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AUTONOMY

IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPEAKING SKILLS BY SPANISH SPEAKERS

AUTONOMÍA EN EL DESARROLLO DE LA HABILIDAD DE EXPRESIÓN ORAL POR HISPANOHABLANTES

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Suggested citation (APA, Seventh Edition)

Sanz-Gámez, L., Herrera-Gálvez, L., & Ramírez-Isaac, J. (2025). Autonomy in the development of speaking skills by spanish speakers. *Revista Transdisciplinaria de Estudios Sociales y Tecnológicos*, 5(3), 92-97.

Fecha de presentación: 15/06/2025

Fecha de aceptación: 31/07/2025

Fecha de publicación: 01/09/2025



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ABSTRACT

This article explores the role of autonomy in the development of speaking skills among Spanish-speaking students, with an emphasis on the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language (SFL). It analyzes methodologies, strategies, and results of didactic interventions aimed at enhancing autonomy, as well as the factors influencing the process. The study is based on a literature review and analysis of classroom experiences, highlighting the importance of communicative strategies, group work, and the creation of safe learning environments. The results show that autonomy fosters confidence, motivation, and communicative competence, although it faces challenges related to affective and sociocultural factors. The conclusion is that promoting autonomy through active and personalized methodologies is key to the effective development of oral expression skills.

Keywords:

Autonomy, speaking skills, Spanish speakers, EFL, communicative strategies.

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora el papel de la autonomía en el desarrollo de las habilidades de expresión oral entre estudiantes hispanohablantes, con énfasis en la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera (ELE). Se analizan metodologías, estrategias y resultados de intervenciones didácticas orientadas a potenciar la autonomía, así como los factores que influyen en el proceso. El estudio se basa en una revisión bibliográfica y en el análisis de experiencias en el aula, destacando la importancia de las estrategias comunicativas, el trabajo en grupo y la creación de ambientes de aprendizaje seguros. Los resultados muestran que la autonomía fomenta la confianza, la motivación y la competencia comunicativa, aunque enfrenta desafíos relacionados con factores afectivos y socioculturales. Se concluye que promover la autonomía mediante metodologías activas y personalizadas es clave para el desarrollo efectivo de las habilidades de expresión oral.

Palabras clave:

Autonomía, expresión oral, hispanohablantes, inglés como lengua extranjera, estrategias comunicativas.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the fundamental skills in acquiring and mastering a language, especially for Spanish speakers who aim to refine their communicative competence in Spanish. Oral expression is not only a vehicle for transmitting ideas but also a key component of social interaction and cultural participation. Traditionally, the teaching of speaking has focused primarily on the transmission of linguistic knowledge, grammar rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation, while often relegating the development of learner autonomy to a secondary role.

This teacher-centered approach has sometimes limited students' opportunities to explore their own strategies for communication, relying instead on repetition and memorization (Durruthy et al., 2024; Miranda Torres et al., 2023).

However, contemporary pedagogical approaches emphasize the centrality of the learner in the process of language acquisition. In this perspective, the student is not a passive recipient of knowledge but an active and autonomous agent capable of regulating their own learning (Lavado et al., 2025), setting goals, and monitoring their progress. Encouraging autonomy in oral expression enables learners to take responsibility for their communicative development, face real-life situations with greater confidence, and reduce dependence on external guidance.

Developing autonomy in oral production entails more than just mastering linguistic structures; it also requires the ability to employ communicative strategies that compensate for gaps in knowledge, such as paraphrasing, using gestures, or reformulating messages to ensure mutual understanding. Furthermore, autonomy involves adapting speech to various interactional contexts, whether formal or informal, academic or social, demonstrating flexibility and communicative awareness (Chik et al., 2018; Little, 2016).

In addition to cognitive and strategic dimensions, affective factors play a decisive role in oral performance. Variables such as anxiety, self-esteem, and motivation strongly influence how students engage in spoken communication. High levels of anxiety may hinder fluency, while strong motivation and positive self-perception can enhance willingness to communicate and risk-taking in language use. For this reason, fostering autonomy is closely tied to creating supportive learning environments that value student voices, encourage experimentation, and normalize errors as part of the learning process.

Therefore, it becomes essential to analyze the ways in which autonomy can be cultivated within the classroom and beyond, as well as to assess the impact it has on the development of oral expression skills. By integrating learner-centered methodologies, promoting self-regulation, and addressing the emotional dimension of speaking,

educators can contribute to more effective and meaningful language learning experiences, ultimately equipping students with the communicative competence needed to thrive in real-world contexts.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is based on a bibliographic review of recent research on autonomy and speaking skills in Spanish speakers, complemented by the analysis of documented didactic experiences in EFL teaching contexts. The selected works address:

- Learning and communication strategies for oral expression.
- Group dynamics as a resource for developing autonomy.
- Affective and sociocultural factors influencing oral participation.
- Evaluation of results from didactic interventions oriented toward autonomy.

The methodology includes synthesizing results from qualitative and quantitative research, as well as comparing different pedagogical approaches. Experiences from both beginner and advanced levels were considered, with special attention to adapting activities to the needs and characteristics of students.

To analyze the role of autonomy in developing oral expression among Spanish speakers, a systematic and critical review of recent scientific literature was conducted, complemented by the study of practical experiences in educational contexts. The criteria and procedures used in selecting and analyzing sources are detailed below:

Literature Selection Criteria

- **Publication Dates:** Priority was given to studies and articles published between 2020 and 2024 to ensure the data and theoretical approaches were current and relevant.
- **Academic Sources:** Publications indexed in recognized databases such as SciELO, Dialnet, and university repositories were selected, as well as official documents from educational institutions.
- **Topics:** Research explicitly addressing autonomy in oral expression learning, oral communicative strategies, affective factors related to orality, and the use of technology for developing oral competence in Spanish speakers was included.
- **Methodology:** Studies with qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies were considered, prioritizing those presenting empirical results and analysis of didactic interventions.
- **Linguistic Context:** The focus was on research conducted in Spanish as a native and foreign language

teaching context, especially with Spanish-speaking populations.

Review Procedure

1. Initial search using keywords such as “autonomy,” “oral expression,” “communicative strategies,” “Spanish teaching,” “affective factors,” and “ICT in oral expression.”
2. Filtering by relevance: Abstracts and keywords were reviewed to discard documents not fitting the central topic or lacking academic rigor.
3. Detailed reading: Selected texts were analyzed in depth, extracting information on objectives, methods, results, and conclusions.
4. Synthesis and comparison: Findings were organized into thematic categories to identify trends, similarities, and differences among the studies.
5. Incorporation of examples and cases: Practical examples and didactic activities described in the studies were selected to illustrate effective strategies for fostering autonomy in oral expression.

Analysis of Didactic Experiences

In addition to the literature review, educational experiences at primary, secondary, and university levels were analyzed, including:

- Implementation of group dynamics and role-playing games to improve spontaneity and oral interaction.
- Use of digital technologies for self-assessment and autonomous practice.
- Evaluation of the influence of affective factors, such as anxiety and motivation, on autonomy and oral performance.

Analysis of Didactic Experiences on Autonomy in English Learning

To complement the literature review on autonomy and oral expression, a detailed analysis was conducted of recent didactic experiences focused on autonomous English learning (Cabrera et al., 2010; González Rodríguez, 2015; Morales Sánchez, 2024), providing empirical and methodological evidence relevant to developing autonomy in oral expression among Spanish speakers.

- **PDAA-CAA Virtual Modality Didactic Experience:** A recent study at the Self-Learning Center of the Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro (PDAA-CAA) implemented a didactic-pedagogical proposal integrating interactive activities and self-assessment elements to foster autonomy in English learning, with a special focus on oral production. The proposal included digital technologies such as audio and video recordings and tools for self-reflection on performance, enabling students to become aware of their progress

and difficulties. Results showed that technology-supported activities had the greatest impact on students' perception of autonomy, who reported increased motivation and capacity for self-management. However, student interaction was limited, suggesting the need to incorporate digital collaborative spaces to strengthen the social dimension of autonomy. It was also recommended to expand research with qualitative techniques for a deeper understanding of autonomous processes.

- **“Solo Learning” Socioformative Approach in Cuba:** The “Solo Learning” experience in English teaching promoted responsibility and assertive decision-making by students, who faced real-life challenges from a socioformative perspective. This methodology integrated various study areas and relied on ICT use, fostering innovative and up-to-date autonomous learning. The authors highlighted that incorporating technologies such as Big Data and artificial intelligence can further enhance autonomy in English learning by offering personalized and adaptive resources that meet individual student needs.
- **Study on Learning Management Control in University Students:** A study in a university context evaluated autonomy in English learning based on Benson & Voller (2019), theoretical proposal, which distinguishes three dimensions: control of learning management, control of cognitive processes, and control of content. The research showed that only a small percentage of students reached high levels of autonomy, mainly due to the lack of concrete regulation of self-study and external factors affecting discipline and personal organization. This finding underscores the importance of designing strategies that promote planning, organization, and autonomous evaluation of learning, as well as the need to strengthen student motivation and commitment.
- **Implementation of a Course Based on Promoting Autonomy in Secondary School:** In a study with tenth-grade secondary students in Chile, an English course was evaluated that was designed to foster autonomy through self-regulation, motivation, teacher-student relationships, and the use of metacognitive strategies. The mixed-method research used surveys, focus groups, and field diaries to collect data. The results indicated that students increased the frequency of autonomous behaviors, identified factors that favor autonomy, and recognized the importance of the teacher's role in supporting the process. However, it was noted that the time invested in developing autonomy could affect progress in other aspects of English learning, highlighting the need to balance objectives.
- **Playful and Creative Strategies in Preschool to Foster Autonomy:** A study in Colombia focused on preschool children showed that the lack of time and creative activities limited the development of English and autonomy in learning. Activities were designed that incorporated play,

art, and exploration, allowing children to experience language use in a playful and group context. The methodology included qualitative techniques such as interviews, participant observation, and field diaries, which identified factors influencing autonomy from an early age. The results showed that group activities and free play foster motivation and self-regulation, essential elements for autonomous development.

References for the Review

Works such as systematic reviews of oral communicative strategies in the classroom, studies on oral communicative competence in the mother tongue, and analyses of the relationship between emotional autonomy and oral expression in secondary students were considered. Official documents proposing criteria for developing linguistic awareness and autonomy in Spanish teaching were also consulted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Integration of Findings

These didactic experiences provide practical evidence of how autonomy can be promoted in English learning, especially in oral expression, through:

- Incorporating digital technologies that facilitate self-assessment and autonomous practice.
- Implementing socio-formative methodologies that connect learning with real and meaningful contexts.
- Designing activities that enhance planning, organization, and control of learning.
- Creating safe and motivating environments, focusing on social interaction and collaboration.
- Paying attention to affective and metacognitive factors that influence self-regulation.

These elements are considered in the analysis of autonomy in oral expression among Spanish speakers, providing a solid framework for understanding and designing effective educational interventions.

Development of Autonomy through Communicative Strategies

Reviewed studies agree that autonomy in oral expression is enhanced through the conscious use of communicative strategies such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, and asking for help. These strategies allow students to overcome lexical and grammatical limitations, facilitating effective interaction even at beginner levels. Explicit instruction in using these tools increases confidence and communicative effectiveness.

Group Dynamics and Safe Environments

Working through group dynamics is particularly effective in fostering autonomy and reducing anxiety associated with oral expression. Creating a comfortable and trusting classroom environment encourages active participation, cooperation, and acceptance of mistakes as part of learning. Group interaction not only improves oral competence but also contributes to developing the social and affective skills necessary for autonomy.

Affective and Sociocultural Factors

Anxiety, embarrassment, and fear of making mistakes are common obstacles in developing oral expression, especially in foreign language contexts. Promoting autonomy also involves addressing these factors through activities that increase self-esteem and motivation. Adapting tasks to the interests and needs of the group, as well as integrating relevant sociocultural elements, improves the relevance and effectiveness of teaching.

Results of Didactic Interventions

Documented experiences show that autonomy translates into greater fluency, appropriateness, and spontaneity in oral production. Autonomous students can regulate their learning, identify their difficulties, and proactively seek solutions. Furthermore, autonomy encourages the transfer of communicative skills to contexts outside the classroom, consolidating long-term learning.

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence gathered confirms that the development of autonomy plays a decisive role in the acquisition and mastery of oral expression among Spanish speakers learning English. Autonomy functions not merely as an accessory skill but as a central dimension of communicative competence, enabling learners to take ownership of their learning processes and to engage in spoken interaction more confidently and effectively.

The results demonstrate that autonomy is fostered through a combination of pedagogical, affective, and sociocultural factors. Explicit instruction in communicative strategies—such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, and seeking clarification—empowers students to overcome lexical and grammatical limitations while simultaneously enhancing fluency and accuracy. Group work and collaborative dynamics, when carried out in a safe and trusting environment, further reinforce autonomy by lowering affective barriers, reducing anxiety, and promoting peer support.

Moreover, attention to affective variables such as self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety management proves indispensable for sustaining autonomy in oral tasks. Didactic

interventions that address these dimensions not only strengthen learners' oral performance in the classroom but also encourage the transfer of communicative skills to real-life contexts, thus ensuring long-term learning and applicability beyond academic settings.

Despite these positive findings, certain challenges persist. Cultural and contextual diversity requires flexible methodological approaches that adapt to learners' specific needs and backgrounds. Likewise, anxiety and fear of making mistakes remain significant obstacles that must be systematically addressed through inclusive, supportive, and student-centered pedagogies.

In sum, promoting autonomy in oral expression should be considered a core objective in both formal and informal language learning environments. By integrating communicative strategies, socio-formative practices, and affective considerations, educators can cultivate competent, resilient, and autonomous speakers capable of navigating diverse communicative contexts with confidence.

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