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## *La selección y utilización de los documentos históricos escritos en las clases de Historia*

### *The selection and use of the historical documents and writings in History lessons*

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Recibido: 12 de abril de 2017

Aceptado: 22 de octubre de 2017

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**Resumen:** Teniendo en cuenta que constituye una necesidad en los momentos actuales la utilización de los documentos históricos escritos como fuente primaria del conocimiento histórico para probar y motivar el conocimiento de importantes hechos de la historia, el presente trabajo tiene como objetivo reflexionar sobre la selección y utilización correcta de estos documentos y su importancia en el proceso de enseñanza – aprendizaje de la Historia. Para ello se emplearon métodos teóricos y empíricos.

**Palabras clave:** Documentos históricos escritos; Criterios de selección; Enseñanza – aprendizaje de la Historia; Conocimiento histórico

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**Abstract:** Taking into account that the use of historical written documents is a primary source of historical knowledge to prove and motivate the knowledge of important facts of history, and is a necessity at present, this paper aims at pondering about the selection and correct use of these documents and their importance in the teaching - learning process of History. To accomplish the goal of the research, theoretical and empirical methods were used.

**Keywords:** Written historical documents; Selection criteria; Teaching - learning of History; Historical knowledge

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## **Introduction**

Within any contemporary educational system, Higher Education is called to respond to the needs imposed by economic and social development through the training of professionals who will face the impetuous advance of science and technology.

The training of these professionals is based on curricula that ensure they graduate from higher education prepared to solve the different problems that will arise daily in their future scenario. Therefore, the methodological work carried out by undergraduate professors must start with designs that are sufficiently dynamic and flexible to allow the development of

scientific pedagogical processes, where action modes are offered to face the challenges and transformations of the current Cuban school with quality.

In correspondence with these changes, measures have been planned to bring the training of teachers and professors to the new realities, among which the assumption of structures based on the emergence of a new career conception stands out. The education of professors of Marxism, Leninism and History is not an exception, since the course 2008/2009, it was instituted as an independent major within the broad spectrum of education of pedagogues in Cuba.

In the process of teaching -learning (PEA in Spanish) of History, written historical documents are indispensable means of teaching. Since they constitute primary sources of historical knowledge, they contribute to demonstrate the veracity and scientific character of it and allow enhancing the quality of teaching this science.

The objective of this paper is to reflect on the selection and correct use of written historical documents, and the importance of these primary sources of knowledge in the quality of the teaching -learning process of History.

### **Development**

It is very important to make clear what a historical document is in order to understand how important it is for the history teacher to correctly select and use them.

According to Pendás (2002) "the written documents are those primary sources that carry the historical information through the handwritten word, carved, typed and printed by any technical resource" (p.64).

González (1979) locates the historical documents, including the works of the classics of the Marxist - Leninist philosophy, as means of direct perception, from the point of view of their representation, as printed materials.

It is necessary to signify that the methodology used in the processing of the sources is of utmost importance, without ceasing to consider that they are not the only premise to arrive at the historical truth and the reliability of the results offered during the teaching of the

history. As primary sources in the teaching-learning process of History they constitute excellent evidence for the student.

Hence the need to use a methodology that allows them to be used in a coherent way, through a teaching - learning process that recognizes the student as a subject of learning and proposes to develop reasoning, and the exercise of thinking through actions that demand a certain level of independence.

There is a great difference between the level reached by the student who receives all the processed information, and the one who learns to process it under the direction of the teacher in the initial moments, and then with a greater degree of independence. In the same way it is more productive to analyze historic documents and other primary sources.

For the proper selection of written historical documents, the following selection criteria must be taken into account:

- 1- Availability of the content of the written historical document.
- 2- Domain of the content of the documents related to the topics to be addressed.
- 3- Results of the diagnosis applied to students in the subject.
- 4- Correspondence between the content of the themes of the program and the selected document.
- 5- The time fund designated to teach the program.
- 6- Articulation between the objectives of the program of the discipline and specifically those of the program.
- 7- Relationship between the selection of the method to be used and the selection of the document.
- 8- Affordability of the language of the document in correspondence with the level of the student.
- 9- The contribution of the content of the document to the understanding of the facts or processes of the history with which it is related.
- 10- Purpose with which the document is used.

11- Determination of the direction of the teaching work for the analysis of the written historical document.

None of them constitutes a unilateral or dogmatic criterion, on the contrary, they are susceptible to adjustments taking into account the characteristics of the students and the monitoring of the diagnosis.

The selection of the written historical document can be determined from the program of the subject itself. If this is not the case, the teacher is in charge of carrying it out, hence the importance of taking into account the criteria set forth above.

The selection of the written historical document to be analyzed with the students during the teaching - learning process should enable the fulfillment of the objectives of the program, since these, in addition to being of strict compliance, are the didactic aspirations that the students must fulfill and each activity planned, oriented, executed and evaluated will be a function of these objectives.

Its use in History classes will help students to understand solidly the origin of the conclusions that appear in school texts, in addition, it will allow, with an adequate pedagogical direction, to make critics and objective analysis of them, obtain testimonies, counterpoint opinions and verify data. All of the above allows contributing to develop the critical spirit, the ethical search in historical analysis, the expansion of knowledge and the development of skills.

We assumed the criterion of classification of the means that constitute historical sources contributed by Díaz Pendás (2002):

- The most concrete original objects of material culture. Museum pieces (archaeological evidence, weapons of an era, clothing, instruments, etc.)
- Primary sources of audiovisual nature: sound films, kinesis, videos, film strips and series of synchronized slides with sound.
- Images without sound: silent movies, photos, slides, paintings, illustrations, cartoons.
- Graphic or symbolic primary sources: written documents, periodic publications of a period, maps, sketches, etc.

- Primary oral sources: oral testimonies, speeches, recordings.

It means that other authors such as Rita Marina Álvarez and Justo Chávez in their text *Methodology of the Teaching of History* of 1979 offer a classification of the means of teaching that does not differ from the previous one only that constitutes a more general criterion of them.

The sources of historical knowledge, where historical documents are included, constitute the main basis of scientific-cultural information for the teacher and the students. Hence the value and usefulness of combining forms of expository type such as inquiry during their use, provided that they start from the student's level of development, both in its psychological aspect and in that of previous knowledge.

Álvarez and Chávez (1979), locate historical documents written within graphic or symbolic media because they are printed, and original media, since they constitute sources of historical knowledge.

The teaching of history will be more scientific as long as it approaches the primary sources and uses methods that propitiate the productive use of them. Therefore, it is necessary to progressively strengthen the presence of historical sources in the teaching - learning process of history, among which written documents occupy a prominent place.

The importance of the study of historical documents in the teaching of history is recognized by Díaz Pendás (2002) in aspects such as the following:

- They put the student in contact with the primary sources.
- Constitute probative elements of the content under study.
- They favor the use of emotional influence.
- They constitute a basis for the formation of convictions.
- Contribute to the development of skills for the analysis of the historical process.
- Illustrate, confirm and complement the historical knowledge acquired by students.
- They favor the solidity of historical knowledge.
- Contribute to raising the scientific level of teaching History.

- They offer, through the application of a correct methodology, the possibility that the student makes more effort to reconstruct the historical process by himself and has more elements of foundation and demonstration.
- They develop a critical sense, since the students draw conclusions - however incomplete they may be - as a result of his personal study of these sources.
- Teach students one of the most important ways in which historians obtain information for their conclusions, while at the same time strengthening in the students the respect for history as a science.

The methodology for working with historical documents as means of teaching includes several aspects, among which are the directions of the teaching work with historical documents, and the algorithm for working with historical documents.

For the first aspect the directions of the teaching work are assumed with historical documents established by Professor Horacio Díaz Pendás in his text *Teaching of History* of the year 2002. They are:

- Self-preparation of the history teacher: it is about the use of historical documents by the teacher within their documentation files or in their self-preparation sources, integrating them into the bibliography used in the preparation of each topic and class systems. The place occupied by the analysis of them during their preparation will depend on the space they have in their classes, that is, if the teacher is unaware of the existence of the documents, then he will not be able to use them in his classes, nor even think about how to do it.
- The inclusion of fragments of the document in the teacher's exhibition: it is about conceiving in a planned way which fragment will be used during the class. The teacher must analyze beforehand if this is a carrier of new information for the student, or will pose a new problem, that is, a close relationship must be established between the document as a teaching means and the didactic functions of the History class.

The teacher must keep in mind that a fragment is only a part of the whole, so his selection must be careful, so that it is understood and not perceived as something isolated from a context. In case it is read, the most comprehensible and emotive should be selected, and its reading should be done with the required intonation and quality.

- The students' work with the documents: it is aimed at students working with the entire documents, who will have the opportunity to read them as a whole in order to understand the essential ideas, assess their significance and issue criteria related to the historical process to which they are linked. This direction also makes possible to awaken in the student the motivation to investigate, which requires an adequate preparation of the teacher in the methodological order to conceive forms of teaching and activities that foster cognitive independence.

For the analysis of a written historical document, the professor must apply an algorithm that facilitates the understanding, analysis and subsequent evaluation of that document. This varies depending on the type of document that has been selected. An example of an algorithm to follow can be the following:

- What does the title of the written historical document anticipate?
- Where and when was it written?
- The contextualization of the document to consider it within its historical time in relation to events.
- Who is its author?
- Search the dictionary for words which meaning you do not know.
- What does it inform us about?
- Why was it written?
- Who is it for?
- In what tone and language is it written?
- What interests does the content represent?
- Make a general reading of the document to become familiar with its content.
- Make a second reading to properly study and understand the document, and point out the main ideas of each paragraph.
- Expose the essential ideas of the document.

- Make critical comments with the reasoning suggested by the text.

There is an interest in a historical synthesis of what has been studied, that is, the relationship of the content of the document with all the other historical factors that the student knows.

- The assessment of the document, its historical significance, its repercussion, its contribution to the study of the event or context, and its transcendence.
- What is its value as a historical source?

These questions and activities contain the essential and necessary elements to perform the analysis of any historical document, but they do not constitute a rigid scheme, instead, they are susceptible to changes based on the teacher's experiences.

The algorithm must be changed for students into a method of working with the sources, a style to approach historical knowledge, with the aim of developing critical thinking.

Below is an example of this algorithm through a document written by a classic Marxist-Leninist that has its own characteristics and that compelles the student to consult this type of resource.

#### Practical class guide

Title.- Analysis of the article Duality of Powers, by V. I. Lenin

Objective.- Explain the essential ideas contained in the article Duality of Powers.

Method.- Independent work.

Procedure.- Search and processing of information.

Activity system:

1. Who is the author of the article Duality of Powers?
2. When and where was it written?
3. In what historical context was it written?
4. Explain how the historical context influenced the content addressed in the article.
5. Read the complete article.
6. Look for the lexical meaning of the unknown words.

7. Does it characterize, according to Lenin's criteria, the soviets of workers 'and soldiers' deputies?
8. Why is Lenin in the article qualifying the soviets of workers 'and soldiers' deputies as an embryonic power?
9. Explain the reasons stated by Lenin for which the Provisional Government should be overthrown immediately.
10. Value the importance of the content of the document for the process developed in Russia.
11. Make a summary where the essential ideas of the article are evaluated. Use several ways for summarizing the information.

General methodological guidelines:

For this type of organization of teaching, it should be ensured that all students have the document under analysis, set consultation hours to clarify doubts and verify how the activity is being done to grant success.

The practical class will be evaluated after the theme 2.1 of the program of Universal History IV in the major of Marxism, Leninism and History. It has a mark of five points and will take into account oral expression, cognitive independence, quality and sufficiency of the ideas expressed.

## **Conclusions**

Written historical documents are important teaching aids in the teaching-learning process of History, for that reason they should be selected in an appropriate manner considering the selection criteria and a correct application of the methodology for their analysis.

The proper use of historical documents by history teachers ensures that this procedure becomes a model of professional performance in the initial training of education professionals.

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