Fecha de presentación: septiembre, 2019, **Fecha de Aceptación**: octubre, 2019, **Fecha de publicación**: diciembre, 2019

05

AN ELECTRONIC REFERENCE GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING SELF-MANAGED LEARNING IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGES MAJOR

UNA GUÍA DE REFERENCIA ELECTRÓNICA PARA DESARROLLAR EL APRENDIZAJE AUTOMANDADO EN LAS LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS PRINCIPALES

Eduardo Pérez Novo[1]
E-mail: eperez@ucf.edu.cu
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2516-0572
Onelio Castillo Barrios[1]
E-mail: ocastillo@ucf.edu.cu.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4379-5942
Lázaro Adel Heredia Gómez[1]
E-mail: laheredia@ucf.edu.cu
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2466-4413
Dalia Millán Peña[1]
E-mail: dmillanp@ucf.edu.cu.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0739-5514
Diana Millán Peña[1]
E-mail: dmillan@ucf.edu.cu
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9279-4255
Andrés Echevarría Díaz[1]
E-mail: ahdiaz@ucf.edu.cu
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3505-5610
[1] Universidad de Cienfuegos "Carlos Rafael Rodríguez" Cuba.

Suggested citation (APA, sixth edition)

Pérez Novo, E., Castillo Barrios, O., Heredia Gómez, L. A., Millán Peña, D., Millán Peña, D., & Echevarría Díaz, A. (2019). An electronic reference guide for developing self-managed learning in the foreign languages major. *Revista Conrado*, 15(71), 32-42. Retrieved from http://conrado.ucf.edu.cu/index.php/conrado

RESUMEN

Self-managed learning is a way in which individuals can manage their own learning. This means universities should guide students to take responsibility for decisions about what and how they learn, and when and where they learn so they can continue to extend their repertoire of capabilities without the need to necessarily be reliant on another human resource to teach or manage their learning. This approach holds paramount importance in the current conditions of Cuban education with the generalized used of digital devices as part of the Information and Communications Technologies and the use of databases for sharing and consulting information. Having access to the digital database plays a significant role in the development of language skills in a language classroom. The present research aims at designing an Electronic Reference Guide to be used as the link between these worlds, providing students with a tool to enable their involvement in their own learning. For the achievement of this goal the following methods were implemented: historical-logical, analytical- synthetical, inductive- deductive, observation, survey, interview and percentage analysis. The results obtained in terms of efficient independent study and learning management of the sample while using the product elaborated proved its potential.

Palabras clave:

Self-managed learning, Self- Access Center, Electronic Reference Guide.

ABSTRACT

El aprendizaje auto gestionado es una forma en la que los individuos pueden administrar su propio aprendizaje. Esto implica que las universidades deben guiar a los estudiantes a asumir la responsabilidad sobre qué y cómo aprenden, cuándo y dónde para que puedan expandir su arsenal de habilidades sin que necesariamente dependan de otro recurso humano que les instruya o conduzca su aprendizaje. Este enfoque cobra importancia significativa en las condiciones actuales de la educación cubana con el uso generalizado de dispositivos digitales como parte de las Tecnologías de Información y Comunicaciones y el uso de bases de datos para compartir y consultar información. Tener acceso a una base de datos digitalizada juega un papel importante en el desarrollo de habilidades lingüísticas en la clase de idiomas. La presente investigación tiene como objetivo diseñar una Guía Electrónica de Referencia que sirva de vínculo entre estos mundos, brindándole a los estudiantes una herramienta que les permita involucrarse en su propio aprendizaje. Para la consecución del objetivo se emplearon diferentes métodos como histórico-lógico, analítico-sintético, inductivo-deductivo, observación, encuesta, entrevista y análisis porcentual. Los resultados obtenidos en cuanto a estudio independiente efectivo y gestión del aprendizaje en la muestra prueban el potencial del producto elaborado.

Keywords:

Aprendizaje auto gestionado, Centro de Autoacceso, Guía Electrónica de Referencia.

INTRODUCTION

Today's generation of students are growing up in a digital world. Using digital devices is a huge part of their everyday experience out of school. With all of this so intrinsic to their 'outside school' experience, the challenge for the teaching profession is how to harness all this for learning within the classroom and at home. This generation of 'digital natives' has much lower need for libraries of physical content for example, the traditional resource used by students half a generation ago.

One crucial question is: will this new technology actually improve education? The impact of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) on learning outcomes has been inconclusive, billions of pounds/euros spent – but is generally difficult to evaluate effectiveness in terms of improved results. Nonetheless there are outcomes that are conclusive, and which indirectly impact on learning outcomes. These include improvements in:

- Engagement.
- Motivation
- Independent learning.
- Parental engagement.
- Student and staff attendance and punctuality.
- Extending the children's learning time.

With the change in learning styles, the role of the teacher is changing too; as well as being a presenter of lesson material; they also assume the role of facilitator/coach in an increasingly collaborative learning environment. These two key styles of learning; presenting and collaborating; link directly to some of the different types of technology employed in the classroom. Interactive White Boards have been the bastion of the presenting style of learning, where the teacher is at front of class, and all students are involved in interactive learning.

The crucial point is that the teacher will still want and need to be in charge of the classroom, they may decide to let students use technology for some parts of a lesson but they will still want to be the center-point of attention and control. This may be at the front of the classroom or, as is becoming more relevant, to be able to move around the classroom and still remain in control. In these styles of classroom environment clearly the ability of devices to talk to each other i.e. the seamless connectivity between student tablets and front-of-class display, increasingly becomes the key.

Teachers do need to be present to help understand issues and work through problems and answer questions. The teacher then becomes a facilitator, tutor or guide and can spend more time one on one with the students. Teachers are finding that they can start to introduce this concept and slowly build on it and does not need to start as a complete radical change. Generally, the hope is that with the students' devices will help with some or all of the following goals:

Allowing teachers and software to deliver more personalized content and lessons to students, while allowing students to learn at their own pace and ability level;

- Helping students to become technologically skilled and literate and thus better prepared for modern workplaces;
- Empowering students to do more complex and creative work by allowing them to use digital and online applications and tools, among other aims.

Several authors have addressed this educational issue such as Zimmerman (1989); Waschull (2001); Ally (2004); Ku & Chang (2011); Artino & Jones (2012); Wang, Shannon & Ross (2013); Serdyukov & Hill (2013); Greenland & Moore (2014); Castillo (2017), the two latter national researchers. They all propose to lead independent study in such a way that students become fully aware of their own learning and take personal actions to enhance it. Needless to say that to fulfill this goal didactic materials must be available and organized, otherwise the effect would be quite negative.

Fitting this endeavor, arises the notion that having access to the digital database of a subject plays a significant role in the development of language skills in a language classroom. Despite the importance of receiving classes several times per week; some teachers of English are still trying to focus their lessons on the few English books that remain in the inventory of the school without been able to give the students an easy access way to the digital bibliography. This can provide the students with an enormous amount of new published literature, including journal and newspaper articles, conference proceedings and books if it is correctly developed. For many students English is a very difficult subject because its correct practice is exclusively restrained to classroom activities, which is not in correspondence with the first objective for the teaching of English in Cuba, that of the use of the language outside the school context.

While checking the current didactic problems of the Foreign Languages Department at ***Carlos Rafael Rodríguez*** university regarding the teaching- learning process of English, the following fact was detected:

There are insufficiencies regarding the availability of physical bibliography for the students of the Foreign Language

Teaching specialty, making difficult the development of independent study and thus the achievement of conscious learning as part of their curricular activity in the University of Cienfuegos.

This situation was then corroborated through the application of several research instruments and techniques such as:

1. Class observation (see appendix 1)
2. Survey to teachers of English who work at "Conrado Benítez" campus (see appendix 2).
3. Interview to students of Foreign Language Teaching at "Conrado Benítez" campus (see appendix 3).

From these instruments and techniques, the following regularities arose:

- Students are not guided and feel no motivation towards getting involved in their own learning process.
- Neither teachers nor students make the most out of the advantages offered by the Self- Access Center in terms of the availability and spectrum of materials stored in its databases.
- For teachers, the 'letting go' of control can be equally disorienting and it may seem that giving students such control depreciates teachers' skills and experience. Traditionally, teachers are used to being the center of student activity, controlling how, when and why students do what they do. Students have been expected to work in "lock-step" with the teacher orchestrating what students do to a very high degree. Teachers, in turn, rely on textbooks that allow little variation.
- Students (and sometimes teachers as well) lack awareness and preparation on how to carry out efficient work in this Center, mainly due to the absence of methodological guidelines or materials that provide effective orientations that could lead the processes.

The practical contribution of the present research is set on the Electronic Reference Guide elaborated, since this product could enable positive impact in the learning processes held within the Foreign Languages major and even on others. The approaches contained in it could constitute guidelines for Self- Managed Learning of the students, enabling them achieving higher levels of cognitive performance and thus greater linguistic proficiency as well as the enhancement of their research skills, providing adequate environment for knowledge acquisition from a student- centered insight. Self- managed learning is nowa-days one of the most appealing working philosophies worldwide in terms of higher education, being adopted by multiple colleges or universities in their curricular studies, providing the present research with appropriate levels of pertinence and relevance.

DEVELOPMENT

In order to present the results of this research three main concepts must be clarified. First, Independent study: Independent study (IS) is a form of education offered by many high schools, colleges, and other educational institutions. It is sometimes referred to as ***directed study***, and is an educational activity undertaken by an individual with little to no supervision.

Typically, a student and professor or teacher agree upon a topic for the student to research with guidance from the instructor for an agreed upon amount of credits. Independent studies provide a way for well-motivated students to pursue a topic of interest that does not necessarily fit into a traditional academic curriculum. They are a way for students to learn specialized material or gain research experience (Serdyukov & Hill, 2013).

Second, Self-Managed Learning: SML consists of a series of cyclical stages in which its starting point can be the learners' information and primary beliefs. When SM learners take part in educational activities, they first use their information, beliefs, and knowledge so that they can have an assessment of the qualifications and tools required for those activities. Then, based on their evaluation, they determine their "goals". Finally, through using strategies which result in cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes, they approach their pre-set goals (Zimmerman, 1995). Through the monitoring process of their learning activities and controlling their progress, students come up with an internal feedback which provides them with new information to reassess those activities and the approach they should take while participating in the activities.

Efficient independent students who become self-managed learners hold the following characteristics:

1. Self-managed learners are familiar and know how to apply a series of cognitive strategies (rehearsal, elaboration, organization) which help them to attend to, transform, organize, elaborate, and recover information (Winne, 1995; Zimmerman, 2001).
2. They know how to plan, control, and direct their mental process toward achievement of personal goals, i.e., metacognition (Corno, 2001).
3. Self-managed students show motivational beliefs and adaptive emotions such as a sense of academic self-efficacy, the adoption learning goals, the development of positive emotion towards tasks (e.g. joy, satisfaction, enthusiasm) and the capability to control and modify them to the requirements of the pre- set task and the specific learning situation (Weinstein, Husman & Deirking, 2000; Zimmerman, 2002).

4. They plan and control the time and effort to be spent on tasks, and they know how to create and structure favorable environments, such as finding a suitable place to study and seeking help from teachers and classmates when they encounter problems (Winne, 1995; Corno, 2001; Zimmerman, 2001).
5. To the extent allowed by the context, Self-managed learners show greater efforts to participate in controlling and regulating academic tasks, classroom climate, and structure (Corno, 2001; Weinstein, 2000; Zimmerman, 2002).
6. Self-managed learners are able to effect a series of volitional strategies aimed at avoiding external and internal distractions so that they maintain their concentration, effort and motivation in performing tasks (Weinstein, Husman, & Deirking, 2000; Zimmerman, 2001, 2002).

The relationship between self-regulated learning and academic achievement has been theorized under the social cognitive view that self-regulated learning is acquired through a triadic interaction between three important characteristics: a) self- observation (monitoring one's actions) seen as the most important of these processes; b) self-judgment (evaluation of one's performance), and c) self-reactions (one's response to performance outcomes; Zimmerman, 1989). More importantly, this view postulates that learning is not merely a fixed trait, but can be influenced and improved with the aim of achieving successful academic outcomes (Zimmerman, 1989). Students may use a variety of cognitive, metacognitive, and resource management SRL strategies as part of their SML behavior. Cognitive strategies such as rehearsal aim to help learners acquire knowledge at a surface level by retaining information. Self -regulated learning strategies affect learning outcomes by assisting learners to acquire and retain knowledge in a structured and methodological way. Strategies are part of the SML process and are specific skills that can be taught to students to put into real world practice (Zimmerman, 1989).

To sum up, Self-managed students take responsibility for their own learning, consider learning as a proactive process, are self-motivated and use strategies enabling them achieve the desired academic results.

In order to determine the roles ascribed to "learners" in the management process, it is important to have an overview of characteristics, features, and general assumptions shared by almost all models of management. After reviewing all models of self-management, Wolters, et al. (2003) consider learners as ***"active, constructive, and having the potential for control of their environment***" (p. 3) as participants in the learning process. Learners are assumed to actively construct their own meanings, goals, and strategies from information available in the "external" environment as well as in their own minds (the "internal" environment). Instead of being mere passive recipients of information from teachers, parents, or other adults, learners are active, constructive meaning-makers as they go about learning (Pintrich, 2000). The second, but related, assumption is the potential for control assumption. All the models assume that learners can potentially monitor, control, and regulate certain aspects of their own cognition, motivation, and behavior as well as some environmental features (Karabenick, 2001). This assumption does not imply that individuals will or can monitor and control their cognition, motivation, or behavior at all times or in all contexts, rather just that some monitoring, control, and management is possible. All of the models concede that certain biological, developmental, contextual, and individual differences and constraints can interfere with individual efforts at management (Butler & Winne, 1995; Zimmerman, 1989, 1998, 2000).

Distinctive features for Self- managed learning. IS vs. SML

Self-managed learning (SML) is a way in which individuals can manage their own learning. This means organizations can have self-managed learning programmers that fit within their structure and ensure staff is developing in a certain direction; or individuals can take responsibility for decisions about what and how they learn, and when and where they learn. Self-managed learning programs can be designed and developed, allowing individuals to lead and manage themselves through learning, so that can continue to extend their repertoire of capabilities without the need to necessarily be reliant on another human resource to teach or manage their learning. It is a form of development where we take the initiative in learning new skills, knowledge and attitudes with the support of the organization. Five questions to start the self-managed learning:

- Where have I come from – what are our past experiences?
- Where I am now – what strength and weakness do I have? What is the current situation that I am in?
- Where do I want to get to – what goals/targets/objectives do I want to set for ourself?
- How will I get there – what programmed of study should I design to achieve our goals?
- How will I know if I have arrived – what criteria can I apply to assess our learning

Clear goal setting – an overview

Step 1: get the big picture. It will be a statement, outlining, idealized description of your life's outcome that will inspire you and create your target

Step 2: brainstorm your thoughts to come up with a wish-list for each of your relevant life aspects, career, family and friends

Step 3: set achievable goals, even if that means taking a larger goal or dream and breaking it down into bite-size chunks. A personal SWOT analysis is a great way to work it out

- Strength.
- Weakness.
- Opportunities.
- Threat

Step 4: Prioritize – goal setting is a skill, how to set goals takes time and practice to become proficient. Once you achieve the easy, single goals, you'll feel motivated to try the process on some harder goals and confident in applying the process.

Step 5: when you have a set of personal goals that are meaningful and will help you achieve your "big – picture", all you need to do is develop your chosen goals and make sure they are SMART:

- Specific.
- Measurable.
- Attainable.
- Realistic.

It can be said that (SML) is a new and revolutionary way for the students to receive the content related to the subjects playing an active role. With this new study method, the student becomes protagonist of his learning and responsible of his potential development. (SML) gives the student an innovative tool to increase his knowledge not only at a cognitive level, but also at skills needed to perform as a good professional.

How are they contrasted?

IS has always been a complement of modern education. Armstrong (2012), claimed that in higher education students should be given more materials suitable for self-study. Students should be encouraged to do more independent study trough (SML).

For students to be successful in their (SML), they must possess self-discipline and reflective capability. Some research suggests that being able to regulate one's own learning is something which must be modeled to students, for it is not a natural human tendency for the population at large. In order to interact with the environment, a framework has been identified to determine the components of any learning system: a reward function, incremental action value functions and action selection methods. Rewards work best in motivating learning when they are specifically chosen on an individual student basis. New knowledge must be incorporated into previously existing information as its value is to be assessed.

The secular and modern societies gave foundations for a new system of education and a new kind of relation between (IS) and (SML), especially in college education. While the number of schools and students raised from one century to the other, so did the number of autodidacts. The industrial revolution produced new educational tools used in schools, universities and outside academic circles to create a post-modern era that gave birth to the World Wide Web and encyclopedic data banks. As this concept becomes more widespread and popular, web locations like Self- Access Centers are developed to be learning centers for many students to actively and freely learn together.

The third and final concept that founds this study is Self-Access Center:

Based on Maria del Rocío Domínguez Gaona research (2008), Self-access centers came up on late sixties and early seventies as a languages laboratories evolution that consisted on a console which controlled the students' cabins. The prevalent methodology in those laboratories in order to learn a second language was the audio-lingual method, which came out from behaviorism and explained that learning depended on three elements: a stimulus, an answer caused by the stimulus and an effort. In this context is said the laboratories didn´t satisfy the expectative anymore and they started to be scruffy or were become as "libraries" this suggested a kind of self-access center (Gremmo & Riley, 1995). With a new approach known as: Communicative approach. Other situation which originated the appearance of these Self-access centers was the need to increase the range of the languages courses, English mainly, to give an answer to different kinds of needs and proposes (Benson & Voller, 1997). Joined to this the technology development is consider an activator on the apparition of the self-access centers due the technology was seen as an important support on the language learning and a great promoter of the learning autonomy (Gremmo & Riley, 1995). It was in the eighties when the expansion on the use of technology in teaching and learning of languages was given, marking a new era on this field (Lonergan, 1991).

One of the first self-access centers is the one of El Centro de Investigación y Aplicaciones Pedagógicas de Lenguas (CRAPEL) of Nancy´s University in France in 1974, which emerged as an experiment to the development of self-learning in language learners auspicated by The European Counselor. It is evident that the self-access were spread by the entire world and brought themselves the development of self-learning users. A (SALC) gives the student a real chance to learn and polish his skills in an educational environment provided with all the material and tools needed as well as the advising personnel properly qualified to help the learner achieve any goal related to any learning process such as (IP) and (SML). (SALC) give freedom of choice regarding to learning to its users allowing them to self-evaluate and self-correct their own development.

Self-Access Learning Centers (SALC) can be defined as dedicated spaces where learning, resources, technology, tasks and facilitators meet to enhance the development of independent learning as well as language skills (Gardner & Miller, 1999; Cotterall & Reinders, 2001; McMurry, Tanner & Anderson, 2009; Reinders, 2012). They promote investigations on the concept of management, practices, technology integration, learning gain, catering to heterogeneous groups of learners with different skills and abilities, offering a wide range of resources to this mix of learners, meeting institutional expectations, collecting and analyzing data that can contribute to the improvement of SALC services, and evaluating.

SALC are not places solely used to enhance ***"the learner's ability to take responsibility for their own learning"*** (Reinders, 2012) – their ability to study independently. As Gardner and Miller's (1999) definition suggests, SALCs are also areas where students can develop their independent use of technology to enhance their learning skills. Castellano, Mynard & Rubesch (2011), apply an action research methodology to understand their clientele's use of technology available at their university SALC. While the findings regarding students' use of technology (such as videos, dvd, the Internet to access social networking websites) are compelling, the article does not capitalize on student feedback. Castellano (2011), states, ***"seven students mentioned an interest in learning about mobile technology for language learning, including the iPad",*** and yet little is debated for increasing the use of such technology in SALC. The authors may be aware but did not explore the possibility that Japanese students, like any mobile-capable university students, have the opportunity of learning with computers and laptops and, more recently, have access to a wide range of free learning resources on their mobile devices (Jackson & Shenton, 2010).

Self-Access and its implications. How do they work?

There are diverse definitions on what is and involves a self-access center. Grander & Miller (1999), define it as a language learning system which involves diverse elements such as:

a) Resources: materials, activities, technology, people (assessors, administrators, other students),

b) Administration, which permits coordination and planning on the center work.

c) A control and support system for students,

d) Capacitating for the user and staff,

e) Tutors

f) Self-evaluation

g) Learning feedback

h) Center evaluation

i) Development and adaptation of self-learning materials

One of the academic goals of many self-access centers is to promote self-learning. This is defined as every single student ability to learn by him/herself. And it will be acquired on a systematic and conscious way (Holec, 1979). On this type of situations, student responsibility is involved of his own learning and the developing of learning strategies (learn to learn). However, for many institutions, autonomous learning is not defined as independent learning. In many situations, a center exists, but nothing is done to promote learner autonomy. The center quickly becomes a computer lab or library, but maintains the name, claiming that it is a self-access center. In short, there are many self-access centers, but the information we have with regards to their efficacy and functionality is limited.

Use of multiple technologies in a more independent setting has been shown to improve motivation and increase students' ability to work independently by taking more responsibility for their own learning. Students also report feeling more "empowered" by such modes of instruction.

Fully Independent Learning

In its most extreme form of self-directed learning, students set their own curriculum and goals, self-accessing their progress. Teachers function only as "counsellors" who give feedback after students evaluate their learning.

Semi-Guided Learning

To address problems with student use of self-access centers, some centers make tutors available to give academic and a kind of psychological support. Students may

or may not choose how self-directed or tutor-dependent they choose to be. While the academic effectiveness of a semi-independent study course has not been proven, student response to such a scheme in Hong Kong was very positive.

Self- Access language learning centers are educational facilities designed for student learning that is at least partially, if not fully self-directed. Students have access to resources ranging from photocopied exercises with answer keys to computer software for language learning. These centers are an outgrowth of a style of learning that can go by several names: learner-centered approach, learner autonomy or self-directed learning. These centers exist primarily in Asia, Europe and North America. Use of such facilities and the pedagogical theory they are based upon has its advantages and disadvantages. Proper use can result in a feeling of empowerment and better learning outcomes, but getting to the point where students and teachers can exploit them effectively can be problematic. For this reason, the structure of established self-access centers varies from completely student-directed work with classroom immersion to programs that provide primarily tutor or instructor guidance for student work.

Some of the advantages of this form of learning is that students at the very least set the pace of their work. Depending on the individual center, students can also set the level and content of their work. Students can use these centers voluntarily or can have assignments to complete there. The major advantage, therefore, is flexibility, with the purpose of giving the students themselves the opportunity to tailor the course more to their learning needs and styles than a more traditional mode of teaching.

Self-access center combined with English-language writing center

Online self-access learning

These Centers are an outgrowth of a style of learning that can go by several names: Learner-Centered Approach, Learner Autonomy or self-Directed Learning. These centers exist primarily in Asia, Europe and North America. However, the self-access centers as a support to the languages learning

In a plenary address, Nunan (2000), states: ***"Autonomy implies a capacity to exercise control over one's own learning".*** He says that autonomous learners should be able to determine the general focus of their learning, take an active role in the management of the learning process, and have freedom of choice with regards to learning resources and activities. Self-access actually refers to materials, people and other resources that learners can take advantage of to learn independently. These learners may or may not be associated with a traditional class or course. The idea is that self-access allows students to choose the materials and activities for their individual learning experience.

Online self-access or online language support, is a type of self-access learning. In its most basic form, online self-access involves institutions making language learning materials available online to students. More elaborate forms include opportunities for supporting learners online (e.g. through advisory sessions), tools for collaborative learning, e-portfolios, and active monitoring of student performance by the software. Examples of such systems include the University of Auckland's electronic learning environment and 'My English', developed at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, in Bangkok, Thailand. Many centers are using online resources from a variety of commercial English training services.

Continuing this definition, we find that self-access can extend into many types of autonomous learning. In fact, full-autonomy would involve complete self-access, whereas homework uses the least amount of self-access.

The final product presented as result of the current study is an Electronic Reference Guide (ERG) for Self-Managed Learning in the Foreign Languages major, involving students from all academic years of the English Language Major. The ERG provides students with complementary materials and orientations to make their independent study match the features of SML, providing the major with an updated character in terms of knowledge acquisition fitting the way in which this issue is addressed worldwide now-a-days. The ERG is based on the use of the ACCESS platform within the Microsoft Office software at least as for the first version, implying migration to a more efficient platform in the future.

What is a Reference Guide?

Reference Guides accompany each report to help users understand and use that specific data. It is often called a data ***guide***, interpretation ***guide***, or interpretive ***guide***. The report's ***reference*** sheet functions as the ***guide's*** first page, and subsequent sections contain the instructions (how to read the data), essential orientations (showing the user where to look on this database – and what to look for – to meet the users' cognitive needs or learning tasks, and a "more info" section (offering where to get additional information on related topics).

Types of Reference Books:

The followings are several types of reference books:

1. Language Dictionary.
2. Encyclopaedia.
3. Biographical Sources.
4. Directories.
5. Bibliographies.
6. Audio visual Materials.
7. Year-Books, Almanacs, and Supplements to encyclopaedia.
8. Geographical sources, Gazetteers, guide-books, maps, atlases etc.
9. Current sources: Handbooks, manuals and sources of statistics.

Some of the characteristics of reference guides/ books are:

1. They are intended primarily for occasional consultation.
2. They are consulted for definite items of information.
3. The information included in them is collected from a vast number of sources.
4. It is a miscellany of information and facts.
5. The arrangement of information is such that it can be conveniently and quickly recalled.
6. It follows some methods of arrangement e.g. Alphabetical, Chronological or other methods.
7. They include only the bird-eye-view of the topics and rarely deal them in depth.
8. They usually concentrate on facts.
9. They are normally not issued on loan and kept for use in the library only.
10. Information in a reference guide/ book is so organized that anyone can easily get their desired information.

The Electronic Reference Guide intended meets these parameters in order to actually enhance the opportunities of the users to achieve efficient SML. It comprises the following elements:

- Reference to complementary materials to be used as part of SML.
- Reference to all digital data stored in the Self- Access Center regarding all disciplines within the curriculum of the Foreign Languages Major by indexing the materials.
- Reference to research conducted on EFL teaching.
- Links to materials and websites presenting useful information regarding EFL teaching.

Autonomy and autonomous learning constitute the basis for the use of the Reference Guide. Considering a general meaning of this term as the condition of something that does not depend on anything else, autonomy can be understood as the counter-edge, the opposite point of a learning continuum: conventional-dependent vs. unconventional-independent. The history of the term, in the field of education and language learning, can be dated back to the post-WWII period, when social rights movements arose and education was first considered as an empowering tool, leading to the awareness of its value. Collins (1991), and Hammond confirm the latter by saying that *"the ultimate purpose of education is the betterment of society, and that critical awareness and social action to promote emancipation are desirable results of any educational intervention".*

So, the ERG provides elements that facilitate the aforementioned aspects, making the students more responsible for their learning and cognitive growth. They could get more involved in the whole process after they receive the information they need and are provided with the tool to fulfill the task effectively.

Once elaborated, the implementation process for the ERG started in September 2018. Students from all academic years of the major were notified about the availability of this digital tool and its benefits for making their learning-directed tasks more efficient. Students from 2nd, 3rd and 4th years embraced the idea enthusiastically and began to use it on weekly basis. Two instruments were elaborated and applied to corroborate both, usefulness of the tool and level of usage: An interview to the users (see Appendix 4) and a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that automatically calculated the amount of students using the ERG and the percentage represented from the total amount of services provided by the SALC. The satisfaction of the users was measured by the interview previously mentioned. Users were able to look for, find, download or consult the materials they needed for completing learning tasks, research projects and assignments from different subjects within the curriculum. Through the process of implementation marked decline in the level of aid they required to operate the ERG and use its resources was detected, proving the accessibility and usage ease of the product elaborated and making it fit the intended aim of fostering Self-Managed-Learning.

The following graph shows the tendency of usage throughout the course. The results show a steady increase since the very beginning of the academic year; yet, a significant drop took place in May, in which the frequency of programmed blackouts grew drastically due to nationwide regulations involving fuel shortage. This variable could not

be foreseen in such dimension so it was regarded at the time of offering recommendations for implementing the ERG in coming courses (Figure 1).

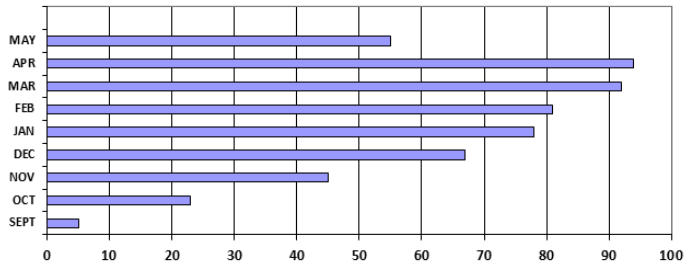

Figure 1. Monthly amount of services involving the use of the ERG at the SALC.

It is noticeable that once the students became aware of the existence of the ERG and its potential for helping them in their SML they rapidly grew their acceptance towards it. They quickly started using it to complement contents and exercises dealt with in class and on which they presented doubts or needed deeper approaches to broaden their knowledge and expand their cognitive performance regarding linguistic skills. Moreover, they also used the ERG to deal with contents from subjects other than the ones specific to their specialty as well as their Term Papers and Diploma Papers, thus giving the ERG a more complete impact according to the objective sought in this research. The total amount of services provided at the SALC implying the use of the ERG raised up to 540, only surpassed by internet surfing and social media interaction.

In order to contrast these results, the interview was implemented. The regularities stated from this instrument are the following:

1. 100% of the students interviewed expressed that the ERG is a quite complete and useful tool for their studies in the major because it helps the save a lot of time while looking for the information they need to complete assignments projects and other learning tasks required to complete their preparation.
2. 92% of the sample considers that the variety of the materials included in the database meets their needs at the time of consulting, reviewing and/or practicing the contents they deal with in class with a wide spectrum of forms, meanings and registers they are supposed to master. The rest of the students were simply not able to notice all the benefits because they are in the starting years and they still do not have the tools to use the SALC effectively since their learning remains teacher-guided.
3. 100% of the interviewed stated they feel more comfortable using the ERG than the MOODLE platform since it does not require connectivity to be accessed, an unresolved issue in our university.
4. 100% of the students considered that the user interface that hosts the ERG presents no complications, that is, it is easy to use and the hyperlink system chosen to access the digital bibliography facilitates the process of interacting or downloading the materials as well as the possibility of working with multimedia products.

Nevertheless, the marks of the students after the implementation of the ERG would have been an important parameter to prove its validity. But unfortunately the final evaluations period would take place after the presentation of this report so they could not be included as part of the validation; another recommendation emerged from this issue.

These elements enable the author the assertion that the product presented as final result of the present research accomplished the objective stated within the theoretical design and the idea to be defended has been validated.

CONCLUSIONS

Once concluded the research process it can be stated that:

Students and professors are unaware of the availability and potential stored in the Self Access Center database.

Having access to the digital database of a subject plays a significant role in the development of language skills in a language classroom. Despite the importance of receiving classes several times per week; some teachers of English are still trying to focus their lessons on the few English books that remain in the inventory of the school without been able to give the students an easy access way to the digital bibliography.

Autonomy and autonomous learning constitute the basis for the use of the Reference Guide. Considering a general meaning of this term as the condition of something that does not depend on anything else, autonomy can be understood as the counter-edge, the opposite point of a learning continuum: conventional-dependent vs. unconventional-independent.

The implementation of the Electronic Reference Guide could actually and effectively bridge the gap for students to become self-managed learners at least in its early stages.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Ally, M. (2004). Foundations of educational theory for online learning. In, T.Anderson (Ed.), The theory and practice of online learning. (pp. 3-31). Edmonton: Athabasca University Press.

Artino, A. R., & Jones, K. (2012). Exploring the complex relations between achievement emotions and self-regulated learning behaviors in online learning. Internet And Higher Education, 15(3), 170-175. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ969232

Greenland, S. J., & Moore, C. (2014). Patterns of online student enrolment and attrition in Australian open access online education: a preliminary case study. Open Praxis, 6(1), 45-54. Retrieved from https://openpraxis.org/index.php/OpenPraxis/article/view/95/72

Ku, D., & Chang, C. (2011). The effect of academic discipline and gender difference on Taiwanese college students' learning styles and strategies in web-based learning environments. Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, (3), 265-272. Retrieved from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/bce4/ff165e0f670ea-4f591bc5731fe1087e6abad.pdf

Pintrich, P. R. (2004). A conceptual framework for assessing motivation and self- regulated learning in college students. Educational Psychology Review, 16(4), 385–407. Retrieved from https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10648-004-0006-x

Serdyukov, P., & Hill, R. (2013). Flying with clipped wings: are students independent in online college classes? Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching, 6(1), 54-67. Retrieved from https://www.nu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/journal-of-research-in-innovative-teaching-volume-6.pdf

Wang, C.H., Shannon, D. M., & Ross, M. E. (2013). Students' characteristics, self-regulated learning, technology self-efficacy, and course outcomes in online learning. Distance Education, 34(3), 302-323. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1023862

Waschull, S.B. (2001). The online delivery of psychology courses: Attrition, performance, and evaluation. Teaching of Psychology, 28(2), 143-147. Retrieved from http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1207/S15328023TOP2802_15

Zimmerman, B. J. (1989). A social cognitive view of self-regulated academic learning. Journal of Educational Psychology, 81(3)9–339. Retrieved from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e1ff/53e710437e009f06bc264b093a2ba9523879.pdf

APPENDIXS

Appendix 1. Observation guide.

Objective: To explore the ways in which independent study is fostered in the Foreign Languages major

Elements to be observed:

1. Availability of bibliographical sources that meet basic, complementary and auxiliary types.
2. Awareness on the possibilities offered by the Self-Access Center.
3. Implementation of actions directed to the use of the Self-Access Center.
4. Objectives of the actions designed for independent study.
5. Whether the teacher gives special attention to the ways in which students manage their learning.
6. Awareness and motivation of the students towards getting involved in their learning.

Appendix 2. Survey to teachers of the Foreign Languages major.

Objective: To verify the level of awareness on the development of independent study in their students and the potential use of the Self-Access Center.

1. Do you consider important the development of independent study? Why?/ Why not?
2. Are you familiar with the term Self-Managed Learning?
3. In your classes, you foster the development of independent and self-directed study

___ Always ___ sometimes ___ never

How?

Why?/ why not?

4. 4. Regarding the Self-Access Center:

In its databases students can find

___ Digital books

___ Printed books and magazines

___ Downloaded didactic materials

___ I don´t know.

Appendix 3. Interview to Foreign Languages students.

Objective: To know the level of awareness of students regarding their learning as well as their knowledge about the possibilities offered by the Self-Access Center.

Questionnaire

1. What do you understand by learning management?
2. Do you take any actions to promote your learning beyond the classroom?
3. What elements could be useful to you at the time of studying on your own?
4. Do you know what the Self-Access Center is and where it is located?
5. Do you know the activities you can carry out in that center? If you do, please state some.

Appendix 4. Interview to Foreign Languages students 2.

Objective: To know the level of satisfaction of users regarding the Electronic Reference Guide designed and implemented at the Self-Access Center.

Questionnaire

1. Do you know what the Self-Access Center is and where it is located?
2. Do you know the activities you can carry out in that center? If you do, please state some.
3. Did you have the chance of using the ERG to access the Center´s database?
4. Do you think that the materials comprised in the database are helpful and varied? Why?
5. Do you feel comfortable while interacting with the ERG? Why?
6. Please state any other related element you consider important.