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## DEVELOPMENT OF READING COMPREHENSION SKILL IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CIENFUEGOS

### DESARROLLO DE LA HABILIDAD DE COMPRESIÓN DE LECTURAS EN INGLÉS CON FINES ESPECÍFICOS EN LA UNIVERSIDAD DE CIENFUEGOS

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#### ABSTRACT

This research was possible due to existing problems at the Cienfuegos University where the students of Agriculture had difficulties with reading comprehension in English. At the same time, they don't have a textbook that relates the content of the technical subjects and the foreign language, as a result they were not able to translate and interpret texts, constituting the major objectives in their training, because the updated literature is in English. It was carried out a methodological strategy for the development of these skills in English based on readings related to the most important contents that the students should know at the end of their speciality, a glossary of terms that facilitate understanding of technical vocabulary and a list of exercises. These readings are closely related to the development of sustainable agriculture, care and protection of the environment among other issues. This work was carried out for 2 year, reaching satisfactory results, motivation and interest of students, improved learning outcomes, reading comprehension and interpretation of texts, better graduates with scientific cultural knowledge and literature for conducting independent work or other activities.

#### Keywords:

Skill, agronomy, technical vocabulary, English, comprehension.

#### RESUMEN

Esta investigación se realiza debido a la problemática existente en la Universidad de Cienfuegos donde los estudiantes de la especialidad de Agronomía presentaban dificultades con la comprensión de lecturas en inglés. A su vez carecían de un texto que relacionara el contenido de las asignaturas técnicas con el idioma extranjero por lo que no eran capaces de traducir e interpretar textos, constituyendo este uno de los principales objetivos en la formación de los estudiantes ya que la bibliografía más actualizada sobre estos temas se encuentra en inglés. El objetivo fundamental fue elaborar una estrategia metodológica para el desarrollo de estas habilidades basada en lecturas en inglés relacionadas con los contenidos fundamentales que debían conocer los estudiantes al finalizar su carrera, un glosario de términos que facilitara el conocimiento del vocabulario técnico de la especialidad y un banco de ejercicios. Estas lecturas están relacionadas estrechamente con el desarrollo de la agricultura sostenible, el cuidado y protección del medioambiente entre otros temas. El trabajo se ha llevado a cabo por espacio de 1 año alcanzándose resultados satisfactorios: motivación e interés de los estudiantes, mejores resultados en el aprendizaje, aumento de la comprensión lectora e interpretación de textos, egresados con mayor preparación científica – cultural, bibliografía para la realización de trabajos independientes u otras actividades.

#### Palabras clave:

Habilidad, agronomía, vocabulario técnico, inglés, comprensión.

## INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English has great importance in universities, that is why there must be a close relationship between the specialties and this subject. This is one of the fundamental objectives in the students learning process due to the incalculable value that the knowledge of the technical vocabulary of each career has for their future professional work because the updated bibliography on these themes is in this foreign language.

At the time this research was carried out, the English subject was divided into four semesters where general English was taught in the first and second, academic in the third and professional in the last, also known in other contexts as English for Specific Purpose. Among the fundamental skills of the subject are, oral, written, listening, reading comprehension, among others, presenting difficulties in the last one. There are several causes that propitiate this situation, among them the research can highlight: difficulties with reading comprehension in the mother tongue and few readings related to the specialty, therefore, students are not able to translate and understand texts of medium complexity where they should use the technical vocabulary of it.

The integration of language and content is a fundamental methodological contribution in a context of teaching a second language or a foreign language. To ensure that the student who does not know the foreign language can learn the curricular contents in the same way as the rest of their classmates, it is necessary to integrate the teaching of the language with those contents; To direct the learning of our students to their authentic cultural context and improve the effectiveness of our teaching, it is essential to integrate the teaching of the language with the curricular content.

This integration can follow several paths: on the one hand, the language teacher (s) can assume the other curricular areas content to work from a linguistic point of view with them; On the other hand, teachers in other areas can become aware of the importance of language in their teaching and program, teach and evaluate in such a way that all students have access to content. In a sense, all teachers are language teachers.

The integration of language and content instruction has been a growing phenomenon in the language field since the early 1980s. Programs, models, and approaches have proliferated at all levels of instruction, from elementary schools through postsecondary levels, bringing with them a diverse nomenclature to identify instructional settings where language and content are integrated. For many second and foreign language educators, the various forms of language/content integration fall under the rubric of *content-based instruction* (Met, 1999).

This phenomenon grew considerably from 1980 in all levels of education. The term content - based instruction is commonly used to describe the integration between language and content but it is not always used in the same way, for example Crandall & Tucker (1990), define it as an approach to teaching the language that integrates the presentation of topics or tasks related to the different subjects within the foreign language classes. Curtain & Pesola (1994), use the term in a more restricted way Curricular concepts that are taught through the foreign language. Krueger & Ryan (1993), distinguish between content-based and form-based instruction, and clarify that the term discipline-based instruction is more appropriate for achieving integration of language learning with different disciplines and content.

There is also a variety of definitions of "content". As can be seen from Crandall & Tucker's definition, content is clearly "academic subject matter" while Genesee (1994), suggests that content need not be academic; it can include any topic, theme or non-language issue of interest or importance to the learners. Chaput (1993), defines content as any topic of intellectual substance which contributes to the students' understanding of language in general, and the target language in particular. Met (1999), has proposed that 'content' in content-based programs represents material that is cognitively engaging and demanding for the learner, and is material that extends beyond the target language or target culture.

Taking into account the present problems, the analyzed bibliography about reading comprehension as well as the incalculable importance that this represents for the development and performance of the Agrarian Engineering future professional, in addition to the changes that the English subject is undergoing in the current moments where students must have a B1 + level at the end of their university studies, demonstrating that they are capable of mastering the four language skills not only in general topics but also in their specialty. To solve this situation a methodological strategy that responds to the objectives of our research was carried out.

The methodological strategy pursues the development of reading comprehension skills as well as the language strategy for this specialty. In this way, the students with the help of booklet, exercises, glossaries, can learn the technical vocabulary and achieve comprehension and interpretation of texts in less time and with higher quality and take useful tools that include linguistic knowledge, master the vocabulary of the specialty, the ability to discriminate important concepts from those that are not, to select the central and secondary ideas and acquire the necessary skills in writing abstracts (Pérez Morales, 2001).

## DEVELOPMENT

To develop reading comprehension skills in Agrarian Engineering students using texts, exercises, glossaries of their specialty.

### Strategy content

- Tasks aimed at the selection of texts in the specialty mentioned above and that constitute fundamental objectives of it, in addition to contribute to the formation of highly prepared professionals.
- Tasks aimed at developing reading comprehension skills to be able to answer questions from the text, extract the essential idea, interpret and provide a Spanish version of it.
- Tasks aimed at developing the technical vocabulary of the specialty so that they are able to understand, interpret texts of different nature.
- Tasks aimed at distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information in order to extract the main idea from the text and interpret it.

A selection of texts of the aforementioned specialty have been compiled, which form an integral part of the prepared booklet, which also include exercises and a glossary of technical terms that will help the student navigate in the technical English of their specialty. These readings will not only be used by the students but also by the teachers of the specialty to develop the language strategy in their classes (Clark, 1987).

To fulfill the objectives, a bibliographic material that is related to the different technical subjects was prepared. For this, the specialty curriculum, the skills, important topics such as sustainable development, the environment and the fundamental contents of the specialty were taken into account and also the experience of different Agrarian Engineering professors (Figure 1).

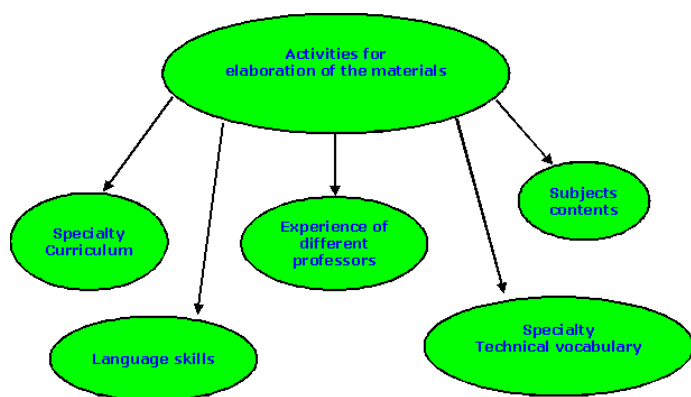


Figure 1. Activities for elaboration of the materials.

Arduous work was carried out in choosing the topics to be treated in each reading unit, which were guided by the foundations of problem teaching, with increasing complexity according to the level of the students, starting from the easy to the difficult, from the simple to the complex, multiple and heterogeneous, eliminating the routine and stereotyped. In the same way, the exercises will be based on true and false, chronological order, answer questions from the text, select among groups of ideas the essential one, identify in reading the technical vocabulary of the specialty and grammatical structures studied, match columns, give the Spanish version of the main idea, as well as translating the text and summarizing it (Glendinning, 1992).

It was analyzed that the program of the English subject for Agricultural Engineering students has 64 hours, we selected 15 fundamental topics with 4 hours duration and 4 hours of evaluations, moreover the material has other readings that can be used for independent works, seminars, etc., specific technical terms glossary of the specialty, list of irregular verbs, as well as methodological guidelines for teachers and examples of exercises to be carried out in class. It contains topics of interest that can be used as independent work, research, writing articles, and can also be used by teachers of the different subjects as part of the language strategy and to change the teaching category since it contains the most important themes of the specialty.

At the beginning of the semester, a pretest was carried out to the second year students of Agrarian Engineering, obtaining the following results: from a sample of 20 students, only 2 obtain three points and the others reproved the test. Taking these results into account, we can conclude that the specialty of Agronomy has difficulties in reading comprehension skills.

The research was carried out and the above-mentioned materials were put into practice. They were received with great satisfaction by students and teachers. These materials were used throughout the semester, observing increased student motivation.

At the end of the school year, a final test was applied to determine the effectiveness of our research, achieving the following results:

- 100% (20) of students passed the test:
- 25% (5) with scores of 3 points.
- 50% (10) with 4 points.
- 25% (5) with 5 points.

- The following table shows the behavior of the different skills in the courses where the strategy was applied (Table 1).

Table 1. Skills in the courses where the strategy was applied.

Course	Enrollment	Answer Questions			Extract Main Idea			Technical Vocabulary			Summarize		
		3	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	5
2015-2016	20	5	10	5	5	11	4	4	11	5	5	10	5
2016-2017	20	1	11	8	2	11	7	3	9	8	3	9	8
Total	40	6	21	13	7	22	11	7	20	13	8	19	13

The results shown above illustrate how students with the use of the proposed materials were able to improve their reading comprehension skills and increased their knowledge not only in the English subject but also in the specialty.

### CONCLUSIONS

The creation of technical readings related to the specialty of Agrarian Engineering applied to the English subject: Increased interest and motivation of students, development of the oral expression  
**Better learning outcomes. Increased reading comprehension and interpretation of texts.**

Graduates with higher scientific, technical and cultural training. Bibliography for carrying out independent works or other activities. Fulfilment of the objectives of the subject and the specialty.

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