

***Professional Skills in the Teaching-Learning of English as a Teacher Education Major at the Holguín University***

***Las habilidades profesionales en la enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés especialidad con perfil pedagógico en la Universidad de Holguín***

***Habilidades profissionais no ensino-aprendizagem da especialidade de Inglês com perfil pedagógico na Universidade de Holguín***

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**Abstract**

This article is the result of previous doctoral, master and project research on the matter by the authors. They presented informed arguments on professional skills. The objective was to prove from theoretical and practical bases that the study, analysis and proposal on this topic is central in the teaching and learning of English in the Teacher Education Major. The theoretical methods used were the historic-logical, analytic-synthetic, inductive-deductive, and documentary study. The work done allowed the authors to reveal essential aspects on the category and their theoretical, methodological and professional implications. Skill development means that the student acquires knowledge and applies it in a specific field. English as a teacher education major gives special prominence to skill development through the integrated practice of the language, and aims at the development of skills that are part of the specific field of study, the so-called professional skills. This article explores skill theory in general and delves into the specific term professional skills, contextualized in the teaching and learning of English as a teacher education major in Holguín.

**Key words:** learning of English; skills; professional skills; practice; skill development

**Resumen**

En el trabajo, resultado de investigaciones de especialidad, doctorado, maestría y proyectos, los autores realizaron un análisis para una argumentación sobre las habilidades profesionales. Se tuvo como objetivo demostrar desde la teoría y la práctica que el estudio, análisis y propuestas sobre el tema es central en la enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés en la especialidad. Se emplearon métodos teóricos como el histórico-lógico, análisis-síntesis, inducción-deducción, y el análisis de fuentes escritas. Los análisis permitieron revelar aspectos esenciales sobre la categoría objeto de estudio y sus implicaciones teórico-metodológicas y profesionales. Desarrollar una habilidad profesional muestra que un sujeto es capaz de asimilar conocimientos y aplicarlos desde una determinada rama del saber en su objeto específico. En la carrera de inglés especialidad con perfil pedagógico se busca el desarrollo de las habilidades comunicativas a través de la práctica integral del idioma, y se aspira además al desarrollo de habilidades propias de la profesión específica, las llamadas habilidades profesionales. Este artículo presenta una reflexión sobre las habilidades en general y una propuesta y análisis de las habilidades profesionales en especial, desde la teoría y la

ilustración, con singularidad en la enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés especialidad con perfil pedagógico en la universidad de Holguín.

**Palabras clave:** aprendizaje de inglés; habilidades; habilidades profesionales; práctica; desarrollo de habilidades

### **Resumo (português)**

Este artigo é resultado de pesquisas anteriores de doutoramento, mestrado e projeto de pesquisa dos autores sobre o assunto. Os autores realizaram uma análise sobre os fundamentos referentes às habilidades profissionais. O objetivo foi comprovar a partir de bases teóricas e práticas que o estudo, a análise e a proposta sobre o tema é central no ensino e na aprendizagem da Língua Inglesa na Graduação de Professores. Os métodos teóricos utilizados foram o estudo histórico-lógico, analítico-sintético, indutivo-dedutivo e documental. O trabalho realizado permitiu aos autores revelar aspectos essenciais sobre a categoria e suas implicações teóricas, metodológicas e profissionais. O desenvolvimento de habilidades significa que o aluno adquire conhecimentos e os aplica em um campo específico. O curso de inglês como formação de professores dá especial destaque ao desenvolvimento de habilidades por meio da prática integrada do idioma e visa o desenvolvimento de habilidades que fazem parte do campo específico de estudo, as chamadas habilidades profissionais. Este artigo explora a teoria das habilidades em geral e investiga o termo específico habilidades profissionais, contextualizadas no ensino e aprendizagem de inglês como especialização em formação de professores em Holguín.

**Palavras-chave:** aprendizagem de inglês; habilidades; habilidades profissionais; prática; desenvolvimento de habilidades

### **Introduction**

The paper's objectives are to prove that skill formation and development in FLT, the theory underlying both processes and their didactic crystallization, has been a must on the map of foreign language teaching. Central to a discussion on the matter is the notion that skills are defined as the know-how, or are called the learn-to-do according to UNESCO standards. This is translated as putting to use the knowledge acquired.

In an educational context, skill development means that the student acquires knowledge and applies it in a specific field. Cuban researcher Álvarez de Zayas (1996) states that skills, as a part of the contents, allow to characterize didactically speaking the operations performed by the students, as they interact with their object of study, transforming it, passing on to it their human influence.

The mastering of a foreign language involves, for example, knowing the rules for verb conjugation. The learner must also practice it to internalize habit and skill so that language command reaches expected levels. Therefore, foreign language teaching gives special prominence to skill development through the integrated practice of the language in communicative situations. The previous statement is fundamental for an understanding on how the process operates. As a constituent of contents, skills are the individual's practical performance within a specific field of knowledge amassed in the vast

cultural mosaic of humankind. A preliminary approach from a psychological standpoint reveals that skills are the actions and operations mastered by that individual – the learner – with a definite objective in mind.

It must be pointed out that skill formation and development are by no means the exclusive possession or prerogative of foreign language teaching. Any learning activity presupposes the acquisition of knowledge and the development of general and particular skills, depending on the reality and perspective of the process.

Recent studies on skill formation and development carried out in the field by researchers from the Teacher Education English Major, rendered elements that explain why this work came to life. While it is a fact that official documents analyzed show clearly the multifarious aspects related to teaching and learning, and the teaching staff is one of seniority and dedication, there is still much to be explored in the areas of theory and contextualized practice to improve the process. This paper is an endeavor towards that end. The major aspires to develop general communicative skills inherent in learning a foreign language. However, the goal goes beyond that: developing a set of profession-related skills, the so-called professional skills.

This article explores skill theory in general and delves into the specific term professional skills, contextualized in the teaching and learning of English as a teacher education major in Holguín.

### **Material and Methods**

The theoretical methods used were historic-logical, analytic-synthetic, inductive-deductive, and documentary study. The work done allowed the authors to reveal essential aspects on the category and their theoretical, methodological and professional implications. Skill development means that the student acquires knowledge and applies it in a specific field. English as a teacher education major gives special prominence to skill development through the integrated practice of the language, and aims at the development of skills that are part of the specific field of study, the so-called professional skills

### **Results and Discussion**

Stepping into the concept of skill implies, primarily, an analysis based on a compilation of definitions. Obviously, this paper cannot list all of them. It will propose a selection and disclose coincidental points.

Petrovsky (1978) states that skills are the mastery of a system of psychical and practical activities, which are necessary for the conscious regulation of activity, knowledge and habits. Danilov &

Skatkin (1978) clarify that skills are an extremely encompassing and complex pedagogical concept, and view them as the capacity acquired to use creatively knowledge and habits in theoretical and practical activity. They were able to summarize the definition in saying that skills are knowledge in action.

González (1995) defines these as the mastery of psychical and practical operations that allow rational control of activity. She adds that they are the result of systematization of actions under such conditions that their constant development is guaranteed. They are actions, which are embedded in learning and assure efficient human performance. Álvarez de Zayas (1996) says that skills are the mastery of the content that reveals human behavior in a specific context. For him, they are actions and operations mastered by the individual, with a goal in sight.

A critical reading of these definitions leads to mark words that are essential to the analysis: action, practice, activity, use of knowledge and habits, behavior, acquired capacity. In other words, the study of the very concept brings to light that the process occurs as follows: from practice to the psychical plane and back again. Furthermore, skill development is a full combinatory exchange between the outside and the inside, a dialectical harmony between psyche and reality. It should be noted that Danilov and Skatkin refer to “capacity.”

A constant in the definitions is the fact that many authors include skills within the contents, discerning what is to be taught and what is to be learned. For González et al, (2004) contents are the product of humanity’s contribution during its historic development. They include:

- ✓ Systems of knowledge.
- ✓ Systems of skills and habits.
- ✓ Systems of relations with the world (values, feelings, attitudes).
- ✓ Systems of experiences (affective and motivational) in activity.

There are no skills and no habits without previous knowledge: the latter is the foundation upon which the former form and develop. Knowledge comes first then you teach how to operate with it in a given reality and a given practice context. Knowledge and skills are coherently connected. These are modeled and developed. Rephrasing it, knowledge is a key premise for the development of the skills. Skills are a form of assimilation of activity. Alongside with habits, they enable individuals to carry out a task. So when they apply to an activity they acquire a system of procedures and methods that are useful for the performance of a variety of tasks. They also begin to master actions piecemeal, as

they exact their performance. Only with a feedback on what they have already learned – knowledge and habits – will they be able to perform better.

Skill manifests itself in the most perfect and elemental way of acting. At a higher level, it is considered as the mastering of the whole process, and presupposes the acquisition of knowledge and the formation of habits as essential components. An effective skill formation includes systematization through repetition of actions and steady reinforcement, together with continual improvement.

Skills are therefore a systematization of actions and these are subordinate processes of a conscious objective, as was previously stated. It can be said that in the case of the skills, automatization is not reached: this is a characteristic of habits. The fulfillment of skill-related actions demands conscious regulation by the individual. Skill development implies the possibility to choose and put in practice different methods and knowledge acquired in correspondence to the final goal and the conditions of the task.

A further analysis of skills in the teaching and learning of a foreign language should make reference to Leontiev (Taken from Antich et al, 1986). He states that the learning process is a complex activity with two aspects, a methodological and a theoretical one:

1. The acquisition of knowledge (the premise of the existence of previous knowledge to move to the next level).
2. The formation of habits and skills (formed and developed based on previous knowledge).

To understand how teaching and learning work and which their cycles are for presentation and exploitation in a lesson, we must depart from the theory of verbal activity. It is founded on the general theory of activity defined by Vigotsky and his followers (Leontiev, Luria, Galperin). Verbal activity has four aspects: listening, speaking, reading and writing. From these elements, the system of teaching is organized, that is, we speak about a reading comprehension, a speaking, a writing and a listening comprehension lesson, depending on the leading skill involved.

It should be pointed out that even when there is a leading skill in a lesson, they all act in combination through the process: it is impossible to develop a pure skill when in real life they overlap in communication. It is clear that there is no such thing as a pure one-skill lesson. Students will do tasks of all types and will navigate back and forth the skills of the language during the hours allotted. However, there is a predominant skill, because that is what you seek as a teacher and that is what the syllabus suggests as contents to be taught. That skill is the header in each lesson.

Now, skill development in the teaching and learning of English as a teacher education major in the university implies an inherent pedagogical-professional, interdisciplinary and formative premise. Skills are not developed per se but as means to upgrade communicative competence, which in turn will enable teachers-to-be to use indispensable “tools” to lead the teaching-learning process of English once they graduate: the necessary development of professional skills.

These tools are referred to in the directive documents the major responds to. They state the teachers-to-be must have reached upon graduation an ethical and professional formation that will allow them to lead the pedagogical process from an analytical perspective of their professional contexts towards the solution of problems, debate and research. Students will solve pedagogical, social, scientific problems, as they must have formed and developed technical skills to apply them creatively in their professional scenarios.

It should be noted that the documents emphasize the students’ development of communicative skills to enter a further skill dimension, that of professional skills.

Llanes (?) offers definitions of professional skills:

“Son aquellas que garantizan el éxito en la ejecución de la actividad de la profesión y la solución de los más diversos problemas de esa especialidad”.

“Habilidades previstas en el contenido del proceso docente educativo que se corresponden con los modos de actuación del profesional dado y han de tener un nivel de sistematización tal que, una vez apropiado de ellas, le será posible al estudiante enfrentar y dar solución a múltiples problemas profesionales”.

“El contenido lógico de las acciones que realiza el profesional al interactuar con los objetos de la profesión”.

Llanes states that in approaching each definition, it can be noticed authors coincide this type of activity is in line with the role models of a professional. This guarantees the solution of problems in each specific field.

The definitions reveal the intentional character of this type of skill development. Two aspects are essential: direct connection with the profession and its modeling to solve problems.

At this point in the analysis, the authors consider it pertinent to present a distinguishing working definition of professional skills. Thus, professional skills in the teaching and learning of English as a teacher education major are:

“Those skills formed and developed during the teaching and learning of English as a teacher education major, which will allow future teachers to learn and teach English and solve academic, contextual, social, pedagogical issues related to their profession.” (Ronda, Olivé, Rodríguez)

#### Activities to develop professional skills

The following activities are examples to show how the pedagogical-professional aspect is channeled in class.

#### Simulated Situations: Women in Society Today

I. One of your students has verbally attacked his former girlfriend. She is shocked. He claims that she offended him and deserves “even a spanking.” She defends herself explaining he tried to force her to come back to him and regarded her as a person with no rights.

II. A debate opens in your lesson as to the role of women in society. Some male students claim that women cannot perform certain jobs (builder, bus driver, sports narrator, high-ranking military official), and the girls, respond mentioning female-dominated jobs (nurse, telephone operator, typist).

III. A boy in your class despises a girl who has had “many boyfriends.” He tries to label her publicly as a “promiscuous one” saying she is “too unstable.” The girl, an excellent student, says boys who have many girlfriends are considered heroes, not promiscuous.

Profession-related activities derived from the situations above:

1- Read the situations analytically and detect the conflicts and problems seen through the characters.

List them.

2- Prepare a five-item strategy that leads to achieving:

- ✓ A degree of solidarity and support in favor of the affected characters.
- ✓ A critical approach to the characters' behavior.
- ✓ A concrete proposal (steps) to influence on the characters' verbalizations, attitudes and behaviors.
- ✓ Possible solutions to the problems posed in each situation.
- ✓ A plan to help and guide the affected students and to support their families.

3- Write out a report on the work done to be presented orally in plenary session.

4- Write notes to be told to the families that include:

- ✓ How you feel about the problem as a teacher, a member of an educational institution, and as a human being.
- ✓ How the families should face the problem and help the boys and girls.
- ✓ An outline of the difficulties ahead and how they can be overcome.
- ✓ An offering of unconditional counseling and help.

5- Prepare expositions with the elements below:

- ✓ A contrast between the bad models given in the situations and good ones, bringing the latter ones to the foreground, taking them from personal experiences, anecdotes.
- ✓ An emphasis on the good points of the characters and how these can be channeled positively for the students' personal growth.
- ✓ A presentation of other situations that escape the contents of the ones they read and analyzed, which become new points of departure for solving.

## **Conclusions**

Research done on the matter of skill formation and development rendered the need to go further in the fulfillment of specific professional objectives in the Teacher Education English Major of the Holguín University, within the Discipline Integrated English Practice. The present paper aimed at contributing a properly contextualized proposal.

An approximation to the problem started with the contextualization of the analyses made. Empirical and epistemic inquiry into the category led to systematization, assumption and modeling of a theoretical corpus where skills are viewed beyond the initial communicative element into the professional component. As well, practical activities to channel the results didactically were offered according to the professional needs and realities of the Teacher Education English Major of the Holguín University.

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