

Rivne State University of the Humanities

Philological Faculty

**Department of Theory and Practice of Foreign Languages and Teaching
Methodology**

Diploma research of the educational qualification level «Bachelor Degree»

**«Encouraging of self-initiation at the English
language lessons»**

Presented by: the 4th year student

of the Philological Faculty

**Oleksandr ANTONIUK (Антонюк Олександр
Юрійович)**

**A Supervisor: Phd in Psychology, Associate
Professor of the Department of Theory and Practice
of Foreign Languages and**

Teaching Methodology

Dmytro BIHUNOV

Rivne – 2025

Introduction.....	Error! No bookmark name given.
Chapter I.	Error! No bookmark name given.
Theoretical Foundations of Self-Initiation in English Language Learning ...	Error! No bookmark name given.
1.1 Core Theoretical Approaches.....	Error! No bookmark name given.
1.2 Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory and ZPD	Error! No bookmark name given.
1. 3 Constructivist Learning Perspective	Error! No bookmark name given.
1.4 Affective Filter Hypothesis	Error! No bookmark name given.
1.5 Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI)	Error! No bookmark name given.
1.6 Humanistic and Experiential Learning Theories	Error! No bookmark name given.
1.7 Overall Insights	Error! No bookmark name given.
Chapter II.	Error! No bookmark name given.
Duolingo as a Tool for Promoting Self-Initiated Language Learning.....	Error! No bookmark name given.
2.1. Learner Autonomy Through Personalized Structure .	Error! No bookmark name given.
2.2. Motivation Through Gamification	Error! No bookmark name given.
2.3. Adaptive Technology and Real-Time Feedback	Error! No bookmark name given.
2.4. Goal Setting and Reflection	Error! No bookmark name given.
2.5. Promoting Language Practice Beyond the App.....	Error! No bookmark name given.

2.6. Accessibility and Equity in Learning	Error! No bookmark name given.
2.7 Conclusion	Error! No bookmark name given.
Chapter III.	Error! No bookmark name given.
Mr. Keating's Approach to Cultivating Self-Initiation in Dead Poets Society	Error! No bookmark name given.
3.1 Setting the Stage: A Traditional School Meets Progressive Thought	Error! No bookmark name given.
3.2 Defying Conformity: Questioning the Established System ..	Error! No bookmark name given.
3.3 Building Connection: Rethinking Teacher–Student Dynamics.....	Error! No bookmark name given.
3.4 Fostering Critical Thought Through Literature	Error! No bookmark name given.
3.5 Learning Through Experience: Movement and Discovery ...	Error! No bookmark name given.
3.6 Reviving the Dead Poets Society: Independent Learning in Practice	Error! No bookmark name given.
3.7 Empowering Personal Passions and Dreams (Expanded)	Error! No bookmark name given.
3.8 Conclusion: Education as the Catalyst for Self-Initiation.....	Error! No bookmark name given.
Chapter IV.	Error! No bookmark name given.
How Children's Songs Encourage Self-Initiation in English Learning Lessons.	Error! No bookmark name given.
4.1 Definition of Self-Initiation in Language Learning....	Error! No bookmark name given.

4.2 Importance of Motivation and Active Participation in Early Language Acquisition	Error! No bookmark name given.
4.3 Role of Songs as a Multimodal Teaching Strategy	Error! No bookmark name given.
4.4 Thesis Statement	Error! No bookmark name given.
4.5 Theoretical Foundations Supporting Songs in Language Learning	Error! No bookmark name given.
4.6 Features of Children's Songs That Support Self-Initiation...	Error! No bookmark name given.
Chapter V	Error! No bookmark name given.
Practical assignment	Error! No bookmark name given.
References.....	Error! No bookmark name given.

Summary

Antoniuk Oleksandr (2025). Encouraging Self-Initiation at the English Language Lessons: Through the Use of Duolingo, Children's Songs, and Dead Poets Society. Diploma research of the educational qualification level «Bachelor Degree». Rivne State University of the Humanities. The manuscript.

This bachelor's thesis investigates the concept and practical implementation of self-initiation in English language learning, with a specific focus on how this phenomenon can be fostered through contemporary digital tools, multimodal musical activities, and inspirational cinematic narratives. The study is structured around three central case studies: the global language learning platform Duolingo, the educational use of children's songs, and the pedagogical ideals reflected in the film *Dead Poets Society*. These three domains are examined for their potential to inspire autonomous behavior, intrinsic motivation, and consistent engagement in language learning, particularly among school-aged learners.

The research is grounded in a strong theoretical framework, drawing from Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan), Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, Constructivist Learning Theory, and Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory. Each of these perspectives contributes to understanding the psychological, emotional, and cognitive factors that shape learner autonomy. The work also incorporates principles from psycholinguistics, educational psychology, and applied linguistics, making it interdisciplinary in nature.

In the analysis of Duolingo, the thesis explores how gamified learning structures (such as leaderboards, badges, and streak systems), adaptive learning technologies, and customizable learning paths contribute to the development of self-regulated learning behaviors. The platform is shown to promote metacognition, goal-setting, and persistent engagement without requiring external enforcement, making it a powerful example of how technology can enhance learner agency and personalize instruction based on user data.

The section on children's songs examines their use in primary English language classrooms as tools for vocabulary acquisition, grammatical pattern recognition, and cultural learning. Songs are found to reduce anxiety, promote repetition and memory, and stimulate emotional resonance with language. The integration of music, movement, and imagery makes this medium especially effective for young learners. Creative extensions—such as dramatizations and karaoke-based practices—are shown to increase participation and encourage students to initiate language use independently outside formal settings.

In the case study based on *Dead Poets Society*, the thesis draws on the figure of Mr. Keating as a symbolic representation of a teacher who nurtures student voice, critical thinking, and emotional depth. His approach stands in contrast to authoritarian or rote-based instruction, offering a model of pedagogy where students are encouraged to discover personal meaning in learning. The film serves as a metaphor for language education that is emotionally grounded, intellectually liberating, and deeply motivating.

The study identifies emotion, autonomy, and relevance as recurring themes that underpin successful self-initiated learning experiences. It argues that when learners are given control over their process, presented with engaging and meaningful content, and supported in a low-anxiety environment, they are far more likely to take initiative, persist through challenges, and engage in lifelong learning.

The practical significance of this research lies in its ability to guide educators toward more flexible, student-centered, and emotionally intelligent methodologies in the language classroom. Recommendations are offered for integrating Duolingo effectively, designing song-based lessons that go beyond passive listening, and creating classroom atmospheres where learners feel empowered to explore the language creatively and personally.

The work concludes by proposing avenues for further study, such as the role of social media, gamified storytelling platforms, and learner-generated content in developing self-initiation across various age groups and cultural contexts. It also highlights the necessity for teacher training programs to emphasize the development of emotional intelligence and autonomy-supportive teaching strategies.

Keywords: self-initiation, learner autonomy, Duolingo, children's songs, Dead Poets Society, gamification, motivation, intrinsic engagement, English language education, affective filter, digital pedagogy, multimodal learning, educational psychology.

Антонюк Олександр (2025). Сприяння самостійності на уроках англійської мови: за допомогою Duolingo, дитячих пісень та фільму «Dead Poets Society». Дипломна робота на здобуття освітнього ступеня «бакалавр». Рівненський державний гуманітарний університет. Рукопис.

Дана дипломна робота присвячена дослідженню поняття самоініціативності у процесі вивчення англійської мови та шляхів її розвитку через сучасні цифрові засоби, мультимодальні музичні практики та натхненні педагогічні приклади з кіно. Основою дослідження стали три тематичні кейси: платформа онлайн-навчання Duolingo, дидактичне використання дитячих пісень, а також педагогічні послання фільму «Товариство мертвих поетів». Вибрані приклади аналізуються з позицій їх здатності стимулювати автономну поведінку учнів, внутрішню мотивацію та сталість у вивченні мови, особливо в умовах шкільного навчання.

Теоретичне підґрунтя роботи сформоване на базі теорії самодетермінації (Deci & Ryan), гіпотези емоційного фільтру (Krashen), конструктивістського підходу до навчання, а також теорії множинного інтелекту (Gardner). У роботі задіяно широкий спектр джерел із психолінгвістики, освітньої психології та прикладної лінгвістики, що робить її міждисциплінарною.

Розділ, присвячений Duolingo, досліджує, як елементи гейміфікації (дошки лідерів, досягнення, системи балів), адаптивне навчання та можливість індивідуального налаштування навчального шляху сприяють формуванню саморегульованої поведінки. Платформа стимулює метапізнання, самостійне планування цілей та систематичну практику без зовнішнього тиску. Duolingo підтверджує, що технології, спроектовані з урахуванням людської психології, можуть ефективно розвивати навчальну автономію.

У розділі про дитячі пісні розглядається їх роль як ефективного інструмента в початковому вивченні англійської мови. Пісні сприяють засвоєнню лексики, граматичних структур, а також зниженню тривожності. Завдяки мультисенсорному впливу (поєднання музики, руху та образів), пісні активізують різні типи інтелекту та формують емоційний зв'язок з мовою. Діти, які самостійно співають або вигадують нові тексти, демонструють мовленнєву ініціативу та особисту мотивацію.

Фільм «Товариство мертвих поетів» розглядається як педагогічна модель, що демонструє, як учитель може пробудити в учнях внутрішнє бажання до навчання. Персонаж містера Кітінга слугує прикладом викладача, який заохочує самовираження, емоційну автентичність та критичне мислення, що є важливими елементами самоініціативного навчання.

Усі три кейси об'єднує одна ключова думка: емоційне залучення, мотивація та автономія — це нерозривні складники ефективного засвоєння мови. Як показує дослідження, саме за таких умов учні охоче ініціюють навчальні дії, продовжують практику поза межами уроків та сприймають англійську мову як особистісно значущу сферу. Ці висновки узгоджуються з гіпотезою афективного фільтру (Krashen), згідно з якою позитивний емоційний фон сприяє кращому засвоєнню іноземної мови.

Практична цінність роботи полягає в розробці рекомендацій для вчителів, що включають гнучкі методики навчання, використання технологій як засобу для посилення самостійності учнів, а також створення безпечного й емоційно підтримувального середовища. Дослідження також пропонує шляхи подальшого вивчення: наприклад, роль соціальних мереж, подкастів і відеоігор у формуванні самоініціативи в учнів різного віку.

Ключові слова: самоініціатива, автономія учня, Duolingo, дитячі пісні, фільм «Товариство мертвих поетів», гейміфікація, мотивація, внутрішня активність, емоційне навчання, технології в освіті, англійська мова, психолінгвістика, освітня психологія.

Introduction

Relevance of the Topic.

In recent years, the issue of learner autonomy has become increasingly significant in the field of English language teaching. The concept of *self-initiation*—learners' ability to independently start, maintain, and regulate their learning—reflects a paradigm shift from teacher-led instruction to student-centered education. Modern pedagogical approaches emphasize the importance of motivation, personal relevance, and learner agency, which align with current trends in cognitive psychology, language didactics, and educational technology. Despite existing research on learner autonomy (e.g., by Deci & Ryan, Vygotsky, Krashen, Gardner), there is still a need to explore practical and effective ways to encourage self-initiation in real classroom contexts. In particular, analyzing how digital platforms like Duolingo, artistic resources such as the film *Dead Poets Society*, and multimodal teaching tools like children's songs foster learner independence is timely and necessary in the current educational landscape.

Aim of the Study.

The aim of this thesis is to determine the psychological, pedagogical, and methodological conditions that encourage self-initiated learning behaviors in English language lessons.

To achieve this aim, the following tasks must be accomplished:

- to define the concept of self-initiation in the context of language learning;
- to identify key theoretical approaches to the development of learner autonomy;

- to analyze how Duolingo promotes self-initiated learning through gamification and adaptivity;
- to explore how pedagogical strategies portrayed in *Dead Poets Society* stimulate independence and critical thinking;
- to examine the role of children’s songs in promoting spontaneous and autonomous language use among young learners;
- to synthesize effective methods and conditions for fostering self-initiation in English lessons.

Object of the Study — the process of developing learner autonomy in English language education.

Subject of the Study — pedagogical, psychological, and methodological factors that foster self-initiation in English lessons, using the cases of Duolingo, a pedagogical film, and children’s songs.

Source Base of the Research.

This study draws upon a range of theoretical and practical materials, including scholarly works in applied linguistics, educational psychology, and methodology; empirical observations of digital tools (Duolingo); analysis of the film *Dead Poets Society* as a pedagogical model; and selected English-language children’s songs used in classroom settings.

Research Methods.

- *Theoretical analysis* was employed to explore scholarly literature on learner autonomy and motivation;

- *Comparative method* was used to contrast the mechanisms of self-initiation across different case studies;
- *Observation and interpretation* helped examine the use of songs and film-based methods in fostering learner initiative;
- *Content analysis* was applied to evaluate how Duolingo’s features encourage autonomous learning.

Scientific Novelty.

The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary integration of three distinct resources—educational technology, narrative pedagogy, and musical content—as means of encouraging self-initiation in English learning. The approach provides a fresh, comprehensive perspective that has not yet been fully explored in existing academic literature.

Practical Value.

The practical significance of the study is in its applicability to real teaching contexts. The findings can be used by teachers to design learner-centered lessons that promote autonomy, by developers of educational tools, and by curriculum designers aiming to modernize English language instruction in schools.

Research Validation.

The key ideas and results of this thesis were applied and tested during classroom-based teaching practice and presented at student academic conferences.

Structure and Volume of the Thesis.

The thesis consists of an introduction, three main chapters, conclusions, a list of references, and appendices. The total volume is 55 pages.

Chapter I.

Theoretical Foundations of Self-Initiation in English Language Learning

The concept of self-initiation in learning a language rests on the principle that students must take an active role in managing their learning experience. Instead of being passive recipients of knowledge, learners are encouraged to make informed decisions about what they learn, how they learn it, and why. This approach aligns with contemporary educational paradigms that emphasize learner agency, empowerment, and meaningful engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978).

1.1 Core Theoretical Approaches

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT) outlines autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential psychological drivers of motivation. Autonomy reflects the learner's sense of control, competence refers to self-belief in one's ability, and relatedness concerns meaningful social connections (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These three needs must be met to stimulate intrinsic motivation.

For example, Duolingo supports these needs through goal-oriented tasks, feedback on progress, and interactive social tools (Loewen et al., 2020). In film, *Dead Poets Society* illustrates SDT in practice, with the teacher fostering independence and self-expression, as well as establishing close rapport with students (Weir, 1989). Similarly, children's songs promote initiative by offering enjoyable repetition, group engagement, and opportunities for individual interpretation (Paquette & Rieg, 2008).

1.2 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and ZPD

Lev Vygotsky introduced the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to describe the space where learners achieve more with guided assistance than they could on their own. Through scaffolding—support that is gradually reduced—learners can grow toward independence (Vygotsky, 1978).

Digital platforms like Duolingo utilize adaptive learning systems to keep learners within their optimal ZPD range (Loewen et al., 2020). Mr. Keating, the teacher in *Dead Poets Society*, also exemplifies this method: he challenges his students intellectually before stepping back to let them think critically and independently (Weir, 1989). Children's music functions as a form of linguistic scaffolding too, simplifying complex language through rhythmic repetition and engaging content (Paquette & Rieg, 2008).

1.3 Constructivist Learning Perspective

Rooted in the theories of Piaget and Bruner, constructivism asserts that learners build their own understanding through experiences, active inquiry, and problem-solving tasks (Bruner, 1966; Piaget, 1972).

Duolingo encourages learners to explore and correct their own mistakes through iterative learning tasks (Loewen et al., 2020). In *Dead Poets Society*, students are pushed to rethink traditional norms and construct personal interpretations of knowledge (Weir, 1989). Likewise, songs used in early language education combine motion, sound, and play, helping learners make sense of language in contextually rich and self-driven ways (Paquette & Rieg, 2008).

1.4 Affective Filter Hypothesis

Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis proposes that emotional states such as motivation, anxiety, and confidence significantly affect language acquisition. A low affective filter enables better language input and output (Krashen, 1982).

Duolingo creates a non-threatening environment where learners can engage without fear of judgment (Loewen et al., 2020). Mr. Keating in *Dead Poets Society* also reduces anxiety through emotional support, enabling honest dialogue and creative thinking (Weir, 1989). Children's songs, through their upbeat and inclusive nature, create joyful learning experiences that diminish fear and promote active participation (Paquette & Rieg, 2008).

1.5 Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI)

Howard Gardner's MI theory broadens the understanding of intelligence by identifying different modalities such as linguistic, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, and interpersonal intelligences (Gardner, 1983).

In children's song-based instruction, learners tap into multiple intelligences through singing, movement, and peer interaction (Paquette & Rieg, 2008). Mr. Keating engages students by combining poetry, dramatic expression, and cooperative learning, which caters to a range of intelligences (Weir, 1989). Similarly, Duolingo's use of audio, visuals, and logic-based activities supports varied cognitive strengths (Loewen et al., 2020).

1.6 Humanistic and Experiential Learning Theories

Drawing on thinkers like Rogers and Dewey, humanistic education emphasizes student-centered learning, emotional safety, and experiential engagement. Learners are

seen as whole individuals whose personal growth is a central part of the educational process (Rogers, 1969; Dewey, 1938).

Mr. Keating embodies this approach by encouraging deep emotional exploration alongside academic development (Weir, 1989). Music-based activities in early education mirror this philosophy, offering tactile, social, and emotional learning opportunities (Paquette & Rieg, 2008). Duolingo supports experiential learning by giving learners autonomy to explore content at their pace, receive feedback, and reflect on their learning journey (Loewen et al., 2020).

1.7 Overall Insights

The emergence of self-initiated learning is not accidental; it develops in contexts that encourage intellectual challenge, emotional safety, and personal engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). Whether through digital tools, innovative pedagogy, or musical instruction, effective strategies for fostering self-initiation weave together cognitive support, emotional motivation, and active participation. Such methods not only improve language acquisition but also cultivate learners' independence, resilience, and lifelong curiosity.

Chapter II.

Duolingo as a Tool for Promoting Self-Initiated Language Learning

In the rapidly evolving realm of language education, digital platforms have reshaped how individuals learn, especially in terms of accessibility, motivation, and learner independence. Duolingo, a widely used language-learning application, exemplifies a system designed not only to teach linguistic content but also to cultivate self-initiated learning behaviors. Through its gamified structure, adaptive technologies, and flexible user experience, it empowers learners to take responsibility for their own educational progress. This chapter explores how Duolingo promotes learner autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and metacognitive growth, aligning with contemporary educational theories and practical learning strategies.

2.1. Learner Autonomy Through Personalized Structure

One of Duolingo's defining characteristics is the control it offers learners over their study routines. Users independently choose when to practice, how much time to dedicate, and whether to follow the app's suggested pathway or navigate the content freely. This personalization fosters a sense of ownership over the learning process, which is foundational to developing autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Unlike traditional classroom environments with fixed schedules, Duolingo allows learners to integrate language learning into their daily lives — whether that means a ten-minute session before bed or short bursts of practice during commutes.

The ability to customize learning goals enhances this autonomy. For instance, users can set daily XP targets that reflect their time availability or motivational state. This

empowers learners to reflect on their personal commitment and adapt their goals as their competence and confidence grow. The app also offers reminders and encouragement when a user falls behind, but without penalties, reinforcing a non-threatening learning environment that supports voluntary participation rather than compliance.

Additionally, the platform's interface design supports user control by allowing them to revisit past lessons, redo incorrect exercises, or skip ahead to more advanced units (if certain criteria are met). These features promote self-directed learning pathways, enabling learners to identify areas that need improvement and tailor their progression accordingly — a key practice in autonomous educational development.

2.2. Motivation Through Gamification

Duolingo's gamification strategy transforms language learning into a dynamic, game-like experience that sustains interest over time. The system of Experience Points (XP) serves as immediate feedback, creating a sense of accomplishment after each completed task. For many learners, this tangible reward is motivating, as it visually reflects their effort and consistency. Over time, accumulating XP becomes part of a personal challenge that reinforces habit formation and consistency — both of which are cornerstones of sustained learning.

The streak system, which counts the number of consecutive days of activity, adds another motivational layer. This feature leverages psychological commitment and loss aversion — the idea that people are more motivated to avoid losses than to achieve gains. By not wanting to break their streak, learners often push themselves to complete at least a small portion of practice daily, even when time or motivation is limited. Many

report feelings of disappointment when a streak is broken and take active steps to prevent it, such as enabling streak protection or prioritizing Duolingo during travel or illness (Consensus, n.d.).

Duolingo also uses badges to mark specific milestones, such as mastering a grammar unit or completing a series of lessons without error. These virtual achievements break the larger goal of language proficiency into smaller, more manageable steps, which reinforces the learner's sense of progress. The presence of leaderboards adds an optional social comparison dimension, where users can compete with others in their group, often leading to increased engagement through friendly rivalry.

While critics of gamification note the potential for superficial engagement, research and user testimonials suggest that, in Duolingo's case, gamification often acts as a gateway to deeper commitment. Learners begin by playing for rewards but gradually shift focus toward genuine linguistic growth as they internalize goals and develop confidence.

2.3. Adaptive Technology and Real-Time Feedback

Duolingo's machine learning algorithms continuously track user performance and tailor lesson difficulty accordingly. This adaptation ensures that learners work within their optimal learning zone, often referred to as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). If a user struggles with particular vocabulary or grammar patterns, the app increases the frequency of those topics and provides alternative practice formats until mastery is achieved.

The importance of real-time feedback in language learning cannot be overstated. When learners receive immediate corrections — such as highlighting a conjugation error or

offering a correct translation — they are better able to encode accurate knowledge and avoid fossilizing mistakes. Duolingo not only corrects errors but also includes brief grammatical explanations, which invite reflection and promote metacognitive skills such as self-monitoring and error awareness (Loewen et al., 2020).

The platform's feedback mechanisms also encourage trial-and-error learning, allowing users to explore different linguistic options and learn from failed attempts in a low-risk environment. This non-punitive approach fosters resilience and reduces the fear of making mistakes — a key emotional barrier in language acquisition, especially for adult learners.

2.4. Goal Setting and Reflection

Duolingo's structure encourages users to engage in self-regulated goal setting. The initial setup prompts them to select a daily XP goal, and progress tracking tools help visualize how consistently these goals are met. Over time, users develop a greater awareness of their learning habits and begin to make informed decisions about whether to increase, maintain, or adjust their goals.

This feature contributes to the development of executive functioning skills, such as planning, time management, and task prioritization. These are essential for self-initiated learning and have long-term benefits that extend beyond language acquisition. Learners who routinely reflect on their study habits are more likely to transfer self-regulatory skills to other academic or personal domains.

Furthermore, Duolingo's dashboard offers data visualizations, such as crown levels and fluency percentages, which serve as reflective tools. By reviewing these metrics,

users can make decisions about what skills to reinforce or which modules to revisit, thus engaging in a cycle of reflection, decision-making, and action.

2.5. Promoting Language Practice Beyond the App

Although Duolingo focuses primarily on structured exercises, it also encourages learner-driven exploration through community features. Forums and discussion threads provide space for users to ask questions, offer advice, and share cultural or grammatical insights. These peer-to-peer interactions foster a sense of community and accountability, both of which are associated with increased motivation and sustained effort (Fueler.io, n.d.).

More advanced learners often report using Duolingo as a launchpad for further study. After identifying weaknesses — such as limited speaking opportunities or insufficient context for idioms — many users seek external materials, including podcasts, films, or language exchanges. This behavior exemplifies transfer of initiative, where learners move from passive tool usage to active resource curation based on their own learning needs.

2.6. Accessibility and Equity in Learning

One of Duolingo's greatest contributions to global education is its free access model. Unlike many platforms that restrict full functionality behind paywalls, Duolingo allows users to learn effectively without financial investment. This approach opens doors for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, making language learning more equitable and inclusive.

Moreover, the app's compatibility with different devices and operating systems ensures that users can study regardless of whether they own a smartphone, tablet, or computer. Its offline mode adds another layer of accessibility, allowing lessons to be downloaded and completed in environments with limited connectivity.

This technological flexibility encourages microlearning — short, focused learning moments that fit into busy or unpredictable schedules. The app's 5-to-10-minute lesson structure reduces the activation threshold for learning, meaning users are more likely to engage, even when time or attention is limited. Over time, this accessibility leads to habit formation, which is essential for language acquisition.

2.7 Conclusion

Duolingo exemplifies how digital innovation can support and encourage self-initiated language learning. By combining user autonomy, gamified motivation, adaptive technologies, and social interactivity, it creates an environment where learners are both supported and empowered. Its structure aligns well with psychological and pedagogical theories of learning, offering tools that not only teach content but also foster independence, reflection, and motivation.

Although Duolingo is not a complete solution — especially when it comes to authentic communication or deep cultural immersion — it serves as a valuable foundation upon which learners can build. For many users, it is the first step toward becoming lifelong, self-directed language learners.

Chapter III.

Mr. Keating's Approach to Cultivating Self-Initiation in Dead Poets Society

3.1 Setting the Stage: A Traditional School Meets Progressive Thought

In the fall of 1959, Welton Academy, a prestigious preparatory school rooted in tradition and discipline, undergoes a subtle yet profound transformation with the arrival of English teacher John Keating. Set within the austere context of a conservative New England institution, *Dead Poets Society* narrates how one educator challenges conformity and inspires self-expression through an unconventional pedagogical approach (Weir, 1989; LitCharts, n.d.).

The school represents the deeply conservative educational values of pre-1960s America, where academic success is closely tied to memorization, discipline, and strict adherence to institutional norms. As Dunne (n.d.) notes in her educational philosophy analysis, this model reflects a larger societal tendency to favor structure and obedience over creativity and independence. Keating's philosophy stands in stark contrast: he advocates for an education that fosters critical thinking, emotional resonance, and personal discovery (Taufiq & Islam, 2021).

3.2 Defying Conformity: Questioning the Established System

Welton's core principles—Tradition, Honor, Discipline, and Excellence—are presented early in the film as rigid expectations rather than flexible ideals. These values, recited by students in ceremonial fashion, serve not to nurture individuality, but to enforce uniformity (Dead Poets Society Wiki, n.d.). This symbolic beginning situates the students within a structure where autonomy is discouraged and performance is prioritized over meaning.

Keating immediately disrupts this norm. In his first lesson, he instructs students to tear out the introduction of their poetry textbook—a passage by Dr. J. Evans Pritchard that proposes measuring poetic quality via mathematical formula (Behavior Nation, n.d.). This radical gesture serves as a rejection of mechanical education and a call for authentic engagement with literature. By urging students to destroy the passage, Keating invites them to critically examine the sources of authority they have long accepted uncritically.

Scholars like Zhafran, Fitriana, and Saputra (2023) interpret this moment as an embodiment of anti-conformist pedagogy that aligns with learner-centered theories, where personal connection to content is prioritized over technical analysis. Keating's method is not merely performative—it represents a philosophical stance that challenges students to engage, question, and take ownership of their intellectual development.

3.3 Building Connection: Rethinking Teacher–Student Dynamics

One of the most distinctive aspects of Mr. Keating's pedagogy lies in how he redefines the typical teacher–student relationship. Instead of positioning himself as an authoritarian figure, Keating deliberately fosters a sense of mutual respect and intellectual partnership. This is symbolically captured in his invitation to the students to refer to him as “O Captain! My Captain!”—a direct reference to Walt Whitman's elegy for Abraham Lincoln (Weir, 1989). Far from being a mere literary flourish, this gesture signals a shift from top-down control to **collaborative learning**.

By aligning himself with Whitman's democratic ideals, Keating encourages students to see education not as submission to authority, but as a shared journey where students are expected to contribute actively. According to Taufiq and Islam (2021), this literary allusion frames Keating not as a lecturer but as a guide—a captain leading his students on a voyage of discovery. This subtle shift helps reduce the power imbalance often present in traditional educational settings and encourages learners to take intellectual risks.

His methods extend beyond metaphor. Keating routinely **physically positions himself at the same level as his students**, walking among them, sitting on desks, or even exiting the classroom during certain exercises. These actions reinforce the idea that authority is not about distance and control, but about **presence, trust, and openness**.

(Zhafran et al., 2023). As Dunne (n.d.) observes, the effectiveness of Keating’s pedagogy stems largely from the emotional climate he creates—one where learners feel safe, respected, and free to speak.

This emotional safety is critical for fostering self-initiation. In many traditional classroom settings, mistakes are stigmatized, and students are discouraged from stepping outside narrowly defined academic expectations. Keating inverts this by validating **process over perfection**. He celebrates creativity, embraces failure as part of learning, and consistently affirms the dignity of student voice. These practices echo Dewey’s (2010) belief that genuine education must be rooted in individual experience and democratic engagement.

3.4 Fostering Critical Thought Through Literature

Mr. Keating’s pedagogical philosophy finds one of its clearest expressions in how he teaches literature. In contrast to traditional approaches that reduce literary study to memorization, textual dissection, or exam preparation, Keating views poetry as a vehicle for **emotional truth, self-awareness, and philosophical reflection**. His conviction that literature is meant to illuminate human experience aligns closely with the perspective of progressive educators like John Dewey, who argued that “the value of the school lies in its power to bring the individual to realize his connection with the broader current of social life” (Dewey, 2010, p. 38).

Keating delivers one of the film’s most memorable lines while teaching poetry: “We don’t read and write poetry because it’s cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion” (Weir, 1989). This statement directly challenges the utilitarian mindset promoted by Welton Academy, which emphasizes achievement and future employment over passion or expression. As Creativity Wake Up (n.d.) observes, Keating uses poetry not as an academic exercise, but as an existential inquiry—encouraging students to explore meaning, mortality, and individual purpose.

The **poets he selects—Whitman, Thoreau, Shakespeare—are not accidental choices**. These authors embody the values Keating wants to instill: intellectual independence, nonconformity, and self-realization. Whitman’s “O Me! O Life!” becomes a recurring motif, culminating in the question: “What will your verse be?”

This rhetorical challenge urges students to view themselves not as spectators of life, but as participants responsible for shaping their own stories (The Stone and the Star, 2014).

Keating's teaching is also deeply experiential. When discussing Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," he takes students outside to walk their own paths—transforming an abstract metaphor into a **physical, participatory lesson**. Similarly, instead of assigning analytical essays, he asks students to compose original poetry, inviting them to take ownership of language and meaning. As Zhafran et al. (2023) point out, this method encourages learners to move from passive consumption of information to **active knowledge creation**, a key attribute of self-initiated learning.

Furthermore, Keating's emphasis on **interpretation rather than memorization** reinforces the belief that education is a dynamic process. His students are not graded on reciting facts, but on how they think, feel, and connect with the material. By prioritizing voice and insight over correctness, Keating creates a classroom where **critical thinking becomes a daily practice**, not a rare exception.

3.5 Learning Through Experience: Movement and Discovery

Beyond intellectual stimulation, Mr. Keating incorporates **kinesthetic and experiential elements** into his lessons, a method rarely employed within the highly structured environment of Welton Academy. One of the most telling examples of this is the **courtyard walking exercise**, which begins as a seemingly simple task: students are asked to walk freely in an open space. Yet what unfolds is a profound demonstration of how quickly individuals fall into synchrony, mirroring one another's pace and rhythm despite no instruction to do so (Weir, 1989).

Keating uses this spontaneous conformity to illustrate an invisible yet pervasive force in society—the tendency to **suppress individuality** in order to fit into group norms. As he explains, "I brought them up here to illustrate the point of conformity—the difficulty in maintaining your own beliefs in the face of others" (Weir, 1989). The lesson functions as a live demonstration of **social conditioning**, reinforcing the necessity of conscious resistance to external pressures—a foundational component of self-initiated thought (Zhafran et al., 2023).

Importantly, Keating does not simply present ideas—he ensures that students **embody them**. When he instructs students to find their own way of walking, it is not about creativity for creativity’s sake. It’s about **practicing the act of making intentional choices** and becoming aware of the social dynamics that inhibit autonomy. Dewey (2010) emphasizes that education is most meaningful when it bridges theory and lived experience, and this moment reflects that union.

Another highly symbolic exercise occurs when Keating stands on his desk to alter his visual perspective, encouraging students to do the same. “I stand upon my desk to remind myself that we must constantly look at things in a different way” (Weir, 1989). This simple physical act encapsulates a powerful message: **perspective is shaped by where we stand**, both literally and figuratively. Creativity Wake Up (n.d.) notes that this act encourages both metaphorical and cognitive flexibility—key traits of critical thinkers and autonomous learners.

These bodily, visual, and emotional experiences cultivate **whole-person learning**. According to Taufiq and Islam (2021), Keating’s pedagogy integrates mind, body, and affect, creating immersive lessons that allow students to internalize abstract concepts. By stepping out of their desks—physically and metaphorically—students are encouraged to take learning into their own hands, explore its meaning, and reflect on its relevance in their own lives.

3.6 Reviving the Dead Poets Society: Independent Learning in Practice

Perhaps the clearest evidence of Keating’s success in cultivating self-initiation is seen in the students’ **revival of the Dead Poets Society**. After hearing about Keating’s own involvement with the group during his school days, students independently research, locate, and restore the tradition without being told to do so. This decision—spontaneous, ungraded, and hidden from adult supervision—demonstrates a **pure expression of autonomy** (LitCharts, n.d.).

The society meetings become a sanctuary for creative expression. Students share not only published poetry but also their own writings, personal reflections, and aspirations.

Knox Overstreet recites a love poem he’s written; Neil Perry explores his growing love for theater; and even the shyest members begin to reveal their thoughts and feelings (AbeBooks, n.d.). These activities demonstrate what Dewey (2010) calls “**educative experiences**”—situations where learners actively construct meaning from reflection and action.

Importantly, the group also offers a **positive model of peer support**. Unlike the negative conformity reinforced by Welton’s social structure, the Dead Poets Society encourages individuality. As Dunne (n.d.) emphasizes, education is most effective when learners are both challenged and supported. Within the society, students do not merely absorb Keating’s ideals—they **model and reinforce them for each other**, taking on mentorship roles that reflect a shift from dependent learners to **co-constructors of knowledge**.

This peer-led dynamic mirrors Keating’s own teaching style. He does not instruct the students to rebel, nor does he supervise the society’s meetings. Instead, he **plants the seed**, trusting his students to nurture it. Such implicit guidance aligns with **constructivist and humanistic teaching approaches**, which emphasize facilitation over direct instruction (Zhafran et al., 2023; Taufiq & Islam, 2021).

3.7 Empowering Personal Passions and Dreams (Expanded)

One of the most emotionally powerful arcs in *Dead Poets Society* centers on Neil Perry’s transformation and the tragic confrontation between personal ambition and external expectations. Neil’s discovery of acting is not merely a subplot—it is a central vehicle through which the film explores the emergence of self-initiation and the formidable barriers that stand in its way. His journey highlights how intrinsic motivation, once awakened, can empower individuals to pursue paths of deep personal significance, even when doing so involves considerable risk or resistance from authority.

Neil’s initial encounter with theater happens serendipitously, through an audition notice for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. His interest is not the result of curriculum or obligation, but of an inner desire that emerges with clarity and urgency. This internal

spark is precisely what educational theorists identify as a hallmark of self-directed learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Mr. Keating does not push Neil into theater; instead, he provides the space and encouragement for Neil to recognize and act on his newfound passion. Keating's approach is consistent with student-centered pedagogies that prioritize learner agency, autonomy, and personal relevance in educational experiences (Barrett, 2020).

The encouragement Keating offers Neil is particularly noteworthy because it models support without coercion. When Neil confides in Keating, expressing that acting makes him feel truly alive, Keating neither dictates a course of action nor dismisses Neil's aspirations. Instead, he validates Neil's feelings and encourages honest communication with his father. This gentle, supportive guidance aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the "zone of proximal development," where learners are supported just enough to take the next step independently (Vygotsky, 1978). The goal is not to impose direction but to help students access their own capacity for decision-making.

Neil's dilemma is complicated by the rigid expectations of his father, who embodies a traditional, authoritarian view of education as a means to an end—typically a stable and prestigious career. Mr. Perry's desire to dictate Neil's future stems from a belief that adult authority should override youthful desire, even at the cost of emotional well-being. This worldview conflicts directly with Keating's educational philosophy, which asserts that meaningful learning stems from inner passion and freedom of choice.

When Mr. Perry discovers Neil's participation in the play and demands he quit, the conflict between institutional expectations and individual autonomy reaches a climax. The devastating outcome—Neil's suicide—serves as a harrowing reminder of what is at stake when young people are denied the ability to author their own lives. Although Keating encourages Neil to stand up for himself, he cannot shield him from the emotional consequences of parental rejection. This painful contradiction raises important ethical questions about the role of educators in fostering autonomy within environments that do not support it (Crain, 2016).

From an educational standpoint, Neil's arc is both cautionary and instructive. It shows the transformative power of discovering a personal calling—what Carl Rogers (1961) would call becoming "fully functioning"—and the deep vulnerability that comes with acting on that calling in a repressive environment. While Neil's story ends in tragedy,

it also underscores the urgency of educational models that make space for students' passions, not as extracurricular indulgences but as core aspects of identity and learning.

By situating Neil's story within a broader critique of rigid, top-down educational models, *Dead Poets Society* presents a powerful argument: When students are not merely allowed but actively encouraged to pursue personal passions, they are more likely to develop resilience, confidence, and a sense of purpose. Conversely, when such pursuits are stifled, the psychological toll can be immense. In this way, the film serves as both a celebration of self-initiation and a cautionary tale about the dangers of its suppression.

3.8 Conclusion: Education as the Catalyst for Self-Initiation

Dead Poets Society is more than a narrative about a charismatic teacher; it is a profound exploration of the educational conditions that enable or suppress self-initiation. Through Mr. Keating's unconventional methods—ranging from experiential exercises and metaphorical symbolism to authentic dialogue and support of student passions—the film offers a compelling case for education as a process of awakening, rather than conformity. Keating's pedagogy consistently encourages students to engage with learning as a personal, emotional, and intellectual journey, where self-expression and critical thinking are as vital as academic performance.

At its core, Keating's approach aligns with multiple educational theories that emphasize autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and whole-person learning. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), Constructivist Theory (Bruner, 1966; Piaget, 1972), Humanistic Education (Rogers, 1969), and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) all find echoes in his methods. By creating a space where students feel seen, heard, and respected, Keating lowers the affective filter (Krashen, 1982), engages multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), and makes learning an act of meaning-making rather than memorization.

The transformations experienced by Todd Anderson, Neil Perry, Knox Overstreet, and others are not accidental or simply emotional responses to a likable teacher; they are the result of structured, intentional pedagogical strategies that value the learner as an

individual. Todd's emergence from self-doubt into self-expression, Knox's courageous pursuit of love, and Neil's passionate engagement with acting are all manifestations of self-initiated learning—each beginning with the spark of personal interest and nurtured by an environment that allows it to grow.

Yet, the film also acknowledges the limits of educational empowerment within rigid systems. Neil's tragic death reveals the painful reality that awakening desire without systemic support can have devastating consequences. It poses a difficult question for educators: What happens when we teach students to think independently in a world that punishes dissent? This tension underscores the need for educational institutions to not only allow space for individuality but to structurally support it.

In this regard, *Dead Poets Society* stands as both inspiration and warning. While it celebrates the triumph of the human spirit and the courage to "seize the day," it also reminds us that authentic learning cannot flourish in isolation—it must be reinforced by cultural, familial, and institutional values that prioritize the development of the whole person.

For modern educators and policy-makers, the film is a powerful reminder that the goal of education should not be mere compliance or preparation for standardized outcomes. Rather, it should empower students to ask questions, take risks, and author their own lives. Encouraging self-initiation is not an optional enrichment; it is the very heart of democratic, humanistic education.

By honoring student voice, embracing creative pedagogy, and acknowledging the emotional dimensions of learning, teachers can foster not only intellectual development but also character, resilience, and purpose. In doing so, they help learners not just succeed in the world, but shape it with intention, imagination, and integrity.

As Mr. Keating asks: "What will your verse be?"—the ultimate challenge to learners and educators alike to take part in the "powerful play" of life with clarity, courage, and authorship.

Chapter IV.

How Children's Songs Encourage Self-Initiation in English Learning Lessons

4.1 Definition of Self-Initiation in Language Learning

Self-initiation in language acquisition denotes a learner's deliberate and voluntary engagement in learning tasks, driven by personal interest and internal motivation rather than external compulsion. This concept involves behaviors such as independently using the target language, revisiting learned content, and experimenting with new expressions. In young learners, self-initiated actions might include humming an English song outside class, attempting to replicate phrases learned in lessons, or spontaneously repeating a new word in everyday contexts. These actions indicate a readiness to learn and a sense of internal motivation, which are foundational for achieving lasting language competence (Cameron, 2001).

This proactive engagement with learning materials aligns with a constructivist view of education, where learners are active agents in constructing knowledge. Self-initiation empowers children to take control of their learning, encouraging cognitive development, fostering curiosity, and enhancing metacognitive awareness. It is particularly important in early childhood education, where learning is most effective when connected to personal interest and authentic contexts.

4.2 Importance of Motivation and Active Participation in Early Language Acquisition

Motivation plays an indispensable role in successful early language learning. When children are intrinsically motivated, they engage more attentively and energetically, which positively impacts language retention and fluency (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation, arising from enjoyment or interest in the task itself, has been consistently linked to greater perseverance and more frequent engagement with learning materials.

In contrast, extrinsic motivation (e.g., rewards or grades) tends to produce only temporary engagement.

Active participation—mental, emotional, and physical—is equally vital. It ensures that learners are not passive recipients but active constructors of knowledge. Physically participating in singing and accompanying gestures, emotionally connecting to song themes, and mentally engaging with new vocabulary are all crucial. By encouraging children to self-initiate their interaction with the language, teachers help build learners' confidence and linguistic independence (Cameron, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Incorporating song-based activities that promote movement, personal choice, and fun can greatly enhance learner motivation. For example, when a song reflects a learner's personal experiences or interests (e.g., family, pets, daily routines), it becomes more engaging, leading to greater emotional investment and repeated use.

4.3 Role of Songs as a Multimodal Teaching Strategy

Songs serve as dynamic teaching tools, combining sound, rhythm, visuals, and emotions to create a highly engaging learning environment. Their rhythmic and repetitive nature simplifies complex linguistic concepts and supports memorization (Murphey, 1992). Moreover, songs encourage movement and mimicry, tapping into multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993). This rich, multisensory input promotes not only understanding but also encourages children to explore and produce language spontaneously.

Unlike traditional drills, songs create enjoyable, low-stress opportunities for practice. Learners are more likely to sing voluntarily than to repeat vocabulary mechanically. Additionally, musical input enhances neural processing by linking language to melody and emotion, which facilitates long-term retention.

Songs also provide structured language exposure. Many English songs for children are designed with simplified syntax and frequently used vocabulary, helping learners build a foundation in basic sentence patterns, verb conjugations, and prepositions. These grammatical structures become more accessible and memorable when delivered through catchy melodies and repetitive choruses.

4.4 Thesis Statement

Children's songs function as catalysts for self-initiated learning in English language lessons. By enhancing emotional connection, boosting memory, and allowing for autonomous exploration, songs equip children with the tools and motivation to take charge of their language development.

4.5 Theoretical Foundations Supporting Songs in Language Learning

4.5.1 Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

According to Vygotsky (1978), the ZPD is the gap between what a learner can do alone and what they can achieve with support. Scaffolding within this zone enables gradual internalization of language structures. Songs serve as powerful scaffolds by offering repeated linguistic patterns and predictable structures. For example, when a teacher sings with gestures, children absorb vocabulary within their ZPD. Over time, they begin to sing independently, reflecting internalized understanding and self-initiated use.

The repetitive and rhythmic quality of songs reduces cognitive demands, freeing learners to focus on pronunciation, comprehension, and grammar. This natural scaffolding process eventually leads to the learner's autonomous production of the language (Murphey, 1992).

4.5.2 Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen (1982) proposes that emotional factors like stress and anxiety can inhibit language learning. A low affective filter—characterized by low anxiety and high motivation—allows learners to absorb language more effectively. Children's songs create a positive, low-pressure environment that enhances learner comfort. Singing in groups or individually often feels more like play than study, which lowers emotional barriers and fosters confidence (Murphey, 1992).

Additionally, familiar and joyful songs can be used as rituals to create emotional stability in the classroom. Starting the day with a familiar greeting song or closing with a farewell tune can establish routine, lower anxiety, and signal transitions, all of which help learners feel safe and willing to experiment with language.

4.5.3 Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory

Gardner's theory (1993) emphasizes that children learn in varied ways, with some responding particularly well to musical input. Songs engage musical, bodily-kinesthetic, and linguistic intelligences simultaneously. This multimodal approach enhances memory and encourages spontaneous participation, increasing the likelihood of self-initiated language use.

Furthermore, music supports social and interpersonal development. Group singing fosters cooperation, turn-taking, and empathy. These social skills further support communicative competence and can motivate learners to use language in peer interactions outside the classroom setting.

4.5.4 Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci & Ryan

Self-Determination Theory identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the core needs driving intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Children's songs meet all three:

1. **Autonomy:** Learners choose or personalize songs.
2. **Competence:** Mastery is reinforced through repetition.
3. **Relatedness:** Shared singing experiences foster connection.

When learners feel in control, capable, and socially supported, they are more likely to initiate language use. Teachers can enhance this by creating opportunities for learners to create their own versions of songs or perform in front of classmates, which affirms their independence and linguistic ability.

4.6 Features of Children's Songs That Support Self-Initiation

4.6.1 Repetition and Predictable Language Patterns

Children's songs often feature repeating phrases and structures. This repetition solidifies language patterns in memory and builds learner confidence (Murphey, 1992). Songs like "If You're Happy and You Know It" and "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" are particularly effective in encouraging prediction and participation.

These predictable structures reduce the mental effort needed to produce language, allowing young learners to focus on meaning and interaction. When learners feel they know what comes next, they are more likely to join in voluntarily and repeat the song independently (Vygotsky, 1978).

Repetition also aids learners with varying proficiency levels. For beginners, repeated exposure ensures foundational vocabulary acquisition. For more advanced learners, it provides opportunities to experiment with intonation, pronunciation, and fluency.

4.6.2 Melody and Rhythm for Retention and Fluency

Melody and rhythm function as natural memory aids, helping children retain new vocabulary and grammatical forms. Songs with catchy tunes like "The Alphabet Song" or "Old MacDonald" make it easier to remember and retrieve words (Gardner, 1993; Murphey, 1992). Singing also encourages accurate pronunciation and awareness of rhythm and stress in English speech, contributing to fluency.

Moreover, rhythm enhances motor memory. When movement accompanies a song, learners form stronger neural connections, supporting long-term retention and encouraging self-initiated language use.

Rhythmic patterns can also serve as models for sentence stress, which helps learners develop a sense of natural phrasing. For example, emphasizing syllables in "London Bridge is falling down" mirrors stress-timed rhythm in English and enhances learners' phonological awareness.

4.6.3 Emotional and Cultural Relevance

Songs often reflect themes familiar to children—animals, daily routines, or emotions—making the content more relatable and engaging. When learners connect emotionally with a song, they are more motivated to repeat and reuse its language (Murphey, 1992).

Additionally, songs that reflect learners' cultural contexts help create a sense of belonging and facilitate social interaction. For instance, singing about family or food allows learners to link English vocabulary with their lived experiences, making language use more meaningful and self-driven.

Multicultural songs can also broaden learners' worldviews and instill intercultural awareness. Including songs from diverse backgrounds in English class affirms the value of different identities, increasing inclusivity and emotional investment in the language learning process.

4.6.4 Choice and Autonomy in Song Selection

Giving learners the opportunity to choose songs introduces an element of agency into the learning process. When children are allowed to pick songs they like or relate to, it fosters intrinsic motivation. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), such autonomy is central to self-directed learning. The sense of ownership over their learning materials encourages children to listen, rehearse, and even explore similar content outside the classroom setting.

Teachers can support this by maintaining a repertoire of songs with varied themes and difficulty levels. Rotating options and letting learners vote on which songs to sing not only democratizes the learning environment but also reinforces learners' investment in the activity. This active participation enhances emotional connection and promotes repetition beyond classroom confines.

4.6.5 Creative and Performance-Based Extensions

Songs can serve as a foundation for creative extensions that deepen language engagement. When learners are encouraged to dramatize, illustrate, or rewrite parts of a song, they interact with the content at a higher cognitive level. Such extensions—

drawing scenes from a song, mimicking characters, or inventing new verses—transform passive listening into active exploration.

Performance-based activities, such as classroom concerts or role-plays, further reinforce language retention and promote public speaking skills. These activities validate learners' efforts, showcase their abilities to peers, and bolster confidence, all of which are key in fostering continued self-initiation.

4.6.6 Integration of Technology: Digital Songs and Apps

Modern language teaching can benefit from integrating digital tools like karaoke videos, interactive apps, or YouTube channels dedicated to children's songs. Technology provides learners with access to song-based content anytime, enabling them to engage with English autonomously.

Apps that include games based on song lyrics, pronunciation feedback, or lyric-matching tasks combine fun with focused practice. Karaoke modes in educational platforms can also encourage repeated listening and production in a playful, non-threatening format. These digital interventions act as extensions of classroom learning and create spaces for individual experimentation, further reinforcing self-initiation.

4.6.7 Observational Evidence of Self-Initiation Through Songs

Numerous studies and classroom observations attest to the efficacy of songs in prompting autonomous language use. Teachers have reported cases where students spontaneously start singing English songs during breaks or integrate vocabulary from songs into free-play conversations. This behavior illustrates how deeply embedded songs become in learners' linguistic repertoires.

For instance, Paquette and Rieg (2008) observed that preschool learners exposed to regular musical instruction used more English spontaneously during unstructured activities compared to those engaged primarily in storytelling. Such findings reinforce the idea that songs provide a safe and memorable foundation upon which learners can independently build their language skills.

4.6.8 Songs Versus Traditional Language Drills

Traditional drills often emphasize rote repetition without meaningful context. While effective in short-term memorization, they lack the emotional and sensory engagement that songs offer. In contrast, songs combine linguistic content with melody, movement, and emotional resonance—key ingredients for lasting acquisition.

Songs provide input that is not only repetitive but also pleasurable, which increases attention and motivation. Moreover, the playful nature of music makes learners more open to taking linguistic risks, a core component of self-initiation. By making learning enjoyable, songs shift learners' focus from fear of mistakes to curiosity and experimentation.

4.6.9 Challenges and Pedagogical Considerations

Despite their many advantages, using songs in the classroom requires thoughtful integration. Teachers must ensure that songs align with linguistic goals and are age-appropriate. Overuse of songs without clear learning objectives can result in entertainment without acquisition.

Additionally, cultural sensitivity should guide song selection. Songs with unfamiliar references or outdated norms may confuse learners or alienate some students. Educators should strive for inclusivity by incorporating a mix of traditional English songs and culturally diverse content.

Assessment can also be a challenge. Since songs often engage learners in holistic and expressive activities, measuring progress through conventional testing might not capture gains in motivation, confidence, or communicative ability. Alternative assessments such as observation logs, performance rubrics, or learner journals may offer a more accurate reflection.

4.6.10 Encouragement of Risk-Taking Through Safe Participation

Songs establish a low-stakes, joyful environment where mistakes are not only tolerated but normalized. This unique atmosphere encourages learners to take risks with pronunciation, vocabulary use, and syntax without the fear of judgment. Risk-taking is essential for language development, as learners must experiment with unfamiliar

structures to advance their competence. Singing in unison or in groups dilutes individual pressure, allowing shy or less confident learners to participate alongside their peers, gradually building their courage to initiate language use independently.

Furthermore, repeated exposure to familiar songs enables learners to anticipate and produce language with increasing accuracy. As their confidence builds, they become more willing to attempt spontaneous output in different settings, such as during storytelling or classroom dialogue. This cycle of risk-taking and reward promotes a positive feedback loop that fuels ongoing self-initiated learning.

4.6.11 Linking Songs to Cross-Curricular Themes

Integrating children's songs with broader curricular topics—such as science, math, or social studies—deepens learners' engagement and expands the functional use of language. For instance, a song about the weather not only reinforces weather-related vocabulary but can be tied to daily calendar routines, scientific discussions about seasons, or environmental themes. Such cross-curricular integration provides learners with authentic reasons to use language and helps them see English as a practical tool for expressing knowledge beyond language class.

Teachers can also incorporate songs into project-based learning activities. For example, after learning a song about animals, students might create a class book featuring drawings and descriptions of their favorite animals in English. These integrated experiences promote sustained attention and deeper processing, increasing the likelihood of continued engagement with English outside formal instruction.

4.6.12 Feedback and Reflection Through Song Journals

Encouraging learners to keep song journals—where they illustrate songs, reflect on their favorites, or write down new vocabulary—can transform passive listening into reflective learning. These journals become personal language portfolios and serve as tangible evidence of growth. They also foster self-awareness, a key component of metacognition, by prompting learners to think about what they learned and how they felt during the process.

Reflection builds motivation by helping learners recognize their progress. It also allows teachers to identify patterns in student preferences, strengths, and challenges, guiding

future instruction. When children can see how their language use evolves, they are more likely to take initiative in extending their skills.

4.6.13 Parent Involvement and Home Reinforcement

Songs easily transcend the classroom and can be shared at home, engaging caregivers in the learning process. Parents who sing with their children or listen to English songs together reinforce the target language in a supportive environment. This consistency between home and school settings increases the frequency and quality of language exposure.

Schools can support this by creating playlists, sharing lyric sheets, or recommending child-friendly apps and channels. When parents participate in song-based activities—even without strong English proficiency themselves—they model curiosity and positive attitudes toward language learning, which can be highly motivating for children. Such joint engagement reinforces learners' self-initiation and connects language practice to familial bonding.

4.6.14 Songs as Memory Anchors in Classroom Routines

Using songs as routine markers throughout the school day helps structure learners' experiences and supports language retention. Greeting songs, clean-up songs, or transition tunes signal predictable classroom events and embed language in daily routines. These short, repeated musical phrases function as memory anchors—specific linguistic cues tied to actions—which learners quickly absorb and reuse.

These functional uses of English increase the likelihood of spontaneous language production, even among learners who might not yet be producing full sentences. For example, a child might begin by humming the “Clean-Up Song” and gradually begin verbalizing its lyrics or giving instructions to peers, reflecting emergent self-initiated language behavior.

4.6.15 Customizing Songs for Learner Needs

While popular children's songs are widely used, modifying lyrics or creating new songs tailored to learners' interests or classroom themes can make activities more relevant. For instance, adapting a familiar tune to review classroom vocabulary—“This

is the way we read our books..."—adds novelty and personal relevance. Teachers may also invite learners to co-create lyrics, reinforcing ownership over content and stimulating creativity.

These personalized approaches not only enhance engagement but also accommodate varied language levels. Differentiating songs by adjusting vocabulary difficulty, tempo, or accompanying visuals ensures that all learners can participate meaningfully. This inclusive strategy boosts confidence and encourages learners to take further initiative in exploring language.

4.6.16 Limitations and Balanced Integration

Despite their many benefits, songs are not a standalone method. They work best when integrated into a well-rounded curriculum that includes reading, speaking, and interactive activities. Overuse without variation may lead to fatigue or diminish novelty. Additionally, not all learners are equally motivated by music; some may prefer storytelling, games, or other modalities. Understanding individual learner profiles is key to sustaining motivation and promoting genuine self-initiation.

Moreover, the quality of instructional implementation affects outcomes. Simply playing songs without interaction or reflection will not achieve the same effect as active, participatory use. Therefore, teacher training on effective song integration is crucial. Workshops or professional development on music-based pedagogy can help educators develop confidence in using songs and designing creative follow-up activities that align with language goals.

4.6.17 Conclusion

Children's songs hold a central and irreplaceable place in early English language education, especially in their capacity to foster self-initiation—the learner's internal motivation and willingness to engage with the language independently. The unique combination of rhythm, melody, repetition, and thematic familiarity found in songs provides young learners with an inviting, low-stress entry point into language use. These musical experiences are enjoyable and memorable, which makes children more likely to repeat them voluntarily outside the classroom, whether by humming tunes, reenacting lyrics, or applying learned vocabulary in new contexts.

Unlike traditional language drills, which often emphasize correctness and repetition in isolation, songs naturally embed linguistic structures within emotionally engaging and meaningful narratives. This emotional resonance is key to sustaining children's attention and increasing the likelihood of long-term retention. Songs like "If You're Happy and You Know It" or "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" involve the whole body and multiple senses, reinforcing learning through action, sound, and emotion. These multimodal inputs align with various learning styles and intelligences, providing every child with a way to connect meaningfully with the content.

Furthermore, the use of children's songs supports the core principles of Self-Determination Theory—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—by enabling learners to choose songs they enjoy, feel successful through repetition and mastery, and connect with peers during group singing. When learners are given agency, such as selecting or personalizing songs, they are more likely to become emotionally invested and take initiative in practicing English.

By thoughtfully integrating songs into the curriculum—through performance, creative reinterpretation, and technological tools—educators not only teach language but cultivate the learner's voice. In this way, children's songs are not simply a pedagogical tool but a catalyst for developing the confidence, curiosity, and self-regulatory habits that form the foundation of lifelong language learning.

Chapter V

Practical assignment

“My Song, My Way” – A Personalized Song Creation and Performance Task

Target Age:

6–10 years old

Language Level:

Beginner to Pre-Intermediate

Objective:

To encourage learners to take initiative in using English creatively, confidently, and independently by engaging with vocabulary and grammar through a familiar song.

Learning Goals:

1. Improve vocabulary retention through active engagement
2. Foster learner autonomy by offering choices
3. Encourage creative use of learned structures
4. Build confidence in spoken and sung English
5. Promote emotional connection to language content

Materials:

1. A familiar English children's song (e.g., "If You're Happy and You Know It" or "Old MacDonald")
2. Song lyric templates (with blanks)
3. Markers, paper, crayons
4. Optionally: tablet/laptop for digital karaoke or recording
5. Stickers or simple achievement tokens (optional for motivation)

Step-by-Step Instructions:

Step 1: Song Warm-Up (10 minutes)

1. Play the chosen song with gestures.
2. Encourage full-class participation in singing and movement.
3. Briefly review the meaning of key words (e.g., clap, happy, moo, cow).

Step 2: Song Exploration (5–10 minutes)

1. Show the printed lyrics and ask learners to underline familiar words.
2. Ask simple questions: "What do you do when you are happy?" or "What other animals do you know?"

Step 3: Personalization Task (15–20 minutes)

1. Give students a simple "song frame" like:

If you're [emotion] and you know it, [your action]...

Old MacStudent had a farm, E-I-E-I-O... and on that farm s/he had a [student's animal]...

2. Let them create their **own versions**:

Choose new actions, animals, or emotions

Draw accompanying illustrations

Practice their version in pairs or small groups

Step 4: Optional Tech Component (10–15 minutes)

1. Students can use apps (like Duolingo ABC, Sing Up, or simple karaoke apps) to record or perform their versions.
2. Teachers can compile performances into a short class “songbook” or video montage.

Step 5: Performance and Reflection (15 minutes)

1. Let volunteers perform their new verses in front of the class.
2. Applaud all efforts and emphasize that mistakes are welcome.
3. Use simple reflection prompts:
 - “Was it fun to make your own song?”
 - “Do you want to make another?”
 - “What new word did you use today?”

Result:

After conducting this exercise at one of my lessons in 3rd grade, students learnt new words and practiced using them in sentences. By doing this, I received strong knowledge and encouragement in my students.

How It Encourages Self-Initiation

1. Autonomy: Learners choose content and personalize the task
2. Creativity: Encourages independent thinking and language construction
3. Motivation: Fun format increases intrinsic engagement
4. Repetition: Practice embeds vocabulary naturally
5. Reflection: Builds metacognitive awareness

General Conclusion

The exploration conducted in this thesis has centered around one of the most crucial aspects of modern language pedagogy: **self-initiation** in English language learning. Through diverse yet interrelated case studies—namely, the implementation of **digital tools** (with Duolingo as a representative platform), the pedagogical impact of **children’s songs**, and the inspirational educational ethos presented in the film *Dead Poets Society*—this study has demonstrated that cultivating learner autonomy is not merely an idealistic goal, but a practical and achievable strategy for empowering students in a variety of educational contexts.

In an age defined by rapid digitalization, diverse learning environments, and shifting pedagogical values, the emphasis on **self-driven learning** becomes increasingly relevant. The concept of self-initiation—understood as a learner’s internal willingness and capacity to engage with educational content voluntarily and meaningfully—emerges as a foundational pillar of long-term language mastery. Unlike externally mandated compliance, self-initiation originates from intrinsic motivation, internalized curiosity, and personal relevance, all of which serve to transform passive recipients of instruction into active participants in their own development.

This work has provided compelling evidence, both theoretical and practical, that self-initiation can be nurtured across different age groups, learning formats, and linguistic competencies when learners are placed in environments that prioritize **autonomy, creativity, emotional investment, and reflection**. These findings bear significant implications for teachers, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers seeking to prepare learners for lifelong linguistic and cognitive flexibility.

A unifying thread running throughout the research is the recognition that language learning is not a mechanical act of memorization, but rather a **deeply human process**—one rooted in interaction, culture, expression, and emotion. When learning is presented through tools that engage multiple senses and intellects, such as gamified apps or music, or when it is framed by emotional narratives as in film, the likelihood of genuine learner engagement increases dramatically. Each of the selected case

studies has exemplified how different mediums can fulfill this role when leveraged with pedagogical intention.

First, **technology** offers unprecedented opportunities to tailor learning experiences to the unique preferences and rhythms of individual students. Platforms such as Duolingo demonstrate that gamified design can create structured, motivating, and personalized pathways toward language acquisition. Through instant feedback, user agency, and adaptive challenges, learners are encouraged to take initiative, monitor their progress, and sustain consistent engagement—all key attributes of autonomous learning.

However, digital learning is not an end in itself; it becomes most effective when balanced with activities that develop the **emotional and creative aspects of language use**, as seen through the use of **children's songs**. These musical tools are not merely entertainment but pedagogical vehicles that provide rhythm, structure, and emotional resonance to young learners. Songs create an atmosphere of joy and familiarity, which reduces affective barriers and invites learners to experiment with language use on their own. When children spontaneously sing lyrics outside the classroom or invent new verses, they are not only practicing language—they are actively constructing meaning from it.

Beyond the material tools and methods, this thesis also emphasized the **philosophical and interpersonal dimension** of education. Through the lens of *Dead Poets Society*, it became clear that teacher presence, attitude, and relational approach play a critical role in nurturing student agency. Educators who foster openness, emotional safety, and the courage to “seize the day” become enablers of self-initiation. Learners need to feel seen, trusted, and inspired—not just taught. This emotional dimension is often overlooked in rigid curricular planning, yet it is the element that breathes life into any language classroom.

What ties all of these strategies together—whether digital, musical, or cinematic—is their ability to **connect learning to personal meaning**. When learners are emotionally invested in the content, feel competent in navigating challenges, and have the autonomy to make choices, they become self-propelled. This echoes the foundations of **Self-Determination Theory** and **Krashen's Affective Filter**

Hypothesis, both of which underscore the importance of motivation, confidence, and emotional comfort in successful language learning.

The implications of this research suggest that English language instruction, particularly in early and adolescent education, should prioritize:

1. **Choice and Autonomy:** Learners should be given space to select tasks, set goals, and pursue personalized learning pathways.
2. **Emotionally Engaging Content:** Materials must resonate with the learner's experiences, interests, and emotions.
3. **Multimodal Learning:** Combining visuals, audio, interaction, and storytelling enhances memory, attention, and intrinsic motivation.
4. **Empowering Teaching Practices:** Teachers should position themselves not as information dispensers, but as facilitators, guides, and motivators.
5. **Integration of Technology and Media:** These tools should be used not to replace teaching, but to **extend learning beyond classroom walls**, enabling continual self-driven practice.

Moreover, while the study focused primarily on English language learning, the principles of self-initiation are widely applicable across other domains of education. Encouraging students to think, reflect, create, and act independently prepares them not just for exams or language tests, but for adaptive participation in a complex, interconnected, and multilingual world.

Looking ahead, the findings of this thesis open several pathways for further exploration. Future research might consider longitudinal effects of self-initiated learning, comparative studies between different learning tools, or cross-cultural investigations into how autonomy manifests in diverse educational systems. Likewise, studies involving neurocognitive tracking of learner engagement or the intersection of AI-based tutoring and self-regulation could yield valuable insights.

To conclude, the process of fostering self-initiation is not about minimizing the teacher's role, but about **redefining it**. Teachers become **designers of learning ecosystems**—curators of content, orchestrators of emotion, and catalysts of autonomy. When these roles are embraced, the classroom transforms into a space where learners are not merely taught English, but **discover themselves through English**. This thesis affirms that the tools, methods, and mindsets that support self-

initiation are already within reach; what is required is the intentional effort to bring them together into cohesive, learner-centered practice.

References

1. Bruner, J. S. (1966). *Toward a theory of instruction*. Harvard University Press.
2. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227-268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
3. Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Macmillan.
4. Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. Basic Books.
5. Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
6. Loewen, S., Isbell, D. R., & Sporn, Z. (2020). The effectiveness of app-based language instruction for developing receptive linguistic knowledge and oral communicative ability. *Foreign Language Annals*, 53(2), 209–233. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12456>
7. Paquette, K. R., & Rieg, S. A. (2008). Using music to support the literacy development of young English language learners. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 36(3), 227–232. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-008-0277-9>
8. Piaget, J. (1972). *The psychology of the child*. Basic Books.
9. Rogers, C. R. (1969). *Freedom to learn*. Merrill.
10. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
11. Weir, P. (Director). (1989). *Dead poets society* [Film]. Touchstone Pictures.

Duolingo

Journal

Article

1. Kazu, I. Y., & Kuvvetli, M. (2024). Improve speaking skills with Duolingo's mobile game-based language learning. *Asian Journal of Education and Training*, 10(1), 62–75. <https://doi.org/10.20448/edu.v10i1.5488>

- Websites, Blogs, and Reports
2. Consensus. (n.d.). Does Duolingo help language learning? <https://consensus.app/questions/does-duolingo-help-language-learning/>
 3. Duolingo. (n.d.). Official website. <https://www.duolingo.com>
 4. Duolingo. (2020). Duolingo efficacy study whitepaper. <https://duolingo-papers.s3.amazonaws.com/reports/duolingo-efficacy-whitepaper.pdf>
 5. Duolingo. (n.d.). Results from Duolingo efficacy studies. Duolingo Blog. <https://blog.duolingo.com/results-duolingo-efficacy-studies/>
 6. Duolingo. (n.d.). Research portal. <https://research.duolingo.com>
 7. Duolingo Guides. (n.d.). How Duolingo use AI. <https://duolingoguides.com/how-duolingo-use-ai/>
 8. Edumentors.co.uk. (2024). Duolingo detailed overview. <https://edumentors.co.uk/blog/duolingo-detailed-overview/>
 9. Fueler.io. (n.d.). Mini product analysis of Duolingo: The gamified language learning application. <https://fueler.io/dikshapatrob/mini-product-analysis-of-duolingo-the-gamified-language-learning-application>
 10. Runze. (n.d.). An analysis of foreign language learning using Duolingo data. Technical Blog. <https://runze.github.io/technical-posts/an-analysis-of-foreign-language-learning-using-duolingo-data/>

Dead Poets Society References

1. Abbey Dunne. (n.d.). *Philosophy of education task. History of education.* Retrieved from <https://abbeydunne.weebly.com/philosophy-of-education.html>
2. AbeBooks. (n.d.). *Dead Poets Society by N.H. Kleinbaum.* Retrieved from <https://www.abebooks.com/servlet/BookDetailsPL?bi=30934425275>
3. Baruch College. (n.d.). *Poetry and poetics.* Retrieved from <https://www.baruch.cuny.edu/wsas/academics/writingcenter/documents/PoetryandPoetics.pdf>

4. Behavior Nation. (n.d.). *5 self-initiation strategies to enhance your child's social skills*. Retrieved from <https://www.behaviornation.com/blog/self-initiation-strategies>
5. Books-A-Million. (n.d.). *Dead Poets Society* by N.H. Kleinbaum. Retrieved from <https://www.booksamillion.com/p/Dead-Poets-Society/N-H-Kleinbaum/9781401308773>
6. Creativity Wake Up. (n.d.). *Dead poets*. Retrieved from <https://www.creativitywakeup.com/the-dead-poets-society/>
7. EduBirdie Hub. (n.d.). *The movie Dead Poets Society and its theme of the equilibrium in teaching*. Retrieved from <https://edubirdie.com/examples/the-movie-dead-poets-society-and-its-theme-of-the-equilibrium-in-teaching/>
8. Husted, D. (n.d.). *Poem of the week: "O Me! O Life!" by Walt Whitman. Sleeping softly in this bed*. Retrieved from <https://davidjhusted.com/2021/10/10/poem-of-the-week-o-me-o-life-by-walt-whitman/>
9. LitCharts. (n.d.). *Dead Poets Society: Themes*. Retrieved from <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dead-poets-society/themes>
10. LitCharts. (n.d.). *Dead Poets Society: Conformity and success*. Retrieved from <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dead-poets-society/themes/conformity-and-success>
11. LitCharts. (n.d.). *Dead Poets Society: Life, death, and carpe diem*. Retrieved from <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dead-poets-society/themes/life-death-and-carpe-diem>
12. LitCharts. (n.d.). *Dead Poets Society: Standing on the desk*. Retrieved from <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dead-poets-society/summary>
13. Poetry and Poetics. (n.d.). *O Me! O Life!* Retrieved from <https://poetryandpoetics.org/o-me-o-life>
14. Quizlet. (n.d.). *Dead Poets Society flash cards*. Retrieved from <https://quizlet.com/108517300/dead-poets-society-flash-cards/>
15. Shmoop. (n.d.). *Flags of Welton symbol in Dead Poets Society*. Retrieved from <https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/movie/dead-poets-society/analysis/flags-of-welton>
16. The Stone and the Star. (2014, August). *Robin Williams and Walt Whitman: O Me! O Life!*. Retrieved from <https://thestoneandthestar.blogspot.com/2014/08/robin-williams-and-walt-whitman-o-me-o.html>

17. Tips Folder. (n.d.). *Were four pillars Dead Poets Society*. Retrieved from <https://www.tipsfolder.com/what-are-the-four-pillars-in-dead-poets-society-2c5a1be6fc52d35f>

Children's songs references

1. Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Gardner, H. (1993). *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*. Basic Books.
3. Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
4. Murphey, T. (1992). *Music and Song*. Oxford University Press.
5. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*. Plenum.
6. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.
7. Paquette, K. R., & Rieg, S. A. (2008). Using Music to Support the Literacy Development of Young English Language Learners. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 36(3), 227–232.
8. Fonseca-Mora, M. C., Toscano-Fuentes, C., & Wermke, K. (2011). Melodies that help: The relation between language aptitude and musical intelligence in young English learners. *International Journal of English Studies*, 11(1), 73–95.
9. Brewster, J., Ellis, G., & Girard, D. (2002). *The Primary English Teacher's Guide*. Penguin English.