

## *The Self-Learning Process of English at the Guantánamo University Language Center*

### proceso de autoaprendizaje del inglés en el Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad de Guantánamo

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Recibido: 19/03/2024

Aceptado: 10/06/2024

#### Resumen

El estudio del proceso de autoaprendizaje del inglés en el Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad de Guantánamo es de gran importancia para lograr un aprendizaje significativo a la luz de la implementación de la política de perfeccionamiento de dicho idioma con base en el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las lenguas. El presente artículo profundiza en los referentes teóricos del enfoque desarrollador para el logro del referido aprendizaje, de igual forma contiene sugerencias destinadas a los profesores de inglés como vía para su preparación.

**Palabras clave:** *enfoque desarrollador; proceso de aprendizaje; autoaprendizaje del inglés*

#### Abstract

The study of the self-learning process of English at the Guantánamo University Language Center is of great importance to achieve meaningful learning, as is recommended by the policy for the improvement of this language based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This article goes deeper into the theoretical references on which the developmental approach is based. It also contains suggestions for English teachers as a means of preparation

**Keywords:** : developmental approach; learning process; self-learning of English



## Introduction

The Cuban Ministry of Higher Education (MES in Spanish) implemented throughout the country the policy to improve the training process in English for students of Cuban Higher Education with the purpose of optimizing the use of the English language by our Cuban graduates and a greater influence of these on the socio-economic and cultural development of the country. To boost the learning of university students, different programs are taught by levels of competence according to the descriptors defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). These programs are taught by language centers which were created for this purpose. They are designed to guarantee that the teacher allows student cognitive independence, through various activities of an eminently practical nature, which encourage self-learning and develop the four basic skills of the language, contributing, in this way, to the achievement of communication.

As part of this policy, and gradually, the English Language Discipline is conceived outside the Teaching Process Plan as an educational, socio-political and cultural project of the institution and majors, based on the Professional Model. It has a differentiated school organization, with training of teaching groups on equal levels, and high levels of in-person training. That is why students will decide the ways of their own extracurricular learning and will have four years to acquire the necessary knowledge and certification.

Although various researchers have provided substantiated information on the process of self-learning English, pedagogical experience shows that, despite the lack of research in this area, it has been shown that there are still limitations. Therefore, a series of pedagogical and didactic proposals are suggested to overcome the deficiencies mentioned above. These proposals aim to design a developmental self-learning process.

## General theoretical foundations that support a developmental self-learning process

Self-learning English is an empowering and rewarding experience, but it is definitely not easy. The complexities of language, the need for self-discipline, and the lack of structured feedback make it a challenging but achievable goal.

There are many authors and researchers who have contributed to the language acquisition understanding that it can be applied in the self-learning process. Such is the case of Steven D. Krashen, whose ideas are relevant in the exploration of this type of learning. Krashen's "Input Hypothesis" argues that language acquisition occurs primarily through exposure to comprehensible input, that is, language that is understood, even if only partially. (Krashen, 1985). This is critical for self-learning, as it implies that the learner must actively pursue this



input, whether by reading, listening, watching videos, or interacting with native speakers. The research provides strong evidence that it is a demanding process requiring significant self-discipline, resourcefulness, and adaptability.

The process of self-learning English, from a methodological point of view, is a complex activity that consists of two different aspects: the acquisition of linguistic knowledge and the formation of linguistic habits and skills. This is determined mainly by the teacher's pedagogical behavior that is derived from the main theoretical foundations of pedagogy in relation to the philosophical, sociological, psychological, pedagogical, linguistic, and didactic foundations.

## Philosophical foundation

The process of self-learning English from a developmental approach is based on several philosophical foundations, among which constructivism, humanism and the theory of cognitive development stand out.

Key figures in constructivism include Lev Vygotsky, who focused on how the social environment allows for internal reconstruction, and Jean Piaget, who focused on how knowledge is constructed from interaction with the environment. The authors' ideas serve as a basis for pedagogical practice today.

One of the aspects of Piaget's paradigm is the idea that he conceives the human being as a self-managing entity that is capable of processing the information obtained from the environment, interpreting it according to what he already knows, converting it into new knowledge. (Saldarriaga et al, 2016).

His theory on constructivism can be applied to language learning, including learning English. This means self-learners of English need to actively engage with language, experiment, and make mistakes to build understanding. From this perspective, learning English is conceived as an active process in which the student assumes a leading role, exploring and reflecting on the English language. Self-learning thus becomes an opportunity to construct meanings and understand the language in a personalized way.

On the other hand, the developmental approach to self-learning of English is nourished by humanism. This philosophical movement had prominent figures such as Carl Rogers, who was the father of non-directivity and humanistic pedagogy (Rogers, 2014). Their significant contributions to education have had a lasting impact. Key benefits that make a humanistic education model ideal include its "student-centeredness, fostering individuality, encouraging learning, and contributing to social well-being." (Rojas et al, 2021, p 10)

According to Rogers, it is important to participate in designing an educational experience that would liberate the students' curiosity and enhance the joy of learning.



From this viewpoint, the student is perceived as an autonomous, imaginative entity capable of steering his or her own educational journey. Self-discovery, self-assessment, and self-worth are advocated as essential foundations for linguistic advancement.

The outlook of "humanism" is not a rigid framework, but rather a collection of guiding principles that shape the development of self-directed learning strategies. By embracing these principles, one can craft a learning experience that is captivating, significant, and ultimately triumphant.

Finally, the theory of cognitive development contributes to the English self-learning process from a developmental approach by highlighting the importance of the student's intellectual and emotional maturation. It is recognized that learning English involves the assimilation of new concepts, problem solving and adaptation to diverse communicative situations, which requires progressive cognitive development.

Regarding cognitive development in the process of self-learning, nowadays, Vygotsky's philosophy is increasingly applied, especially in educational contexts, where his techniques serve to promote personal growth in students. (Fidalgo-Suárez, Sevilla-Vallejo, 2020).

Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development emphasizes the role of social interaction in learning and the guided learning process in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. This highlights the collaborative process of learning. Students learn through interactions with others who have more knowledge and experience. This process, known as the zone of proximal development, involves scaffolding and support from more knowledgeable others to help learners reach their full potential. In terms of self-learning English, Vygotsky's theory suggests that interacting with others who are fluent in English can greatly enhance language acquisition through conversations, feedback, and guidance.

Self-learning of English from a developmental approach is also based on sociological aspects that influence the learning process.

## Sociological foundation

From a sociological perspective, the influence of the social environment on learning English is recognized, since the student interacts with various communicative contexts that allow them to practice and improve their skills in the language. Furthermore, cultural and linguistic diversity is valued as an enriching element for the development of communicative competence in English.

Likewise, social interaction is accepted in the self-learning of English, since students have the opportunity to participate in conversations, debates and collaborative activities that favor their linguistic development. The developmental approach promotes peer interaction, cooperation and teamwork as strategies to enhance English learning.



On the other hand, the impact of globalization and technology on learning English is considered, since access to digital resources, educational platforms and online communication tools expand the possibilities of practice and autonomous learning. Students can take advantage of these opportunities to expand their linguistic competence and understanding of the English language in a broader context.

## Psychological foundation

Self-learning of English from a developmental approach is also based on psychological aspects that influence the learning process. In this sense, motivation, autonomy and self-efficacy of the students in their language acquisition process are considered.

From a psychological perspective, the importance of the student's intrinsic motivation to learn English is recognized, that is, the interest and personal satisfaction obtained by mastering the language. The developmental approach promotes strategies that encourage self-determination and self-management of learning, allowing the student to take an active role in their English acquisition process.

Likewise, the importance of the students' self-efficacy is valued, that is, their perception of their ability to learn and use English effectively. The developmental approach seeks to strengthen their confidence in using language skills, promoting successful experiences and providing positive feedback that reinforces their self-esteem and their belief in their ability to learn the language.

The development of metacognitive skills is imperative, that is, the students' ability to plan, monitor and regulate their own learning process. The developmental approach seeks to promote reflection on the learning strategies used, goal setting, and self-regulation of effort and attention during the English acquisition process.

## Pedagogical foundation

Self-learning of English from a developmental approach is based on pedagogical aspects that seek to promote significant and lasting learning in the student. Personalization of learning, the use of active strategies and the promotion of student autonomy are basic requirements.

From a pedagogical perspective, we recognize the need of adapting the teaching-learning process to the individual needs of the students. The developmental approach promotes the personalization of learning, allowing the student to choose their own study materials, set their own goals and plan their own English acquisition process. This encourages greater commitment and motivation on the part of the student, as they feel more involved in their own learning process.



Likewise, using active strategies that encourage student participation and reflection in their English acquisition process is valued. The developmental approach seeks to promote learning through problem solving, collaborative work, experimentation and the practical application of the language in real situations. This allows the student to develop language skills more effectively and meaningfully.

Promoting the students' autonomy in learning English is a substantial component of the process. The developmental approach seeks to encourage decision-making and self-regulation on the part of the student, allowing them to take an active role in their own language acquisition process. This helps develop self-learning skills that will be beneficial throughout your life.

## Linguistic foundation

Self-learning of English from a developmental approach is based on linguistic aspects that seek to promote significant and lasting learning in the student. In this sense, the importance of constant exposure to the language, the development of communication skills and continuous practice in real situations is considered.

From a linguistic perspective, constant exposure to English for the development of the students' linguistic competence is taken into account. The developmental approach promotes language immersion through the use of authentic materials, such as movies, music, books and real conversations. This allows the student to become familiar with the actual use of the language and develop a deeper understanding of its structures and uses.

As well, developing communication skills through self-learning of English is another aspect of high interest in the process. The developmental approach promotes active practice of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, allowing the student to communicate effectively in everyday situations. This contributes to developing solid communicative competence that will be beneficial in real contexts of language use.

Continuous practice in real situations for the development of the student's linguistic competence is added. The developmental approach encourages the practical application of the language in real contexts, such as conversations with native speakers, cultural exchanges and linguistic immersion situations. This leads the students to consolidate their linguistic skills and acquire greater fluency in the use of English.

Self-learning of English from a developmental approach is based on didactic aspects that seek to promote autonomous, meaningful and personalized learning. Therefrom, the activation of the students' intrinsic motivation, autonomy in the learning process and adaptation to individual needs.



## Didactic foundation

The developmental approach awakens student interest and curiosity through relevant and meaningful materials and activities. Thus, students maintain a high level of motivation and commitment to the learning process over time.

The developmental approach encourages decision-making and self-regulation, allowing students to be the protagonists of their own learning. This promotes a greater sense of responsibility and commitment to the English self-learning process.

Furthermore, adapting the learning process to the individual needs of the students is a must in teaching. The developmental approach seeks to personalize learning, taking into account the interests, objectives and learning styles of each student. This may pave the way to the creation of a more meaningful and relevant learning environment for the students, favoring their progress and development in the language.

## Requirements for a developmental self-learning process in the English language

When a university professor directs the self-learning process in English courses, he or she must take into account a series of requirements to ensure that students can develop their skills effectively and autonomously. Some of the important requirements are:

- The teacher must design activities that promote the students' autonomy in learning English. These activities should be challenging, meaningful and motivating, allowing them to make decisions about their own learning process.
- The teacher must provide guidance and support to students in their self-learning process. This may include the provision of resources, resolution of doubts, feedback and constant motivation.
- It is essential that the teacher and students establish clear and achievable objectives for the self-learning process. These objectives must be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.
- The teacher must implement continuous evaluation mechanisms to monitor the students' progress in learning English. Evaluation must be formative, varied and focused on the development of linguistic skills.
- The teacher must encourage self-regulation in students, helping them develop skills such as planning, organization, self-assessment and reflection on their own learning.



-The teacher can take advantage of the use of educational technology to support the self-learning process in English courses. This includes the use of online platforms, mobile applications, educational software and multimedia resources.

Assuming these requirements guarantees effective, meaningful and autonomous learning by students. These aspects contribute to creating an environment conducive to developmental self-learning, in which the teacher acts as a guide and facilitator of this process.

## The self-learning process and its main participants

This process is a method of acquiring knowledge, skills and competencies independently, with the help of the teacher. Three elements are part of this process: student, study material and feedback.

The student: It is the individual who assumes responsibility for his or her own learning. Qualities such as self-discipline, motivation and ability to seek resources and tools to acquire new knowledge, are a part of the students' repertoire.

This entire development process puts the learners at the center of their own process of acquiring knowledge and skills. Some important aspects that can determine the role of the student in a developmental self-learning process include self-discipline, intrinsic motivation, resource search and skill selection, self-reflection and practical application.

Students must be able to set learning goals, plan their time and maintain the discipline necessary to continue their studies independently. They must find the internal motivation to acquire new knowledge, whether for personal interest, professional development or any other reason that drives them to learn. They must also be able to identify reliable sources of information, select relevant study materials, and use technological tools to access relevant resources. It also requires a student who is able to reflect on his or her own progress, identify areas for improvement, and adjust his or her study approach as necessary. Added to the above, a part is the students' ability to apply the knowledge acquired in real situations, which may involve solving problems, participating in projects or practicing specific skills.

Study material: This can be any resource that facilitates learning: books, videos, online courses, podcasts, among others. The student must carefully select the material that is most useful and relevant to his or her learning objectives.

Feedback: Although it is not always a visible protagonist, it is essential in the self-learning process. It can come from different sources, such as personal evaluations, interaction with other students or professionals on the subject, and the practical application of this knowledge.



These three protagonists work together to make the self-learning process effective and meaningful for the student.

## Developmental conception of didactic categories

In the context of self-learning of English, the categories of objective, content, method, teaching aids, lesson and assessment are fundamental to design an effective approach that allows students to develop their language skills autonomously. These categories can be addressed in the context of self-learning English in the following way:

The objective category is the main one. By establishing clear and achievable objectives for self-learning English, we improve oral comprehension, expand vocabulary, perfect pronunciation, etc. Objectives can be short, mid or long term, and must be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

The content category helps to carefully select and organize the topic to be studied, including vocabulary, grammar, idiomatic expressions, readings, audios and videos in English, according to the established objectives. Contents must be varied, relevant and adapted to the students' level of competence, as well as their specific interests and needs.

The method category is related to choosing effective methodologies and strategies for self-learning English, such as the communicative approach, task-based learning, virtual language immersion and the use of interactive applications. We should encourage the development of linguistic skills through practical activities, listening comprehension exercises, conversation practice and writing.

The teaching aids category is linked to the selection of appropriate technical means and resources for self-learning English, such as textbooks, audiovisual material, mobile applications and online platforms. Hence, digital technologies are used to access multimedia resources, interactive tools and online communities that facilitate autonomous learning of English.

The lesson is a fundamental way of organizing the process of self-learning English, as it provides a structure and a systematic approach to the study of the language. Through lessons, students can receive direct instruction, participate in hands-on activities, and receive feedback on their progress.

Lessons also offer the opportunity to interact with other students, which can encourage language practice and the exchange of ideas. Additionally, teachers can modify classes to students' individual needs, providing specific materials and activities to help them achieve their learning goals.



The assessment category is essential to measure progress, identify areas for improvement and adjust study strategies. Some forms of assessment that can be used in this context include self-assessment for the student to evaluate their own knowledge and skills in the English language. They will be able to identify their strengths, weaknesses and plan their learning more effectively. Co-assessment gives them the opportunity to collaborate with other fellow students so they mutually evaluate their progress in learning English. This gives them different perspectives and constructive feedback to improve their skills.

Assessment through online platforms offers free or paid English tests and assessments. These tests can help students measure their level of language proficiency and set realistic goals. Another example is progress tracking. It is crucial to keep track of your progress in learning English by taking regular tests, reviewing previous work and comparing it with reference standards such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

By integrating these categories in the design of an English self-learning plan, the aim is to provide students with a solid structure that allows them to establish clear goals, access relevant content, use effective methods and take advantage of appropriate means for their linguistic development autonomously.

In the context of Cuban universities, the English self-learning process can be organized in various ways to provide students with the necessary tools and support the autonomous development of their linguistic skills. At the Guantánamo University Language Center, the English self-learning process is organized and evaluated as follows:

1. Organization of the self-learning process: Students of all majors, in their different Faculties, have access to resources such as English books and notebooks in the warehouse. They also have computers with internet access in the university laboratories. They also have audiovisual and multimedia materials at different levels for learning English at the Language Center. Similarly, they are provided with a study guide with clear objectives, suggested activities and recommendations for self-learning.
2. Guidance and tutorial support: Students receive guidance from the Language Center teachers, who provide them with guidelines and strategies to organize their study, select appropriate materials, and establish learning goals. They are also offered individualized tutorial support to resolve questions and receive feedback on their progress.
3. Evaluation of the self-learning process: The evaluation of the English self-learning process is carried out in a continuous and formative manner. Different evaluation instruments are used: written tests, practical exercises, oral presentations and individual or group projects. Participation in activities, efficient use of available resources and improvement in language skills, are a part of this conception.



4. Monitoring and feedback: Students' progress in their self-learning of English is constantly monitored. Teachers provide regular feedback on progress made; identify areas for improvement and offer recommendations to strengthen language skills. Self-reflection and self-assessment are also encouraged as part of the learning process.

In summary, at the Guantánamo University Language Center, the English self-learning process is organized through a physical space, guidance and tutorial support, continuous evaluation and personalized monitoring to guarantee effective and meaningful learning by students.

## Conclusions

The research was aimed at delving into the theoretical foundations that support self-learning of the English language at the Language Center of the Guantánamo University. The analysis from different philosophical, sociological, psychological, pedagogical, linguistic and didactic conceptions managed to provide theoretical elements that support this process. It must be equipped with a systemic approach, with a developmental nature where the content of the class is linked with experiential, cognitive and motivational elements.

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### Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

### Author Contribution

Yanelis Jovellar Iznaga (principal author): Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing- Original draft preparation, Writing- Reviewing and Editing.

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