

**Students' narratives related to their experiences about learning English through
the applicability of the Blended Learning Approach**

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Trabajo de Grado II

2022

Abstract

During the pandemic, education in Colombia had to face great challenges by having to apply new pedagogical models in order to give continuity to classes, however, once the crisis caused by Covid-19 was overcome and classes were returned to Face to Face, there are doubts about the knowledge that the students managed to learn because of the different obstacles that each one had to face. This project seeks to identify the other knowledge that during the pandemic the students who were in the fifth grade of primary school obtained during the implementation of the teaching models based on the Blended Learning Approach in the development of English classes and how these knowledges influence their current learning process. The field work was carried out through a narrative investigation, with which taking into account the participants' narratives we are looking for their own perceptions about their knowledge acquired during that period of time under the new teaching and learning models. For the collection of these perceptions, instruments based on a focus group, a drawn narrative and an individual interview were applied, in this way to achieve, through dialogue and expression, obtain the points of view that they obtained as a result of their own experiences. Among the main results, it can be highlighted that the participants agreed that the knowledge that was directly related to the English subject was not obtained according to the intentions of the teachers; On the other hand, they highlighted that they did obtain other knowledge through the implementation of the new tools required for the participation of the classes or the performance of the tasks assigned by the teachers. Most of the participants expressed that although they were not able to obtain the curricular knowledge that corresponded to the subject, they obtained other knowledge that they use today for some academic activities.

Resumen

Durante la pandemia la educación en Colombia tuvo que enfrentar grandes desafíos al tener que aplicar nuevos modelos pedagógicos con el fin dar continuidad a las clases, sin embargo, una vez superada la crisis causada por el Covid-19 y haber regresado a las clases cara a cara, quedan dudas sobre los conocimientos que lograron aprender los estudiantes a causa de los diferentes obstáculos que cada uno tuvo que enfrentar. Con este proyecto se busca identificar los conocimientos otros, que durante la pandemia los estudiantes que cursaban el quinto grado de primaria, obtuvieron durante la implementación de los modelos de enseñanza basados en el Blended Learning Approach en el desarrollo de las clases de inglés y cómo estos conocimientos influyen en su aprendizaje actual. El trabajo de campo se realizó a través de una investigación narrativa, con lo cual se busca entre las narraciones de los participantes sus propias percepciones acerca de sus conocimientos adquiridos durante ese periodo de tiempo bajo los nuevos modelos de enseñanza y aprendizaje. Para la recolección de esas percepciones se aplicaron los instrumentos basados en un grupo focal, una narración dibujada y una entrevista individual, de esta manera lograr a través del diálogo y la expresión, obtener los puntos de vista que obtuvieron a raíz de sus propias vivencias. Entre los principales resultados, se puede destacar que los participantes coincidieron en que los conocimientos que estaban directamente relacionados a la materia inglés no fueron obtenidos según las intenciones de los docentes; por otro lado, destacaron que sí obtuvieron otros conocimientos a través de la implementación de las nuevas herramientas requeridas para la participación de las clases o la realización de las tareas asignadas por los docentes. La mayoría de los participantes expresaron que aunque no lograron obtener los conocimientos curriculares que correspondían a la materia, obtuvieron otros conocimientos que hoy en día usan para algunas actividades académicas.

Key words: B-learning, virtuality, knowledge others, education, pandemic.

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Colombian government established a total quarantine, that is why, education had to be moved from the classroom to an online setting, therefore, creating both new opportunities and obstacles for teachers and students in their process of teaching and learning respectively, however as of march of 2021 covid restrictions started to be raised in Colombia and the Ministry of Education (MEN) implemented a new method that consisted in alternating online and face-to-face classes meaning that students would return to school for some hours per week while also having some online classes, this phenomenon is called Blended Learning Approach, this new method was implemented for a period of time, as full online classes did; finally, after the pandemic got more controlled, the government made the decision to implement full face to face classes again, just applying some biosecurity routines by part of all the members involved in schools settings, so, students moved from B-learning sessions to presential ones.

Blended Learning was not a new concept worldwide, but in Colombia, it was, especially in public schools. however, these new methodologies applied in teaching/learning processes brought big challenges for both teachers and students, the biggest obstacles were mainly related to the lack of access some students had to required devices or to the internet and, the lack of technological literacy, a big quantity of teachers and students did not know how to use the different kind of tools and platforms that were available for developing an online class and which would be the most appropriate way to integrate this opposite method; all those obstacles mentioned previously generated several sorts of thoughts and beliefs in students and mainly in their parents; these beliefs were about the performance the students were having on their academic classes and activities, the most common ones were negative, arguing that the students were not learning anything through those methods; these beliefs were supported because many of them were getting worse grades or were not achieving the objectives of the teacher and the institutions. However, only the curricular knowledge was

being taken into account ignoring other kinds of knowledge that could have emerged as a consequence of E-learning and B-learning classes.

Other knowledges are those that emerge as a result of any kind of activity or action, however, it is completely unknown to most people since its origin is completely indirect and unintentional, this phenomenon is named knowledge-others, and although there are not many researches focused on this concept, the education during the pandemic can be a clear example of it, since lots of people had to learn how to use technological resources; although nowadays, the students are back to face to face classes, there are many questions about what happened with all that knowledge other than the students could learn during the pandemic, however, there are two specific questions that we are looking to answer through this study. Did the students learn during the pandemic? With this question, we are not just seeking to know if they did or did not, but also what are those knowledge-others they may recognize; the other fact we are aiming to figure out is how the knowledge others acquired during the pandemic is impacting their current English learning process.

It is important to know these effects because even if education is being held once again inside a classroom, the future is unwritten and in case online classes have to be implemented once again teachers will know what's coming, and having this knowledge would help them improve their teaching strategies

It can also be said that this research would contribute to the application of Blended Learning in the future, not only during moments of crisis like in a pandemic, because we are in an era of technology and students are more likely to use their phones, social media, and online tools more often than before. According to Tayebnik and Puteh (2012), in agreement with Oh and Park (2009) and Davis and Fill (2007), blended instruction offers teachers the possibility to spend more time with learners in both small groups and individually, and to

create a flexible and active learning environment that has the potential to change students' experiences and outcomes.

On the other hand, students could have also acquired different knowledge that was not included in the curriculum, this is what is called "knowledge others" so the purpose of this research is to discover what other things students learned that could have impacted their lives and their learning process in their future. According to Palermo (2008).

Literature Review

Some researches can be found in which the results obtained in some contexts when teaching English using the B-learning method is exposed, the results obtained were very divided and on some occasions, they had some specific points they were looking for to evaluate in terms of the performance obtained by students in the English language.

Regarding the questionnaires that were carried out in one of the investigations, in the multiple-choice questions no variations were observed between the group that received face-to-face classes compared to the B-learning group, however, in terms of open questions, the experimental group obtained better performance than the control group (Esparaza et al., 2015).

In another investigation in which a control group was not used, but only an experimental group whose previous knowledge of the language was evaluated and, after applying B-learning, contrasting the performance obtained by the students in terms of the four skills for the reception and production of English language (listening, speaking, reading and writing), a substantial improvement was obtained in terms of their mastery, showing great effectiveness when applying this teaching/learning approach (Roldan, 2018).

On the other hand, not all researchers reached the same results, as some investigations got results with no differences between learning through B-learning and traditional education, as Sezen Tosun's research (2015) in which there was no significant difference in the performance of the control and experimental groups when evaluating the learning obtained on vocabulary in the English language.

In addition, not all the researchers were looking at the performance of the participants. Still, also their perceptions about the B-learning approach, the experimental group as well as the control group did not feel confident about their performance in the pretest, however, in the posttest, the experimental group felt more confident about their performance. Throughout an interview, the experimental group shared their belief that B-Learning is a helpful approach because it is possible to take advantage of all the technological and online tools and clarify some topics and concepts face to face (Esparaza et al., 2015).

However, the investigations found that although they were in different locations and different experimental groups, all of them were carried out in concise academic periods, therefore it is necessary to carry out more investigations in this field to be able to contrast the results obtained previously and reach more accurate conclusions.

Research Question

What were the "knowledge others" that English students acquired during the pandemic times?

Justification

This research is being conducted because for the researchers it is important to show that there could be different kinds of knowledge that students could acquire that differ from the content that is in the curriculum and this "knowledge other" can still be very helpful in their academic process as well as their everyday life.

COVID-19 was in many ways an opportunity to learn and adapt to the circumstances. Students, teachers, and parents had to quickly change their way of thinking about the way knowledge was acquired and learned and online learning was made mandatory worldwide. This sudden change meant that education had to be adapted to an online environment and even if it was exceedingly difficult for some people it gave the world a new way of thinking and it meant that education can't ever be stopped.

This realization made it possible for people to start thinking out of the box and gathering new information that they didn't have any access to before or didn't have the need to explore. That new knowledge helped the world evolve and it's now prepared to face something similar that may happen in the future.

Objectives

General objective

Identify from students' narratives how were the "knowledge others" acquired as a result of implementing Blended-Learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Specific Objectives

- A. Identify the student's perceptions about their "knowledge others" that they acquired during the pandemic times.

B. Describe the “Knowledge others” that students acquired during the period that B-Learning was implemented.

C. Recognize how students are applying their "knowledge others" in current times.

CENTRAL QUESTION	GENERAL OBJECTIVE	TOOLS
What was the knowledge-others acquired by the students by the implementation of and B-learning classes?	Identify from students’ narratives what the knowledge-others acquired as a result of implementing blended-learning during the Covid 19 pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus group - Narratives
SPECIFIC QUESTIONS	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	
How do students perceive their knowledge after B-Learning classes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify the students’ perceptions about their knowledge after the B-learning classes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus group
What were those knowledge others the students were exposed to, and which were acquired?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe the knowledge-others students acquired during the period that B-learning classes were implemented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narratives
How do those knowledge others influence the students’ current learning process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognise the students’ perceptions about their knowledge-others and their influence on their current learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Focus group

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Theoretical Framework

The concept of “knowledge others” refers to the own knowledge that students can acquire that has nothing to do with the curriculum, as Ariza & Yara (2016) points out the concept of “knowledge others”: “can be used for ideological emancipation and development of men helping the school to become an institution that allows students to learn through critical awareness” this can help society to claim teachings that had been neglected, a clear example is students own knowledge (Ariza and Yara, p. 35).

Ariza & Yara (2016) define “knowledge others” as communities' knowledge, including knowledge about nature, social life, territoriality, and science and mathematics that make up the common sense of a community or a particular social group and define the idea of belonging and sharing an identity.

This knowledge is present in every student and during the difficult times that we went through during the Covid-19 Pandemic, students had to learn things that weren't normally taught at school and many of them had to do it by themselves as they were going on with their learning.

This led to the conclusion that even if students had issues with the subject, English for example, they still learned something during the pandemic, and that knowledge was also important because it can help students in the future.

Due to the Covid-19 virus pandemic that since March 2020 forced the country to be in total quarantine for several months, students from both public and private schools nationwide had to migrate to receive their classes virtually immediately and unexpectedly; when the restrictions started to be diminished, the schools had to move to a model which mixes traditional face to face classes and virtual classes (e-learning) getting transversality between them, this educational model is known as Blended Learning (B-learning) and although this concept is relatively new in Colombia, in other countries it has been given greater relevance for several years.

Blended learning could be defined as that model where teaching and learning are not based purely on virtual classes, nor on traditional classes that are entirely face-to-face, but rather those face-to-face classes that are supplemented with classes based on different types of instructions through technology (Tosun, 2015). This model has also been connected to other fields of education such as English Teaching Methodology, educational technology, computer-assisted language learning (CALL), and distance education (Picciano et al., 2013).

On the other hand, the benefits that this teaching model offers are established since it brings great facilities such as a more flexible, active, interactive, encouraging, and inspiring environment (Zhang and Zhu, 2018). One of the areas where studies have been carried out applying this model is the teaching of English as a second language or as a foreign language (ESL), highlighting the great benefit that can be obtained from all the currently available tools.

The implementation of B-learning takes a major value in the teaching of ESL since compelling reasons are identified over other teaching models, an improvement in the pedagogies for teaching and learning can be achieved, greater access and flexibility, and an increase in cost-benefits (Graham et al., 2005)

However, when implementing them, it is observed that Colombia was not prepared for these teaching-learning processes virtually, and although it was at that moment that this issue was most evident, some researches from years ago show the unsuccessful attempts of the Ministry of Information Technologies and communication (MinTIC) and the Ministry of Education for implementing technology in the classroom, since there are some facts as the lack of training for teachers to use them (Parra et al., 2014) as well as little access to the internet for an important part of the population (Rey, 2020), among others; nevertheless, it is important to highlight those emergent tools and means that are becoming essential and which are based on technology.

Therefore, technology has become the main point in the relationship teaching-learning. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of new educational models such as Blended Learning (BL), besides existing models, such is the case of e-learning. Technology became the best tool used in the classroom. Many academic institutions apply ICT as a strategy in the curriculum. In the ideal context, this is an excellent instrument to achieve the proposed goals, due to the facilities connecting people in real-time anywhere around the world. This phenomenon brought advantages and challenges to the educational system. The ideas of the text are based mainly on the challenges of 1. The teachers, 2. Students, and 3. Administrative sector, in concordance with (Bernal and Parra, 2020).

The first challenge that affects the three items is the connection to the internet. Colombia, according to Departamento Nacional de Estadística (DANE, 2018) has 50.4% of connectivity, where six “Departamentos” contribute 60% of this number. In addition, the other important challenge presented in the administrative sector is the highest investment in technological infrastructure, because not only the institutions should pay for the services of telecommunication, but also the training in the use of the ICT, and finally, according to

Moskal, et al. (2013), support to students and teachers with the use of LMS (Learning Management System) through help desk services.

On the other hand, teachers have a great challenge in the 21st century and they should not just teach a specific subject. Teachers' praxis should establish different teaching and learning objectives. Analyzing the review of the literature, the lack of training and domain of the ICT and the motivation of students are important factors that influence the application of the BL. In line with Moskal, et al. (2013), the absence of national, regional, and local policies does not support digital culture and literacy, therefore every one of the agents should improve in this field. Finally, the invitation is to create new strategies that include the whole target student adapting the theory to the real context. In conclusion, the most important factor that the teacher must include in the curriculum is the student's needs. Because the background is really important in the moment of learning, It should be the duty of the teacher and the institutions. The innovation and application at the moment to teach and the awareness in LMS and ICT are keys in the learning and teaching process in agreement with Muhtia et al. (2013).

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the world in a way it has never seen in recent years, according to UNICEF (2020) "schools around the world have closed, affecting 1.6 billion learners – approximately 91 percent of the world's enrolled students" (p. 1). This presented a new problem for education as many of these students didn't have the resources, time, or easy access to online learning as a study at the University of Wolkite made by Tadesse & Muluye (2020) points out: "The pandemic of COVID-19 pandemic is affecting schools, students, teachers, and parents. The COVID-19 crisis increases social inequality in schools". (p 161).

With online learning being mandatory for everybody, students, especially those that come from rural areas, had a hard time attending their classes, Stanistreet et al. (2021) say “In contexts where significant numbers of learners are from deprived areas or homes, out of reach of technology and the internet, new gaps were created between learners” (p 628). This can be seen in the context of Colombia, as according to UNESCO there is a population between 25% and 50% that have no internet access, this is worrying because it means that millions of children in the country had to stop their studies. But besides lack of resources, students also started showing symptoms of stress, depression, and anxiety. (Chandasari, 2020).

The most common approach that institutions had during lockdown was having all students attend their classes on screen at the same time, but this has proven not to be highly successful or effective because as Zhao and Watterson (2021) say it resulted in “distress, disengagement, and much less personal interaction and learning than traditional face-to-face situations” (p 8). Not to mention that lockdown may have people feeling stress, fear, and anxiety, such as a fright of dying, a fear of their relatives dying (Sahu, 2020). This stress may affect the mental, and physical health of students and it also impacts them academically as many undergraduate students won’t be able to graduate (Teresse & Muluye, 2020).

In conclusion, the covid-19 pandemic has left a mark on our education worldwide and the governments of all countries must start working on new plans to reduce the inequities that were found during this crisis and also a way to improve the mental health of students and teachers.

Paradigms and Methods

The research has three main approaches: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method. The first one is quantitative, this theory is applied using data and statistics, besides, according

to Crowel (2014) the researcher should compare two or more variables and identify the relationship between them, therefore seeking universal laws. On the other hand, in the qualitative method approach, this theory recognizes subjectivity, because the investigator brings his perceptions to the research, as claimed by (Ratner, 2002, p.1) "the researcher is encouraged to reflect on the values and objectives" about the investigation. It is important to underline that qualitative research declares the personal reality and how the subject can interpret it, based on his experiences and socio-cultural issues, therefore the goal is to apply the historical hermeneutic and interpretative paradigm in the seek, due to this theory recognizes the worldview through the language and how this creates the reality. In concordance with Laverly (2003), "language and understanding are inseparable structural aspects of humans". Besides, the narrative will be used as a technique, also accomplishing the general objective and answering the research question. According to (Riessman, 2008, p.10). the investigator asks the target about their lives and experiences "he can understand, these private constructions of identity must mesh with a community of life stories". Finally, mixed methods are the combination or integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

This paper seeks to answer the questions: What were the "knowledge others" that English students acquired during the pandemic times? This answer will be achieved with the general objective: Identity from students' narratives and what were the "knowledge others" acquired as a result of implementing Blended-Learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the original proposal, the test is going to develop by qualitative research and a historical hermeneutic paradigm using students' narratives.

Data Collection

Focus group

The researchers will conduct a focus group because it is an easy way to gather information from the subject, and it will help them give proper feedback besides the questions can open a wide variety of answers from the subjects which will make it very important at the end when analyzing the information gathered and it will lead to very interesting conclusions.

Students' narratives

The second technique that will be used is students' narratives using a short tale and an explanation of the students what they think "knowledge others" is, it will help the researchers get a better understanding of what the subjects think about the topic of the researches and it also helps the subjects reflect on their knowledge and get a deeper understanding of the many things they learned during the COVID 19 pandemic and the blended learning method that was implemented during those times.

Our research will be developed in a public school in Bello city, this school before the pandemic used few technological resources to present the classes, during the pandemic this school had to implement government rules about keeping developing the classes using virtual platforms, so teachers only had one week to adapt their classes to virtual ones; the school is located in strata number 3, So, most of its students are in strata 2 and 3.

Our population is based on 6 students who were in fifth grade, but now they are coursing sixth grade, the students are about 11 and 12 years old, socioeconomically they are in strata 1, 2, and 3, and all of them passed by the same transitions, from face to face classes to completely virtual classes, then were part of the alternation between online classes and face to face classes (Blended learning) and currently they are full presential classes again.

Findings

After applying the instruments that were designed for the research, we found a lot of useful and interesting information about what the students experienced during the pandemic, their understanding of “Knowledge others” and the difficulties they faced during online and blended learning. The key findings will be presented below.

When asked about their experience with the pandemic when it first arrived and how they were able to deal with it, most of the students agreed that it was very hard, they described lockdown as “boring” and sometimes “lonely” because they didn’t like the fact that they couldn’t hang out with their friends as they used to, they also said that wearing face masks while outside was awful and sometimes it had to be worn even in their homes when a relative got sick of Covid. Overall, they understood that the pandemic was a global issue and they had to follow the rules that were established at the time but that did not mean that they liked it.

When asked about their experience learning English in a virtual setting the students unanimously agreed that it was tough to concentrate as connectivity wasn’t always good and communication with their teacher and peers was difficult. These issues align with what was stated by Albiladi & Alshareef (2019) “First, teachers might face issues when working with students on curriculum activities. Students might have difficulty communicating with peers to finish the given tasks. Second, there might be challenges with student self-management” (p. 236). This led to students not learning much about the subject as they weren’t able to enter the class or on other occasions they just weren’t interested in it, as a student said “Yo así era si cuando estaban dentro de las clases, yo me salía a propósito y decía que era la señal, mera tramposa”. Thus, the curricular goals and knowledge planned by the institution and the English teachers were not achieved ultimately, or at least, not through the teachers’ activities.

Lastly, when asked about the knowledge they acquired during these times that were outside of the curriculum, or what we call “Knowledge other”, students told us through the focus group and their writings that they were able to get several skills that helped them then and they still use now. We can divide this knowledge into two categories as shown in the table below:

KNOWLEDGE OTHERS	
Academic uses	Non-Academic uses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online learning autonomy. - Online tools usage (Zoom, google translate, google classroom, meet, Teams, Quizzes). - Word 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Human experiences. - Covid-19 and pandemic management. - Recycling. - Environmental care. - New social media apps like TikTok. - Use apps for English learning such as Duolingo - Use online video games.

As shown in the table, the students learned a significant amount of knowledge that although it did not fill the teachers’ expectations nor follow the institutional requirements, is a knowledge that is being used currently by the students and can be applied in their contemporary learning process; in addition, it helps to demystify those beliefs which are spread among different members of the educative population that aim to highlight that “students did not learn anything during the pandemic time”.

Conclusión

In brief students’ perceptions about the “knowledge others” are lacking in an academic way, and due to that the students talk about their negative experiences because the strategies applied in the classroom don't allow engagement with the concepts, therefore the students take advantage of the teacher and explain their attitude, due to they lose motivation

to learn the language and other opportunities. In contrast, the students acquired competencies on platforms and apps that support cheating in their tasks.

In conclusion, “knowledge others” is a concept introduced at the beginning related to decolonization, however, the research allowed us to identify some knowledge that was divided into two categories; academic use (students apply the knowledge in the class) and Non-academic use. Therefore the seek achieved describes them. This knowledge according to our target didn't acquire any knowledge in relation to English, but it supports a student's competencies such as digital skills and autonomous learning. On the other hand, the Non-academic uses that aren't used in the classroom by the students are important in other aspects, such as environment, society, and culture.

Nowadays, students have not been using much of the “knowledge others” that they acquired during the pandemic as classes are completely face-to-face again and there are little to no online courses anymore. They still use some of the social media that were new during the pandemic like TikTok, but it is not used for academic purposes. However, those different kinds of knowledge still remain in the students' brains and it is safe to say that it won't be wasted as they may encounter some opportunities in the future to put them into practice.

Recommendations

For this kind of research, it is important to look out for different demographics as it was made with fifth graders but it can be done with students of any age and their “knowledge others” could also be very meaningful in order to understand this concept that is relatively new and very few people have dived into.

Limitations

The biggest limitation that was presented for the researchers was the management of time. All of us work and have extra curricular activities which made very difficult for us to be fully involved in the research. Some of us couldn't be part of the application of the instruments therefore it was sometimes hard to analyze the results as we weren't there with the students when they were answering the questions.

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