

## Student choice and reading in the EFL classroom

Irina Argüelles Álvarez  
Universidad Politécnica de Madrid

### Abstract

This paper deals with the role of both the teacher and the student when choosing materials for the course, more specifically, with the selection of books for extensive reading. Although carried out in a first year tertiary education level, the results of this small scale study could be a good starting point for reflection in previous secondary and pre-university educational levels. It will be attempted here to make explicit the reasons that lead teachers to make their reading choices within the scope of a traditional syllabus type and the actual reasons that students have to make their own choice within a more negotiated syllabus design. The conclusion of this study points to the fact that genre and topic preferences guide the choice when selecting a book to read in the classroom. On the other hand, if students have the option to select their own readings this can have a direct effect in their implication in the learning process, eventually leading to greater motivation and thus, to better learning.

**Keywords:** extensive reading, student choice, student implication, language learning process.

### Resumen

Este trabajo se centra en el papel que desempeñan tanto los profesores como los alumnos en la selección de materiales para el curso, en concreto, en la elección de las lecturas. Si bien es cierto que el estudio se lleva a cabo en el primer curso de niveles universitarios, los resultados de esta investigación de aula, pueden servir como punto de partida para la reflexión en los niveles previos de educación secundaria y bachillerato. En este trabajo se analizan los motivos que llevan a los profesores a elegir ciertas lecturas de curso dentro del contexto más tradicional y el contraste con las razones que esgrimen los estudiantes para decidirse por unas o por otras dentro de un contexto flexible más próximo al del currículo negociado. La conclusión de este estudio apunta al género y al tema del libro como principales factores que guían la elección de los estudiantes. Por otro lado, si el estudiante tiene la opción de elegir su lectura de curso, se favorece su implicación con respecto al proceso de aprendizaje que podría redundar en una mayor motivación y por ende, en un aprendizaje mejor.

**Palabras clave:** lectura extensiva, elección del alumno, implicación del alumno, aprendizaje de lenguas.

## 1. Introduction

Although literature on autonomy or Self Directed Learning (SDL), as was also called in the context of lifelong learners in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, is extensive (Benson 2005), more research can be carried out to understand the part played by the student in the organization of a language course. It is not intended here to repeat a history of the different theoretical aspects of autonomy as there is by now a considerable measure of agreement as to the importance of the student's implication in their learning process. There are many definitions of autonomy; technical, psychological or political versions (Benson and Voller 1997, Little 1994) but researchers share the view that learner autonomy is an important goal in second language acquisition (Holec 1987, Little 1990, 1991). Learner autonomy has been used to make predictions about second language acquisition, the usual assumption being that an autonomous learner will be a "good learner" and that learning is best achieved if students play an active role in the process (Holec 1987, Rubin 1987).

The incorporation of autonomy as a goal in the curricula in European countries has led to classroom-based approaches aiming at the development of learner autonomy which is seen as a capacity for taking control of learning (Sinclair 2000, Benson 2001). This capacity can be developed and deployed in a number of ways and situations (Little 1991) and the study presented here aims at exemplifying one of the many practical in-class actions which may eventually contribute to build an “education towards autonomy” as Ojanguren and Blanco (2006) put it:

El aprendizaje autónomo no es sinónimo de aprender sin apoyo profesional, no implica una cesión de la responsabilidad al alumno, *sino una mayor importancia a la educación hacia la autonomía*, donde el trabajo voluntario y autónomo lleva generalmente implícita una motivación más alta y la posibilidad de desarrollar un método de aprendizaje individual que conduzca a un mayor éxito en el aprendizaje. (italics are ours)

While SDL includes many different aspects, this small scale study will deal with the role of both the teacher and the student when choosing materials for the course, more specifically, it will deal with the selection of extensive reading. Traditionally, it has been the teacher’s role to decide what books would be suitable for different students, levels or groups but the least of the times she would take into account the student’s opinion about them. Most research (Tudor 1993, Cotterall 1995, 2000) has assumed that the help of students in making decisions which concern the development of the course have a clear direct positive relation with their motivation; learning is more effective and students get more out of activities, they are also likely to be more secure in their learning. The fact that the student takes part in the process would also benefit the over-loaded teacher who transfers part of her responsibility and becomes a facilitator, counsellor or resource (Voller 1997).

Making a decision in this context, directly implicates the collaboration and negotiation not only among learners but also between learners and teacher (Breen and Littlejohn 2000). Some evidence in support of the negotiated syllabus presented by Clarke (1989, 1991) concerns the question of materials: «Many teachers, if not the vast majority, have built their profession upon the mastery of a specific body of materials [...] it might be that the materials generated by and for one group would rarely if ever find future appropriacy to another group». To summarise, the approach permits the adoption of a negotiated component, although within an externally imposed syllabus, which provides the students with an opportunity to further intervene in their own learning (Holec 1987 or Holme 1996). During the first stages and after the teacher’s introduction to the books, the students analyze or discuss the suitability of different books and decide which ones they consider the most adequate for themselves. Students then, select a book which implies the most basic learner choice, this where students have an opinion or can choose among a number of options concerning activities they are going to engage in for a period of time.

Thus, in accordance with some of the theories previously mentioned, why not leave the decision to the learner? Some teachers will claim that students lack “reasonable” criteria to make a good choice but, what are the student’s criteria? Do they differ from the teachers’? And, in case they are different, are these criteria necessarily wrong? In what follows I shall attempt to make a connection between the reasons that lead teachers to make their choices when selecting reading materials for their students within the scope of a traditional syllabus type and the actual reasons that these last have to make their own choice within a more negotiated syllabus design.

## 2. Literature in a foreign language

Provided that «the teaching of reading must do more than simply exercise reading in the target language» (Brumfit, 1987), the criteria for selection must recognize different students' needs and expectations. Brumfit lists basic criteria for the selection of texts of any kind:

1. Linguistic level, measured in terms of lexicon or syntax.
2. Cultural level: «Different works of literature will be close to the cultural and social expectations of different groups of learners.»
3. Length.
4. Pedagogical role. Books can be deliberately selected in relation with the topic.
5. Genre representation. Different sorts of literature have to be made available.
6. Classic status or “face validity”. Some text may be more motivating for students than others.

These Brumfit's criteria are here adopted as a departure point for the design of questionnaires which are aimed at studying the reasons for the selection of books on the part of students and teachers.

In a first approximation, the intuitive idea is that it is language level the most powerful criterion that will basically guide teachers' choice although it is also thought not to be appropriate alone. They will possibly consider also genre and try to include poetry or theatre as something new for students and worth reading. As for students, when confronted for the first time to the selection of an optional reading for the course, they are expected to base their decision in the length of the book, they will prefer the shortest ones. It is also possible that they will consider genre although not for the same reasons as teachers do; they are thought to prefer those books they know something about because they have already read them in Spanish or because they have seen or have access to the film with the same title.

If the criteria for the selection are shown to be different, it is understood that the fact that the student chooses her own reading or no, may eventually have an effect in their learning process. According to the approach based on a negotiated component, although within an externally imposed syllabus (Holec 1987, Holme 1996), the departing hypothesis is that if students chose their reading they would achieve greater motivation and more effectiveness in their learning.

## 3. The study

Based on a Classroom Action Research (CAR) model, this study seeks to identify to what extent the decisions made by teachers when selecting readings for the course within the more traditional Learning Directed by Others (LDO) scope correspond with the needs and preferences of the students. In a course prepared and taught by several teachers the discussion aroused among them whether the students should or should not choose the course readings and the pilot study presented herein followed the debate. With respect to the methodology and according to Mettetal (2003), CAR represents a midpoint on a continuum ranging from teacher reflection at one end to traditional educational research at the other and is an adequate way for instructors to discover what works best in their own classroom situation, thus allowing informed decisions about the teaching and learning process.

Assuming that not self-learning trained learners have intuitions about their individual needs, the externally chosen readers are likely to generate a response (positive or negative) on the part of the students. The former and also the actual reasons that these last have to make their own choices within a more negotiated syllabus design and the extent to which they correspond with the decisions made by the teacher were studied.

Thus, we are concerned with three different aspects here: the student's response to externally imposed materials, their reasons for their choice when selecting readers and the comparison with the teacher's actual reasons. An important although additional factor in this framework is the notion of consciousness which as Little (1991) presents it, «...implies the possibility of the learners having an attitude to it [learning task], which in turn admits the possibility of widely differing degrees of success».

This notion will be adopted in the final part of the paper to argue that trained self directed or simply more autonomous learners are more likely to critically choose their readings and explicitly judge their teacher's choice rather than these students who are not aware of their learning process.

### *3.1. The research questions*

- What are the reasons that lead teachers to select certain course readers for their students within an LDO scope?
- What is the student's response to their teacher's choice when the text is externally selected?
- What are the reasons that lead students to select their own course readers within a SDL scope?
- To what extent are these reasons similar to / different from the teachers'?
- To what extent does students' awareness of the learning process play a role in the selection or response in each case?

### *3.2. The subjects*

The subjects participating in this pilot study are 10 teachers of English as a foreign language; 20 Spanish students of EFL all of them enrolled in a first year upper intermediate English course and 30 Spanish students of English as a foreign language all of them enrolled in a first year intermediate English course both offered by the University Alfonso X el Sabio in Madrid, Spain. Their ages range from 18 to 20 years old. They have reached this level by means of a level test prepared by the teachers in the Faculty of Applied Linguistics and they all got similar marks in them.

### *3.3. The books*

It is agreed by the teachers in the department (a total number of 10) that students in level 3 must compulsory read a book to pass the level. Every teacher has the option to choose for their own group one book among a previous selection of three in which only part of the teachers participates with some proposals. The options for the teachers to choose are:

1. *To kill a Mocking Bird* by Harper Lee (Minerva)
2. *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne (Faber)
3. *Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life* by Roald Dahl (Penguin)

In order to gather data for our study, some experimental groups in level 2 are given the possibility to choose an optional reading. The process of selection is similar to the previous one: the two teachers in these experimental groups select four possible readings but in this case, they give students the option to read one of them or more. Bringing them into the classroom, and letting students consult, they have the choice of taking a look to the possible options; number of pages, difficulty, topic...The options for the students to choose are:

1. *Meet me in Istanbul* by Richard Chisholm
2. *The Client* by John Grisham
3. *The go – between* by L. P. Hartley
4. *Far from the Madding Crow* by Thomas Hardy

These last are abridged editions in Penguin and Heinemann.

### 3.4. *The method*

In gathering the data, three questionnaires are used: one is designed to elicit information regarding the reasons that lead teachers to select certain course readers, the second studies the reasons students have to select the book they are going to read and the last is designed to gain information regarding the student's preferences and responses to the external choice when the book is imposed.

The aim of the first and second questionnaires is to check if there is any significant difference between the criteria of choice that subjects follow in the group (teachers or students) and between groups (teachers vs. students). It is also important to see to what extent the students have more or less problems in the selection in comparison with the teachers. The aim of the third questionnaire is to study student's feelings and reactions to teachers' choices; thus, the initial motivation with which they will face their "imposed" readings.

Depending on the gathered data, an interview with some of the students could be included as part of the investigation to get some responses about learners' intuitions which eventually explained their answers to the former questionnaires. Some general questions to gain information about their autonomy or teacher independency degree would be included although this individual information is considered additional in our study. As noted above, more autonomous learners are likely to be more critical in the choice of their readings rather than these students who are less. In a relaxed situation, the teacher would show the student alone his/her answers and ask some questions to gain information about the extent to which the student is more or less aware of his/her learning process which we understand here as related with their autonomy degree. It is possible that a "more autonomous" or simply more self-aware student will find greater motivation in choosing her own reading and probably will be more critical to the teacher's choice. On the other hand, the "less autonomous" one can be terrified by the idea of having to make a personal decision and is likely to prefer to have a compulsory reading chosen for her.

### 3.5 *The questionnaires*

The 10 teachers of English of the first year upper intermediate English course and the first year intermediate English course and the 50 students attending these courses complete the questionnaires. In order to gather data on teachers / students' reasons to select and to ensure enough answers from which valid conclusions can be drawn, it is felt essential to encourage subjects to actively participate giving their personal opinion as sincerely as possible.

- a) To gain information regarding the reasons that lead teachers to select certain course readers, the subjects are presented with a number of questions related to their process of selection (APPENDIX A). These questions range from closer questions which will provide the opportunity to the subjects to be more confident about their answers to more open questions. The questionnaires are translated so that the teachers have the option to answer to the Spanish or English version.
- b) To gain information regarding the reasons that lead students to select the book they prefer, the subjects are presented with a number of questions related to their process of selection (APPENDIX B). To design the questionnaire the researcher follows the same process as with the teachers. The students are given these questionnaires in their own language (Spanish) so that they feel more confident and understand what they are being asked, and immediately after having chosen their books.
- c) To gain information regarding the student's responses to the teacher's choice, they will complete another questionnaire which includes questions in connection with the book they have been asked to read (APPENDIX C). Previous to the reading they are required to take a close look at it and answer the questions in their sheets. By means of this questionnaire we will get a very close to truth first general impression on the part on the student in response to her compulsory reading of the course.

## 4. The results

### 4.1 *The teacher's criteria*

What are the reasons that lead teachers to select certain course readers for their students within an LDO scope? The reasons that lead teachers to select certain readers for their students are:

- title (preferably if it's representative of a cultural moment, or if it has connection with a current affair, or if it has literary value)
- difficulty of grammar and vocabulary
- number of pages

### 4.2 *The students' criteria*

What are the reasons that lead students to select certain course readers within a SDL scope? The reasons that lead students to select certain readers within a SDL scope are these:

- title (some references to the availability of a film with the same title)
- difficulty of grammar and vocabulary
- number of pages

When we analysed the results, three things called our attention first:

- 1) 85% of the students did not share their opinions or evaluate the books with a group and only 15% asked their classmates so as to agree to read the same book.
- 2) On the other hand, although we did expect most of the students to ask the teacher questions about her preferences or the difficulty of the book, they chose completely on their own using the information given, the book itself.
- 3) 50% of the students chose the book after eliminating the others and the other 50% as soon as they saw it.

In general, we can say that for 60% of the students the level indicated on the back page is important, the number of pages is important for 52% (although not all of them admit it directly), and the title is the most important thing for 55%. Nearly half the students admit to have chosen a book because they have seen or heard about the film with the same title. The connection between cinema and students' preferences is more relevant than originally expected.

The percentages regarding the reluctance of students to work collaboratively would lead us to the conclusion that students are not taught within a co-operative methodology. Their tendency is to work individually unless the teacher asks them to work in groups. They are not used to spontaneously make a group and comment, which would benefit their process of choice and eventually their learning process. Students are neither prepared to get information from the teacher and although this could be understood as a sign of teacher independency, it could also be interpreted, together with their lack of initiative to work in groups, as a failure to identify the teacher as a facilitator, counsellor or resource as described in Voller(1997). Students have their own preferences regarding the process of choice and no problems to do it but these data could eventually lead more to consider the students in the group as "individualistic" rather to as "autonomous".

#### 4.3. The students' response to imposed material

What is the student's response to their teacher's choice when the text is externally selected? The student's answers to the questionnaires are summarised in tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1: Students opinion related to the importance of reading a book during the course and preferences of choice.

	Students who find it necessary	Students who do not find it necessary	TOTAL NUMBER
	80%	20%	100%
Would prefer to choose among 3 or 4 proposed by the teacher	55%	5%	60%
Would prefer to read any book selected by themselves	15%	10%	25%
Would prefer their teacher to give them a compulsory reading	10%	5%	15%

The results in this chart show the disagreement of the students in level 3 who were asked to read a book with no option of choice. Half of them will do because they consider it important, although they would have preferred to choose their own reading among three or four possibilities offered by the teacher or to select by themselves.

Their preferences of genre and topic are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

GENRE	NUMBER STUDENTS	TOPIC	NUMBER STUDENTS
Novel	70%	Adventures / thrillers	73%
Short stories	25%	Humour	14%
Poetry	5%	History	13%

The book selected by the teacher *Ah, sweet mystery of life* by Roald Dahl consists on seven short stories of humour. In an informal interview, the teacher explains the choice. It was made quite clear in an informal conversation that she thought students would enjoy something funny considering they come from different studies and they are possibly not very interested in literature in general but the choice is not the option mostly preferred by the students who established adventure and thriller as their first option.

#### 4.4. Reading selection and students' response

To what extent are these reasons for the selection similar to / different from the teachers'? Surprisingly, teachers and students agree about the importance of the level indicated on the back page and about the number of pages. We say surprisingly because the students were expected to be much more worried than teachers about these two aspects, as expected results were thought to show that students would prefer to avoid difficult and/or long texts.

Again, for both teachers and students the title and the summary are the most important aspects, whereas the pictures and the cover are the least important ones in general. However, 50% of the teachers admit that they chose the book mainly according to their preferences. For most of these teachers, the reason why they chose a book is its literary value or its representativeness of certain cultural moment or its relationship with a current affair. On the other hand, student's preferences prove to be for adventure & thriller and film-connected books.

In an informal interview with some of the students that answered they would prefer to have the book chosen for them, the general impression is that not only their competence in English is lower than the rest of students' but also they are teacher - dependent in many aspects; their degree of autonomy or self-awareness regarding the process of learning in general is seen as low. On the other hand, those students who opted for selecting their own readings seem much more confident with their English, more teacher - independent in many other aspects (more self-confident) and have clearer ideas about their preferences not only in respect to readings but also to the process of learning a language itself and their own strategies. Their English level is in general also better than their partners'.

## 5. Final conclusions and further research

It can in fact be seen as exaggerated to speak about autonomy or Self Directed Learning when treating about the participation of students in the selection of an adequate reading for the course. Nevertheless, this single action, if understood as some freedom to control learning content, can exemplify one out of a large number of possible alternatives. Carried out together with other participatory activities during the course, just choosing a



title can lead to higher student involvement in the traditional classroom; contribute to raise their awareness concerning their own learning needs or merely likes and eventually lead to a more negotiated syllabus and greater learner autonomy.

The conclusion of this study as regards teachers, is that if the main difference in the selection of a book to read in the classroom are genre and topic preferences, they might start considering the possibility of giving the students part of the responsibility by letting them choose their own reading as it is not proved that most of them would try to choose an extremely easy or short book which could eventually be not considered adequate for their level. On the other hand, learners might gradually get involved in the decision-making process where they would have increasingly more opportunities to act rather than to assume a passive role regarding the organization of the course.

Finally, the departure point of this study assumed from previous research (see section 1) that if students are given the chance to participate in the decision making process, they will gain motivation which implies a more effective learning. According to this general framework, it is here understood that the simple selection of a reader can have a direct effect in motivation and thus, in learning. Although further research must be carried out to prove this—i.e. by means of a longitudinal study which would attend to the students results or opinions after the course—it can be inferred from the informal interviews with some of them, that their command of English as well as their degree of teacher-independency affect their preferences and their response to externally imposed material. More autonomous learners—and we are speaking here of «people taking more control over their learning in classrooms and outside them» (Benson 2001) —are also more likely to critically choose their readings and explicitly judge their teacher's choice rather than these students who are less conscious of their learning process.

## References

- Benson, P. 2001. *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning*. London: Longman.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2005. 'Autonomy'. In J. Cummins & C. Davison (Eds.). *The International Handbook of English Language Teaching*. Vol. 2. Norwell, MA: Springer.
- Benson, P. and P. Voller. 1997. *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. London: Longman.
- Blanco Hölscher, M. A. Ojanguren Sánchez and J. A. Alvarez González. 2006. *Aprendizaje de lenguas en tandem en la Universidad de Oviedo*. Universidad de Oviedo.
- Breen, M.P. and Littlejohn, A. (Eds.) 2000. *The Process Syllabus: Negotiation in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brumfit, C. 1987. "Reading skills and the study of literature in a foreign language". In C.J. Brumfit and R.A. Carter, *Literature and Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press: 184-190.
- Clarke, D. 1989. "Materials adaptation: why leave it all to the teacher?". *ELT Journal* 43(2), 133-141.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. "The negotiated syllabus: what it is and how is it likely to work?". *Applied Linguistics*, 12:1, 13-28.
- Cotterall, S. 1995. "Developing a course strategy for learner autonomy". *ELT Journal* 49(3), 219-127.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. "Promoting learner autonomy through the curriculum: Principles for designing language courses". *ELT Journal*, 54:2, 109-117.
- Little, D. 1990. "Autonomy in language learning. Some theoretical and practical considerations". In I. Gathercole, *Autonomy in Language Learning*. London: CILT, 7-15.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. *Learner Autonomy. Definitions, Issues and Problems*. Dublin: Authentik.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. "Autonomy in language learning. Some theoretical and practical considerations". In Swarbrick, A. *Teaching modern languages*. London: Routledge, 81-87.
- Holec, H. 1987. "The learner as manager: Managing learning or managing to learn?". In A. Wenden and J. Rubin, *Learner Strategies in Language Learning*. London: Prentice Hall, 145-156.
- Holme, R. 1996. "Negotiating needs and course content". In *ESP Ideas*, Chapter 1. London, Longman.
- Mettetal, G. 2003. "Improving Teaching through Classroom Action Research". <http://data.ohr.umn.edu/protected/research7.pdf> (last consulted on 14/10/2012)
- Rubin, J. 1987. "Learner strategies: Theoretical assumptions, research history and typology". In A. Wenden and J. Rubin, *Learner Strategies in Language Learning*. London: Prentice Hall, 15-30.
- Sinclair, B. 2000. "Learner autonomy: The next phase?" In B. Sinclair, I. McGrath and T. Lamb (eds.) *Learner autonomy, teacher autonomy: Future directions*. London: Longman. 4-14
- Tudor, I. 1993. "Teacher roles in the learner - centred classroom". *ELT Journal* 47(1), 22-31.
- Voller, P. 1997. "Does the teacher have a role in autonomous language learning?". In P. Benson and P. Voller. *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. London: Longman, 98- 113.

## APPENDIX A

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

- 1.- How important is the level indicated on the back page?
- very important    important    Not very important    Not important at all    I didn't notice  
I don't know
- 2.- How important is the number of pages?
- very important    important    Not very important    Not important at all    I didn't notice  
I don't know
- 3.- In which order did you take the following into account ?
- the cover    the title    the summary    the pictures
- Whose preferences and likes did you take into account, yours or your students'? Explain
- 4.- Choose one of these statements that you agree with. Explain your answer.
- I chose this book because it is related to another book / to a film. I want to analyse an aspect they share
- I chose this book because of its connection with a current affair which can be interesting
- I chose this book just because I want my students to read it
- 5.- What type of book (genre) have you chosen? Explain your answer.

## APPENDIX B

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEVEL II STUDENTS

- 1.- How important is the level indicated on the back page?
- very important    important    Not very important    Not important at all    I didn't notice  
I don't know
- 2.- How important is the number of pages?
- very important    important    Not very important    Not important at all    I didn't notice  
I don't know

3.- In which order did you take the following into account ?

the cover   the title   the summary   the pictures

IF YOU CHOSE THE BOOK AFTER ELIMINATING THE OTHERS, ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

4.- Which book(s) did you first reject? Why?

5.- What made you choose a book among the others?

6.- Did you have any doubts when choosing a book? Why? What made you decide?

7.- Did you ask anyone? If so, who? what did you want to know?

IF YOU CHOSE THE BOOK AS SOON AS YOU SAW IT, ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

4.- What attracted you the most? Why?

5.- Did you have a look at all the books even if you had a favourite one? Why?

6.- Did you change your mind? Why?

7.- Did you ask anyone? If so, who? what did you want to know?

## APPENDIX C

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEVEL III STUDENTS

1.- In my opinion, having to read a book is ...

- necessary   - unnecessary   - boring   - ok   - other

2.- What type of book do you prefer?

- a play   - a novel   - poetry   - short stories   - other

What is your first impression of the book the teacher has asked you to read? Explain your answer.

3.- Which topics do you prefer?

- humour   - thriller   - adventure   - history   - love   - other

In which one would you include the book you have been asked to read?

4.- Choose one of these statements that you agree with. Explain your answer.

- I prefer to be told which book I have to read so as to avoid choosing one myself

- I prefer to be given the chance to choose any book

- I prefer to be given the chance to choose among 4 or 5 books

- other

---

**Irina Argüelles Álvarez** received a Ph.D. from the Department of English Philology at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid in 2002. She is a full-time professor at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid where she teaches English for professional and academic purposes. Dr. Argüelles has directed more than ten innovation projects funded by the UPM and published several papers concerning good teaching practices, autonomous learning and the use of information and communication technologies in blended learning. [irina@euitt.upm.es](mailto:irina@euitt.upm.es)

Received: 15 April 2012 / Accepted version: 14 Oct. 2012