

PEDAGOGICAL PROPOSALS

TO PROMOTE LEARNING AUTONOMY IN ENGLISH TEACHING

PROPUESTAS PEDAGÓGICAS PARA PROMOVER LA AUTONOMÍA DEL APRENDIZAJE EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS

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ABSTRACT

English language teachers promote independent learning among their students in various ways. Some of the tools mentioned in this research are: learning contracts, learning portfolios, teaching methodologies such as project-based instruction, strategy-based instruction, the cognitive-academic approach to language learning, and small actions such as reflective dialogue with students to raise awareness about their goals and learning process. Similarly, ICTs play an important role in the development of this topic, with educational applications, websites, video platforms, blogs, and social media being some of the resources successfully implemented to promote independent learning.

Keywords:

English teaching, reflective dialogue, educational applications, learning autonomy.

RESUMEN

La autonomía del aprendizaje del inglés es promovida por los profesores de lengua extranjera de distintas maneras entre sus estudiantes. Algunas de las herramientas mencionadas en esta investigación son: los contratos de aprendizaje, portafolios de aprendizaje, metodologías de enseñanza como la instrucción basada en proyectos, la instrucción basada en estrategias, el enfoque cognitivo académico de aprendizaje de idiomas o la ejecución de pequeñas acciones como el diálogo reflexivo con los estudiantes para concientizarlos respecto a sus objetivos y proceso de aprendizaje. De igual manera, TIC juegan un papel importante en el desarrollo de este tema, siendo las aplicaciones educativas, sitios web, plataformas de video, blogs y redes sociales algunos de los recursos implementados exitosamente como promotores de autonomía del aprendizaje.

Palabras clave:

Enseñanza del Inglés, diálogo reflexivo, aplicaciones educativas, autonomía del aprendizaje.

INTRODUCTION

In Mexico and other regions of the world, English programs make use of self-access centers to support foreign language learning. It was in Hong Kong where Chan (2015), carried out a project with the participation of 57 students of the Bachelor's Degree in English at the Polytechnic University of that city. During the development of the research, the author experimented with the creation of a learning contract where students described their learning objectives and committed to send evidence on a regular basis over the course of a semester. It is apparent from the research that the contract format includes: two specific objectives to be met for each language skill (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), the action plan followed to meet the objectives, describing specifically what type of activities will be performed, the time allotted to work on them, and the dates on which they will be performed.

The study participants, at the conclusion of their semester-long language course were required to answer a questionnaire that was analyzed to answer the question: are university students ready for autonomous learning? Chan (2015), concluded that students perceive themselves as autonomous learners generally, and find the learning contract motivating to control their learning process. However, students still claim to need assistance from the teacher in writing and speaking skills, which is inferred to result from the desire for feedback from the teaching figure.

In the study conducted by Castro et al. (2019), the researchers successfully developed a didactic model aimed at contributing to the development of learning autonomy, said study was implemented among 25 English teachers in training at a Colombian university, obtaining positive results in terms of the level of autonomy development. The methodological design was descriptive pretest-posttest type in which a didactic model based on the project method was designed and applied. The structure of the model includes aim, objectives, principles, characterization of the object, strategy or methodology (stages, objectives and actions by stages), forms of evaluation and forms of implementation.

As part of the implementation of the model, Castro et al. (2019), and incorporated the following instruments: self-report questionnaire to know the actions that the subjects of study perform to develop their autonomy in the process of learning English; the portfolio technique, where students recorded project data such as objective, time of completion, evidence of learning and evaluation; the survey to know the opinion of the tutors of teachers in training in relation to learning autonomy, the methods to develop it and its importance and the observation to ascertain the degree of autonomy.

The authors concluded their study successfully, obtaining favorable results regarding the development of autonomy,

attributing the fact that the methodology used allowed students to set goals, establish action plans and self-evaluate their work (Castro et al., 2019).

Another significant methodology that contributes to improving learning autonomy is the inverted classroom model in which, unlike traditional teaching models, students possess greater freedom and can learn independently according to their abilities (Du, 2020). Among other advantages that the same author points out from the implementation of the model are: the stimulus towards motivation, the activation of autonomous behavior, the creation of a more harmonious classroom atmosphere, a good spirit of cooperation, and the flexibility to adapt the contents according to the level of the students, their available time, place where they are and progress made.

Romano (2020) explored the relationship between learning autonomy and the practice of writing in the foreign language, along with the beliefs and perspectives of teachers and students about such practices. As an example of the autonomy-promoting practices identified in her study, the author highlights the stimulation towards active student participation through the formulation of questions to activate prior knowledge and to reflect on critical thinking through metacognitive reflection, the elaboration of writing plans, and the implementation of peer feedback.

Through a series of classroom observations, questionnaires and interviews, the researcher concluded that assessment and reflective dialogue are the axes to be taken as starting points to stimulate autonomy in writing (Romano, 2020).

Other researchers have directed their efforts towards the promotion of autonomy through the explicit teaching of learning strategies. A clear example of such a procedure is the study conducted by Kuluşaki & Yumry (2020), which yielded quite favorable results. The researchers observed the increase in students' autonomy thanks to the answers provided to the autonomous learning ability questionnaire applied to the participants, where they claimed to have increased their autonomy by understanding the requirements of the course and class, as well as the objective of each activity in the classroom, the students also acquired the ability to organize their learning process in terms of time, formulation of objectives and the elaboration of study plans. Similarly, students improved their ability to monitor and evaluate their English learning process.

As a teaching methodology during the conduct of Kuluşaki & Yumry's (2020) study, the teachers followed two methods: Strategy Based Instruction and the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach. According to Cohen (2003), cited in Kuluşaki & Yumry (2020), Strategy Based Instruction encourages students to explore their strengths and weaknesses, as well as to address their learning difficulties, thus allowing for monitoring, improvement

and evaluation of their process. The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach also proved to be a potential system toward promoting learning autonomy by applying the six stages that comprise it: preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, expansion, and assessment (Wang, 2016, as cited in Kuluşaki & Yumry, 2020).

Similarly, Rezalou & Firat (2022), took it upon themselves to investigate the effect of the direct application of learning strategies, aiming their study to find out which learning strategies are most used by learners and whether there was a correlation between them and the progress shown in the language, based on the average grade obtained by the students in the subject. It was concluded that the strategies preferred by the students are the metacognitive ones, as they allow them to control and plan their learning process efficiently. The authors also confirmed the positive connection between strategy application and academic performance.

Students showed a positive attitude towards explicit strategy training, who claimed to have increased their awareness of autonomy, improved their reading and self-study skills, and acquired a desire for greater responsibility (Kuluşaki & Yumry, 2020).

In contrast, Mansooji et al. (2022) propose a simpler technique to foster autonomy in the classroom. They emphasize the importance of actions aimed at promoting student choice, such as allocating a certain amount of class time for free-choice reading or allowing students to select the topics of their oral presentations.

Despite the extensive studies that have been carried out on the central theme of this project and the efforts of experts in the area of language teaching to promote autonomous learning, the authors agree that there is still a need to deepen the processes oriented towards the promotion of autonomy. Below are some of the proposals put forward towards the achievement of that goal.

Franco & Huerta (2019), argue that it is necessary that first of all language instructors develop in themselves the ability to learn autonomously in order to be able to transmit it. Additionally, they consider that there is a need for teachers to receive training in how to become promoters of autonomy. The same authors consider it indispensable to inform students about the learning objectives, providing various alternatives to help them achieve them, as well as to provide their own training on how to become autonomous learners.

For his part, Daflizar (2021), supports the proposal to provide material specifically designed for strategy training, although he mentions that this measure would be more suitable to be applied to language teachers in training. However, he suggests that in other contexts it might be useful to generate discussion among learners regarding

their beliefs and practices regarding learning autonomy. Similarly, Mansooji et al. (2022), add that it is necessary to find out why learners are learning English, what they plan to gain, and how they intend to reach their goals.

The purpose of engaging in such a dialogue with learners is to find out the factors that motivate them to learn. In this sense, intrinsic and personal factors come into consideration, such as the will to succeed and the desire to please their parents (Daflizar, 2021). Thus, it can be seen that the family has a certain influence on the educational process of students, since many of them are still dependent on their parents in many aspects, including the economic one. Understanding this situation is relevant for the teacher to generate empathy towards the situation in which students find themselves and in turn generate socioemotional strategies to deal with such factors.

This paper presents national and foreign research based on classroom practices implemented to promote autonomous learning of English, a phenomenon that has attracted the attention of researchers specializing in foreign language teaching given the problems involved in learning a second language. The development of learning autonomy has been shown to bring multiple cognitive and metacognitive benefits to students. The techniques and resources used for this purpose are diverse, ranging from informal learning, the use of technologies in the form of applications, online resources, intelligent assistants to the implementation of methodologies focused on an autonomous learning modality.

This essay corresponds to the second of the three categories that make up the state of the art of the research project of terminal character to obtain the degree of specialist in teaching entitled "Autonomy of learning focused on the preparation for the TOEFL exam in university students".

DEVELOPMENT

The use of information and communication technologies plays an important role in the acquisition of learning autonomy. The attraction to the topic of ICT applied in education is not recent, since one of the oldest consulted references is the article by Berns & Valero (2013), which describes the impact of video game style applications, which also promote learning autonomy by being more attractive, efficient, fun and entertaining than other more classical digital tools. Another advantage of these types of applications is that they offer many opportunities for interaction, provide interactive and immersive environments, and language is presented in context through game-based activities.

Like such applications, there are multiple other alternatives on the web to take advantage of in the development of learning autonomy, being Khotioma et al. (2019), who suggest promoting the use of the Internet to achieve that

end. Among the ways in which this tool can be used are didactic applications and websites designed specifically for teaching English and other resources that were not originally created for educational purposes, but that have become a great support for learning, such as social networks, video platforms and podcasts.

There are several applications designed for language learning, including Quizlet, Duolingo, HelloTalk and Memrise, the latter being studied by Aminatun & Oktaviani (2019), as a potentiator of learning autonomy. Among the advantages of the application, the authors emphasize that general content related to grammar and vocabulary can be found, but also ESP (English for Specific Purposes) content, such as business English. The relationship between the use of the application and autonomous learning is that, since it can be downloaded for free and installed on their devices, students can access Memrise anywhere and at any time.

Memrise also facilitates the role of teachers as promoters of autonomy by allowing the creation of groups in which they decide the content and monitor the activity of their students, keeping a record of the scores obtained in the activities performed. Following such a rhythm of work can help students begin to create good habits of independent study (Aminatun & Oktaviani, 2019).

However, it was in the study conducted by Inayati & Karifianto (2022), which managed to identify that among the preferred software of students to learn English autonomously are video platforms such as Youtube, social networks such as Instagram, online dictionaries and translators, general search engines such as Google, messaging platforms such as Whatsapp and blogs. In contrast, the least used resources are websites and applications created for language teaching purposes. Among the activities carried out that students perform within virtual spaces to learn English, watching movies and listening to songs in English are identified as the most popular. Not far behind is the use of social networks, with which, through reading and writing publications, students strengthen their comprehension and written production skills.

In turn, Pratiwi & Waluyo (2023), studied the degree of autonomy that students could acquire by using digital technologies such as Google Form, Quizizz, Quizlet and Kahoot! During this quasi-experimental research, a comparison was made between the level of autonomy acquired after a six-week course in two groups, the control group, in which they used printed material and the sessions were taught in a more traditional way, and the experimental group in which the aforementioned technologies were implemented. The results showed that the students in the experimental class developed their autonomy on a larger scale and also increased their listening,

reading and grammatical comprehension skills of the foreign language.

CONCLUSIONS

There is a considerable amount of research devoted to the topic of promoting autonomy in foreign language learning. In the 13 articles and 2 theses cited, it can be seen that the proposals suggested to promote autonomy in learning English can take such complex forms as the implementation of didactic models, such as the project-based one designed by Castro et al. (2019), the CALLA and SBI methodologies focused on explicit teaching strategies applied in the research of Kuluşaki & Yumry (2020), the inverted classroom method of Du (2020), techniques such as the learning contract used by Chan (2015), and the development of writing plans proposed by Romano (2020), which could be adapted to oral production.

Returning to methodologies based on teaching strategies, the study by Rezalou & Firat (2020) is of relevance, as it yielded quantitative results correlating the application of strategies with students' academic performance, measured through the grade point average obtained. The authors found that metacognitive strategies were the most employed by students and also positively influenced their academic results.

Similarly, the strong influence of ICTs in the autonomous learning of foreign languages is visualized, which allows the promotion of such learning through the countless websites and applications created for language teaching, but also digital resources that were not precisely designed for this purpose, such as social networks, messaging services and video and music platforms.

An analysis of the techniques, methodologies and strategies used by teachers to foster autonomous learning shows that communication with students is vital during the process, since it is necessary to know the motivational factors that influence the reasons and goals of language learning, as well as external factors that may interfere in the process, such as the socioeconomic level of the students. Being informed about these circumstances and considering them when making certain decisions in the classroom gives students a sense of inclusion and active participation in their learning process, which is a great incentive to foster autonomy.

Another common factor among the pedagogical proposals that is also related to communication with students is the clear and explicit formulation of learning objectives. By being aware of what is to be achieved, it is more feasible to design a plan of action to follow in order to do so. Both the learning contract technique, the project-based methodology and the explicit teaching strategies include this similarity in their execution, which will be taken into

account at the time of elaborating the pedagogical proposal of this study.

Although there is a diversity of tools available to promote autonomy in learning a foreign language, research agrees that it is still necessary to work on obtaining such achievement, particularly in terms of training both authors of learning, teachers and students, about what learning autonomously implies and how to do it, the point raised by Franco & Huerta (2019), regarding the development of autonomy in teachers themselves, is of special interest.

It should be noted that several of the investigations were developed in a context of undergraduate degrees oriented to language teaching, so the results of the implementation of the methodologies applied in students from other contexts could vary.

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