

## **The Routledge Handbook of Language Learning and Teaching Beyond the Classroom**

**Edited by Hayo Reinders, Chun Lai and Pia Sundqvist**

### **Introduction – Language learning and teaching beyond the classroom**

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An estimated 80 % of adult learning takes place outside of formal education (Cross, 2007). For additional/foreign/second language (L2) learning, it is likely that out-of-class experiences play an equally important role. The vast amount of time and the diversified experiences essential to language development makes in-class learning insufficient in meeting the language development need. Out-of-class language learning not only constitutes an important context for personally meaningful and authentic language exposure and use, but also plays essential roles in maintaining motivation in learning (Reinders, 2022). Language learning beyond the classroom is a common phenomenon among language learners, and is part and parcel in language development (Cole & Vanderplank, 2016; Dressman & Sadler, 2019). It is therefore surprising that the role of informal language learning outside the classroom is not given its due attention in second language education field, with the vast majority of research instead focusing on classroom methods, materials, and interaction.

In effect, language learning beyond the classroom is not a new phenomenon, and has existed in one form or another since the emergence of ‘schooled’ second language education. However, its scale has exponentially accelerated with the development of technology, in particular the arrival of the internet in the 90s, as technology makes learning beyond the classroom much more accessible. The increased scale of language learning beyond the classroom raises its importance for language education, and has started to draw researchers’ attention. Studies from a range of backgrounds have started to explore the important contribution of informal language learning, both in its own right, and in its relationship with classroom learning and teaching. The rise of research attention aligns with the surge of interest in informal learning in education in general in the early 2000s (Ito et al., 2020; Malcolm, Hodgkinson & Colley, 2003), and intertwines with the development in language pedagogy and the use of technology in teaching and learning. Studies in the areas of learner autonomy, learning strategies, study abroad, work-based learning, language support, learners’ voices, self-regulated learning, computer-mediated communication (CMC), computer-assisted language learning (CALL), mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), education for migrants, digital gaming, and many others, all add to our understanding of the complex and intersecting ways in which learners construct their own L2 learning experiences, drawing from a wide range of resources, including materials, teachers, self-study, technology, other learners, and native speakers (see, e.g., Benson & Reinders, 2011). The existing body of research has generated a rich understanding about informal language learning, which calls for and forms the basis of efforts to solidify and bring together the insights from various disciplines to present the current state of knowledge in one accessible *Handbook*, to provide a sound and comprehensive basis for researchers and graduate students in all languages to build their own research on. This *Handbook of Language Learning and Teaching Beyond the Classroom* provides a comprehensive overview of the existing body of literature related to language learning and teaching beyond the walls of the classroom, presenting current conceptualizations, research findings, and methodological issues on informal L2 learning and

teaching in various contexts. While the scope of this *Handbook* is broad, a clear focus on *learning beyond the classroom* (LBC) runs through its three parts and all included chapters.

### **What do we mean by Language Learning and Teaching Beyond the Classroom?**

As is common in all young fields of research, a plethora of closely-related terms tends to emerge, denoting more or less similar concepts. We would like to take this opportunity to position *language learning and teaching beyond the classroom* (LLTBC) in relation to some of these frequently used terms and concepts that have been proposed over the last two decades or so.

Some of these terms highlight the real-life and situate nature of LLTBC. Take one of the most recent concepts, *language learning in the digital wild* (or *wilds*), as an example. Sauro and Zourou (2017) define this as “informal language learning that takes places in digital spaces, communities, and networks that are independent of formal instructional contexts” (Sauro & Zourou, 2017, p. 186). Their definition first appeared in a call for papers for a special issue on ‘CALL in the digital wilds’ with the journal *Language Learning & Technology*. In the published issue (Sauro & Zourou, 2019) they describe learning in the digital wilds as not determined or controlled by educational institutions and as occurring in digital contexts or communities where the main aim is not necessarily L2 teaching or learning. Another feature they highlighted is that learning is driven or initiated by the learner, and not directly mediated by matters such as educational policy and evaluation. We may add that the core term *the wild* was originally coined by Hutchins (1995), to refer to real life, situated cognition.

Others underscore the informal nature of LLTBC. Examples are Sockett’s (2014) *online informal learning of English* (OILE) as well as Lee and Dressman’s (2018) *informal digital learning of English* (IDLE). So is Sundqvist’s (2009) earlier term *Extramural English* (EE), which she coined to refer to “the English [that] learners come in contact with or are involved in outside the walls of the classroom” (p. 1). In stark contrast to OILE and IDLE, Extramural English encompasses both digital and non-digital activities and incidental as well as intentional learning, and EE is therefore more clearly unrelated to schooling or educational institutions, which makes that term broader in comparison – and possibly closer in meaning to the recently suggested learning in the (digital) wild(s). The concept of Extramural English is explored in more depth in Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016), where they further emphasize the fact that EE always is initiated by the learner. Further, they propose a quadrant model of language learning (and to a certain extent also of teaching). According to their model, L2 learning can be explained with the help of two dimensions: the learner’s driving force for learning the target language (which is connected to the level of formality in learning), and the learner’s physical location when carrying out (or being exposed to) an activity using the target language (in this case, English). The driving force is illustrated as a horizontal axis (from 100 % other-initiated to 100 % learner-initiated) and the location as a vertical axis (from the learner sitting at the desk in a classroom in the home country to a place as far away as possible). The symbolic origo, then, would correspond to language learning that is partially initiated by the learner and partially by the teacher, and it would take place right at the wall of the classroom in the home country. Learners who step *beyond* that wall and, for example, put their headphones on and start listening to music in English engage in a prototypical extramural activity. Sundqvist (2019) has later proposed the term *Extramural L<sub>n</sub>* in reference to any L2, because the principles at play in Extramural English apply also to other target languages, such as learning Japanese extramurally in Saudi Arabia (Al-Nofaie, 2018).

In addition, a vast number of other terms have also been used in studies from different parts of the world to describe the phenomenon of L2 learning beyond the classroom, such as *after-school*, *autonomous*, *extracurricular*, *independent*, *informal*, *naturalistic*, *non-formal*, *out-of-class*, *out-of-school*, *self-directed*, *self-instructed* and *unintentional* language learning. By proposing a general theoretical framework that highlights four distinct dimensions of L2 learning beyond the classroom – *location*, *formality*, *pedagogy*, and *locus of control* – Benson (2011) attempts not only to explain the scope of L2 learning that actually takes place beyond classroom walls, but also teaching beyond those walls. While *beyond* teaching may sound like a contradiction in terms, Benson's framework offers guidance. For example, with regard to the first dimension (location), at least in some parts of the world, it is common with tutorial lessons in learners' homes. Benson exemplifies this with reference to Hong Kong, where older students attending the university or secondary school offer tutorial lessons (one-to-one) in the homes of younger students, often as a way of financing their own studies (Benson, 2011). Thus, tutoring is one clear example of teaching beyond the classroom, which can be explained theoretically by considering the location of L2 learning/teaching.

Whether learning/teaching is formal or informal is connected with Benson's (2011) second dimension: formality. In essence, formality refers to "the degree to which learning is independent of organized courses leading to formal qualifications" (p. 10). Whereas LLTBC typically is informal, some learners may perceive that they are also being taught (cf. formal). For instance, in a young learner study from Denmark, one of the participants, Antonio, describes how he often searched on the internet to find information related to the digital games he played, letting YouTube teach him (Hannibal Jensen, 2019).

The third dimension (pedagogy) concerns the role of pedagogy as well as types of pedagogy involved in L2 learning beyond the classroom, and especially when learning has an element of instruction to it. Only to give two examples, self-instructed and naturalistic learning (mentioned above) can be explained by this third dimension of LLTBC. These two examples "lie at two ends of a continuum", according to Benson (2011, p. 11), as he explains how L2 learners in self-instructed learning can choose to read certain books or watch certain programs designed for the purpose of learning, while in comparison, in naturalistic learning, regular books or programs can be chosen but without any intent to learn. More precisely, Benson (p. 12) suggests there will be a shift of focus the moment a learner becomes engaged in the latter activity, from paying attention to focusing on "communication, enjoyment or learning something other than the language itself."

The final dimension is locus of control. He argues that "the underlying conditions for locus of control in language learning are (...) highly variable" (p. 12), but what is clear is that out-of-school settings tend to demand that learners make their own decisions about their own learning. Thus, in language learning beyond the classroom, learners are in control.

With this discussion on closely-related terms as a backdrop, we would suggest that LLTBC is the broadest term of them all, and thus the broadest currently used in this field of research. LLTBC distinguishes itself from each of the other terms accounted for, in different ways. Its closest 'relative' (very similar conceptualization) would be learning through Extramural L<sub>n</sub> engagement, but LLTBC still differs in that the teaching component is much more pronounced in LLTBC.

**What are the aims of this handbook?**

As this is an emerging research field, and despite the accumulating empirical evidence, the theoretical basis of LLTBC is still quite weak. As the previous section suggests, the field is quite indeterminate with a wide range of terminologies used. What does the theoretical concept of LLTBC entail? What are its different dimensions? How does it relate to associated terms such as autonomy, motivation, and identity? As LLTBC has its theoretical basis in a variety of fields, reaching a clear theoretical demarcation of LLTBC and its constitutive elements might be a daunting task. However, the answers to these questions may provide the initial steps towards achieving conceptual clarity, and will hopefully enable scholars in this field to work from a shared starting point and continue to chart out the field to enrich our understanding.

As LLTBC highlights both language learning and teaching beyond the classroom, we highlight the roles of external parties, other than the learners, in shaping their learning experience, and the interaction of the formal and informal components of language education. Although we have witnessed an increase in research on LLTBC in recent years, the majority of this body of literature has focused on observing and profiling the nature and effects of language learners' self-directed incidental learning beyond the classroom. This handbook aims to accumulate the insights from the field on how learners' experiences beyond the classroom may be shaped by external forces, and hence be better supported. By solidifying these insights, we hope to draw greater attention to the field, in order to facilitate a dialogue between researchers in the areas of both formal and informal learning, so as to coordinate the affordances of both in language education.

Researching LLTBC is a difficult task since it is not easy to keep records of learners' behaviors in informal contexts. Thus, many existing studies rely on self-report data, which suffers from a number of methodological challenges. Thus, more innovative approaches are needed in this field to provide more objective, in-depth insights into learners' out-of-class behaviors. This handbook aims to provide a collection of innovative methods and related methodological issues in researching LLTBC so that researchers in this field can have a repertoire of methodological tools to rely on.

### **What did we ask our contributors to do?**

To ensure uniformity in terms of chapter structure, we asked all our contributors to follow a similar outline for their chapter. That is, we instructed them to provide a brief overview of the chapter topic and its importance in an introduction. We then asked for a section on key constructs, which should offer readers an overview of how those constructs have been defined, operationalized, and developed over time. Next we asked our authors to discuss key issues that researchers and practitioners are currently facing related to the specific chapter topic. We also wanted everybody to include a section on the implications of the current state of the field for theory and practice, and to offer some ideas about future directions. In short, where is the field moving to? Each chapter then ends with three reflective questions as well as three annotated recommended reading tips. Altogether, we hope the chapter closings will be welcome to those readers who wish to learn more about specific chapter topics.

### **The scope and outline of this volume**

This *Handbook* consists of three major sections: Part I – Mapping LBC, Part II – Supporting LBC, and Part III – Researching LBC. This type of division is slightly different from other Handbooks in the series but given the relatively emergent status of the field, we feel that this tripartite division will be the most useful to our readers.

Part I, *Mapping LBC*, provides an overview of the broad and emerging field of learning, but also teaching, beyond the classroom. It covers the key concepts, theoretical underpinnings, and historical developments that have contributed to our current understanding of what LBC is (and what it is not), its core components, and its manifestations across different learner and environmental characteristics. There are 8 chapters in Part I.

Part II, *Supporting LBC*, presents an overview of learners' engagement in various informal learning contexts, reviews the factors that shape these contexts, ranging from teacher instructional practices inside the classroom to learner beliefs and capacities outside the classroom, to the design of learning experiences and resources across both spheres. This section also discusses how these factors could be facilitated, ranging from explicit preparatory programmes (e.g., learner training), to the provision of resources and support that aim to bridge more and less formal education (e.g., self-access and language advising), as well as the design and implementation of resources and environments to be used by learners themselves (e.g., digital games and language exchange). There are 12 chapters in Part II.

Part III, *Researching LBC*, includes chapters that target different topics relating to researching LBC. This includes overviews and critical evaluations of tools and instruments that have previously been used in LBC research, discussions on how to gather and utilize data about both young and adult learners' LBC, discussions on learning analytics and data mining, and central methodological issues, such as questions about validity, reliability and not least ethical issues in LBC research. This section also includes empirical papers that address pedagogy and technology in relation to researching LBC. There are 10 chapters in Part III.

## Conclusion

The call for papers and invitations to this Handbook were sent out in January of 2020. Little did we know then about the challenges a pandemic would pose on the work of actually completing this Handbook, not only for us as editors, but of course also for our authors. Finalizing this volume has been a huge joint effort and there are numerous people to whom we owe a debt of gratitude. First of all we would like to thank the authors themselves. We sent invitations to authoritative as well as upcoming scholars in the field, and they all went to great lengths in order to meet our different deadlines and help us with other requests throughout the whole process of completing the volume. We recognize how difficult the process has been and are immensely grateful for all their efforts – and proud of the results. Second, we would like to thank Katie Peace from Routledge whose support and assistance have been much appreciated, from day one when we first proposed the idea of this Handbook. We also appreciate that Routledge was patient when we had to change the time line somewhat because of the unforeseen circumstances. And finally, producing a volume with a total of 30 chapters demands time and we are forever grateful to our families, and particularly to Aylina (Hayo), Jun (Chun), and Martin (Pia).

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