

**LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND THE NEW MILLENNIALS' LITERACIES****Ana Osuna<sup>1\*</sup>, Carlos Zavala<sup>2</sup>, Ma. Reynoso<sup>3</sup> and Ileana Osuna<sup>4</sup>**<sup>1\*</sup> student in Education, Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, program affiliated to PNPC of CONACYT<sup>2</sup>PhD in Social Sciences, Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, program affiliated to PNPC of CONACYT. Full-time professor researcher<sup>3</sup>PhD student in Education, Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, program affiliated to PNPC of CONACYT<sup>4</sup>PhD student in Education, Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, program affiliated to PNPC of CONACYTDOI: 10.5281/zenodo.1161740

---

**Keywords:** English, learning, millennials, literacies, Internet**Abstract**

Although Mexico has made efforts to teach English to students for more than seven decades, the results of its policies have not been as expected. However, young people who have reached successful levels of language proficiency could show us other factors they interact with that let them achieve those proficiency levels. These students, called millennials, learn differently from their predecessors and their learning scenarios are no longer found only at school. Internet, an environment where they invest half of their day, could be more than a mere distractor as has been stated. This work is part of an unfinished research that seeks to analyze the relationship between the use of the Internet for leisure purposes and the learning of English as a foreign language in young students. A mixed perspective with a sequential explanatory design is used, where at first the data of a survey applied to students reveals that those with language proficiency use their interaction with different leisure activities on the Internet to learn and improve their linguistic competence. This daily contact becomes a fund of knowledge that allows them to develop their level of English, both in informality and in formal language learning at school.

---

**Introduction**

Millennials are young people born between 1982 and 2000, who are still mostly students; respond to very different motivations than previous generations (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Gifted with notorious skills in the use of information technologies, their social environment is in permanent contact with the screens: smart phones, tablets or computers; and with them the Internet, social networks and audiovisual content where they spend little more than eight hours a day as part of their free time, according to the latest studies on Internet usage habits in Mexico (Internet.mx, 2017).

This frequent interaction in virtual communities is criticized and classified as a waste of time. However, there are young people who say that this constant contact with the Internet is a valuable space of literacy, where the learning of tools such as the English proficiency as a foreign language while having fun is developed. In a country that has tried to teach English as a foreign language for more than 70 years, its effort have not reached the expected results, since several sources point out that of the Mexican students who enter the preparatory school, after three years of secondary instruction in public schools, 79% of them do not speak English at all (O'Donoghue, 2015) and the results are not very different with university students.

Based on the aforementioned, this research seeks to answer the following questions: How is the use of the internet with leisure purposes and the learning of English as a foreign language related in young students? What contact do young people have with the Internet and with what activities? What language skills are practiced with



## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH SCIENCE & MANAGEMENT

the use of the Internet for leisure, if they do?

The mixed perspective directs the investigation routes and at first, in the quantitative part, a survey is carried out to about 200 students where, with the help of the *SPSS* program, the so criticized space of recreation of young people is explored and it gives a description of interesting findings that this interaction generates.

### Methodology

The particular type of methodological perspective that was chosen, the explanatory sequential design, begins with a quantitative phase that includes the design and application of a survey and in a second moment, given the difficulty of observing students in their free time at home, the in-depth interview follows. This document examines the results of the first phase of the research, the quantitative one.

The survey, of 48 questions, was adapted from three sources: *11º informe de estudio sobre los hábitos de los usuarios de Internet en México*, prepared by the AMIPCI (Mexican Internet Association) (Internet.mx, 2017), of *Informe Análisis de uso y consumo de medios y redes sociales en Internet entre los adolescentes españoles. Características y prácticas de riesgo* (García-Jiménez, López de Ayala, & García, 2013) presented in 2009 by the Ministry of Science and Innovation and *World Internet Project Capítulo México* (Islas, Arribas, & Gutiérrez, 2011) carried out in 2011.

Subsequently the instrument was reviewed by 5 experts (two of them members of the National System of Researchers in the area of Information Technology, another two with postgraduate studies in Education and specialists in learning and teaching EFL (English as a foreign language) and a last expert who is a specialist in scales). Two pilots were applied and the values of the Cronbach's Alpha (.859, .887 and .640 in 3 of the 4 sections of the survey) calculated by the *SPSS* program (*Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*) were calculated. It considers that the instrument applied in this quantitative part is valid and reliable.

It was applied, mostly, to students of a public university language center that houses students with very diverse socio-demographic characteristics. We also surveyed students studied English only at their school (both private and public ones).

### Results

#### Profile of the students

When analyzing the survey applied to a total of 176 students of English as a FL, the following is observed: 63.42% of the respondents are women and the remaining 36.58% are men. The average age of the respondents is 20 years, which corresponds to the generation called millennials, and the average monthly family income is around \$ 8,870 pesos. Regarding the place of residence and schooling of the students; 14.2% of the total of the respondents live in rural communities, of which 60% of them have finished or are doing professional studies. While 85.8% of the students surveyed reside in the urban area; of them, 12.5% study secondary school, 39.58% preparatory school, 46.5% of them are professional students and 1.38% are students or have completed a master's degree or a PhD.

#### Frequency and time of connection to Internet

The appearance of computers and later the Internet were permeating the daily life of most people. Young people are those who most appropriated the use and enjoyment of these environments. Thus, young people work, get informed, learn and socialize through the screens. The data provided in figure 1 shows which percentage of these students are connected every day and the number of hours per day related to the level of English proficiency of these students. It is observed as a greater command of the language, a higher percentage of students connect to



## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH SCIENCE & MANAGEMENT

the Internet every day. From all the basic level young people interviewed, 73% of them are connected every day and 32% do so for more than 5 hours. 80% of the intermediate level connects daily and 32% do so for more than five hours, while of the high level students, 80% are online every day, but 60% do it for more than five hours. Finally, the total of advanced level students (100%) connects to the Internet every day and more than five hours a day.

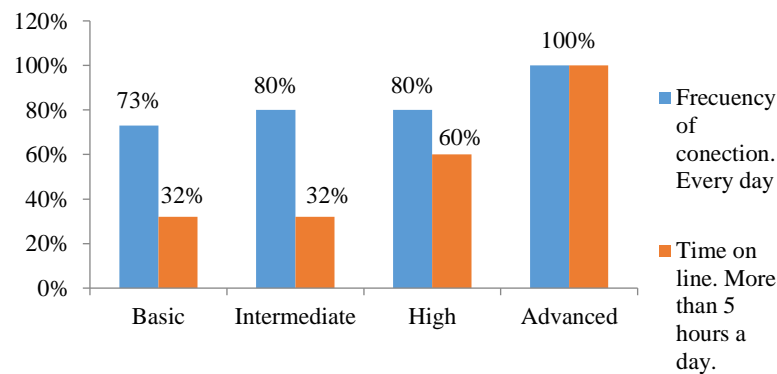


Figure1. Frequency and online time

### Leisure activities on the Internet and its connection with English

Socialization in our days has undergone profound changes, smart phones and the Internet took the place of business cards, the phone book, the camera, the radio and the music player, among others. In addition, they opened new spaces for digital socialization and became an important part of the daily life of young people and adults. They shortened distances, announced products and services and even made people match up with the same sense of humor.

Of those interactions with fun of young people figure 2 reports that 17.30% of respondents said they are always in touch with the language when using the streaming company Netflix to watch series and films in English. Some of the series with subtitles in Spanish, others with subtitles in English, but all of them with the original voices of the actors in the language. The next activity where more students practice it is when they download movies and see them in English (8.60% of them always do it). Youtube videos and programs, which 7.50% of them always see in English, are also part of their leisure time. 7% of young people say that the file download is always done in English and 6.70% of them always use English when they connect to social networks. Finally, 4% of them play video games online in English and, without being fun, another 4% always do homework in English. The following figures give us more details of their contact with most of these activities.



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH SCIENCE & MANAGEMENT

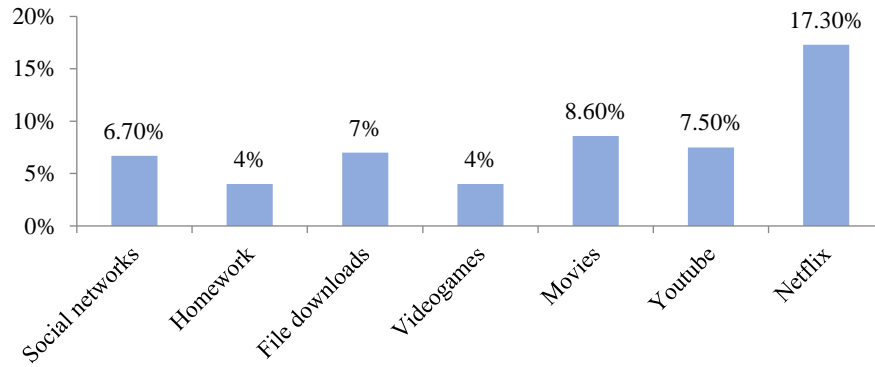


Figure2. Leisure activities where English is always used on the Internet

Streaming companies and websites

It can be seen in Figure 3 that of the total number of students with a basic level, only 7.61% declare that they are always in contact with English through Netflix programming, a quarter of students with an intermediate level of language proficiency (25%) always watches programming in English, 40% of high-level students do it with the same frequency and more than three-quarters of advanced-level students (85.71%) do so always as well. Regarding the use of YouTube (which some classify as a social network), of the students with a basic level 3.77% of them watch videos in English always, 7.14% of the intermediate level also always and more than two third parties of young people with an advanced level (71.42%) see them with the same frequency.

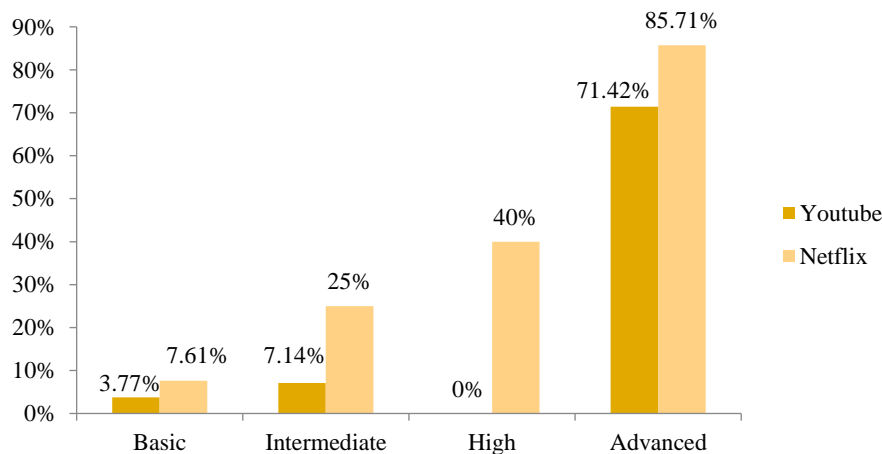


Figure3. Level of proficiency and use of Netflix and Youtube always in English

Types of social networks and English

The data suggest that social networks represent one of the favorite socialization spaces of young people and that this socialization generates learning in the English domain. Of which social networks students prefer, figure 4 shows information. More than half of young people who use English very frequently (53.94%) assert that they do it on Facebook. 14.47% of them use Whatsapp to practice English, on Twitter 7.23% of users very frequently do it in English and 11.18% of them use Instagram with information in English with the same frequency. A



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH SCIENCE & MANAGEMENT

1.97% of them connect to *Snapchat* with information in English very frequently and 1.31% prefers *Pinterest* in that language and with that same frequency. Finally 9.86% use other social networks with information in English very frequently, mention *Youtube*, *Messenger* and *Tumblr*.

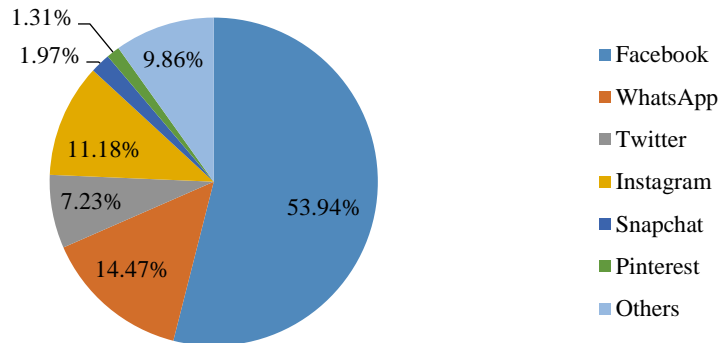


Figure4. Types of social networks used in English very frequently

## Social networks and English

Our contacts are those who directly deal with updating their own data, the computer application that we use to manage our social network takes care of reminding us of the birthdays and events of our agenda. The social network itself emerges as a virtual space in which participants can share information, photos, videos, links of interest, but also communicate, chat, tell what they are doing at that time and even what is the mood of each one (Orihuela, 2008, 60).

Social networks have become the space where young people socialize and build their identities. In addition to the fun activities, there are new learning schemes that these environments promote. In this order of ideas, in figure 5 it can be seen that of the students surveyed at the basic level, 45% of them are always in contact with social networks and of that percentage only 3.77% use English. Of the intermediate level 44.6% are always connected to networks and only 3.57% use English, while of the total of high level students 80% are always in contact with social networks and of that amount 20% use English. To finish with advanced level students where 85.7% of them are always connected to social networks and 71.42% do so in English.

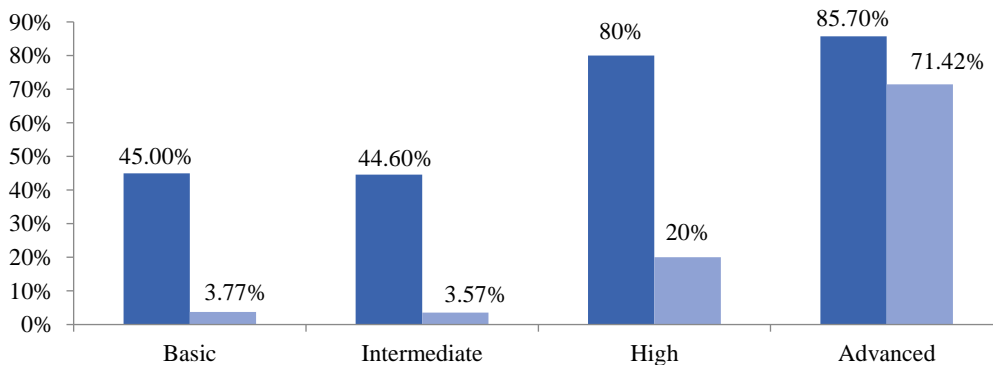


Figure5. Contact with Social Networks and level of English

**Video games**

The enjoyment of online video games is an activity that has been practiced by more and more people, however, it is still an activity that mostly men practice since only 1.8% of women surveyed claim to always play video games in English, while 7.8% of men do it with the same frequency in that language. Of how the relation of contact with video games in English behaves according to the level of language proficiency, can be observed on figure 6: of all the students with basic level who play videogames very frequently, only 4.71% of them do it in English, while Intermediate students who play video games online in English with the same frequency do so at 10.71% and 42.85% at the advanced level play them in English with the same frequency. Again in this activity it is notorious that students with the highest command of the language use their leisure time online to learn English.

The type of game students play is related to the practice of different language skills, and for example, those who play *Call of Duty* rarely read and write since they listen and speak English more frequently during the game. On the other hand, students argue that when playing *FIFA* there is no frequent oral communication and what is practiced is reading.

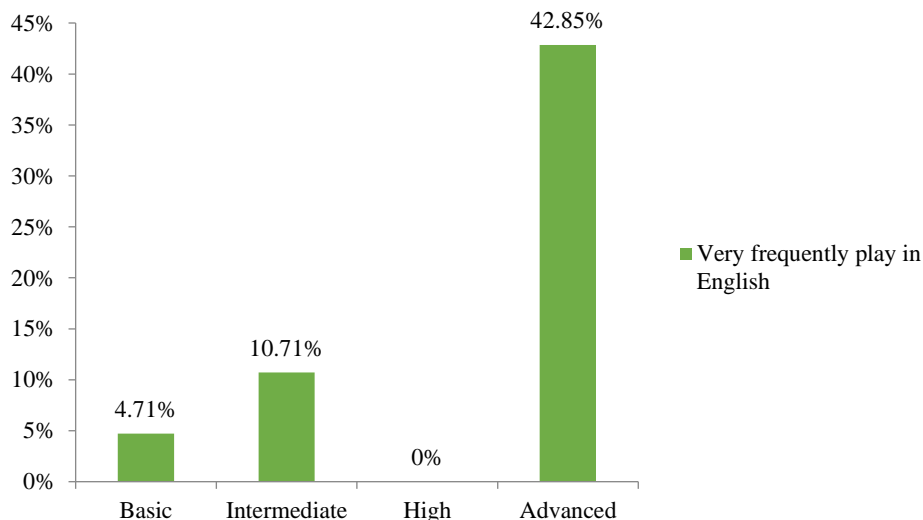


Figure6. Videogames and English

**Contact with native speakers and English learning**

Figure 7 shows that of the total number of students with a basic level, only .93% said they always had contact with English speakers during their leisure activities online, 5.35% of those with an intermediate level interact with English speakers with the same frequency. From all high level students 40% of them always practice English with other people on the Internet and of the advanced ones 71.42% do it with the same frequency. They were questioned if they considered that they learn English when they are having fun on the Internet and how often they did it. A 3.73% of the basics always learn the language, 10.71% of intermediate level also, while 40% of high level students do it with the same frequency. Finally, 71.42% of the advanced level students indicate that they always learn English through the Internet in their leisure activities. It is evident that the level of English proficiency is related to the frequency of contact with English speakers and the development of linguistic competence in that language.



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH SCIENCE & MANAGEMENT

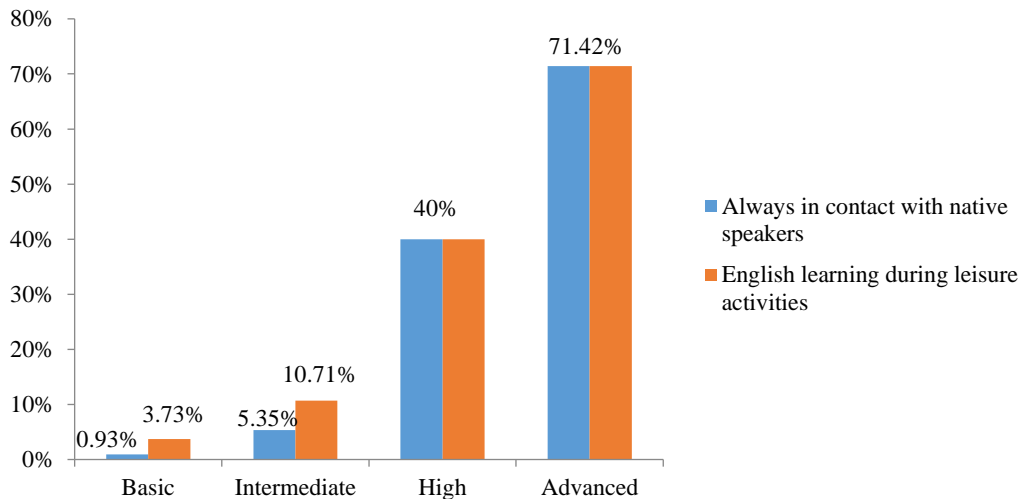


Figure7. Contact with English speakers and language learning on the Internet

**English language skills and Internet**

In the process of learning a foreign language, the development of the four language skills is not carried out uniformly. The skill that is most developed depends on diverse factors such as: the interests of the student, their personal skills and the wealth of information that their context provides. The use of the Internet is a context that not only promotes the mastery of language skills, it is also a space of opportunities for learning the so-called skills of the 21st century, among others: collaboration skills, communication skills, self-direction skills, global connections and using technology as a tool for learning (Ravitz, Hixson, English, & Megendoller, 2012).

Figure 8 shows information about the language skills most developed by students when using the Internet for leisure. The most developed skill is oral comprehension when it is affirmed that by 35.15% of the total of the respondents, the reading follows with a 29.69% of them, 20% affirms that they develop the oral competence and what is less developed is the writing skill with a 13.33%.

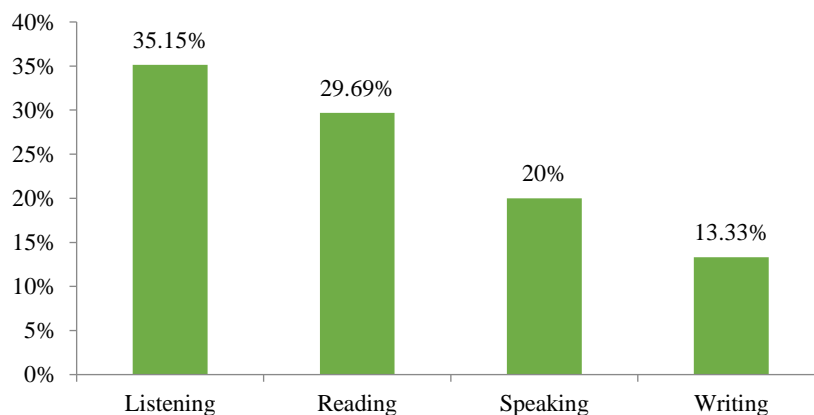


Figure8. English skills and the use of Internet

When observing the results of the quantitative part of the investigation comes to our mind some concepts that the sociocultural perspective of Vygotsky, in the first instance, and the theory of cognitive resources later



contribute to the observed dimensions.

The sociocultural theorists affirm that the individual develops thinking skills while reflecting on what the other say and means and what he himself responds to his interlocutor, either in written or oral form. This interaction between individuals provokes a process of mutual learning and speaks of the zone of proximal development, where the support of an interested interlocutor can promote the learning of an apprentice, be this student or partner in some social situation (Vygotsky, 1995). This scenario responds to the characteristics of the students of this study, with the difference that the support of the interlocutor that promotes learning is not physically present, but online. Likewise, Vygotsky (1995) points out that groups of people develop characteristics dictated by their historical and social context. Millennials are not the exception. His skills and socialization mediated by the Internet define their ways not only to communicate, work and consume, but also to learn.

The funds of knowledge theory helps to interpret the problem studied. This perspective sees learning as a social process that develops in diverse environments: historical, political, ideological and cultural, among others. Environments that affect the student, who comes to the classroom with knowledge that has been provided by his life experiences (González, Moll, & Amanthi, 2009). In the same order of ideas, this theory holds that cognitive resources are repositories of knowledge that are activated by the frequent interaction and exchange of information that occurs in the practice of significant daily activities. In the learning of a foreign language, in this case English, the systems of information exchange that constitute the funds of knowledge of the students, since they cannot be developed with native speakers in person, are developed in virtual information exchange systems; Internet and its audiovisual contents mainly. It becomes a repository of important knowledge that may or may not connect to the node that is the classroom at school. That possible connection of nodes: leisure activities on Internet and classroom learning could be made if students, teachers and schools are aware of its importance in the learning process. Are they of it?

## Conclusions

Today adolescence and adulthood involve the building of communities and identities in relation to changing textual and media landscapes. They involve finding a way forward in what is an increasingly volatile and uncertain job market, and negotiating a consumer society fraught with risk, where written and media texts are used to position, construct, sell, and define individuals at every turn in virtually every domain of everyday life, in the shopping mall and the school, online and face to face (Luke & Elkins, 1998, p. 6).

Young people with a higher command of English use their contact with the Internet for leisure activities as a cognitive resource that leads them to a significant learning of the language despite what is commonly thought of their time invested in such activities. It is confirmed that, as suggested by Mei Yi Lin and Ocampo (2008), in learning English as a FL it is necessary to take into account the new informal juvenile literacies; to digital media such as the Internet with its social networks and other audiovisual contents full of emotion and meaning, which may be waiting to be perceived and included in avant-garde educational scheme.

**Author Contributions:** Ana Osuna supervised the theoretical approach, collected some empirical evidence and wrote the first draft of the paper; Carlos Zavala supervised the methodological approach of the research; Ma. Reynoso and Ileana Osuna collected some empirical evidence and collaborate with the first draft redaction.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.



**References**

1. García, A., & López de Ayala, M. &. (24 de Noviembre de 2016). *Hábitos de uso en Internet y en las redes sociales de los adolescentes españoles*. Obtenido de <http://dx.doi.org/10.3916/C41-2013-19>
2. García-Jiménez, A., López de Ayala, M., & García, B. (2013). Hábitos de uso en Internet y en las redes sociales en adolescentes españoles. *Comunicar* , 195-204.
3. González, N., Moll, L., & Amanthi, C. (2009). *Funds of Knowledge.Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities and Classrooms*. EUA: LEA Publishers.
4. Howe, N., & Strauss, B. (2000). *Millennials rising: The next great generation*. USA: Vintagebooks.
5. Internet.mx, A. d. (2017). *13° Estudio sobre los Hábitos de los Usuarios de Internet en México*. México: INFOTEC y Estadística Digital.
6. Islas, O., Arribas, A., & Gutiérrez, F. (16 de Agosto de 2011). *Análisis comparativo de los resultados del Estudio sobre hábitos de los usuarios de Internet en México*. Recuperado el 16 de Enero de 2018, de <http://www.redalyc.org/comocitar.ou?id=199520010045>
7. Luke, A., & Elkins, J. (1998). Reinventing literacy in "New times". *Journal of Adolescent & adult literacy* , 4-7.
8. O'Donoghue, J. (2015). *Sorry. El aprendizaje del inglés en México*. México, D.F.: Mexicanos Primero.
9. Orihuela, J. L. (2008). Internet: la hora de las redes sociales. *Nueva Revista* , 57-62.
10. Ravitz, J., Hixson, N., English, M., & Megendoller, J. (2012). Using project based learning to teach 21st Century skills: Findings from a statewide initiative. *AERA* , 1-9.
11. Valles, M. (2002). *Cuadernos metodológicos. Entrevistas cualitativas*. Madrid: CIS.
12. Vygotsky, L. (1995). *Pensamiento y Lenguaje*. México: Ediciones Fausto.