

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE WITHIN THE ENGLISH CLASS IN COLOMBIAN SCHOOLS THROUGH THE STRUCTURAL BACKWARD DESIGN

DESENVOLVIMENTO DA COMPETÊNCIA COMUNICATIVA DENTRO DA AULA DE INGLÊS NOS ESPAÇOS
EDUCATIVOS COLOMBIANOS ATRAVÉS DO DESENHO ESTRUTURAL DO PLANEJAMENTO REVERSO

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Abstract: This article seeks to update in-service and pre-service English teachers, starting from conceptualizing competencies and differentiating them from common confusions such as capacities and skills. Then, it centralizes on what has been called the “development of communicative competence.” For this, the Backward structural design proposed by Jack Richards has been used, bearing in mind the requirements and responsibilities of an English teacher within the current Colombian context. To promote the development of communicative competence within Colombian educational centers, we offer a review of the suggested methodology and the expected results we seek to observe. The case study methodology was used for this research inside basic educational settings, relying on various sources of data, including, observations, documents, and archival records. The English language is now considered a “lingua franca”, an international language with which discourses are exchanged in political, scientific, and economic fields. Since Colombia is a country in constant development, mainly in the technological areas, this article aims to aid current and future English teachers.

Keywords: Competencies; Communicative competence; English teacher; Backward design.

Resumo: Este artigo busca atualizar professores de inglês em exercício e em formação, partindo da conceituação de competências, e diferenciando-as de confusões comuns como capacidades e habilidades. Depois, centraliza-se no que se tem chamado de “desenvolvimento da competência comunicativa”. Para isso, utilizou-se o planejamento reverso proposto por Jack Richards, levando em consideração as exigências e responsabilidades de um professor de inglês no atual contexto colombiano. Para promover o desenvolvimento da competência comunicativa nos centros educacionais colombianos, oferecemos uma revisão da metodologia sugerida e dos resultados esperados que procuramos observar. A metodologia de estudo de caso foi utilizada para esta pesquisa em ambientes educacionais básicos, contando com diversas fontes de dados, incluindo observações, documentos e registros de arquivo. Hoje em dia, a língua inglesa é considerada “língua franca”, uma língua internacional com a qual se realizam trocas de discursos nos campos político, científico e econômico; e sendo a Colômbia um país em constante desenvolvimento, principalmente nas áreas tecnológicas, este artigo tem como objetivo fornecer auxílio aos atuais e futuros professores de inglês.

Palavras-chave: Competências; Competência comunicativa; Professor de inglês; Planejamento reverso.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings need to interact with others since, by nature, they seek to express feelings, emotions, thoughts, and opinions at all times, and to do so, the communication process is vital. Within this dynamic, both the speaker and the listener must have a command of communicative competence to establish an adequate exchange of speeches. In this way, the development of all kinds of English classes must ensure a space where this competence is appropriated, inserting the sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and linguistic aspects among the participants. For their part, the teachers dedicated to teaching English in Colombian territory must provide the necessary spaces for this to happen. For that reason, this study wants to update English teachers to develop communicative competence among learners using the Backward structural design presented by Jack Richards. Currently, there is a variety of approaches to teaching English. Considering previous information, could the Backward structural design support the development of communicative competence?

In Colombia, teaching English is mandatory at various formal educational levels. To regulate the learning of this language, the Ministry of National Education formulated the Basic Learning Rights in Teaching English (2016), which describes the competencies that students must achieve from the first grade of primary school to the last stage of education, considering listening, reading, writing, monologue, and conversation skills. For higher education in Colombia, the Resolution 02041 of 2016, issued by the Ministry of National Education, established the levels of communicative competence that students pursuing technological and professional careers (A2), bachelor's programs (B1), and bachelor's in foreign languages (C1) must have. All this is covered under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, and evaluation.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, and evaluation prioritizes the development of communicative competence as vital for the appropriation of the language under levels of mastery (basic, independent, and advanced). Communicative competence must encompass a common good among students, which makes their needs, interests, and resources visible, in addition to the design of native material by the teacher. The class material considers each academic population's learning styles and singularities, allowing participants to develop an active role among themselves in class meetings.

Now, for developing an English class within the development of communicative competence, the teacher must transform his pedagogical practices to configure the true meaning of his work within the local, regional, national, and international context about the conception of the development of this competence. In other words, it is about creating structured learning spaces so that the active and reflective role of the student is present throughout the class, demonstrating the appropriate scope of their communicative competence to establish dialogues in context.

Nowadays, there are different definitions of communicative competence. Authors such as The Royal Spanish Academy (2018), Hymes (1972), and Richards (2012) have defined it. However, this research emphasizes the definition of the Common European Framework. Communicative competence in this limited sense has the following components: sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and linguistic (2002). Before describing them, discussing the different types of skills is essential.

TYPES OF SKILLS

Finding the exact meaning of competence is complex. We can see various definitions based on its use: authority, suitability, function, or requirements. The Royal Spanish Academy defines competence as “The aptitude or suitability to do something or intervene in a certain matter” (RAE, 2018). Consequently, there is a tendency to confuse terms about competence, such as capacity, skill, and ability.

Capacities are inherent and natural conditions for man to learn (motor, cognitive, and affective). Skills are motor abilities to perform a function, while capabilities refer to tasks performed effectively and efficiently. Due to its functional diversity, competencies are presented in a primary, generic, or specific way.

Essential competencies are necessary to live in a community (citizen competencies, communicative competencies, cognitive competencies, etc.). Generic competencies address common competencies in various occupations or professions, for example, professionals in areas such as business administration, accounting, and economics, who share a set of generic competencies such as financial analysis and business management (TOBÓN, 2010, p. 62). Finally, specific competencies are those well-defined to a profession or occupation.

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Communicative competence is part of the essential competencies, a set of skills or abilities that enable appropriate participation in specific communicative situations (HYMES, 1972, p. 94). From this perspective, wanting to communicate is an event that requires skills to establish links and constructive relationships with others and with the environment. In other words, communicative competence is a person's effective and efficient performance to function in specific contexts. For a good development of this competence in teaching the English language, five fundamental characteristics must be kept in mind, according to Richards: accuracy, fluency, complexity, appropriation, and capacity (RICHARDS, 2012); on the other hand, there must also be accuracy when using the grammatical rules correctly from their compression, function, and fluency, to maintain an adequate rhythm of communication with others. Complexity is the ability to expand grammar and vocabulary from the practical use and evolution of the language. The appropriation to

communicate, depending on the context, is determined by the use of expressions and the behavior of the language; this capacity then allows the language to be generated and to know what topics to talk about.

The development of this competence occurs gradually and progressively because the practice builds a domain and appropriation of it, where the individual turns to other fields of study such as psychology, which exposes behavior as part of human expression; linguistics, from which the formation of language skills are related, and pragmatics as a functionality of the language. The Common European Framework of Reference for Foreign Languages proposes three components for optimal communicative competence development: sociolinguistic, linguistic, and pragmatic competence.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

Sociolinguistic competence allows a person to communicate accurately in different contexts, with other people, and with varying intentions of communication (GONZÁLEZ, 2003, p. 260). That is, language is understood and interpreted according to the context. Language can be read anywhere, but it is only codified by others based on their experiences and culture.

Culture plays a vital role in understanding language since a word's meaning changes from one region to another. It is not the same to say *Perico* in Antioquia as in Bucaramanga; *Perico* in Antioquia can be an animal, a coffee with milk, or a psychoactive substance, while in Bucaramanga, it refers to the gastronomic dish: scrambled eggs. Another example is the interpretation of the word *buseeta*, a means of transportation in Colombia. In Brazil, adapting the word is a derogatory way of referring to the female reproductive organ. For this reason, language within culture is approached in two ways: the first deals with conceptual knowledge about history, geography, and arts, among others; The second responds to the capacities and abilities to identify the different registers and adapt linguistically in immediate situations.

Within the Common European Framework, sociolinguistic competence includes the knowledge and skills necessary to address the social dimension of language use based on essential aspects such as linguistic markers in social relationships, rules of courtesy, expressions of popular wisdom, different registers, and accents.

Linguistic markers are imparted from the type of relationship one has with the interlocutor and can be presented in a familiar, formal, informal, or solemn way. Politeness norms occur positively or negatively based on the attitudes of both the speaker and the listener. Expressions of popular wisdom are characterized by contributing to the presentation and identity of culture. We find proverbs, idioms, and local or regional customs in them. Finally, in the registers and accents, the language diversities are identified according to their context for use and accommodation of meanings and interpretations.

PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

Pragmatic competence is achieved from the appropriate relationship between the discourse interlocutors and the communication context. In this case, it not only focuses on what is said and how it is said but also keeps in mind who says it, to whom it is displayed, and why it is said. In the words of Hymes, “being competent from a pragmatic point of view means adjusting what is said about the circumstances and the interlocutors” (HYMES, 1972, p. 95).

Three other competencies are integrated for acquiring pragmatic competence that enables an adequate use of discourse: discursive, functional, and organizational competence.

Discursive competence is arranging sentences into sequences to produce coherent language fragments. This is understood as the knowledge of the organization of sentences and the ability to regulate that order based on the purpose of communicating something, the cause-and-effect relationships, and the structuring of the language. Functional competence establishes the use of oral and written speech for specific purposes. These functions can be micro or macro-functions. Micro-functions are isolated and brief statements, while macro-functions are structured sequences for speech presentation. Organizational competence orders how the discourse is presented, considering how the information is structured, how it is told, how it is argued, and how it is prepared.

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

Linguistic competence, such as the recognition and appropriate use of the language, refers to the ability to know and use the language correctly, considering its phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical components (GONZÁLEZ, 2003, p. 261).

It is timely and imperative to recognize that linguistic systems are complex by nature and that the language of a society is diverse and broad since they are constantly evolving, responding to the demands of current communication; in other words, you could not compare the linguistics of fifty years ago with the current one, and for this reason, it is not correct to say that someone masters a language in its entirety due to its changes. This competence is articulated under specific components: lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic, and orthoepic.

The lexical component refers to the recognition of the vocabulary for the use of the language and the ability to use it appropriately based on ready-made expressions that can be made up of one or several words and are understood as a whole; these are presented in idioms, formulas or fixed structures of language, and the polysemy that is equivalent to the multiple meanings that have been given to certain words.

In the grammatical component are the language's grammatical resources, which are classified into elements, categories, classes, structures, processes, and relationships. All this is in tune with morphology, which is responsible for the internal organization of words and the syntax of groupings of words to produce sentences.

The semantic component includes the meaning and significance of the words in relation to the context, considering grammatical semantics that covers all grammatical elements concerning their definitions and pragmatic semantics that accounts for the logical relationships of these meanings and interpretations.

For its part, the phonological component responds to skills in the production of sounds (phonemes), phonetic features (sonority and labiality), phonetic composition (syllabic structures), phonetics of sentences (prosody), and phonetic reduction (vocal reduction), and assimilation).

The orthographic component represents competence in correctly writing texts based on spelling, punctuation, and symbols. Finally, the orthoepic feature refers to the speaker's skill and ability to use different means and resources to improve and internalize all the previous components to achieve optimal development of their linguistic competence.

THE ENGLISH TEACHER

For the development of communicative competence among students, the English teacher is a person who has pedagogical skills and adequate command of the English language, whether acquired as a mother tongue, second, or foreign language. Currently, within the different Colombian educational institutions, there are professionals with degrees such as a Bachelor in English, Bachelor in Modern Languages, Bachelor in Bilingual Teaching, and Bachelor in Languages, among others. Within these programs, courses or subjects of pedagogy, didactics, curriculum, research, and languages are taught, specifically to the degree to be obtained, seeking that the graduate acquires everything necessary to be able to work as a teacher of English or another language. Resolution 02041 of 2016, issued by the Ministry of Education of Colombia, established that new English teaching program applicants must accredit a C1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference under an international test based on the resolution date.

In the case of unlicensed professionals who wish to venture into teaching English, they must have courses in pedagogical training and courses in teaching English as a foreign language (TKT, TESOL, or TEFL), in addition to having a C1 certificate in the foreign language. All these requirements allow the person dedicated to teaching English within Colombian territory and the different public or private educational institutions to have sufficient pedagogical, curricular, didactic, and disciplinary knowledge to impart their teaching functions with the appropriation of communicative competence among its students. Hence, this group develops adequately in search of better educational quality.

BACKWARD DESIGN

For students to take ownership of communicative competence, the development of the English class must be conditioned as a proper language learning space. For this reason, the teacher

must plan the course rigorously, allowing optimal outcomes of this competence already described above among its participants.

For course planning in teaching English, it is recommended to use the structure designed by Wiggins & Mactighe, who compile the sequential order in three stages to build suitable class units: desired results, learning evidence, and learning plan (WIGGINS & MACTIGHE, 2012).

About the desired results, the objectives of the unit or class must be stated based on the context. Subsequently, the delivery of products or presentations is stipulated under clear criteria to be evaluated. Finally, these budgets are aligned with various learning experiences that make achieving the different formulated objectives possible. This curricular structuring gains more strength with the approach called Backward created by Richards, which explains in seven steps how to create a curricular design privileging learning outcomes and considering the support supplies given by the teacher. These steps consist of doing a context analysis, establishing the objectives, selecting the contents, organizing the contents, establishing the learning experiences, ordering the learning experiences, and deciding what to evaluate (RICHARDS, 2013, pp. 20-28).

First, the teacher must conduct a detailed study of the surrounding context, considering the population, physical resources, and institutional policies. After this, the objectives to be achieved are outlined. These objectives must be acquisition, transfer, meaning, and standardized (WIGGINS & MACTIGHE, 2012, p. 21).

The acquisition objectives show what the student can do autonomously, thanks to the teacher's proposal. The transfer objectives enable the appropriation of the content worked on appropriately. The meaning objectives promote reflection and meaning, starting from using what will be developed during classes. The standardized objectives are taken from how lessons will be conducted as presented by the Common European Framework of Reference and national, regional, local, and institutional educational policies (competencies, standards, or achievement indicators).

After capturing the four objectives, evidence of learning is identified and described to select the contents that will support achieving the objectives sequentially. The achievements of the goals can be seen within the evidence of learning proposed by the English teacher and developed by the students. The teacher selects which products will be evaluated and in what way, providing feedback spaces will strengthen the development of the learners' communicative competence. Ultimately, this must be directed toward individual and collective awareness in a formative way for the benefit of the appropriation of the same communicative competence.

CONCLUSIONS

The first conclusion indicates that the Common European Framework incorporates three components to develop communicative competence: linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic.

The second conclusion points out that it must be understood that the development of communicative competence under the Backward structural design is established under three principles: effectiveness, orientation, and appropriation.

Effectiveness is a way to achieve objectives, considering the participants' specific situations that facilitate communicative interaction. For its part, orientation is a didactic sequence, which allows for establishing an order for dynamic development within the English class. Finally, appropriation is the specific abstraction that the student makes according to all the resources the teacher presents. This occurs individually and gradually since each individual differentially develops their potential. But this does not mean that a domain of communicative competence does not happen between the interested parties, only that it presents some similarities and differences between them. Appropriation is evident when the student interacts in conversations or immediate situations with some command of the foreign language.

Finally, it is postulated that communicative competence is an ideal performance that the speaker (sender) appropriates to communicate with the listener (receiver) based on their immediate situation. Proper appropriation of this competence is achieved when the principles of the communicative approach are understood, hence the teacher's responsibility to ensure that their students complete it.

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