

Communicative Competences: A Reading From Social Representations And Educational Actors

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Abstract

In the search for the consolidation of the educational quality policy, the Colombian government is concerned with strengthening competency-based training, its design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in all cycles of the school system; it is part of the permanent improvement of academic performance. Particularly in technical secondary education, training is provided in labour competences aimed at a real articulation of knowledge and know-how. Recognising the practice and symbolic load contained in the development of communicative competences in students and teachers under study and the institutional processes undertaken for the improvement of academic performance constitutes the research effort. Dissonant perspectives on academic performance converge in a public educational institution in the municipality of Los Patios, Norte de Santander. The study assumes a qualitative perspective in order to interpret the meanings and sense of the information obtained in the field research. The methodology corresponds to the interpretative method, qualitative approach of the Symbolic Interactionism research method, its techniques and procedures. They were conceived as a means to carry out the qualitative analysis of social reality, with which to fragment, conceptualise and integrate the data in order to achieve an inductive theorisation process. The interview and documentary review constituted the data search techniques. In order to enrich and give depth to the knowledge, the results of the different techniques used for data collection, i.e. interview and self-reporting, were compared in this study. Similarly, the results were contrasted with the theories that explain the phenomenon studied, which gave rise to the presentation of the orientations towards communicative competences from their social representations.

Keywords: Social representations, communicative competences, academic performance, educational policy.

Introduction

Competences currently represent the way to achieve educational objectives at school (Prada et al., 2021; Gamboa et al., 2020; Pompa & Pérez, 2015). In turn, the concept of quality in the educational environment is associated with the competence-based approach, understood as a training process that prioritises know-how. However, the assessment of such an educational perspective shows positions, which could be antagonistic, referring to its meaning and scope in the understanding of a particular educational project. These competences are associated with social representations, which over time have been relevant in the development of interpersonal and social relations, in the process of informing and interpreting ideas, expectations and individual and collective needs, thus making communicative competence a key element in human development.

Consequently, communication processes are extremely important because it is through communication that people interact with the world, regardless of the means they use to express their ideas and thoughts. Communication is the tool that allows man to evolve and position himself in a society, hence its relevance. Each individual assigns the level of importance and relevance to these, since it depends on their relationship with the context to determine the use and diversification of the same.

In this order of ideas, it is relevant to address the social representations that individuals have because they are part of the knowledge, practices, beliefs and values of a society (Gamboa-Suarez et al., 2017). Moscovici (2009) indicates in this regard that: "social representations are related to specific objects, which leads the individual to obtain knowledge of how to interpret, think, conceive and explain phenomena or practices" (p.13). All of this is part of the knowledge and experiences that are essential elements for the educational development of students, due to the importance of being able to analyse different situations.

León (2009) states that: "social representations are forms of thought that are socially elaborated and shared, guiding and justifying the behaviour of groups, highlighting the exchange of communication" (p. 367). In this way, it is possible to identify the forms of language, beliefs, opinions, the impact it has on the cognitive and emotional process, which allows the individual to share and interact socially, thus contributing to constitute the scenario of daily occurrences in social life because the communicative system is enhanced in everyday contexts, based on a specific reality.

All this is due to the acquisition of the mother tongue, which configures the linguistic and grammatical elements that give man the tools to communicate and develop in a given context.

Language makes infinite processes possible, including cognitive processes, where teaching and learning are governed by the reading and construction of texts, which, when analysed, interpreted and related to other texts, produce different meanings and senses. Reading and writing are two processes that correspond to each other. Through reading, human beings open up to knowledge, to the structuring of their thinking, to the evaluation of ideas and to decision-making, which are then expressed in coherent writings that present their thinking and critical position in relation to the situations in which they find themselves.

Reading and writing as cognitive processes integrate the communicative competences conceived as the "set of knowledge, abilities and skills required for the adequate, correct, coherent and aesthetic use of both the oral and written code... focusing on listening and speaking, reading and writing competently" (Reyzábal, 2012). Critical reading is a form of expression of the processes of textual production, which are part of the communicative competences that allow the person to develop and communicate effectively in their environment, valuing the situations they are presented with and responding to them correctly, making use of their knowledge to solve the problem through dialogic, coherent and contextually relevant communication (Hernández et al., 2021).

Advancing in this competence involves the deployment of strategies and dynamic ways of approaching reading processes and making them more complex to the point of generating criteria, maximum evaluation of the information for the establishment of premises and relations with other reference discourses. In other words, the person must be able to organise the information they receive from the medium, structure it on the basis of the knowledge they possess and produce a coherent response to the communicative situation in which they find themselves. This involves the articulation of discourse with knowledge, experience and context. In this way, the human capacity to communicate effectively in a community is understood, recognising grammatical and linguistic rules and the use of language in a social, cultural and historically delimited context.

In this order of ideas, the national government has determined that education in Colombia should focus on training by competences, determining that it is an appropriate way to guide the teaching and learning processes in search of an education on equal terms and training for life, leaving aside the accumulation of knowledge and methods, giving priority to the practice of the same (Gómez, 2020a; 2020b). This is how the Ministry of National Education has proposed the Basic Competency Standards as an educational policy, as a reference of what each student should know and know how to do at the expected level of quality in their passage through the education system; determining a training by competencies "to advance towards an integral training approach that promotes competencies for life and encompasses multiple dimensions of being" (Trujillo, 2011). This approach responds to quality benchmarks that seek to demonstrate and continuously evaluate the education system, giving relevance to

teaching and ensuring student learning. It is present from pre-school through basic and secondary education to higher education, where competences are intensified according to the academic programme to be studied.

Within this line, it is important to highlight the importance of social representations internally in the educational process, because they guarantee in individuals the daily manifestations, the viability of daily work, communication, criticism, thus generating the construction of social meaning, which allows to approach reality from different perspectives. Whether from the academic, collective, socio-critical or mechanical point of view, leading to meanings that are immersed within the social reality. In this way, it is possible to achieve the rescue of valuable elements that, due to the constant evolution of humanity, have been lost or disintegrated in their essence; a fact by which the educational environment becomes a substantial element that provides the possibility for these social representations to grow and strengthen.

From there arises the investigative intention to observe that the educational institution in study presents a continuous improvement in the results of the Saber 11 tests, positioning it as a benchmark of quality in the municipality, which have allowed access to multiple benefits of the educational basket, which are items aimed at improving the school climate, such as provision of furniture, teaching resources and technological infrastructure so that academic processes can be developed. This technological platform includes the adaptation of computer rooms, desktop computers, tablets, laptops, digital boards, wireless internet networks and wifi zones. In addition, technical support and continuous training for students and teachers. This equipment is provided so that teachers can make their teaching practices more dynamic, diversify content and teaching strategies, and enhance the acquisition of communication, cognitive, work and citizenship skills.

This improvement is the result of the commitment acquired by the educational community in response to the requirements of the Ministry of National Education to obtain quality education. This is a somewhat utopian goal because the Ministry evaluates a student's level of competence through written tests based on reading. And from the results of these tests it can determine the elements associated with the provision of educational services such as school climate, academic performance, administrative management and teacher performance, among others.

This institution At the Anna Vitiello Educational Institution, where the researcher works, since 2013 the restructuring of the curriculum, approach and pedagogical model has been underway, which has allowed the orientation of the training processes with a view to developing and strengthening the students' cognitive, cognitive and citizenship skills. To this end, work routes have been established that prioritise reading comprehension processes with

different didactic strategies that motivate and strengthen critical thinking. This work dynamic has had an effect on the results achieved in the Saber tests from 2014 to 2021 as evidenced in the reports of the ICFES, which is responsible for designing, applying and grading the Saber tests.

These results are the result of a process that began in 2013 with the restructuring of the curricula, methodological processes and didactics implemented from the construction of the Institutional Educational Project (PEI), which was due to the fact that the institution went from being a private entity to being a public concession and all its legal documentation had to be built and adjusted to the requirements and conditions of the concession. Therefore, progress has been gradual and aimed at continuous improvement.

This indicates that the institutions under study are gradually improving their results in the Saber tests, and their results are approaching the national benchmark score. However, this dynamic of the results shows that there are inconsistencies in the training and assessment processes, since greater attention is paid to preparing students to obtain high averages, but there is no relevance to training for life, to develop in different everyday areas. The processes are being limited to the resolution of tests rather than to action and the practice of knowledge. This is a consequence of the harassment of public policies to generate positive results in external tests that show the quality of educational processes through statistics.

However, this continuous improvement also reveals shortcomings in the processes, giving rise to reflections on the low level of appropriation of communicative competences, the results of which have repercussions on the comprehensive training of students. This leads us to ask why training in communicative competences leads, in the best of cases, to the resolution of immediate problems to the detriment of critical stances in academic, professional or civic life, particularly in a subject whose technical training requires a willingness to work proactively, to be enterprising, to enable the success required for the constant improvement of their quality of life.

The consequence of all this has been that the educational task appears to be wearing down academic work, as it attempts to comply with administrative policies to the detriment of the revitalisation of the pedagogical exercise of teaching. This is explained by the fact that quality policies bring with them a series of formalism and mechanisation of the educational service that go no further than the filling out of documents and do not transcend the resignification of pedagogical and institutional practices. In view of this, a question arises that transcribes the research interest: How do the representations of the pedagogical act, under the Competency Approach, guide the relationships of the subjects in the school environment and determine anticipations and expectations regarding the practice, which translate into school performance? Hence the relevance of applying an analytical tool such as social

representation, which allows us to understand social thinking on the subject, in order to find, according to Abric (2001) "a global and unitary vision of an object, but also of a subject" (p.1). Representation, in its function as a system for interpreting reality, is indispensable for understanding school dynamics.

Finally, it is specified that, by requiring social representations, the study aims to recognise the explanatory framework of the processes of constitution of social thought, by means of which the subjects take a position on the academic reality around the competency-based approach and its implications in practice. The aim of the research is to understand the social representations of communicative competences in an educational institution in the municipality of Los Patios, Norte de Santander, Colombia. Understanding the meanings and experiences of students and teachers in relation to competences. Comparing the experiences and meanings of teachers and students from the communicative competences and contrasting the social representations of the actors regarding communicative competences from the formal theory.

Methodology

The nature of the study implies the consideration that reality is a social construction that is only knowable and accessible through the interpretations of the social actors, linked to the context, and is oriented towards the understanding of the phenomenon in the very environment where such discourses occur. The methodological assumption is understood as the knowledge of reality based on the interpretative and reflexive exercise with respect to this context and these discourses.

For this reason, the approach of social representations, as one of the categories of analysis of this study, given that these allow us to identify the worldview, the points of view of individuals to understand the dynamics of social interactions and social practices, based on the functions of knowledge, thus understanding and explaining reality. Likewise, as a means to carry out the qualitative analysis of social reality, and to fragment, conceptualise and integrate the data in order to achieve an inductive theorisation process, Grounded Theory, its techniques and procedures are used.

It should be noted that the choice of approach is due to the fact that qualitative research is used to describe, in a natural way, different situations, events, people and interactions. Moreover, the systematisation of theory is achieved through the comparative analysis of the data collected, and the interpretative compression of reality.

The instrument applied to collect ample and sufficient information on the experiences and representations instituted and instituting in the study was the interview and the documentary enquiry that orients the collection of data through the study of documents that trace the

treatment of concepts related to the strategies to respond to educational policies; with the aim of revealing orientations in the construction of communicative competences, as well as the concept of representation of the same.

The subjects of the study are teachers and students in tenth and eleventh grades belonging to the technical secondary education level and graduates who have been awarded university scholarships for high academic performance in the Saber 11 tests. The study scenario is an official educational institution that offers educational services to 780 students, from pre-school to secondary technical school, in the morning and in a single location.

Results

Meanings and experiences associated with social representations

Social representations

The teachers and students in the study have different conceptions of social representations, but they agree on five elements that give meaning to the term and its applicability in the context. Initially, they all agree that a representation is an idea specific to each person, i.e. it is a product of thought, the result of various processes of observation, analysis, synthesis and understanding of a fact or object that allows them to get an idea of the situation and assimilate it in order to understand it. This definition coincides with that of Abric (2001) when he states that "a representation is always the representation of something to someone" (p. 12). In other words, nothing arises or makes sense on its own but when the individual or a group assigns meaning to it and gives validity to the representation through the knowledge and application given to it.

Special reference is also made to the influences exerted by the environment through relationships, knowledge and experiences in the family, cultural, educational, social and work environment. Since these determine the meaning given to the representations. That is to say, one's own idea is always anchored to the pre-knowledge acquired through experiences and orientations received. An idea, according to the interviewees, is never pure in the sense that it is assumed and thought in a clean way, free of influences from the environment.

In this sense, Abric (2001) states that "there is no objective reality, but that all reality is represented, appropriated by the individual and reconstructed in his cognitive system, integrated in his value system that depends on his history and the social and ideological context that surrounds him" (p. 12). It is therefore important to control the influences that the environment can exert to determine the elements that are part of the new conceptions or ideas. Likewise, each person will determine what type of influence he or she responds to according to his or her interest and the demands of the context.

Another element highlighted by the actors is that a representation is associated with a form of assertive communication that allows the new conceptions to be made known in a clear way that determines the actions in this respect. The actors emphasise that if one does not manage to communicate effectively the idea that one is taking on, it is very difficult to develop it in context. This is because the continuous socialisation of one's own ideas allows them to be assimilated and emphasised in the intellect, achieving their appropriation quickly..

Finally, every new idea that emerges leads to new learning that strengthens the intellect, enriches the argument and promotes decision-making. The actors agree that each time new knowledge is acquired, new elements are brought in that promote critical thinking, i.e., thoughtful decision-making that is adjusted to the context. In this way, behaviours are determined by the representations that are established and will make sense to the extent that they are enriched by exposure to new learning experiences and performance of the individual or group in the different areas of daily life. In this way, the actors' perceptions of the subject matter are identified.

Meanings and experiences associated with the term Competence from theoretical knowledge

Competence - theoretical knowledge

In the category Competences seen from the theoretical knowledge, the actors in the study approach the concept of competences from the capacity and level of performance that a subject has to carry out a task. The actors conceive the concept of competence as the use of knowledge and the way of performing. The knowledge acquired is put into action in different moments of everyday and working life. The way in which the subject performs will have a lot to do with the use he/she makes of the knowledge acquired. They point out that knowledge must always be put into practice and it is there where its level of importance and relevance in relation to the context is assessed.

Likewise, the capacity of human beings to acquire knowledge and skills is incalculable, but it depends on the stimuli they receive and the environment that favours their learning. To the extent that the subject is ready for new learning, a number of processes are deployed that are chained together to make the new knowledge meaningful and to make it stick in the long-term memory. So that it can be apprehended, remembered and applied in a particular situation.

In this regard, Levy-Leboyer, (as cited in Correa 2007), defines the term competences as "repertoires of knowledge that some master better than others, which makes them effective in a given situation" (p.12). Which in contrast to what the actors say makes sense insofar as a stock of knowledge is required to be at hand to be able to dispose of at the required moment.

Another important element that stands out in the actors' comments is the ability to apply knowledge to everyday actions. That is to say, as in the everyday life of human beings, situations arise that require the location of specific knowledge to guide the resolution of a situation. The person must be able to provide solutions to both simple and complex problems based on the knowledge he/she has and the reasoning he/she exercises when analysing the circumstances to determine the type of intervention he/she is going to carry out. In this instance, the subject must weigh up the conditions and make decisions that will enable him/her to resolve the situation presented to him/her in the right way. It is worth highlighting the importance assigned to acquiring a skill that will enable him/her to manage in different situations. On a daily basis, a person goes through various environments, whether social, family, academic, work, among others. Scenarios that expose multiple situations that force the subjects to develop correctly in order not to generate conflicts that negatively affect their stay or belonging to the environment. In this way, it is necessary to bring together knowledge and skills that allow them to understand the phenomena or problems that arise and determine the action to implement in order to keep the situation under control, achieving benefits for themselves and for those around them.

Communicative competence - from Theory

With regard to the theoretical relationship that the actors establish with regard to the term communicative competences, it can be seen that three ways of understanding it are reiterated. The first refers to a form of expression and the second to a way of communicating; in these, relevance is given to the space generated to make known a thought, knowledge, idea or situation that favours the appearance of the third element, which is the capacity for interaction in which the individual can establish channels of communication with their peers to generate an exchange of ideas and behaviours that facilitate coexistence and development in the environment.

This conception is somewhat removed from theoretical reality. Chomsky (1965) defines competence as the "capacity and disposition for action and interpretation" (p. 21). It is the way of reflecting and processing the thoughts that each person has about a specific subject or several subjects at the same time, in order to subsequently contribute suggestions to the communication process that is established between people, based on the analysis of a task or situation.

This criterion refers to the area of knowledge, where the field of communication is defined in terms of what is learned and the activity that is developed between members. Therefore, it is of vital importance the implementation of a learning process that leads to the ability to manage creativity, the construction of new interpretative frameworks that are subject to the theories that emphasise the importance of communicative competence.

From everyday experience, the actors conceive communicative competences as an ability to make themselves understood, to make known the ideas they have in mind in a correct way, through oral and written discourses that allow the transmission of coherent ideas and with a specific communicative intention, favouring the persuasion of their listeners. Thus, an assertive communication is achieved in which elements such as listening, attending, analysing and transmitting ideas that lead to competitiveness and the flow of information are immersed.

Emphasis is also placed on the processes of inference and problem solving. From the reception of information or data, the subject establishes a series of processes that allow him/her to decipher, analyse and understand the information in order to determine an action to follow with respect to a given situation or context. Thus, observation, listening and analysis are simultaneous processes that provide conceptual clarity to the subject so that he/she can make decisions and thus provide solutions to the problems that arise. They also establish a wider range of interaction that facilitates communicative exchange with peers. By putting communicative experiences into practice, everyday life will become more enriching, information will be transmitted more clearly and the message will be more comprehensible even in situations that require a solution, such as conflicting positions.

Communicative competences - from the formative process

In this instance, it is evident that the actors have a more grounded conception of communicative competences given the experience they have had. They manage to approach intrinsic elements of these competences in colloquial terms, but with great experience in the construction of discourses, identification of communicative intention, among other processes. This is a far cry from the relationship they establish from the theoretical point of view, where there is no technical knowledge and their assessments lack foundation.

The actors define communicative competences from the point of view of the learning process and how they contribute to integral development. In the first instance, communicative competences enable the development of skills and complex thought processes. In which the individual receives information, decodes, analyses and interprets it in order to issue a coherent response to the communicative situation. As this skill is strengthened, access is gained to more complex interpretation processes in which the interlocutors' problem-solving skills come into play.

Meanwhile, the actors associate the term communicative competences with the ethics of listening, which refers to the care and respect that should be taken when making judgements or issuing information that may affect the integrity of the individual or collective, as stated by the Ministry of National Education (2006), when it affirms that one should "know and

analyse the elements, roles, relationships and basic rules of communication, in order to infer the intentions and expectations of the interlocutors and make the communicative processes more effective" (p.20). Another associated element is assertive communication which refers to the ability to express ideas and feelings in a subtle and delicate way without affecting the subjectivity of the interlocutors.

Assertive communication according to Satir (2011) is: "the ability to convey and receive messages of one's own and others' feelings, beliefs or opinions in a timely, honest and respectful manner" (p.65); that is, in the educational process, it is paramount to develop skills and in its effect to promote assertive communication, which in the formative act begins with the formation of pedagogical methods to stable the desired communication.

Likewise, communicative competences make it possible to transform the environment and generate competitiveness in the workplace. To the extent that people take ownership of their knowledge and put it into practice in an orderly and complete manner, showing the best disposition in their performance, they promote significant changes in their environment, which gives them social recognition and positioning in their area of training. According to Villanueva (2010) "competitiveness broadens the scope of efficiency that arises in a personal way in terms of effort, allowing constant quality improvement and adding to this innovation, which is reinforced with the tools acquired in the training process" (p. 14), in this way new opportunities can be sought in the work environment.

The status of a competent person is not only gestated by the type of comprehensive training that he/she possesses but also by the level of performance that he/she sustains. If the person manages to maintain a balance between personal training and work training, he/she will be able to have an ethical and significant participation in the environment in which he/she develops because his/her moral and ethical-professional principles will prevail, which will govern his/her actions and thus determine his/her recognition in society. In this respect, Villanueva (2010) states: "communicative competences form part of the organisational capacity where individuals demonstrate their personal performance and through communication generate new ideas and the acceptance of the environment in order to achieve new opportunities" (p. 16).

Communicative competences - from the MEN guidelines

The communicative competences from the Ministry of National Education's guidelines are seen by the actors as an imposition of knowledge and practices that must respond to nationally standardised criteria in which educational institutions must comply with the development of basic competences in their students. Responding diligently to the demands of the current education policy that goes hand in hand with global economic policies. Therefore, the actors emphasise that education in Colombia responds directly to the needs of

the economic system that requires the training of people who are able to communicate and develop specific tasks.

Likewise, the pedagogical action resides in forging a permanent change in the student's life, promoting actions that generate learning, bringing to fruition the motivation for new knowledge, inciting them to new discoveries and building their learning, which is why awakening interest in learning is the goal that the teacher sets for himself, the key is to know how to achieve it. To do this, the teacher must tap into the psyche of the students' inner energy sources and channel this energy so that it drives them to learn with commitment, enthusiasm and satisfaction. There will then be no coercion or boredom, and learning will be more effective and meaningful.

This in turn requires greater concentration in order to assimilate concepts and put them into practice quickly and accurately. However, the national government, through the Ministry of Education, places special emphasis on meeting the benchmarks of international tests that look at what factors are associated with educational success. The PISA test, for example, was structured by governments from a policy perspective and focused on four thematic domains relating to: the quality of learning outcomes; equity in learning outcomes and equity in educational opportunities; the effectiveness and efficiency of educational processes; and the impact of learning outcomes on social and economic well-being (Schleicher, 2006, p. 9).

In this category, the actors are not far from reality when defining external tests as an evaluation instrument for students. They are very clear that they must respond to political and economic guidelines that guarantee the continuity of the provision of educational services and their employability once the training cycle is completed.

Communication skills - institutional improvement

Among the guidelines highlighted by the actors regarding the relationship between academic performance and institutional improvement, reference is made to the strengthening that has been given to the development and expression of the student in the academic and social fields. They argue that it is necessary to open up spaces for students to develop their communication skills through various exercises and techniques. They have the guidance and accompaniment to write speeches, poems, stories. They can sing, act, dramatise their readings and creations, present their ideas and projects. In this way, they feel motivated and committed to academic performance and make their learning a meaningful experience.

This conception of human learning sees knowledge as the fruit of the interaction between the person and the environment, showing to what extent learning processes are not only processes of conceptualisation, but true exercise of capacities on the reality that surrounds

the person. Thus, learning is a process of construction of knowledge that takes place in the processes of interaction between the person and the reality of the environment.

One of the conclusions reached by the actors is that the reading and analysis carried out by the students in a continuous and judicious manner is a determining factor in the improvement of academic performance. For this reason, it is necessary to count on the commitment of the students to follow instructions and teaching strategies that allow them to advance and develop integrally. The commitment of parents to accompany, guide and supervise the continuity of the learning process at home and finally the commitment of teachers to update lesson plans and establish the transversality of the curriculum.

Therefore, if clear learning goals are established and good communication channels are maintained, there will be an improvement in academic performance and therefore an institutional improvement that ultimately benefits the students themselves because they will enjoy better pedagogical practices, school environment and social recognition. Jodelet (2009) states that "the mastery of language, together with the development of the communicative function, both oral and written, can be extended to the reality and the world around us" (p.8). In this sense, it is important to consider the area of language and communication because it favours the development of cognitive skills and abilities that will lead to a level of comprehension of what has been read.

Curriculum and school performance

The actors address the existing relationship between curriculum and academic performance, highlighting the need for the design of pedagogical strategies that take into account the guidelines provided by the results of the Saber Tests and the score obtained in the Synthetic Index of Educational Quality (ISCE). In this way, the articulation of the propaedeutic cycle (technical secondary education) with the other training cycles (basic primary and secondary education) can be promoted and in this way a real transversalisation of the curriculum can be established and the pedagogical actions that are implemented are pertinent to the context and needs of the educational institution.

Therefore, this representation invites to an important reflection, where the continuous updating should not only be not only the curriculum but also the educational actors who must be at the forefront to train competent individuals in a world of extremely accelerated changes in the technological, labour and communication contexts.

Pedagogical strategies and academic performance

With regard to the pedagogical strategies being implemented to improve academic performance in relation to communicative competences, the actors highlight the reading and production of different types of texts and the strengthening of the processes of interpretation

and argumentation, which have enabled students to make significant progress in the development of their reading competence and improve their academic performance in all areas of education.

To the extent that students are aware of the processes they must develop in order to understand a text, they also appropriate strategies that allow them to make rapid progress in their learning process and enrich their lexicon to generate persuasive and argumentative discourse that validates their criteria and decision-making. The Ministry of National Education's goal is to foster the development of communication skills by improving reading behaviour, reading comprehension and textual production in pre-school, elementary and secondary school students by strengthening the school as a fundamental space for the formation of readers and writers, and by linking the family to these processes.

Seen in this way, reading is a skill, as it is shown to be a specific type of complex behaviour which requires periods of training and deliberate practice to acquire. Hence, every teacher should reflect seriously and deeply on reading from the perspective of seeing it as a process that leads to learning. It is therefore in the hands of teachers to achieve this approach, for books fulfil a social function in the development of learners, satisfying the need for access to technical knowledge and social rules by providing students with the possibility of expressing their feelings in order to foster in them a personal social adjustment by recreating themselves with reading and ultimately guaranteeing academic success.

Academic Achievement and Saber Tests

Finally, the actors outline their representations regarding the close relationship between academic performance and the Saber tests. In the first instance, they affirm that in recent years they have been making great academic and administrative efforts to generate good results in these tests, but that ultimately the results depend a lot on the level of commitment of the students when taking the test, as their level of preparation, concentration and willingness make the difference in the results. In addition, the institution has been promoting processes of critical reading and quantitative reasoning to strengthen the basic competences that provide students with the tools to solve problematic situations.

However, they say that the relevance of the tests has led institutions to focus on preparing students to take them, thus downplaying the importance of other processes that are part of the comprehensive education that should be received at school. In this way, priority is being given to mechanical learning, which teaches students how to respond to tests, but which neglects meaningful learning that transcends over time through the experiences it generates and the motivation it provides.

They also argue that priority is not being given to life-long learning, but that more time, resources and attention is being given to test-taking. Ultimately, the tests are seen as one

more requirement for entry to higher education and a determining factor in institutional evaluation. It must be taken into account that school performance is the result of the complex world that surrounds the participant in his or her individual qualities: aptitudes, abilities, personality, socio-familial environment: family, friends, neighbourhood, school reality: type of school, relationships with teachers and classmates, teaching methods, and therefore its analysis is complicated and has multiple interactions.

Conclusions

The results of the study leave important findings and reflections on the quality of education from the discourses of educational actors. The conclusions and recommendations are presented in coherence with each objective and synthesise the interpretation of the representations of communicative competences.

Social representations from the point of view of the educational actors refer to the ideas that each person constructs from the wealth of knowledge and experiences they have had. They also provide the possibility of contrasting these ideas with the environment, validating them in order to convert them into new concepts or knowledge that will determine, at a given moment, a value judgement that will strengthen their decision-making.

Competences are assumed by the actors to be the capacity of human beings to acquire knowledge and put it into practice. But, at the same time, they maintain that it is a way of guiding pedagogical processes so that individuals can respond appropriately to the demands of the policies that currently govern society.

Communication competences are understood by the actors as the ability of human beings to transmit their ideas and persuade others, facilitating interaction and problem solving. From the formative processes, communicative competences are conceived as the set of competences that allow for the development of communicative skills that favour meaningful learning, labour competitiveness and the transformation of environments.

With regard to the ministerial guidelines that orientate the communicative competences, the actors are sceptical about their intentions since they are convinced that the interest they assign to these competences is to respond to the requirements and impositions of international economic policies, based on standardised evaluations that seek to form competitive beings from the practice of knowledge and skilful in the performance of specific tasks.

One element that underlies these representations is academic performance and institutional improvement in which the development of communicative competences has an impact. In the first instance, they note that in order to achieve better school performance, the collective construction of specific goals for institutional improvement is required to guide the

pedagogical work to that end, using effective communication channels and continuous accompaniment and feedback from the parties involved. The active participation of the entire educational community is required, especially of students to follow instructions, of parents to accompany and supervise academic processes at home, and of teachers to dynamise their pedagogical practice by strengthening the processes of reading and analysis in students.

The curriculum is another element related to academic performance and to which the actors object that it is necessary to articulate the study plans of the propaedeutic cycle with those of the educational institution so that there is continuity in the formative process and the student is not forced to deal with separate processes, but on the contrary, a transversalisation of the areas of knowledge with the competences developed by these cycles is generated. Determining the pedagogical and didactic strategies that strengthen both cognitive, working and communicative competences.

In terms of pedagogical strategies, the actors insist that the student's ability to interpret data, store relevant information, argue and make value judgements through critical reading and the production of oral and written discourses must continue to be strengthened. Without forgetting that, while developing the main skills, priority should also be given to group expression techniques such as debates, seminars, round tables where students can express their thoughts in a free but argued manner. Individual techniques such as oratory, rhetoric, poetry, music, etc. are also important.

A third element that underlies academic performance and that causes concern among stakeholders is the pressure exerted by the Saber tests on pedagogical practices and institutional improvement, given that the institution has been generating training processes oriented towards the mechanisation of learning in order to successfully pass these tests, leaving aside mediated and meaningful learning. Enormous efforts have been made to strengthen the processes of reading and quantitative reasoning. Stimuli have been determined internally so that students respond consciously and judiciously to these tests in order to obtain institutional improvement. However, the actors differ from all these efforts, arguing that in the end it all depends on the student and his or her willingness to take the test, seeing it as just another requirement for entry to higher education.

The above indicates that, at the Anna Vitiello educational institution, pedagogical practices are being carried out that guide and develop the students' communicative competences, but more attention is paid to the technical secondary cycle due to the commitment they have to obtain good results in the Saber exams. However, the strengthening of these competences allows teachers to develop didactic actions that stimulate students to analyse data, validate information, synthesise, argue and take a critical stance on the subjects and situations they

deal with, thus providing them with the ability to function more appropriately in their environment.

The following recommendations emerge from the above conclusions:

The wealth of communicative competences is infinite. Teachers should take the time to get to know them and find out how they can make them part of their speciality. They not only provide cognitive tools but also procedural tools that improve the assimilation and practice of the knowledge acquired.

In all speech acts, linguistic, paralinguistic, pragmatic, textual, kinaesthetic and proxemic competence is put into practice in a natural way. But if these were developed with greater awareness, our communicative processes would be more effective. The individual would assume the integrality of the communicative exchange and the messages that are produced would become meaningful for both the sender and the receiver.

Meaningful learning is based on a good communicative process, which is why it is necessary for teachers to structure, revise and continuously improve their discourse. Adapting it to the needs of the students so that they can understand, assimilate and apply the message transmitted to them. In this way, the practice of knowledge is done through dialogic socialisation and contrast with the environment.

The processes of critical reading and textual production are inherent to the educational process, regardless of the speciality or subject being addressed. What is really important is that the teacher is convinced of the relevance of reading and writing. In this way, they can make their students aware so that they can take a free position on the basis of their thoughts and defend them with the use of valid arguments. This is the way in which students recognise their ability to make decisions and participate in important issues.

In the technical secondary education cycle, it is essential to reinforce communicative competences in the light of labour competences because they are the means for the student to be able to offer his or her skills and access the labour market.

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