

Education

EXPLORING OUT-OF-CLASS CONTEXTS IN EFL LEARNING: ROMANIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES¹

Elena MEȘTEREAGĂ,
Nicolaus Olahus Technological High School, Orăștie, Romania

e-mail: elena.mestereaga@gmail.com

Daniel DEJICA,
Politehnica University Timisoara, Romania

e-mail: daniel.dejica@upt.ro

Abstract

This study explores the role of out-of-class contexts (OOCs) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning among Romanian high school students, emphasizing how informal environments complement formal instruction. Data from 125 students across four public schools reveals active engagement with English through media consumption, gaming, and social media, enhancing vocabulary, listening comprehension, and speaking confidence. Informal settings provide low-anxiety opportunities for meaningful communication and experimentation. Motivation plays a pivotal role, with students linking English proficiency to future opportunities. Personal learning ecologies, such as online reading and conversations with others, foster development within supportive spaces. The study advocates integrating OOCs into formal instruction to bridge theoretical and practical knowledge, creating a holistic learning environment aligned with learners' interests and real-world needs.

Keywords: Out-of-class contexts (OOCs); English as a Foreign Language (EFL); High school students; Informal language learning; Personal learning ecologies; Communicative language teaching (CLT).

Introduction

The Romanian education system has undergone significant reforms since the fall of Communism in 1989, transitioning from traditional teaching methods to more modern approaches influenced by Western educational practices. Among these changes is the widespread adoption of English as the primary foreign language taught in schools, replacing Russian and French. The shift toward Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles has emphasized interactive and learner-centered approaches over rote memorization and grammar drills (Toma & Dejica, 2023).

Despite these advancements, challenges remain in ensuring that all students achieve proficiency in English. While formal classroom instruction provides a foundation for language learning, it is increasingly recognized that out-of-class contexts (OOCs) play a vital role in

¹ Article History: Received: 11.03.2025. Accepted: 11.03.2025. Published: 15.05.2025. No funding was received either for the research presented in the article or for the creation of the article.

fostering linguistic competence. In this context, theoretical frameworks such as CLT principles and ecological perspectives on education highlight the importance of adapting teaching methods to local contexts and learners' needs. Studies have shown that informal language learning—through activities like watching movies or engaging in online communities—can significantly enhance language acquisition by providing authentic opportunities for practice. Research by Nunan (1989), Sundqvist (2009), and Cabot (2016) underscores the value of active participation in OOCs for developing linguistic skills. However, there is limited research on how Romanian EFL learners utilize these contexts. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the role of personal learning ecologies in supporting English proficiency among high school students. We explore how Romanian high school students use English outside the classroom and how these experiences contribute to their overall language development.

Our main research objectives include examining learners' perceptions of English use in daily life, identifying the social and contextual factors that influence EFL learning in OOCs, and exploring ways to integrate these insights into formal instruction. By focusing on high school students, we seek to provide practical recommendations for enhancing EFL education through a holistic approach that leverages both formal and informal learning environments. This article is part of a broader research initiative, as outlined in Meștereagă (2021). It builds upon the foundational concepts and findings presented in that work, delving into specific aspects to offer further analysis and insight.

1. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The significance of out-of-class contexts (OOCs) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning cannot be overstated (Benson, 2011; Richards, 2015, Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). These contexts, which encompass opportunities for practicing English outside formal classroom settings, provide learners with authentic exposure and practical applications of the language. Examples of OOCs include engaging with social media platforms, consuming entertainment media like movies and music, reading English materials, participating in language exchange programs, traveling, and using language learning apps. Complementing formal instruction, such activities create dynamic avenues for students to enhance their language acquisition.

Theoretical foundations such as the sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) and the input-interaction-output model (Long, 1996; Gass, 1997) emphasize the importance of social interaction in second language learning. Krashen's input hypothesis (Krashen 1985) underscores the necessity of exposure to comprehensible input, whereas his distinction between learning and acquisition highlights the subconscious nature of the latter, which occurs through meaningful exposure. Bialystok's focus on functional practice (Bialystok, 1994) also highlights the importance of exposure to the target language and meaningful practice. Together, these theories converge on the idea that rich, engaging input and social interaction are pivotal for language development.

A learner's social environment significantly shapes their attitudes, motivation, and opportunities for language use. Networks, personal English learning ecologies, and communities of practice all contribute to creating a supportive ecosystem for language learning. Central to this process is Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where social scaffolding enables learners to progress beyond their current abilities. This foundational work introduces the concept of ZPD, emphasizing the role of social interaction and guidance in learning. Thus, engaging with interpersonal spaces and speech communities becomes a crucial element in advancing learners' linguistic capabilities.

The social environment influences learners' social identity (Norton & Toohey, 2011) and motivation (Igoudin, 2013), as interactions within speech communities, personal networks,

and interpersonal spaces shape their self-concept as English speakers and drive their enthusiasm for engaging with the language. Learners construct and negotiate their social identities through language use (Norton, 1995), and these identities influence their confidence and self-concept as English speakers. Teachers play a crucial role in supporting this process by fostering positive attitudes and motivating learners. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are vital, with studies showing that learners who hold favorable attitudes toward English and its speakers, and who actively participate in OOCs, demonstrate greater progress in language skills (Dörnyei, 2001). Barker (2004) and Hyland (2004) further emphasizes the role of social factors in shaping learners' attitudes toward OOCs.

The social environment shapes learners' engagement with out-of-class contexts by influencing their access to resources, motivation to participate, and opportunities to interact with English in authentic, real-world settings. In this context, out-of-class contexts offer valuable opportunities for EFL learners to practice English in real-life situations. Benson (2001) categorizes out-of-class learning into naturalistic language learning, self-instruction, and self-directed naturalistic language learning. Understanding these contexts helps teachers support learners' language development by providing individualized packages of support.

The dual roles of input and output (Ellis, 1994; Krashen, 1995) are central to language acquisition. Formal education typically focuses on providing structured input in grammar and form, whereas OOCs expand these opportunities through books, movies, online interactions, and music. Output, on the other hand, allows learners to practice language production—be it through conversations, writing, or interacting with English speakers. Swain (1985) identifies noticing, hypothesis testing, and negotiation of meaning as key functions of output in the learning process.

Social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp offer extensive options for online communication, providing virtual speech communities for EFL learners. Researchers (Lomicka & Lord, 2009; Kitchakarn, 2016; Zhou, 2021) show that social media supports language learning, enhancing learners' engagement, interaction, and collaboration. Students should be encouraged to use social media tools to develop their EFL skills and confidence.

In summary, the integration of sociocultural perspectives and theoretical models highlights the importance of OOCs in EFL learning. By leveraging these contexts, educators can provide learners with holistic support that extends beyond the classroom, enabling them to develop their language skills and construct positive social identities as English speakers.

2. Methodology

Our primary focus was on understanding the social and contextual features that influence English learning. We formulated three main research questions, (1) What social and contextual conditions support English use for high school students?, (2) How do social networks and media influence their English language progress?, (3) In what ways can informal activities improve their skills?, aimed at exploring learners' environments, the relevance of social networks, and the role of informal activities in developing language skills.

We employed a mixed-methods approach (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) to gather data from 125 high school students across four public schools in Hunedoara County, Romania. We used questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, diaries, and observations to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights into learners' experiences with OOCs. Participants were divided into two groups: one consisting of students from schools with average performance levels (Group 1 – students from schools A, B, and C) and another from a top-performing school (Group 2 – students from school D). Data was analyzed using statistical methods for quantitative responses and thematic coding for qualitative data.

The main reason for employing multiple instruments in data collection was to guarantee both validity and reliability. Ethnographic observations captured learners' interactions, settings, and behaviors, revealing the varied opportunities for English use beyond the classroom. These observations were supplemented by questionnaires, which provided biographical information and insights into learners' perceptions of OOCs. Semi-structured interviews with high school learners explored their backgrounds, motivations, and social networks, while seven-day diaries documented daily activities involving English use. Quantitative analysis, using descriptive statistics, complemented these findings by providing numerical insights into learners' behaviors and attitudes. This combination of methods allowed us to address both the breadth and depth of the phenomenon under study, ensuring a robust understanding of EFL learners' engagement with OOCs and offered a comprehensive image of how Romanian high school students engage with English in their personal environments.

The data collection procedures followed a structured timeline, ensuring systematic and efficient gathering of information. Observation and self-reflection were conducted over a two-year period, while questionnaires were distributed in phases across the participating schools. Interviews and diaries offered deeper qualitative insights, allowing learners to share their experiences and perspectives in their own words. This multi-instrument approach facilitated the triangulation of data, a critical step in enhancing the trustworthiness of findings.

Ensuring validity was a central aspect of the study. Internal validity was strengthened through pattern matching, logic models, and triangulation, while external validity was supported by the relevance of the research design. Triangulation incorporated multiple data sources, collection methods, and theoretical perspectives, offering a holistic evaluation of the phenomena. Theories such as the sociocultural model and the input-interaction-output model provided a framework for interpreting the findings.

Finally, ethical considerations were rigorously upheld throughout the research process. Participants were fully informed about the study's aims and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms and coding systems. These measures ensured the privacy of participants while fostering an open and trusting research environment.

3. Results

The findings of the study focus on the practices, perceptions, and experiences of Romanian high school EFL learners in Hunedoara County as they engage with English in out-of-class contexts (OOCs). We aimed to explore how these learners utilize personal learning ecologies to enhance their language skills and the sociocultural factors shaping their progress. Drawing on data collected through questionnaires, diaries, and interviews, the analysis delves into key areas such as learners' attitudes toward English, their engagement with OOCs, and the influence of their social networks. By examining these elements, we tried to understand how high school learners navigate and negotiate their identity as English users, contributing to the broader discussion of effective EFL learning strategies. We grouped school learners into two study categories: students from schools A, B, and C, and students from school D, acknowledged as the highest-performing institution in the region. This grouping allows for a comparative analysis of how learners' environments impact their English learning. Overall, the results underscore the significant role of OOCs in shaping English language proficiency among high school learners. The comparative analysis between the two study groups reveals how disparities in access, resources, and motivation impact learners' engagement with English. While passive exposure to English was common across all schools, active use in authentic contexts emerged as a key differentiator in achieving higher proficiency levels. These findings highlight the importance of creating supportive learning environments that encourage students

to integrate English into their daily lives, bridging the gap between formal instruction and informal learning opportunities.

3.1. EFL Learners' Backgrounds and Engagement with English

The two groups totaled 125 high-school students. The first group, consisting of 81 learners from schools A, B, and C, had a median age of 16.7 and primarily came from families where parents had completed high school and worked in physical jobs. In contrast, the second group, with 44 learners from School D (median age: 17.34), reflected more favorable conditions, with parents often holding university degrees and intellectual occupations. Learners in Group 2 also demonstrated a longer history of English study, with a minimum of 8 years compared to 4 years for some in Group 1. Despite these differences, learners in both groups rated their English proficiency as "good" or higher, with Group 2 showing slightly more confidence overall.

Both groups actively engaged with English in OOCs, with most learners using English daily through activities such as watching movies, listening to music, and engaging in informal conversations. Group 2 showed a marginally higher frequency of English use, with no students reporting a complete absence of out-of-class engagement. These findings highlight the significant role OOCs play in supporting language acquisition, helping learners apply their classroom knowledge in authentic, informal environments.

3.2. Motivations for Using English in Out-of-Class-Contexts

High school learners engage with English in out-of-class contexts (OOCs) for leisure, family interactions, and broader social purposes, with many intentionally using these opportunities to enhance their proficiency. Learners' attitudes toward English were assessed through the statement: "I consider learning English is important for my future". This sentiment saw unanimous agreement, with 71.6% of Group 1 (schools A, B, and C) and 75% of Group 2 (school D) strongly agreeing, highlighting a shared recognition of English as essential for future success. Such attitudes align with Spolsky's (1989) and Gardner's (1985) views on the motivational and practical roles of English, fostering intrinsic motivation and effective learning.

Career aspirations and professional goals were significant drivers for English use. Over 60% of learners in both groups expressed a desire for jobs in multinational companies, with a strong correlation ($r = 0.865$) between the groups. Interview insights revealed learners associating English with career success, such as Elison, who aspires to be a psychologist in England, and Jad, who sees English as crucial for journalism. Other learners emphasized how English enhances their education and personal satisfaction, with statements like: "English is going to be useful in my entire life, not just in my professional life."

Our data shows that high school learners recognize English as a cornerstone for their academic and professional futures. Their motivations are driven by both the practical advantages of English in the global job market and the personal satisfaction derived from mastering the language. Positive attitudes and intentional engagement with OOCs contribute to their readiness for future opportunities, emphasizing the importance of fostering supportive environments that encourage learners to integrate English into their daily lives.

3.3. Learners' Perceptions: English in Formal vs. Informal Settings

High school learners overwhelmingly (97%) perceived differences between using English in the classroom and in out-of-class contexts (OOCs). In the classroom, learners in Group 1 (schools A, B, and C) highlighted a focus on formal speaking and pressure from grades and teacher evaluations. Similarly, Group 2 learners (school D) emphasized grammar-focused

tasks and formal communication styles. Fewer than 10% of learners in either group strongly agreed they enjoyed communicating in English during class, reflecting the constraints of the academic environment.

Conversely, learners expressed favorable perceptions of English use in OOCs. Group 1 participants reported finding OOCs easier, more enjoyable, and less stressful, appreciating the freedom to choose topics of personal interest and communicate informally. Group 2 learners echoed these sentiments, describing OOCs as confidence-boosting and natural. They emphasized mutual understanding over grammatical precision, particularly in conversations with native speakers (NSs) or non-native speakers (NNSs). Both groups valued the opportunities OOCs provided for fluency-building and integrating English into daily life.

Overall, OOCs were perceived as more effective and enjoyable for language use, fostering informal, practical engagement with English. This finding is supported by over 59% of learners in both groups agreeing or strongly agreeing with enjoying communication with foreigners or NSs in OOCs, emphasizing the importance of such contexts for building confidence and motivation.

3.4. Media and Interaction: Opportunities for EFL Use Beyond the Classroom

High school learners' responses to the questionnaire reveal a diverse range of favorite activities for using English in out-of-class contexts (OOCs). Among both groups, the most popular activity is listening to music (95.1% for Group 1; 97.7% for Group 2), followed closely by watching films or videos (92.6% and 95.5%, respectively). These results highlight the appeal of media consumption as a primary avenue for practicing English, offering learners a combination of entertainment and exposure to authentic language use.

Diary entries from learners provide additional insight into their preferences. For example, one student from Group 1 described music as a personal "therapy," connecting deeply with international artists like Christina Aguilera and expressing that music is tied to her emotions and moods. Another student, Lucy, shared how YouTube tutorials in English helped her learn piano, showcasing how learners engage with the language not only for leisure but also for skill development.

Learners' engagement with visual media reflects similar patterns. Movies, documentaries, and YouTube videos are frequently mentioned, with learners citing their role in improving vocabulary and comprehension. For instance, one diary entry from Group 2 detailed the enjoyment and learning derived from watching a documentary on dolphins, which expanded the student's knowledge of specific terminology. Another student described combining entertainment with practical language use by searching for a macaroni-and-cheese recipe and following instructional videos in English.

Reading materials presented a noticeable distinction between the two groups. In Group 2, 72.7% preferred reading online magazines, articles, or news, and 70.5% enjoyed reading novels, short stories, or academic books. Group 1 showed a lower preference for novels and academic books, with only 35.8% selecting this option. Both groups, however, reported limited engagement with printed media such as magazines and newspapers, with less than half choosing these as favorite activities. Learners often cited practical needs as motivators for reading in English. For example, one diary entry mentioned using English to access information unavailable in Romanian, such as tutorials and programming algorithms.

Interactive activities, such as speaking with native or non-native speakers, also played a significant role. Group 2 showed slightly higher engagement in speaking activities overall, whether face-to-face or online. Group 1 learners demonstrated a strong preference for informal written communication, such as writing emails, chats, or text messages (70.4%), while fewer learners in both groups engaged in more formal writing tasks like keeping a diary or blog.

The findings underscore how learners seamlessly integrate English into their daily lives. They explore diverse activities, from consuming media and searching for information to participating in games and collaborative discussions with peers. This varied engagement reflects how OOCs facilitate meaningful and practical English use, enabling learners to develop their language skills in personalized, enjoyable ways.

3.5. Skill Development Through OOCs: Reading, Listening, Writing, and Speaking

High school learners demonstrate how out-of-class contexts (OOCs) can meaningfully contribute to their development in English. However, the extent of learning varies depending on how intentionally and effectively learners engage with these opportunities. While learners' use of English in informal settings does not automatically equate to language acquisition, their personal English learning ecologies—characterized by diverse activities and exposure—play a significant role in developing their skills. The four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) are explored individually to highlight their progress.

a. Reading: Learners engaged with a range of materials, from classic literature like *The Wind in the Willows* to online articles on programming and politics, chosen to match their proficiency levels. Nearly 60% of participants reported improved knowledge and reading speed, while 85% noted vocabulary enrichment. Diary entries demonstrated how reading served practical needs, such as finding information for homework, and helped learners achieve intellectual goals, like exploring historical or literary topics.

b. Listening: Music was the most popular activity, with learners citing improvements in pronunciation and vocabulary. Almost 85% agreed or strongly agreed that listening improved their skills, although responses were mixed on coping with fast speech (38.27% neutral). Learners combined enjoyment with valuable exposure to natural language use through songs and radio programs.

c. Writing: Informal activities, such as gaming chats and correspondence, helped learners improve grammar (66.65%) and reduce spelling errors (58.01%). While fewer felt these activities supported formal writing skills, they gained practical experience in written communication. Learners described letter writing as a fun way to learn, despite its outdated nature.

d. Speaking: Identified as the most challenging skill due to fear of mistakes and shyness, speaking improved through practice in informal, low-pressure settings. Around 55.54% agreed or strongly agreed that OOCs helped them overcome fear, while 49.38% noted better communication with native speakers. Diary entries showed learners engaging in real-life interactions, such as navigating public transport for a tourist, which boosted their confidence and fluency.

Across all four language skills, learners' engagement with OOCs contributed significantly to their linguistic development. Listening and speaking activities, in particular, provided authentic opportunities for real-time practice, while reading and writing allowed for deliberate and thoughtful skill-building. By integrating English into their daily lives, high school learners created meaningful personal learning ecologies that supported their progress and enhanced their confidence in using the language.

3.6. Using Films, Videos, and Media for Comprehensible Input in EFL Learning

Watching films and videos emerged as a valuable and engaging practice for high school EFL learners, offering exposure to authentic language use in real-life contexts. This medium

provides learners with examples of natural expressions, conversational flow, and contextual cues such as gestures and facial expressions, which aid comprehension and mimic real-life interactions. For some participants, films and television serve as their primary source of real-life input, especially in settings where English is not commonly spoken.

Films, with their visual support, allow learners to interpret language more effectively, bridging gaps in vocabulary and comprehension. Many learners choose to enhance their understanding by using subtitles. For example, one learner used English subtitles while watching *Riverdale* to improve her grasp of spelling, pronunciation, and the meanings of unfamiliar words. Similarly, Lucy reflected on how subtitles in *The Invisible Woman* helped her navigate the British accent, leading to a deeper understanding of both formal and informal English, and boosting her confidence in listening.

While many learners approach films as a relaxing activity, some intentionally transform these experiences into learning opportunities. For instance, one participant highlighted how watching documentaries and TV series expanded her vocabulary and exposed her to sophisticated expressions. The process of making connections between what they watch and what they learn underlines how films and videos serve as a source of comprehensible input, particularly when supported by previous classroom exposure.

In addition to entertainment, learners turn to English-language resources to solve real-world problems and accomplish tasks. One student relied on YouTube tutorials to repair violin strings, noting that no equivalent resources were available in Romanian. Another learner used English instructions to create a chart, emphasizing how proficiency in English enabled her to achieve her goal. These practical applications illustrate how OOCs foster meaningful engagement with the language, as learners tackle challenges while simultaneously building their linguistic capabilities.

By integrating English into their personal interests and practical needs, high school learners create dynamic learning ecologies. These practices not only provide comprehensible input but also encourage learners to engage with the language actively, developing their skills in a natural and enjoyable way.

3.7. Active Language Use: Exploring EFL Output Practices in Social Contexts

Romanian high school learners actively engage in producing English through various informal practices in their social contexts. These output activities, encompassing both written and oral forms, include interactions with native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs), online gaming, board games, casual conversations with friends and classmates, and even personal rituals like morning prayers. These practices create valuable opportunities for learners to apply their knowledge of English outside the classroom.

Diary entries provide glimpses into these interactions. One learner shared how they prayed in English, describing it as a spontaneous choice that deepened their engagement with the language. Another detailed speaking with a best friend in England, gaining the confidence to express themselves in English after overcoming initial fear. Online gaming also emerged as a significant activity, with one participant noting how they communicated exclusively in English while playing *Warcraft* and even made a new friend from Columbia during the game.

Social interactions further supported learners' output practices. Lucy wrote about conversing on Facebook with a foreign friend, while another learner invited classmates to play a board game in English, which combined learning with fun as they discovered new vocabulary together. These informal activities were complemented by thought-provoking conversations, such as discussing English idioms with a classmate on a bus ride.

Through these practices, learners engage in meaning-focused communication, aligning with Swain's (2000) concept of the output hypothesis. By exploring form and meaning while

receiving immediate feedback from their conversation partners, learners improve their fluency and automaticity in the language. Although these contexts are informal, they provide learners with opportunities to transfer theoretical knowledge from their EFL classes into practical, active use, bridging the gap between learning and real-life application.

Overall, the informal learning environments created by personal English learning ecologies allow high school learners to develop their communication skills in meaningful ways. Whether through conversations, games, or personal tasks, these practices enhance their fluency, confidence, and ability to use English dynamically in diverse situations.

3.8. Shaping Social Identity Through English Use

High school learners' identities as English users are shaped and reshaped through their daily interactions and experiences with the language. According to Kroskrity (2000), linguistic practices help individuals construct social identities that grant them membership in specific communities. For these learners, each successful encounter in English reinforces their identity and confidence, while setbacks can challenge their sense of belonging as English users. One learner (2218) reflected in her diary how a positive experience using English made her feel motivated to improve further, while another (2217) expressed that "*English has become a part of our lives, and I sometimes use it even if I don't realize.*" Similarly, 2116 noted a moment when he spontaneously started thinking in English, illustrating how deeply integrated the language had become in his cognitive processes.

These reflections reveal how personal successes and interactions contribute to the formation of social identity as English users. Learners expressed pride in their ability to communicate in English, with one noting that speaking with international friends allowed her to overcome linguistic barriers and connect with new cultures. The role of identity in fostering sustained interest in EFL learning is significant, as Barron (2006) suggests that a learner's identity is central to understanding their self-initiated and motivated learning efforts.

3.9. Interpersonal Spaces: Fostering Confidence Through English Use

Relationships play a pivotal role in shaping the success or discouragement of learners' English use, as noted in the theoretical framework. High school learners' informal social networks—comprising friends, family, and international contacts—serve as the foundation for their interpersonal spaces where English is actively used. These networks, while often loose and diverse, create opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning, receive feedback, and further develop their skills.

Diary entries provide a glimpse into these interpersonal spaces. Some learners spoke about regular conversations with international friends, including a Macedonian friend or a cousin from South Africa, while others described interactions with family members who encouraged English use. For instance, one learner spoke about speaking English with her father, who had learned the language later in life and inspired her to practice. Another noted the role of her elder sister and her English-speaking friends in helping her adapt to the British accent and grow comfortable with speaking.

Online platforms also play a critical role in expanding learners' social networks. Learners described engaging in online conversations through games or social media, emphasizing how corrections and feedback from peers helped them refine their language. One respondent shared that her small group of English-speaking friends on Skype provided a supportive environment to improve her proficiency, while another one recounted how occasional interaction with native speakers enhanced her confidence.

These collaborative and interactive practices exemplify how learners build relationships through English, creating interpersonal spaces that support their identity as English users. As

Cummins (2000b) explains, such meaningful interactions are reinforced by situational cues and active negotiation of meaning, providing learners with valuable feedback and growth opportunities.

3.10. Some Remarks on the Role of OOCs in EFL Learning

Our findings highlight the vital role that OOCs play in fostering English proficiency among high school learners. Through diverse practices such as watching films, listening to music, reading, writing, and engaging in spoken communication, learners actively create personal learning ecologies that facilitate their linguistic and cognitive development. The data also emphasizes the significance of identity and social networks in shaping learners' motivation and confidence, reinforcing the importance of meaningful interactions for effective language use. While the learners' experiences vary depending on their backgrounds and contexts, the overall results demonstrate their agency in leveraging both informal and formal opportunities to enhance their English skills. Our findings underscore the potential of OOCs to bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-life applications, empowering learners to become confident and autonomous English users.

Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study has explored the dynamic interplay between high school EFL learners and out-of-class contexts (OOCs), shedding light on how these informal settings contribute to English language acquisition. By examining learners' practices, perceptions, and social interactions, the research highlights the pivotal role that personal learning ecologies play in fostering language development. Through active engagement with English in diverse settings—whether watching films, listening to music, reading, writing, or speaking—learners not only reinforce their classroom learning but also develop the confidence and motivation to use English in real-life scenarios.

A key finding of this study is the critical influence of social identity and relationships on learners' progress. EFL learners construct their identities as English users through meaningful interactions, successfully navigating linguistic challenges and gaining the confidence to communicate effectively. Their interpersonal spaces, composed of friends, family, and international contacts, provide opportunities for authentic language use and feedback, which significantly enhance their proficiency and fluency.

Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of learner agency in the process of language acquisition. The active participation of learners in creating and utilizing OOCs demonstrates their commitment to improving their skills. By combining their personal interests with intentional learning strategies, they transform informal activities into meaningful language practices, showcasing the potential of self-initiated learning.

Ultimately, this study emphasizes the need to bridge formal instruction with informal learning opportunities, encouraging learners to integrate English into their daily lives. By doing so, they become not only proficient users of the language, but also autonomous and confident individuals prepared to navigate the globalized world. The findings presented here offer valuable insights into the practices and potential of high school EFL learners, providing a foundation for further exploration of effective language learning strategies in similar contexts.

While this study provides valuable insights into the engagement of Romanian high school EFL learners with out-of-class contexts (OOCs), certain limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research is geographically confined to four schools in Hunedoara County, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other regions or educational systems. Second, the study primarily relies on self-reported data from questionnaires, diaries,

and interviews, which, while rich in qualitative depth, may be influenced by participants' subjective perspectives or recall bias. Additionally, the study focuses exclusively on high school learners, excluding younger or older age groups whose experiences with OOCs may vary significantly. The absence of long-term follow-up further limits the ability to measure the sustained impact of OOCs on learners' language proficiency over time. Finally, cultural and contextual factors unique to Romania may not fully reflect the experiences of EFL learners in other countries, suggesting the need for further research across diverse populations to validate and expand the findings.

References:

- Barker, D. (2004). *The social context of language learning: A study of attitudes and motivation in second language acquisition*.
- Benson, P. (2011). *Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning*. London: Routledge.
- Bialystok, E. (1994). Analysis and control in the development of second language proficiency. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 16(2), 157–168.
- Cabot, H. (2016). 'Refugee Vvices': Tragedy, ghosts, and the anthropology of not knowing. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 45(6), 645-672.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gass, S. M., (1997). *Input, interaction, and the second language learner*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Hyland, K. (2004). *Genre and second language writing*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Igoudin, L. (2013). Social identity and language learning motivation: Exploring the connection and activating learning. *International perspectives on motivation* (pp. 192-214). London: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://10.1057/9781137000873_11
- Kitchakarn, O. (2016). How students perceived social media as a learning tool in enhancing their language learning performance. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 15(4), 53-60.
- Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. London: Longman.
- Lomicka, L., & Lord, G. (2009). The next generation: Social networking and online collaboration in foreign language learning. *CALICO Journal*, 26(2), 371-397.
- Long, M. H. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. C. Ritchie & T. K. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 413–468). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

- Meştereagă, E. (2021). *The role of out-of-class contexts in EFL learning*. Timişoara: Editura Universităţii de Vest.
- Norton, B. (1995). Social identity, investment, and language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(1), 9-31.
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2011). Identity, language learning, and social change. *Language Teaching*, 44(4), 412-446.
- Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C. (2015). *Key issues in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sundqvist, P. (2009). *Extramural English matters: Out-of-School English and its impact on Swedish ninth graders' oral proficiency and vocabulary*. [Doctoral dissertation, Karlstad University].
- Sundqvist, P., & Sylvén, L. K. (2016). *Extramural English in teaching and learning: From theory and research to practice*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In S. Gass & C. Madden (Eds.), *Input in second language acquisition* (pp. 235–253). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Toma, A. & D. Dejica. (2023). Mental translation and its contribution to communicative language teaching and learning. *Professional Communication and Translation Studies*, 16 / 2023, 120-126. Timisoara: Editura Politehnica.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wisdom, J., & Creswell, J. W. (2013). Mixed methods: Integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis while studying patient-centered medical home models. *PCMH Research Methods Series 13*, 1-5. Rockville: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.
- Zhou, Y. (2021). Impacts of social media on language learning: A review of literature. *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Humanities Education and Social Sciences (ICHESS 2021)*.