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Bachelor thesis

**Empowering EFL students towards
effective self-directed informal digital learning of English**

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Table of contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Theories of informal SLA.....	2
3. Current studies, facts and figures about IDLE	3
4. Terminology relating to informal language learning	5
4.1.Dimensions of learning beyond the classroom: Benson’s framework.....	6
5. Suggestions for approaching effective IDLE.....	8
6. Pedagogical framework for IDLE regarding the SLA context.....	11
7. Target groups of learners	15
8. Suggestions for a methodological framework for implementing IDLE in TEFL.....	17
9. Applicability in different cultural settings	20
10. Evaluation of online resources for self-directed learners regarding their effectiveness for SLA	22
10.1.Results	25
10.2.Quantified results	30
10.3.Discussion and critique on IDLE efficacy.....	31
11. Suggestions for future research.....	33
12. Conclusion	34
References	36
Appendix.....	41

1. Introduction

The further off from England the nearer is to France;
Then turn not pale, beloved snail, but come and join the dance.
(Carroll 1869, 152, "The Lobster Quadrille")

The leeway for educators to empower and support language students in actively engaging and interacting with the languages that they are learning is greater than ever before through the participatory nature of emerging technologies. Learning English as a second language is no exception to this, with the language's omnipresence in communication both online and in new media in general. The approach of exhausting the full potential of self-directed informal language learning instead of merely regarding it as a side effect is starting to receive more attention in recent research regarding *Second Language Acquisition* (SLA) (cf. Lee and Lee 2018, 4).

Learning today is becoming "increasingly self-directed, open and informal" (Song and Bonk 2016, 2) through the rapid development of emerging technologies (cf. Bull *et al.* 2008, 106). At the same time, current educators are not appropriately facilitating these appealing opportunities for their student's informal learning. Based on that assumption, the following will elucidate the issue further and offer ways to utilise these developments by bringing *Informal Digital Learning of English* (IDLE) (cf. Lee 2017, 1-12) into *English as a Second Language* (ESL) or *English as a Foreign Language* (EFL) classrooms in secondary education.

Instead of merely taking these processes of IDLE for granted, teachers with a heightened awareness for the "continuum in settings and ways of acquisition" (Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor 2005, 4) of language would pay close attention to their students' needs and encourage them to engage with the language informally beyond the classroom, which in turn supports their formal, in-classroom performance in language learning.

This approach is also reflected in the title of the thesis: "Empowering EFL students towards effective self-directed informal digital learning of English". Acknowledging the positive effects of IDLE-activities could help students find their own crucially important intrinsic motivation (cf. Loyens, Magda, and Rikers 2008, 418) for engaging with and naturally using the language that they are studying. Additionally, this gives teachers a better understanding for how their students "may interact with their object of study once class is over" (Kusyk 2019, 3). As a result, self-directed informal learning outside of classroom settings becomes the most effective, and teachers can apply this auxiliary knowledge to make lifeworld-based recommendations to their students.

In order to outline the real-life application of this approach, motivational factors, aspects that are beneficial to learning outcomes, as well as groundwork of instructional pedagogy in the field of SLA need to be illuminated. Although the practical implementation and effectiveness of such methods varies for each learner, recommendations for certain groups that would benefit most can be made in the sense of offering them the most suited type of self-directed digital resources, catered to their personal interests. Additionally, chapter nine is going to give an outlook on how the approach could prove beneficial for EFL curriculums in widely different

cultural settings.

In order to give examples and possible starting points to put the approach to good use, the evaluative part of this thesis is going to list, describe and assess five distinct informal digital learning resources from five different categories. The emphasis will be on digital platforms that are not *primarily* regarded to be language learning resources.

By assessing them through a previously determined evaluation framework, they can be judged in regards to their expediency for the informal language learning experiences discussed within this thesis. In order to draw conclusions informed by the findings of the evaluation, a critical discussion on IDLE efficacy will be presented.

2. Theories of informal SLA

Increased opportunities for learning and teaching languages beyond the classroom, enabled through new media and technology, has recently garnered a fair amount of attention in the field of *Computer Assisted Language Learning* (CALL) and the field of SLA (cf. Benson and Reinders 2011; Nunan and Richards 2015). When looking at theoretical models of SLA proposed by researchers such as Canale and Swain (1979), Bachman and Palmer (1996) and Purpura (2004), the increase in language knowledge is expressed through advances in a number of distinct categories: *pragmatic knowledge*, *discourse knowledge*, *functional knowledge*, and *sociolinguistic knowledge*.

A multifaceted increase in skill in all of these areas can not be achieved by solely relying on interaction with the language as offered through traditional classroom methodologies such as the "grammar translation method popular since the 1950s" (Schmidt *et al.* 2016, 34). Such classical concepts for language teaching are "characterized as behaviorist in nature, as they call upon skills such as memorization, drilling practice, and repetition" (Brown 2007, 53) and often do not get past the point of merely teaching the learners new vocabulary and far from authentic vernacular use of the language.

On the other hand, there is the constructivist theory of learning, as attributed to leading educational psychologists such as John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, which instead propose that "knowledge is acquired by processes that blend the learner's pre-existing knowledge framework, acquired through years of development and experience, with that encountered in social contexts" (Schmidt *et al.* 2016, 34).

If language learning is thereby regarded as a *social* activity, in which "the individual learns by being part of the surrounding community and the world as a whole" (Oxford 1997, 445), interactive digital resources could prove to be beneficial in establishing a connection to such communities and allowing for frequent communication in the target language (TL).

In a case study, Lam (2000, 476) made similar discoveries which demonstrate the impact constructivist learning endeavours can have on language acquisition.

In an ethnographically inspired case study, Lam (2000[476]) showed how a Chinese teenager living in the USA was able to construct his English identity discursively in synchronous and asynchronous communication on the computer with peers. For a long time, this student had been concerned about the

slow progress he made in English and wanted to take measures to speed it up. By communicating on the Internet with friends all around the globe, and using tutorials, among other things about building websites, he was able to improve his written skills immensely. Above all, the English he used and encountered on the Internet 'enabled him to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness to a global English-speaking community' (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016, 116-117)

The learning experiences that have become possible through digital resources are active, process-based, anchored in and driven by learners' interests, and therefore have the potential to cultivate self-regulated, independent learning (cf. McLoughlin and Lee 2010, 29). This concerns language learning in all educational stages.

The popularity of such resources for informal learning has not just been furthered through students' increased demand for independence and freedom of choice when learning, however. As stated in Benson and Reinders (2011, 36), it is also a direct consequence of the rapid development seen in digital technologies and their adaption by school students. Such technologies seem to have greatly increased second language (L2) affordance beyond the classroom and are demonstrating how education could transform by harnessing the technologies students already use in their daily lives (cf. Bull *et al.* 2008; Greenhow, Robelia, and Hughes 2009).

As of now, "the literature in various linguistic, psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic domains does not converge on an integrated, coherent view on L2 learning (and L1 learning)" (Hulstijn 2002, 200) which demonstrates the potential usefulness of exploring new and different paths of language acquisition that had previously been left unregarded.

3. Current studies, facts and figures about IDLE

As new encounters with the English language became available, both language users and learners changed their behaviour and started using digital resources offered in the TL more frequently. This is reflected in recent studies on SLA and the usage numbers of digital platforms, as "we are seeing greater use of multimodal creativity (especially digital storytelling) both in school and out-of school settings" (Dressman and Sadler 2020, 460) on predominantly anglophone platforms such as YouTube.

One author in particular, Ju Seong Lee of Education University of Hong Kong, has contributed to the field extensively through his exploratory studies on students' engagement in IDLE practices (cf. McLoughlin and Lee 2010; Lee 2018; Lee and Lee 2018; Lee and Drajeti 2019). His work is focused on the informal digital learning of English instead of merely *Mobile Assisted Language Learning* (MALL), which is usually formal in nature and is going to serve as a basis for many assumptions made throughout this thesis.

A representative study ($N=1000$) called "2020 Postbank Jugend-Digitalstudie" (Postbank 2020) conducted in Germany has shown that teenagers aged 16-18 years have, on average, spent 71.5 hours per week using the Internet and online services. In comparison to the preceding numbers from 2019, this signifies a 23% increase and suggests a surge of usage times. The staggering daily screen time of more than 10 hours demonstrates, how much capacity and time online services take up in the everyday life of adolescent users. Almost all

of the teenagers who were interviewed¹ stated, how they used their mobile devices and smartphones to gain access to these platforms.

One reason behind this drastic increase is suspected to be the COVID-19 pandemic, which not only added to usage hours through homeschooling and online lessons, but also increased the recreational use of the Internet and digital media. For instance, an investigation of the media use of German teenagers aged ten to 17 years found a concerning increase of 75% in time spent playing digital video games as opposed to last year (cf. Felschen and dpa 2020). However, such empirical studies should not be condemned prematurely, but rather carefully investigated and classified accordingly.

For example, one particular study by Lee and Dražati (2019, 168) suggests positive effects of time spent engaged in online activities, as "students' IDLE engagement [...] play[s] a significant role in second language communication. In particular, pedagogical benefits of affective variables (e.g., grit, self-confidence, and motivation) and productive IDLE activities". Furthermore, Ma (2015, quoted in: Dressman and Sadler 2020, 276) points out, that the mobile technologies and resources that are most frequently used by EFL students are not dedicated "tutor like-learning apps" but more often tools that fulfil personal needs and cater to personal interests or enjoyment. For instance, instructive language learning apps like Duolingo would not be as popular with students as browsing their personalised feed of English content on social media apps such as Tumblr.

This only makes sense, as the Internet and content that is accessible online is being used on an interest-driven basis and offered through a medium that is *necessarily* linked to the use of English language (cf. Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016, 119).

Another example of a frequently used type of online activity would be computer-mediated interpersonal communication and social media in general.

Over the last decade, social media has gone from being a dream of Silicon Valley technologists to a central part of contemporary digital life around the world. (Boyd 2015, 2)

The scope of usage of these platforms can be illustrated by looking at recent numbers of a study called "WhatsApp, Instagram und Co. - so süchtig macht Social Media" (DAK-Gesundheit 2017). It was conducted by the German Forsa institute for social research with 1001 children and teenagers, between 12 and 17 years of age. In this survey, 85% of the participants stated, that they are using social media every single day of the week.

With social media use being so frequent and not bound to a specific language or location, it could open up a wide range of opportunities for informal L2 learning if employed consciously. However, the use of social media does not necessarily imply a productive and active interaction with L2, as large parts of the use do not go beyond consuming content.

When it comes to the pedagogic, structural dimension of language learning beyond the classroom, there is a tendency for students to engage in receptive activities significantly more often than in productive ones. This could be proven by recent studies conducted with

¹ In fact, 97% of them (cf. Postbank 2020).

groups of vocational education students (cf. Wu 2012, 37), secondary school students (cf. Chan 2016, 1919), and university undergraduate students (cf. Gardner and Yung 2017, 3; Lai, Hu, and Lyu 2017, 3).

One field that does indeed inspire interactive and somewhat more productive engagement with the English language would be conversation-based learning through mediums such as video games played in the TL. In a study conducted by Reinders and Wattana (2014, 101-123) concerning the effects of digital gameplay on willingness to communicate in a second language, the claim that “quantity of IDLE [as a result of playing video games online] was positively associated with two aspects of affective domains (confidence and enjoyment)” (Lee 2019, 121) was confirmed. This finding is consistent with the results of prior studies, which explored affective benefits of engaging in digital (online) games (cf. Thorne, Black, and Sykes 2009). In yet another study, Chik (2014, 85-100) discovered how pronounced the advantage offered through digital gaming could be for young language learners, as it allows them to take control of their L2 learning experience autonomously and cater it to their needs. She also suggests, that one likely development within the CALL community throughout the next few years will be the integration of L2 gaming into formal L2 teaching and learning environments (cf. Chik 2014, 97).

At present, such findings and implications on the potential of “recreational language learning” (Chik and Ho 2017, 162-171) have not been adopted widely enough to have caused a shift in the way that L2 learning both in and outside of educational institutions is being connected. It has been argued by some authors that this hesitance stems from the fact that “despite rapid growth in app numbers, MALL research has been criticized for a lack of objective, quantifiable learning outcomes” (Schmidt *et al.* 2016, 33). While such measurable successes are surely of great importance in the field of instructed and examined formal learning, they are arguably less meaningful for the informal “learning objectives with fewer constraints than formal school settings” (Bull *et al.* 2008, 103) as discussed within this thesis.

4. Terminology relating to informal language learning

There is a great variety of terms used in the field of SLA that express different modes of interaction with, and acquisition of English as discussed thus far. However, these terms are used more or less consistently in publications by different researchers. They range from “Extramural English” (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016), “Online Informal Learning of English” (Sockett 2014), “Out-of-Class English Learning” (Lai, Hu, and Lyu 2017) to “Language Learning and Teaching Beyond the Classroom” (Reinders & Benson 2017), with the latter being the inclusive term of choice used throughout this thesis. All of these notions “share much in common when regarding their perspectives and principles” (Lee 2019, 123).

The concept of *Online Informal Learning of English* has found its way into SLA terminology since 2014, is abbreviated as “OILE” (Sockett 2014, 7) and understood to be “a complex range of internet-based activities”. Other authors, such as Lee (2017, 768) have coined the

aforementioned term IDLE which can be conceptualised as “self-directed, informal English learning using a range of different digital devices (e.g. smartphones, desktop computers) and resources (e.g. web apps, social media) independent of formal contexts”. Such modes of learning are informal and organised differently than non-formal and formal learning practices, reflected in their definition of being “any activit[ies] involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria” (Livingstone 2006, 206).

Another distinction to make is between *self-directed* and *self-regulated* types of learning, two terms whose use “has become more frequent over the past years” (Saks & Leijen 2014, 191), especially in research surrounding digital learning environments.

The term *self-regulated learning* originates from the field of cognitive psychology and describes a type of activity practised mainly in school environments, where the task is set by a teacher (Robertson 2011, 1629) and students are faced with a more narrow, micro-level construct for their learning. The second term, *self-directed learning*, is used synonymously with a number of expressions including “self-management, learner autonomy, independent learning, e-learning” (Saks and Leijen 2014, 197) and emphasises activities that, also according to Saks and Leijen (2014, 193), are practiced “mainly outside traditional schooling environments”.

Self-directed learners initiate the learning tasks themselves (cf. Robertson 2011, 1629), which involves the possibility of designing a personal learning environment - which happens in a broader macro-level construct. However, both types require intrinsic motivation by the learner and involve four key-phases of *defining tasks*, *setting goals* and *planning*, *enacting strategies* and finally *monitoring* and *reflecting* the *process* of learning (cf. Saks and Leijen 2014, 193).

On the other hand, there is also a differentiation between *acquisition* and *learning* of a language. When engaged in activities that allow for language learning beyond the classroom, the aspect of acquisition² plays a significant role for the language intake - “resulting in ‘conscious’ knowledge about the language” (Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor 2005, 7).

4.1. Dimensions of learning beyond the classroom: Benson’s framework

Since the discussion on language learning and teaching beyond the classroom is characterised by a multitude of different factors, the following model proposed by Benson (2011, 7-16) is widely accepted in the field of SLA and useful for understanding and explaining key aspects of learning beyond the classroom as it helps to specify the nature of IDLE activities. The proposed framework consists of four dimensions in regards to setting and mode of practice in language learning and teaching: *Formality*, *Location*, *Pedagogy*, and *Locus of Control*.

² Acquisition is coined as a product of more subconscious, psychological processes.

A clear distinction between these properties can help in the evaluation in regards to the effectiveness of both receptive and productive IDLE activities. The term *digital* used within this study refers to digital devices³ and resources⁴. Furthermore, the term certification describes reports that prove a person’s competence in an area, as well as formal certificates handed out by a practitioner or institutions.

	Formal Digital Learning of English	Non-Formal Digital Learning of English	IDLE	
			Extracurricular	Extramural
Formality	Structured; Certification	Structured; No certification	Semi-structured; Certification	Unstructured; No certification
Location	In-class	Out-of-class	Out-of-class	Out-of-class
Pedagogy	Instructed	Instructed	Self-instructed	Naturalistic
Locus of Control	Other-directed	Other-directed	Self-directed	Self-directed

Table 1. Classification of IDLE, based on Benson’s (2011) four dimensions (Lee 2019, 115)

Formality

The aspect of formality addresses the degree to which the environment for learning is structured and organised. It is expressed through the differentiation between the *structured*, *semi-structured* or *unstructured* nature of learning activities. In the case of IDLE activities, the aspect of formality is *unstructured* and there is *no certification* for learning outcomes. Thus, referring to “non-institutional programmes or individual learning projects” (Benson 2011, 10) like learning English from “popular culture or the internet” (Dressman and Sadler 2020, 323).

Location

Regarding IDLE, location refers to properties of locality in learning opportunities outside of educational institutions which can be supplementary to the learning and teaching happening in institutions such as schools (cf. Benson 2011, 9). More specifically, *out-of-class* (or *out-of-school*) learning usually refers to non-prescribed and unstructured activities in which no educator is involved which may give instructions or assess learning performance - as opposed to *in-class* formal digital learning of English. In the dimension of locality, students broaden their knowledge of a subject independently by exploring an interest of theirs. The choice and control over activities that they are taking part in is self-directed by the learner.

Pedagogy

According to Benson’s classification, the dimension of pedagogy comprises terms such as *instructed*, *self-instructed* or *naturalistic*. He points out, how instruction also has to be understood as a type of pedagogy (cf. Benson 2011, 10). IDLE activities on the other hand

³ This refers to consumer hardware by the likes of smartphones, personal computers or tablets.

⁴ Referring to websites, video streaming services or social media sites for instance.

are characterised by a lack of instruction and offer a naturalistic approach to L2 experiences. If an EFL student listens to an L2 Podcast online for example, the Podcast might be beneficial for their L2 acquisition, however its consumption is not instructive but rather naturalistic exposure to language.

Locus of Control

For true autonomy and freedom of choice, the study of a second language would have to be a decision made by determined learners themselves. However, in secondary education that is usually not the case. EFL students in many European countries are required to learn the language as a part of their scholastic curriculum, already taking away from their genuine autonomy in learning the language (cf. Benson 2011, 12). In Benson's four dimensions, this is reflected in terms of the *Locus of Control* that students have. It is separated into the terms *other-directed* as well as *self-directed* and "centers on the extent to which learners experience that learning is under their own control or under the control of somebody or something else" (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016, 9). Language learning beyond the classroom provides students with many chances for making their own decisions with an internal *Locus of Control* in regards to what they want to learn. Thus, allowing them to actively self-direct all parts of the process and exercise autonomy by making their own choices. Learner autonomy can be identified as a key factor to facilitate L2 learning through IDLE activities.

5. Suggestions for approaching effective IDLE

IDLE in extramural contexts is self-directed, naturalistic, digital learning of English in unstructured, out-of-class environments, independent of a formal language program. (Lee 2019, 116)

In this chapter, the distinct approach of a teacher mediated framework for awareness on digital informal learning of English as suggested within this thesis is going to be discussed. Through this central theme, better assumptions can be made on what the nature of language is and what conditions might promote language acquisition (cf. Richards and Rodgers, 1986, 12) in the most effective way, even beyond the classroom or outside of educational institutions.

According to the organisational key concept coined by Anthony (1963, 63), techniques must carry out a method which is consistent with an approach in order to be effective. In the context of SLA, the learners themselves need to consider methods suggested by English practitioners and put them to good use by individually deciding on techniques that are suited for their own learning needs. The motivation to engage in such activities in digital spaces is "personal, not academic or institutional, driven by the 'wish to be entertained, to be able to communicate with acquaintances, or to find relevant information for personal or school purposes' (Kusyk 2016, 92)" (Dressman and Sadler 2020, 459-460).

To begin with, technology-mediated informal learning underlies the concept of learning "in the digital wilds" (Thorne *et al.* 2015, 215-233), describing a manifold of services and learning

opportunities provided by both the Internet and modern hardware. Herein, "arenas of social activity" open up to students, which are "less controllable than classroom or organized online intercultural exchanges" and instead offer "interesting, and perhaps even compelling, opportunities for intercultural exchange, agentive action and meaning making" (Thorne 2010, 144, quoted in: Dressman and Sadler 2020). This realm of interaction with a second language is best explored through the previously mentioned self-directed learning, which emphasises the choices in one's learning path (cf. Loyens, Magda, and Rikers 2008).

In order to promote such self-directed learning activities, the "learners need to be empowered to make their own learning decisions" (Downes 2010, 28). According to Loyens (2008, 418), a learner who is "intrinsically motivated" to do so is likely to be most effective. This would involve taking the initiative, diagnosing personal learning needs, formulating goals, identifying human or material resources, implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating outcomes (cf. Knowles 1975, 18) - a rather complex interplay between different dimensions of learning.

The proposal at hand is that an effective IDLE activity would ideally generate such intrinsic motivation for students in a genuine (*naturalistic*) way, giving them latitude to be self-directed in their informal learning. The basic premise that the approach discussed herein follows is, that informal language learning beyond the classroom is equally as important for an EFL learner's progress in the English language as formal language learning in instructed classroom settings.

With that in mind, a pedagogical balance between instructed, in-class learning and self-directed, more naturalistic learning beyond the classroom driven by personal interest⁵ and exploration can be established in regards to teaching English to speakers of other languages within secondary education. Groups of students within these age bands and environments are frequently engaged with digital resources and are thought to be part of a growing generation of "Digital Natives" (Downes 2010, 27), making them fairly likely to interact with devices and platforms that frequently offer content in English already.

This is where institutions and educators could help students to exhaust this idle potential, as they are traditionally seen to be the ones offering second language experiences and interaction. This approach is not new, as authors such as Tomlinson (2003, 74) have already argued in the past, that "teaching and learning context should be considered as a whole, whereby we talk about learner *empowerment* rather than learner [*under-]involvement*".

Digital media provides the means for doing so, letting students become the "main input providers" (Tomlinson 2003, 61) once they find themselves outside of classroom settings. Through making educators more aware of IDLE efficacy, their attention might shift from traditional, formal CALL (cf. Lee 2017, 1), which has arguably found its way into schools already, to students' informal learning in entirely out-of-school, non-institutional realms of freely chosen digital engagement (cf. Thorne, Black, and Sykes 2009, 1).

⁵ Specifically, personal interest leading to a sense of internal locus of control.

In order to fuel this transitional process, "educators must help their students transform their understandings and values regarding the content", and make efforts to support the "development of a critical consciousness and critical media literacy" (Bull *et. al* 2008, 105). The promising nature of new media with its interactivity and low-threshold for involvement becomes seizable that way.

The connection of formal and informal learning would arguably lead to a reconsideration of the value that informal learning practices hold, instead of just perceiving them as "second best" out of prejudice (Dressman and Sadler 2020, 377). This was best put by Lam (2013, 823) in her appeal to "reconsider how our educational practices may leverage these young people's communicative repertoires as resources for learning instead of keeping them invisible or marginalized in the classroom".

In times where the ecological conditions of both learning and teaching are shifting, new realms outside of school environments are opening up, allowing for a type of learning that offers the following advantages as summed up by various commentators:

- A sense of presence, possibly even community, in online interaction
 - Improved learner support
 - Unlimited practice of difficult concepts, skills etc.
 - Unlimited access to resources via the Internet
 - Improved delivery of learner preferences – notably those required by students with disabilities
 - Global access to resources and teaching
 - Learning anywhere, any time
- (Thorpe 2008, 24)

It becomes apparent, that this type of learning is multi-faceted, often mediated in a social context and offers a multitude of aspects beneficial for SLA. For example, as described at length by VanPatten and Williams (2014, 9), "in the linguistic environment, exposure to input is necessary for SLA" because the use of a language develops primarily through social interaction.

Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016, 7) have argued, that extramural language use in gaming (as well as other IDLE-based activities) encompass "input, output, and/or interaction in [the target language]", meaning that "the essential components needed for second-language (L2) learning are in place". It also provides an experiential base and motivation for further activity that leads to subsequent learning. Many common approaches to SLA are labeled to be *usage based* and characterised through the fact, that "[l]anguage learning is primarily based on learners' exposure to their second language (L2)" (Wulff and Ellis 2018, 75).

This means, that the linguistic L2 input which they receive through their use allows them to employ cognitive mechanisms beneficial to language learning (among others).

When looking at a traditional ESL classroom however, social interaction in English is quite sparse among students and certainly not sufficient for making learners feel naturally immersed in the TL. This becomes even more pronounced once they leave the instructed environment of their classrooms, which is erroneously regarded as the natural and sole *playing field* in which learning or language learning needs to take place.

As of now, "[p]rimary and secondary school students' out-of-class learning activities were

most often found to be parent- or teacher-initiated and with a primary focus on serving examination needs” (Dressman and Sadler 2020, 277) of their formal curriculums.

Considering this, Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor (2005, 7) argue how “language acquisition needs also to take place in a non-instructed setting” that would have to be self-directed and truly individual for each learner, independent of certification and examination. Online resources that facilitate such interactions are already commonly used by many students (cf. Lee 2017, 2) with prime examples being online communities revolving around shared interests, online video games or instant messaging applications.

Activities of this kind are the quintessential meaning of IDLE as discussed in this thesis: natural use of the English language which occurs when non-native speakers of English engage in meaning or leisure-based activities online (cf. Kusyk 2019, 1), leading to implicit vernacular L2 acquisition. Other examples of opportunities for students to interact with the English language in such a way could be instant messaging and synchronous chat, participation in blogs and wikis, *remixing*, watching series or films and many more.

As Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor (2005, 3) state, if the L2 is not being used “there is stagnation and ultimately a loss of skills”, emphasising the need for constant intellectual involvement as offered through IDLE activities.

Despite this, linguistic interaction enabled through digital resources will not automatically ensure an increase in L2 proficiency, as the growth and loss of language skills is dependent on various other variables (cf. Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor 2005, 3). Some of these might be the age of the learner, their intelligence and aptitude, previous SLA experiences, the amount of interaction that activities allow for learners, as well as their attitude towards the learning with the resulting intrinsic motivation. Despite this, an English teacher can help make an informed decision about what types of IDLE activities and strategies students might employ. These considerations are taken into account for the subjective nature of all recommendations of steps to take and resources to use in order to realise the approach. After all, it is the individuality of these tools that entails their effectiveness.

6. Pedagogical framework for IDLE regarding the SLA context

Appropriately outlining the pedagogical properties of language learning endeavours as a cohesive topic is difficult, given the limited extent of this thesis. However, the appropriate pedagogy put to use needs to be considered in order to understand incentives for learners as well as the motivational factors which are involved.

As Song and Bonk (2016, 3) put it, informal learners are characterised as motivated to choose or self-direct their own learning and are thought to be motivated by widely different incentives than in formal learning. While formal learners strive for concrete certificates, degrees or grades, the motivators for informal learning are far more elusive. In the field of informal language learning, notions of “constructs of *self* and *identity*” (Dressman and Sadler 2020, 16) have become increasingly dominant terms for explaining the motivational factors

that learners experience. Dörnyei proposes the “L2 Motivational Self System” (2009, 9), based on the theory of three types of “selves” sought for by the learner: The *ideal L2 self*, the *ought-to L2 self* and the *L2 learning experience*.

Firstly, the *ideal L2 self* “refers to the learner’s personal imaginary of having the attributes of a competent L2 user” (Dressman and Sadler 2020, 16) and encompasses all personally relevant aspects of becoming a capable user of L2. For example, in order to have conversations, demonstrating “internalised instrumental motives” (Gardner and Yung 2017, 2). The *ought-to L2 self* is rather about the *societal* (or, in formal language learning, *institutional*) context of L2 use and describes the willingness to meet societal expectations by appropriately using a L2 as well as the avoidance of possible negative outcomes. In this case, the learner is subjected to “extrinsic instrumental motives” (Gardner and Yung 2017, 2). At last, there is the *L2 learning experience* which expresses a learner’s experience in their environment and how fruitful it is for their individual learning process.

Informed by this model, Dressman and Sadler suggest that “the two more salient constructs in the *L2 Motivational Self System* are the *Ideal L2 self* and the *L2 learning experience* [which] are most likely to be predictive of motivation and achievement” (Dressman and Sadler 2020, 16-17).

On the other hand, the concept of *identity* influences the pedagogical circumstances in the sense of enabling learners to “construct their desired identities in imagined L2 communities” in order to be able to respond to situational contexts (Block 2007; Menard-Warwick 2009, quoted in: Dressman and Sadler 2020, 17).

This allows the assumption, that a learner’s personal *future imaginary* plays a significant role in the motivation for and effectiveness (as testified through achievement) of informal language learning experiences.

It is also known, that acquisition of a second language proceeds most rapidly through a combination of form-focused instruction and exposure to the TL (cf. Benson and Reinders 2011, 7), which would speak for the idea of teachers best supporting their students by making them aware of resources that allow for such exposure. This is reflected in a pedagogical appeal by Lee (2017, 11) in which he states, that “they [teachers] should consider implementing IDLE-integrated pedagogy (e.g., balancing both form- and meaning-focused language learning) in their educational contexts, which is essential for achieving successful L2 acquisition”.

When educators inspire EFL students to utilise informal digital resources for self-directed learners outside of the classroom, they actively augment their use of, and intellectual involvement with the language as well as implicit processes of language acquisition.

One reason for these digital platforms and communicative tools being especially beneficial for EFL learning is, that they are considered to be naturalistic in their pedagogy, hence the term “self-directed naturalistic learning” (Benson and Reinders 2011, 107), rooted in the pedagogical principle of “rais[ing] the agentive possibilities for foreign language students”

(Thorne and Reinhardt 2008, 563).

Learners set up a naturalistic learning situation for themselves with the intention of language learning, but once engaged in the situation, "switch[...] the focus of attention to communication, enjoyment or learning something other than the language itself" (Benson and Reinders 2011, 11). Such experiences enabled through technology are perceived as an authentic exposure to language, completely dependent on the choices made by users.

There is ample evidence, that *noticing* is an integral process in SLA and obtaining new information, where "conscious understanding helps in the acquisition process" (Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor 2005, 9), achieved through some level of conscious attention to the input. Subsequently, the L2 input should be coupled with an instructional aspect, possibly from the direction of teachers, in order for learners to meet it with enough awareness to notice new forms of language. Ellis (2017, 17) further investigated the various roles that consciousness plays in SLA, deducing the steps of

the learner noticing [...] evidence; their attending to language form; their perception focused by social scaffolding or explicit instruction; their voluntary use of pedagogical grammatical descriptions and analogical reasoning; their reflective induction of metalinguistic insights about language; and their consciously guided practice which results, eventually, in unconscious, automatized skill. (Ellis 2017, 17)

As a result, teachers can make their students aware of such practices for implicit language acquisition, without instructing them in the formal sense of the word.

The same phenomenon then carries on to recreational activities of students: If they played their favourite video game in English, it would be teaching them the language without being explicitly instructive. Research on video gaming and its impact on SLA through the creation of immersive linguistic environments found, that gamers "suggested intentionality as the key to turning informal L2 gaming into L2 learning experiences" (Hulstijn 2008, quoted in: Chik 2014, 96). This demonstrates how vernacular L2 use in digital resources such as video games can become advantageous opportunities for L2 learning.

Next, there is the domain of "Public Pedagogy" which suggests that "learning often takes on a subtler, embodied mode, moving away from the cognitive 'rigor' commonly associated with educational experiences" (Sandlin, Schultz, and Burdick 2010, 22). This is happening outside of formal schooling and positions informal learning in spaces such as "popular culture", "the Internet", "public spaces such as museums and parks", and "other civic and commercial spaces" (Sandlin, Schultz, and Burdick 2010, 29).

For instance, social media platforms have become important sites of public pedagogy, demonstrating places where we go to learn and places where we learn indirectly, as we come to understand ourselves in relation to others and our culture through social media interactions (cf. Sandlin, Schultz, and Burdick 2010, 194). The users of these platforms can engage in interpersonal communication (as enabled through instant messaging services for instance) and thereby benefit from those public spaces that allow for robust dialogue while

challenging each participant to "think critically about received knowledge and energizing them to recognize their own power as individual and social agents" (Giroux 2005, 25), while letting a community adopt teaching roles.

One model for practically applying the principle of public pedagogy as well as *mediated* language awareness to contemporary classroom teaching and learning practices was proposed by Thorne and Reinhardt (2008, 558-572) in the form of "bridging activities":

Our pedagogical proposal is that advanced foreign language learning can be served by combining the best of the analytic traditions of schooling with the life experiences and future needs of today's foreign language students. (Thorne and Reinhardt 2008, 562)

This approach is centred around increasing the literacy of L2 students and strives to "enhance engagement" and "relevance" of activities by incorporating the "students' digital-vernacular expertise, experience, and curiosity, coupled with instructor guidance at the level of semiotic form to explore interactional features, discourse-level grammar, and genre" (Thorne and Reinhardt 2008, 558).

They propose, that students should be helped in "foster[ing] critical awareness of the anatomy and functional organisation of a wide range of communicative practices" (Thorne and Reinhardt 2008, 567) within spaces of digital communication. By applying this approach, "observation and collection, guided exploration and analysis, and creation and participation" (Thorne and Reinhardt 2008, 558) regarding new media used by L2 learners is put into the spotlight for pedagogical decisions made in foreign language education. Thereby incorporating, and perhaps formally valuing, a plurality of ubiquitous informal digital communication practices that are generally considered stigmatised or, at best, vernacular linguistic varieties.

An illustration of the positive benefits caused by such pedagogical contexts would be that "learners often address that their informal learning activities are more motivating and engaging than formal learning activities" (Song and Bonk 2016, 3). This only makes sense, as they allow for more freedom of "choice over timing, location, contents, and path of learning" (Song and Bonk 2016, 2) as well as offering more individuality than other settings.

As argued by Lee and Drajati (2019, 11), IDLE activities can nevertheless become idle on the part of the students, which makes it necessary to provide them with a well developed instructional design oriented on their particular learning needs, coupled with a teacher's constant affective capacity as well as behavioural support. Through this combination, students' engagement in IDLE activities can be optimised and sustained.

In the long run, establishing the use of such techniques could also be beneficial to the trajectory of 'lifelong learning', as "knowledge of a language is never stable and is seen to be in constant development through its use" (Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor 2005, 3).

As argued by Daniel (1998, quoted in: Thorpe 2008, 23-24), the practice of lifelong learning has "grown immensely" through the proliferation of information and communication

technologies used by adults. Studying beyond school age by using a range of media to pursue both occupational and leisure goals has become increasingly common (Daniel 1998, quoted in: Thorpe 2008, 23-24) and served as an inspirational concept for EFL learners beyond school age. Lifelong learning is, just like IDLE, voluntary, ongoing and self-motivated, so through the employment of appropriate strategies for effectively using digital resources, adult learners might be able to more easily find the right online resources that match their L2 learning needs (as well as their general pursuit of knowledge). The consumption of media in the TL might also become a more likely habit if they are being encouraged to do so through their secondary and tertiary education curriculums.

The final aim of the aforementioned pedagogical considerations would be to prevent superficial learning caused by a classroom-centred curriculum through empowering teachers to highlight the most efficacious learning tools that their students can use to enhance the frequency and quality of interaction with the TL.

7. Target groups of learners

In this chapter, exemplary groups and types of students will be described that benefit most from the informal, digital learning activities previously discussed. Informal learners' behaviour and motivational factors such as levels of engagement as well as effects caused by frequency of exposure when using online resources (cf. Kusyk 2019, 9) are considered, before outlining the implementation through an orderly set of procedures.

First of all, it is known that learners that are intrinsically motivated actively process new information and events while utilising available learning resources to obtain new knowledge and skills in a self-directed way (cf. Song and Bonk 2016, 2). However, the degree of internal motivation to do so is rooted in identifiable successes and own sense of achievement the EFL learners have. If they are self-directed and interested in activities that include IDLE, they will also prove to be more successful in their L2 learning.

These accomplishments in their learning endeavours depend on individual factors such as aptitude in L2 attainment, the learners' age, their starting age, educational background as well as the quality of the linguistic input provided to, and consumed by them. Depending on the learning modalities (for instance visual or auditory in regards to IDLE), some students can more easily take up L2 input provided by different types of resources.

The learners should belong to an age band that is autonomous enough to pursue their own interests, as well as proficient enough in the use of information and communication technologies to self-direct and evaluate their learning process. The age in which students start to interact with such technologies varies, but even their first mobile device connected to the Internet is likely to offer a range of possibilities for L2 input already.

For instance, German secondary aged children on a "Gymnasium" (secondary education comparable to British grammar schools) spend their years at these schools during a time of

their adolescence in which many of them begin to use their first smartphone or personal computer and acquire experiences online. When most of them start to learn English as a foreign language in the fifth year of their scholastic career, they can often refer back to externally acquired language knowledge that they have incidentally taken up while recreationally pursuing their interests online (such as watching YouTube videos or browsing Instagram). Of course, the quality of the input that they have consumed prior to their time taught in EFL classrooms might not necessarily be appropriate, as the learners are not sufficiently aware of the specifications of a good informal learning resource which is beneficial to incidental L2 acquisition.

Next, it is of utmost importance to employ methods that allow students to use L2 consistently and in a way that has a personal relevance to them, as "[i]nformal learning happens [...] in a highly personalized manner based on [...] particular needs, interests, and past experiences" (Bull *et al.* 2008, 103). Different groups of learners require different techniques to enhance their learning experience, as not everything available is appropriate for each individual. Such factors need to be respected when educational stakeholders select an appropriate audience for digital services and tools to recommend to learners.

Therefore, practical examples of locations which would allow for IDLE based activities would be during students' use of digital media when they are at home, on the move during their commute to school, on their way to leisure activities, on holiday or generally in out-of-class environments. In order to do so, they do not require a designated, controlled setup but rather the technology that they already own and are most familiar with.

Aspects of accessibility as well as ubiquity are an important factor for making realistic recommendations. As found in a study by Song & Bonk (2016, 4), "management of learning resources (e.g. accessibility, adaptability, and reusability)" were determined to be "key factors that have an impact on the effectiveness of the online learning".

For instance, informal learning resources should never lead or contribute to the exclusion of students from low-income families by requiring specific costly hardware or subscription fees that parents would have to pay for.

Furthermore, "[t]echnology does also offer new possibilities for access to learning for those with special needs" (Thorpe 2005, 30), meaning that a requirement for suitable digital tools would be that they are inclusive. They should offer alternative modes of interaction or engagement to students with disabilities in order to allow them to benefit from their use, too.

When implemented appropriately in groups and localities described above, IDLE activities in a language-awareness-based pedagogical framework would arguably benefit EFL students. These assumptions allow for a further examination of methods and strategies that need to be employed in order to promote language learning beyond the classroom.

8. Suggestions for a methodological framework for implementing IDLE in TEFL

Student 1: Do you like to see Western films?

Student 2: Well, of course. But I'm afraid I'll learn nothing from it because I enjoy watching too much (Benson 2017, 142)

A distinct methodology (a set of pedagogical practices) allows for the suggestion of new possibilities in the foreign language syllabus that have not been considered previously due to a lack of awareness or a lack of research on the matter. By fully exhausting the range of opportunities offered through IDLE, the positive effects for students' learning experience can be amplified.

Such findings are an outcome of "[n]ew literacies research, an evolution of the socio-cultural perspective, focuses on multilingual, multicultural, and multimodal reading, writing, and meaning-making as social and cultural practices mediated by digital technologies" (Dressman and Sadler 2020, 383). Ideally, the discussion on the nature of language learning as part of the approach can be used to define tangible objectives by following a systematic plan for empowering EFL students to make effective use of the learning potential provided by IDLE activities. Similarly, Lai, Hu, and Lyu (2017, 23) stated, that "focusing on learning experience with technology is a viable direction to explore in understanding the nature of out-of-class technology use for language learning".

Thorne and Reinhardt (2008, 566) propose an integration of *bridging activities* into the EFL curriculum by introducing "learning objectives that promote the development of language awareness across these various media and modalities", with educational stakeholders on the forefront for effectively implementing such measures. An endeavour that is often hindered by the current situation in German schools, where technical equipment is not uncommonly poor and teachers are neither required nor incentivised to thematise the use of digital media with their students.

There is a limited possibility for the use of technology in-class due to financial constraints, a lack of competence or awareness on how to make use of such tools and often rigid opinions on the futility of such digital resources for language education. The threshold for unconvinced teachers to discuss and use such technologies can be lowered by demonstrating that mobile technologies and social media of the everyday life already used by students are sound starting points for informal, naturalistic engagement with the English language. This part of students' lifeworld is arguably not reflected in classroom culture today.

The issue was also underlined by the observations of Kukulska-Hulme (cf. 2009, 164), which highlighted that the process of encouraging learners to make use of mobile technologies for learning beyond the classroom may even be experienced as a threat by some teachers. Most importantly, teachers should not feel in competition with such tools but rather face the challenging task to determine what is best learned in-class, instructed by an educator and what can then subsequently be learned through the use of digital tools used in extramural, out-of-class settings (cf. Kukulska-Hulme 2009, 164). By considering, how the two separate learning spaces in regards to location and formality can be connected, "informal learning

experiences outside of school offer a potential bridge between social media and academic content” (Bull *et al.* 2008, 102).

In order to do so, teachers would have to empower their students to become apt directors of their own learning decisions, appealing to their locus of control (cf. Dressman and Sadler 2020, 22-23) during vernacular L2 use in online resources. According to Tomlinson (2003, 418), “[t]he significance of allowing all of these decisions is to train learners in developing active participation, responsibility, autonomy and wider personal involvement – all of which represent important features of real-life communication”. Allowing for such a range of learner choices empowers students to make informed, self-directed deliberations about their activities in order to reach their learning goals autodidactically.

The participatory nature of digital online resources can thereby be harnessed for increased engagement with the language and L2 learning. The instruction to do so “may have an awareness-raising effect” (Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor 2005, 8) by furthering critical awareness development at different levels of formality - especially in spaces beyond the classroom. For instance, as “films can be a very valuable resource in a language learning context”, a student could deliberately choose to watch their favourite film in the TL as suggested by their teacher, as a result getting “provide[d with] significant amounts of communicative input” (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016, 103) in a viewing experience that is highly learner-directed. The language input is informal, as long as seeing the film is not driven by a classroom intervention (cf. Dressman and Sadler 2020, 103).

On another note, during an interview of American language students in regards to their informal L2 learning behaviour at home, Choi and Yi found that “pop culture was employed as an example of informal language, and as a bridge into the more formal language [use]” (Choi and Yi 2012, 110-129, quoted in: Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016, 120-121). The extramural pursuance of such interests opened up a novel “point of departure for various writing assignments, and as a forum for discussions on topics such as social issues” (Choi and Yi 2012, 110-129, quoted in: Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016, 120-121) within the TEFL classroom. This highlights, how such activities can open up topics of discussion from the immediate environment of students and their personal interests.

Another advantageous step could be to establish regular school events that raise awareness for the effective and secure use of digital platforms such as social media. On one hand, media literacy and media competence could be increased, while also preparing students for “Digital Citizenship” (Costello 2020). A digital citizen being a person that uses the Internet regularly and effectively based on a comprehensive understanding for the quality of digital communities. It also comprises aspects of digital literacy, etiquette, online safety, and an acknowledgement of private versus public information (cf. Costello 2020).

Multiple authors stress the “need for pedagogies that expose learners to a variety of genres, stances, and critical reflection (Warner and Chen 2017)” (Dressman and Sadler 2020, 374) and sensitising learners to online cultural practices and genres. Through this, their ”

participation in electronic discussion[s]” grows into something more than linguistic training and starts to feel like “engagement with a cultural practice” (Hanna and De Nooy 2003, 71) instead. For instance, the participation in authentic online communication as enabled through social media allows self-directed online resources to turn into “means of enabling learners to expand the scope of positions, which they occupy as users of a new language” (Warner and Richardson 2017, 197, quoted in: Dressman and Sadler 2020, 374).

On the contrary, the current practice in secondary education is to rather try and *domesticate* the use of technology and social media for L2 learning, leaving no room for exploration and naturalistic informal learning experiences. Teachers were frequently found to quickly “erase” the “unpredictable, wild, and erratic dimension of social media” in order to establish a “top-down, tutor-oriented, almost prearranged classroom use” (Dressman and Sadler 2020, 374) instead.

To counteract misunderstandings about the erratic nature of such tools, implementation needs future teachers to be more aware of the fact that self-directed online resources should “put learners at the centre of the learning process and make them input providers (hence part of the materials adaption process), whereas teachers should be facilitators and co-ordinators and should provide a stimulus, a starting point, for language exposure as well as for different approaches to learning” (Tomlinson 2003, 56).

As previously highlighted, enjoyment and interest are an important consideration in the selective engagement of students in out-of-class learning activities (cf. Dressman, Sadler, 276). However, as of now relatively little communication takes place between those students that engage in the TL outside of the classroom and their teachers in regards to their IDLE activities. This makes appropriately reflecting their experiences with this type of interaction and their personal gains in language learning from it unlikely.

Teachers serving as a mediating authority, interested in and informed about their students’ communicative repertoires, would be able to help by pointing out new tools to discover and appropriate resources in order to interact with the English language more frequently. This also helps students to make the most effective use of them. Through continually sharing and discussing their experiences, keeping up a steady communication, competencies on the part of the students can be generated.

This process is also seen as beneficial for teacher empowerment, as educators that are concerned with their students’ lifeworld experiences during the use of digital platforms are more fit to make according suggestions and understand their students’ learning needs. Knowledge on such aspects of their students’ practices are viewed as “means of continuous professional [teacher] development” that can leave teachers with positive effects in “regard to self-confidence and a sense of feeling connected to one’s students, but also with regard to emotional experiences recognized by one’s colleagues and school leaders” (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016, 94). Another advantage was suggested by Choi and Yi (2012, 110-129), which conducted a study on the matter and came to the conclusion, that through learning about

their students' out-of-school interests, teachers are in a "favorable position to build on them for in-school literacy and language activities" (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016, 120-121).

To make the shift towards teachers that are more aware of their students' vernacular use of self-directed online resources, the teachers themselves need to have a competent understanding of these tools. This is what chapter ten is concerned with, by giving a constructivist evaluation of selected resources that are available today with judgements on their effectiveness and purposefulness for informal English language acquisition.

9. Applicability in different cultural settings

Rapid technological advancement as well as globalisation have increased the number of non-native speakers of English worldwide, making online informal learning of English a phenomenon that is no longer specific to certain cultural and regional conditions. The following will outline ways in which the methodology described above can be altered in order to make it accessible in remote and underprivileged regions of the world (cf. Song, Karimi & Kim 2015, 5), opening up new opportunities to enhance language education.

The minimum requirements for effective CALL have become increasingly lower, from the formally set up stationary learning computers used by many educational institutions throughout the last decade, to today's MALL that allows for the use of significantly more portable and affordable technology to create compelling language learning environments. This technology-enhanced language learning emphasises the focus on learners and lowers the threshold for people learning English as a foreign language to make use of their knowledge when participating in global online communication.

The first critical requirement for generating awareness about the benefits of IDLE activities is that students are capable of accessing online platforms that offer such exposure to the English language with the devices that they own. Fortunately, according to Song, Karimi, and Kim (2016, 1-2) mobile technologies are increasingly offering such access in remote areas and underprivileged regions of the world. Most notably in rural areas with poor infrastructure, "an internet-enabled handset can signify the only form of internet access", making mobile devices indispensable as emphasised by the numbers of mobile Internet connections being "approximately three times higher than fixed-line internet" (Karlsson, Penteniari, and Croxson 2017, 2).

The smartphone as a ubiquitous, Internet enabled device serves as an important piece in the puzzle of establishing informal learning of English and the use of English as a global language. There is a rapid rise in smartphone ownership worldwide, with sales accelerating the most in emerging markets such as India, Southeast Asia in general or Africa. Accordingly, there is a noticeable proliferation in the usage numbers of mobile apps and platforms in these regions, where they enable "many people's first internet experiences, and [...] offer them a gateway to enter the digital economy and a chance to benefit from life-enhancing opportunities" (Karlsson, Penteniari, and Croxson 2017, 2). There is also a steep growth of a

user base that accesses video sharing websites like YouTube from under-resourced countries, for instance, with the globally "most-viewed" and "most-subscribed" channel on the platform being an exclusively Indian one (Wikipedia contributors 2020).

According to research conducted by Taylor and Silver (2019) in eight emerging economies, especially "[y]ounger people in every country surveyed are much more likely to have smartphones, access the Internet and use social media", signifying their impact on the increase of social media use in those countries. The increasing rate of smartphone and social media adoption, especially "among the younger age group" (Taylor and Silver 2019) demonstrates, that there are suitable conditions in emerging economies for acquainting learners with the adaptation of digital resources that are beneficial to IDLE. The challenge is however, to establish a connection between the use of such platforms and informal language learning opportunities with traditional EFL curriculums taught in school.

Through educating teachers and language instructors on the matter, they can promote the effective use of self-directed online resources without the need for providing students with additional hardware or introducing additional costs. This approach also demonstrates means to counteract educational injustice by not excluding groups of students who may not have access to the latest technological devices.

At present, the technology used in developing countries is so novel, that there is often no prior knowledge on the matter. Consequently, there is a lack of media competence as there are no educators that are able to show students best practice in utilising information and communication technologies. Thorpe (2005, 24) argued, that a "lack of success in use of ICT [Information and Communication Technologies] may result as much from cultural differences in how people expect to learn, as from any feature of the new media themselves" as there is no shared understanding about how make the best use of such resources.

On a personal note, during the work with vocational education students in Laos, a country in Southeast Asia, there was a high willingness on the part of the students to engage with content in English as provided through online platforms, as soon as the behaviour was incentivised by teachers. When topics of cultural interest were first introduced and discussed inside the TEFL classroom, for instance the lyrics and interpretation of a popular American pop song the students liked, they would instinctively make use of their smartphones to find out more. If content online concerning the topic was predominantly available in English (as is the case with American pop music), learners started to make sense of it autodidactically by the use of translation apps to check on unknown vocabulary, by looking at images or asking their teacher for help. The interest sparked inside the English lesson would then often serve as a starting point for students to extend their engagement with the issue into their free time by, for instance, listening to English music at home or reading about the creators of the music.

This is paradigmatic for informal language learning behaviour, in this case driven through curiosity about cultural difference. Sockett (2014, 4) found, that the motivating factor to

consume material in English was actually not the language itself, but rather the "perceived cultural desirability" attached to the content, involving pop music, films and TV shows. In a similar vein, a study conducted by Murray (2008, 2-17) encountered that adult Japanese L2 English learners all shared a high interest in American pop culture, which they commonly highlighted as the pivotal factor that kept up their motivation to learn English.

A great share of transposing IDLE methodology into cultural settings where English is a distant foreign language is to make learners feel self-confident, able and open enough to experiment with such L2 activities and to engage with input from different cultures. As they are striving for their *ideal L2 self*, they find themselves intrinsically motivated and feel empowered to self-direct their learning endeavours beyond the classroom.

By addressing this through classroom teaching efforts, teachers can help learners to embrace the full potential of emerging literacies associated with digital media (cf. Thorne & Reinhardt 2008, 560), by providing the right resources and incentives - regardless of specific cultural settings.

10. Evaluation of online resources for self-directed learners regarding their effectiveness for SLA

This chapter comprises an evaluation of exemplary self-directed learning resources that spark the genuine interest of learners, encourage frequent intellectual involvement with the language and foster a vibrant use of English beyond the classroom. Through knowledge on this, educators can facilitate a self-directed, intentional and social form of learning by reacting to their students' learning needs with appropriate recommendations that allow to maximise L2 acquisition through the engagement with personal interests.

As quoted earlier, Song & Bonk (2016, 2) point out, that through the "proliferation of using online learning resources in self-directed ways around the world", there is now a wide variety of tools available, allowing learners to choose the ones that best cater to their fields of interest. However, as of now only "scant knowledge exists about learning-related factors, such as informal learners' behaviors and motivations, which would suggest guidelines for improving performance" (Song & Bonk 2016, 1). Therefore, an evaluation of tools and techniques consistent with the method would have to be subjective as well as judgmental. This is common practice in the field, as

we can never predict exactly how any particular factor will affect any particular learner, not only because it is impossible to know exactly all factors involved and how much exactly each of these factors might influence language development but especially because these factors interact with each other. (Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor 2005, 3)

For the purpose of creating an SLA based evaluation scheme towards the effectiveness of resources for IDLE, a look at an arrangement of five standards for assessing formal CALL as suggested by Chapelle can be helpful in order to outline the most important aspects. What follows is widely applicable to IDLE evaluation as well.

1. CALL evaluation is situation-specific;
2. CALL should be evaluated both judgmentally and empirically;

3. CALL evaluation criteria should come from instructed SLA theory and research;
 4. the criteria should be applied relative to the purpose of the CALL task; and
 5. the central consideration should be language learning potential.
- Chapelle (2001, 52)

Considering the criteria above, it becomes possible to design a constructivist framework for evaluating the effectiveness of self-directed online learning-resources in order to make accurate predictions about them. Informed by this as well as a proposal made by Fuentes and Martínez (2018, 32-34) in their publication on the "Design of a Checklist for Evaluating Language Learning Websites", the following categories were chosen as an adequate selection of foci that ought to be considered when evaluating how purposeful information and communication tools are for IDLE. Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016, 9) suggest that "[a] theoretical model can be described as a framework that can generate analytical tools for understanding and explaining (and sometimes making predictions about) a given subject matter". By posing the following questions, the individual resources can be analysed using a five-point Likert scale in regards to criteria contributive to IDLE efficacy:

- *Interactivity*: Can the learner become a self-directed, active participant when using the resource? Does the L2 input revolve around the learner, and is there social integration? What level of interactivity does the resource allow for (e.g. consuming video streams as opposed to participating in video conferences)?

The scale ranges from least *interactive (passive)* to *fully interactive (simulation)*.

- *Accessibility*: Which hurdles in terms of ubiquity, compatibility and affordability does the learner need to overcome in order to use the platform? Are there any "[r]elevant constraints includ[ing] the availability of hardware and software that are adequate for the planned activities⁶" (Chapelle 2001, 57)? Is the focus on content, instead of the platform that it runs on?

The Likert scale ranges from *low accessibility* to *high accessibility*.

- *Variety*: Is there a wide variety of topics offered through the platform that allows learners to engage with different word fields and diverse information? Does the platform appeal to a multitude of learners with different interests?

The resource is rated from being *limited* to *varied* in regards to the diversity of content and language offered.

- *Quality*: Is the content offered on the platform current, accurate and reliable? Is the content being curated or catered to learners' needs? Is the language used correct and grammatically sound?

The score ranges from *low quality* to *high quality* of language and content offered on the platform.

- *Self-motivation*: Does the resource appear to be self-motivating in its presentation and use? Does it appeal to learners' L2 *future imaginary* (cf. Dörnyei 2009, 9) by putting the

⁶ In Chapelle (2001, 57) these are described as aspects of "Practicality".

language learning progress into the centre of attention? Is the resource enabling learners to “construct their desired identities in imagined L2 communities” (Block 2007; Menard-Warwick 2009, quoted in: Dressman and Sadler 2020, 17), making it the driving force for learners to be able to respond to situational contexts?

Platforms are rated from being *unlikely to be self-motivating* to *highly likely to be self-motivating* in their use.

The five aspects above are going to serve as criteria for the evaluation, however they are not fully comprehensive due to the elusive nature of learning through information and communication technologies. Some additional factors contributive to L2 acquisition are deliberately left out, as they are too dependent on individual users to make adequate assumptions by rating them. The first one of these factors would be conscious self-evaluation, where learners review their learning outcomes themselves, leading them to find their own best practice in regards to their IDLE activities. Then, there is the pedagogical dimension their learning takes place in, which is either naturalistic or self-directed because of the nature of these tools. All of them can also be considered as being highly authentic resources in English, as they are informal, unstructured, independent of certificates and also used by native English speakers.

One exemplary online resource from five distinct categories (e.g. social media platforms) is going to be evaluated, with the selection based typical resources for extramural English use already found in the digital environment of many learners today:

- *Streaming media*: Platforms that instantaneously deliver multimedia content in the form of video to users online. The specific format of TED talks that are increasingly gaining mainstream attention are going to be evaluated.
- *Social media*: Accurately described as interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks (cf. Kietzmann *et al.* 2011, 241; Obar and Wildman 2015, 2). In this case, the widely popular microblogging and social networking website Tumblr is going to be assessed.
- *Instant messaging*: Services, that allow for interpersonal communication, simultaneously, across the globe. Because of it amassing a vast amount of users worldwide, WhatsApp Messenger is going to be evaluated in its contribution to informal learning of English.
- *Digital games*: Electronic games either on or offline that involve the players' interaction with a user interface to generate visual or auditory feedback on a two or three-dimensional display device. As “[g]aming is a worldwide phenomenon that engages many L2 English speakers” (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016, 130), the open-world video game Minecraft in particular is going to be assessed.

- *Podcasts*: Digitally available spoken-word broadcasts that often appear on a weekly or monthly basis, intended to be downloaded onto mobile devices. The history Podcast The Past and The Curious is going to serve as an example for this category.

In order to give a valid reasoning for the judgmental ratings of each individual resource, the *Appendix* offers additional insights and describes the underlying thought process.

10.1. Results

	Interactivity	Accessibility	Variety	Quality	Self-motivation
TED Talks (Streaming media)	2	5	3	4	2
Tumblr (Social media)	4	3	4	1	3
WhatsApp (Instant messaging)	4	4	3	1	4
Minecraft (Digital games)	5	2	3	3	4
The Past and The Curious (Podcasts)	1	4	2	4	2

Table 2. Evaluation towards IDLE expediency of digital resources, based on evaluative framework

Streaming media: TED Talks

Running under the slogan "ideas worth spreading" (TED Conferences, LLC 2020), TED Conferences LLC is an American media organisation that provides a platform for their TED Talks both online and offline. The talks are being held during events across the globe and are high-quality presentations or lectures addressing many scientific, cultural, political, and academic topics. Although watching the talks has no age requirement, users must be at least 13 years of age to create a TED account. Most of the content is offered in English and available for free viewing online under a Creative Commons license.

The range of topics covered is immense, with over 3,500 TED Talks freely available on the website so far (cf. TED Conferences, LLC 2020a). Many of the talks are presented in an entertaining or outright funny way, whilst aimed to inspire viewers towards thoughtful practice by presenting a different point of view on a contemporary range of subjects, stemming from the intention to share ideas across languages and borders.

There is a high degree of accessibility given, as all talks are available without prior registration in the form of video streams on the TED website itself or other video-sharing platforms such as YouTube. Additionally, there is a global community of TED Translators that work together as volunteers to caption and translate TED Talks into over 100

languages (TED Conferences, LLC 2020b). Not only is this helpful for viewers with disabilities as the platform even offers a live transcript for their talks, but it also supports perceptual learning about foreign speech by providing lexical information (cf. Mitterer and McQueen 2009).

Moreover, the platform offers a playlist of talks appropriate for more formal language practice (TED Conferences, LLC 2020c), as well as talks about language learning itself. On another note, TED Talks may spark students' interest and knowledge on issues that they were previously unfamiliar with, enabling them to become active participants in discussions on the matter. This can happen by them either autodidactically making use of the comment section, or in a more formal way if an attentive teacher provides them with the means to do so in a mediated in-classroom discussion on the issues that they are concerned with the most.

While the content facilitated by the TED organisation has limitations and has been subject to valid criticisms, educators could still recommend the platform to their students or even turn them into a component of an overall course sequence, especially within higher grades and learner groups that show an increased interest for societal issues.

Social media: Tumblr

The microblogging and social networking website Tumblr hit mainstream attention when it was purchased by Yahoo! in 2013 and now comprises over 500 million blogs (cf. Tumblr, Inc. n.d.). Being funded through advertising, the website is free to use and has a minimum age requirement of 13 years for users in the European Union. The website allows users to create their own blogs with multimedia content, follow other peoples' blogs, participate in discourse on the content in the form of threads and communicate personally through instant messages. It is seen as a highly interactive, interest-driven social network and part of a "growing trend [of] the participation in online fandom communities" (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014, 775). The fandom communities on the platform often revolve around American and British pop culture and thereby increase the affinity of users for English-speaking culture.

The engagement with the cultural content shared often follows a "distinct set of community practices" (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014, 787) which appeals to adolescent users in their formation of desired identities within the L2 network. Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter (2014, 775) also propose, that "Tumblr fandom communities thrive with a common sense of social purpose and exclusivity where users feel they can present a more authentic reflection of themselves to those sharing similar experiences and interests".

This is a phenomenon that was previously established to be beneficial to informal language learning, supported by findings of various studies "which emphasize the positive role of social networks in language learning in general and L2 vocabulary learning in particular" (Dehghan, Rezvani, and Fazeli 2017, 7).

Conversely, the restraints for the use and recommendation of Tumblr as a social networking site are rather pronounced. There is a steep learning curve in regards to the site's "usability

standards” (Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter 2014, 783) that makes it hard for new users to become engaged with the communities on the platform. Despite recently introduced revisions and new regulations, there is also a lack of quality control and revisal of the content accessible on the platform which makes it questionable if the youngest users of the platform are consistently presented with appropriate content.

Instant messaging: WhatsApp Messenger

WhatsApp Messenger is a cross-platform social networking application and Voice over IP (VoIP) service owned by Facebook, Inc. It allows for simultaneous, multimodal communication between clients and became the world's most popular messaging application in 2015 (cf. Metz 2016). Through its massive popularity worldwide with over 2 billion users as of February 2020 (cf. Porter 2020), it serves as a prime example for technological tools and apps used in social-oriented technological experiences (cf. Lai, Hu, and Lyu 2017, 9) which are already widely adopted.

Similar to experiences like those of the Chinese teenager living in the USA quoted in chapter two, users are able to construct their L2 English identity through discourse made possible through synchronous communication technologies. Especially, when L2 vocabulary learning is induced through naturally texting and conversing with others in English.

Despite the fact that much of today's communication is mediated by participation in such instant messaging platforms, several conditions have to be met in order to make them productive for L2 acquisition. Most importantly, learners would first have to establish a connection to L2 conversation partners through, for instance, L2 teacher-initiated international telecollaboration projects or their participation in student exchange programmes where they immerse themselves in foreign language and culture, subsequently staying in touch with native speakers. This type of authentic interaction with the language "can support forms of collaborative learning via multimodal combinations of images, text-based chat, voice recording, and video" (Dressman and Sadler 2020, 173-174) and is comparable with MALL methodology beneficial for immersion in the language which may in turn lead to an increased motivation of learners.

It is unlikely however, that the participation in simultaneous communication online can appropriately replace the face-to-face nature of interpersonal communication. This comprises the observation, that students demonstrated a certain "hesitancy with social-oriented technological experiences" (Lai, Hu, and Lyu 2017, 9-10). In some instances, Lai, Hu, and Lyu (2017, 9-10) brought forward, they even "felt embarrassed because of their limited language proficiency", making instant messaging online with a L2 conversation partner a much more intimidating experience.

However, there are also some additional caveats to the use of instant messaging for IDLE. The variety of the discourse as well as the linguistic quality heavily depend on individual conversation partners, which means that there is no way to warrant positive L2 learning

outcomes. Even though WhatsApp Messenger "operates on nearly all current types of devices and operating systems" (Dehghan, Rezvani, and Fazeli 2017, 2), the initial setup requires a smartphone and a registration using a mobile phone number as well as constant Internet connection. Thereby, the prerequisites for using WhatsApp Messenger are fairly high.

Digital games: Minecraft

Minecraft is an online-enabled sandbox video game developed by Mojang Studios. The game was first released to the public in 2009 and has since been ported to countless platforms such as smartphones, personal computers and video game consoles. In the game, players can move freely in a procedurally-generated 3D world that is entirely made up of blocks. After gathering raw materials and resources, the player can build any imaginable structure, contraption or landscape either alone or in multiplayer scenarios.

With 200 million copies sold (cf. Warren 2020) it has become the best-selling video game of all time and led some researchers and educators to consider the inherent power of this digital game as an effective L2 learning tool. Gaming activity encourages interactive and critical learning, as input within the game, commentary and discourse in its surrounding community⁷ is typically presented in English. As demonstrated by the following quote, the game Minecraft could indeed serve as a placeholder for many other gaming and gaming-related activities that offer a similar potential of ample input for implicit language acquisition.

Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio (2009) investigated language use among players of Final Fantasy X, a science-fantasy multiplayer role-playing game, in which lexical and prosodic repetitions are an integral part. Based on data from video recordings of game interaction in the home environment, the researchers found that the players/learners (boys, aged 10–14) developed both their linguistic and interactional competence in English. (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016, 133)

As argued by Chik (2014, 86-87), "[r]ecent research highlights the diverse L2 learning affordances and opportunities available in COTS [Commercial Off-The-Shelf games] and massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) (Cornillie, Thorne, & Desmet 2012; Reinders 2012)". Students playing games such as Minecraft in the TL advance their lexical knowledge while opening the door for communicative opportunities, such as students playing together while informally communicating in English. In the more formal field of CALL, this type of gaming activity has already proven to be effective.

According to Dressman and Sadler (2020, 69), "[t]here is ample evidence that computer technologies have enhanced engagement, attention, motivation, and feedback for language learning" and have been adapted successfully in the "gamification" of foreign language classes (Irvin 2017) by the use of adaptations of the game such as "Minecraft: Education Edition" for English language learners (Cloud 2019).

Such applications can seize the "rich linguistic in-game resources" (Zheng, Bischoff, and

⁷ In a study conducted by Chik (2012, 109) involving both language teachers and experienced gamers, it was brought forward that "gamers saw potential for language learning in three areas: through in-game texts, through online gaming platforms, and in discussion forums".

Gilliland 2015, 782) and are also contributive for informal learning beyond the classroom. As language-learning platforms, digital games offer an embodied experience of otherwise abstract words and vocabulary by embedding them in their narrative context (cf. Zheng, Bischoff, and Gilliland 2015, 782). Furthermore, in games like Minecraft, which are seen as cultural phenomena, the "gameplay-as-learning practices are supported by wider communities of digital gamers who take on roles as language teachers and advisers" (Chik 2014, 85). This leads to the pedagogical implication, that players engaged in these kinds of gaming activities can learn autonomously through communities based on the domain of public pedagogy, without conscious effort. Moreover, Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016, 130) brought up the point, that "teachers who are knowledgeable about gaming are well prepared for groups of learners that can otherwise be rather challenging to teach", empowering their in-class methodology by referring to extramural activities.

Podcasts: The Past and The Curious

The Past and the Curious is an American Podcast series that is released monthly and has been running since 2016. As of July 2020, there are 45 episodes that concern different historical events, narratives and personalities, one told within each episode. The episodes have a high production value with elaborately written and fact-checked stories, professional recording and a music score accompanying every episode. According to the creators, these measures are being taken to be as fun, relatable and inspiring to listeners as possible (cf. The Past and The Curious 2020). The Podcast can be characterised as *Edutainment* and is, as the slogan accurately describes⁸, aimed at kids or families.

The advantage of the format is, that EFL learners in secondary schools with a lower English proficiency are likely to be able to follow the Podcast for the most part due to the uncomplicated and comical language and vocabulary used. While listening to Podcasts is a receptive, passive activity, The Past and the Curious offers an authentic spoken source of speech in the TL for learners. Although this particular Podcast is the most adequate for students with a heightened interest in history, there are many other downloadable listening materials that can be recommended to students, allowing them to choose autonomously what best fits their interests. For years there has been a wealth of Podcast resources free to download, offering receptive language learning opportunities for acquisitive listeners.

The factor of ubiquity offers a major advantage of Podcasts as an entertainment format, as "learners can listen to them at any time" (Dressman and Sadler 2020, 432), making them effective for providing a constant stream of English language input beneficial for implicit language intake. This is also why countless examples of similar Podcasts have emerged which focus on creating auditory content appropriate for formal EFL learning efforts. Other

⁸ The slogan reads "The Past and The Curious, A History Podcast for Kids! - Parents love us, Teachers love us, and most importantly, kids do too!" with the mission statement of the makers being "History is amazing. The stories from our collective past have the power to transform people today" (The Past and The Curious 2020).

examples would be "6 Minute English" by BBC⁹, "Learning English Broadcast" by VOA¹⁰ or the "The English We Speak", also by BBC¹¹ - All of which intend to bring listeners closer to the language by authentic out-of-class listening practice.

10.2. Quantified results

Evaluative efforts such as the ones above are intended to "offer pedagogical insights into how ELT [English Language Teaching] researchers and teachers can better prepare contemporary English learners for cross-cultural interactions in multicultural environments, whether in digital or face-to-face milieus" (Lee 2020, 1). As various attitudinal variables influence a learner's individual experience, assumptions on students' perception of these platforms may vary from their actual experience. However, it is still possible to get a grasp of tendencies as to how effective they might be for EFL students. The following quantified results based on *Table 2*. are informed by the most critical aspects for students' informal learning through self-directed digital resources and makes a comparison between resources possible.

The five quantified aspects make up a sum of 20 points, distributed in regards to their expediency. The factor of *accessibility* needs to be stressed the most at a value of six points, as digital resources need to be as accessible and ubiquitous to learners as possible. This is especially important for recommendations by educational stakeholders, as it encompasses a social component. Informal learning opportunities through technology have the capability to counteract social and educational injustice by empowering learners to make use of the means available to them. Combined with *self-motivation*, quantified at a value of five, granting learners' enjoyment and appeal to be motivated by the use, the greatest share in factors that make IDLE activities effective for L2 learning are covered.

If students have no trouble accessing the platform and are enjoying their engagement with it, they are likely to repeat their interaction and solidify gains in L2 knowledge. If this happens, suggestions are being accepted and students proceed to return to the self-directed learning resource autodidactically.

Subsequently, the factor of *interactivity* is quantified by four, as it makes platforms engaging in a way only digital spaces can offer. Comparable to *e-Learning*, a passive learning resource (such as a captioned image) is regarded to be less effective for L2 acquisition than a simulative activity as provided through game-based learning for instance. When looking at the aspects of *variety* and *quality*, it appears that *quality*, which is rather compelling to consider to be more important for recommendations, does not outweigh the motivational

⁹ BBC. 2020. 'BBC Radio - 6 Minute English'. BBC. Retrieved 26 July 2020 (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02pc9tn>).

¹⁰ Voice of America. 2020. 'Learning English Broadcast'. VOA. Retrieved 26 July 2020 (<https://learningenglish.voanews.com/z/1689>).

¹¹ BBC. 2020. 'BBC Radio - The English We Speak'. BBC. Retrieved 26 July 2020 (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02pc9zn>).

aspect of *variety*. A more versatile resource that offers different multimodal activities, word fields and linguistic input keeps a learner’s interest high and thereby contributes to motivation and frequency of use.

The self-construction of a personal experience through IDLE activities is implicit in its pedagogy, not goal-oriented and not testified through certification. Thereby, it does not necessarily depend on a constantly high degree of *quality*, especially since competent self-directed learners are able to assess content in regards to its *quality* autonomously.

As a result, *quality* is quantified by a factor of two whilst *variety* is quantified by a factor of three. These considerations are joined together in the following *Table 3*.

	Interactivity	Accessibility	Variety	Quality	Self-motivation	Sum
Quantifier	4	6	3	2	5	20
TED Talks (Streaming media)	8	30	9	8	10	65
Tumblr (Social media)	16	18	12	2	15	63
WhatsApp (Instant messaging)	16	24	9	2	20	71
Minecraft (Digital games)	20	12	9	6	20	67
The Past and The Curious (Podcasts)	4	24	6	8	10	52

Table 3. Quantified results of evaluation towards IDLE expediency of digital resources

10.3. Discussion and critique on IDLE efficacy

Poor take-up may often reflect an inappropriate or low quality offering, rather than a rejection of technology per se. (Thorpe 2005, 23)

By conceiving techniques for the actual implementation in the language classroom, educational stakeholders can advance their students’ knowledge of language as well as culture in a most efficacious way as “learning in the digital era requires shifting from content mastery to critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, participation, and distribution in digital environments” (Zheng, Bischoff, and Gilliland 2015, 787).

Throughout this thesis it has become apparent, “that the effectiveness of ICT depends on course designers and authors understanding what it can deliver and having resources to ensure that a high quality experience is on offer to the learner” (Thorpe 2005, 23), which is why the collection of criteria for the evaluation was so painstakingly chosen.

Tomlinson (2003, 60) expressed most appropriately, that “[t]he value of certain alternative and innovative approaches and ideas”, such as the ones covered within this thesis, are arguably “not based so much on empirical evidence, but on the discussion they can provoke in order to, ultimately, constitute a break from some of the more widely accepted, teacher-

centred practices”.

It has become obvious, that once the interplay between the identified factors of authenticity, active engagement, cultural desirability, self-confidence, accessibility and candour to experiment come together in a student's vernacular use of IDLE resources, they are likely to find themselves to be at an advantage for L2 acquisition in contrast to students that do not.

In some instances it is solely the lack of "rules or codes of conduct regarding the use of this application for a pedagogical purpose in order not to consider it as merely an entertainment device" (Dehghan, Rezvani, and Fazeli 2017, 9) that is holding them back.

Nevertheless, some critical voices have been raised in the field of SLA in regards to the informal learning of English by using online resources. Authors such as Reinders and White (2011, 1) state, that "[w]e now better understand that unrestricted access to information, without proper guidance and feedback can in fact inhibit learners from taking more responsibility (Murray, 1999), and thus developing themselves as autonomous learners". They perceive an uncontrolled access to media, in the sense of the *digital wilds* mentioned earlier, to have a rather negative impact on learners.

Salaberry (2001, 39-56) argues against a "technology-driven pedagogy", suggesting that despite their revolutionary status it is not clear that any modern technologies (e.g., television, radio or the Internet) have offered the same pedagogical benefits as traditional second language instruction.

Beatty (2013, 80) criticises, that "teachers need to be concerned about investing time and money in unproven technology", and ultimately suspects a caveat in institutions therefore being "less enthusiastic about budgeting for services and upgrades". Furthermore, it needs to be considered, that "[d]elivery of resources, however, does not guarantee learning, even when the initial barriers of access have been overcome" (Thorpe 2005, 23).

The task of overcoming such barriers presents a challenge on its own, with varying perspectives and competencies amongst the generations of *Digital Natives* and *Digital Immigrants*. For educators belonging to the latter group, it might be harder to understand the complex, participatory nature of new digital media, which makes it harder for them to implement the use of new media into the scholastic curriculum of secondary schools. They may have adapted parts of these new technologies, but do not share the same level of comfort, familiarity, or commitment in their use as opposed to their students. In fact, some teachers might actually end up feeling left out in the course of this process, as there is only limited empirical research available that could guide best practice and only "limited models for effective integration of media in their teaching" (Bull *et al.* 2008, 102) being available.

This is where the previously mentioned *bridging activities* might serve as a part of the solution, as they "focus on developing learner awareness of vernacular digital language conventions and analyzing these conventions to bridge in-class activity with the wider world of mediated language use" (Thorne & Reinhardt 2008, 562).

The prerequisites for making use of these technologies are increasingly being met, furthering the role of English as global language, with adaptation of apps, websites and services growing worldwide. A study conducted with students in the fourth grade (cf. Sundqvist and Sylvén 2014, 3-20) has proven, that the frequent extracurricular use of English is definitely given on the side of students. Within this age group, the amount of EE was extensive at an average of 7.2 hours per week (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016, 134). This is unlikely to lack in any effect on language knowledge, given that IDLE starts as soon as mobile devices are used, content in English is consumed frequently and then met with awareness and, at a later point, intentionality.

Recent events, such as the global circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, have also done their share in generating awareness for the matter of learning through and with information and communication technologies. They have forced educators to realise new opportunities for complementing traditional classroom instruction and served as a starting point for them to make use of these resources, which were in many cases already available, more deliberately.

"In the light of increased opportunities for out-of-class language learning and questioning of the importance of classroom instruction to achieving high levels of proficiency", Benson (2017, 135) most fittingly agrees that "a holistic view of the in-class and out-of-class spaces in which languages are learned is now needed" in order to make a much needed leap in preparing schooling environments for the *Information Age*.

11. Suggestions for future research

Although Sefton-Green (2004, 31) emphasises, that it is "probably impossible to find out how all children and young people might be learning with ICTs out of school", this chapter is intended to outline how future research could be approached through both judgemental and empirical analysis of IDLE activities.

Of course, this thesis does not claim to be a complete rundown of, and scientific verdict on the matter, but rather a discussion of steps into the right direction for the advancement of contemporary L2 education. An outlook on future research in the field is necessary, as "it is still inconclusive whether or to what extent the quantity and diversity of IDLE activities used by EFL students relate to English learning outcomes" (Lee 2019, 114). From this point of departure, both quantitative and qualitative empirical research could be used to substantiate the claims made in this thesis, proving the expediency of curriculums that consider IDLE activities.

Firstly, qualitative interviews with current teachers of English as a foreign language could be conducted, asking for their lifeworld experiences in regards to their students' informal learning behaviour and how they assess learning outcomes of students that do engage with such tools recreationally versus students that do not. In addition, expert interviews with teachers in secondary education could be appointed in order to collect data on their

subjective judgement on the self-directed online resources presented above. By doing so, institutions could refer back to these findings in order to incorporate IDLE based methodology into their curriculums, for which they need to establish "a framework within which strategic decisions about use of ICT can be made" (Thorpe 2005, 29).

Although similar research on the phenomenon of OILE has been brought forward by Sockett (2014) with French EFL students, a longitudinal quantitative study in which German EFL students use and evaluate¹² the platforms suggested above could be conducted. This would be conducive for drawing various conclusions on the issue. Namely, which digital resources are particularly beneficial for language learning outcomes, helping in the specification of a *target audience* for these types of activities, as well as learning to which distinct categories of language knowledge IDLE activities contribute most.

Informal digital learning of languages could also be examined in regards to other foreign target languages than English, in order to find out if learners would progress differently in those cases.

With regard to "[e]xisting literature fail[ing] to sufficiently describe the way people learn online informally in daily life" (Sefton-Green 2004, 31), the conversation needs to be picked up from there by producing empirical results on conditions, that are or are not beneficial to informal language learning. Thus, future studies should explore the interaction of technological experiences and the "influencing factors with the characteristics of different learner populations" (Lai, Hu, and Lyu 2017, 24).

12. Conclusion

The main argument brought forward by this thesis is, that students can be made aware by educators, that they have the ability to turn their preferred digital leisure activities into effective language learning practices. In this sense, students can develop their self-directed learning efforts to be as conscious and effective as possible, while adopting the view that casual exposure to the TL outside of the classroom is crucial for their L2 acquisition.

On the plus side, students who lack in opportunities to use the TL in their everyday life can leverage the naturalistic, interest-driven and accessible L2 exposure which IDLE activities provide. For instance, students who wish merely to be entertained by the use of contemporary technologies only reap the advantage for their L2 learning when accessing them in English.

Through doing so, combined efforts shift the emphasis from the classroom to the world beyond the classroom while facilitating a deeper involvement with the TL. Moreover, it grants students the required skills for becoming independent lifelong learners and proficient future users of English in both online and offline communication.

As most secondary students today are *Digital Natives*, who are already surrounded with

¹² In the same vein, Williamson (2007) reports on ideas for the the development and testing of a self-rating scale of self-directed learning.

these informal learning opportunities, the prerequisites to put the approach to use are already being met in many cases. As a result, educational stakeholders today need to follow suit and take the next step on the path less traveled, prevail in their unfavourable situation of being *Digital Immigrants*, and seize the full potential of informal technology-mediated language acquisition in their teaching pedagogy. Through tying in with the already adopted technologies and services, teachers can help to "cultivate and contribute to successful L2 learning events for [their] students" (Kusyk 2019).

All measures and resources suggested within this thesis are aimed at providing teachers with the necessary means and auxiliary knowledge on IDLE, to make it a known, transparently discussed issue in the TEFL classroom through demonstrating their interest and endorsement. Such prospects could certainly be a strong incentive that motivates students for the use of and engagement with appropriate information and communication technologies as proposed in this paper. The wide scope for empirical exploration in order to find out just how effective L2 learning beyond the classroom can be, became apparent while closely investigating and writing on the topic.

It was brought forward, that educators that are acquainted with their students "digital-vernacular expertise" could help reduce "the disconnect between the prescriptivist epistemology of schooling and the language use that is appropriate and even necessary for full participation in other contexts (internet-mediated and otherwise)" (Thorne & Reinhardt 2008, 567). Based on this, the aforementioned approach enhances the agency of learners while being equally motivating for L2 acquisition by appealing to their *future imaginaries*. Additionally, emerging digital literacies appeal to the concept of *learner autonomy* and further twenty-first century competencies such as technological fluency or *Digital Citizenship*.

The notion of the introductory quote of Lewis Carroll's "Lobster Quadrille" (1869, 152) that this thesis started on, beautifully relates to authentic naturalistic language learning experiences crossing borders through information and communication technologies. It became evident, how the interaction with foreign language and culture through IDLE is contributive to language acquisition. When EFL educators take on roles as facilitators and encouragers, they are metaphorically inviting learners to *join the dance* and seize such opportunities. By doing so, they provide them with the necessary means to overcome fears and thresholds towards engaging with other cultures and communities in English, thereby empowering students to become effective and informed self-directed language learners.

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Appendix

Judgmental evaluation of platforms by criteria of language learning potential

Streaming media: TED Talks	
Interactivity (2)	<p>Watching TED Talks is a passive experience, with no interaction. However, TED Talks might serve as a starting point for learners to discover new interests and engage with the discussion around these topics.</p> <p>While serving as a facilitator of socially relevant talking points, I rate the limited interactivity of the platform with a score two points out of five.</p>
Accessibility (5)	<p>TED Talks are accessible without prior registration using various devices such as smartphones. They are available for free, without ads on various multimedia platforms as well as the TED website itself. TED Conferences LLC devotes time and effort into bringing their talks to people who lack access to broadband or have other accessibility issues. The transcripts for the videos can be displayed while playing them, allowing even hearing impaired viewers to consume the content. TED Talks are also being translated into many different languages, in case students require subtitles in their L1.</p> <p>Thus, I rated them as being highly accessible at five points on the Likert scale.</p>
Variety (3)	<p>Almost all of the video content provided by TED is public speeches aimed at making a societal impact through knowledge and awareness on various matters. If a student is not interested in such topics or does not find any particular issue that concerns them, they are unlikely to enjoy and sustain the use of the platform. Although the input might appeal to a multitude of learners with different interests, the medium and mode of presentation stays mostly the same.</p> <p>This limited variety is reflected in my score of three points.</p>
Quality (4)	<p>TED Conferences LLC curates their speaker list and ensures a diversified lineup. There are several guidelines as well as a code of conduct offered by curators, aimed to ensure that the information shared by speakers is as accurate and factual as possible.</p> <p>Although the information shared by individual speakers might be biased in order to support their point, I decided to assign four points in the criterion of quality.</p>
Self-motivation (2)	<p>The self-motivation in watching TED Talks, or streaming media in general, is highly subjective. Engaging with educational content and theoretical discussions such as the talks offered on this platform requires a student that is willing to learn and willing to challenge their thinking. As some topics are scientific or technical, it might be hard for learners to motivate themselves to relate to the content in order to construct their desired identities.</p> <p>Hence, I chose to grant a score of two in regards to self-motivation.</p>
Digital games: Minecraft	
Interactivity (5)	<p>With Minecraft being a video-game, it offers a simulative experience and presents the highest degree of interactivity possible. Players of the game can move freely and interact with objects, shaping all aspects of their experience. Educators have previously used Minecraft in education for the gamification of language, science and history classes.</p> <p>Accordingly, I assessed the level of interactivity at a score of five.</p>

Digital games: Minecraft

Accessibility (2)	<p>First of all, Minecraft requires a purchase of the game as well as an account in order to be played. While the game is available on platforms ranging from smartphones to personal computers, it still requires capable hardware and, for multiplayer online gaming, a constant Internet connection. In order to play in multiplayer mode on English online servers, users first need to find and explore communities that host such servers. Players with disabilities can make use of new adaptive controller designs tailored to their needs.</p> <p>The constraints mentioned before add up to a relatively low accessibility score of two out of five.</p>
Variety (3)	<p>As a sandbox game, the possibilities for players to live out their creativity in-game are endless. However, if a student does not enjoy playing video games or does not feel compelled by the concept of this particular game, they are unlikely to discover the full scope of variety offered around Minecraft. Due to the massive community of Minecraft, countless projects have been brought forward by the likes of Reporters Without Borders' "Uncensored Library" (Maher 2020), and other creative and unique undertakings.</p> <p>These considerations are reflected in my score of three out of five in regards to variety.</p>
Quality (3)	<p>Minecraft has grown into a fairly high-budget production and sophisticated gaming experience. In recent public releases of the game, language and vocabulary used is correct and appropriate. Authentic communication with peers as enabled through the in-game chat however is neither reviewed nor linguistically sophisticated. On the other hand, English discussions in online communities on the game between native speakers of different languages can be fairly elaborate.</p> <p>As a result, I suggest a rating of three in regards to the quality of the input offered by the game.</p>
Self-motivation (4)	<p>The game Minecraft has been described as a cultural phenomenon. Through the participation in in-game communities, learners can work together on collaborative multiplayer projects. This increases the motivation and enjoyment of users to participate and become a part of the experience. Furthermore, there is a potential for players to engage in online peer discussion on the game and its trivia.</p> <p>Based on this, I rated the game as likely to be self-motivating in its use with a score of four.</p>

Social media: Tumblr

Interactivity (4)	<p>Tumblr offers all kinds of multimedia content provided by users themselves such as photos, videos, audio files and more. On the microblogging platform, every user is able to compose their own posts and share their own creative content. The platform makes use of a personalised feed that displays the content of all people followed by the user. On this feed, members can respond to, like and reblog posts of others. Additionally, there is a function that allows participants to have conversations by the use of instant messages.</p> <p>Based on this, I assessed the platform to have a high level of interactivity of four, as is the case with similar social media websites.</p>
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Social media: Tumblr	
Accessibility (3)	<p>Tumblr is free to use, but known to have a rather complicated user interface and makes it hard to initially build a community around shared interests. That aside, a registration is required in order to post on the website. However, once a learner is confident enough to know their way around the platform and communities, interaction with other users or blogs becomes fairly easy.</p> <p>Thus, I rated the platform to be in the midfield of accessibility at three points.</p>
Variety (4)	<p>As the website is bold, colourful and highly customisable it offers an extended variety of content. Everything shared on it is interest-driven which caused many different communities to form on the platform with different concerns and viewing angles.</p> <p>As a result, I decided to rate Tumblr with four points for its variety of content on offer.</p>
Quality (1)	<p>The social media network Tumblr offers an authentic setting for cultural exchange, where all input and content is delivered by users. Even though the platform makes an effort to quality control the content, there is no guarantee for the information shared being correct. There is also no indication, that the casual language used on the platform is required to be correct.</p> <p>As a consequence, I decided to only assign one point in regards to quality.</p>
Self-motivation (3)	<p>As Tumblr offers a custom experience to every user, it positively contributes to learner agency and affinity for English language communities. The platform largely revolves around custom content shared by the fanbases of culturally desirable pop artists and artists in general. Notions of self and identity are frequent topics, sparking engagement in discussions and exchange between users of different languages and cultures.</p> <p>These points led me to giving it a score of three in regards to self-motivation.</p>

Instant messaging: WhatsApp Messenger	
Interactivity (4)	<p>Younger generations of learners are communicating by using new codes of communication on highly interactive digital platforms such as WhatsApp. This makes interpersonal communication in the form of text messaging as well as video calls possible, which are both regarded as interactive activities that provoke active participation by all users involved.</p> <p>For this reason, I scored WhatsApp with four points in regards to its level of interactivity.</p>
Accessibility (4)	<p>The usage of WhatsApp on smartphones for communication is highly adopted worldwide and in some countries almost a societal expectation. The interface is easy and straightforward to use. Establishing the contact with an English native speaker on the platform is the only hurdle to overcome. However, teachers and institutions could mediate this process through suggesting cultural exchanges or through telecollaboration projects.</p> <p>With WhatsApp being part of a ubiquitous range of social media and communication platforms, I decided to give a score of four in regards to its accessibility.</p>

Instant messaging: WhatsApp Messenger	
Variety (3)	<p>Socially oriented technological experiences such as the use of instant messaging platform such as WhatsApp can only be as varied as the multimodal exchanges of their users are.</p> <p>Thereby resulting in a score in the midrange at three points.</p>
Quality (1)	<p>Even if learners spent hours daily chatting with foreign friends in English using WhatsApp, their language knowledge might remain low. This is due to the fact, that communication using instant messaging is often grammatically wrong, rushed or simply not carefully written by participants. As chats are encrypted and personal, there is also no way of curating and reviewing the messages exchanged between users in regards to their quality.</p> <p>This is demonstrated by the low score concerning quality of one point.</p>
Self-motivation (4)	<p>The aspects of self-motivation are arguably given through the high adaptation of this resource that enables context-relevant collaboration beyond the classroom through online discourse. Cultural exchanges in the TL, for instance as a result of student exchange experiences abroad or telecollaborations, are likely to be motivating and engaging for learners.</p> <p>As a result, I picked a score of four out of five in the factor of self-motivation by WhatsApp users.</p>

Podcasts: The Past and the Curious	
Interactivity (1)	<p>As an audio Podcast, The Past and the Curious is a passive listening experience. There is no chance to join in or open up a discussion on the input provided. Learners are merely listening to stories, opinions or conversations without any interaction as opposed to, for instance, a livestream.</p> <p>This is reflected in a score of one in regards to interactivity, unless students were to decide to record their own Podcast in English, making the experience more personalised and interactive.</p>
Accessibility (4)	<p>Podcasts are as accessible as media available online can be. The Past and the Curious is no exception to this, as it can be downloaded on the website or through dedicated Podcast apps that are available for free. A listener is only required speakers or headphones to be able to listen either at home or on the go, regardless of the location. However, Podcasts usually do not provide transcripts and translations that could serve as a help for less proficient speakers of English or students that are hearing impaired. Outside of The Past and the Curious, some Podcast formats are subscription based and not available for free, however the cost to the consumer is usually low.</p> <p>These considerations are reflected in an accessibility rating of four.</p>
Variety (2)	<p>While there are Podcasts on almost any given topic, The Past and the Curious in particular is focused on history. Thus, the format is limited in its variety, especially with it being audio-only content. While the individual episodes each concern different stories and narratives, they all revolve around proceedings of the past.</p> <p>As a result, I chose a score of two for the limited variety of the media format.</p>

Podcasts: The Past and the Curious

Quality (4)	<p>Whilst the quality of the Podcast medium can vary, The Past and the Curious is a carefully researched and professionally produced format. The speakers are American English native speakers and offer authentic and correct language input to listeners.</p> <p>On the contrary, the disruptive medium of Podcasts is open for anyone to participate in and produce their own content without requirements for the content provided being accurate. Thereby, the linguistic quality of English language used and content delivered can vary.</p> <p>This results in the relatively high score of four in regards to quality.</p>
Self-motivation (2)	<p>The Past and the Curious is an Edutainment Podcast that tries to offer true stories of inspiration and humour while appealing to the listeners' interest in history and historical narratives. Of course, some groups of students may find this highly entertaining and feel intrinsically motivated to listen to the format, while it is equally as likely that others will not. Podcasts as a medium are highly diverse however and offer a rich variety where every learner should be able to find one that appeals to their field of interest.</p> <p>These thoughts resonate in the form of two points in regards to self-motivation.</p>