a) the sections in which grammar and vocabulary were introduced, and b) the sections in which they might use the grammar and vocabulary that they had learned throughout the lesson. To illustrate, MAG expressed “*Yo me enfocaba más en la producción escrita, porque eso era...-lo de la gramática pues era aplicarlo ahí...-cuando yo veía lo de la gramática, lo pegaba en word. Y luego si... hacía lo...-utilizarlo*” (Focus Group). As can be noted, for MAG to show that she could use grammar on written exercises was in some way to show her learning results. For this reason, she placed emphasis on copying and pasting the grammar aspects into a document,

even though the lesson provided many other elements to take into account. In the same way, ACh affirmed that taking notes about grammar and vocabulary was far-reaching for her process of learning, as well as the written exercises:

“ps yo me enfoqué en las lecciones. También pues me tomaba como el tiempo de escribir, de tomar apuntes, en la lección de gramática, vocabulario, porque ahí hay bastante vocabulario nuevo. También en la parte escrita. En la parte escrita también me enfocaba. Pues buscar en el diccionario palabras desconocidas, que necesitaba decir.” (ACh, Focus Group).

In turn, SM said :

“Por lo menos yo, pues, al principio, desde el colegio y todo, era algo como muy mecánico, las estructuras, entonces el sujeto, complemento, tal, y así va esto, tan tan, tan. De esa manera yo aprendo. Pero me dí cuenta que hay formas más dinámicas [...] y más interesantes y la página me mostró eso” (Focus Group).

As this participant said, from his perspective, the study of linguistic aspects plays a central role when learning a language, although he discovered new dynamic ways while working on the website. It could be hypothesized that students inclined towards grammar and vocabulary, due to an influence by the program's curriculum. The first four semesters aim to provide the foundations of the target language; as a result, the study of linguistic contents has an important role in class, independently of how these are taught.

Data collected by the learning logs also showed the relevance of learning grammar and vocabulary in students' perspectives. Participants were asked to record the aspects they had learned after every session. Results are reported in percentages of their responses for each aspect (figure 3). Almost half of the participants (49.6%) coincided on they had learned new words and expressions. Slightly over 30% reported that they had learned grammar aspects. Therefore, answers such as *“about vocabulary I have learned words related to a singer and his presentations: released. appalud, performer, receive, contract, album, entertainer. About grammar, I learned passive voice”* (MA, Learning Log 2) or *“I learned some vocabulary related*

to the music field and in grammar i learned about passive voice” (EJ, Learning Log 2) were common among the students. These results represent a very similar situation from a study of pre-service EFL teachers’ beliefs about foreign language learning reported by Altan (2012). He found that most students believe that learning new words was the most important part of language learning, while a minority seemed to support grammar as the central part. It is possible that students think that teachers are expecting to mention a list of words or explanations about grammar, instead of cultural knowledge or another skill when they are asked about their progress in the language or the aspects they had learned.

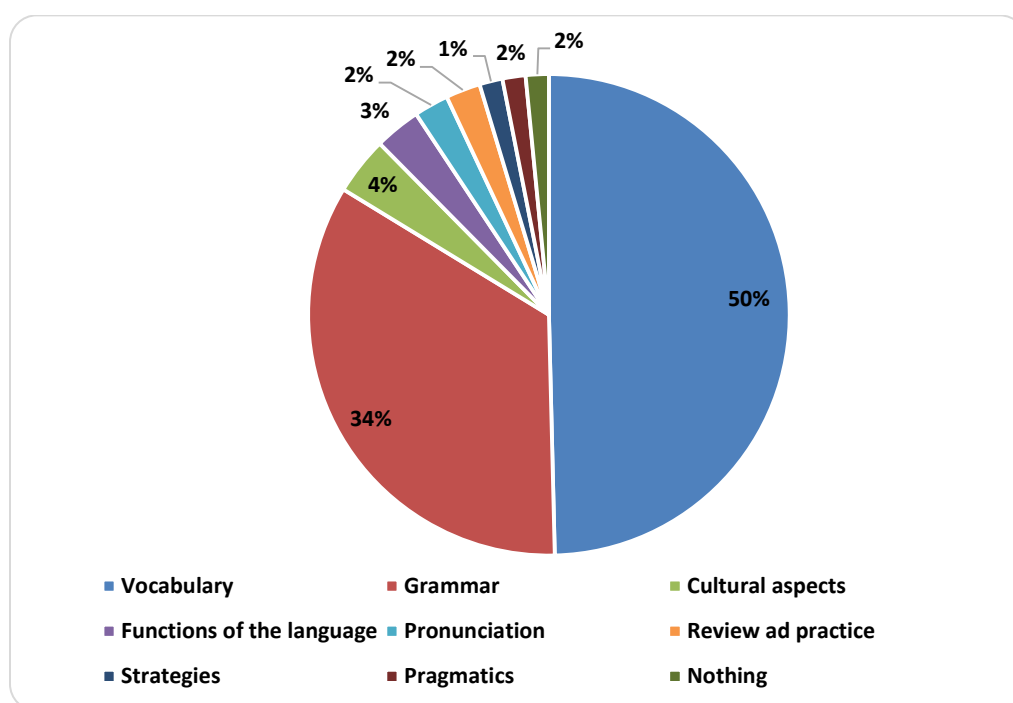


Figure 3. Aspects learned on Livemocha.

It is worth noticing that for a small part of the students, other aspects such as cultural information (sports, celebrations, songs), learning strategies, pronunciation, functions of the language (such as taking notes, making requests, giving advice, etc.), or pragmatics seem to be

less important, when they also think that learning a language involves to automatize knowledge throughout the practice and to develop a cultural awareness, as we explain in the previous categories.

Lastly, while data from the learning logs and from the focus group reported concern on grammar and vocabulary, this perception does not correspond to data from the survey. Over 30% of respondents either agreed or disagreed with the statement “the most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.” These findings corroborate conclusions by other researches (Hawkey, 2004; Cota & Ruiz, 2013). Hawkey found that teachers’ and students’ beliefs about learning grammar can be influenced by the communicative approaches that have emerged in the ELT field. Since the main goal of these approaches is to develop a communicative competence, a focus on grammatical contents is pushed into the background. In consequence, when students or teachers should talk about what a person needs to learn a language, a discussion about grammar is avoided. Nonetheless, when they reported personal experiences, they assert that learning grammar requires more attention when learning a language.

8.2 Students’ perceptions about the language learning views on *Livemocha*

In this section, we will present the findings concerning the students’ perceptions about the underlying language learning views on the SNSLL *Livemocha*. Drawing on their experience using *Livemocha* over a period of 12 weeks, participants highlighted some principles and aspects related to cognitivist and social processes (see table 2).

Table 2*Main language learning views identified on Livemocha*

1. Learning as a linear process that integrates the four skills	In this perspective, language learning is considered as the result of a linear process, starting from basic levels and following a prescribed sequence, in which the four skills are developed.
2. Learning through cooperation and social interaction	This category refers to language learning as the result of cooperation with other members of the community (chatting, revising exercises and providing feedback) and the exchange of information about culture.

8.2.1 Learning as a linear process that integrates the four skills

Participants' responses revealed that Livemocha conceives of language learning as the result of a linear process that starts from basic units and follows a prescribed sequence, in which the four skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) are developed. In the survey, over 25% of the responses asserted that Livemocha focuses on the practice of the four skills (see figure 4). Slightly over 17% reported that teaching through vocabulary lists was an important element. Moreover, for a small group of students (15%) grammar teaching and cultural contents are also taken into account in the language learning view on the SNSLL. Interaction with peers (10%), practice starting from models (10%) and personal reflection (5%) were less frequent among the answers.

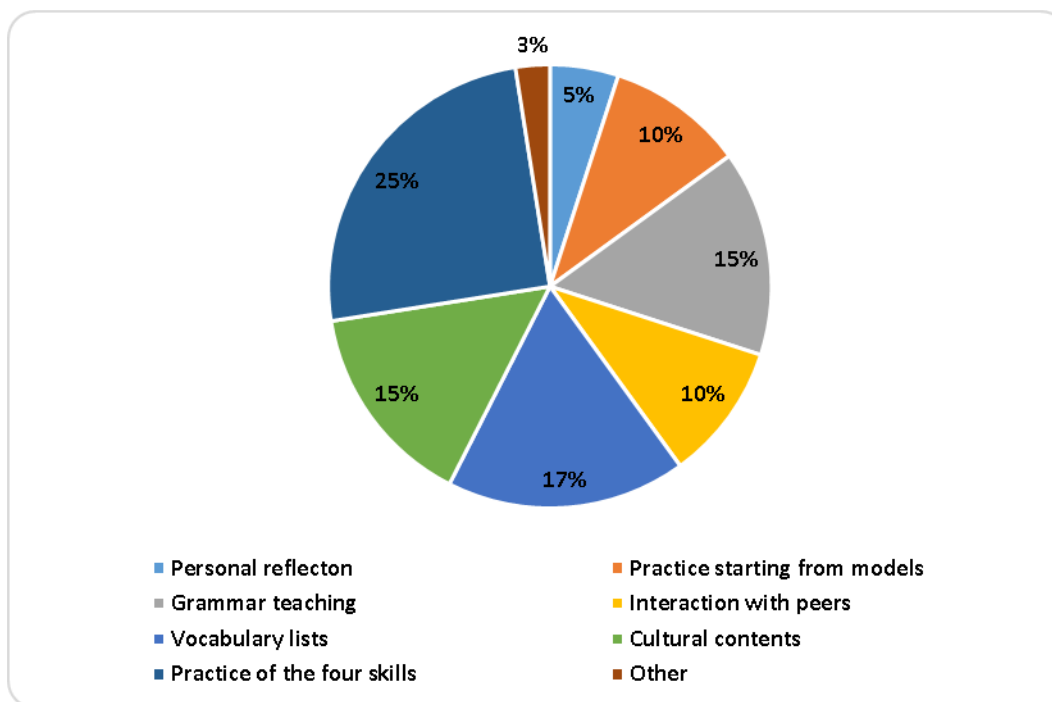


Figure 4. Activities in which Livemocha focused on according to the participants.

Some participants also expressed that working on the four skills was essential for their learning process, since it promotes meaningful learning. To illustrate, JQ claimed she agreed with the language learning view underlying Livemocha because “*It [Livemocha] has the four skills necessary for improve learning a new language*” (Survey). In turn, JSM also showed affinity with this view and said “*I agree with the website model because it has a mixed content of the 4 skills we are improving and by that way we learn significately*” (Survey). This focus on the four skills corresponds to conclusions by other researchers (Lin, 2012; Lloyd, 2012 & Liu et. al. 2015) who have pointed out the inclusion of the four skills in the SNSLL design, since users not only work on the receptive skills (listening and reading), but also they had the opportunity of developing their productive skills (speaking and writing) through direct contact with native-speakers.

These results of users’ perceptions were consistent with what they expressed on the focus group. Besides the practice of the four skills, participants emphasized that the contents followed

a linear sequence. As a case in point, when talking about the activities she did on Livemocha, CS argued *“a mi me parecen bien. Se complementan. O sea van en el orden, ¿no? O sea, primero como la introducción, de que trates de coger lo que puedes con el video aunque sea la primera vez que lo escuchas y luego entonces ya viene la teoría, el vocabulario que luego vas a tener que usar, en speaking, en el writing, entonces todo va muy relacionado”* (Focus Group). As can be seen, CS observes that Livemocha based its pedagogical model on a series of stages leading users to practice what they had already noticed in the video and had studied in previous sections. Similarly, JQ explains how Livemocha started from an activity in which users could notice the language in use, to later reflect on the structure and function, and finally, to produce something with that knowledge:

Yo creo que ellos [Livemocha] piensan que primero uno ve el lenguaje como se usa, luego define qué era lo que estaban hablando ahí y el vocabulario y sus especificaciones, cuando se usa y cuando no, luego el uso de la gramática, de ese video para que el aprendiz entienda cuál es el orden de ciertas oraciones y en qué lugar van ciertos complementos de las oraciones. Luego ya la...-en la producción escrita y la producción oral. (JQ, Focus Group)

Another aspect closely related to the idea that language learning happens through a linear process has to do with levels. Some participants stated that Livemocha was organized in different levels, and it invited users to start from basic contents, before moving to more advanced lessons. For example, MG based on her experience revising compositions in Spanish concluded that Livemocha offered the user a variety of levels in which all the skills were gradually developed:

Yo creo que Livemocha busca una persona simplemente que quiera aprender la lengua y ya, porque yo solamente califique en español, inglés no, [eh] y son cosas que van desde lo más básico, cómo armar una oración, que es la manera en la que uno aprende todas las lenguas, que este es el sujeto, que luego va el verbo, que luego va el complemento, todo eso. [...] Entonces lo que buscan es como ir desarrollando paulatinamente todas las habilidades que tiene uno, y llevándolo por todos los niveles. (MG, Focus Group)

Some students also remarked that Livemocha's view on language learning considered user's learning styles. As stated by MA, people have different ways of processing, understanding and retaining information, and Livemocha was designed to supply all those styles:

Además creo que hay que tener en cuenta que hay diferentes tipos de estudiantes. Están los estudiantes que aprenden viendo, están los estudiantes que aprenden escuchando y están los estudiantes que les gusta practicar en la hoja y en papel. Entonces, creo que la página está diseñada para enganchar prácticamente todos los tipos de estudiantes y si le gustó el vídeo, él que le gusta ver los videos, si le gustó el de la gramática o si le gustó...-o si...-él que le gustó hacer la práctica...-la producción. (MA, Focus Group)

So far, we have seen the main student's perception about the language learning view on Livemocha. According to them, the SNSLL conceived of language learning as a process in which the four skills must be developed, starting from basic contents to include gradually those who required more effort. It seems reasonable to conclude, as seen by students, that principles of the cognitivist theory of learning predominated in Livemocha, particularly, an approach based on the information processing model. According to McLaughlin (198, as cited by Saville-Trike, 2006) these kinds of approaches organize their components so that “*lower-order skills*” precede “*higher-order skills*”, and the latter are prerequisite for the former. Therefore, Livemocha's lessons started with a video, in which the topic was presented. It was followed by vocabulary and grammar sections, in the form of flashcards with definitions, pictures, pronunciation and examples. To this point, only receptive skills were activated. Then, a section for solving exercises was presented. This could be understood as the transition to the higher-order skills. Lastly, sections in which users were supposed to produce texts by themselves became a more complex task, thus productive skills were required. In addition, Livemocha (2016) confirmed that its sequence was framed into the *Whole-Part-Whole methodology*, a skills-based training system, in which users were expected to learn by “observing a new concept, breaking it down to

learn how it works, and then trying it out for themselves.”

Concerning the general structure of all lessons in Livemocha, different levels started from basic to advance. They followed the logic that simpler topics should be learned before other more intricate grammar topics. For example, in the English course section, lessons were organized in six different sub-sections entitled *English Foundations A-C*, *English Foundations D-F*, *English Foundations G-L*, and so on. The first 60 lessons included in the English Foundations A-F focused on very basic topics, such as the alphabet, the numbers, greetings, the time, body parts, etc. Therefore, learners were expected to become familiar with very basic vocabulary and to produce simple phrases providing personal information. On the contrary, lessons from G to Z intended to work in topics that required a more complex cognitive process. For example, to talk about daily routines, vacations, future plans, hypothesis, etc. In sum, first lessons required learners to understand words or short phrases; but gradually, they were expected to understand and express more structured discourses.

As we mentioned before, cognitivist approaches place emphasis in the learners differences (age, attitude, genre, etc.) and are characterized by the assumption that learning is linear, stable and follows a fixed sequence, whose main goal is to achieve a communicative competence (Järvinen, 2010) . These were assumptions that define what participants expressed in the study. In this respect, other researchers have also found similar results in terms of cognitive language learning views underlying SNSLL (Stevenson & Liu, 2010; Loiseau, Potolia & Zourou, 2011; Alvarez, 2016). Authors like Stevenson and Liu (2010) describe this way of learning as traditional and in their study about the use of SNSLL, they concluded that participants were more interested in websites that provided a static and traditional learning content. Participants also suggested that Livemocha was the site they liked the most, since it fulfilled those requirements.

In this respect, it could be said that although social networking sites for language learning represent the search for a more social language learning environment, traditional learning activities and contents play a central role in the website design -not to mention that they are relevant for learners. However, this is not the only view identified on Livemocha and students also suggested that there were elements related with cooperative learning and social interaction promoted by the SNSLL.

8.2.2 Learning through cooperation and social interaction

Cooperation and social interaction was another key component within the SNSLL according to students' perspectives. In the survey only 15% of the participants agreed with the presence of a cultural component, while 10% agreed with a peer interaction component when talking about Livemocha's activities and focuses. Nonetheless, the focus group interventions and other questions in the survey revealed an awareness of the predominance of these two components in the general structure and design of the website, and some of the activities carried out during the sessions. As a case in point, EJ expresses in the survey *"(...) I noticed that they include many cultural elements through each lesson (...)"* and JDJ seconds the idea during the focus group when asked about it *"Pues a mí me parece más que todo la cultura, porque uno veía los ademanes que tenían cuando hablaban en el vídeo y las expresiones...-los idioms, algunos (...)"* In turn, MGA during the focus group refers to cooperation by saying: *"Yo creo que ellos también quieren que uno aprenda en cooperación, al chatear con los demás (...) yo creo como que sepas que...que vos podes aprender con nativos y con tus mismos compañeros."*

Students assert having found a relevant component of social interaction because the website offers the user the possibility to interact with other users through the option of chatting,

more precisely, with native speakers. ATG points out that this is a practice encouraged by the website that allows learning in cooperation, addressing different aspects of the language all at the same time.

Yes, I think that when you are talking to another person who is from another country, you are learning culture, vocabulary, grammar, I think it is a great tool to learn a foreign language. And also, the lessons are important and interesting. (ATG, Survey)

Other students identified the option offered for correcting other users as a demonstration of the website addressing the cooperative component. For instance, JDJ explains how the process in which they corrected someone else took place, and they pointed out that the purpose was to provide feedback and act as a more capable peer, which is one key element for constructivist principles:

(...) Y como uno tenía posibilidad de calificarle a algunos compañeros, pues uno buscaba a los compañeros como los que uno tenía más confianza y si uno veía algún error, o uno revisaba el de él y encontraba que uno se había equivocado en algo, entonces le daba retroalimentación y obtenía retroalimentación también. (JDJ, Focus Group)

Other studies have already explored students' perceptions about the relevance of chatting and peer-work with native speakers. One of those studies was carried out by Lin (2012) also working with students within a SNSLL platform, and found that most of the students reported general improvement after having the experience of interacting with native speakers in a SNSLL and receiving feedback from other users. Students in Lin research also recognized the emphasis on the practice of the four skills in different types of exercises. The present research confirmed these results and tried to go a step further to find a linkage between students' perceptions and the theory underlying the SNSLL design.

During the class sessions, the students had the opportunity to use the system of rewards offered by Livemocha which consisted on receiving “Mochapoints” when correcting someone else’s work. These points were needed for getting new lessons in exchange. MAG gives us an idea of how this mechanism works for cooperative learning during the focus group she says that there is learning through “(...) *cooperación, por el hecho de las moneditas, porque la única forma en que vos podés hacer algo, es ayudando a otros y que otras personas te ayuden a vos.*”

This option is also offered by other SNSLL different from Livemocha. It is the case of *Bussu* which also integrates a system of rewards. Alvarez (2016) conducted a research exploring *Busuu* through a case study and found that even when rewards are underlined by behaviorist principles, the procedure of earning points required collaborative activities from the part of the students. It is worth mentioning that students in the present study link the use of “rewards” (mochapoints) to cooperation instead of linking it directly to behaviorist ideas of setting patterns of behavior. According to students’ comments, this cooperative practice is encouraged and in some way, enforced on the website which is an indicator of an underlying conception of learning and how language should be taught. To illustrate, CS expresses this perception as follows:

Y por ejemplo el hecho de que ellos casi que te obliguen a ganarte las monedas calificando a otra persona, haciendo un esfuerzo de más, eso no lo hace cualquiera, o sea una persona que quiere simplemente chatear, o a conocer...-o sea como le pasó a MAG, no se va a poner a eso “no, me tengo que ganar más monedas, tengo que ahorrar para otra lección.” Entonces ellos buscan personas, yo creo que realmente quieran aprender y se esfuerzen. (CS, Focus Group)

Thus, if it is true that the use of rewards is central in behaviorist theory, in this case, we could consider this practice as an attempt to use a common behaviorist practice working under constructivist principles.

Cooperative learning and social interaction are concepts commonly associated to constructivist principles; but it does not mean automatic exclusion of other principles of other language learning theories that may appear in SNSLL design. It is important to say that students do not deny or ignore the cognitivist components found in some of their comments mentioned above, but rather they perceive different components interwoven within the SNSLL for the purpose of getting a significant learning process for the user. For instance, EJ explains in the survey how two components (grammar and context) come together when presenting the content: “(...) *in my opinion this website uses interactive contents to teach a foreign language, for example a grammar lesson is taught inside a context of a specific topic (...) Therefore it is not boring like a common grammar lesson in school*” MAG explains, in turn, how the social interaction component works hand-in-hand with the grammar and vocabulary component for the purpose of teaching the content: “*yo creo que ellos ponen el chat es para que lo que vos aprendiste en vocabulario y en gramática, vayás y también lo apliqués en el chat.*” (Focus Group)

It is important to state that interaction with native speakers as a mode of practice for the skills is more related to cognitivist ideas, but it is when students recognize the value of the cultural component that constructivist and cognitivist ideas interwove. This is the case of JSE who, in the survey, expresses his approval about Livemocha’s design: “*I totally agree [with the design] because the language learning through cultural contents developing [develops] those pragmatic components which make [that contribute] a [to] successful communication.*” In turn, CS gives us an interpretation of the system created on the website in which the cultural and social interaction components, commonly related to constructivist principles, and the practice of the skills, commonly associated to cognitivist ideas, seem to be interwoven in a single defined

structure: *“Yes, I think it's a really complete system to teach a languages. This is because of the media, chats (cultural aspects it brings) and the development of all skills in a related context.”*
(Survey)

Conole and Alevizou (2010) explained that the early application of e-learning was considered behavioristic in nature and how this view was highly criticized resulting in new studies exploring other approaches. These further studies found out that Web 2.0 platforms could support different types of pedagogies that include aspects from different learning theories. Alvarez (2016) also found and explored this phenomenon in a research conducted on the SNSLL *Busuu*. He found that even when the website privileged a constructivist approach, it also integrated components such as repetition and linguistic rules in its activities. The researcher identified the coexistence of elements from varied learning views within the SNSLL and conceptualized it expressing that “*Busuu constitutes an ecological system of nested semiotic spaces where pedagogical elements and principles from different theories of language interweave in conflicting but at the same time complementary ways*” (p.79). Students in the present research not only identified this phenomenon on *Livemocha*, but also support its usefulness for their process of learning a language. The following idea expressed by JDJ in the survey could summarize the students’ perspectives on how the website attempts to teach them a language; in a few words, the SNSLL design contains elements from each learning theory and establishes its foundations on the joint work of them.

I think that this website is a really good option to learn languages and I totally agree with this in the way that it teaches us culture, it makes us to practice the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), it always carries a gramatical content which makes us reflect in what we do and it is possible to interact with others that could be natives or someone else trying to learn as us (JDJ, Survey).

9. CONCLUSIONS

This study proposed to answer two main questions. The first question intended to inquire about students' perceptions about how a foreign language is learnt. In this respect, their perceptions about language learning reveal how constructivist and cognitivist ideas prevail over ecological and behaviorist conceptions. Students comments show a tendency towards cognitivist principles such as the information-processing model and the input hypothesis; but they also seem to have strong affiliation with constructivist principles such as the role of culture when learning a language, the importance of situated learning, the role of cooperative learning and peer work, and the role of the teachers and the students when it comes to autonomous learning. During the sessions working on the SNSLL, students could state and develop their ideas about language learning, strategies, and personal needs. Contradictions were not found in this understanding of learning; students seemed to support aspects belonging to each particular theory presented, but these aspects finally came together to form a unique personal conception of how a language must be learned. These personal conceptions appear to be influenced by prior experiences at school, institutions, university, or previous autonomous work. The interaction on the SNSLL also allowed students to develop language learning strategies such as finding the way to correct their own mistakes, different ways to work with an audio or a video, use of online resources, organize schedules for studying, and finding a way to identify and meet their needs.

The second research question of this study intended to identify students' perceptions about the underlying language learning views on the SNSLL *Livemocha*. When asked about the SNSLL conception about language learning, students identified aspects belonging to the four learning theories in some way. The theoretical principles underlying the four learning theories

were identified coexisting within the website. This aspect brings benefits and limitations for students' learning process. As presented above, the general structure of SNSLLs has proved to be a viable platform for the encounter of diverse types of views of learning and pedagogies. Students' perceptions show a general recognition of this aspect and, in most of the cases, they approve of it. Some of them found they could review and practice contents that they had learned before, by doing practical exercises or by talking with other members on the website. They also focused on activities based on cognitivist principles, such as practicing the contents presented throughout the lesson, and did not feel comfortable with activities that included constructivist principles such as chatting. Finally, student's perceptions of language learning matched with the SNSLL views of learning, which indicates that these online environments could be implemented as a resource to enhance students' language learning process without acting contrary to their ideas. Nonetheless, students' conceptions about the usefulness of integrating different types of activities are also influenced by personal views on how they think they learn, their learning styles, likes and dislikes, and personal needs.

10. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Given the ecological nature of the human being, it is not possible to be dogmatic and defend exclusively the principles of one language learning theory. Reality shows us that human beings tend to adopt strategies and concepts from different theoretical approaches for language learning. In this respect, when these types of studies are carried out with students on the way of becoming teachers, teachers training programs can enhance their curricula and implement new methodologies in accordance with learners learning styles and needs.

Despite the relevance of social networking sites for language learning and the increase in adopting them in formal learning contexts, research has focused mainly on the role of users and the potential of the components or their design, while little research is available on students' perceptions about language learning views and whether or not those views are in accordance with the pedagogical model proposed by the website. SNSLLs can bring new scenarios, full of possibilities and limitations, for learning a language in foreign language programs, and it is necessary to inquire about the possible effects of implementing activities including such online tools. Therefore, this study provides insights to teacher training programs to understand how students learn and to find new ways of fostering second language learning in a significant way.

Finally, some students observed that they strengthen not only their knowledge about the language structure, but also they were able to integrate it into oral and written exercises, as well as into the authentic conversations through the chat. Consequently, they assumed an active role in their learning and progress. From this standpoint, learning a foreign language could be more meaningful if new language learning environments are included in the syllabus, since learners are usually assessed in same traditional ways (tests or workshops) and on few occasions, their ability to communicate with a native speaker in real conversations is fostered.

11. LIMITATIONS

In step with the nature of web 2.0, SNSLLs have constructivist elements that promote social interaction. One of those elements is the chat tool, which allows users to practice language skills with native speakers and to exchange information about culture. Thereby, this tool becomes an excellent resource to engage students in an authentic conversation using the target language and, in some cases, their mother tongue to help others. However, in our study, this tool was not highly exploited, since some technical limitations took place. Contrary to other social networking sites, such as Facebook, Livemocha's chat did not emit a sound or show a warning to inform users that they had received a message, so it forced students to check each conversation to know if their partner had answered. Other problems related to the chat option included the impossibility to know when other Livemocha users were online, the extended time that it took for getting a reply and the slowness when sending messages. Most of the participants complained about these aspects and expressed that the chat was one of the tools that could be improved. In this sense, adjusting this tool so that users could have a better communication, the chat of a social networking site for language learning would increase teachers' educational action in a foreign language classroom.

Furthermore, factors such as personality and prior experiences with technology or social networking sites may have influenced participants' perceptions. Motivation could become an important factor if students do not feel they are meeting their needs either because they find the activities too easy in terms of level or because they do not like the topic proposed by the website. As a consequence, active participation may not be reached and the potential of the resources may not be taken to the fullest. Few students also expressed they did not like to talk with strangers because of "cyber flirting" users are exposed to. Thus, social elements that characterized this

SNSLL were not well perceived and their potential was diminished. Further research in this area could address ways of improving the learning process within SNSLLs in spite of these limitations or even going a step further to explore new technological advances that allow to overcome these limitations.

12. REFERENCES

- Aghaei, S., Nematbakhsh, M. A., & Farsani, H. K. (2012). Evolution of the World Wide Web: From WEB 1.0 TO WEB 4.0. *International Journal of Web & Semantic Technology*, 3 (1), 1-10. Retrieved from <http://airccse.org/journal/ijwest/papers/3112ijwest01.pdf>
- Altan, M. Z. (2012). Pre-service EFL Teachers' Beliefs about Foreign Language Learning. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 35 (4), 481-493. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2011.643399>
- Alvarez, J. A. (2014). Language, Learning, and Identity in Social Networking Sites for Language Learning: The Case of Busuu (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://arizona.openrepository.com/arizona/handle/10150/316461>
- Alvarez, J. A. (2016). Redes sociales para el aprendizaje de idiomas: un examen a las Teorías de Aprendizaje en espacios semióticos anidados. *Signo y Pensamiento*, 35, 66-84. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.syp35-68.snsI>
- Beatty, K. (2013). The Emergency of CALL. In *Teaching & researching: Computer-assisted language learning* (pp. 7-15). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Clark, C., & Gruba, P. (2010). The Use of Social Networking Sites for Foreign Language Learning: An Autoethnographic Study of Livemocha. In C.H. Steel, M.J. Keppell, P. Gerbic & S. Housego (Eds.), *Curriculum, technology & transformation for an unknown future*. Proceedings ascilite Sydney 2010 (pp.164-173). Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229001225_The_use_of_social_networking_sites_for_foreign_language_learning_An_autoethnographic_study_of_Livemocha
- Conole, G., & Alevizou, P. (2010). A literature Review of the Use of Web 2.0 Tools in Higher Education. (A report commissioned by the Higher Education Academy). Retrieved from

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/conole_alevizou_2010.pdf

Cook, V. (2008). *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*. (4th ed.). London, England: Hodder Education.

Cota, S., & Ruiz, E. (2013). Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs about Language Teaching and Learning: A Longitudinal Study. *PROFILE*, 15 (1), 81-95. Retrieved from <http://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/profile/article/view/37866/40577>

Crook, C., Cummings, J., Fisher, T., Graber, R., Harrison, C., Lewin, C., Logan, K., Luckin, R. and Oliver, M. (2008). Web 2.0 technologies for learning: the current landscape – opportunities, challenges and tensions. A Report Becta. Retrieved from http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/1474/1/becta_2008_web2_currentlandscape_litrev.pdf

Edmonds, W. A., & Kennedy, T. D. (2012). *An Applied Reference Guide to Research Designs: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods*. New York, NY: Sage publications, inc.

Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), 210-230.

Ellison, N. B., Lampe, C., & Steinfield, C. (2009). FEATURE Social network sites and society: current trends and future possibilities. *Interactions*, 16(1), 6-9. New York, NY.

Freitas, H., Oliveira, M., Jenkins, M., & Popjoy, O. (1998). The Focus Group, a Qualitative Research method. ISRC, Merrick School of Business, University of Baltimore. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b681/9a3922b1917f56cbd5be351f759895b3340e.pdf>

Friesner, T., & Hart, M. (2005). Learning Logs: Assessment or Research Method. *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methodology*, 3, 117-122. Retrieved

from www.ejbrm.com

- Hawkey, R. (2006). Teacher and Learner Perceptions of Language Learning Activity. *ELT journal*, 60(3), 242-252. Oxford University Press.
- Järvinen, H. M. (2010). *What is Ecology to do with CLIL? An ecological approach in content and language integrated learning*. University of Turku, Finland. Retrieved from <https://es.scribd.com/document/40695069/CLIL-an-Ecological-Approach>
- Koohanf, A., Riley, L., Smith, T., & Schreurs, J.(2009). E-Learning and Constructivism: From Theory to Application. *Interdisciplinary Journal of E-Learning and Learning Objectives*. 5, 91-109. Retrieved from <http://www.ijello.org/Volume5/IJELLOv5p091-109Koohang655.pdf>
- Lantolf, J. P. (2011). The sociocultural Approach to Second Language Acquisition. In D. Atkinson (Ed.), *Alternative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 24-47). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2011). Key Concepts in Language Learning and Language Education. In J. Simpson (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Applied Linguistics* (pp. 155-170). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Levy, M. (1997). *Computer-assisted language learning: Context and conceptualization*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Levy, M., & Stockwell, G. (2013). *CALL Dimensions: Options and Issues*. In *Computer-assisted Language Learning*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Liddicoat, A. J., & Scarino, A. (2013). *Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lightbown, P., & Spada, N. (2006). *How Languages are Learned*. Oxford: University Press.

- Lin, C. H. (2012). *Language Learning through Social Networks: Perceptions and Reality*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://www.llt.msu.edu/issues/february2016/v20n1.pdf#page=129>
- Liu, M., Abe, K., Cao, M. W., Liu, S., Ok, D. U., Park, J. B., Parrish, C., & Sardegna, V. G. (2015). An Analysis of Social Network Websites for Language Learning: Implications for Teaching and Learning English as a Second Language. *CALICO Journal*, 32 (1), 114-152. DOI: [10.1558/calico.v32i1.25963](https://doi.org/10.1558/calico.v32i1.25963)
- Lloyd, E. (2012). Language Learners “Willingness to Communicate” through Livemocha.com. *Apprentissage des langues et systèmes d'information et de communication, Alsic*, 15 (1). Retrieved from <https://alsic.revues.org/2437>
- Loiseau, M., Potolia, A., & Zourou, K. (2011). Communautés web 2.0 d'apprenants de langue avec parcours d'apprentissage: rôles, pédagogie et rapports au contenu. *Environnements Informatiques pour l'Apprentissage Humain, Conférence EIAH*. 111-123. Retrieved from <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00598762v3>
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2014). *Designing Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mayes, T., & De Freitas, S. (2004). Review of e-learning Theories, Frameworks and Models. Retrieved from <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearningpedagogy/outcomes.aspx>
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative Research and case study. Applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2014). National Bilingual Program, Santafé de Bogotá.
- O'Reilly, T., & Musser, J. (2006). *Web 2.0 principles and best practices*. O'Reilly Media.

Retrieved

from:

http://cursa.ihmc.us/rid=1211300618980_550838356_10465/web20_report_excerpt.pdf

Pineda, J. E. (2014). Social Networking Sites in the Classroom: Unveiling new roles for teachers and new approaches to online course design. *Íkala, revista de lenguaje y cultura*, 19 (3), 269-283.

Saville-Troike, M. (2006). *Introducing Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Schunk, D. H. (2012). *Learning theories: an Educational Perspective*. (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Skinner, B.F. (1974). About Behaviorism. In *About Behaviorism* (pp. 209 - 221). New York, NY: Knop Inc. Retrieved from http://fitelson.org/prosem/skinner_2.pdf

Stepp-Greanny, J. (2002). Student Perceptions on Language Learning in a Technological Environment: Implications for the New Millennium. *Language Learning and Technology*, 6(1), 165-180. Retrieved from <http://lt.msu.edu/vol6num1/pdf/steppgreanny.pdf>

Stevenson, M. & Liu, M. (2010). Learning a Language with Web 2.0: Exploring the Use of Social Networking Features of Foreign Language Learning Websites. *CALICO Journal*, 27(2), 233-259. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/cc32/f106fb6cac263cae213cf1b0236fb056128e.pdf>

Van Lier, L. (2004). *The Ecology and Semiotics of Language Learning: A Sociocultural Perspective*. United States of America (pp. 1-22). New York, NY: Kluwer Academic Academic Publishers.

Van Lier, L. (2011). Language Learning An Ecological-Semiotic Approach. In E. Hinkel (Ed.),

- Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 383 - 402). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Walker R., Davies G., & Hewer S. (2012). Introduction to the Internet. Module 1.5 in Davies G. (Ed.) *Information and Communications Technology for Language Teachers (ICT4LT)*, Slough, Thames Valley University. Retrieved from http://www.ict4lt.org/en/en_mod1-5.htm
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: design and methods. Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research*. (4th ed.) SAGE: Thousand Oaks, CA.

APPENDIX A

LAS REDES SOCIALES PARA EL APRENDIZAJE DE LENGUAS (RESAL): UN ESTUDIO DE CASO MÚLTIPLE EN LICENCIATURAS DE IDIOMAS COLOMBIANAS

Estimado estudiante:

Durante el presente semestre, se llevará a cabo un proyecto de investigación en la *Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras Inglés-Francés*, el cual lleva por título: “**Las Redes Sociales para el Aprendizaje de Lenguas (RESAL): Un Estudio de Caso Múltiple en Licenciaturas de Idiomas Colombianas**”. El proyecto busca observar cómo se podría articular el aprendizaje del inglés de una clase presencial con aquel que –potencialmente– puede ofrecer una red social como Livemocha.

En caso de aceptar la invitación para participar en el proyecto, se le solicitará inscribirse en dicha red social, desarrollar unas unidades de estudio, llenar una encuesta al principio del proceso y otras encuestas de seguimiento. También se le pedirá grabar las sesiones de uso de la red, y participar en una entrevista al final.

Los hallazgos de la investigación se recopilarán en un informe final que se presentará al Departamento de Investigaciones de la Universidad. De igual manera, se socializarán dichos resultados en conferencias especializadas y en varias publicaciones que saldrán posteriormente.

Su participación es voluntaria y no representa ningún beneficio económico. Las actividades que se llevarán a cabo en la red social harán parte de sus obligaciones para la clase *Habilidades Integradas IV* y por lo tanto serán evaluadas incluso si usted decide **no** participar en la investigación. Esto quiere decir que si decide no participar en la investigación, las actividades que usted realice en la red social no serán utilizadas como datos para la misma. A todos los participantes se les garantizará:

1. El uso de nombres ficticios para mantener su identidad en el anonimato.
2. Estricta confidencialidad con la información recolectada.
3. El acceso y la verificación de la información recolectada.
4. El uso de la información recolectada será usada únicamente con propósitos académicos.

Agradecemos su gentil atención y su autorización para colaborar en el desarrollo de este proyecto. En caso afirmativo, favor completar la información que se encuentra a continuación.

Grupo de Investigación “*Equipo de Investigación en Lingüística Aplicada*”

José Aldemar Álvarez Valencia (Área de inglés)

Nombre del estudiante _____

Nombre que sugiere se emplee en el reporte final _____

Fecha: _____ Teléfono: _____

Correo electrónico: _____

APPENDIX B

Learning Log 1

Please complete this learning journal after each session on Livemocha.

Class: _____

Date: _____

Time spent on the website: _____

1. What activities did you do on Livemocha today?

2. What do you think you learned new (vocabulary, grammar, etc.) today?

3. Did you communicate with any member of the community during this session?
Yes_____ NO_____

4. What means of communication did you use?
Written Chat_____ Video Chat_____ Email_____ Other? Which ones? _____

5. What themes did you talk about during your exchange?

6. Where those themes interesting or relevant to you? Why?

7. What cultural aspects could you identify during the exchange?

8. What languages did you use during the exchange?
Spanish_____ English_____ French _____ Other? Which ones? _____

9. Who did you interact with? (Write 1, 2, 3 etc. according to the number of people you interacted with today)
Woman_____ Man_____

10. Mark the nationalities of the members of the community you interacted with:
Colombian_____ American_____ Canadian_____ British_____ French_____ German_____ Australian_____ Italian_____ Algeria_____ Indian_____ Others? Which ones? _____

11. What difficulties did you find during this session?

1. Using the computer and tools needed to access the website_____

Mention the specific difficulty?

How did you solve it?

2. Understanding the navigation and organization of the website_____

Mention the specific difficulty?

How did you solve it?

3. Understanding contents in the lessons_____

Mention the specific difficulty?

How did you solve it?

4. Communicating and interacting with members of the community_____

Mention the specific difficulty?

How did you solve it?

5. Other. Which one?

Thank you for your collaboration!!

APPENDIX C

Universidad del Valle
Escuela de Ciencias del Lenguaje
Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras

Survey about the students' learning language perspectives based on the interaction on Livemocha

This survey intends to find out information about your views of language learning. Thank you in advance for your collaboration.

Complete the information below.

- 1) Date: _____
 2) Name: _____
 3) Sex: Male _____ Female _____
 4) Age: _____

Answer the following questions.

5) Select the box that you consider expresses your opinion for each statement. Use the following scale.

1= Strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly Agree.

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
To learn a language a person needs support by a peer who knows more about the target language					
Languages are learned through repetition					
Learning a language follows a prescribed sequence in which contents are organized from easy to more complex					
There is not an appropriate "perfect" version of a language (grammar, pronunciation etc.). Languages are in constant change					
Only teachers have the knowledge about the language. Their role is to model this knowledge to the learner through explanations and repetitive practice					
Learning languages takes place when students organize, process and store information consciously					
Students learn more when they are rewarded or punished when they produce correct or incorrect sentences in the target language					
The teacher's role is to be a mediator to promote language learning in a supportive environment rather than lecture or provide students with the answers without demanding effort from them					
Meaning only emerges in a particular context that is not static or pre-existed. Contexts emerge from the way users make meaning in a particular moment					

It is important to make language learning meaningful and to take into account learners' perceptions of themselves and how the meanings they make interconnect to other spaces of socialization such as the household, the school, the neighborhood and the broader community					
Learners construct their knowledge and skills through their experiences and interactions with others and taking into account the sociocultural context					
The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar					
Language development is not an accumulation of knowledge, but a process of transformation, growth, and reorganization of language experiences					
It is better to learn a language through content (learning about history, art, politics, technology etc.) rather than only focusing on the aspects of the language (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation etc.)					
Learning a language involves categorization of the knowledge using cognitive instruments such as mind maps, charts, and so forth					
It is necessary to know the foreign language culture in order to speak the foreign language					
Language can be thought of as a set of grammatical structures which are learned consciously and controlled by the learner					
Foreign language students learn better if teachers implement cooperative learning					
When developing a language, numerical grades are not necessary. Not everything you learn about the language can be measured					
When foreign language students make oral errors, it is better to provide input, so they can analyse and correct them by themselves					

6) How do you think Livemocha is attempting to teach you the language? Make a cross in the appropriate option(s)

- a) Through personal reflection ____
- b) Through practice starting from models ____
- c) Through grammar teaching ____
- d) Through interaction with peers ____
- e) Through vocabulary lists ____
- f) Through cultural contents ____
- g) Through practice of the four skills ____
- h) Other _____

7) Do you agree with how the website is attempting to teach you? Why?

8) Do you think the use of Livemocha has brought any benefits to your language learning? Which ones?

9) What aspects of Livemocha have not contributed to your improvement with language learning?

10) Has your understanding about how languages are learned changed after using Livemocha?

Yes _____ No _____ How?

11) What activities on Livemocha contribute more to your language learning? Select a number from 1 to 4, according to the following scale:

1 = None; 2 = Very little; 3 = About right; 4 = A lot

Statement	1	2	3	4
Watching a short video related to the topic				
Getting familiar with new vocabulary by seeing and listening to the pronunciation of a word or phrase and then studying its definition, grammatical category, and examples				
Revising linguistic contents, firstly, by reading and listening contextualized examples before checking a brief explanation of the grammatical rule				
Practicing vocabulary and grammatical rules by doing exercises, such as filling the gaps and multiple choice questions (listening comprehension, reading comprehension, mixed)				
Writing a short text following the instructions and submitting it for revision to get feedback, after reading a prompt.				
Recording audio following the instructions and submitting it for revision to get feedback, after reading a prompt				
Writing a short text following the instructions and submitting it to revision to get feedback, after listening to a prompt				
Recording audio following the instructions and submitting it to revision to get feedback, after listening to a prompt				
Helping language partners by providing feedback to their compositions or audio-recordings wither in English or Spanish				
Talking with native speakers via chat				

12) How has the design of the website (audio, images, visual, colors, layout) helped or not your language learning?

Thank you!

APPENDIX D

Grupo Focal proyecto de investigación: Las Redes Sociales para el Aprendizaje de Lenguas (RESAL): Un estudio de Caso Múltiple en Tres Licenciaturas de Idiomas Colombianas

Introducción

Buenos días a todos, gracias por acompañarme en este grupo focal. El objetivo de esta sesión es indagar sobre sus percepciones y experiencias sobre el uso de la red social Livemocha. Durante este semestre, como saben, hemos estado realizando unas sesiones de trabajo en Livemocha, en donde cada semana hemos trabajado en una unidad, utilizando la función de chat o haciendo otras tareas que yo he preparado y que la Livemocha no necesariamente propone. Esto dentro del marco del proyecto de investigación que estamos realizando con otras universidades. El objetivo del proyecto es mirar las maneras en que se pueden integrar este tipo de redes en las clases de lengua extranjera. La información producto de este grupo focal será utilizada para responder a varios interrogantes que nos hemos planteado al interior del estudio. Siéntanse libres de expresar honestamente sus opiniones, sentimientos o reservas respecto a este tipo de redes y su integración en las clases de lengua de licenciaturas.

Para realizar esta sesión es importante tener en cuenta las siguientes recomendaciones: primero que solo una persona hable al tiempo y que todos participen durante la sesión. También, tengan en cuenta que vamos a estar grabando esta sesión.

Me gustaría empezar por pedirles que cada uno se presente diciendo su nombre.

Preguntas introductorias

Livemocha es considerada una red social con propósitos educativos. Quiénes de ustedes han utilizado otro tipo de red social con o sin propósitos educativos? Y ¿cuáles?

Preguntas centrales

Pregunta base:

1. GUÍA DEL ENTREVISTADOR

¿Cuáles son las percepciones de los estudiantes respecto al uso de redes sociales para aprender lenguas como Livemocha con respecto a su proceso de formación docente?

¿Cómo se sintieron utilizando Livemocha durante la clase este semestre?

¿En qué medida Livemocha contribuye al objetivo de formación en lengua extranjera y para la enseñanza de lengua extranjera que ustedes están recibiendo?

2. ¿Cómo se caracterizan las habilidades del lenguaje que los estudiantes de licenciatura desarrollan mediante el uso de las RESAL Livemocha?

¿Cómo la utilización de la página ha tenido algún impacto en el desarrollo de sus habilidades de la lengua?

3. ¿Cuáles son los patrones de uso que adoptan los estudiantes de licenciatura en lengua extranjera en la RESAL Livemocha y su relación con el desarrollo de habilidades del lenguaje?

¿En qué aspectos de los ejercicios que ofrece Livemocha en sus unidades de trabajo se enfocaron más ustedes cuando yo les asignaba el trabajo en alguna de ellas? ¿Por qué?

En varios casos noté que ustedes me preguntaban sobre el vocabulario de las unidades de Livemocha, o tomaban notas en su cuaderno, entre otras. ¿Cuáles son algunas de las cosas que ustedes hacían durante la sesión de trabajo en Livemocha para apoyar o complementar la comprensión de los contenidos? ¿Por qué?

¿Alguno de ustedes hizo uso de la página por fuera de la clase? ¿Cómo fue esa experiencia? ¿En qué contenidos y actividades se focalizaron más?

¿Hay alguna diferencia entre usar Livemocha como parte constitutiva de la clase y como iniciativa propia?

- ¿Cómo la utilizaron ahora que no tenían una estructura específica indicada por el profesor?
- ¿Cuál fue su experiencia con el chat?

4. ¿Cuál es el rol del diseño semiótico multimodal de RESAL en el desarrollo las habilidades del lenguaje en el contexto de un programa de formación de docentes en lengua extranjera?

Hablemos un poco sobre el diseño de la página web desde lo instruccional o pedagógico.

¿Qué recuerdan sobre la manera en que está organizada Livemocha?

¿Qué opinión tienen de las secciones en que están estructuradas las unidades de trabajo en Livemocha?

¿Ustedes creen que hay algún énfasis en Livemocha en términos de desarrollo de habilidades del lenguaje o de la lengua? ¿Cuál sería?

¿Cómo creen que Livemocha o los diseñadores de Livemocha ven a sus usuarios?

- ¿Cómo se ve esto reflejado en la manera en que está diseñada la página?

¿Qué opinión tienen ustedes sobre el diseño de la página web en términos de un material de aprendizaje?

- ¿Qué aspectos harían que a una persona le guste la página dentro de su presentación o navegabilidad?
- ¿Qué tan importante es que se combinen video, audio, imágenes, colores, y otros elementos de diseño?

- Si uno mira algunos materiales didácticos de varios años atrás se observa que había menos elementos de audio, imágenes, colores, etc., que se combinaban para la enseñanza y aprendizaje de lenguas, ¿ustedes creen que se necesita otro tipo de habilidades para manipular este tipo de textos?

¿Qué opinan sobre las temáticas que propone Livemocha y la forma en que las desarrolla en sus unidades?

¿Cómo evalúan la página respecto a aspectos técnicos como navegabilidad, calidad de respuesta de la interface entre otros? ¿Por qué?

5. ¿Cuáles son las representaciones sobre el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de lenguas que subyace a la RESAL Livemocha?

¿Cómo creen ustedes que la página o sus diseñadores piensan que un usuario debe aprender la lengua?

La página tiene un sistema en donde los mismos miembros de la comunidad revisan los escritos y grabaciones de otros usuarios. ¿Cómo les fue con este recurso de la página teniendo en cuenta que ustedes no solo son aprendices de la lengua sino además futuros docentes de lenguas?

Tradicionalmente se ha pensado que aprender una lengua solo puede suceder en el espacio de un salón de clase con un profesor, ¿ustedes creen que las redes sociales como Livemocha está cambiando ese paradigma? ¿Cómo?

¿Qué actividades o qué aspectos consideraban que eran importantes para aprender una lengua antes de usar Livemocha? ¿Dichos aspectos cambiaron o se reforzaron después de usar Livemocha?

6. ¿Cuál es impacto del uso de la RESAL Livemocha en los procesos de desarrollo de la comunicación intercultural en estudiantes de licenciatura en lengua extranjera?

En todo caso pedir ejemplos concretos.

¿Qué tanto se puede aprender sobre cultura usando Livemocha?

¿En qué secciones de la página web creen que las cuestiones culturales se abordan?

- ¿Cómo piensan que Livemocha puede ayudar a sus usuarios a conectarse culturalmente y adquirir habilidades que faciliten entendimiento y comunicación?
- ¿Si mañana se encontrarán con una persona de otro país o viajaran al exterior, creen que el uso de la página web les podría ayudar en algo para las interacciones con otros? ¿por qué?

¿Cree usted que puede enriquecer el conocimiento cultural de otros usuarios de Livemocha? De ser así, ¿qué tanto?

¿En el trabajo que hicieron en las diversas sesiones de trabajo en clase hubo algún momento en el que notaron que el conocimiento o la conciencia sobre algún aspecto cultural era necesario para comunicarse o desarrollar las unidades de trabajo?

- ¿Hubo alguna interacción en el chat en el que notaron que hubo falta de comprensión o malentendidos debido al desconocimiento o mala interpretación de algún aspecto relacionado con lo cultural?

¿Qué opina usted de esta frase? (usarla si creen que no va a causar trauma en el desarrollo de la entrevista)

Los contactos interculturales solo ocurren cuando se interactúa con personas de otras nacionalidades.

7. ¿Inciden o no las ideologías lingüísticas de natividad presentes en la RESAL en la forma como los participantes se ven a sí mismos como usuarios del Inglés? ¿Si existe una incidencia, cómo se da?

Uno de los criterios para darle un rol a los usuarios en la comunidad de Livemocha es la lengua nativa. Recuerden que se busca que los miembros de la comunidad se comuniquen con nativos de la lengua que están aprendiendo, ¿qué opinan ustedes de este criterio?

- ¿Ustedes creen que el contacto con un nativo es necesaria para desarrollar competencia en la lengua extranjera?
- Otra de las tareas de Livemocha es la de ayudar a los miembros de la comunidad revisando audios o composiciones, ¿cómo les pareció esta experiencia y en su mayoría a quienes le revisaron composiciones?

7. ¿Cómo se pueden articular este tipo de redes sociales con las clases presenciales en un programa de formación de docentes de lengua?

Si usted es el profesor titular de un curso de inglés. Una de las herramientas de apoyo es Livemocha. ¿Lo usaría? ¿Por qué? ¿Cómo?

PREGUNTA FINAL

¿Ustedes qué piensan de que se utilicen este tipo de tecnologías en las clases de lengua extranjera pero en particular en clases de lengua de licenciaturas?

· **Summary question.**

Bueno, durante esta charla hemos discutido varios aspectos sobre el uso de las redes sociales, en particular Livemocha en las clases de estudiantes que se están formando para ser docentes de lengua, ustedes han expresado que esta experiencia ha sido....

¿Este resumen que acabo de hacer es apropiado y recoge puntos importantes de la discusión de hoy?

· **Final question.** Gracias todos estos elementos más la información recogida durante el semestre nos va a

ayudar a determinar de qué manera se pueden integrar estas páginas en nuestras clases de lenguas. ¿Hay algo más para comentar sobre Livemocha y su integración en las clases de lengua?

¿Hay alguna sugerencia que quieran hacernos?

El día de mañana voy a poner en sus carpetas de Google drive una encuesta corta de tres preguntas para que me la diligencien. Al final de la encuesta me cuentan cuál nota de quieren reemplazar con el extracredit.

¡Les agradecemos mucho!