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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Transcending Motivation Barriers in Technology Enhanced Language Learning: A Social Inequalities Perspective

Evamaria Brigitta Kaiser<sup>1\*</sup> and Mariya Ivancheva<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Educational Technology Training Provider, Researcher Medienstimmreich GmbH Wüerleweg 37, Ruggell, 9491, Liechtenstein

<sup>2</sup>Senior Lecturer, School of Education University of Strathclyde 141 St James Road, Glasgow, G4 0LT, UK

## ABSTRACT

Factors that influence learning are vitally discussed in language learning circles but are rather underexplored in the field of technology-enhanced language learning (here after TELL). Considering these factors shall assist with responding to the research question of how technology can enhance language learning by taking into consideration the socio-economic contexts of learners. Through a review of literature across academic fields and seven qualitative interviews with key practitioners in this area from across Europe, we address the issue of the digital divide. We discuss arising challenges for self-expression, self-determination, and autonomy in the social space of language learning due to unequal initial positions of language learners, which co-determine success. Implications for practice and policy include the awareness about these multilayered factors that influence TELL to strive for equality with regards to access to knowledge, learning materials and spaces for learners from different backgrounds.

## INTRODUCTION

With the rise of globalization and ever-increasing migration waves, the need for strong communication skills of young generations living in complex multicultural societies is more essential than ever. The outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic that pushed most teaching and learning online, has made this need even more acute and visible. To address this need, already in the early 2000s, the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (here after CEFR) "the need of development of communication skills fostering mutual understanding, which will promote (...) cooperation, and overcome prejudice and discrimination" [1]. This change has been paralleled by the rapid increase of the use of digital technologies [2,3] that requires coping with a further layer of fast-changing demands in the field of communication [4]. Responding to these growing demands including self-determination and development [5], scholars and practitioners have suggested that self-regulated learning with the help of digital technologies would foster increased self-motivation and autonomy [6] and nurture well-being [7].

Focusing on self-regulation, self-motivation and autonomy places the whole responsibility on the learning individual and their cognitive capacities, without taking into consideration the social and affective aspects of learning and how they are played out vis-a-vis social background of learners and intersectional inequalities in the classrooms. Social inequalities influence learning factors like self-motivation [8]. Social class is still under-researched in applied linguistics [9]

### \*Corresponding author

**Evamaria Brigitta Kaiser**, Educational Technology Training Provider, Researcher Medienstimmreich GmbH Wüerleweg 37, Ruggell, 9491, Liechtenstein, Switzerland

**Tel:** +41-78-204-5424

**ORCID:** 0000-0002-0189-6342

**E-mail:** office@medienstimmreich.com

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and so is the question with regards to how socio-contextual factors such as physical, digital, human and social resources [10] and patterns of community learning condition the acquisition of digital literacy skills [11]. It is also important to understand how affective aspects of learning related to literacy acquisition in the field of technology-enhanced learning [12], and how this process relates specifically to TELL [13]. Addressing this discrepancy requires community-led skills approach, as opposed to one led by the individual.

To contribute to such a paradigm shift, this paper sets itself the goal to address some of these questions. Based on an extensive literature review and a focused empirical inquiry, we suggest that scholars should put a stronger consideration on social inequalities in debates about self-motivation and autonomy in the acquisition of digital literacy skills in TELL. Bearing in mind the demands for autonomy in a data-overloaded world, the investigation reflects on ways to transcend motivation barriers in TELL. We aim to raise awareness among educational practitioners to thoughtfully address social inequalities and learning factors through authentic, collaborative TELL tasks.

The study on which this article is based, took place in late 2017-early 2018. Members of the team designed and conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with eight European TELL experts who participated at a conference at the European Centre for Modern Languages (hereafter ECML) in Austria. We asked questions on their individual experiences in TELL, and how they account for social inequalities in the acquisition of digital literacy skills.

In what follows, we first review the literature with a focus on TELL and then move on to the presentation of the empirical findings, after which we offer a discussion connecting the two parts. We first consider the question of how technology can enhance language learning with respect to socio-cultural factors. We then trace the role of technology with regard to autonomy by considering how sociocultural factors might intersect and influence the inclusion of digital language learning materials in the classroom as a social space.

Consistent through the whole discussion about TELL is the question of self-motivation, which, if taken as an individual, cognitive achievement stands in a problematic relationship to intersectional inequalities and affective issues that, we insist, need to be integral to contemporary approaches to learning. The first issue we problematize is the nature of self-motivation and autonomy in social spaces such as the classroom, where class-belonging influences these factors. Discussing the literature and interviewees' replies, we question those individuals alone and in an absolutely self-regulated manner appertain to self-motivation and autonomy as acquisitions of learning. These factors show that the socioeconomic context and intersectional inequalities in the classroom condition their learning practices. The second related issue we tackle is the relationship between access to digital facilities and

knowledge about their use to socio-contextual factors in their inter-connectedness with self-motivation and autonomy discussed in the first part. On this basis, we identify a gap in the literature with respect to the question: What is the role of unequal socio-contextual factors regarding self-motivation and autonomy in TELL? Our empirical case study addresses these issues from professional practice and indicates possible avenues for further research. In this, learner-centered approaches to TELL gain importance. These should be critically re-examined and changed towards a community and institutionally shared responsibility instead of placing it on individual students. There, also infrastructure should be built for practitioners so that TELL can be imposed in a meaningful way.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Following, we describe the role of the social context and communication in technology-enhanced language learning. The research background shapes the framework for the interviews presented in the next section, shedding a light on the learner as a producer: an individualizing vs. a collective approach, social media, autonomy and (self-) motivation and social inequalities and self-motivation in TELL.

### Developing digital literacy: Underlying factors

**TELL and self-motivation in digital literacy development:** Over the last decades scholars and policymakers alike have insisted on an increased significance of technology in language learning to foster adaptability, divergent thinking, and collaboration [14,15]. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages by the Council of Europe (2001, hereafter CEFR) [1], for instance, has served to anticipate and foster these developments, with a focus on interaction, mediation, and content production as key elements of communication. Scholars and practitioners have encouraged the use of meaningful, authentic digital materials to enhance motivation in language learning [15-17]. As a way of incorporating authentic and participative writing tasks scholars have suggested the use of the web 2.0 for Wiki-entries for tourist places [16] online articles, animated videos [2] or blog writing [18]. Collaborative activities with social media enhance deep learning and activate higher-order skills such as critical thinking [19]. The activation of higher-order thinking skills such as seeking, judging and sharing information [20] and guidance of and reflection on learning in the online space is essential when organizing work (e.g. in a Personal Learning Environment (PLE)).

Hence, calendars, online bookmarks, online journals and collaborative workspaces (e.g. Wikis) aid this process [6]. Educational inequities can be addressed by social software through freely accessible means for all learners [21]. Another aspect discussed in the transition from Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to TELL is the importance of communicative competence through the everyday use of digital devices such as tablets or mobile phones [6].

In this, the SAMR model with four levels of technology adaptation: substitution and augmentation to enhance the learning experience, modification and redefinition for its transformation. The former [22,23] levels are beneficial for content delivery, the latter to enhance self-directed content creation and peer learning.

Yet, while some scholars focus on the role of technologies, others insist on TELL's need to foster self-expression within a social context by integrating autonomy within community [22]. Affective issues and social wellbeing are not sufficiently considered in TELL. Early childhood care including bonding strongly influences a child's cognitive development, behavior, future educational chances and emotional wellbeing [13]. When it comes to the affective aspects of literacy, learning care relations including affection and appreciation by primary care givers and educational institutions throughout developmental stages, have a lifelong impact on educational opportunities [12]. The scholar demonstrates that lack of care, affection and comfort not only impacts the ability to acquire literacy, but also the ability to collaborate. Still, the latter is considered as fundamental to acquire (digital) literacy [15,24]. The paradigm of success [25,26] insistence on the provision of community learning spaces with digital facilities and user support, through which members of the learners' social network can be involved in the learning process, help address inequalities occurring through social position. Thus, any discussion of self-motivation from a policy or practice point of view should highlight the importance of wellbeing in the educational environment.

Besides affective issues, autonomy in language learning is aided by the self-determination theory that accounts for personality development and behavioral self-regulation as well as for constructive social development and personal well-being" [27,28]. Elaborating on a learning supportive environment, the authors claim: "Motivation produces [and] is a primary concern to those in roles such as manager, teacher (...) that involve mobilizing others to act". Self-motivation, self-direction and ownership can be fostered by "creating, organizing and sharing digital content and information" [21]. Besides the importance of Self-Directed Learning (SDL) in collaborative learning [29] need for SDL in TELL as well as considers social processes and collective knowledge creation. Hence, the emphasis on [30] the need to train online behavior to navigate social media.

Thus, despite the emphasis on communication and collaboration which imply social skills, the autonomous and self-regulated use of TELL is yet to be explored, especially in formal education [3,30,31].

### **Self-expression, autonomy and learning success in an unequal social context**

When discussing the concept of autonomy, it is important not to think of it within an unequal social context.

Cognitivist approaches to learning ignore intersectional inequalities of class, gender, race, age, disability, and put a blind eye on affective issues. While scholars in this tradition suggest that cognitive skills and the inner thinking process are most important in learning [32], scholars interested in the social aspects of education critique such approaches that suggest meritocracy is neutral and success is a product of an individual's effort only [33]. Individual-centered cognitive approaches to education reduce the thinking ability to information processing [34]. Such critiques suggest that the significance of environmental factors, the co-construction of content and group power dynamics are neglected. To address the complexity of diversity, the concept of superdiversity discusses sociocultural aspects [35]. The sociologist claims that diversity is visible in several areas and gives attention to society-forming factors such as migration, culture and ethnicity.

Already in the early years of schooling, class-based discrepancies in home-trained cognitive abilities, meaning to privilege students from higher income families [36]. Also, the socialization of cognitive skills at early age might vary among different ethnic groups in relation to cultural practices and priorities in child upbringing, which should be taken into consideration [37]. Focusing the debate around TELL on individual skills accumulated through language learning via digital devices and online platforms condition the ability of the individual to actively contribute to the learning process [37]. Class-centered theories of education [33,38]. Including language learning [39] suggest that self-motivation does not solely arise from within an individual but is influenced by interdependent factors in social space and especially with social class. Autonomy and self-motivation are not neutral acquisitions, but assets of learners enabled or constrained by their specific position in society and their un/equal access to and success through the course of education. Access to social wellbeing, emotional security and care also have a distinct class and gender dimension to learning [12]. And thus to the acquisition of self-motivation and autonomy. "To get more equality of recognition we need (...) more equality of access to the social bases of respect and self-respect and being able to participate in such practices and relationships is crucial [40]."

### **The role of intersectionality and social class**

Already since 1980, sociological debates around gender and class intersect with discussions around the socioeconomic and political context is crucial [41]. The concept also includes race and further issues that highlight the multiple avenues through which oppression is experienced. The concept of intersectionality relates to the ways in which individual digital connectivity corresponds to diversity in its complexity [42,43]. When it comes to digital literacy, gender and nationality have a minimal impact, unlike family background, financial status, and basic education [44]. Besides physical and digital resources, human

and social resources need to be fostered [10]. Therefore, it is essential to see the digital divide in interrelation with social development or else inequalities can develop.

This is even more so in the contemporary era when mass access of students from different backgrounds to online courses happens not to support teaching, research, and community engagement, but to boost income generation of public universities and profit-making of private companies [45,46]. Individual digital connectivity and access to education are thus shaped by multi-contextual factors. Under a marketized system of higher education and new managerial university governance, even access to digital devices as the That cherite one-laptop-per-child reform in the UK happens through programs implemented to fulfill the economic and political agenda instead of primarily pursuing the aim to enhance the learning experience of children. In other words, it is not always about quality education for its own sake but the absorption of information technology in the name of education [47].

Against this background, in the current article, we explore this topic in further depth via an empirical study of how a group of leading European TELL practitioners to tackle some social factors and intersectional inequality in their work. We discuss how they reflect on the learners' needs and social inequalities as experienced in classrooms and linked to their autonomy and self-determination in social space.

## METHODOLOGY

The aim of this project has been to provide insights into the necessity and challenges of acquiring digital literacies in TELL to contribute to the empowerment of learners from socially disadvantaged backgrounds to become digitally literate. To this end, we wished to shed a light on the development of applying strategies to cope with the demands of the digital age, the advantages, and risks of navigating the internet for learning purposes, and the affordances of social networks for collaborative and community-based learning.

In October 2017, a two-day workshop "Digital Literacy for the Teaching and Learning of Languages" took place at the ECML in Graz, Austria. It was there that a member of our team conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with eight key participants. To develop further on some topics, after the preliminary thematic analysis of the transcribed and anonymized interviews, we followed up the interviews with a questionnaire, which all involved helpfully filled in.

We developed the interview schedules by operationalizing the three research questions that the study was based on: (i) How can technology enhance language learning? (ii) Which role does the social context play in digital language learning? (iii) What are the key factors to becoming digitally literate? To this end, the interview schedule entailed two parts. The first part concerned more general questions about the

current developments and practices in the TELL field and the integration of particular technologies in the classroom. The second part addressed topics of TELL and inequalities and how these could be addressed in the individual classroom practice and TELL as a field. Surveys explored these topics in some further depth especially when it came to intersectional inequalities in the classroom. The qualitative data analysis presented below draws on narratives of our interviewees and the surveys, here with pseudonyms. While all participants have a background in linguistics, most of the interviewees are employed as language professors or teacher trainers in countries of the European Union. Some of them are also active in primary or secondary education as outlined below.

1. Antoin Frigot, university language professor
2. Louisa Meier, university teacher trainer and international coordinator
3. Florence Lacombe, university language coordinator
4. Steward Lind, university language institute director and teacher trainer
5. Helen Gant, university language professor and teacher trainer
6. Patricia Erne, university teacher trainer and high school language teacher
7. Tatjana Altova, primary school teacher
8. Evana Ratenske, primary school teacher

While one-third of the interviewees teach in primary and secondary education, two-thirds are involved in policymaking. The data were analyzed with thematic manual coding accounting for topics we were initially concerned with, as well as for themes of concern emergent from the interviews.

As TELL is a fast-evolving field, research of this scope can only provide a 'snapshot' of some current patterns of work and larger concerns in the field. Our data points out the level of awareness among practitioners about the necessity to consider socio-contextual factors including social class implications, affective issues and motivational barriers in technology-enhanced language learning. It helps us give voice to practitioners in the field, and to create awareness about the need for accounting social inequalities as well as social and emotional needs of learners within TELL settings. Applying the critical analysis to the insight from these practitioners' literature in the field, we claim that introducing equitable approaches to the use of digital technologies in language learning is imperative if TELL is a field. We see it as the only way to contribute to more equal educational opportunities enabling students from different classes, ethnic, and gender backgrounds to experience success in their learning.

## FINDINGS

The learner as a producer

An individualizing vs. a collective approach to digital literacy.

Following, issues around information analysis, development and processing arise. Thus, a main argument is the need to master the handling of information. This implies the consideration of motivation and autonomy within social space that shapes the way of communication.

In key discussions during workshop breaks in the Conference Hall, the coffee room or group meeting rooms at the ECML, the informants described digital literacy as a complex and fast-evolving subject. Knowing how to interact with people in different contexts, derive, as well as interpret information were defined as key elements of digital literacy, not only by many literature sources but also most of the interviewees. Several respondents also detailed changes in language learning that are supported using technology.

For instance, in relation to digital literacy language professor Helen Gant described the individual's ability of "collecting and sorting out information" as important elements of digital literacy. Linguist Antoin Frigot insisted on literacy being the ability to engage with digital tools in a meaningful way. His proposition was very much aligned with the demand for self-determination and development in language related matters [5]:

Tome, the first major change is the web 2.0, this possibility to be an actor, to be a producer and (...) to have interactions with other people. We need to consider the advantages of the Web 2.0 to gain media literacy... [P]roducing content such as writing *Wikinews* is useful to make students undergo the transition from information-gathering to distribution to gain better understanding of how content is created.

For the same purpose, linguist Helen Gant recommended implementing video productions. Two birds can be killed with one stone, she claimed, with such tasks as technology literacy can be acquired simultaneously.

On the one hand, such a framing of the individual producer as it appeared in the research participants' narratives can also be individualizing and problematic. It focuses on the narrative of individuals in full command over their own craft, which is a framing of individuals stripped of enabling or constraining factors of their social environment. On the other hand, while the question of the learner of the producer can be too individualizing, informants such as Helen Gant underlined the importance of practice in considerate analysis of sources as a way for learners to develop informed choices about the reliability of information so essential to digital literacy education.

## Social media, autonomy and (self) motivation

Social media change the modes through which humans communicate. Therefore, an awareness of different patterns of language, online behavior and different spaces become essential, as also our research participants stated.

In this respect, our interviewees gave importance to bridging formal and informal learning, attempting to foster 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and addressing motivational aspects. Teacher trainer Steward Lind stated:

In ten years' time, exposure to the real use of language outside the classroom will be a massive feature of online communities. ...Common web 2.0 features allow the practice of digital literacy skills including self-responsibility and critical thinking, for which we need to appeal to learners' interests, promote collaboration and motivation.

This was a point of controversy among research participants. For instance, while high school teacher and lecturer at a teacher's university Patricia Erne proposed websites for children to become pen pals to also foster community thinking by making use of online tools for communicative language practice, teacher trainer Louisa Meier was rather skeptical: "I think it will only work with intrinsically motivated students."

The approach of the international coordinator shows that some educators see motivation not as intrinsically present but as produced and nurtured in students over time. While in her words there is no explicit critique of digital approaches that take motivation for granted, it is a clear concern that given the way they function in TELL now, digital technologies might serve a smaller group of (self-) motivated students, rather than the student population as a whole. It also points to the question of the role of the teacher in motivating students and involving them in on- and offline classroom interaction, while also monitoring their progress.

Monitoring processes also came into question when it comes to the close or open nature of social media that several interviewees cautioned about. While senior lecturer Louisa Meier puts it simply: "Social media are there to collaborate, to share knowledge, to share the experience", TELL practitioner Helen Gant cautioned about fake news calling it the 'chatbot-problem' and noted that students using social media are also required:

...To cope with (...) different patterns, language, and different target groups. In this, social media can be used to make students realize differences, similarities and interconnections regarding the virtual and the real world. [Yet, messages in social media] might not be made by a real person but a chatbot.

This statement accounts for the difficulty of distinguishing truthful from untruthful sources that seems more difficult than ever, in the world of Artificial Intelligence

and fake news production. In the same line of thinking, Antoin Frigot cautioned: “[It is important to be aware of] the limits and dangers of these networks (...) and so not to be too excited about everything out there.” University professor Florence Lacombe insisted on the importance of educating students in switching between the real and the virtual world properly to avoid online behavior resulting in unwanted consequences for life. The university professor described how a student reported being sick but at the same time, posted pictures on Facebook that provided evidence that he was rather enjoying himself.

### **Social inequalities, self-motivation, and the digital divide in TELL**

The socioeconomic background influences factors of learning such as motivation, self-perception, and autonomy. Consequently, learning success in TELL arguably is a communal effort rather than an individual’s choice.

Addressing the need for opportunity, language institute director Steward Lind highlighted the importance of the socioeconomic environment and distinguished two essential factors: “[a]ccess to opportunity and confidence inability.” Louisa Meier observed: “Depending on your education, you might be more or less open for language learning, you might have experienced better surroundings for language learning.”

For learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, Helen Gant referred to communication skills outlined in the CEFR by highlighting the importance of the initial phase of language learning because “(...) a certain communicative competence [needs to be established].” Moreover, primary school teacher Evana Ratenska brought the focus to social inequalities resulting in disadvantages, hindering children from being successful: “[Often] learning results from people with less privileged backgrounds [are just average], maybe because of bad education in their families, lack of motivation, drinking parents or [lacking access to] computers or internet.”

Thus, the interviewee acknowledged that being from a less privileged background can negatively impact learning with TELL, not because the communicational competencies acquired are insufficient in general, but as they might be ‘discounted’ as irrelevant or insufficient within an education setting dominated by a middle-class culture [38]. Therefore, the practitioner the existence of the latter as not only being a person’s intrinsic choice but conditioned by contextual factors.

Most participants were attuned to these discrepancies: they expressed those social inequalities impacted self-motivation, self-perception, and autonomy. Steward Lind remarked: “(...) social inequalities can affect [one’s motivation and] self-perception negatively.” Antoin Frigot mentioned: “I think it is important to consider that

new forms of social inequalities can arise.” Louisa Meier regretted the interconnection of social position and family conflicts, resulting in a low self-perception. Primary school teacher Tatjana Altova emphasized the need for strong home-school collaboration. With disillusionment, herself and Helen Gant remarked that at home, less privileged families of their students often would not use digital tools for learning purposes. Therefore, not only self-motivation and access to facilities but also knowledge about their use for learning purposes might be vital. Also addressing the importance of the family background, Tatjana Altova emphasized the need for strong home-school collaboration.

While practitioners were aware of the digital divide in their classrooms and in society at large, their opinions on whether digital technologies help to create a level playing field or cause an even bigger digital divide significantly varied. Antoin Frigot claimed this depended not only on access to devices but also on knowledge about their effective use: “I think it is important to consider that new forms of social inequalities can arise”. Louisa Meier talked about a vicious cycle and stated with clear regret that social position and family conflicts are often interconnected, resulting in low self-esteem among learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Most participants expressed those social inequalities impact self-motivation, self-perception, and autonomy. Still, even on this topic, most interviewees carried on insisting on individual agency rather than a structural position as determining for self-motivation. For instance, Antoin Frigot suggested asking the following questions: “Do the (young) people recognize the value of education or not? Is there a chance for social advancement or at least to find their position (a good position) in society?” This position shows that educators in the TELL field might still have to catch up on debates around structural constraints to self-motivation that is not essential to the class position but emerges in an unequal field that champions certain types of actors and their way to show recognition of value in education while discouraging others.

Being torn whether broader access to the internet and learning tools have the power to address social inequalities, Steward Lind called to make sources of authentic language materials publicly available. Similar issues are addressed in the concept of super-diversity in consideration of socio-cultural aspects [35]. In this regard, Steward Lind reasoned that there are underlying personal and contextual factors and expressed:

(...) second language competence has not been seen as a motivating factor among students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and this coupled with a general lack of confidence in an academic capacity, affects language learning. (...) [With the change in accessing knowledge from the teacher and the coursebook as the only sources of information], exposure to a foreign language (...), access to

rich sources of language in use is available to everyone with an internet connection (...).

The interviewee drew attention to socioeconomic backgrounds, which are strongly related to confidence. It was stated that the importance of acquiring second language competence is not always perceived as a priority among students from lower-income groups. Simply, Steward Lind remarked: "(...) social inequalities can affect [one's motivation and] self-perception negatively." Still playing on a trope of individual or class responsibility rather than understanding different structural positions, Patricia Erne insisted that without self-motivation, knowledge about access to technology and learning strategies do not lead to successful language learning:

Digital tools are a great help IF the learners are already motivated to learn the language. We have offered all kinds of digital tools to kids from a lower class, fairly uneducated families – unfortunately to no avail.

Problematic as it is in the implications of locus of control, this statement still implies that we need to address socio-contextual factors especially when talking about motivation. Unsurprisingly, the solution offered was also short of structural explanation understanding the deep roots of class and further intersectional inequalities. Rather than focusing on digital tools, as a solution to the problems faced, the same research participant proposed to use effective learning strategies useful to promote self-directed learning instead of tackling socio-economic factors, her suggestion was to implement "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" [25] because: "Self-motivation, clear goals, self-efficacy, the concept that (...) I can change my life by taking small steps (...) is the only way to get kids from lower class families out of their situation." Similarly, Helen Gant thought that making use of digital tools, social inequalities could be redressed by appealing to the desire to learn and relate. This was proposed by engaging with friends using Snapchat, Skype, Instagram, or other social media applications. Seeing another chance to equate social and educational inequalities, Louisa Meier spoke about MOOCs in terms of competence, autonomy, and relatedness: "Digital technologies might give access to language learning [courses like MOOCs] for people who might not be able to attend a good school or private classes."

As we discuss further in the next section, limited propositions show that there is still a necessity for awareness-raising to happen not among students and parents, but also among educators working in TELL.

## DISCUSSION

The demand for self-determination and the need for self-motivation in language-related matters is of concern to scholars [5,26,28] and practitioners alike. Still, the narrative of the producer as a self-centered creator of the content is de-centered by some interviewees with a more socially

grounded and critical view of how digital technologies can foster the relationship between production and consumption of content. Various informants also thematized the need for a critical reflection of online behavior and responsive engagement with information to distinguish real from fake news. Like various scholars [15,21], interviewees suggested making use of Web 2.0 to gain media literacy and understand how content is created by producing e.v. videos or Wikinews.

Social media training and its consideration in policymaking in both, formal and informal education to encourage positive behavior, responsibility, and healthy relationships in formal, non-formal and informal learning settings [30]. The informed analysis of sources becomes a core task of educational institutions. This is not a skill that can be taken for granted and belongs to the main area of digital literacy education. Although not emphasized in the interviews, social interactions among students in the same space correlate with the motivation and interactiveness of students and teachers [24]. Hence, it requires throughout consideration of an individualizing vs. a collective approach, accounting for the classroom, home, and informal learning spaces alike.

Self-regulated use of TELL is still under-researched in formal education [21,31]. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that monitoring as discussed by practitioners via Facebook is a form of social control that teachers, school management and parents did not have over students in the past. It is also becoming a two-edged sword: on the one hand, students can be monitored and protected from an ever more complicated and potentially dangerous use of images and data in the online space. On the other hand, this constant monitoring produces possibilities of full surveillance and control and might challenge individual autonomy and encroach on self-motivation in unforeseen ways.

Most of the practitioner's views ascribe the power to self-motivate to a desire to elevate class belonging to the individual without the support of society. This shows a lack of recognition of types of knowledge and motivations that are not clearly demarcated as 'of value' i.e belonging to subjects already possessing middle-class cultural and social capital [38]. It also shows a tendency of practitioners, despite awareness of intersectional inequalities and in their practice, to return to individualizing rather than collective learning strategies. The belief that individuals can transcend their background through individual learning strategies and digital tools, rather than trying to address structural challenges in ways that would achieve a level playing field, needs to be further challenged by TELL scholars. It is not certain if online courses always provide high-quality or equitable education [43,44]. Thus, a multi-layered intersectional analysis could be beneficial to find out whether autonomy and self-motivation are developed with frequency among online learners.

## CONCLUSION

Whilst community learning spaces can make learning and the internet affordable, the acquisition of digital literacy skills that allows society members—regardless of their age – to actively participate in sharing and creating content is not equally distributed across society. On its own, TELL cannot redress social inequalities. Thus, a new paradigm of technology-enhanced community learning needs to emerge that understands class, gender, and further intersectional inequalities and through them promotes deep contextual reading and awareness among different backgrounds, which in turn boosts intercultural communication and technology-enhanced community learning.

The practitioners' narratives we detail here, show that a learner-centered approach to TELL obfuscates the locus of responsibility by placing it on individual students. Turned into 'producers', 'crafting their own fate' or 'highly effective people' they are attributed agency, autonomy, and self-motivation that for many of them is not 'given' i.e. socialized within their community of belonging and formation. And while through different affordances of digital technologies TELL can facilitate the development of critical skills including via content production, and cultural awareness via applications, the engagement of students with these seems to depend on a level of autonomy and self-motivation that should not be taken for granted. As the literature review showed, these can only be developed within enabling collective environment sensitive to the individual background, relational and affective needs.

Against this background, our study brings evidence to an interesting tension among practitioners: one between their high awareness of deeply seated inequalities related to social processes, and their rather individualizing approach to solving such problems. The emphasis on intersectional inequalities and the insistence of the need to address them in the classroom needs still to be taken more full-heartedly on board not just by practitioners themselves but addressed on the national and institutional policy level. Institutional-level support infrastructure should be built for practitioners for TELL to be used in a constructive manner taking into consideration contextual and relational factors that shape individual learners' motivation and autonomy.

## PRACTITIONER'S NOTES

- What is already known about this topic?
- The need to consider self-motivation in language learning has been identified in different disciplines.
- Collaboration and task-authenticity play an important role in language learning.
- Self-expression, autonomy, and self-determination co-determine learning success.
- The digital divide with access to digital facilities and

knowledge about their use must be considered in TELL.

- What this paper adds Self-motivation must additionally be seen in relation to the out-of-school environment, including access to digital technologies and the knowledge about their use.
- Affective issues cannot be neglected in debates around TELL.
- The discussion of student class and ethnic background bridges existing debates in sociolinguistics about social inequalities in relation to affective issues, self-motivation, self-determination and autonomy to debates in TELL.
- A social inequalities perspective considers these factors around learning, which contribute to this hardly explored field in TELL but which co-determine learning success.
- Implications for practice and policy arise with regards to socioeconomic inequalities. Awareness with regards to the creation of social inequalities in language learning among TELL practitioners becomes essential.
- Learner-centered approaches to TELL should be critically re-examined and transformed as they confuse the locus of responsibility by placing it on individual students.
- Institutional level support infrastructure should be built for practitioners in order for TELL to be used in a constructive manner.

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## STATEMENTS ON OPEN DATA, ETHICS AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The research was carried out under the ethical guidelines in respect of the dissertation proposal and block ethical review form of University of Leeds: <http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/ris/info/70/ethics>. The form has been approved by the ethics committee of the institution. Data are currently being anonymised and can be shared at this database in time for publication. There is no conflict of interest in the work reported here.

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