





Knowledge management at Pinar del Río University Language Center

Gestión del conocimiento en el Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad de Pinar del Río



Tamara Gutiérrez Baffil*

*Doctor in Educational Sciences, Full Professor, University of Pinar del Río Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca, Language Centre, Pinar del Río, Cuba. telef.: 53-48-728645,  :tamara@upr.edu.cu ;
 :<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8303-5206>

Anabel Vizcaíno Muñoz

Máster in Educational Sciences, Associate Teacher, University of Pinar del Río Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca, Language Centre, Pinar del Río, Cuba.  :anaviz@upr.edu.cu ;
 :<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3902-1450>

Rubén Alejandro Pérez Gutiérrez

Graduate in Education. English Specialty. Instructor Professor, Universidad de Pinar del Río Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca, Language Centre, Pinar del Río, Cuba.  :ruben.alejandrop@upr.edu.cu;  :<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3375-5883>

To reference this article/Para citar este artículo/Para citar este artigo

Gutiérrez Baffil, T., Vizcaíno Muñoz, A., & Pérez Gutiérrez, R. A. (2023). Knowledge management at Pinar del Río University Language Center. *Avances*, 25(2), 256-270. <http://avances.pinar.cu/index.php/publicaciones/article/view/763/2088>

Received: september 7, 2022

Accepted: march 9, 2023

ABSTRACT

The Language Centre of Pinar del Río University arises within the policy of improving English in Cuban universities framework and its mission is to offer specialised academic services to the intra- and extra-university community to facilitate

communicative competences development in foreign languages, mainly English. The aim of this paper is to present various elements that show how this management is carried out for the institutional development and therefore for the territory. To this end,

methods from the theoretical level, such as historical-logical, analysis-synthesis and modelling, were used, as well as from the empirical level, document analysis, observation and group interview. As a result, the model of foreign languages knowledge management is obtained for the professional comprehensive training of non-philology students. It is concluded that management of language knowledge is carried out based on professional development needs and it is stated in the model for this purpose, which is based on various relationships established with the context in order to achieve the university social relevance.

Key words: management model; knowledge management; professional training; integrated training; foreign languages.

RESUMEN

El Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad de Pinar del Río surge en el marco de la política de perfeccionamiento del inglés en las universidades cubanas y tiene la misión de ofrecer servicios académicos especializados a la comunidad intra y extra universitaria para

INTRODUCTION

In Cuba, Higher education is currently undergoing important changes to improve its institutions. One of them is the improvement of students and professionals continuous training process based on the creation, use and dissemination of knowledge to face the

facilitar el desarrollo de competencias comunicativas en lenguas extranjeras, fundamentalmente el inglés. El objetivo del presente trabajo es exponer diversos elementos que muestran cómo se desarrolla esta gestión en función del desarrollo institucional y, por tanto, del territorio. Para ello, se utilizaron métodos del nivel teórico, como el histórico-lógico, el análisis-síntesis y la modelación, así como del nivel empírico, el análisis de documentos, la observación y la entrevista grupal. Se obtiene como resultado el modelo de gestión del conocimiento en lenguas extranjeras en estudiantes no filólogos para la formación integral del profesional. Se concluye que la gestión del conocimiento de los idiomas se realiza a partir de las necesidades de superación de los profesionales y se concreta en el modelo para este fin que se sustenta en diversas relaciones que establece con el contexto para el logro de la pertinencia social de la universidad.

Palabras clave: gestión del conocimiento; modelo de gestión; formación profesional; formación integral; lenguas extranjeras.

new challenges in their professional future. Consequently, they could participate actively, independently and creatively in the socio-economic development of the country in the frame of sustainable development.

In order to respond to this requirement, among other actions, language centres were created for improving the English training of university students. This policy establishes English proficiency as a requirement to exit Higher Education at an intermediate level equivalent to B1, following the structure by levels recognised for Cuban Higher Education (MES, 2019) and stated by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CE, 2018).

The Language Centre of Pinar del Río University, provides services in English in all the university studies, supporting the three main university processes of teaching, research and extension through the following ways:

- The Strategy that implements the policy to improve English training process at the university.
- The curricular strategy for languages in all undergraduate studies.
- Course programmes by language level.
- Methodological advice to the staff of other undergraduate studies.

It also develops other ways to meet the language training needs of local professionals who need to master these skills to communicate competently in their social and professional spheres:

In the *academic and scientific* sphere it enables the resources management for exchange, internationalisation, academic

mobility, joint programmes and credits for programmes and grades.

In the *economic sphere* it allows the human resources to increase competitiveness to impact on trade, in the relations with economic and financial institutions in the world, as well as the generation of income from the international services export.

Culturally, it supports international and intercultural communication with countries where Spanish is not the mother tongue.

In the *political-ideological sphere* it contributes to broaden general cultural training, strengthening and developing thinking and worldview to face the challenges of today's world.

As can be seen, the role of the Language Centre is highly relevant for the institution and the territory, that is why it was necessary to study in depth the knowledge management that it carries out. Therefore, the problem is stated as: how to manage foreign languages knowledge at Pinar del Río University?, and the objective of the study: to conceive the management of foreign languages knowledge that allows the professionals' permanent improvement so as to contribute to the social and economic development of the territory and the country.

The literature review related to knowledge management revealed studies by

Gutiérrez et al. (2019), Rubier (2019), Casado (2020), Barzaga et al. (2019), Villasana et al. (2021), Valencia-Cruzaty et al. (2021), Mendoza, Plua y Chiquito (2023), Barbón & Fernández (2018), among others, who address elements related to knowledge management such as human talent, decision making and others, which have a very specific impact on higher education

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Several scientific research methods were used to fulfil the objective of this work. On the theoretical level, the historical-logical method was applied to determine the background, particularities, regularities and development of the English training process management; the analysis and synthesis permitted to study the constituting elements of knowledge management and its relationship with language training to determine its particularities, how to integrate them, as well as to discover their relationships and characteristics; the modelling allowed to discover and study the new relationships and qualities of foreign languages knowledge management in the professional training process.

Empirical methods such as documentary analysis, group interview and participant observation allowed to determine the state of the problem.

institutions. Also, other sources review such as MES (2019) documents, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages of CE (2018), Gutiérrez (2020) and others, allowed to deep into the language training process in Cuban higher education.

Documents related to the Policy to improve English teaching at the university, the Strategy Curriculum Language in the degree courses and those related to the teaching organisation in Higher Education gave enough information on the planning, organization and development of courses, evaluation and certification. The group interview was carried out to verify the work in language training management with 21 (100 %) teachers of the Language Centre, 5 (23.8 %) of whom were head of the previous department, 2 (9.5 %) heads of other subjects and 8 executives, for a total of 36 interviewees who have been involved in this process. Participant observation was present at all stages of the study to determine the current state of the object.

Descriptive statistics was used for processing and tabulating the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research revealed that there is a strategic planning for knowledge management in the Language Centre, however, this process shows insufficiencies that affect the quality of professional training and its consequent contribution to social development, as it also depends, and to a large extent, on actions developed by other related areas.

It is verified that the university's Language Curriculum Strategy comprises actions in its main processes, however, there is no evidence of how other subjects articulate with languages for knowledge management in terms of the comprehensive professional training, nor the means for monitoring and control. Another limitation is

related to the communication that should happen between the Language Centre and the rest of the university's structures for knowledge management in foreign languages.

Workshops were held to explain the English language development policy in the university's degree courses, which served as a space to develop the group interview with the participation of the selected sample.

The participating teachers agree that one of the most effective ways to achieve positive results in language knowledge management is the Language Curriculum Strategy which implementation is the responsibility of the degree programmes.

Knowledge Management at the Language Centre of Pinar del Río University

Deepening into the topic of this work, led to find that knowledge management concept is developed from issues related to management in the 80s and 90s, highlighting the total quality management, continuous innovation and organisation. This recognises that knowledge management is necessary to enhance four basic concepts of administration which, according to (Segovia, 2009); (Ruiz & Cruz Martín, 2001) cited in Valencia-Cruzaty et al. (2021), are: a. continuous improvement, b. quality guarantee, process innovation and organisational learning.

From this perspective, Rubier (2019) argues that the success of knowledge management in an organisation is related to the possibility of using different knowledge to acquire new stages, which can improve organisational actions or set the basis for new actions, promote innovation performance and guide the organisation's knowledge system to generate new ideas, consequently improving innovation capabilities.

Casado (2020) emphasises that knowledge capital is increasingly recognised as the differentiated value of companies and

is closely related to its supported technology, which has already become increasingly complex information systems with more complete functions that analyse and predict what will happen and lead to decision making.

Villasana et al. (2021), in their review of the literature related to knowledge management, find various definitions of it and consider that, from the definition and perspective of knowledge considered as an organisational asset, knowledge management is a managerial method or a developing discipline that seeks to use the generated knowledge in a structured and systematic way to achieve goals and optimise decision-making.

Barzaga et al. (2019), in their work on information management and decision-making in educational organisations, state that information and organisational knowledge in the context of education are vital for decision-making, as they consider that decision-making allows to transform information into knowledge, and both play a vital role in educational organisational management.

As can be seen, there are several elements involved in knowledge management in general and, in the field of educational institutions, they are expressed in a natural way as they are knowledge-based organisations that generate, process and manage information in transforming it into knowledge.

In these institutions, information can be found in the form of course programmes, reports, announcements, bulletins, among others, which, supported by computerisation, make the information and processes developed in them more viable.

In this case, information is related to communication that contributes to acquiring or expanding the knowledge held by management actors and is key to decision-making while providing continuous updating of their substantive activities planning, organisation, execution and control.

Communication is a key element in the interaction of management actors where experiences, feelings and emotions are voluntarily shared under equal and open conditions of debate on the information generated in knowledge management. A relevant aspect for this purpose is the active participation of its members, which stimulates the search for the sense of membership, empowerment, cooperative spirit, creativity and organisational learning that are required to achieve the set goals.

In this relationship framework for knowledge management in a higher education organisation, another important aspect is leadership, which for Valencia-Cruzaty et al. (2021), must be expressed in solid ethical values whose administrative actions are aimed at fostering knowledge. For the authors of this work, leadership must be participatory and have a positive influence on the members of the institution

so that, through persuasion and teamwork, they understand the objectives and goals to be achieved, and are motivated towards innovation and creativity for the solving of the issues that arise and their continuous improvement.

These considerations were important in order to deepen the knowledge management in foreign languages at the University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca" and to provide a way to achieve the objectives and goals of this organisational unit and the institution's.

In a study on the language centre management and, specifically, on the management of the Language Centre of the University of Pinar del Río, Gutiérrez et al. (2019) set out its vision as leaders in language training, evaluation and certification of the community, distinguished by their professionalism in knowledge management and innovation in an integrated manner, with an impact on the internationalisation of the university, in terms of the education of professionals committed to their country and their time, in a multilingual and multicultural world.

Similarly, in the management model of language centres proposed in her research, she establishes that their fundamental mission is to direct the policy to improve English training process in the institution, through specialised academic services in foreign languages for teaching, research and extension, as well as providing

methodological advice to the rest of the structures in terms of training, evaluation and certification of languages for the comprehensive education of students and the social relevance of the university (Gutiérrez, 2020).

This model, which has been implemented through the main processes: language training, evaluation and certification, has allowed the Language Centre of the University of Pinar del Río to establish various relationships with the context for the continuous improvement of the professionals in terms of the social and economic development of the territory and the country.

The essential relationship Environment-Knowledge management-Comprehensive professional training-Continuous improvement has been crucial in achieving an increasingly close link between the Language Centre and its environment (internal-external alignment). In this sense, the Centre has become an agent of transforming and adapting to new circumstances, satisfying the demands for improvement of the community in a continuous manner, allowing it to fulfil its strategic objectives in correspondence with these demands.

Language training is an increasingly growing demand in Pinar del Río society due to the needs of local and national development based on the comprehensive training of professionals, which is now being

developed within the framework of the Policy to improve the English language training process for university students, looking for the path it needs for achieving better results and impact.

In another relationship, Resources (inputs)-Knowledge management (transformation)-Results and impacts (outputs), management has been continuously transforming inputs into results that both satisfy internal and external demands (impacts) and ensures it through an effective planning, organisation, implementation and control.

In planning, the initial steps to prepare the process, its necessary inputs and assurances are devised. The organisation defines the teachers and non-teaching staff, the programmes and courses to be taught, the teaching procedures, its teaching methods and means. The implementation has permitted the development of everything planned with the appropriate contribution of those involved and a leadership participation that makes rational use of the resources allocated, as well as the technological aspects to provide continuous monitoring of the courses development. Control allows the analysis of how the planned objectives and results were achieved through evaluation to obtain the necessary information for the continuous improvement of management.

The starting point for knowledge management is the language users training

needs, assessment and certification, teaching and supporting staff, the Policy and its regulations, institutional regulations, study programmes, the physical plant, bibliography, teaching aids, technological support, among other inputs that condition this process.

Knowledge management of languages is carried out at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, through study programmes that are contextualised according to the language users training needs. The needs diagnosis and their pedagogical solution express positive results at the individual, group, institutional and social levels, while strengthening the University-Society relationship. The academic, research and labour settings constitute the action fields of language training and the development of values, knowledge and skills according to the demands of the professional model, which is organically conceived with research and extension, on the basis of a solid scientific basis and a general cultural platform, where language is essential in the interaction at a national and international spheres.

Language training has a strong relationship with evaluation, which is designed to check the users language proficiency level and the effectiveness of the language training process through systematic feedback in order to reduce or eliminate deficiencies.

In this relationship, the effective implementation of the Language Curricular Strategy is important, as it is the node of articulation of the foreign language with the rest of the subjects, promoting the cross-discipline required for professional training according to behavioural patterns.

Language training is also managed taking into account the users' needs, the review of the diagnosis timetable design, the availability of teachers and facilities for this purpose (language laboratories, self-learning centres and classrooms).

The registration for the courses is then planned according to the way selected by the users for their training, in addition, other activities are planned that contribute to language training through research and university extension, such as knowledge Olympiads, student science days, skills competitions, language and culture courses, during school and summer terms.

Then, in the management organisation function, actions are coordinated with all those involved, where communication, information and computerisation, human talent, participation and leadership, supported by all kinds resources, are optimised through the application of the best experiences and creativity to promote progress in the process and raise the quality of the professional's comprehensive training.

In this sense, human talent management is critical for success, since, according to Mendoza, Plua and Chiquito (2023), its objective is to obtain the maximum creation of value for the organisation, through actions directed at always having the level of knowledge, skills and aptitudes to obtain the necessary results to be competitive in the current and future environments.

The visibility the Language Centre shows today in knowledge management is the result of the active and conscious participation of its members in the activities to achieve the goals, which has been possible through organisational learning, cooperation and creativity, that, together with the alignment of individual interests, motivations, aspirations, needs and values with those of the institution, has led to grow the sense of belonging and empowerment needed to make the right decisions.

Communication is a key factor in this management and is carried out through institutional mechanisms and those available in the context. In this case between the Language Centre, the university structures and entities in the territory, upward or downward, depending on its direction. It allows the exchange of experiences, feelings and emotions on equal terms and open to debate on the information generated in the knowledge management for the continuous improvement of training. It also allows the Centre to be visible in its community through

the systematic updating of its work, supported by information and computerisation.

Information is closely related to communication and contributes to acquiring or expanding the knowledge held by management actors, also key to decision-making, provides systematic updates on planning, organisation, implementation and control.

Participatory leadership, persuasion and positive influence on the Centre's members has facilitated teamwork, innovation and creativity in understanding the goals and objectives to be achieved, and continuously inspiring change.

A very particular quality of the knowledge management developed at the Language Centre is the internationalisation that is naturally integrated in the

professional training to access universal culture and the acquisition of new knowledge where languages are vehicles in the achievement international communication competence.

The results derived from the language centre's knowledge management are the outputs of the model and reflect a quantitative and qualitative dimension. They are expressed in terms of the quantity of graduates with certification of the level reached (Table 1), their employability, grants awarded for research, scientific-technical and teachers pedagogical preparation, commitment and social responsibility in the achievement of the objectives and goals initially planned, thus reflecting the Centre's social relevance and the institution as part of the international academic community.

Table 1. Students taking the certification exams.

Academic years	Enrolment*	Students taking the certification exams	
		Number	% vs Enrolment
First	913	361	39,5
Second	690	239	34,6
Third	332	28	8,4
Fourth	164	102	62.2
Fifth	99	87	86.9
TOTAL UPR	2198	817	37.2

Source: Own design

Table 2. Completion of the English language graduation requirement by final year undergraduates.

Below A1	Level A1	Level A2	Level A2+	Level B1	Level B1+	Level B2	Level C1	Level C2
	1	117	32	18	15	3	3	-
Below A2		Level A2		Above A2				
		117	71					
		Have fulfilled the requirement						
		188						

Source: Own design

The Continuous Improvement-Self-Assessment-Impact relationship has led to the integrated self-assessment and continuous improvement of knowledge management for constant upgrading (Table 2). Self-evaluation is the systematic diagnosis of the management planning, organisation, execution and control that is conceived on the participation and reflection basis to search for continuous improvement. From the information it offers, corrections and readjustments are made to improve the management quality and, therefore, to increase the satisfaction level of the university community.

The permanent diagnosis of the knowledge management effectiveness has detected deviations allowing to draw up a plan to improve the quality of the process. It has had a positive impact on the context, which can be seen in the increasing satisfaction level of the beneficiaries, the teachers' commitment in the constant search

to solve the arising problems, teamwork, active participation in the processes and the transforming leadership that has allowed also to develop a culture of organisation's continuous improvement, that, at the same time, has also had an impact on the institution and the community.

A satisfaction survey was administered to 93 students who enrolled and remained in the courses as part of this diagnosis, based on the following indicators:

1. Teachers' contribution to their foreign language learning
2. Demand from teachers to increase their dedication to study
3. Satisfaction with the courses in their foreign language learning
4. Use of the language laboratory for learning.

5. Availability of up-to-date bibliography, either printed or digital, for their foreign language learning
6. Overall level of satisfaction with the process of foreign language teaching and learning

The satisfaction rating was measured as: totally satisfied (TS), satisfied (S) and unsatisfied (U) as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Course satisfaction survey results.

Indicators	TS %	S %	U %
1	66.6	31.1	2.1
2	63.4	32.2	4.3
3	47.3	46.2	6.4
4	28.0	39.0	33.3
5	58.0	33.3	8.6
6	58.0	33.3	8.6

Source: Own design

These results confirm the effectiveness of the model in fulfilling the main objective of improving knowledge management at the University's Language Centre on a continuous basis. It has contributed to the professional comprehensive training based on scientific principles, organisational philosophy built on learning, contextualisation, responsible self-management of knowledge, participative leadership and orientation towards continuous improvement

In combination with the systemic and strategic approach that Barbón & Fernández (2018) refers to, this has interconnected the Language Centre with its environment to achieve the successful transformation of inputs through effective planning,

organisation, implementation and control in knowledge management, which is expressed in its significant results and impacts.

The above has been made possible because the model has qualities that characterise it:

It is open and flexible as it has been modified and adjusted on unforeseen changes.

It is participatory and proactive as it has been applied through teamwork where the implication of all actors has been based on commitment and consensus for decision-making with anticipatory action achieving significant changes.

It is objective as it focuses on critical strategic points, while establishing variables

and indicators that can be compared with the actual results achieved.

It is dynamic and creative as it has been developed through a continuous, interactive and iterative process.

It has information sufficiency by providing stakeholders with all the timely and reliable information to make valid judgements and relevant decisions for continuous improvement.

It is constantly improved as it is corrected based on the experiences of those involved in its application and the new ideas generated to increase its effectiveness within and outside the institutional sphere.

This model is applied in three key moments: planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of knowledge management.

In the knowledge management planning, all conditions were designed to ensure the successful implementation of knowledge management taking into account

CONCLUSIONS

The knowledge management in foreign languages at the University of Pinar del Río is carried out through the model applied in the Language Centre, whose mission is to satisfy the language training, evaluation and certification needs of the entire community through its main processes.

The model of foreign language knowledge management is based on various

the characteristics of the application scenarios, the objectives, the participants, and the material and technological resources.

In the implementation moment, the planned actions were undertaken with the inputs designed to achieve the results and meet the proposed objectives. The systematic review of management performance has contributed to continuous improvement, and the results were socialised to update the improvement plan.

The monitoring and evaluation moment reviewed the fulfilment of the actions foreseen in the planning moment, the way it was conceived to evaluate it as well as the model organisation, implementation and control. The relevance, pertinence and coherence for improving the management quality is also revised to suggest new actions for continuously development based on feedbacks of the previous moments and the management.

relationships it establishes with the context and other components that have as their starting point the needs for professional development, which are transformed so that they are expressed in results that have a positive impact on institutional development and, therefore, on the territory.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- Barbón, O. G., & Fernández, J. W. (2018). The role of strategic educational management in knowledge management, science, technology, and innovation in higher education. *Educación Médica*, 19(1), 51–55. <https://medes.com/publication/135450>
- Barzaga Sablón, O. S., Vélez Pincay, H.J.J., Nevárez Barberán, J.V.H., & Arroyo Cobeña, M. V. (2019). Gestión de la información y toma de decisiones en organizaciones educativas. ISSN 2477-9431. *RCS. Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, XXV(2), 120-130.
- Casado, J. M. (2020). *Más allá de la gestión tradicional del conocimiento*. 2.C Consulting. <https://www.dosc.es/2020/01/30/mas-alla-de-lagestion-tradicional-del-conocimiento>
- Council of Europe, CE. (2018). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume with new descriptors*. Strasbourg: Language Policy Division. <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989> (accessed 2 february 2023).
- Gutiérrez, T., Rivera, S., Robaina, R., & Mijares, L. (2019). Gestión de los procesos universitarios en el Centro de idiomas de la Universidad de Pinar del Río. *Revista Cubana de Educación Superior* (1). <http://www.rces.uh.cu/index.php/RCES/issue/view/25>
- Gutiérrez, T., & Pérez, R.A. (2020). English as Means or Medium of Instruction (EMI) within the Policy to Improve English in Cuban Universities Framework. A Case Study at Pinar del Río University. *Humanizing Language Teaching Pilgrims Issue 3*. ISSN 1755-9715. <https://www.hltmag.co.uk/june2020/>
- Mendoza Mera, A., Plua Parrales, N. V., & Chiquito Tigua, G. P. (2023). Rol del talento humano en las organizaciones públicas. *Avances*, 25(1), 20-34. <http://avances.pinar.cu/index.php/publicaciones/article/view/733/2060>
- Ministerio de Educación Superior, MES. (2019). *Regulaciones para el perfeccionamiento del proceso de formación en idioma inglés de los estudiantes de la Educación Superior cubana*. Resolución No.165/19. La Habana.
- Rubier, D. (2019). La incidencia de la gestión del conocimiento en el éxito de las organizaciones. *Cooperativismo y Desarrollo*, 7(3), 392–405.

<http://coodes.upr.edu.cu/index.php/coodes/article/view/269>

Valencia-Cruzaty, L.E., Ayala-Bolaños, M., & González-Vásquez, Á.E. (2021). Gestión del conocimiento como

estrategia para asegurar la calidad de la Educación Superior en Ecuador. ISSN 1815-4867. *Maestro y Sociedad*, 18(3), 1230-1251.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

G.B.T.: Research design and writing.

V.M.A.: data collection and analysis.

P.G.R.A.: writing and review

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Avances journal assumes the Creative Commons 4.0 international license