

PROCEDURES TO DEVELOP AUTONOMY IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LAS TUNAS

PROCEDIMIENTOS PARA DESARROLLAR LA AUTONOMÍA DEL PROFESOR EN FORMACIÓN DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS EN LA UNIVERSIDAD DE LAS TUNAS

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Abstract

This article presents the experiences as a teacher who has been involved in research on autonomy in foreign language learning. It includes procedures for the development of autonomy in the Foreign Language Teacher Education Program at the University of Las Tunas taking into account the linguistic and didactic aspects trainees need to learn as well as some of the learning strategies that can help them to learn how to learn and to learn how to teach. The experience of the Self-Access Center that is implementing in the university is also offered.

Key words: Self-Access Center, autonomy

Resumen

Este artículo presenta las experiencias como docente que ha estado involucrada en la investigación sobre la autonomía en el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras. Este incluye procedimientos para el desarrollo de la autonomía en el Programa de Formación de Profesores de Lengua Extranjera en la Universidad de Las Tunas teniendo en cuenta los aspectos lingüísticos y didácticos que los estudiantes necesitan aprender así como algunas de las estrategias de aprendizaje que les pueden ayudar a aprender a aprender y aprender a enseñar. También se ofrece la experiencia del Centro de Autoacceso que se implementa en la universidad.

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Palabras claves: Centro de autoacceso, autonomía

The development of autonomy has a great significance for the formation of reflective thinking of teacher training. The present work guides the search for a solution to the shortcomings that arise in the development of teachers' autonomy which limit the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process of foreign languages in the career. To this end, some procedures are proposed to orient and stimulate the teaching-learning process of foreign languages for teacher's training which are specializing in these.

Developmental learning is an aspiration for the teaching-learning process of foreign languages in Higher Education because its implementation allows placing the student responsible and oriented towards the achievement of a goal in the center of attention. In this sense, the initial training process of the professional of foreign language education establishes among its objectives to be able to: "Manage with autonomy the process of learning the foreign language of his students and himself."

This aspiration implies the ability of the teacher training to elaborate his own knowledge, to use it intentionally and to transfer what is learned to other contexts related to the practicing of the profession. On this basis, there is a need to develop the autonomy of teachers training as a necessary condition for them to continue with their learning process, even beyond the classroom and the guidance of a teacher.

However, in our context, to pass from a modality where the teacher training has been traditionally managed in his educational process by a teacher with full authority for decision making, to one where the promotion of the teacher training responsibility prevails for their learning and education in general, it is a challenge.

In Cuba authors such as Blanco, and Recarey (1999); Calunga (2000); Calzado (2004); Castellanos (2001) and Parra (2002) allude in their research about autonomy in the process of initial formation as an essential aspect. It is mostly referred to it from the professional competencies as well as the functions of the professional education. Also, autonomy is inserted among the basic pillars of

learning that students are called to perform with special emphasis on learning to be.

However, their proposals deal with autonomy as an aspiration and classify it as a component or subprocess of a process of higher hierarchical level. There is no theoretical elaboration that goes into the essence of autonomy and its particularities during its different stages of development, especially when it comes to learning foreign languages of teachers in this specialty.

In the international scope, autonomy for the learning of foreign languages has been dealt with by authors such as Holec (1981); Nunan (1997); Littlewood (1999); Ellis (2000); Yang (2007); Sinclair (2009); Little (2010); Reinders (2010); Dang (2012). Their studies made up predominantly of ideas about taking control of self-learning, self-direction of learning, ability, responsibility, capacity, attitude and willingness to carry out self-learning, set goals, objectives and identify learning strategies.

However, their proposals are not sufficient to satisfy the need to develop autonomy by not addressing this problem from an integrative perspective that goes beyond the fragmentation between the cognitive, technical and contextual elements and becomes an indispensable quality of the teacher training to learn how to learn the foreign languages and also need to learn how to teach.

In the area of foreign languages, from the Cuban perspective, autonomy has been approached by authors such as Tardo (2006); Sánchez (2007); Risco (2008); Cabrera (2009); Castillo (2010); Rodríguez and others (2011); Ortiz. (2012) and Martínez (2015). In their proposals they refer to the autonomy from the perspective that circumscribes it to the evaluation, the communicative competence (or one of its components), the appropriation of learning strategies, or as an indicator of the learning competence that belongs to the integral communicative competence. However, the reflection, the use of resources, the assistance and the decisions that the teacher training takes autonomously during the teaching-learning process of the foreign languages are not sufficiently treated.

The study of the theoretical contributions of the scientific literature consulted shows that these proposals do not solve the shortcomings related to the development of autonomy. However, the analysis carried out on these contributions offered

fundamental theoretical elements that were considered for the performing of an empirical study aimed at autonomy in the teaching-learning process of the teacher in Foreign Language training.

This study was based on the use of methods such as observation to lessons, the study of the products of the pedagogical activity such as staff meetings, notebooks and portfolios of teachers training, as well as the experience of the researcher as a foreign language teacher. The evaluation of the instruments applied evidenced the existence of the following difficulties in the teachers training:

- Teacher's excessive dependence to develop learning tasks.
- Unconscious and spontaneous use of learning strategies in the development of tasks.
- Limited skills development to transfer knowledge to new situations.

To achieve a better understanding of the phenomenon of autonomy on teachers training in the learning of foreign languages, a study was carried out related to: the characterization of the autonomy in the teaching-learning process of the teacher in foreign languages formation.

The application of this study detected a high level of deficiencies in the teachers training of all the years to learn the foreign languages, what was manifested in its performance and evidenced the limitations that persist in the development of autonomy:

- Limited knowledge of the indicators needed to promote the development of autonomy, although it was recognized the need for apprehension of self-learning skills by teachers in training.
- Little knowledge of the essential features characterizes autonomy in the foreign languages teaching-learning process, which limits the development of teachers in training.
- Lack of attention to the forms of planning, orientation and control of learning tasks from an integrative perspective does not favor the processes of reflection and regulation in learning the target language, from a didactic point of reference.

The limitations mentioned above are the essential causes of the shortcomings of teachers in training during the learning of foreign languages. These are summarized below:

- Limitations in the decision making of planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning.
- Limited opportunities for adapting the tasks designed to learning styles and strategies.
- Emphasis on reproductive learning that limits the transfer of knowledge.

The diagnosis showed the insufficiencies and potentialities presented by the teachers in training when facing didactic situations, typical of the managing of the teaching-learning process of foreign languages. All these elements evidenced the need of a methodology for the development of autonomy in the teaching-learning process of the teacher training in Foreign Language, in favor of that, the teachers in training:

- Increase knowledge, strategies and resources to face representative situations of the practice of the profession.
- Reflect on the contained demands in each task for setting personal goals and to assess the relevance of its didactic value.
- Self-evaluate during the process and making relevant decisions aimed at solving problems related to the context in which they are carried out and developed.

From its systemic conception, it articulates with the educational strategy established in the career that aims to "contribute to the integral formation of students of the career (knowledge, skills, convictions and values) that allows them to assume a pedagogical-professional way of acting in their spheres of action and in the communities where they exert their influence according to the demands of our society "(MES 2010).

Therefore, it orients about the actions to be taken into account in the teaching-learning process to favor the autonomy of the students in the career taking into consideration the linguistic and didactic aspects. For this, the cooperation of the

teaching staff, the discipline of the specialty with the accompaniment of the teachers as teacher-mentor was essential.

The above was determined on the basis that they know the learning styles and have a diagnosis of the students; Thus achieving the most appropriate ways to follow in each case levels of assistance that promote learning in conditions that favor the development of autonomy; to achieve greater efficiency in function of the development of linguistic and didactic abilities with the corresponding accompaniment of the technological resources.

Hence, the methodology is structured in three stages, with their respective procedures, both for the teacher and for the teacher training, as well as the implementation of a self-access center as an assistance tool to promote autonomy in the teaching-learning process of the teacher training.

The first stage: Design of the dynamics of the process, the teacher in foreign language training draws on those aspects that influence his training, he prepares himself on learning how to learn, to reflect on the concept of autonomous learning, responsibility and managing of his self- learning in foreign languages, the role of cognition, identification of communicative strategies, teaching-learning and the use of technological resources located in the self-access center as a tool to assist in the teaching and learning process of foreign languages. This step is for organization, to guide the teacher training to learn how to control his own process. It suggests the different procedures to guide the work in the teaching-learning process, so that teacher-mentor, as well as teacher training are attended, these are referred to below, in that same order:

- Socialize the general objectives and the objectives for the academic years.
- Reconcile linguistic-communicative goals and learning tasks.
- Set the exchange time from the auto access center.
- Facilitate access to tools on learning styles and self-assessment.
- Diversify the assistance according to the characteristics of the teachers in training.

On another hand, the procedures of the teacher training consist of:

- Set goals that fit the general and personal goals.
- Increase awareness of the need to learn, to train in how to do it, mediated by the self-access center or other disposal resources.
- Seek information and guidance from various sources and request possible assistance.
- Monitor your own learning and performance.

In the case of the second stage of linguistic-communicative and didactic reflection, the teacher training uses in his teaching-learning process of foreign languages the linguistic-communicative and didactic abilities that he has developed when considering his incorporation to this one, he emphasizes in the available materials and technology resources to achieve it better, and to take actively part in the process. This is a systematization of linguistic-communicative and didactic skills already incorporated with the accompaniment of resources selected by the teacher in foreign language training, for the execution of a learning task with the proposal of the teacher-mentor.

In this stage the following procedures are suggested for the teacher-mentor and for the teacher training following this same logic, these are:

- Offer mentoring sessions in intermediate stages of the development of learning tasks.
- Assess the relevance and effectiveness of the use of research methods.
- To monitor the group discussion sessions in the auto access center.
- Promote self-assessment and co-evaluation of the learning strategies used by the trainees to complete the learning tasks.

Procedures for the teacher in training:

- Foresee the assistance that will be requested during the tutoring sessions.
- Socialize communicative strategies and research methods used during learning tasks.
- Apply techniques for self-correcting mistakes in learning foreign languages.

The third stage, on the other hand, is a synthesis of this complex process and is called linguistic-communicative and didactic application. In this one, the teacher

training transfers makes decisions and projects personalized goals. This responds to linguistic-communicative goals already established adapting them to the managing of the teaching-learning process, determining to continue successive learning with less involving of the teacher-mentor.

Both teacher-mentor and teacher training summarize achievements and unresolved deficiencies as a condition for setting new goals and specific tasks. For this stage we propose, for the teacher-mentor, the following procedures:

- To value the linguistic and didactic development and the impact of the use of necessary resources in the learning process of foreign languages.
- Evaluate the decision-making about the learning of the foreign languages in function of the managing of the teaching-learning process in their fields of action.
- Negotiate individualized learning projects.

For the teacher in training:

- Evaluate and set personal goals.
- Transfer the resources you acquired to new situations and learning tasks.
- Make decisions in the solution of tasks related to their learning and the leader.
- Create new strategies that correspond to their personal characteristics.
- Propose and implement individualized learning projects.

The research carried out allows us to arrive at the following conclusions: The study of the diagnosis showed the need to identify the features that characterize the autonomy in the teaching-learning process of foreign languages, as well as the ways to achieve its development.

The stages of the methodology in its interventional aspect, where the self-access center is highlighted, must be dynamic, flexible, integrative and in constant development. Tutoring sessions, group discussions and socialization of results should be the ideal source for the search and assumption of new methods, techniques and procedures that adapt to the diversity found in university classrooms, specially dealing with the learning of foreign languages for those who will teach it in a short time.

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