Digital communicative competence for the Foreign Languages degree program

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to reflect on the importance of improving the digital communicative competence in the Foreign Languages career through the design of a didactic strategy, as a response to the current demands of the Common European Framework and the demands of the Third Improvement of Cuban Education, taking into consideration the guiding principles of the cognitive communicative and sociocultural approach and its influence on the general comprehensive training of the Foreign Languages professional. Methods and techniques were used to discover the current state of the problem under investigation.

Keywords: Approach; Didactic strategy; Digital communicative competence; Virtual environment

Introduction

The acquisition of a foreign language is nowadays an unavoidable necessity for all people who aspire to achieve an adequate level of professional development. In this regard, mastery of the English language has become an essential objective in higher education, since it is precisely this language that is used for communication at the international level.

On the other hand, the vertiginous development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has favored the increase of social networks, educational and

collaborative digital spaces, to which English language teaching is no stranger. Therefore, the virtualization of university processes, as part of the informatization of society and as a quality standard for accreditation, is a requirement in undergraduate and graduate foreign language teaching.

By evaluating the results of the integrative exams from the first to the fourth year of the course under study and the surveys applied to students for the realization of their educational projects, as well as the results of the class controls carried out during the courses under investigation and the review of the methodological work plans of the disciplines that integrate all the years and through the empirical inquiries carried out by the author, it was determined that the use of ICTs specifically referred to virtual environments, is limited.

Consequently, future graduates do not have the necessary knowledge to access new technologies specifically referred to virtual environments, which evidences the need for a logical and systemic reordering of their language training, in this profession that is of vital importance for them, through the design of a didactic strategy.

The concept of strategy began to spread in the field of pedagogical sciences around the 1960s, at the same time that studies aimed at describing metrics related to the quality of education were being developed.

The National Learning Service -SENA- (2010), establishes that the didactic strategy projects, orders, and guides the pedagogical task, in order to meet the institutional objectives in terms of training. Thus, the didactic strategy is a guide for action that orients in obtaining the results that are intended with the learning process, and gives meaning and coordination to everything that is done to achieve the development of competencies in the students.

In this sense, Valle Lima (2012) assumes that a strategy is "a set of sequential and interrelated actions that starting from an initial state (given by the diagnosis) allow directing the passage to an ideal state as a result of planning" (p. 34). Similarly, he states that the construction of a didactic strategy can be carried out in two ways depending on the point of view assumed and the conditions of the object to be modeled, in the form of a theory, in which various solutions to the problem can be found.

When starting from a diagnosis of the phenomenon under study, it can be constructed in one way, and when starting from the characterization of the real state of the phenomenon

under study, a projective model is elaborated that characterizes the desired state, we are in the presence of another form of construction. This last conception was taken into account for the realization of this research.

It also takes into account the aspects of presentation of a scientific result of this type, provided by De Armas and Valle Lima (2011), they are: the epistemological framework (foundation and justification of its necessity), the social context in which it is inserted, its graphic representation, the explanation, the forms of instrumentation and evaluation.

In constructing the design of the proposed strategy, the starting point was a conceptual theoretical framework based on the social sciences (philosophy, pedagogy and psychology), a certain conception of man, the development of his personality, interpersonal communication and the notion of competence, as well as other sources that confirmed the relevance of its instrumentation: analysis of the Educational Projects, the interview to teachers and the observation of the communicative performance of students in scientific conferences, defense of projects and the realization of a group of actions designed to favor the development of digital communicative competence.

Development

For the elaboration of the didactic strategy, the starting point was the consultation of researches that have dealt with it in Cuba, relevant criteria for the research being carried out.

Studies carried out by several authors agree that a strategy presupposes the existence of a series of elements that must be ordered and distributed for the realization and subsequent evaluation of a work projection. Hence, the elements stated by Valle Lima (2012) are assumed, as they are considered necessary for the structuring of the proposal.

Consequently, the starting point is the diagnosis of the initial state to reach the desired state; actions are distinguished that are directed to the treatment of theoretical and practical contents, which are intertwined to the development of digital communicative competence where both the teacher and the students are active agents of the process related to the object under investigation, which reveals its didactic nature.

The diagnosis carried out allowed the author to determine the potentialities that can be assumed as those real possibilities that the institution has to reach a higher level of development. In addition, the diagnosis indicates the real state of the object and shows the problem around which the research is developed.

With these results it is possible to compare the aspired model, which is an ideal representation of the phenomenon under study, characterized by its level of objectivity.

The proposal's rationale establishes the context and location of the problem to be solved, as well as the ideas and starting points on which the didactic strategy is based.

The general objective is based on the planning of the strategy, in which short- and medium-term goals or objectives are defined that allow the transformation of the object from its actual state to the desired state.

Planning is developed in stages of actions, resources, means and methods that correspond to these objectives. Instrumentation describes how it will be applied, under what conditions, for what period of time, those responsible, participants. The Evaluation defines the achievements, obstacles that have been overcome, assessment of the approximation achieved to the desired state. Forms of presentation of the material results.

The proposed strategy is based on the dialectical-materialistic conception as a philosophical foundation, considering language as an essential means of cognition, communication and personological development of man as a social being in the broad context of reality, through the interaction he establishes with his peers, in concrete historical conditions. It also explains the importance of practice as the beginning and end of knowledge, and the use of language, through which students generalize knowledge in productive practice.

The sociological foundation of the strategy takes into account that it contributes to the formation of a professional, who will assume an important social role, through interaction in praxis in the solution of concrete problems, with efficiency and quality, in order to meet the needs of society. From this perspective, the strategy prepares students to contribute to the profile where communication in virtual environments. To this end, from the texts proposed, emphasis is placed on how to use extension, research and marketing techniques, and to participate in development projects and teaching activities.

As a psychological foundation, the strategy is designed taking into account the postulates of Vygotsky's historical-cultural approach as a psychological theory to explain the

development of man, based on the influence of the social environment, in which language is a mediating instrument. When addressing the problem of digital communicative competence in virtual environments, the unity between the cognitive and the affective is taken into account.

The student appropriates his cultural heritage in relation to his peers and makes his own the knowledge translated into strategies, values and attitudes of our society, at the same time that he self-educates and self-develops. Based on the results of the initial and final diagnosis, the concept of the zone of proximal development is used, which is strengthened by taking into account the student's actual level of development and the one he/she can reach with the levels of help provided to model his/her performance with respect to the context where it takes place.

> The teaching-learning process cannot be carried out taking into account only what is inherited by the student; it must consider that the socio-cultural interaction, what exists in society, activity, socialization, communication is decisive. The influence of the group - of others - is one of the determining factors in individual development (Zilberstein, 2002, pp. 92-93).

As a linguistic foundation, the strategy is based on text linguistics, which establishes the relationship between cognition, discourse and society; its conception has taken into account the triadic relationship of the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic dimensions of discourse, based on the recognition of the text as the core of knowledge of linguistic structures and their meaning in context.

As for the pedagogical foundation, the strategy has been conceived taking into account education and its fundamental laws: the unity of education and instruction, of theory and practice, of school and life and the dialectic relationship between the components of the process (Álvarez de Zayas, 1997, p. 33). Pedagogical principles are manifested as the interaction of the affective and the valuational, and the Marti's postulates of the new school are recognized in the concept of preparing man for life, starting from the instructive and productive activity itself in the scenario in which the students develop their activities, both around the knowledge of the English subject and those propitiated by the virtual environments corresponding to their profile.

General didactic foundations

The strategy is conceived from the postulates of developmental didactics, systematized

in the different pedagogical researches of Cuban authors (Álvarez de Zayas, 1997; Valdivia, 1988; Castellanos, 2001; Zilberstein, 2002), who assume the teaching-learning process from this didactics starting from the historical-cultural bases (Vygotsky). From this conception, the proposed strategy favors the development of activity, motivation, communication, reflective thinking, the formulation of problems as a source of knowledge, meaningful learning, the search for solutions, self-regulation, the formation of values and the formation of an integral personality.

From the didactics of language in the conception of the strategy, the theoretical and methodological principles of the cognitive-communicative and sociocultural approach and the general didactic principles of the teaching-learning process of a foreign language proposed in the classic work of Rosa Antich are assumed.

The legal basis takes into account the mastery of the legal framework of educational prevention, since from it are derived laws, regulations and decrees, of the superior organs of the State and the Government, as well as the ministerial resolutions, circular letters, dispositions and indications of the Ministry of Education. From these we assume: - Goal four of the 2020- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development referred to: quality education, framed in goal 4.7 which reflects the mastery of theoretical and practical knowledge necessary to promote sustainable development.

From the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba [Const]. Art. 73. December 22, 2019 (Cuba), which states that: "Education is a right of all people and a responsibility of the State".

From Decree Law 64 (1982), Chapter III, Article 16, this states: "the evaluation process will include the fundamental activities of research and analysis on the family and social conditions of the students, and the assessments by different specialists" (p. 20).

In accordance with the stated didactic foundations, the principles of the cognitive-communicative and sociocultural approach are assumed.

The conception of language as an essential means of human communication and of personal, logical and sociocultural development of the individual. This principle is manifested in debates and reflections on current issues, some of a social nature that enable taking sides and favor the assumption of positions inclined to the solution of human problems, as well as the formation and development of values.

– The relationship between discourse, cognition and society. Students, when

communicating in the solution of tasks, produce both oral and written discourses, in which cognitive and communicative processes are integrated, in the context of interaction that prepares them for the profession. In synthesis, an infinite amount of knowledge of the pedagogical profile (cognition) is materialized through texts in English language with priority attention to the development of oral skills (discourse).

- The contextualized character of the study of language. The fulfillment of this principle justifies why speech linguistics, whose international recognition is a scientific reality, emphasizes the study of language through the selectivity of the text and not in isolated sentences as it was traditionally done, corroborating the inversion of didactic paradigms: from language to speech (before) and from speech to the study of linguistic structures in contexts of use (now).

- The study of language as a social practice of a group or social stratum - Roméu (2003) states that "in the sociocultural dimension, it takes into account the contexts in which communication takes place, the social hierarchies, the roles of the participants, the ideology of those who interact, etc." (p. 55).

The interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary and autonomous nature of the study of language. This principle reveals, first, the interdisciplinary nature of texts, taking into account that every text summarizes and integrates the multiple knowledge of its author, originating from his or her knowledge of the world of the different sciences and culture in general; second, research on discourse involves various disciplines, from their respective fields, which also shows its interdisciplinary and, at the same time, multidisciplinary nature.

Characteristics of the proposed strategy

The participants of the strategy are the students of the Foreign Languages program of the Faculty of Social and Humanistic Sciences, the professors who teach the subjects of the discipline Integral Practice of the English Language (PILI) and Methodology of the English Language, who deal with grammatical contents and contribute to the development of communicative competence in other areas of the curriculum in order to promote the development of digital communicative competence in the program: Foreign Languages through virtual environments.

The tasks proposed in this strategy are adapted to the particular context of the group, and have a beginning and an end. At the same time, the topics covered are close to the students' world so that they can easily get involved in their execution. In addition, students can adopt criteria and make decisions democratically in the communicative and learning aspects, allowing students to evaluate their own development.

It is characterized by being open and dynamic, because it recognizes the complexity and dynamics of the professional training process, given by the relationships between its components, constantly promoting exchange and interrelation of students in different contexts and spheres of action. It accepts the changes generated in teachers and students.

Other qualities that distinguish it are its flexibility, operability and its capacity for transformation, by respecting the specific conditions of the Faculty of Social and Humanistic Sciences of Guantánamo to improve pedagogical training; it seeks the transformation of the initial state of this in a desired state that meets the social and individual needs of students.

Flexible: since it is adjusted to the specific conditions of the career in which it is implemented, also because actions are created that can be adapted to each teacher and student depending on the need of preparation, so that it makes possible the specification of the potentialities and needs that influence the fulfillment of the proposed objective.

Differentiated and contextualized: because it is conducted and responds to the real conditions, needs and characteristics of the career: Foreign Languages at Guantánamo University. Its implementation enables the design of actions according to the needs of teachers and students, which can be executed in the teaching-labor component, so that it helps to improve digital communicative competence.

Transforming: in its nature, it allows evolving the current state of digital communicative competence, enriching it with new knowledge and perfecting it in the educational practice from the teaching-educational process in the third year of the course: Foreign Languages for the achievement of the proposed objectives.

In the didactic modeling of this research, it is conceived as expressed by Valle Lima (2012), according to this author the strategies contain: mission; objectives; actions with methods, procedures, resources, responsible persons and the time in which they must be carried out; the forms of implementation and the forms of evaluation.

For the elaboration of the strategy, the functional systemic-structural method is assumed, since the totality of the system constitutes a dialectical unity of the elements that compose it and allows modeling the object of study, from the determination of its components, as well as the relationships between them, these relationships determine on the one hand its structure and on the other hand, its dynamics, which characterizes its development. (figure 1).

Source: Self elaboration
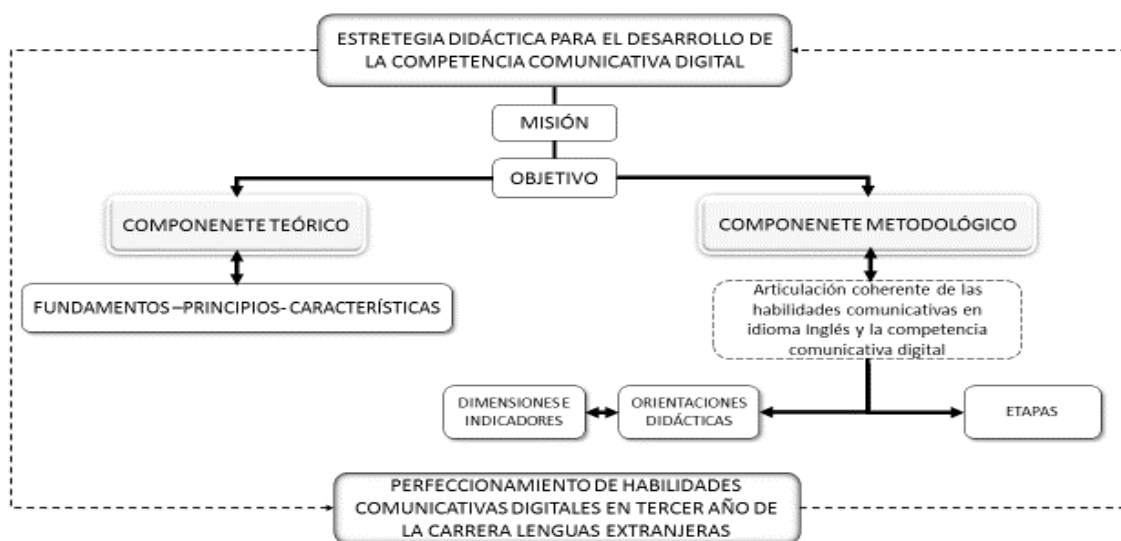
Figure 1: Design of the didactic strategy

Description of the proposed strategy

The proposed strategy is based on the theoretical frame of reference and on the analysis made by the author on this basis, which implies both the construction and comprehension of professional scientific texts, as a reflection of the cognitive activity of man and the progress of science and technology, which possess the same characteristics of science, namely, impersonality, objectivity and accuracy, and, at the same time, fulfill the purpose of contributing to the solution of the problems presented by the students of the third year of the English language course at the University of Guantánamo, regarding the development of digital communicative competence.

The didactic strategy for the improvement of the digital communicative competence in the third year of the Foreign Languages career has a methodological component where the coherent articulation of the communicative skills in English language and the digital communicative competence are stated, for which the methodological orientations are

taken into account to guide the teachers to the fulfillment of the proposed objectives, taking into account the levels, indicators and dimensions that respond to the cognitive, communicative and sociocultural approach for the development of its stages.

In the proposed strategy, the structure as a characteristic of greater stability, makes the system maintain its integrity in close relation to the didactic components, which allows conceiving the system in three stages, based on the actions that the teacher executes and those that the students must develop in each one of them.

First stage: Orientation

Objective: to plan the communication tools in the course program, taking into account the diagnosis of the technological availability and the informatics preparation of the participants in the use of the communication tools, the designation of roles and functions, the indicators to evaluate the pedagogical use of the communication tools of the virtual environments and the regulations to be complied with for each communication tool according to the other organizational forms of the professional development of teachers.

Second stage: Execution

Objective: to implement in the virtual educational practice, the pedagogical use of the communication tools planned in the course program.

In this stage, the system of tasks proposed in the strategy is developed. The stage is structured in two phases. In the first phase, the teacher orients towards the objective and prepares the student for the next phase, so the actions of both are combined; in the second phase, the actions are concentrated on the student. It is also essential for the teacher to motivate the students in order to create an affable emotional climate and an expectation that leads them towards the fulfillment of the proposed objective.

Motivation is the driving force that leads students to perform the different actions, if the student does not feel motivated towards learning, then the expectation is lost and this can lead to not achieving the expected success.

In the execution of the tasks, its orientation will have special importance, because through it, the student feels interest and motivation to use all the mental processes; especially, those that allow him/her to select in a dynamic way the linguistic resources for the development of oral communicative skills. Likewise, the cognitive-affective link between

the student, the teacher and the group will enhance the developmental learning in its realization.

At this stage, the teacher designs actions aimed at discovering the significance of the content, using logical and critical thinking to generalize theoretical aspects and build concepts. All this is achieved through the teacher's activity with the students and among the students themselves. Learning is conceived from the outside in, first at the interpsychological level, in the system of relationships that students establish to reach the essence of the object, and then at the intrapsychological level, when they internalize its properties to become part of their individual activity.

We proceed to configure the communication tools foreseen in the previous stage, with their respective pedagogical conception that responds to the objective for which they were selected (socializing self-preparation, specialized conferences, seminars, workshops, scientific and social debates) taking into account whether the interactions will be individual, group or collaborative, synchronous or asynchronous.

The possible tools that diversify the possibilities of communication are selected according to the available technologies and the computer skills of the participants to use the communication tools. The regulations to be complied with for each communication tool are elaborated in relation to the roles and functions of the teaching team, after the methodological preparation for this purpose.

The teaching team is methodologically prepared on the indicators to evaluate the pedagogical use of communication tools in virtual environments with the objective of training the teaching team on the pedagogical use of communication tools in virtual environments, based on the roles and functions in the planning, configuration, implementation, control and evaluation of these tools for educational communication in virtual environments.

Third stage: Control

Objective: to evaluate the pedagogical use of the communication tools of virtual environments, based on the compendium and systematization of the actions carried out in the previous stages, as well as the growth of the students' performance in the pedagogical use of these communication tools.

The control of the task involves the control guide and the role of the teacher as facilitator and controller of the activity. The teaching-learning process needs to be controlled by all

participants. The student learns to control him/herself from a guide where the indicators that must be taken into account when making oral interventions appear.

This stage manifests itself during the whole process, proving that the process has passed through the internalization stage, that is, from the outside in (psychological stage). In this stage, teachers and students perform the functions.

Virtual environments have changed from a traditional evaluation to a more personalized one, using different tools that seek to involve the participant in such a way that he/she must evaluate his/her own learning and that of others. Emphasizing this approach where the evaluation is more participatory, the participant is the protagonist of his learning to the extent that he investigates, works, interacts, analyzes and reflects to build his knowledge.

These processes foster cooperation and, even more, collaboration, as integrating elements in the formative approach of any learning environment. Both the teacher and the participant are kept abreast of learning progress, which allows the participant to become aware of his/her learning and try to improve in the areas where he/she is failing. In addition, the teacher, through feedback, can guide the participant by indicating the points that need to be improved.

The proposal has shown the need to integrate in the educational context the different educational strategies and digital technologies that allow the development of competencies and skills in teachers and students for the benefit of their academic training. On the other hand, the selection of the strategy and digital technology will allow the opening of academic scenarios for teachers and students supported by critical thinking. Active participation in the development of academic activities will contribute significantly to raise the quality of the teaching and learning process.

Conclusions

The systematization of the theoretical and methodological references evidenced the need to improve the development of digital communicative competence.

The current state revealed allowed assuming the strategy designed from the postulates of the cognitive-communicative and sociocultural approach as the theoretical basis of this research.

The implementation of the instruments applied made it possible to demonstrate the need to carry out research on the topic in question, since it is of utmost importance, taking into account international trends.

The strategy presented in accordance with the criteria of specialists allows for the qualification of the training of Foreign Language professionals by integrating the requirements of the Common European Framework with current trends.