

## The investment of time in the study of english: A little considered factor

Nahum Samperio Sánchez<sup>1</sup>

[nahum@uabc.edu.mx](mailto:nahum@uabc.edu.mx)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2408-1899>

Universidad Autonoma de Baja California  
México

### ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study on the necessary time to learn English. The main objective was to determine the elements that require an investment of time to learn English successfully. This quantitative research collected data from 191 users of English through a questionnaire to discover the relationship between the time spent learning English and mastery of the language at a high intermediate level. The findings indicated that the learners reached the level of English they possess in an average of 9.36 years in school contexts. During this time, exposure to the language and activities outside the classroom that indicate a medium-high to high investment of time stand out. The main activities out of the classroom develop receptive skills.

**Keywords:** *activities outside the classroom; exposure to language; time spent in the classroom; time spent outside the classroom*

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<sup>1</sup> Autor Principal

## **La inversión de tiempo en el estudio del inglés: Un factor poco considerado**

### **RESUMEN**

Este trabajo describe un estudio sobre el tiempo necesario para aprender inglés. El objetivo principal fue determinar qué elementos requieren una inversión de tiempo para aprender inglés. Esta investigación cuantitativa recopiló datos de 191 usuarios de inglés a través de un cuestionario para conocer la relación entre el tiempo dedicado al aprendizaje del inglés y el dominio del idioma en un nivel intermedio alto. Los hallazgos indicaron que los estudiantes alcanzaron el nivel de inglés que poseen en un promedio de 9,36 años en contextos escolares. En este tiempo destacan la exposición al idioma y las actividades fuera del aula que indican una inversión de tiempo entre media-alta y alta. Las principales actividades fuera del aula desarrollan habilidades receptivas.

**Palabras Clave:** *actividades fuera del aula; exposición a la lengua; tiempo invertido en el aula; tiempo invertido fuera del aula.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Language learning, as conscious study through formal instruction, is a long process in which many variables converge for meaningful learning to occur. The variables can be internal, such as motivation, attitude, beliefs, and perceptions (Hernández & Rankin, 2014), and external variables, for example, the teacher, the classroom environment, the curriculum (Khan, Khan, & Zia, 2017). That is, variables inside and outside the classroom (Graham & Post, 2018) intervene and interrelate to result in learning. These factors vary according to the uniqueness of individuals and their differences. However, the investment of time to successfully learn a language not only by attending classes but also by doing something out of the classroom might depend mainly on the Learner.

Research (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021) has established that motivation is fully correlated with language learning, and that it is the platform where learning takes place since it is the force that moves the Learner to adopt a proactive attitude towards their own learning goal. When Learners adopt a proactive behavior, they look for ways or methods to learn better and faster according to their unique needs, wants, and gaps in the target language. Such methods are learning strategies, which have also been identified as an influential factor in language learning (Griffiths, 2018). Nonetheless, motivation can fade away over time; consequently, language learning strategies also decrease along with the enthusiasm or desire to learn.

The time dedicated or time invested in learning, whether in the classroom or outside it, occupies an important place to consider in the language learning process because without an adequate allocation of time for learning, it will not take place. Smythe, Stennett, and Gardner (1975, p. 21) state that “there is strong support for the position that the more time spent studying a second language, the greater the probability that the individual will achieve a high level of sophistication in the language.” This position suggests that the mastery of language skills is developed through use and practice, and it occurs when learners allocate time outside of the classroom. That is why this study sought to identify the correlation between the time invested and the success in English language learning through the following research question: To what extent does the time spent contribute to success in learning English?

With respect to the term success, it is necessary to clarify that the term success in language learning may have different interpretations, since the term is subjective and is related to the Learner's learning objectives. For one Learner, success may be passing an exam or course, while for another it may be being able to conduct a conversation fluently in their area of expertise. Some learners measure their language learning success by their confidence and ability to speak spontaneously when faced with real-world situations. In this way, reaching the objectives signals the point where Learners decide to stop the language learning process. However, learners can stop learning before reaching their goal. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify that, for the purposes of this study, the term 'success' in learning English is used to refer to the level of linguistic competence or command of English at which an individual can make use of the four skills: oral and written expression, oral and reading comprehension in a communicative way; that is, they can communicate in English in everyday and academic activities without difficulty.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Time spent on language learning**

It is not possible to think of successfully learn a language without spending time to study, practice, or use it not only in the classroom but also outside. De Wilde, Brysbaert, and Eyckmans (2020) state that there is evidence that teaching in the classroom is not enough to achieve linguistic competence in a language. In addition, they suggest that formal teaching, that is, in the classroom, should be complemented by informal learning in daily life settings. Although enrolling in a language course implies time when attending classes, it is necessary to recognize that this time is probably insufficient for the Learner to develop all the skills to communicate efficiently.

The investment of time is inherent to the learning process, and it is taken for granted that learners will achieve the mastery of the language at the end of a course or series of lessons or classes. However, it may take longer than expected for many language learners and not many will endure the process and give up on studying. Rubin (1981) suggests that a Learner can achieve success depending not only on ability but on persistence over time, and it is precisely the lack of time, especially for learning outside the classroom, that is a reason to consider why Learners in adult stages abandon the learning process.

The learners' decision to invest time out of the classroom is sparked by motivation. Motivation is the engine that boosts learners to invest time other than class time; however, even having a high motivation to learn can be useless if there is no time to allocate to learning. Rubin (1981) suggests that a person with high ability and natural motivation, but with few opportunities to practice and use the language, may have difficulty acquiring it. To this point, it is also feasible to believe that through the investment of time, motivation can be generated. Nonetheless, it is not easy to determine whether motivation or investment of time have a greater effect as a predictor of success in language learning.

The mastery of the language is achieved through perseverance over long periods of time sustained by motivation and constant exposure to activities in which the language is practiced. As a matter of fact, fluent language learners have consistently used time outside the classroom to practice what they know, or learn what they don't know by taking a proactive attitude towards their learning. Carroll (1963) suggested that there is a positive correlation between time spent studying a language and mastery achieved, indicating that language acquisition and mastery are largely a function of time.

Benigno, De Jong, and Van Moere (2017, p. 3) suggest that there are factors that contribute to language learning competence, for example, motivation, learning strategies, age, learning context or aptitude, among others. Such factors "affect the time each individual needs to progress." Accordingly, the use of strategies or the development of activities outside the classroom ensure a greater investment of time in learning and, consequently, greater practice and exposure to the language. This helps to achieve goals in less time.

However, the amount of time to learn a language remains unclear and is estimated differently by different sources. In a longitudinal study conducted in Los Angeles, California that took 9 years, Thompson (2015) estimated that full proficiency in a second language might take from 4 to 7 years. Thompson (2015, p3) suggests that "students attain speaking and listening proficiency in English after only 2 years in the district, attaining proficiency on measures of reading and writing in English takes considerably longer". Here it is necessary to consider that learners were exposed to the language in their environment which contributed to their development of full proficiency. Hakuta, Butler, and Witt (2000) suggest that oral language proficiency and proficiency take three to five years to develop, while academic English proficiency can take four to seven years; however, this is not a pattern. For his part,

Knight (2018) considers an estimate of the hours dedicated to guided language learning to master a language, and it is in accordance with the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). His estimate indicates that to reach level A1 in a context of study guided by a teacher, it takes approximately 90 to 100 hours; for level A2, from 180 to 200 hours in total; for level B1, approximately 350 to 400 hours; at the B2 master's level, from 500 to 600 hours; mastery of level C1, from 700 to 800 hours; and, finally, to reach proficiency at the C2 level, approximately 1,000 to 1,200 hours are needed. It is worth mentioning that, in this estimate, Knight (2018) does not consider the additional amount of unguided time that Learners spend. That is, the time that the learners decide to invest or expose themselves to the language.

On the other hand, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) defines the levels of language proficiency not by a specific number of hours of study, but by the level of competence that users of a language must achieve. This approach suggests that reaching a competency can take a different amount of time for each individual and much will depend on what each Learner does for their learning. Language learning is a long process that can take years; everything will depend on the level of proficiency that a Learner considers necessary to meet their needs or achieve their goals. As stated earlier in this document, the time it takes to learn a language is entirely related to the learners' learning goal. "A key challenge in defining when someone has learned a language is to be clear about their learning goal" (Knight, 2018, p. 4). For this reason, learners may stop learning or studying when they believe they have acquired the necessary skills for their development, although this does not always mean mastery of the language.

### **Class time**

When we refer to class time, we are talking not only about the time that is officially assigned to the English subject in the study program, but also about the time that is directly related to the teacher's practice. According to Knight (2018), institutions tend to focus on the number of class hours. Courses are scheduled to teach a language over a period of time spread over weeks, months, or years, and language proficiency is expected to be achieved at the end of these programs. However, this may be insufficient to develop the content according to the standards of competence that the programs, publishers or institutions themselves stipulate.

Richards (2015, p. 6) states that “the school curriculum may allow only a few hours of English instruction per week”. These hours are organized and distributed to cover a wide range of skills and sub-skills, but this organization and distribution of time to achieve goals can be significantly reduced by teacher and learner absences, class breaks, late arrivals, early departures, leave or vacations. Additionally, time can also be diminished by the teacher's own ability to manage class time. That is, the time they provide for each activity that is included in the classroom for the development of language skills. Rojas and Hernandez (2014) found that the time assigned to the class is not the same time used in the classroom; this may suggest that there is no efficiency in the use of time by teachers. They state that classroom time is interrupted by different factors that shorten learners’ exposure to the language and that although time is designated for English classes, it is not controlled or supervised.

Knight (2018, p. 4) states that learners need to acquire linguistic competence (grammar, vocabulary, phonetics), sociolinguistic competence (registration, politeness, turns, etc.) and pragmatic competence (cohesion, function, etc.) in addition to developing skills for reading, writing, speaking, and listening; thus, attaining these competencies and developing these skills may require more effort than simply attending classroom lessons. This is barely made clear to learners in the classrooms or in the advertisement of courses. Thus, class time provides a framework for the learning process, but little that ultimately aids learning success originates in the classroom.

Learning English as a foreign language has limited hours per week; therefore, exposure and opportunities to use the language in the classroom are very limited. Richards (2015) explains that for language learning to occur, it must not only be about learning in the classroom, but also outside the classroom. Thus, learners should increase their chances of success by investing self-study time in their process. For this reason, the investment of additional time to the class time is essential since it could be key in the successful learning of languages.

### **Time spent outside the classroom**

Benigno, De Jong, and Van Moere (2017, p. 03) state that “there is no unanimous consent as to how many hours are needed to acquire a greater command of the language”. It is also unclear how much time a learner should spend outside of the classroom; however, it is necessary to consider time to learn outside the classroom when programs or courses are developed. According to Benson and Reinders (2011, p.

2), “full communicative competence appears to depend largely on the student's efforts to use and learn the language beyond the classroom walls”. As specified by Muñoz (2011), repeated exposure to the language being studied plays a fundamental role in language learning. That is why the lack of time to invest in learning, especially outside the classroom, has been an important factor that makes language learning difficult for many learners, mainly adults.

The spent time outside the classroom mainly occurs in two ways: the performance of learning activities with the purpose of improving or learning the language being studied, and exposure to the language through the authentic use of language. Benson (2013, p. 62) defines OCLL (Out of the Classroom Language Learning) as “any type of learning that occurs anywhere other than within the classroom and involves self-instruction, naturalistic learning and self-directed naturalistic learning. In other words, activities that learners consciously do in order to improve, learn or practice the language. Benson (2013) also includes activities outside the classroom and language exposure in his definition in a similar way. In the categories of learning outside the classroom described by Benson, the spent time occurs through exposure to the language consciously and directed by learners themselves when they look for learning resources, learning strategies, or through mere interaction with the environment. The amount of time spent may vary according to the learners’ motivation. For example, Shen, Tseng, Kuo, Su, and Chen (2005) point out that learners are likely to spend about ten hours a week learning English outside the classroom, and probably more if there is a desire to learn faster. Unfortunately, some English learners expect to learn everything in the classroom and with the guidance of a teacher without spending time learning outside of the classroom.

In the time that the learner invests in their own study, they carry out activities outside the classroom that can allow them to improve aspects of the language that they find problematic, difficult, or that need practice. Nunan and Richards (2015) state that the learning activities that learners do outside the classroom can fill in the weaknesses of the learning process in the classroom. However, the benefit of such activities may be limited because learners may not be directing efforts towards their needs, desires, or lacks in the language. The fact that learners are aware of what they need, want, or lack would increase their efforts and time invested. The extent to which learners are aware of the advantage that doing activities has on their learning can help optimize the amount of time spent, for example, listening to the



radio or watching TV (unconscious) or listening to the radio or watching TV to learn vocabulary (consciously); that is, through learning strategies.

### **Language Exposure**

Time spent outside the classroom has been investigated in terms of exposure outside the classroom (De Wilde, Brysbaert & Eyckmans, 2020). Exposure to a foreign language is one of the crucial conditions for achieving mastery since it plays an important role in the learner's linguistic production. It is also essential for the type and level of linguistic competence to be achieved. Exposure can be understood as the amount of time a learner has in contact with the language; that is, the total sum of contacts someone has in the language they study. It can be both verbally and in writing, and it can occur in class, through the teacher and the materials, and outside of class through television, music, books, or the internet. Research has shown that exposure outside of the classroom such as to books, television shows, and computer games have a positive effect on learners' language proficiency (e.g., González-Fernández & Schmitt, 2015). Al-Zoubi (2018, p. 152) defined exposure as “the contact that learners have with the language they are studying”. However, within the classroom, it may be short due to factors mentioned above in this document. In the classroom, contact with the language can be affected, mainly, by a scarce use of the target language by teachers both in instruction and in materials. In the same way, the teachers' low demand for use among peers, and through activities that do not allow the use of the target language. Exposure to the language, unlike activities performed outside the classroom, implies that learners spend time doing activities for pleasure, for example, watching movies or videos, listening to songs, reading books, talking with friends or family without the intention of learning. Nonetheless, learners might improve or develop the language skills when they are exposed to the language. Exposing themselves to the language without intentionality can have different learning benefits since incidental learning occurs when learners pick up words or phrases from the environment to which they are exposed. That is, learning without intention and without a clear awareness of what has been acquired. In contrast, when learners voluntarily decide to participate in activities outside the classroom with the intention or purpose of improving their language skills, it can lead to greater language learning than exposure alone due to the learning strategies they employ to achieve goals.

Although being exposed to the target language does not necessarily mean increased competition, it is the form, the intensity, and timing of exposure that may be more important factors. The quality and quantity of exposure to the target language as a factor in language learning success is uncertain and will likely produce different learner outcomes due to internal and external individual differences (Grey, Cox, Serafini & Sanz, 2015). Nonetheless, it is a fact that exposure is associated with a beneficial learning effect. For example, Al-Zoubi (2018) found a positive correlation between exposure to the English language and language acquisition, as well as in the development of the four language skills.

Gray et. al. (2015) argue that research has not shown clear findings on whether studying a language in an extensive exposure context, such as an immersion course, is superior to a course with limited classroom time. However, there are language courses that try to promote exposure to the language by increasing class time and thus the activities and practice in it, for example, bilingual courses, intensive courses or immersion courses abroad. In this way, course designers ensure more extensive exposure to the language, more opportunities to use the language being studied, and more time spent in learning that can help learners achieve proficiency.

### **Prior studies related to time and activities outside the classroom in language learning**

Many language learners find that classroom time is enough for learning to take place; however, it should be reinforced with individual study time outside of the classroom. In addition, conscious exposure to the language also involves time that helps learners practice it. During this time, the learner directs the effort towards specific wants, needs, and lacks (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) through learning strategies, which take time to develop. Glick, Cohen, Fesntinger, Xu, Li, and Warschauer (2019) in a study with 716 Peruvian learners enrolled in an online English course found that the time spent on the course was a significant negative predictor of the final test score. That is, learners who spent less time scored lower on the test. García, Questier, and Zhu (2019) also investigated self-directed learning and the actions learners do outside of the classroom. They found that learners lack time to engage in learning outside of class, especially during course weeks. In their conclusions, they highlight the importance of a context in which learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning by investing time.

In contrast, Hyland (2004) found in a Hong Kong study that most learners spend considerable time studying and practicing English beyond the classroom. Their results showed that the learners do

activities that help develop reading and listening comprehension, mainly. Similarly, Orhon (2018) conducted research with college learners and found that time spent outside of class helps them develop listening comprehension skills such as listening to songs and watching television, as they found them useful in their learning. In the same order of ideas, Chan (2016) found that doing activities outside the classroom, which implies time invested in learning, was entirely related to the degree of linguistic competence of the participants. For his part, Serrano (2011) discovered in his study that intensive courses in which the learner receives more instruction time, therefore, more hours of guided exposure to the language, were more beneficial than courses in regular programs. Similarly, Ekşi, and Aydin (2013); Barbie (2013); Olmedo (2015) discovered, respectively, in their studies that learners invest time in carrying out activities outside the classroom, and that these mostly reinforce receptive skills such as listening and reading.

In conclusion, to learn a foreign language you must spend time in learning, and this is not only time inside the classroom but also outside the classroom (Parupalli, 2019). Second language learning does not take place entirely within the classroom. It is necessary to educate the learner to increase the time outside the limits of the classroom through exposure to the language. It is also imperative to ask students to do activities, either under the direction of the teacher or without it. In this way, the learner will be able to put into practice the knowledge acquired in classes. In the same way, it is possible that factors that contribute to learning are strengthened, for example, the increase in motivation and the use of learning strategies that can help the learner not only to achieve objectives, but also to progress and endure in the process. Thus, the investment of time becomes an important factor for learning a foreign language.

## **METODOLOGY**

This research followed a descriptive and quantitative methodology to identify the relevance of invested time as a factor that contributes to successful learning of English. A questionnaire with 3 sections was used to collect information on the dimensions that this study set out to find. The amount of time invested to achieve success in learning English is what is described here.

## **Participants**

Data were collected from 191 intermediate and higher-level English language users. The sample consisted of 139 women, 51 men and 1 in the other category. In the sample, 84.3% of the participants are in the age range of 18 to 25 years and 15.7% in different age ranges. The participants were learners in the careers in Language Teaching and Translation of the Faculty of Languages of the Autonomous University of Baja California (UABC), Mexico. The participants are users of English in spoken and written form and are able to understand what they hear and read to meet the necessary demands of a user of the language of a B1 proficiency level or higher according to the CEFR.

## **The instrument**

The questionnaire retrospectively collected numerical data from the participants and included closed questions to quantify the data and demonstrate the statistical significance of the results. Likewise, questions were included to collect demographic information from the respondents such as gender and age. In addition, they inquired about previous experience in language learning, the level of English that respondents have according to their perception, as well as their perception of the time in which they reached the level of English proficiency that they possess. Likewise, the questionnaire inquired about their learning contexts in which participants received English lessons throughout their lives. Each learning context was assigned a number of years and the results were quantified. The learning contexts were kindergarten (1 year), primary (6 years), middle school (3 years), high school (2 years), university (2 years), language schools (1 year) and private classes (1 year).

The second section of the questionnaire reflects the time that the learners invested in their English learning experience by carrying out activities outside the classroom that helped them reach the language level they possessed at the time of the study, the time that they invested in their additional learning to class time and the frequency with which activities were carried out outside the classroom. This section of the questionnaire included a 23-item Likert scale that measured the frequency of use of activities commonly performed outside the classroom. The more activities and frequency of use reported, the more exposure and time spent learning outside the classroom.

The questionnaire was piloted and corrected according to observations. Then, it was applied individually at the facilities of the language faculty and the university over a period of 4 weeks, requesting the

participants' participation and ensuring the privacy of their information at all times. The data obtained was entered into the SPSS database for analysis.

## RESULTS

The analysis indicated that the average number of years spent in achieving proficiency in learning English in their learning contexts is 9.36 years. In other words, the learning process to reach the level of mastery they had at the time of the study took more than 9 years. It should be noted that this time estimate considers the time invested in carrying out activities outside the classroom and the exposure to the language that the participants reported doing. In Mexico, English classes are compulsory in secondary school (3 years = 333 hours) and high school (2-3 years = 216-324 hours), which can be interpreted as 5-6 years of study as the amount minimum amount of time received in English classes in the educational system of this country. However, to reach the language level that the participants have, the time could have been longer. Likewise, 72.1% reported spending 4.5 hours or more weekly outside the classroom. This additional time is equivalent to the number of hours that are regularly taught in secondary or high school weekly in Mexico.

Based on the sum of years of the educational contexts in which the learners received English lessons, the results indicated that 29.9% received English lessons from 1 to 6 years, 31.3% from 7 to 11 years and 38.7 % from 12 to 16 years. This result shows that for the largest percentage of participants took between 7 and 16 years to successfully learn English; Of course, it is necessary to consider in this estimate the time spent outside the classroom in carrying out activities, and exposure to the language which was not quantified in this study.

In addition, a Pearson product-moment analysis was carried out to observe the statistically significant correlation between the average of the years of study and the level of language that they reported having from their perception, since a limitation of this study was not including a test standardized to indicate actual level of command of the language according to the CEFR. The results indicated a positive relationship P-value of  $> .000$ ,  $r=.268$ . Specifically, the greater the amount of time invested, the higher the level of English they achieved.

This section of the questionnaire also asked about the amount of time in which participants believed they had reached their current language level. In their perception, 31% of the sample reported having learned the language in a period of 2 to 3 years, 29.8% in 4 to 6 years and 28.3% in more than 6 years. It is necessary to mention here that it is the perception of the participants; however, the 28.3% of participants who reported having learned the language in a period greater than 6 years coincides with the average number of years spent in the language learning contexts described above.

Participants were asked to identify whether language lessons across all learning contexts in which they received language lessons determined their current language level. 53% of the participants reported an indecisive point of view. That is, they neither accept nor deny that the language lessons at school contributed to their learning of English. Therefore, it is possible that the exposure to the language and the activities they did outside the classroom have contributed to achieving the level of mastery they have. On the other hand, 27.7% acknowledged having learned the language in their lessons while 19.4% denied having learned the English they know at school. What stands out from this data set is that participants were unable to clearly perceive whether the lessons they took during their previous education contributed to their current English proficiency.

The questionnaire also identified the activities that contributed to reaching the level of current language proficiency. The number of mentions was quantified and the percentages were obtained. The average number of activities carried out was  $M = 5.9$ , which suggests that the learners participated outside the classroom in at least 6 of the 14 activities included in the survey. Regarding the activities, 84.3% of the participants reported listening to songs as an activity that contributed to their learning, 80.6% reported watching television, 69.1% watching videos on the Internet, and 58.6% reading books. These findings are consistent with those of Hyland (2004) and Orhon (2018) described in the literature review who found that participants reinforce receptive skills more when they perform activities outside the classroom.

### **Out of the classroom activities and invested time**

Being able to quantify the exact amount of time a learner spends outside of the classroom is difficult; however, looking at the number and frequency in which learners engaged in activities outside of the classroom provides insight into the time they spent in learning. The greater the number and frequency of activities performed outside the classroom, the greater the amount of time spent outside the classroom. The questionnaire for data collection included a Likert scale with 23 unidimensional items that collected data on activities commonly used outside the classroom to identify those with the highest frequency of use. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the internal consistency reliability test was  $\alpha=.910$ . Therefore, the value indicates that the scale is statistically appropriate for making inferences based on the analysis. Participants were asked how often they engaged in activities outside of the classroom. 74.3% of the participants reported doing activities from time to time to always. In order to know the amount of time that the learners invested using activities outside the classroom, the amount and frequency in which the learners carried out activities outside the classroom were calculated, the data were grouped in low, medium-low, medium, medium-high and high time investment. The analysis indicated that 38.7% of the participants showed a medium, 43.5% a medium-high, and 9.9% a high time investment; that is, 92.1% of the participants stated that they invested time at a medium to high level. This finding suggests that the investment of time outside the classroom is a factor that contributes to reaching the level of English proficiency. Table 1 shows the average frequency of use of the activities arranged in descending order.

Description	M	SD
1. I listened to songs in English.	4.55	.818
3. I watched TV in English.	3.98	1.08
6. I read websites, blogs, or posts in English.	3.95	1.06
20. I did activities that came in the English textbook/workbook even if it was not homework.	3.80	1.33
16. I looked for the pronunciation of new words.	3.63	1.31
15. I looked for information in English on the internet or in books.	3.57	1.24
5. I read newspapers, magazines, articles, or books in English.	3.44	1.25
2. I watched tutorials in English.	3.30	1.36
22. I studied my class notes.	3.13	1.35
10. I looked for opportunities to speak in English.	3.05	1.38
14. I had written conversations (chats) in English through social networks like Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.	3.03	1.39
13. I wrote on social networks in English.	2.94	1.41
21. I rewrote my class notes in clean.	2.92	1.50
18. I studied English grammar.	2.91	1.30
4. I listened to the news in English.	2.84	1.37
17. I made my vocabulary lists to learn vocabulary.	2.77	1.43
9. I played video games in which I had to speak in English.	2.76	1.62
23. I made flashcards with vocabulary or grammar that I wanted to learn.	2.60	1.39
7. I talked to family members and friends in English.	2.57	1.47
19. I wrote my examples of some grammar structures.	2.47	1.34
11. I wrote emails in English.	2.39	1.41
8. I had phone conversations in English.	1.99	1.32
12. I wrote a diary (electronic or handwritten) to practice my writing.	1.92	1.33

**Table 1** shows that the participants spent time outside the classroom mainly on activities such as listening to songs, watching television, and reading websites, blogs, and publications in English. This finding is consistent with research carried out on extracurricular activities such as Barbee (2013), Olmedo (2015), Eksi and Aidyn (2013) who showed that watching television and listening to songs were the most used activities to rehearse language outside the classroom. It is possible to speculate that



language learners find these activities enjoyable since by their nature such activities are created for that purpose.

Finally, the questionnaire tried to identify the time dedicated to learning through activities outside the classroom and the correlation that exists with their success in learning English. Consequently, a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed to see if there is a statistically significant correlation between these two variables. Results indicated a significant P-value relationship of  $>.000$ ,  $r = .425$ . In other words, the frequent use of activities outside the classroom, which translates into time spent in learning, contributed to their language learning success.

## **DISCUSSION**

The time invested in learning has been considered inherent to learning itself. There is a belief that completing an English course will lead to master the language at the level of proficiency that the course itself stipulates, but this is not always the case. Very commonly, the knowledge acquired in the classroom must be reinforced outside with activities and learning strategies, as well as exposure to the language. For this, an investment of additional time to the class is necessary. During this time, the learner will consciously perform activities through study or unconsciously through exposure to the language in their environment; in these activities they will spend time learning or understanding, memorizing or remembering, and practicing and using the knowledge you have.

One finding from this research suggests that study participants reached proficiency in an average of 9.36 school years. In this time estimate, participants reported taking classes in educational settings ranging from kindergarten through college, including English classes at language centers or private tutoring. Of course, in this estimation it is necessary to consider the time of exposure to the language and the conscious activities carried out to learn outside the classroom that, in sum, increase the time it took them to master the language. It is necessary to highlight that through the activities performed outside the classroom and the frequency in which they were done, the time investment of 92.1% of the participants is medium-high to high. In other words, the investment of additional time to the compulsory classes that the educational system provides is necessary since it is a factor that contributes to learning and mastering the language.

The additional time spent in class emerges from each individual's desire or need to learn and these are not generalized characteristics of English learners, especially in mandatory language learning contexts. Probably, the lack of time to invest in their learning outside the classroom is a relevant factor that prevents the learner from acquiring the language skills stipulated in the English program in public education. Also, the little or no investment of time in learning outside the classroom can be attributed to the lack of motivation that defines the behavior or desire at a given moment.

Learning English takes more time than it takes to teach the language in the public system through classroom lessons. The minimum time for a learner to receive compulsory language lessons, in the framework of this research, is 5 years with a frequency of 3 hours a week on school days; however, this amount of time is far from the average in which learners reported successfully learning the language.

These results are consistent with those of other studies (e.g. Benson & Reinders 2011, Shen, et al., 2005) that suggest that communicative competence depends on learners' efforts to learn the language beyond the walls of a classroom. The findings also agree with those of Al-Zoubi (2018), who found a positive correlation between exposure to English and language acquisition, as well as in the development of the four language skills.

As stated before, it is not surprising to believe that the mere act of attending compulsory language lessons can lead to competent command of the language. This is not to suggest that compulsory language lessons have no effect on learning, but rather that the time spent in English classes and the time learners spend on activities outside the classroom could significantly increase proficiency and decrease the amount of time to reach the learning goal as long as their motivation to learn persists.

That is why the language policies must direct efforts to implement courses and classes that effectively employ the proper use of time to generate the necessary conditions for the learner to practice and use the knowledge acquired in the classroom. In this way, the chances that the learner obtains a linguistic competence in the time allocated for it increases.

In the time spent outside the classroom, 82.2% of the participants reported having carried out activities that benefited their learning, mainly in the development of receptive skills such as listening to songs, watching television and reading websites, blogs or publications in English. This finding is consistent with those of Ekşi and Aydın (2013) who showed that learners participate more in activities outside of

class that reinforce receptive skills such as listening and reading. In addition, the findings also coincide with those of Barbee (2013) and Olmedo (2015) who indicated that watching television and listening to songs are the activities in which learners most frequently spend time outside the classroom and that they are an important part of their learning. From this, we infer that activities performed outside the limits of the classroom or exposure to language have a beneficial effect on language proficiency. However, it is necessary to clarify that listening to a song just for the pleasure of listening to it is not the same as listening to a song to identify vocabulary, for example. The conscious effort that is put into performing such an action is what can make the difference that would make it a learning strategy. Possibly, learners do these activities with the idea of practicing the language they are learning in class without having the conscious element that leads them to learn. Consequently, doing this type of activities, consciously or unconsciously, translates into a benefit for learning.

Finally, it is interesting to note that activities that help learners develop productive skills are not used frequently, especially orally, since verbal communication could be the ultimate goal in language learning. However, this option to practice receptive skills eventually helped learners develop strong productive skills since learners in this study are already language users.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is difficult to establish what will make a learner learn a language successfully due to the diversity of variables that affect the progression of language learning. Perhaps motivation is the most relevant factor; however, without the necessary and adequate time to invest in learning through activities and exposure to the language outside the classroom, motivation can diminish and eventually disappear. Even a highly motivated learner with the best strategies could not learn effectively without the time to invest in practice or study. That is why many learners, due to the lack of time to invest outside the classroom, become demotivated and give up learning.

Although the process is undoubtedly different for each learner, the time invested in learning is a potential factor that has been seen as inherent in the language learning process without considering that lack of time translates into lack of practice and lack of exposure to language.

It is the final decision of the learners to invest time in learning outside the classroom, and the lack of time can come from reasons that any individual can have and that should not be discussed. However, research on time to reach proficiency in English can help policymakers to pay attention and revise targets or design and establish new systems that consider learners' investment of time as an important factor in language courses. It is necessary to implement policies that guarantee the increase of time in English courses. In the same way, we should look into the classroom; teachers must optimize class time to ensure the use of the language, consequently, greater practice and greater exposure, since it could represent the only opportunity in that learners are in contact with English.

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