

The effective curriculum design for English teachers' professional development in Cuba

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ABSTRACT

The rise of academic and professional communication between professionals of different nationalities who use English language as their mother tongue, second language or foreign language, necessarily leads to consider and promote the study of the English language as a language for international communication from two fundamental directions: instrument that guarantees the training, self-improvement and academic - professional update and as a way of communication between professionals. However, the study and learning of the English language becomes a goal yet to be achieved in the integral training of Cuban higher education professionals. In light of the needs and projections of the country's development and in line with international trends, the command of this language is a first order imperative. With this purpose, transcendental transformations have been happening among which the demand of the command of the English language stands out. From 2016 onwards, it was decided to gradually incorporate in all majors the certification of A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as a graduation requirement. But are the teachers prepared to assume this change? Do they have the necessary tools to take on the new challenge? This paper presents the characterization of an effective curriculum design for English teachers professional development based on the needs of teachers for their professional growth. Different research methods were used in the process of writing the article such as: surveys, interviews, observation among others.

Key words: curriculum design, professional development, CEFR, teaching learning process

RESUMEN

El aumento de la comunicación académica y profesional entre profesionales de diferentes nacionalidades que utilizan el idioma inglés como lengua materna, segundo idioma o idioma extranjero, necesariamente lleva a considerar y promover el estudio del idioma inglés como idioma para la comunicación internacional desde dos direcciones fundamentales: Instrumento que garantiza la capacitación, la superación personal y la actualización académica - profesional y como medio de comunicación entre profesionales. Sin embargo, el estudio y el aprendizaje del idioma inglés se convierten en una meta aún por alcanzar en la capacitación integral de los profesionales de la educación superior cubana. A la luz de las necesidades y proyecciones del desarrollo del país y en línea con las tendencias internacionales, el dominio de este idioma es un imperativo de primer orden. Con este propósito, se han producido transformaciones trascendentales, entre las que destaca la exigencia del dominio del idioma inglés. A partir de 2016, se decidió incorporar gradualmente en todas las carreras la certificación del nivel A2 del Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas como requisito de graduación. ¿Pero están los profesores de inglés preparados para asumir este cambio? ¿Tienen las herramientas necesarias para asumir el nuevo reto? Este documento presenta la caracterización de un diseño curricular efectivo para el desarrollo profesional de profesores de inglés basado en las necesidades de los profesores para su crecimiento profesional. Se utilizaron diferentes métodos de investigación en el proceso de redacción del artículo, tales como: encuestas, entrevistas, observación, entre otros.

Palabras clave: diseño curricular, desarrollo profesional, MCER, proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje.

Introduction

The 21st century demands from the Cuban university to face new challenges in the training and professional performance of the future graduates. In an era characterized by the development and impact of science on society and the economy and the corresponding increase of knowledge and scientific information in different languages, the formation of the Cuban professional must incorporate the study and dominion of the foreign languages. The learning of English like the language of more wide international diffusion becomes evident.

The rise of academic and professional communication between professionals of different nationalities who use this language as their mother tongue, second language or foreign language, necessarily leads to consider and promote the study of the English language as a language for international communication from two fundamental directions: instrument that guarantees the training, self-improvement and academic - professional update and as a way of communication between professionals. This communicative-professional interaction demonstrates the need to enhance the communicative skills to be developed in the teaching-learning process of the English language for the integral formation of the contemporary professional.

Therefore, the study and learning of the English language becomes a goal yet to be achieved in the integral training of Cuban higher education professionals, particularly in light of the needs and projections of the country's development and in line with international trends, the command of this language is a first order imperative.

The Ministry of Higher Education recognizes the need to reform and improve the teaching - learning process of the English language in order to achieve a better quality of employment by our graduates, and, in consonance, a greater influence of them in the socio - economic and cultural development of the country and within the concert of sonatina at the level of relations with the world.

With this purpose, transcendent transformations have been happening among which the demand of the command of the English language stands out. From 2016 onwards, it was decided to gradually incorporate in all majors the approval of B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as a graduation requirement. But are the teachers prepared to assume this changed?

In this sense, professional development courses would be a way to help the teachers. Analyzing Continuous Professional Development in Cuba, there are authors that have provided different models such as Valiente (2000), Medina (2005) and Páez (2007). In the case of Valiente, the model refers to the general characteristics of the general teacher regardless of the specific subject. However, Medina and Páez are more to the specificities of the English teachers. They make emphasis on the different competencies related to these teachers. Páez refers to the pedagogical, methodological, academic (linguistic knowledge) and communicative competences. She also describes some other characteristics such as:

- efficient in the teacher talk,
- researcher of his/her own action,
- creator of instructional materials, and
- regulator of his/her own continuous professional development.

In fulfillment of these last characteristics, she proposes a series of courses and activities pursuing for continuous professional development.

What is Continuous professional Development?

Seen as a systematic process in which the crucial goal is to ensure the training of better language teachers whose newly acquired knowledge is reflected in the outcomes of their students, effective Continuous Professional Development is to grasp any opportunity for in-service professional development in order to attain a high standard of teaching and learning.

Effective professional development is on-going, includes training, practice and feedback, and provides adequate time and follow-up support. Successful programs involve teachers in learning activities that are similar to ones they will use with their students, and encourage the development of teachers' learning communities. There is growing interest in developing schools as learning organisations, and in ways for teachers to share their expertise and experience more systematically.

OECD's comparative review on teachers noted, 2005

According to Corona Camaraza (2013):

“Teachers need training to play this decisive role in the learning process, and here is where Continuing Professional Development (CPD) comes into play. Fortunately, Cuban teachers nationwide enjoyed the privilege of having activities for their professional development included in their workload. CPD should include a variety of modalities: from self-study to Master’s Degree and Doctoral Programs... but seen as a systematic process in which the ultimate goal is to ensure the training of better English language teachers whose newly acquired knowledge is reflected in the outcomes of their students. In my opinion, therefore, CDP has to include and integrate: Teacher’s English language proficiency, Pedagogic knowledge Methodology, and Professional knowledge”.

The British Council has been very active helping in the English Language English teachers training and development. It pays close attention to the CPD of English Language Teachers. Teaching for Success means that a teacher is able to plan and monitor his/her own professional development and go through the four stages (1. awareness, 2. understanding, 3. engagement and 4. integration) and 12 professional practices and the elements that describe those professional practices¹.

Analyzing the changes proposed in the teaching of English in Cuba and considering the definition of training as the teaching or developing in others any skills and knowledge related to specific useful competencies, there is a necessity to update existing continuous professional development models in order to fulfill the goals of the Ministry of Higher Education.

What would be the characteristics of a curriculum to guide the professional development of English teachers?

To answer this question is a crucial to identify the skills and competencies needed in an English teacher to plays the different roles that make him/her an educator in class. This skills and competencies should be in alignment to the competencies of a university professor set by the Ministry of Higher Education. These competencies are close related to performance in class.

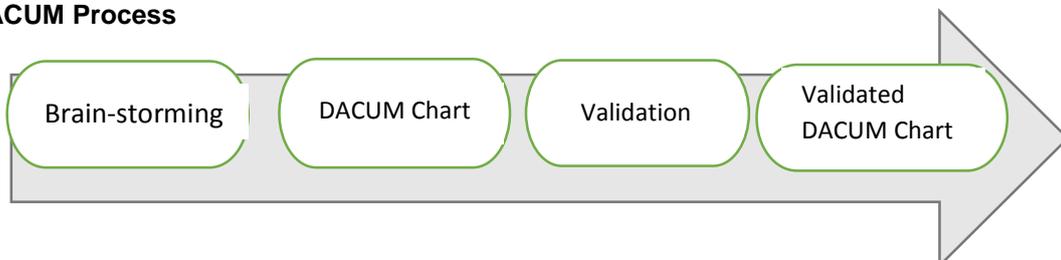
The authors consider three main factors that contribute to a high performance:

- Skills and competencies
- Attitudes and motivation
- Commitment for excellence

Definitely, it would be a skill- oriented or cognitive areas curriculum. Once the skills and competencies are defined, there should be a need analysis to determine the areas to work on during the training process. For this purpose the authors decided to follow the **Developing A CURriculuM (DACUM) process**.

According to Santhakumar (2018), the purpose of needs analysis in an academic institution is to identify which occupational areas have enough employment opportunities and will attract enough students to justify an instructional program. In the case of this paper, the purpose is to identify the areas that need a training program.

DACUM Process



Uses a **brainstorming** technique

¹ Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Framework. British Council www.teachingenglish.org.uk

- Brainstorming by expert workers (rely on your actual hourly employees as the experts on every task and duty that must be carried out to do their job well at your organization.)
- To generate information about duties and tasks
- Considers the expert workers as the best source of job related information

This brainstorming phase is of great importance for it involves the teachers as well as the administrators. Some of the characteristics of this phase are:

- Carried out in a workshop setting
- Consisting of 8 to 12 experts
- Involve people who **do** the job, rather than who **know** the job
- Two or three supervisors
- Under the guidance of a facilitator
- Work for 1 or 2 days

The quality of the brainstorming phase depends on the ability of the facilitator to conduct the activity, the selection of experts and supervisors, the participation of experts in the workshop and the proper identification of tasks and duties.

DACUM Chart

Outcome of workshop

- A set of Duty – Task statements for the job under analysis
- Describes what an expert worker must be able to do.
- Tasks should begin with an action verb for clarity and consistency

Example:

Organize the classroom

Answer the students' questions

Duties	Tasks			
Prepare the lesson	Formulate the objective	Select the content	Choose the best method	Give feedback to the students

Validation

- DACUM Chart reviewed by larger group of expert workers and supervisors
- The group identifies duties and tasks that are relevant / important

Is the task actually performed in the job or occupation?

How important is the task?

How difficult is it to learn to perform the task?

How frequently is the task performed?

Task verification data collected are statistically analyzed and become a basis for decisions about which tasks should be taught and which should not.

Validated DACUM Chart

- Validated tasks form the basis for task analysis
- Knowledge, skills and attitudes are identified for these tasks
- Courses are formed
- Instructional methods identified
- Instructional material developed
- Evaluation process defined

The validated DACUM Chart sets the path for task analysis



Task analysis

- Tasks that are the most important components of a job. (essential)
- The tasks that are difficult and consume the majority of the worker's time. (tedious)
- Tasks that have serious consequences if the worker makes a mistake.
- Tasks that are prerequisites for learning other important tasks
- Tasks that should be reviewed in ongoing training programs. (reiteration)
- Task Selection, data gathered during task verification are used to select tasks for instruction.

Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes

- What one needs to know to perform the task (Identify "need-to-know" knowledge, not "nice-to-know".)
- The skill / ability required
- What attitudes one needs to perform
- The steps one follows in performing the task
- What actions must a worker take to perform the task correctly
- What should the final product or service be like
- Time taken to perform the task

Identifying Attitudes

- Safety, environmental precautions
- Interpersonal relations
- Getting along with supervisor and co-workers
- Respect for tools, equipment, materials, and supplies
- Time management / meeting time targets
- Personal hygiene

Once the tasks are identified as well as the skills, knowledge and attitudes involved, it is time to set the performing criteria for each task. Having these aspects considered, the trainer can select the contents to be taught in each course according to the teachers' needs.

CONCLUSIONS

The English teacher the Cuban Ministry of Higher Education demands should be a competent professional able to deliver a quality lesson that enables the students to act according to the needs of society. In this sense, the professional development of such teachers should meet the necessity to fulfill the task at hand. This article provides the characteristics for the designing of an effective curriculum guiding the paths to successful teaching. Though the authors have only covered the initial phase, the purpose of this research is to provide the complete curriculum for professional development of English teachers in Cuba.

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