

Completion of university studies in the Foreign Languages Major. A comprehensive approach

El ejercicio de culminación de estudios en la carrera Lenguas Extranjeras.

Una concepción integradora

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Abstract

The objective of the article is to offer the organizing, didactic and linguo-methodological actions that guaranteed the preparation of last year students from the Foreign Languages Majors to do the exams as part of the completion of university studies. Methods from the theoretical level such as analytic-synthetic and logical-historic ones were used as well as document analysis, observation, survey and group discussion and reflection from the empirical level which allowed assessing and compiling necessary data related to this preparation process and the design of the aforementioned actions. The actions carried out, from a comprehensive approach, by the teaching and methodological staff from the Foreign Languages Major and the discipline Didactics of Foreign Languages, as the main integrating discipline of the curriculum, permitted improving the preparation of students and the quality of results in the completion of university studies which were evidenced in the exams.

Keywords: completion of university studies, exam, preparation

Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo ofrecer las acciones organizativas, didácticas, y lingüístico-metodológicas que garantizaron la preparación de los estudiantes del último año de las carreras Lenguas Extranjeras en la realización del ejercicio de culminación de estudios. Se emplearon métodos del nivel teórico como el analítico-sintético y el histórico-lógico, así como el análisis de documentos, la observación y la encuesta del nivel empírico, los que permitieron valorar y recopilar todos los datos relacionados con el proceso de preparación y diseñar las acciones declaradas. Las acciones desarrolladas, desde un enfoque integrador, permitieron al colectivo de profesores de la carrera Lenguas Extranjeras y de la disciplina principal integradora Didáctica de las Lenguas Extranjeras, perfeccionar la preparación de los estudiantes y la calidad de los resultados en el ejercicio de culminación de estudios, lo cual fue evidenciado en los exámenes.

Palabras clave: culminación de estudios, examen, preparación

Introduction

Today, Cuban higher education is in a transition towards the continuous improvement of its professionals on the basis of a close link with the social environment and the use of scientific methods which may promote the development in connection with the university, the strategic sectors of the economy and society with the use of information and communications technologies.

Therefore, according to Horruitiner (2006), the process of professional training must meet the goal of achieving graduates university students committed to their homeland, possessing a scientific, technical, humanistic and environmental culture, with capacities, skills and ethics necessary to carry out the profession, with possibilities to adapt and renew their knowledge in order to meet the needs of a progressive society and to contribute to achieving high levels of sustainable development in the country.

To fulfil this purpose, current Plans of Study aim at achieving quality in the training of professionals with a holistic approach as today's aspiration of forming proactive actors in the transformations that are needed, Artola, Tarifa & Finalé (2019).

In response to this demand, the new Plan of Study E and the Professional Model of the Bachelor of Education. Foreign Languages Majors: English and English for Higher Education (MES

2016), express within their general objectives the need of teacher trainees to be able to independently and autonomously conduct the teaching and learning process of the foreign language of their students and their own, based on the use of learning strategies that promote critical-reflective assessment of their pedagogical professional performance and methods and techniques of educational research and for solving academic and professional problems.

The aforementioned ideas shed light on the close link between the academic, practicum, research and extension components in terms of the preparation of teacher trainees during their major through their transition through the management cycle (planning, organization, implementation and control), so that they can understand that the management of the educational process is a system comprising interpersonal, legal, organizational and interactive aspects typical of the educational environment where they work, Guerra y Espindola (2022).

This preparation will help them solve fundamental professional problems of the graduate in foreign languages (English), included in the Professional Model related to the determination of professional problems in this pedagogical major from the base link, which has been defined as the school educational process in its integration with the pedagogical process and its expression in the teaching-learning process of foreign languages, with priority being given to English, in which the experiences of the student are taken into account in accordance with the current needs and prospects of Cuban socio-economic and cultural development.

As expressed in the Professional Model, MES (2016), the Organizational Regulation of the teaching process and the direction of teaching and methodological work for university majors, MES (2022), and by several authors such as Morales & Cruz (2018), Valiente, Pompa & Pérez (2021), Jiménez, González & Medina (2022), as well as González, Cornell & Fiz (2022), the completion of studies, as an evaluation or evaluation process, final stage of training, result, stage or process of curriculum closure, is defined as an exercise covering the academic and work components, and aims to assess the level of preparation of future graduates, the professional skills developed, and the degree to which the general objectives of the study plan

have been achieved.

For this purpose, the discipline Didactics of Foreign Languages, as the main integrating discipline in the Study Plan E, and as Sarría, Díaz, Roca and Velázquez (2022) also refer, it is responsible for ensuring the preparation of teacher trainees for the completion of studies, where they must demonstrate mastery of the modes of action necessary for their profession at the base link.

The ideas discussed above highlight the importance of the completion of studies, as a type of evaluation of university culmination, which requires the acquisition of knowledge and the development of professional skills by future graduates and; therefore, involves the preparation of students to meet the requirements and objectives of the exercise.

For this reason, the objective of the article is to offer the actions that in the organizational, didactic and methodological order guaranteed the preparation of students of the Foreign Languages Majors: English and English for Higher Education in the completion of studies exam.

Development

Preparation for the completion of university studies from a comprehensive approach

Several authors such as Luz (2010), Jiménez, Díaz Catalá (2011), Matamoros, Gutiérrez, Rouco y Collado (2015), Cruz, Matos & Hernández (2017), Serrano & Torres (2022), have shown concern about the characteristics, types of evaluation of the exercise for completing university studies, and about the need to guarantee adequate preparation of students; that's why, they have proposed different didactic, methodological alternatives, guides, standards, and strategies in order to perfect such process and certify its quality.

As expressed in the Organizational Regulation of the teaching process and direction of teaching and methodological work for university majors, MES (2022), in Article 321.1., the evaluation of the completion of the studies verifies the degree of compliance with the general objectives of the study plan and the most frequent types include the state exam; and the defense of the diploma work, although others can be designed such as professional exercises, projects, portfolios, presentation of articles published in high-impact scientific journals or others, in

correspondence with the objectives of the major in question.

In the particular case of the Foreign Languages Major at the University of Ciego de Ávila Máximo Gómez de Ciego de Ávila, the exercises approved for the completion of university studies are the state exam; and the defense of the diploma work respectively.

Consequently, in the aforementioned Organizational Regulation MES (2022), the state exam is defined as the type of evaluation that aims to verify the degree of mastery that the student has of the general objectives of the major, through evaluative exercises directly related to the modes of action of the profession.

To perform these two types of exercises with quality, the student must know their characteristics sufficiently in advance so that they can prepare adequately.

In both cases of the types of exercise, to grant the final evaluation, the designated examining board must take into account the following aspects, as referred to in Article 377 of the MES Organizational Regulations MES (2022): quality of work, use of the methodology of scientific research, scientific-technical novelty, use of curricular strategies in accordance with the content of the work, management of bibliographical sources, creative capacity, originality and independence in the development of the work, quality of the presentation during the defense, answers to the questions addressed by the members of the examining board or the opposer, mastery of the topic, confidence to argue and defend their points of view, and opinions of the professor designated for the scientific orientation of the student, of the opponent and of the labor entity for which the work was carried out.

Taking into account the characteristics of these types of exercise and the demands of the professional model and other regulatory documents, and with the objective of facilitating teacher trainees demonstrate with quality the mastery of the modes of action necessary for the exercise of the profession in the base link, the direction of the comprehensive discipline Didactics of Foreign Languages (FLD) and the Foreign Languages Major implemented several organizational, didactic and linguistic-methodological actions.

Organizational actions for the Preparation of students for the completion of university studies

Organizational actions were aimed at the development and approval in the Major Staff, of the Strategy for completing studies, which includes the type of exercise for completing university studies: state or diploma work, the preparation schedule with its stages and deadlines, the workshops, the pre-defense, and the defense, as well as the members of the examining boards for the evaluation of each type of exercise.

In the same way, the teaching schedule was prepared and the teachers of the disciplines General Pedagogical Training, Didactics of Foreign Languages, English Linguistic Studies, History of English-Speaking Peoples' Culture and Philosophy were appointed for the preparation of the students.

Subsequently, as part of the methodological actions, the FLD discipline as a component of the Major Staff, developed the program for the state exam, in accordance with the objectives of the professional model, containing the methodological foundations, the forms and characteristics of the exam, the general objectives and specific topics of each of the disciplines, as well as the bibliography.

Linguistic-methodological actions for the Preparation of students for the completion of university studies

Consequently, as part of the linguistic-methodological actions, a discussion and reflection workshop was done with the teachers of each of the disciplines, with the objective of debating the program developed for the state exam and its characteristics in order to achieve the necessary interdisciplinary links in the methodological order from a developmental conception of each of the components and links of the assimilation of the content of each discipline, as part of the preparation of the students, and at the same time specify the general and specific objectives of this type of evaluation expressed in the program and in the professional's model.

This exchange also allowed to emphasize on the basic core of the content and its essentiality in terms of the systematization of knowledge and the development of the students' professional and linguistic skills.

Simultaneously, the bibliographical sources to be used by teachers and students during preparation and their availability in hard or digital format were specified, as well as their location on the Moodle Platform for consultation by students.

This workshop also made it possible to reflect on the psycho-pedagogical characterization of the students, and report on their potential and limitations, their employment relationship or not with educational institutions, their professional performance in previous courses, in order to guarantee quality in the direction of the teaching process. -learning during preparation for the state exercise and diploma work, and other planned actions.

In this regard, it was necessary to model the action plan to be developed in the process of preparing for the completion of university studies, establishing the existing relationships between the students' needs, possibilities, potentials and limitations to guarantee compliance with the planned actions.

Another important moment as part of the actions developed was the exchange that the head of the Foreign Languages Major and the FLD discipline had with the last year students about the characteristics of the university studies completion exercises, the completion strategy and the preparation schedule. This Exchange made it possible to clarify students' doubts regarding the two exercises of the state exam: theoretical and practical, as well as the defense of the diploma work, and the evaluation requirements as established in the MES Organizational Regulations (2022).

Didactic and methodological actions for the Preparation of students for the completion of university studies

From the didactic and methodological order, the actions developed also included the development of the programs for each subject, the bibliography, material aids, study guides, compendiums, template for class planning in the case of the state exam and template for the diploma work, as well as the assembly on the Moodle platform of the preparation subject for the completion of studies.

Both the template developed and the proforma for the diploma work, both prepared by the teachers of the DLE discipline, constituted essential guiding documents aimed at achieving

coherence and linearity in the planning of the class and in the writing of the research report, to the Both documents include the didactic and linguistic guidelines and precise guides regarding the structure, parts and characteristics of the scientific and academic writing, as well as the developmental conception of the class.

As part of the follow-up to the implemented actions, visits were made to the lessons taught by the head of the FLD discipline and the head of the Foreign Languages Major to ensure the quality of the preparation and linearity in the direction of the teaching-learning process and at the same time monitor the level of student satisfaction.

In the case of students who completed their diploma work, individual and group tutoring meetings were held, which made it possible to verify the students' progress in the execution of the research tasks and the writing of the final report.

In this case, special emphasis was given to the scientific-technical vocabulary of research methodology and didactics during the modeling and simulation of the exercises by the students, which facilitated, through systematic recording of the most frequent mistakes committed by students during the exchange and pre-advocacy workshops, develop a glossary of specialized terms for phonetic, morphosyntactic, and enrichment of the disciplines' own lexicon as part of the students' training for assessment.

This glossary was shared through WhatsApp to all students immersed in the preparation for the completion of university studies exercise and was furthermore systematized in the preparation encounters held. This document offers the possibility of incorporating pronunciation, lexical and morphosyntactic units from own exchange with students in order to perfect the language both orally and in writing, and to be used as a permanent consultation material by teachers who prepare students for this type of exercise with a direct link to pedagogical practice.

Results of the implementation of actions for the Preparation of students for the completion of university studies

Aiming to verify the level of satisfaction of students and teachers with the implemented actions, a survey was applied to a heterogeneous sample of 16 Foreign Language Majors students and 8 teachers, who worked in the preparation and simultaneously as tutors of

the students. Within the aspects surveyed were included: preparation and defense schedule, preparation received, materials developed and delivered, template for class development and scientific report drafting, tutor work, pre-defense and workshops, as well as suggestions.

As a result of the survey, it was possible to verify that 14 students (87.5%), expressed being satisfied with the preparation and defense schedule, while 2 (12.5%), referred to being dissatisfied.

Regarding the materials prepared and delivered, 15 students (93.7%), were satisfied, and only one student (6.25%) expressed being unsatisfied.

In regards to the template for class preparation and scientific report drafting, 13 students (81.25%) were satisfied, while the remaining 3 (18.75%), referred to being not satisfied.

Regarding the work with the tutor, 15 students (93.7%), manifested being satisfied, and only one student (6.25%) expressed being unsatisfied.

On the pre-defense and workshop, 14 students (87.5%) referred to being oriented and 2 (12.5%), expressed being unoriented.

The suggestions offered by the students were aimed at extending the preparation time and guaranteeing the preparation of the students from the early years of the degree and once the preparation is received in the final year, so that it would be possible to consolidate, systematize and deepen in essential aspects related to the contents of the disciplines to be assessed in the state exercise.

The results of the teacher survey revealed positive results, as a trend, the 8 teachers (100%), expressed being satisfied with the preparation and advocacy schedule, as well as with the materials developed and delivered to the students and the template for the drafting of class and the drafting of the scientific report.

Regarding the work as a tutor, 5 teachers (62.5%), manifested being satisfied, and 3 (37.5%) expressed being unsatisfied by alleging in the suggestions that not all students were systematic in their interaction with the tutors.

On the pre-defense and the workshop, the 8 teachers (100%) referred to being guides for the

students.

The results of the actions developed were equally evidenced in the qualitative and quantitative achievements of the students in the exercises. Out of a total of 27 students presented, 27 passed with the following grades: 12 students (44.44%) with 5 points, 11 students (40.74%) with 4 points and 4 students (14.81%) with 3 points.

In the qualitative order, the main limitations of the students were centered on the handling of the English language, as well as the precision in didactic aspects related to the formulation of the objective and the grading of the exercises catering to the assimilation levels of the classes.

Generally, the organizational, didactic and linguistic-methodological actions implemented by the DLE discipline and the Foreign Languages Major contributed to achieving coherence, unity and linearity in organizing, planning and executing the preparation of foreign languages major students for the accomplishment of the culmination exercises: diploma work and the state, which was evidenced in the satisfactory results and in the quality of the works presented where students generally demonstrated mastery of the content of the didactics of foreign language teaching, handling of the English language linked to their professional profile and abilities for solving problems of educational practice through research.

Conclusions

The culmination of university studies is an essential form of closing assessment of the curriculum of studies aimed at verifying the level of preparation of future graduates, the professional competencies developed, and the degree of fulfillment of the overall objectives of the syllabus; therefore, it should constitute a priority in all university degrees from the academic, didactic and methodological order.

The training and development of professional skills as an expression of the future graduates' mode of acting requires coordinated, coherent and systematic actions in the direction of the teaching-learning process with a close with training schools to be able to solve problems from pedagogical practice and the fulfillment of the objectives stated in the syllabus.

The main integrating discipline, as part of the Major Staff, is responsible for playing a leading

role in the organization, planning and execution of the culmination exercises through the integration of the other disciplines of the curriculum and an interdisciplinary conception that integrates all actions and influences of the other disciplines of the curriculum of study in the preparation of students.

The organizational, didactic and linguistic-methodological actions implemented contributed significantly to the preparation of students for the performance of the culmination exercises as evidenced by the results obtained both quantitatively and qualitatively.

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