



Exploring Assessment and Feedback: EFL E-Learning in Saboyá during Covid-19

Explorando la evaluación y retroalimentación: EFL e-learning en saboyá durante el covid-19

* Original Research Article


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Submission: August 02, 2023


Accepted: September 18, 2023


Published: September 22, 2023


How to cite this article:

Castillo-Barrero, J.C., Chaparro-Preciado, A.F., Herrera-Sánchez, A.T., & Morales-Hernández, K.L., (2023). Exploring Assessment and Feedback: EFL E-Learning in Saboyá during Covid-19. *ENLETAWA Journal*, 16(2), 1-33. e14379.  <https://doi.org/10.19053/2011835X.14379>

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Abstract

During the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers from a rural institution in Saboyá experienced a negative impact on their academic processes due to limited student access to the internet. The objective of this research was to identify and analyze the assessment strategies, mediated in e-learning, for English as a foreign language classes in a rural school. This investigation was based on a qualitative case study in which teachers from the institution voluntarily participated. The information was collected through questionnaires, artifacts, and field notes, and was analyzed through a triangulation process. The results revealed that the assessment strategy employed in this institution focused on the development of worksheets exchanged throughout WhatsApp. Consequently, the assessment had a primarily summative orientation. Furthermore, communication was limited to phone calls which resulted in a deficiency in the feedback process

Keywords: Assessment, assessment strategies, e-learning, English as a foreign language, worksheets, Covid-19

Resumen

Durante la pandemia de Covid-19, los docentes de una institución rural en Saboyá experimentaron un impacto negativo en sus procesos académicos debido al acceso limitado a internet por parte de los estudiantes. El objetivo de esta investigación fue identificar y analizar las estrategias de evaluación implementadas en las clases de inglés como lengua extranjera, mediadas por *e-learning*, en una escuela rural. Esta investigación se basó en un estudio de caso de tipo cualitativo en el que participaron voluntariamente los docentes de la institución. La información fue recopilada a través de cuestionarios, artefactos y notas de campo, y se analizó mediante un proceso de triangulación. Los resultados revelaron que la estrategia de evaluación aplicada en esta institución se enfocó en el desarrollo de guías de trabajo intercambiadas a través de WhatsApp. Por lo tanto, la evaluación tuvo una orientación principalmente sumativa. Asimismo, la comunicación se limitó a llamadas telefónicas, lo que resultó en una deficiencia en el proceso de retroalimentación.

Palabras clave: Evaluación, estrategias de evaluación, aprendizaje en línea, inglés como lengua extranjera, guías de trabajo, Covid-19

Introduction

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Colombian rural education encountered a series of new challenges. Those circumstances forced a transition to virtual instruction, ensuring the continuity of educational services while imposing certain limitations on the instructional process itself. Ahmed and Opoku (2021), affirmed that “globally, educational institutions faced many challenges in delivering teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in the adoption of technology supported learning” (p. 7). As a result, student assessment emerged as a critical concern, influencing teachers' performance and the objective of facilitating meaningful learning, particularly in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction. To effectively address these challenges, it became imperative to develop appropriate assessment strategies that align with students' learning processes.

Adding to this, it is the constraint posed by limited access to resources and materials needed to devise effective assessment methods within e-learning environments. In accordance with this, Rusman, Maskun, and Suroto (2021) noted that “the constraints (...) are learning inputs in the form of: media, teaching materials, aids, lecturer qualifications, and learning devices” (p. 6). Additionally, the absence of in-person interaction and paths to provide constructive feedback to students within virtual learning settings exacerbates the task of assessment.

Accordingly, assessment is a fundamental aspect of ensuring learning. Sánchez Mendiola & Martínez González (2020) asserted that assessment instruments examine the fulfillment of teaching objectives, and provide orientations to teaching practices (pp. 53). As lecturing methodologies have had to be modified, undoubtedly assessment has to be performed considering the new contextual conditions. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, online assessment instruments have become an affordable option that allows verifying learners' performance and providing feedback. Bardhan, Mohanty & Dey (2020) argued that in order to make online learning more participative and interactive, online tools such as games, polls, forms, and learning platforms, among others can be integrated.

However, in rural settings where there is no proper internet coverage and where the interactions between teachers and students are extremely limited, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020) calls attention to the fact that “most teachers have not only had to re-plan and adapt education processes -including adjusting methods and curricula, designing materials, and diversifying the media, formats, and platforms used-” (p.9). Hence, teachers have resorted to more flexible assessment methods, including the adaptation and creation of materials to facilitate this process through the use of available technologies to mediate the assessment. This situation is indispensable enough for current education that even some educational institutions have opted to either temporarily suspend assessments, or adopt diverse perspectives and

methodologies with the aim of assessing and validating learning (UNESCO, 2020). After all, it is important to design instruments considering contextual needs.

Because of the aforementioned, one of the contextual needs that teachers must consider is the limited access to the technological resources available to assess students in rural areas. Even though the teacher has the intention to use various online tools for assessing, it becomes a difficult task because they cannot use them to integrate most of their students. Ligarretto (2020) presents the statistics reports regarding internet connectivity in rural and urban areas taken from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) and warns us that only about 26 % of students in rural areas have connectivity, compared to 89 % in urban areas. Having said that, rural teachers are dealing with these kinds of challenges, since rural learners neither have internet coverage to access their lessons properly, nor the capacity to be aware of their progress, because of the lack of accurate assessment procedures in e-learning contexts.

It has been acknowledged that technology has turned out to be relevant for teaching and learning a foreign language. In this respect, Fernández, Álvarez & Mariño (2013) mention that "the effective integration of new technologies in educational systems becomes a first-order necessity in the globalized world in which we live" (p. 275). Nevertheless, this match between technology and learning is arduous to achieve in rural areas in Colombia, knowing the national internet coverage statistics previously mentioned. Thus, since instruction is virtual and

online assessment instruments are not able to be used in rural settings, teachers face adversities when properly developing their lessons.

In the same way, assessment during the pandemic has been affected due to the lack of in-person interactions. On this matter, Hattie and Timperley (2007) state: “There are aspects of feedback which influence learning positively and develop feedback to improve learning” (p.87). It means that assessment exercises and good monitoring of the students through feedback, leads to meaningful learning. Nonetheless, in Colombian rural settings, this sort of effect mediated by feedback is highly reduced as teachers are not able to interact with students. For educators, it constitutes a vast issue because “direct observation is always a prerequisite for feedback, providing the observer with specific data for feedback analysis” (Jug, Jiang & Bean, 2019, p. 245). Therefore, in contexts where internet connection is uncommon and teacher’s observation is almost null, assessing becomes a defiance even higher.

This study took place during the second semester of 2021 in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, which corresponded to our period of internship in a school located in a rural area of the municipality of Saboyá, Colombia. As a matter of fact, our intervention was limited to offering support and guidance to headquarters’ teachers with respect to the creation of materials for their classes. This educational institution follows the “New School” model, and as stated by Urrea & Figueiredo (2018), it is characterized by the fact of being multi-grade and for making use of worksheets.

Correspondingly, the target population for this study were the EFL teachers from that rural institution, as they were pushed to re-establish assessment strategies that allowed them to verify students' learning, even when the social conditions were not appropriate. In light of the previous, this situation leads to state the following research question:

- What kind of assessment and feedback strategies were implemented in EFL classes mediated by e-learning in a rural school?

Consequently, the research objectives are presented as follows:

- To identify the general panorama of assessment and feedback strategies in a rural school located in Saboyá mediated by e-learning in EFL classes.
- To analyze the assessment and feedback strategies implemented for EFL classes in e-learning environments in a rural school.

Ethical considerations

This study takes into account the law 1581 of 2012 which protects participants' personal information ensuring their privacy and anonymity, as asserted by the Congreso de la República de Colombia (2012). The EFL teachers participated voluntarily and an informed consent was provided not only to them, but also to the research project tutor and the directors of the rural institution in Saboyá, prior to starting the research. There was not economic compensation neither for their collaboration nor information supplied.

Theoretical framework

Given the fact that the ongoing pandemic has reformed diverse educational spheres, including teaching through virtuality and the assessment process, the theory focuses on discussing the interrelationship between the techniques used as assessment strategies and the virtual learning environment. In that sense, it was explored the concept of assessment to subsequently denote the associations with the notions of assessment strategies and feedback. Later, it was acknowledged the frame of English as a foreign language instruction and how e-learning intervenes in it. The previous postulates conform to the basis of this research and are described below:

Assessment Mediated by Virtuality as a Tool to Monitor E-Learning Processes:

Within a specific rural context, in which virtual education conditions are sought, teachers are required to design evaluative tools that allow them to track pupils' learning progress, to identify their appropriation of content in the course of lessons, and at the same time, to create some instruments for grading their outcomes. According to (AFT, NCME and NEA, 1990, as cited in Kuruvilla, 2018) assessment makes reference to the different measures that are applied in order to gather information about students' levels, weaknesses, strengths, and learning progress. Additionally, the assessment process deals with the fact of collecting

information about learners' progress regarding their communicative competence to provide feedback and to determine instructional efficacy. Thus, implementing an assessment exercise during the pandemic for EFL classes conforms to a notable effort, since the ICT availability involves the planning of certain methodological strategies with certain restrictions. Teachers' instruments must try to obtain a wider view of learners' communicative abilities progression through different techniques and procedures.

For that, educators need to establish what is the scope of their assessment methodology. According to Yambi (2020), assessment can be subdivided into formative and summative. In terms of formative assessment, it is asserted that it has the purpose of identifying and enhancing students' performance progressively, taking a relevant role in their learning and assimilation of topics; whereas the summative one is more related to grading and reviewing students' overall work and consequently achievement.

During a class, in pandemic conditions, a teacher may not be able to value the same aspects that permit the recognition of learners' lesson appropriation as they used to inside the physical classrooms. Lack of interaction, with the lecturer and between the students, can reduce the range of possibilities for natural appraisal. In those terms, and making allusion to the formative strategies, there are some specific concepts that can be classified into this type of assessment because of their attributes. Nagowah & Nagowah (2009), developed

the meaning of oral assessment whose focal point is on checking students' communicative skills, appropriation of contents, and their effectiveness. Moreover, self-assessment is defined as measuring someone's own work, progress, and learning process. Additionally, informal assessment verifies learners' progress and learning through brainstorming, debates, body language interpretation and participation. Likewise, informal assessment is the dynamic in which the teachers can evidence learning throughout the course of their daily activities. This means that teachers have to be aware of students' comments, responses, questions and other aspects in order to recognize their understanding of content (Bell & Cowie, 2001).

Nonetheless, even in the category of summative assessment strategies, grading also includes a relevant scale of interaction and association. For instance, summative assessment can be associated with the terms of formal assessment and peer assessment. The first one compares learners' performance and evaluates their general achievement (Nagowah & Nagowah, 2009). This scheme also focuses on grading students and making use of instruments such as quizzes, written papers, and exams. The second one, "requires students to provide either feedback or grades (or both) to their peers on a product or a performance, based on the criteria of excellence for that product or event which students may have been involved in determining" (Boud and Falchikov, 2007 as cited on Spiller, 2012, p.10). Often the instruments to assess their peers, equivalent to checklists, are

either provided by the educators or created by learners themselves (Nagowah & Nagowah, 2009).

Similarly, at the moment of discussing assessment, it is necessary to introduce the term feedback. As stated by Hattie & Timperley (2007), “feedback is conceptualized as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding” (p.81). In this sense, when it comes to assessing, this information takes a relevant role, and it is a particular feature that cannot be ignored even in virtuality. In regard to this, Yambi (2020) draws attention to this topic, and states its importance due to the fact that it allows students to achieve their own learning process and also on both, the teaching methods and instruction given in an effort to enhance their learning goals in a meaningful manner.

The research purpose and setting are connected to the earlier definitions, as teachers need to adapt, create, or develop assessment instruments while considering the context of the student populations. These aspects enable teachers to effectively implement assessment mechanisms within e-learning environments for EFL students. This entails that teachers must consider every opportunity they have when interacting with their pupils, assessing them in light of the diverse limitations and challenges that are unique to EFL lessons in contrast to the previous conditions in rural areas.

In any case, the assessment process needs to encompass a wide range of possibilities to accurately gauge student outcomes and learning progress. By taking into account the aforementioned concepts, a foundation was established for understanding the assessment strategies employed by EFL teachers in this rural institution, allowing for an analysis of their characteristics and implementation methods.

EFL Instruction Mediated By E-Learning in Rural Settings:

The COVID-19 pandemic demanded a transformation in the English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and learning process, compelling a transition to virtual modalities. In this sense, Avrinia (2022), stated that a significant change like this prompted a discernible reliance on e-learning methodologies, wherein the use of information and communication technologies alongside internet networks became essential for running classes and academic activities. Nevertheless, the extension of online learning to rural areas encounters challenges due to unstable internet connections and the scarcity of learning support devices, as claimed by Atmojo & Nugroho (2020). As a consequence of these factors, EFL educators hold a prevailing opinion that the advancement of rural students' English language proficiency is limited under virtual conditions attributable to the improper implementation of language study and practice. Thus, teachers resorted to disseminating instructional materials for students to develop at home in order to enhance and reinforce their learning.

Avrinia (2022), further advances the discourse by categorizing e-learning into two modalities, synchronous and asynchronous. The former involves real-time interaction wherein learners and teachers converge in a shared virtual space simultaneously. Conversely, asynchronous learning, which is considered the most common e-learning modality, lets students work on their own schedule and engage with course material independently, often facilitated through mechanisms such as WhatsApp (pp.15). By considering the preceding notions, WhatsApp assumes a significant role in online education by enabling communication between learners and instructors, since the platform serves as a channel for the exchange of knowledge and teaching-learning material.

In essence, it becomes noticeable that difficulties related to internet connectivity and access to technological devices in rural settings might hinder the effective instruction and acquisition of a foreign language such as English. Hence, this situation requires an exploration of pedagogical alternatives capable of effectively addressing the restrictions prevalent in these areas. This inquiry is intrinsically linked to our research, as we endeavor to comprehend the strategies employed by the rural EFL teachers of the institution when the instruction shifted toward virtuality.

Method

Research Design

This is a case study carried out under a qualitative approach since the endeavor here is to describe and explore the phenomenon of assessment

strategies implemented by the teachers of a rural school. As a first notion, Creswell (2009) argues that “the process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from a particular to a general theme, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data”. (p.32). This investigation is identified as a case study due to the intention of contemplating the bounded assessment system of a rural school in the middle of the pandemic, and the selection of teachers and their educational strategies as the object of study. For this reason, this is a case study, as "a qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). Hence, implementing this kind of research allows us to have a notion of the course of action because it is generally useful for addressing the problems that take place in an academic background (Tomal, 2010).

Correspondingly, this paper has the approach of a descriptive case study investigation as it has established the features of the affair, departing from the contributors’ voices. A research of these characteristics executes “the in-depth study of one or more instances of a phenomenon in its real-life context that reflects the perspectives of the participant involved in the phenomenon” (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2007, p. 447). With that in mind, this research fulfills the requirements of this type of study since it is focused on a particular population who are the teachers, it has a specific phenomenon which are the assessment strategies, and they share a particular and real context. Once delimited the type of case study, it allows us to

carry out the attempt to describe, analyze, and understand the phenomena, their interactions, relations, and circumstances under the parameters of rugosity and consistency.

In this respect, the outline of this research is established by considering the designation of instruments for data collection: questionnaires, artifacts, field notes, and the systematic data analysis method. Lastly, there is a section on results and discussion, followed by their respective conclusions.

Data Collection Methods

It is a matter of importance to apply the data collection instruments that suit each research study in order to obtain appropriate data. According to this, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) mention that it is crucial to design and select accurate data-gathering instruments since it enables researchers to tackle, synthesize, and point out the research endeavors. Contemplating this, and the phenomena of study, three instruments were applied in order to contribute to the project's development. Those instruments are: teacher's assessment artifacts, a questionnaire, and the field notes in which the internship experiences were stored, regarding teachers' instruction related to assessment.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were selected as an instrument for information collection due to they "are useful for gathering original data about people, their behavior, experiences and social interactions, attitudes and opinions, and awareness of

events" (McLafferty, 2010 and Parfitt, 2005, as cited in McGuirk and O'Neill, 2016, p. 3). In this sense, questionnaires helped us to obtain first-hand information from staff teachers about the strategies, limitations, and tools that they use to assess in their immediate context.

Artifacts

Artifacts "are raw records of classroom practice, which reveal teachers' instructional efforts and students' learning products" as mentioned by Borko, Kuffner, Arnold & Creighton (2007). The artifacts that were requested from staff educators include any tools designed during the pandemic to check student's learning; for instance, quizzes, feedback forms, exams, oral exam descriptions, the evidence of the application of brainstorming, oral and written exercises that allow students' participation, homework, rubrics, and printed worksheets solved. Particularly, artifacts were chosen, since they provide us with a closer view of the strategies performed by teachers during this period with the aim of assessing.

Field Notes

In order to complete the baseline for conventional data triangulation and to reach a higher degree of accuracy, there was a compilation of the most significant field notes related to comments and feedback received from staff teachers. These notes contain ideas about how teachers performed strategies and mechanisms to carry out the assessment process for EFL apprentices. This instrument is crucial given that it allows us to acquire extra detailed information regarding lecturers'

perceptions of their lessons, pupils, activities developed and assessment procedures. Regarding the validity of field notes as an instrument, (Hinds, Vogel and Clarke-Steffen, 1997, as cited in Phillippi and Lauderdale, 2018) asserted that “field notes contextualize the study and provide perspective on participants’ lives that can be useful when looking at the data in the future or examining perceptions across time” (p. 383). Consequently, all these instruments are aligned to the purpose of gathering the proper data that enriches the understanding of the studied phenomenon and conforms to the ground of further analysis.

Data Analysis

The aim of this research project was to analyze the strategies that were implemented by the teachers of a rural school located in Saboyá for assessing their students and providing feedback during the Covid-19 pandemic, applying the E-learning model. Therefore, after collecting the data, we proceed to develop a data triangulation “whose objective is to verify the trends detected in a certain group of observations” (Vallejo and De Franco, 2009, p. 122). Thus, a data matrix was created and employed in order to analyze the main topics, the repeated words, phrases and ideas across the answers obtained through the questionnaires under the categories or codes of assessment strategies and feedback strategies.

Subsequently, the compatibility of the encoded data with the principal features of the artifacts provided by teachers was examined and interpreted to elucidate if the answers fit the actions taken in the phenomena of study. Lastly, a rigorous scrutiny of the field notes written during the period of the internship was

performed, to validate the two previous sources and relate the outcomes with theory. This triangulation classification is regarded as employing various data sources to acquire diverse perspectives on a subject with the aim of confirming its validity (Arias, 2000, as cited in Vallejo and De Franco, 2009).

Findings and Discussion

On the basis of the data collected through the instruments, the findings elucidate the set of tactics performed by staff teachers from this rural school with the intention of assessing the academic growth of their students and their language skills during the pandemic. In this order, the information gathered for this study provided the understanding and the relevance of the practical assessment adaptation in rural contexts during the pandemic period. In this sense, the results displayed the categories of assessment strategies and feedback. The first one has two subcategories which are content and activities, and an effort to accomplish both assessment categories; while the second one has one subcategory called Unintentional feedback segregation because of poverty.

Assessment strategies

Assessing constitutes an important aspect of the learning process in EFL students because it allows teachers to proceed by considering learners' achievement and their skills in the English language. In this sense, Tosuncuoglu (2018) asserted that the assessment of EFL learning "reveals how many students have achieved their learning objectives in a foreign language, who has any difficulties or problems with their learning, and which techniques are useful in

teaching a foreign language” (p. 163). Given the inherent difficulties that the pandemic brought, it was evidenced that teachers developed the following strategies to assess their learners, as it is demonstrated in the data below:

Questionnaire - Transcript 1:

Question: What strategies do you implement for assessing your students in EFL lessons during the pandemic?

Answer:

- The implemented strategies for assessing students during the pandemic have been **phone and video calls**, videos in which each learner socializes their work and **printed worksheets**.

Questionnaire - Transcript 2:

Question: How do you deal with the assessment of students in an online-learning model?

Answer:

- It was a complex process. We took into account the development of **worksheets**.

Questionnaire - Transcript 3:

Question: How did the pandemic affect your assessment processes in your rural school?

Answer:

- It was a bit difficult to detect progress, we always tried to interact with the children. Evidence from **workshops** was delivered and collected **every 15 days**, the evidence was sent and received via **WhatsApp** every day, and there was a schedule for making personal **video calls**.

In regards to transcripts 1, 2, and 3, it was reflected that the use of worksheets was the principal strategy that teachers implemented under the conditions of social distance and internet connectivity insufficiency previously described. It means that their teaching procedures during the pandemic were deeply arranged to asynchronous learning mediated by the creation of worksheets. Furthermore, teachers claimed that these were sent and received through WhatsApp channels within a prudent period of time.

This strategy is supported by Urrea and Figueiredo's (2018) notions regarding the teachers' role in the New School model, in which teachers guide the learning process of their students through the use of worksheets. Likewise, worksheets allow teachers to evaluate their learners and establish their promotion to the next grade. Thereby, in the course of this time, the learners' assessment was focused on the accurate development of the worksheets. This evaluative methodology is fully supported by artifacts collected in the field.

In this respect, worksheets might be an underestimated tool in the teaching environment, but they constitute a crucial advantage mechanism that permits teachers to track their students' content apprehension and discernment. Regarding this, Dr. Lee (2014) states that "as an assessment tool, worksheets can be used by teachers to

understand students' previous knowledge, outcome of learning, and the process of learning. Concurrently, they can enable students to monitor the progress of their own learning" (p. 96).

Content and activities

To further understand the attributes and nature of the approach that uses worksheets as an assessment tool, it is crucial to identify the characteristics of the activities addressed by those instruments. In this sense, the following transcripts and examples provide us with a broad perspective on the operation of worksheets.

Questionnaire - Transcript 4:

Question: What strategies do you implement for assessing your students in EFL lessons during the pandemic?

Answer:

- In order to assess during the pandemic, we use **word search**, **crosswords** and exercises of **completing phrases** and **correspondence** according to the **academic level**.

Field Note # 7:

DATE: Sep 21

- The participant teacher requested to reduce the number of activities from 5 to 3 for the **worksheet** "Feelings and Emotions" & "The Fruits", since the lesson would focus on **vocabulary reviews**. The strategy would involve **correspondence (image and meaning)**, **crosswords**, and **complete sentence exercises**. In accordance with **assessing** students, it was suggested to modify the lessons and **worksheets** in order to review specific

vocabulary by taking into account the topic, the estimated time that was predestined for the development of the activities, and the **learners' English level**.

In light of the former, following the statements of transcript 4 and field note 7, it can be inferred that the worksheets were planned and created by contemplating the grade and consequential English level of learners. Hence, the type of exercises along with the complexity of the topics varied depending on students' language proficiency. Concerning this aspect, Paez (2017) affirms that the worksheets or the materials used should cover clear instructions and learning strategies according to the student's level to achieve determined goals. Thus, these claims are substantiated by the artifacts that are found in the annexes section of this paper.

Within the activities that are found in the worksheets, there were crosswords, alphabet soups, correspondence exercises, completing sentences, and content related to other disciplinary areas. As a result, the worksheet activities allowed learners to practice vocabulary, grammar, and spelling. In agreement with Hindeme, Iwikotan & Hounhanou (2021), "we need to test particular skills and abilities, we can test language (to find out what students have learned): Grammar, Vocabulary, Spelling, Pronunciation. We can also test skills (to find out what students can do): Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing". Thereupon, the evidence demonstrates that the instruments created with the objective of assessing the

pupils in this rural school had an approach in the technical use of the language and not in students' production or skills.

An Effort to Accomplish Both Assessment Categories

In an effort to identify the types of assessment implemented by the educators of the rural institution, by taking into account the current conditions and context, it is considered the following piece of information. The excerpt exposes the assessment instrument applied and leads to the fact of distinguishing between the summative and formative assessment.

Field Note # 6:

DATE: Sep 21

Transcript part A:

- The teacher mentions that the assessment process needs to be carried out only through the development of **worksheets (summative assessment)**, during the pandemic period. This means that strategies like assessing learners' performance in forums, expositions, and group activities (**formative assessment**) had to be postponed until return to presentially.

Correspondingly, by considering the artifacts provided and the data registered in field note 6, it can be noticed that the use of worksheets prevailed as an assessment tool during the pandemic. This instrument permitted teachers to provide grades regarding the unit of the week, which is a distinctive characteristic

of the summative assessment type. Certainly, as Williams, Kear and Rosewell (2012) claimed, “assessment should include both formative and summative elements. Formative assessment provides feedback to students; summative assessment contributes to their course results. Individual items of assessment may fulfill either or both functions” (p. 28). Nevertheless, this excerpt of data, along with artifacts and questionnaires, verify that the assessment procedures performed during the pandemic were not completely integral, since a formative approach was not denoted given the technological barriers presented in their rural community.

Feedback Strategies During The Pandemic.

Considering the aforementioned point, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, feedback became markedly restricted as students, confined to their homes, lacked the chance to engage in their customary in-person classes. Indeed, “feedback can take different forms: text and/or multimedia technologies (audio and video recordings, screenshots with audio, as well as the possibility of uploading compressed videos)” (Batalla-Busquets, Plana and Martínez 2014, p. 3). Nonetheless, as it was revealed in transcripts 1 and 3, teachers of this rural institution were limited to using WhatsApp as the leading virtual tool for interacting with their students and providing assertive feedback. The methodology can be reflected in the following piece of data:

Questionnaire - Transcript 5:

Question: How do you provide feedback to your students in the current pandemic situation?

Answer:

- Feedback is **given directly** with regard to the activities **done each week** and that week's topic. We **call** each student individually to give **suggestions, corrections and extra explanations** of the topics with **videos, images and text messages**.

This feedback practice was confirmed by the artifacts stored during the research, as some of the worksheets were accompanied by messages indicating either positive comments or corrections needed. The use of this technological tool as a plan of action was relevant for pupils, given that:

“WhatsApp has helped students obtain information related to tasks and learning activities. Still, it also enabled peer interaction pertaining to the learning task and activity, learning support and motivation. As students perceive WhatsApp's usefulness to support their learning, they will likely continuously use such a social media application” (Mulyono, Suryoputro & Jamil, 2021, p. 5).

Unintentional Feedback Segregation Because of Poverty.

It was also identified that teachers encountered constraints in providing a feedback exercise for all of their students. Transcripts 6 and 7 permit to infer some conclusions:

Questionnaire - Transcript 6:

Question: How do you provide feedback to your students in the current pandemic situation?

Answer:

- Correcting the worksheets through **microclasses** when the situation allows it.

Questionnaire - Transcript 7:

Question: What kind of issues have you faced when it comes to assessing your students?

Answer:

- Lack of adequate means, and the **network does not work**, because some parents **do not have enough resources to acquire a telephone and even less Internet.**

The previous responses elucidate an intriguing situation presented in the educational process of thousands of students in the rural areas of Colombia. In these regions “The disadvantages materialize in both the limited access to the internet and computers within the house, as well as in the challenges faced by schools, educators, and parents to respond optimally in the virtual modality” (Sánchez, Quiroga and Ospina, 2020, p. 29). Viewed in this way, the absence of resources within the families of the community does not allow students to receive appropriate feedback all of the times they should, and at the same time, does not allow teachers to track their learners’ progress. As some of the students were not able to access electronic devices or the internet, and some others were able after a huge effort, there was a kind of unintentional segregation, generated by the poverty

conditions, due to some learners that were exposed to interacting with teachers more than others.

Conclusions

Within the scope of this research, it was observed that the e-learning assessment and feedback strategies proposed were implemented in a challenging manner by the EFL teachers in this rural school. It is evident that the strategies mentioned for assessing and providing feedback to students were primarily centered around the design and development of worksheets. As a result, these tools took on a summative approach with the main purpose of assigning a numeric grade. Having in mind the above, it is noteworthy that there was a lack of formative assessment practices.

On the other hand, virtual encounters (teacher-student and student-student) could not be implemented properly due to crucial factors such as connectivity loss and paucity of electronic devices. Eventually, that situation induced an inadequate feedback process because teachers could not measure students' learning integrally by contemplating not only the summative assessment but also the formative assessment. However, in terms of feedback strategies, teachers relied primarily on WhatsApp and in phone calls to monitor their students' EFL progress. There was no serious evidence about the use of a formal process for providing students feedback about their performance.

This study confirms a calling for the authorities to implement accurate public policies to eliminate the gaps in terms of accessing technologies and the internet in the rural municipalities of Colombia. Regarding the EFL lessons, rural EFL teachers must be trained in ICTs to acquire new abilities, foster their capacities, and increase their knowledge. By doing so, teachers will be able to integrate new strategies for improving learners' learning in the classroom (either physical or virtual).

Moreover, new studies should be initiated to investigate the challenges experienced by teachers when assessing and providing feedback in other rural institutions, and the consequences provoked by the pandemic. In case of finding coincidences between the cases, some possible generalizations could be achieved. That would admit new inferences on the matter and the generation of innovative pedagogical ideas to overcome the academic lag generated during the years of quarantine.

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