UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE BAJA CALIFORNIA

FACULTAD DE IDIOMAS

SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIERS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUTONOMOUS FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: A GUIDEBOOK TO OVERCOME SUCH CHALLENGES

Para obtener el Grado de Maestra en Lenguas Modernas

Presenta

ZAIDETH ZOBEIDA PONCE ALONSO

Mexicali, Baja California, junio de 2020

UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE BAJA CALIFORNIA

FACULTAD DE IDIOMAS

SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIERS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUTONOMOUS FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: A GUIDEBOOK TO OVERCOME SUCH CHALLENGES

Para obtener el Grado de Maestra en Lenguas Modernas

Presenta

ZAIDETH ZOBEIDA PONCE ALONSO

Aprobado por:

DRA. LAURA EMILIA FIERRO LÓPEZ

Directora

DRA. MA. DEL ROCÍO DOMÍNGUEZ GAONA

Codirectora

DRA. LILIA MARTÍNEZ LOBATOS

Lectora

Mexicali, Baja California, junio de 2020

Table of Contents

List of Tables ----------6

Abstract ----------7

Chapter 1. Introduction ----------8

1.1 Background of the Problem ----------8

1.2 Statement of the Problem ----------11

1.3 Research Question ----------13

1.4 Aim of the Study ----------13

1.4.1 Objectives. ----------13

1.5 Justification ----------14

Chapter 2. Literature Review ----------17

2.2 The Role of the Language Teacher in Promoting Learner Autonomy ---------- 20

2.3 Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs towards Learner Autonomy ---------- 22

2.4 Barriers to the Development of Language Learning Autonomy ---------- 24

2.5 Sociocultural Factors in the Development of Learner Autonomy ---------- 26

Chapter 3. Methodology ---------- 29

3.1 Brief Description of the Context ---------- 29

3.2 Choice of Methodology ----------31

3.3 Information about the Participants ---------- 33

3.4 Data Collection Instrument ----------36

3.5 Description of the Data Collection and Analysis Process ---------- 38

3.6 Description of the guidebook ---------- 38

Chapter 4. Results ----------40

4.1 Data analysis and interpretation ---------- 40

4.1.1 Definition of learner autonomy. ---------- 40

4.1.2 Promoting learner autonomy. ---------- 43

4.1.3 Attitudes towards learner autonomy. ---------- 45

4.1.4 Sociocultural background of teachers and learners. ---------- 47

4.1.4.1 Preference for an authority figure. ---------- 48

4.1.4.2 Tendency towards collectivism. ---------- 51

4.1.4.3 Low tolerance of ambiguity. ---------- 53

4.2 Proposal ---------- 55
4.2.1 Teacher training for autonomous learning. ---------- 56
4.2.2 Teach learning strategies. ----------56
4.2.3 Give students choices. ---------- 57
4.2.4 Build upon prior knowledge. ----------57
4.2.5 Encourage students to bring resources or materials related to the content of the lesson. ----------58
4.2.6 Use cooperative learning strategies. ---------- 58
4.2.7 Provide feedback to students. ---------- 58
4.2.8 Encourage students to assess their own learning progress. ---------- 59
4.2.9 Have learners suggest materials and resources at the SAC. ---------- 59

Chapter 5. Conclusions ----------61

References ----------62

List of Tables

Table 1. Defining learning autonomy ---------- 19
Table 2. Roles in teaching and counseling ---------- 21
Table 3. Sample profile ---------- 35
Table 4. Operationalization ---------- 37

Abstract

The present study aims to analyze how the sociocultural background might influence the development of learner autonomy in foreign language education in order to propose some strategies to overcome such challenges. Given the lack of research on the sociocultural barriers in learner autonomy in a Mexican context and the need to hear teachers' voices about this issue, qualitative data was obtained from semi-structured interviews with six language teachers on their perspectives on learner autonomy, its application to the language classroom, and their experiences with Mexican and foreign learners/contexts in order to find out differences regarding learner autonomy. The results suggest three main sociocultural characteristics: preference for an authority figure, tendency towards collectivism, and low tolerance of ambiguity. Finally, nine strategies were proposed in order to help language teachers to deal with such sociocultural characteristics when fostering learner autonomy in the border city of Mexicali, where this study was carried out.

Keywords: Learner autonomy, Mexican context, sociocultural influence, teachers' perspectives, teaching strategies.