

Una caracterización del rol investigativo del profesor de inglés para la solución de problemas comunicativos en secundaria básica

Characterizing the Research Function in English Teachers for Solving Communicative Problems in Junior High

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Resumen

El artículo caracteriza la habilidad investigar en profesores de inglés, desde la coherencia didáctica que demuestran para preparar, planificar, ejecutar y controlar el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje y cómo resuelven problemas profesionales relacionados con la comunicación oral y escrita en la escuela. Los métodos de investigación utilizados fueron: análisis-síntesis, inducción-deducción, análisis documental, observación (a sesiones de tutoría previas a la culminación de estudios y a presentaciones de trabajos de curso), criterio de expertos y técnicas como la encuesta y la entrevista. Los resultados obtenidos con la triangulación revelan insuficiencias formativas existentes en la dimensión investigativa profesores en formación de la especialidad de Lenguas Extranjeras Inglés-Francés objeto de estudio y en la formación continua, lo que puede atribuirse al escaso tratamiento de la macro-habilidad (investigar) y a sus micro-habilidad relacionadas. Tal hallazgo condujo a modelar una escala para evaluar la habilidad investigar en los

Palabras clave: objetivo, contenido, método; medios de enseñanza; evaluación

Abstract

The article aims to characterize the English teacher's research ability through the didactic coherence they demonstrate to prepare, plan, execute and control the teaching-learning process in the school and how they solve professional problems related to oral and written communication. The research methods used were: analysis-synthesis, induction-deduction, documentary analysis, observation (to tutoring sessions of teachers prior to the culmination of studies and to presentations of term papers), modeling, experts' criteria and techniques, such as survey and interview. The results obtained through triangulation indicate that there are formative insufficiencies in the research dimension in trainees of the Foreign Languages English-French major under study and in continuing education. This can have its origin in the scarce treatment to the macro-skill's (do research) structural decomposition and its related micro-skill. These results led to modeling a scale to evaluate the research skill in English pre-service teachers, to favor the training process.

Keywords: objective, content, method; teaching aids; assessment



Introduction

Research, professional development and improvement are made up of tasks aimed at the critical analysis of teachers' work and their educational reality and also the problematization and reconstruction of educational theory and practice in the different contexts where the professionals work. This means the application of the scientific method in daily work as a continuum. This is a declaration of the Cuban Ministry of the Higher Education in the model of the professional of Foreign Languages (MES, 2016).

Creative teachers do as much as they can to improve learning in their contexts. Committed teachers, passionate about the profession never get rid of needs analysis, and rest on their assumptions and possible solutions while preparing for the teaching process and planning their lessons, but there is a need to characterize the research function of the English teacher, which can be regarded, on the light of Cuban foreign language teaching and thinking today, as logical and highly relevant for the development of oral and written communication skills. It is also an important aspect of modern language pedagogy and language teaching, that combines the roles of foreign language teacher and teacher-researcher, which can lead to more effective and evidence-based teaching practices.

The research function of the teacher in this context involves action research for conducting classroom-based research to identify effective strategies for developing oral and written skills and analyzing the outcomes of different teaching methods and adapting traditional ones accordingly. The low resource and low technology settings teaching scenarios in most Cuban schools prevent us from technology integration in research, though access is equal to every learner in the country, the difference between city and countryside schools is huge, not only in the matter of teacher conditions, but even English teachers are very scarce, and when we come to compare, the system is very much deprived, so opportunities, neither for teachers, nor for learners are abundant, thus exploring the effectiveness of digital tools in enhancing communication skills is one of the barriers we face, as well as evaluating the impact and effects of online learning approaches.

According to Ur (1996) "Very heterogeneous classes can be extremely difficult to teach: hence the importance of studying the main problems and searching for principles and practical ideas that can contribute to effective solutions" (p. 306). This thought may account for data collection and analysis for gathering information on student performance in oral and written tasks, when you are committed to the profession and face daily classroom problems, looking for solutions using both quantitative and qualitative methods to assess progress. The teacher, as part of his/her professional development, reviews the existing literature to keep up-to-date, in this era of communication when available resources are not few. Staying current with the latest research in second language acquisition and communication skills development and applying findings from academic studies to classroom practice is a must. Acosta (2005, 2007) accounts for



professional teaching tasks and an interactive didactic for training language teachers, but this author does not give any emphasis to the importance of research, thus his theories in providing any leading activity in this respect.

English Didactics has experimental approaches and new methodologies or technologies for enhancing communication skills teachers can test in their contexts and environments, as they compare the use of effective traditional versus innovative approaches to language teaching and learning for students' learning. So, collecting and analyzing student feedback on learning experiences, and using this information to refine teaching strategies must necessarily lead to better results and teaching practices.

One can always go back, over and over to Ur's (1996) theory and practice that accounts for a course in language teaching practice of theory, which provides examples followed by Cuban teachers in varied contexts and scenarios, with positive results today. These gravitate with national and international literature that, unfortunately, has not revealed aspects of action research properly, or guided teachers in the use of empirical methods and data collection to face language learning problems in the teaching of oral and written communication.

The new vision of the teaching-learning of English and its policy in Cuba calls for a re-dimensioning of the process of training and development of the research skill and the micro-skills inherent in the English language professional, for both, those who are being trained and those who are in practice. The training and development of the research skill constitute a valuable tool to detect the problems that arise and to achieve their solution.

Many of these challenges encountered in the solution of learners problems to communicate in English are tied to existing limitations today, present in the processes of formation and continuous development, Acosta (1997), developed a theory around communicative language teaching in the 90's, contextualized in Cuba. It has been followed for years by many Cuban teachers, but this theory did not center on offering possible solutions to face linguistic problems, it only related 'must do's with no other options. Teachers who were not creative ones just followed the suggested formulas for teaching. Today, it is partly solved, thanks to investigations undertaken in Cuba and around the world, which have proved to be relevant in the field, and have been put into practice. Nevertheless, it cannot be generalized or assumed that the whole Cuban context accounts for progress in this sense.

As part of the results obtained with the application of the methods, techniques and investigation instruments declared for the diagnosis and further characterization of the teacher's research function, was introduced the use of rubrics with the sample study, through direct observation, interview and survey, accompanied by experts' consultation and criteria.



Methodology

The scientific procedure used corresponds to the expert criteria, and the application of the methods, techniques and the research instruments declared. It was structured in steps to favor the operationalization of the variable. We planned and prepared a descriptive scale; selected the instruments to be used in correspondence with type of activity, elaborated the materials and validated of the scientific instruments instrumented. The selection of the research sample assumed (40 junior high school teachers, 10 from the first year teacher's training school Rita Longa, 10 from the second, 10 from the third and 18 from the fourth year were chosen).

The selected sample represents 84.26% 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 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 the four years trainees carry out practicum, and the objectives for this curricular activity have the leadership of English didactics discipline. The subjects should make possible, in a continuum, the consolidation and deepening of research abilities, habits and skills in the different academic years, as one of the tasks teachers need to carry out.

There was a period for the preparation of the team of applicators, all researchers of the project; data collection and the 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 the characterization of teacher's research function, and further conclusions to take actions and decision making.

The variable measured was the development of teacher's research abilities, through the instruments, which look for inner didactic coherence teachers declared for teaching oral and written communication in different grades and levels. The synthesis of the global measurement revealed a low initial state of the variable. 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 oral and written communication in different grades.
- The fact that the staff receive trainees for the teacher training school to complement and complete their formation and learning needs in terms of teaching for the development of oral and written communication, that is, skills for teaching a foreign language and facing problems in the classroom in correspondence to the objectives of formation.



The operationalization of the variable involved a heuristic examination of its essential features, which allowed the identification of indicators and sub-indicators, displayed in a scale for measurement, used for processing the data generated during this specific moment of the research period, which was relevant and allowed finding interesting, useful and novel information patterns, as the existing relationships, causes in the behavioral patterns of the data gathered.

The scale also allowed assessing and analyzing the results, through the use of the elements declared for characterizing the didactic coherence in teachers. In such a way, the indicators that characterize general aspects of the cognitive, motivational and behavioral development in service teachers and trainees were used, in the contexts of performance for the research function and tasks within it 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 from Gamboa (2020): Null (0), Bad (1), Fair (2), Good (3), Very Good (4), Excellent (5).

Discussion

Didactic coherence refers to the logical and consistent alignment of teaching methods, materials, activities, and assessments with the learning objectives and the needs of the students. In the context of teaching oral and written communication, it involves creating a structured and interconnected approach that effectively develops language skills. Thus, there are some key points and hints for maintaining didactic coherence, which include:

- Aligning objectives with activities.
- Scaffolding learning.
- Integrating skills.
- A balance in the use of authentic and non-authentic materials created by the teacher to meet the needs of the learners.
- Providing consistent feedback.
- Attaining a balance between explicit instruction and practice.
- Adapting personal and non-personal components of the teaching learning process to student needs.
- Creating thematic units.
- Organizing the curriculum.



- Using consistent terminology of the teacher's language in the classroom.
- Linking assessments to objectives.

This ability in a teacher is characterized by the consistency, logic, and alignment in the instructional approach, ensuring that all aspects of teaching work harmoniously to facilitate effective learning. A characterization of didactic coherence in teachers can be categorized into the following key areas as preparation, planning, execution and control of the teaching learning process of English for communication, the case of analysis.

Preparation, planning, execution and control of the teaching-learning process of English

There must be previous moments to teaching, to think about formation considering teacher's aims for instruction and education. This is the moment when the process starts, just exactly before the planning. This moment may be individual or in team work, but there is necessarily a moment of isolation, because there are some personal aims the teacher might want to follow or attain, and ensure that each lesson activity ahead directly contributes to the stated learning objectives for oral and written communication.

In the case of this paramount moment, there is a lesson-building process that progresses from simpler to more complex tasks, activities, exercises and practice that the teacher plans to allow and help learners gradually develop their skills. This practice must combine, in the case of a foreign language learning, reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities that reflect real-world language use, which learners can later reproduce and produce.

Execution then, incorporates age-appropriate, real-world texts and media to increase relevance and engagement with learners, and offer, as well, regular, constructive feedback that is in line with the learning objectives and assessment criteria already thought about and planned. There is a need to combine direct teaching of language structures with wide opportunities for language learners to apply the knowledge acquired. Organize lessons around themes or topics to provide context and coherence across different language skills; for the aspects related to execution, the teacher employs uniform language teaching terms and concepts throughout the course to avoid confusion, that is to say, an effective use of teachers' language.

Control, or assessment, there is much consent today in the use of both terms to suggest there is a measurement of both, the process the teacher carries out, and the learners results, because we regularly assess student progress and adjust teaching methods accordingly to maintain coherence with their learning pace, this way teachers ensure that evaluations accurately measure the skills and knowledge outlined in the learning objectives, through the linguistic content taught.



New trends and perception of classroom research

Research abilities have been widely paid attention to worldwide, however, for the last twenty years in the Cuban context, it has been an objective in training, and thus, professional development assumes it, as a paramount component for action research and for paving the way for immediate professional solutions to problems encountered in the teaching learning process and pedagogical professional problems and case studies.

The authors here show the results of the initial phase from a research project undertaken to respond to priorities of the national Ministry of Education and insufficiencies at territorial scale that have to do with the strengthening of the methodological work in junior high and teacher training schools, specifically Rita Longa Aróstegui, in Las Tunas, for the formation and development of research skills and attitudes, along with other pedagogical and professional topics, such as guidance, training, English teaching for oral and written communication and the mode of action.

There are requirements delimited for the third improvement in the English subject and the profile of the teacher training school graduate, which show a need of a re-dimension, in order to strengthen the continuous training of teachers, particularly postgraduate training in the modality of postgraduate courses in the specialty of English, for those are the professional in charge of mentoring trainees at schools before graduation.

Dr. Rosa Marta Antich's (1921-2005) pedagogical approach focused on the teaching of English and the training of foreign language teachers. Her work was reflected in the creation of didactic materials and in her commitment to the education of new generations of Cubans, her legacy continues to inspire those involved in language teaching.

Nevertheless, Cuba's innovative approach to English language education needs a fundamental shift in how we develop research skills among both pre-service and in-service English language professionals. This paradigm shift should recognize research competence not merely as an academic exercise, but as a critical tool for continuous improvement in teaching practice.

By enhancing research skills and their component micro-skills, we empower educators to become active problem-solvers in their classrooms and school institutions, to transform teachers into reflective practitioners capable of identifying, analyzing, and addressing the unique challenges they encounter in their specific educational contexts. The novelty lies in integrating research skill development as a core component of professional growth, rather than treating it as a separate or secondary concern. This integration promises to create a more responsive, adaptive, and effective English language education system in Cuba, one that can evolve to meet the changing needs of learners and society, for effective communication in the up-to-date intercultural changing world.



An overview to a set of indicators and sub-indicators attained through a one-dimension scale. Benefits for a new approach

The combination of instruments used, centered on the indicators proposed are set to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dimension teacher's research abilities in the context of oral and written communication skills development in English language learners. Teachers can benefit from the linguistic contents in a lesson to manifest the planning, execution and control to face potential errors of the knowledge system, as well as the connections between them, taking advantage of difficulties and potentialities for transformation and help, if teachers do not or has not been trained to developed the research function to teach oral and written communication.

If we follow a contrastive analysis of teacher practice before 2016, the generation of the so-called "Plan E", for language teacher training, we can compare how teacher education changed in respect to integration, scaffolding, creativity and metacognition, just to mention the areas where stronger research skills display and can greatly benefit teaching in several ways, mainly for solving problems in classroom context and where research is valuable because it helps teachers find solutions to particular problems arising in the classroom or the school, for extracurricular activities learners perform, concerning the English language.

Professional learning underpins professional knowledge related to new research skills, and understanding how to plan and execute in correspondence with different ways from usual ones, on the bases of sources of information and networks for professional support teacher come across and connect with, at the time, depending on the experience and the expertise get closer understanding of the context and improve professional skills that enable to teach, lead the process more strategically and effectively, gain self-efficacy and voice within their own school and more widely within the profession—to a certain extent—may lead to curriculum innovation, due to the development of certain capacities and autonomous professional judgments that allow teachers to move out of a submissive position and be innovators.

In essence, strong research skills can empower teachers to make informed decisions, enhance their teaching practices, and ultimately improve learner outcomes. Research can be regarded as a valuable tool in the ever-evolving field of education. Instruction can be personalized to specific needs, teaching becomes proactive at the time difficulties are anticipated for preventive instruction and targeted practice, and there is a continuous ongoing improvement that leads to ongoing refinement of teaching methods for student empowerment, for involving them in a process of detecting their own errors, their analysis, the promotion of metacognition and autonomous learning through practical skill development applicable to various aspects of teaching and learning.

Though formal research training is valuable, teachers can still develop a research-oriented mindset through their careers with practical approaches, techniques and effective planning,



which allows to identify patterns in language acquisition that suit need in general, develop more effective teaching strategies centered in learners communication skills and habits, create targeted exercise types for the different practice forms, considering mechanical, meaningful, communicative and creative practice, and foster a deeper understanding of the language learning process. An overview of aspects such as frequency of use of research strategies in the classroom, perceived limitations teachers themselves have to do research, attitudes and beliefs about usefulness and importance of research to solve the problems that arise, upgrading professional training needs, and further development of the dimension research function in teacher education, are also conscious desires teachers take.

In the particular case of English teaching, we assume aspects mentioned regarding the research function in teacher education, to face professional problems, mainly regarding the teaching of oral and written skills for communication and in order to go beyond common daily classroom practice, urged by time constraints due to heavy teaching loads and the limited access to didactic resources, other than the ones teacher prepare themselves, sometimes lacking update, we propose three indicators and a meaningful number of sub-indicators that may arise teacher's awareness for action research to give solution to learners limitations in context.

Table 1. Scale to evaluate the development of teacher's research abilities. Dimension, indicators and sub-indicators

Dimension	Indicators	Sub-indicators
Research ability	Research engagement and resource utilization	Implements diagnostic tests at the beginning of units to identify existing knowledge gaps and potential areas of difficulty
		Conducts action research by implementing a change, observing results, and reflecting on outcomes
		Experiments with different error correction techniques and observes their effectiveness
		Provides insights into the nature of language acquisition
		Uses existing resources like textbooks, teaching guides, and online forums to understand common difficulties in specific communicative areas
		Analyzes learners' performance in communication tasks.
		highlights specific areas where language production breaks down



<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Attitudes and beliefs on importance of research</p>	<p>Identifies patterns in language acquisition</p> <p>Develops effective teaching strategies for action over diagnosed problems</p> <p>Creates targeted interventions for common issues</p> <p>Fosters understanding of the language learning process</p> <p>Examines how errors in one skill area (e.g., writing) manifest in another (e.g., speaking)</p> <p>Provides a more holistic view of language development</p> <p>Encourages learners to discuss their thought processes during language production</p> <p>Reveals cognitive connections and misconceptions</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Need for training in the formation and development of the research function</p>	<p>Regularly solicits and analyzes learners' feedback on difficulties</p> <p>Reveals patterns that might not be obvious to teacher acting, but realizes</p> <p>Discusses observations that provide valuable insights into common issues</p> <p>Discusses challenges with colleagues that provide valuable insights into potential solutions</p> <p>Shows no capacities for organizing linguistic content from simple to complex</p> <p>Does not allow the progression of knowledge acquisition</p> <p>Needs systematic content analysis from others</p>



We consider there must be a responsibility towards the concerns, the validity and reliability of classroom-based research, furthermore, teachers' attitudes and beliefs about usefulness and importance of research. Whenever that happens, there are generally positive attitudes towards the importance of research in education, and the belief that research can improve teaching practices and learners' outcomes does away with skepticism, perception changes, recognition of the value of action research and reflective practice grows, and thus, teachers show and develop the need for further training in the formation and development of the research function. This is part of the perception we had during data collection, and triangulation of the results from the instruments applied at Rita Longa Teachers' Training School, and the foreign languages major in Las Tunas University.

The development of the research function in teacher education is increasingly recognized is crucial for several reasons, first of all, it must be evidence-based practice, to enable teachers to take decisions informed, based on empirical evidence. There must lead to professional growth, engaging in research promotes continuous learning and improvement. There is always educational innovation, because teacher-researchers are more likely to develop and test new teaching methods, on the basis of critical-reflective thinking, research skills enhance teachers' ability to critically evaluate educational trends and policies which bring about benefits for learners in terms of improvement and outcomes; and finally there is a contribution to the educational field and valuable contribution insights from teachers' experiences.

However, there are challenges in developing the research dimension; among them, balancing research with teaching duties, overcoming the perception that research is separate from teaching, providing adequate resources and support for teacher-researchers is not always at teachers fingertips, ensuring research skills are relevant and applicable to classroom settings from the beginning, creating pathways for the dissemination of teacher-led research.

Conclusions

This is large-scale, multifaceted approach that may allow for a nuanced assessment of both the quantity and quality of a teacher's engagement with research in their professional practice, by embracing the development of the research function; teachers can create more effective, to develop effective oral and written communication skills in English learners. This not only benefits the students directly, but it also contributes to the advancement of language teaching methodologies.

By adopting the analysis of linguistic content and learners' performance as a systematic approach, teachers can significantly enhance their ability to teach oral and written communication effectively, even without formal research training. This process also often sparks interest in more formal research methods, potentially leading to further professional development like areas for specialization, master's degrees, or doctorate studies in this area, due to the growing recognition of the importance of action, the research function in teacher



education, where is still a significant gap between recognition and widespread implementation; addressing training and development needs through perceived limitations, while fostering positive attitudes towards research could significantly enhance the research capacity of teachers, ultimately benefiting both educators and students.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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