



## Nueva cultura del aprendizaje del inglés en estudiantes universitarios

A New English Learning Culture for University Students

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### RESUMEN

El artículo presenta los resultados del proyecto de investigación “Creación de una nueva cultura del aprendizaje de lenguas”. Los autores tienen la esperanza que los estudios del inglés en la universidad puedan ser mejorados con la formación de una nueva cultura de aprendizaje que haga de los estudiantes excelentes aprendices. Métodos del tipo teórico y empírico permitieron el análisis y caracterización del problema: los estudiantes no saben cómo aprender inglés. Existe la necesidad de la elaboración de una nueva cultura del aprendizaje, así como de una estrategia para su aplicación, dirigida a lograr la competencia comunicativa, interactiva e intercultural. Una nueva cultura del aprendizaje del inglés fue concebida desde la inclusión de nuevas dimensiones, como son los aprendizajes híbridos, fuera del aula, de interacción social y reflexión, la clase invertida, la psicología del éxito, las estrategias de comunicación y aprendizaje, la relación cultura-lengua, y las creencias acerca de la lengua, el habla y la comunicación, entre otras variables. Un sistema de acciones fue diseñado y puesto en práctica para educar la nueva cultura del aprendizaje del inglés en estudiantes de la Carrera de Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad de Pinar del Río. Los profesores y estudiantes fueron los mediadores para lograr aprender a aprender la lengua. Los resultados reflejan la transformación realizada en la cultura tradicional del aprendizaje del inglés de los estudiantes en una nueva, donde tiene lugar un aprendizaje más divertido, motivador, dinámico, rápido y efectivo.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Cultura del aprendizaje, estudiantes universitarios, lengua inglesa.

### ABSTRACT

*This article presents the results of the Research Project entitled “Creation of a New English Language Learning Culture”. The authors have the hope that English study at the university can be improved with the formation of a new learning culture that made the students excellent learners. Theoretical and empirical methods allowed the analysis and characterization of the problem: the learners do not know how to learn English. Consequently, there is a need of elaborating a new English learning culture as well as a strategy for its application, directed to achieve better learnings for the communicative, interactive and intercultural competences. A new English learning culture was thought from the inclusion of new dimensions, such as blended learnings, outside the classroom, flipped lesson, success psychology, learning and teaching strategies, culture-language relationship, and the beliefs about language, speech and communication, among other variables. A system of actions was designed and put into practice to educate the new English learning culture in the students from Foreign Language Studies at the University of Pinar del Rio. The teachers and the students themselves were the mediators to achieve to learn to learn the language. The results reflect the transformations made in the students’ traditional English learning culture in favor of the new one where enjoyable, motivating, dynamic, faster and more efficient learning takes place.*

### KEYWORDS

English language, learning culture, university students.

## 1. Introduction

The term Language Learning Culture is not widely used in the world. Richards and Lockhart (1994) devote two chapters of their book: *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*, to explore teachers' beliefs and learners' beliefs systems. They tell about the source of teachers' beliefs, the beliefs about English, learning, teaching, the program, the curriculum, and about language teaching as a profession. They also focus on the learners and tell about their cognitive styles, the learning strategies, the beliefs about the nature of English, the speakers, the four language skills, the language learning and teaching process, the appropriate classroom behavior, about the self, the goals, and they give instruments to measure each item mentioned.

English is taught to all students in the Cuban universities. Besides, future English teachers are trained and graduated in four years. However, the learning results in terms of communication are not good at all. Future English teachers end their studies at the university without reaching yet the expected B2 level. The problem is that most of the university students do not know how to learn the English language. In fact, the students' paradigm "Learn to Learn" is weak. Hence, the target to change is not simply the method, but the learner who studies the language. Our hope lies in the need that students and teachers have to acquire a New English Learning Culture to become excellent teachers and learners. So, what is needed is an excellent language learner to cope with and get the best from all the technical, human and social resources at hands in order to learn English efficiently. The teacher's greatest challenge is to teach them a New English Learning Culture to be excellent learners, so that they could improve their English competences.

This work is based in the ideas of Van Ek (1977), Livingstone, (1985), Acosta et al. (1997), Richards (2005), González Cancio, (2009), Pulido (2016), Acosta y Gómez (2017), Acosta y Vigil (2019), Acosta y Careaga (2019), Pérez Morejón et al. (2022) about the learning culture and foreign language teaching.

## 2. Methodology

The authors of this article used a definition of language learning culture as the starting point to operationalize the dependent variable: English learning culture. They have defined it as the system of beliefs, attitudes, sources, psychology, approaches, strategies and resources the students use to learn the language. The authors used these qualities to decide on the dimensions and indicators the dependent variable might have, which would be considered, later on, to elaborate the instruments needed to measure and get information about the scientific problem, its real state and the changes it has gone with the instrumentation of the strategy intended for this purpose.

The students' English language culture was measured through a survey and a group debate, before and after the instrumentation of the strategy especially elaborated to create in the students the New English Learning Culture. Then, the results of both measurements were compared quantitatively and qualitatively to find out the difference, if any, that tells if the learners' English learning culture was transformed into a new one or not.

## Questionnaires applied to the students

The authors elaborated questionnaires and guides for each empirical method used. These were administered to diagnose the current state of the students' English Learning Culture, and later on, to obtain data about the social impact of the NELC education process carried out to make the students better learners.

### 3. Results and discussion

In the survey the students evaluated their own English learning. This self-evaluation shows that 14 % got 5, 55% got 4, and 31 % obtained a grade of 3. The students who said that they learned more outside the classroom had a historical mark of 5 or 4, while those who said that they learned more inside the classroom had a mark between 4 and 3.

#### A students' self-evaluation of their own English learning culture

The qualities or dimensions of the NELC was evaluated in first year at the beginning and at the end of school course 2018-2019. The difference in marks tells us the transformation of the students' English Learning Culture into a new one:

**Table 1.**  
*The students' English learning culture*

Items	Initial test	Final test	Difference
a) Beliefs about the language and its learning	4	4.6	12%
b) Learning English outside the classroom	3.3	4.5	24%
c) Successful psychology to learn English	3.9	4.6	14%
d) English language learning strategies	3.7	4.4	14%
e) Level of general and integral culture	3.6	4	8%
f) The use of technology to learn English	2.7	4.1	28%
g) Focusing real English use in learning it	3.2	4.5	26%
h) Connectivity with the world and oneself	2.2	3.5	26%
i) Opportunities for reflective social interaction	3	4.8	36%
j) How to use humanism in learning English	3.3	4.5	24%

Out of this data, in the initial questionnaire a total of 53 students is evaluated of "Fair" (26) and "Regular" (27), while two students get a mark of two points and one gets "Very Good". Therefore, the students' level of English Learning Culture ranks very low. Meanwhile data from the final questionnaire shows that the means is higher. A means of the students' English Learning Culture Self-evaluation (from 5) is 3 in the initial test, and 4.35 in the final test, with a meaningful difference of 1.35 (27%).

On the other hand, a second questionnaire was administered to 56 sample students the first day they entered to the University in order to obtain detail information so as to characterize their cognitive and social areas and elaborate their profiles. The results are these:

**Table 2.**  
***The students' cognitive and social areas***

Items to be self-evaluated	No	%	Yes	%	Difference
English mastering background	51	91	5	9	7%
General cultural background	46	82	10	18	64%
Motivation for English learning	5	9	51	91	82%
How much you like English	2	4	54	96	93%
Want to be an English teach	10	18	46	82	64%
Resources at hand to learn English	41	73	15	27	46%
How hard is to learn English here	42	75	14	25	50%
Happy with your English learning here	18	32	38	68	36%

### **Questionnaire for the students' general cultural background**

The written test to measure the students' general cultural background shows that their level of general cultural background is very low, for 98% failed the test. The students do not know Who Isabel Allende, Alice Walker and Víctor Hugo are, they do not watch Telesur, they are unable to understand the question: "What is our oil doing under their soil?", and to say who the Black Panthers, Martin Luther King, Baby Ruth and Jack Robinson were, or what the CNN and BBC are, and what these groups of letters stand for: JFK. GGM. CFK. USA. BE.

### **The New English Learning Culture**

The NELC has got a number of important dimensions. What are, for us, the qualities of a New English Learning Culture? Let us have a look at them:

1. The learners' beliefs about the language and its learning.
2. Learning English outside and inside the classroom.
3. The psychology of success in learning English.
4. Using technology to improve English learning.
5. Language learning happens through reflection and social interaction.
6. The use of new English learning strategies
7. Learning real English use rather than the language system.
8. Connectivity with the world and oneself by means of English.
9. The student's cultural background and the English language.
10. Humanism in English Learning.

For the creation in the students of the NELC, the authors designed a set of interactive learning tasks to show them how they could learn English better. Some are new techniques created by the authors to make students reflect on their own language learning, feel how language operates to create meaning in given contexts, and how useful it is to develop communication skills.

## **Discussion**

The results show and test the initial idea that gave rise to this research: the need to form in the university students a NELC to make them capable of learning more and better. Theoretically speaking this idea was justified, but now it is tested empirically.

## **Main facts**

- It has been proved that when the students come for the first time to the University, they have distorted and wrong ideas about what language is and how it is learned.
- Many students are not quite aware of the role of social interaction in learning.
- Sometimes the students get tired of saying things repeatedly because they don't realize that speech is endless as a way to learn the language better.
- Most students and teachers still think that language is grammar.
- Learning English demands many hours of interaction and reflection outside the classroom because learning inside the classroom is not enough to become a competent English user.
- Few students use up-to-date learning strategies and are stuck to old strategies, such as learn phrases rather than words, learn with your ears rather than you're your eyes.
- The most striking dimension of the NELC has been undoubtedly learning real English, perhaps for its novelty, opposed openly to the old habit of learning bookish English from formal English textbooks.
- Technology makes language alive available, but not all students use it properly for that.
- The students' connection is still weak for several reasons: need of University internalization processes, lack of access to The Internet, and lack of English-speaking people to develop communication and socialization skills.
- The students' attitude is good in general terms, even when there are some that do not make great efforts and give enough time to English learning. However, they all hope to be good citizens, using English for the sake of peace, justice and faith.

The main task is to encourage the students to love English and its learning. Only love can make English learning useful and meaningful. The students should feel the need to learn English for it helps them to socialize with other people, to express their emotions and to be useful and creative citizens.

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