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Foundations of a Didactic Strategy for Developing the Skill of Ordering Historical Events in University Students

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the establishment of the logical order of historical phenomena and their precise location in time are essential conditions for understanding the historical process and its regularities in the teaching of Cuban History. Under current circumstances, this represents a national necessity, as it enables the comprehension of past events, facilitates the interpretation of present realities, and offers a vision of possible future developments. For this reason, History occupies a prominent role in the education of university students and helps them understand the world in which they live.

Objective: to substantiate the theoretical-methodological foundations that support the development of the skill of ordering historical events in university students.

Methods: theoretical-level methods were used, such as the historical-logical, analytical-synthetic, and inductive-deductive approaches; and as empirical methods, document analysis and interviews with professionals from other Cuban and foreign universities. **Results:** Deficiencies were revealed in the studied process, which, despite being sequenced, systemic, and contextualized, does not contribute effectively to the development of historical thinking.

Conclusions: shortcomings were identified in the way the process of professional skill formation and development is conducted in general, and of this specific skill in particular, during undergraduate education. Pedagogical changes are needed in the ways Cuban History is taught and learned by university students.

Keywords: Strategy; Fundamentals; History; Temporality.

INTRODUCTION

Since its origins, humanity has expressed its temporal awareness in many ways: through cave paintings, oral or written narratives, photographs, and films. Everything humanity has created allows us to understand how time has passed, and the social environment serves as a key source for recognizing the traces time has left in the places where people live.

The passage of time is fundamentally observed through changes—in the physical characteristics of objects, people, and places—as well as through continuities.

The social environment becomes an open book that can be used as a documentary and audiovisual source. Town squares, monuments, houses, means of transportation, clothing, elders' memories, traditional songs, stories, and legends are examples that illustrate how human life is constantly framed by time and space.

The question "What is time?" has been addressed by philosophers since antiquity—Aristotle, Newton, Einstein, and many other classical thinkers—each situating their answer within their broader theories of being and their worldviews; thus, the meaning of each answer is always historically conditioned.

Humanity intuitively feels that time flows inexorably, unaffected by anything whatsoever, so that even if all activity suddenly ceased, time would continue uninterrupted. Hence, time is regarded as something universal and absolute.

To assert that time governs all historical development—that history is inconceivable without time, and therefore that there is no history without time—is to state a principle, a truth repeatedly emphasized by historians.

However, historical time differs from that of other social sciences or from physicists' conception of time, as Pagés,⁽¹⁾ states:

"For the historian, time is both the starting point and the ultimate goal of any historical investigation. It is a time that is not unidimensional, that raises multiple theoretical and methodological questions, and that must be clearly defined and delimited."

Thus, it becomes evident that historical time is multifaceted: the duration of different social realities varies, and the rhythms of societal or continental evolution differ across developmental phases.

Human knowledge—and temporal understanding specifically—is the result of humanity's long learning process, such that each society and individual builds upon pre-existing knowledge and extends it further.

Time is a relationship and one aspect of the social construction of reality; it is the cognitive category that symbolizes the temporal dimensions of reality, within which a temporal dimension inherently exists. When historical learning is conceived primarily as the acquisition of knowledge rather than as knowing how to act, content is inevitably subjected to chronological classification.

Despite the presence of the time category in the reflections of major philosophers, centuries passed before it gained comparable prominence among historians. It was not until the early 20th century that historical temporality began to be considered as a lens through which to analyze historical reality. This shift emerged from the Annales School and led to a transformation in the aims of historical research, redirecting focus toward a more comprehensive history centered on aspects beyond the political or military.

It cannot be said that a single school or uniform direction emerged to guide historical study; rather, a broadening of horizons occurred, within which historians' interest in deeply understanding and explaining the realities that define historical time in any given era became evident.

Viewing history from a qualitative perspective helps reflect on ruptures in certain social and cultural patterns developed by predecessor societies, as well as on those aspects that continue to shape the present. From this standpoint, the perception of historical time—of change and continuity—is key to analyzing and understanding history. However, historians' approaches and research frameworks have little connection with what is taught in classrooms.

In the case of Spain, the situation resembles that described by Díaz-Barriga and García,⁽²⁾ regarding Mexico:

"[...] the learning of historical content at different educational levels consists of fragmented and disconnected data and facts, and knowledge of historical events and periods remains superficial. Due to this fragmentation, appropriate connections among historical facts cannot be established, making it impossible to construct a diachronic temporal link among them."

Consistent with these ideas, Pagés and Santisteban,⁽³⁾ note:

"The teaching of historical time currently faces significant changes in representations of temporality, as well as transformations in the ways history is interpreted. The meaning of time in the 21st century appears different from that of previous eras. Yet, history teaching seems not to have changed much. [...] It is necessary to reconsider our conception of time, exploring the relationships between time and space, granting temporality the importance it deserves in history, and helping develop historical consciousness as temporal consciousness."

In a sense, it can be said that historical time seeks explanation beyond mere chronology; it observes and analyzes movements, changes, and durations, reflecting on whether these occur slowly or rapidly, whether they persist over time, whether they imply progress, regression, or stagnation, and whether other processes emerge simultaneously elsewhere—thus activating cognitive strategies and processes that help answer how and why such phenomena occurred and what their causes were.

Time is represented and interpreted based on each individual's beliefs, knowledge, and experiences. Therefore, while each person conceptualizes time in a particular way, they also share temporal references common to their group or culture.

Another characteristic of time is its multiplicity of meanings. The author considers this multiplicity potentially challenging for comprehension, depending on how it is taught to students of specific age groups. For example, science speaks of physical or biological time, whereas religious beliefs refer to eternal time or immortality. Additionally, everyday experience involves personal time.

One of the best ways to understand and describe personal time is through common expressions such as: "time is gold," "there's more time than life," "I don't have time for...," or "time feels slower when we stay still."

Thus, historical time is regarded as an objective, chronological, linear reality, continuously undergoing construction, change, and transformation, and intrinsically interconnected with historical events.

For the effective integration of the historical time category into history teaching, educators must master the four qualities of time outlined by Pagés: ⁽¹⁾

1. Indissoluble: due to its inseparable relationship with space, which introduces its first quality.
2. Irreversible: it cannot be traversed backward.
3. Relative: it depends on the observer and the specific frame of reference.
4. Multiplicity: the diversity of observational and analytical levels, as well as perspectives for study and understanding.

In another context, Trepat, ⁽⁴⁾ states:

"For proper learning of historical time, it is insufficient to present temporal concepts and their operations only once. It is necessary, throughout different units and courses and in connection with other content involving temporal notions, to consistently explain mechanisms of calculation, representation, and periodization, gradually expanding their conceptualization."

Meanwhile, developmental didactics recognizes that skills constitute a fundamental element in university students' learning, as education entails not only acquiring knowledge but also knowing how to apply it. In this regard, González et al., ⁽⁵⁾ note that the process of skill formation is highly complex, requiring instructors to identify which skills their students need to develop and to incorporate them into the actions defined by learning objectives.

Contemporary scholars such as, Saldaña, ⁽⁶⁾ Alfonso, ⁽⁷⁾ Varela Ávila, ⁽⁸⁾ Badillo, ⁽⁹⁾ Vargas and Colomé, ⁽¹⁰⁾ and Pallí, ⁽¹¹⁾ are currently researching skill formation and development, emphasizing the importance of considering skills in the design and implementation of the teaching process—following the logic of how a skill is formed, namely its internal structure and the conscious, varied, and repeated execution of corresponding actions.

In the skill-formation process, learners internalize the structure of the knowledge object and transform it into a mode of action. The teaching guideline is thus to provide the method and facilitate appropriation of the methodological process, rather than merely delivering finished information. This approach offers a method for studying the essence of the object through the actions and operations that constitute the cognitive activity structuring the skill, forming the system of invariants specific to that skill.

Analysis of the above premises allows characterization of this process at the international level:

- ✓ The process of developing the skill of ordering historical events is not directly reflected in existing research on this topic, although related ideas concerning temporality, time, and historical time are presented.
- ✓ A primary objective across all educational levels is the study and application of the past to understand the present and improve the future.

- ✓ Deep, meaningful teaching in the learning of historical time is essential—moving beyond mechanical and reproductive learning and contributing to intellectual growth as human beings.

Evident shortcomings exist in the process of skill development among university students, manifested during initial training through the asystemic nature of this development and its misalignment with professional practice. Consequently, this research addresses the urgent need to train professionals capable of solving professional problems with a transformative perspective, making skill development imperative. Thus, the objective of this article is to establish the theoretical-methodological foundations supporting the development of the skill of ordering historical events in university students.

METHODS

At the empirical level, documentary analysis and exchanges of opinions with other instructors—experts in temporal location, historical temporality, and chronological ordering—were employed. As part of the documentary analysis, Google Scholar was used to search for literature related to the terms: temporality, temporal location, chronological ordering, and skills. From the initial pool of sources identified (in both Spanish and English), the selection was significantly narrowed, considering only those published in the current century, particularly within the last five years. The authors' own experience in addressing these topics throughout their university teaching careers—with emphasis on postgraduate education and doctoral thesis supervision—was also taken into account.

Three theoretical-level methods of knowledge were primarily used:

1. Historical-logical method, to identify epistemological trends regarding the topics addressed, by contrasting chronological evidence with essential features identified from the theoretical perspective of the skill of ordering historical events.
2. Analytical-synthetic method, to establish regularities by separately evaluating essential postulates and reaching consensus on new evaluative criteria.
3. Inductive-deductive method, aimed at formulating generalizations derived from specific premises, as well as arriving at specific conclusions drawn from general principles when conditions warranted it.

At the empirical level, documentary analysis was also used to examine guidelines concerning the methodological work and preparation of the Cuban History course, as well as all its normative documentation.

Interviews with professionals from Cuban and foreign universities provided new insights into the handling of the skill of ordering historical events, viewed from both Cuban and international educational contexts.

RESULTS

Documentary analysis revealed a moderate approach to the teaching-learning process of History, focused primarily on the transmission of knowledge from teachers to students. Furthermore, there are deficiencies in treating skills as a central component of this process. The conception, implementation, and monitoring of classroom activities by History instructors—

particularly regarding the formation of the skill of ordering historical events—are inconsistent, rendering the approach decontextualized and misaligned with the needs and interests of university students.

Teaching activities do not comprehensively support students' mastery of the skill of ordering historical events.

For university students, developing historical thinking and understanding the pathways and methods for acquiring the skill of ordering historical events are essential.

These assertions are evidenced by the fact that 80 % of interviewed instructors agree on the critical importance of knowing the pathways and methods to develop the skill of ordering historical events, considering it one of the most complex skills within the teaching–learning process of the subject for fostering historical thinking among students; 20 % consider it somewhat decisive. Not a single instructor expressed disagreement.

Moreover, the Cuban History course contributes little to the development of this skill among students, as reflected in the fact that 70 % of instructors regard the course content and its methodological system as offering minimal support for developing the skill of ordering historical events.

Insufficient theoretical-methodological preparation among instructors in guiding skill development was also observed, stemming from difficulties in structuring the subject's methodological framework. This is demonstrated by the fact that only 50% of instructors rated their preparation to guide the development of this skill as "very appropriate," 35 % as "appropriate," 18 % as "somewhat inappropriate," and 9 % as "inadequate."

In the teaching–learning process of Cuban History classes, instructors' activities are inconsistent with the internal structure of the skill. They repeatedly use the same patterns of questions and exercises, promoting mechanical memorization of historical dates among university students.

Furthermore, instructors do not implement an effective didactic approach to strengthen students' ability to use this skill structure as a vehicle for learning content. Likewise, there is no evident, effective work on the skill of ordering historical events in relation to students' future professional roles.

The above analyses result from the application of the aforementioned methods. The review of current literature on the topic underscores the need to continue addressing this issue due to its significance in university student formation.

Despite researchers' contributions on this subject, gaps remain that can only be addressed through the appropriate contextualization of this inquiry.

In this regard, the following theoretical foundations underpin the design of a didactic strategy for developing the skill of ordering historical events in university students:

- ✓ The formation process of the skill of ordering historical events in university students is guided and regulated by systemic, integral, and contextualized principles.
- ✓ This formation process is supported by contributions from related disciplines and subjects that influence it through academic, professional, research, and outreach components.
- ✓ The formation process is concretized through engagement with professional problems associated with this skill.

DISCUSSION

Following the application of the aforementioned methods and the analysis of results, the need to further explore this topic becomes evident due to its relevance and value in the education of university students.

Rojas et al.,⁽¹²⁾ argue that a developmental conception of History teaching and its intellectual skills should be pursued, particularly in the process of forming the skill of ordering historical events.

From another perspective, Breijo and Novo,⁽¹³⁾ state that Cuban Higher Education is currently committed to preserving its model of a modern, humanistic, universalized, scientific, technological, innovative university, integrated into society and deeply dedicated to forming university students endowed with personal qualities, culture, and skills that enable them to act responsibly and with social commitment.

Similarly, Breijo, Pérez, and Hidalgo,⁽¹⁴⁾ assert that, despite Cuban Higher Education's clear recognition of the need for lifelong learning—and although the current training model demands both initial job preparation and a robust postgraduate education system—a harmonious and coherent linkage among these three elements has not been achieved. This has limited the essential development of specific skills necessary for optimal professional performance.

Along the same lines, Darias,⁽¹⁵⁾ specify that becoming a fully competent professional requires a mediated professionalization process that begins during initial training and continues through ongoing education—a process that, according to these authors, greatly benefits university students aspiring to higher levels of preparation.

Fornaris et al.,⁽¹⁶⁾ emphasize the necessity for university students not only to learn theories, laws, and concepts, but also to develop skills that foster holistic personality development. In this regard, professional skills play a crucial role, as they help shape students' personalities for future professional life.

The postulates of Breijo,⁽¹⁷⁾ are also considered, particularly those concerning the core principles of a developmental approach to History teaching, which are grounded in diagnosing the student's actual level—culturally and humanistically—to characterize their performance in terms of knowledge, attitudes, and procedures.

The authors of this study affirm that the instructor must act as an exemplary facilitator in this process—probing, questioning, and actively participating in knowledge construction and students' proper formation.

University students must develop a system of professional skills that enables them to situate themselves temporally—within an era, century, decade, five-year period, year, "before," and "after"—using a logical framework that allows them to engage in learning situations through their own strategies.

To foster professional skill development in university students, instructors must strategically implement the following actions recommended by Rojas et al.,⁽¹²⁾:

1. Diagnose the student's actual level from an integral perspective, identifying their performance and the developmental stage of their competencies.
2. Foster a classroom climate characterized by participation, cooperation, communication, and flexibility, embedded in positive interpersonal relationships.
3. Structure the teaching–learning process so that instructors create essential environments that encourage students' active knowledge-seeking and, consequently, meaningful learning.
4. Convey the human significance of content, leveraging its educational quality through conviction, sensitivity, and vividness.
5. Enable students to internalize knowledge and recognize its social, professional, and personal value based on its functional relevance.
6. Innovatively leverage students' prior experiences and knowledge, providing differentiated levels of support tailored to individual needs.

CONCLUSIONS

The skill of ordering historical events constitutes an essential formative axis in Higher Education, as it contributes to the development of historical thinking, critical understanding of national historical processes, and the professional preparation of university students. Limitations in the didactic treatment of this skill within Cuban History classes are evident, negatively impacting students' holistic development and their ability to establish temporal, causal, and contextual relationships among historical events. This research confirms the need to transform the didactics of Cuban History by incorporating strategies that link historical content with university students' professional demands, adopting an active, reflective, and contextualized perspective. A more comprehensive didactic approach is required—one that integrates historical content with key elements of the university training process, thereby fostering the development of intellectual and professional skills that go beyond the mere memorization of facts. The results obtained support the relevance of designing a specific didactic strategy aimed at strengthening the skill of ordering historical events, as a means to enhance the quality of the teaching–learning process and address the current challenges facing Cuban Higher Education.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Authors' contributions

CARG: was responsible for the conception and design of the research.

All authors participated in data collection, data analysis, bibliographic review and selection, drafting of the final manuscript, and its revision, correction, and approval.

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