

## *Adapting CERF as a curriculum organizer to teacher training in Foreign Language Didactics*

### *Adaptación del MCER como organizador del currículo en Didáctica de las Lenguas Extranjeras a la formación del profesorado*

### *Adaptação do QEER como organizador do currículo no Ensino de Línguas Estrangeiras à formação de professores*

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#### **Abstract**

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) defines levels of language proficiency. Its relevance has led to its adoption as an organizer of curricula for language learning, teaching and evaluation. For that reason it becomes a need in the training of teachers, to deepen their knowledge of language didactics. Its use can bring benefits, making it possible to align curricula, define learning outcomes and proficiency levels, relating these levels to facilitate its efficient implementation. It is, then, the objective here to unveil through curriculum organizers delimited for Foreign Language Didactics, their action-oriented pedagogical approach and its influence in training such professionals, and to map and adapt their structure to the principles of this framework. Contents, procedures and methods should aim at the integrated development of theoretical knowledge and practical teaching skills. It is a change that can significantly improve the training of language teachers.

**Key words:** CERF; curriculum organizer; Foreign Language Didactics; teacher training

#### **Resumen**

El Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas (MCER) define niveles de competencia lingüística y por su relevancia permite adoptarlos como organizador de planes de estudio para aprendizaje, enseñanza y evaluación. Se convierte en una necesidad en la formación del profesorado; profundiza en conocimientos sobre didáctica de las lenguas, trae beneficios al alinear el currículo, definir resultados de aprendizaje y niveles de competencia, relacionándolos para facilitar su implementación. El objetivo es develar, a través de organizadores del currículo delimitados para la Didáctica de las Lenguas Extranjeras, el enfoque pedagógico orientado a la acción que proporciona el MCER para influir en la formación de profesores, clave para mapear la estructura del currículo, identificar lagunas y adaptar sus principios a este marco, con contenidos, procedimientos y métodos para el desarrollo integrado de conocimientos teóricos y habilidades prácticas meta en la formación. Se trata de un cambio significativo para una mejor formación.

**Palabras clave:** MCER; organizadores del currículo; Didáctica de las Lenguas Extranjeras; formación de profesores

#### **Resumo**

O Quadro Europeu Comum de Referência para as Línguas (QEER) define níveis de competência linguística e a sua relevância permite-lhe ser adotado como organizador de currículos para a aprendizagem, o ensino e a avaliação. Torna-se uma necessidade na formação de professores; aprofunda o conhecimento da didática das línguas, traz benefícios ao alinhar o currículo, ao definir os resultados da aprendizagem e os níveis de proficiência, e ao relacioná-los para facilitar a sua implementação. O objetivo é desvendar, através de organizadores curriculares delimitados para o Ensino de Línguas Estrangeiras, a abordagem pedagógica orientada para a ação proporcionada pelo QEER para influenciar a formação de professores, fundamental para mapear a estrutura do currículo, identificar lacunas e adaptar os seus princípios a este quadro, com conteúdos, procedimentos e métodos para o desenvolvimento integrado de conhecimentos teóricos e competências práticas visadas na formação. Esta é uma mudança significativa para uma melhor formação.

**Palavras-chave:** QEER; organizadores curriculares; ensino de línguas estrangeiras; formação de professores

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## **Introduction**

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was developed by the Council of Europe and introduced in 2001, aiming to provide a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, and reference materials across Europe. CEFR, (2001) is designed to standardize language education by defining proficiency levels from A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficient). It also provides common language for describing language proficiency, facilitating communication and cooperation in the educational and professional domains.

The development of the CEFR (2001) coincided with fundamental changes in language teaching, namely the abandonment of the grammatical translation method and the move towards the functional/notional approach and the communicative approach. So, one can say that it is also the result of the need for a common international framework for language learning that would facilitate cooperation between educational institutions in different countries, particularly within Europe. It could be described as:

- A theoretical and practical document that brings together in a systemic way the most relevant aspects of language learning and teaching from a communicative, constructivist, multilingual and action-oriented perspective;
- A common basis for the elaboration of language programs, curricular guidelines, examinations, manuals and teaching materials;
- A scale of six common reference levels for the organization of language learning (the communicative activities that language users and learners can carry out);
- An international reference for the field of modern languages, for the definition of levels of linguistic and communicative competence in speakers of a foreign language;
- A vision of the user/learner as a social agent who co-constructs meaning in interaction and develops plurilingual and pluricultural competence.

There are quite a few learning theories that support CERF, among them one can find:

- The communicative theory, which conceives language as an instrument of communication and not only as a system of rules. This theory emphasizes the development of communicative competence, that is, the ability to use language appropriately and effectively according to context, purpose and interlocutors. The communicative theory is inspired by the studies on communicative competence carried out by philosophers of language such as Wittgenstein (1889-1951), or by sociolinguists such as Hymes (2001) and Canale (1987);
- The social constructivist theory, which holds that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and the use of cultural tools. This theory recognizes the role of mediation, collaboration

and negotiation of meaning in language learning and use, and is based on the contributions of psychologists such as Vygotsky (1896-1934), Bruner (1915-2016) and James Wertsch , and pedagogues such as Freire (1921-1997) and Piaget (1896-1980);

- The multilingual theory, which recognizes linguistic and cultural diversity as a value and a resource for communication. This theory implies the development of plurilingual and pluricultural competence. It is based on studies on plurilingualism carried out by linguists Coste (2008) and Beacco et al. (2015), or by educators such as Van der Vorp et al. (2017);

- Task-based theory, which proposes the use of authentic and meaningful tasks as the basic units of language teaching and assessment. This theory promotes learner-centered learning, which implies active participation, autonomy and responsibility in the learning process; it is supported by studies on the task-based approach carried out by linguists such as Nunan (2004); Ellis et al.(2020).

The objective delimited here is to unveil the pedagogic function of foreign language teaching Didactics, taking advantage of a group of curriculum organizers delimited for this discipline (Smith, 2021), on the basis of the action-oriented pedagogical approach provided by the CEFR and the merits to influence the training of foreign language teaching professionals, which leads to a deepening on the study of foreign language Didactics professors delivery of professional guidance during training, and find out the ongoing development trainees through it as a variable, through three dimensions, six indicators and a significant number of sub-indicators, in the specific case of Las Tunas University.

Among the main challenges of the teaching-learning of English as a foreign language in Cuba can be identified:

- A lack of teaching resources and materials, many schools lack up-to-date workbooks, aligned to the process of improvement carried out at present, as well as technology such as computers, internet, and other materials for effective teaching and learning;

- Limited opportunities for conversational practice. Students have few opportunities to practice and use English in real conversations;

- Too large class sizes. English classes tend to have many students, making it difficult for the teacher to complete the practice cycle in a 45-minute lesson;

- Insufficient opportunities for teacher development or pedagogical methodology preparation, mainly in small towns and the countryside;

- Little emphasis on developing communication skills during the lesson. Teaching often focuses on grammar and vocabulary, without working on speaking, communicative competence, listening, reading and writing skills development.

Many of these challenges are tied to limitations in the present in the process of formation (Alberteris et al. 2018), which have been solved thanks to a wider investigation that modeled three subsystems, structured in a variable, three dimensions, six indicators and a meaningful high number of sub-

indicators. The cognitive development (thinking) dimension, for example, holds the indicators model of the professional and given general aspects of cognitive development.

In this study it gathers a total of six sub indicators in the first, and 26 in the second; the dimension motivational development (feeling), holds the indicators pedagogic professional identity and specific general aspects of motivational development, with 13 sub-indicators the first and seven in the second; and finally the dimension behavioral development (acting), holds the twelve general and specific abilities and some of the general aspects of behavioral development, which in total gathers 19 sub-indicators in both.

As part of the results obtained with the application of the methods, techniques and investigative instruments declared in the former investigation to study the sample, that implied the use of the Excel book MAPPLEXTSmith, (Gamboa y Castillo, 2019), through a formative experiment carried out at that moment, which was accompanied by experts consultation and criteria.

### **Materials and methods**

The scientific procedure used corresponds to the expert criteria, and the application of the methods, techniques and the investigative instruments declared before. It was structured according to the following steps.

Planning and preparation, with the consequent conceptualization and operationalization of the variable; description of the scale; selection, elaboration and validation of the scientific instruments; validation of the scale; selection of the research sample; a sample of 101 teachers in training was assumed (42 from the first year, 31 from the second, 14 from the third and 14 from the fourth year and additionally, without constituting part of this sample, in the fifth year 10 teachers in training were chosen, who were not being trained under the influence of E plan, but cooperated to test the study of the proposal).

The selected sample represents 74.26% of the population, it was chosen according to a proportional stratified sampling (Gamboa, 2018), considering characteristics of the population such as its size and heterogeneity in terms of the variable that was investigated. In such a way, each of the municipalities in the province were represented, proportionally to the original composition of the population, given that in those years the discipline Foreign Language Didactics is taught, in the modalities of basic and proper curriculum. Those subjects make possible the consolidation and deepening of the pedagogical professional orientation in the different academic years in which the research was carried out.

There was a period for the preparation of the team of applicators of the scientific instruments; data collection and the corresponding application of the scientific instruments; organization and presentation of data, after processing the information; tabulation, organization and presentation in tables, charts or graphs; synthesis, analysis and interpretation of the data, which led to the

characterization of the level of development of the variable, and finally the formulation of conclusions and decision making.

The variable measured was the professional guidance, through the structure of the declared curriculum organizers for learning, teaching and evaluation, in foreign language Didactics, to align the CERF (2001) action-oriented pedagogic approach, revealing the pedagogic function of Didactics. The synthesis of the global measurement revealed a low initial state of the planning in Didactic professors. This result was obtained with the application of all the stated research methods, techniques and instruments, referring to those of the sample, composed of 11 members of the teaching staff of the Foreign Languages Department of Las Tunas University. The MAPPLEXTSmith Excel book, (Gamboa y Castillo, 2019) was used for data processing.

During this study, potentialities were found in the sample, which were then taken into account to maximize opportunities, such as: their high motivational rates regarding teaching for the major, the fact that the staff is complete to cover the teaching needs, the developed communicative skills in the foreign language in correspondence with the objectives of formation.

The operationalization of the variable involved a heuristic examination of its essential features, which led to the identification of three dimensions, six indicators and 70 sub-indicators. The MAPPLEXTSmith software (Gamboa y Castillo, 2019) was used for processing the more than 200 000 data generated during the research period. The scale was used to "generate large volumes of relevant data (...) that would allow finding interesting patterns of useful and novel information, as a function of finding existing relationships (...) for the search for causes in the behavioral patterns of the data" (Gamboa, 2020, p. 143).

The scale for investigating the professional guidance that is deployed, allowed assessing and analyzing the results, through the use of the curriculum organizers. In such a way, indicators that characterize general aspects of the cognitive, motivational and behavioral development of trainees were used, in the contexts of performance for the functions and tasks in the teaching-learning of English. The criteria for evaluating the level of execution of each of these indicators and assigning the corresponding categories were taken in correspondence with Gamboa (2020): Null, (0), Bad, (1), Fair, (2), Good, (3), Very Good, (4), Excellent, (5).

### **Results and discussion**

A factual evaluation, from the author's experience to the training process of Foreign Language Didactics in Cuba and with it, to the role of the components of the pedagogic-educative process and to the essential features of the teaching-learning process, as expressions of it, shows that the educational objectives define the intentionality of training, mainly for the training periods at school grades and research components; however, there is no breakdown of the system of professional guidance contents to be developed for this major at present. This should allow taking advantage of its

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strengths by addressing the why, what for, and with what, and not only the how and what to teach, as has been the case until now.

The methodological sessions for professional guidance developed and the consequent performance for each member of the sample was attended, with the application of methods, techniques and instruments to contrast the results obtained with the application of curriculum organizer. These curriculum organizers for English language teaching, learning and evaluation are adapted for this research from Borrero y Gamboa (2017), who add elements to the one provided by Rico (1998), aspect that offered greater scientific rigor and better attention to the potential development of active teachers in the exercise of the profession. They suggest finding other different elements to contents, which express useful and objective knowledge to organize them. It is “that knowledge adopted as fundamental components to articulate the design, development and evaluation of didactic units”. (p. 45)

The main relationships among the organizers of the curriculum, the professional problems, the integral pedagogical diagnosis of what teachers know, as well as the experiences, are established and contextualized to develop a coherent way of thinking, feeling and acting. The relations of complementarity of the curriculum organizers are highlighted with a central idea which is the experiential coherence as a quality, which use may be facilitated with introduction of thematic axes, such as:

The curriculum organizers delimited are:

- Delimitation of the educational component according to the class instructions;
- Working with large groups;
- Common mistakes of English language learners;
- Diversity of learners in a school group;
- Unity of instruction and education in the classroom;
- Diversity of materials and technological resources available to teachers and learners;
- Pedagogical value and meaning of art to reinforce accuracy and fluency;
- Socio-cultural elements included in the language classroom and in the lesson.

The curriculum organizers were inserted in practice in three subsystems that coincide with the content of the dimensions for the measurement of the status of each indicator, which was the average of the scores obtained on the Likert scale used. The total in the measurement of the variable in the sample as a whole is calculated based on the average of the evaluations obtained by each member and not on the overall averages of its indicators. In this way, the weight that the development of the mode of action generated by the professional guidance being deployed would have on each of the sampled

members, is weighted according to the indicators, their sums and the average of the indicators, already declared above.

In such a way, a process of synthesis of the information obtained from the actions of the empirical inquiry on the variable is carried out, in order to arrive at more general conclusions related to it (Gamboa, 2018). The conclusions of each of the indicators are integrated into generalizing conclusions that characterize the variable, highlighting the relationships that are established.

The theoretical-cognitive subsystem of the profession has a cognitive function and encompasses the components: knowledge, general and specific skills and values that the teacher identifies to solve professional problems, based on the pedagogical function and the didactic nucleus of the Didactics of Foreign Languages.

The skills, values and habits are formed, developed, consolidated and reinforced materialized in professional attitudes; and an affective link with the profession is achieved from the content of the professional orientation that is inserted in the topics of the class, mediated by the formative-educational content and everything that typifies the pedagogical professional mode of action, which the profession demands.

In this subsystem, the content, functions, tasks and professional role are objectified in a systematic and systemic way, in order to develop interest, the ability to make the right decisions, the motivation for what is done; in this process it is possible to create teaching means and materials that lead to self-determination.

It is from detecting/identifying a problem that the educational work is deployed both from the curriculum, as well as from the rest of the training areas. This is a pedagogical task. It begins by identifying a professional problem, familiarization occurs, skills are developed that raise awareness and lead to elaborate solutions, and then redefine concepts and judgments about the educational teaching process of the foreign language, until reaching actions that are generalizable for the teaching and learning of verbal skills, in correspondence with the school grade with which one interacts.

Relationships of complementarity occur, with a central idea that is cognitive coherence, understood as the congruence achieved with knowledge, with which the teacher connects ideas, achieves a deeper and lasting understanding, finds a meaning for the functions, tasks, and professional role at the micro level of concreteness of the curriculum and solves professional problems.

In the pedagogical professional experience subsystem of Foreign Languages, after knowing the contents of the profession and knowing how to identify professional problems, he/she contextualizes them in the performance. This subsystem has a linking function of the knowledge acquired with the spheres and contexts of performance. The dynamics that occurs is a relationship of significance between the contents of the profession, the spheres and the contexts of action with the necessary coherence for teaching.

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It is required to consolidate the appropriate use of the technical vocabulary of the profession and foreign languages, the language of the teacher in the classroom and the production of materials and means for the educational process. With this, the coherent development of the mode of action is pursued and that learning is meaningful from the professional problem-content relationship of the specialty, to awaken interest in the profession, in what it feels, which provokes reactions to the environment and creates emotional bonds.

From the relationships that arise, contextual coherence emanates, understood as a quality with potentialities to transfer from one context to another what is learned, the cognitive acts on the experiential and offers possibilities to the teacher to develop better and better, since one learns by experiencing situations proper to the object of the profession. The professional problems are the dynamics of the relations between both contexts; the labor pulls the academic and the investigative, with self-preparation, which reflects the theory-practice relationship and the learning-education-development.

The dialectical relationship between the cognitive, the experiential, the pedagogical professional, the evaluative, with a view to the critical reflection of the object and the motivational-affective, aimed at enhancing the meaning of the profession, serve to achieve a personal sense, a significance, as well as to promote and signify the content, which at the same time achieve an affective bond and develop culture and pedagogical professional identity and favors the further development of the mode of action.

The relationship between the two subsystems is one of complementarity and the systemic character granted to it; it is not linear, but of interdependence; it is presupposed under certain conditions and at certain times. It shares functions with other processes, thanks to the levels of integration of the organizational components, necessary to achieve a higher level of flexibility, coherence and contextualization with the pedagogical professional orientation to be deployed.

The practical-instrumental subsystem of Foreign Languages is dedicated to the practical instrumentation of the content of the profession; its components are the organizers of the curriculum and the pedagogical professional functions. This is understood as the connection with the performance profile, which allows achieving a particular vision of what is taught and learned in a foreign language in an organized manner, enhances the preparation in the knowledge system, and a meaningful and developmental learning is achieved from the pedagogical professional orientation that is exercised to face didactic and social demands of the profession. Hence, this subsystem has an organizing-planning function in correspondence with the contextual reality.

The identification of the diversity of organizers of the curriculum of the pedagogical professional content of Foreign Languages is essential for the Didactics of Foreign Languages to significantly



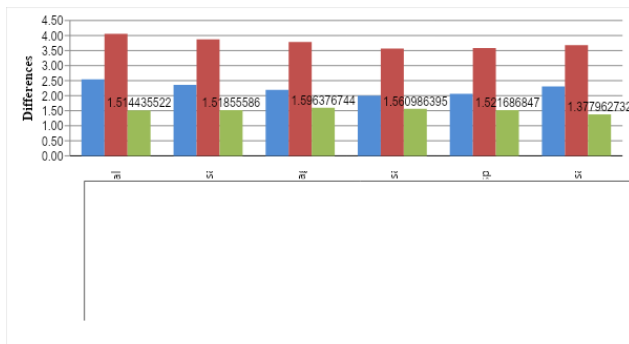
develop its pedagogical function, it is a sign of progress and cognitive coherence, aligned with the CEFR, for an adequate coherence of the formative process of the discipline Didactics of Foreign Languages, which enables the teacher to identify, organize and select the meanings of contents and insert them in the subjects of study. In this way, the contents, skills and values are established in essence, which emphasize the curriculum organizers for teaching, learning and evaluation, achieving greater impact in each domain and a better pedagogical coherence within the didactic nucleus of the Didactics of Foreign Languages, in a systemic and cyclical manner.

By conceiving pedagogical contents based on curriculum organizers as a unit for their application and the solution of professional problems, it is possible to relate the meanings of learning with professional contents and thus broaden the spectrum of the formative process. The student-teacher, teaching-learning, instruction-education relationships are significant as invariant categories of both Didactics and Pedagogy.

Figure 1 shows the growth of the dimensions taken into account to develop the way of thinking, feeling and acting of each teacher in training sampled. Among the indicators that advanced the most are those referring to professional pedagogical identity, general aspects of motivational development and general and specific skills.

**Figure 1**

*Differences between initial and final status by indicators*



Nota: Se muestran las acciones, *Acting*, *Feeling* and *Thinking*

The argumentation of these relationships and their understanding implies exposing experiences, points of view, criteria and evaluations on experiences of pedagogical practice, on learning, teaching, evaluation and the behavior and progress of students, and are an expression of pedagogical, didactic, pedagogical professional orientation, linguistic knowledge and personal concerns, which only contemplate and focus on the particularities of teaching, learning and evaluation of foreign languages. The present time demands a type of foreign language teacher who trains and educates in correspondence with social needs and on the basis of these, sustained by love for the profession.

At the time to access the sources of information, and collect the necessary data, analysis and synthesis, as well as induction and deduction, were used as procedures of several different methods, techniques and instruments. These were applied by the researcher, with the support of University teachers,

municipal methodologists in their role as advisors of teaching practicum periods and tutors in schools of the different educational levels and school grades, with a dialectical-materialistic approach.

Among these, surveys, peer observation, and the documentary review, all supported by guides, were used. The fact of using a greater number of them helped to get closer to reality and allowed the necessary triangulation that prevents errors. In addition, this was intended to comply with the statistical principle of not studying isolated facts. The perception scale applied to specialists who functioned as sources of information, to measure the variable under study, gave an evaluation between 0 and 5, according to the Likert scale used and in correspondence with the perception that the trainee evaluated the professional guidance they receive. The teachers of the Foreign Languages staff at the University of Las Tunas, with whom we worked due to the ease of access to them frequently, interacted with the sample of this study, made it possible to systematically reach the totality of the teacher's trainers.

## **Conclusions**

This study is useful to Foreign Language Didactics professors, tutors and teachers-to-be. It contributes to self-transformation of subjects, prepares for judging, criticizing and reflecting on teaching objectives, enriches assumptions and beliefs, helps integrate other disciplines, and provides a better comprehension and interpretation of professional work and the mode of action in context to perform coherent tasks and roles in the process of planning English lessons for the development of communication habits and skills, demonstrating the usefulness of CEFR for aligning curricula and defining proficiency levels, most of all for enhancing teacher training by implementing CEFR approach.

The subsystems introduced are based on pedagogic categories, principles and laws; they are flexible, systematic, developmental and transformative, provide guidance, insert professional contents into Foreign Language Didactics topics, and take into consideration the pedagogic nucleus of Didactics for the organization of the curriculum, adapting syllabus structure to map to CEFR for efficient implementation.

The MAPPLEXTSmith scale is a valuable tool for investigating professionals' development from initial familiarization to wider generalization of knowledge and abilities for successful performance in the profession, with the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical skills for teachers, as well as to improve overall teacher preparation.

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#### **Conflicto de intereses**

El autor declara que no existe conflicto de intereses