

Virtual Classroom Management from the Teachers' Position in the New Education Normality

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The Barcelona Conference on Education 2021
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Given the current pandemic emergency (COVID-19), it is necessary to have updated information on the educational reality of Ecuador. Education, in any situation, should be a priority and should never stop, which leads to adapting the curriculum to the emergency through virtual classrooms; although they already existed before, not all schools and students used it to the same extent. The aim of this research is to translate into a theoretical framework the management of virtual classrooms from the teachers' point of view within the framework of the new educational normality. A methodological design with a mixed approach was used. The qualitative paradigm was applied, of the phenomenological-hermeneutic type, and an interview with 5 teachers was used as an instrument. The quantitative technique was also applied, using a questionnaire as an instrument. The sample consisted of 50 teachers from a high school in the city of Quito, Ecuador. Most teachers have assumed with real commitment their management of teaching and learning in virtual classrooms and recognize the importance of the use of technological tools and their contribution to education. The support of the authorities on duty is required so that teachers are continuously trained and can face any crisis in the educational field; thus, achieving an adequate structure that allows teachers and students to be at the forefront of the technological demands that society currently requires.

Keywords: Virtual Classrooms, Teachers, Management, Technological Tools

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Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has caused an unprecedented crisis in all areas. In the education field, this emergency led to the massive suspension of face-to-face activities of educational institutions in more than 190 countries, to prevent the spread of the virus and mitigate its impact. According to data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2020).

Likewise, Castro (2020), reveals that, during the first half of March, when the first cases of COVID-19 began to be detected in Latin America, Ecuador urged confinement and suspended face-to-face classes in private and public entities. Therefore, teachers and students with the support of parents of the investigated high school in the city of Quito took on the challenge of teaching through social networks.

Facing this health crisis meant a great opportunity for teachers to reinvent themselves and look for different ways to innovate their pedagogical practices in virtuality. For this reason, it is also relevant, according to Valenzuela (2020), education should focus on the essential, the important, and the possible in order to achieve the objectives prioritized by our official curriculum with flexibility and empathy. The teacher becomes a guide who stimulates and collaborates with the student in his learning process to show the results obtained through the evaluation of each subject or specific knowledge.

Faced with this new reality, it is necessary to ask the question:

What was the virtual classroom management from the teachers' point of view in the new educational normality?

According to the foregoing, the aim of this research paper is to reflect in a theoretical scheme the management of virtual classrooms from the teachers' position in the framework of current educational normality, which will be part of the research line of Management and Organizational Development in the Family - School - Community Program, in order to promote the development of individual and collective capacities and potentialities of students, enabling the learning, generation and use of knowledge, techniques, arts, and culture through virtual classrooms in the High school under investigation.

Background

The global context of the pandemic has transformed the different dimensions of our lives and the education world. In this regard, Poblete (2020) mentions that we can continue to do the same, live it as pure loss or learn from the great transformations that our society has experienced due to this health crisis. The development of information technologies has favored the development of virtual classrooms, making it possible to overcome geographical, social, and other barriers of a personal nature.

The implementation of virtual classrooms in education allowed the training of teachers in these spaces. According to Valenzuela (2020), this health crisis forced schools to suspend face-to-face teaching, which does not imply transferring the role of the educator to the parents (recognizing that they are the first and main educators of their children), burdening them with new tasks and responsibilities for which they have not been trained and which, probably, due to the multiple difficulties associated with these times, it is not possible to assume either.

To speak of management is to administer and establish concrete actions to make the programmed tasks a reality. In this regard, Rebolledo Saavedra (cited by Sánchez, 2019) defines Management as a process undertaken by one or more people to coordinate the work activities of other individuals. Indicating also that the management comes to be like a new way of seeing the institution, it mobilizes it towards the achievement of its purposes and develops its capacity to articulate the internal processes. In addition, management is to develop the art of discovering and closing gaps, and to achieve this effectively requires knowledge, competencies, disciplines, and reference models.

In the field of educational management, Pérez Sayago (n/d), relates this term to the possibilities of an institution to solve situations or achieve a purpose. He also argues that it is the process through which an educational institution is directed, conducted, oriented, and administered. It is also seen as the set of processes, decision-making, and execution of actions that allow to carry out pedagogical practices, their implementation, and evaluation.

Borja and Carcausto (2020), point out that digital tools in education are the set of applications and platforms that help both teachers and students in their academic work. Currently, information and communication technologies (ICT) are being used, of which digital tools or resources are part.

Virtuality and Education in Times of COVID-19

In this regard, it is pertinent to highlight, according to Expósito and Marsollier (ob. cit.), the importance that online education has acquired in 2020, an unprecedented fact that will mark a before and after in pedagogical practices and in current educational systems globally. In addition, the social, cultural, and economic inequalities of more than 180 countries that have been victims of the pandemic by COVID-19 have been highlighted.

The need and urgency brought about by the current health crisis led governments to change the mode of study of educational institutions as a measure to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, affecting 94% of students worldwide according to UNESCO data (2020). However, researchers argue that the flame of education cannot be extinguished and even in this context of extreme emergency, it must be guaranteed as a fundamental human right.

It is worth mentioning that in the study conducted by Expósito and Marsollier (ob. cit.), they state, regarding the use of technologies, that the WhatsApp application has been the most used by teachers to communicate with their students and carry out their pedagogical tasks. The results allowed identifying two types of technologies (Popular and Specific) and the use of popular technologies by students of low socioeconomic resources, state-run schools, compulsory education levels, and in adult education predominates.

Other authors coincide in highlighting the importance of the use of popular technologies (especially WhatsApp) insofar as it has allowed most teachers and students, especially from disadvantaged contexts, to continue with the educational process, at least in the first moment of the crisis, as pointed out by Kem-Mekah-Kadzue, Bonilla-Guachamín 2020 (cited by Expósito and Marsollier, ob. cit.) [8]. With reference to specific technologies, the results indicate that their use prevails among students of middle and high socioeconomic level, in privately managed institutions, and at higher levels (non-university and undergraduate) of the educational system.

Methodology

The methodological design with mixed approach will be used in this research. The qualitative paradigm will be applied, of a phenomenological-hermeneutic type, which considers the importance of understanding the phenomena from the perspective of the participants in each situation. The interview with 8 teachers will be used as an instrument. In addition, the quantitative technique will be applied, the instrument will be a questionnaire. The sample will be constituted by 50 teachers of high school in Quito's city, that is why this knowledge is based on logical principles used to achieve a range of objectives that govern a scientific investigation.

The survey consists of 10 questions that are divided into two sections, the first section tries to know about the management of technological tools, the second section aims to know about the management of virtual classrooms. The results obtained are as follows:

Chart 1: Teachers' Questionnaire

1. Do you know what the acronyms TIC and TAC mean?
2. Do you think that the use of Virtual Learning Environments makes us dependent on technology and not very reflective when using it as support in the classroom?
3. Is there a contingency plan established by the authorities of the educational institution regarding the COVID 19 pandemic?

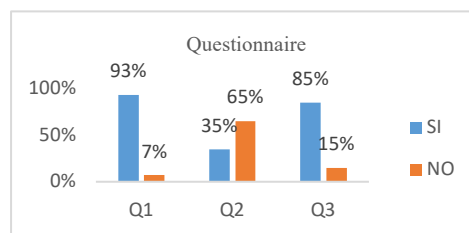


Figure 1: Statistic Analysis

Chart 2: Teachers' Questionnaire

1. How often do you use these means to support your teaching work?
2. What percentage do you consider you use ICT and ACT in your virtual classes?
3. In what percentage would qualify the support in training by the Ministry of Education for the management of ICT and virtual classrooms?
4. Do you consider that the use of ICT in class is a determining factor in student learning as support tool alternative in the teaching of various

contents?

5. Do you use new technologies such as email, platforms or mobile devices to communicate with your students?

6. Have you presented symptoms such as Stress, anguish or any illness in the new educational normality?

7. Do you consider that technological resources allow greater interaction with knowledge, motivating the learning process?

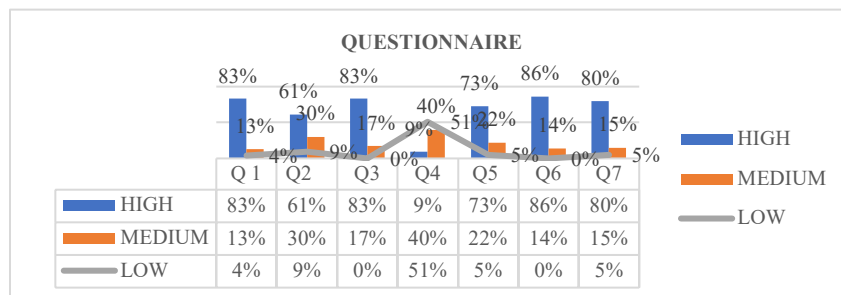


Figure 2: *Statistic Analysis*

Result Analysis

According to the results, it shows that the pandemic forced authorities and teachers to accelerate digital adoption in the education sector, trying to find urgent correctives to face this emergency, who had to investigate, self-train, and take advantage of the human resources that the institution had to support and train classmates who knew something and others who were totally unaware of the management of ICT in the classroom. It is important how to carry out teaching and how to reach students virtually, which becomes a great challenge for all members of the educational community, teachers, students and parents.

The educational task involves the use of technological skills of its members through the commitment that determines the virtual educational environment and the communication needs that are established between them.

Chart 3: Teachers' Interview

Interview

1. How was the virtual classroom management in Ecuador before COVID 19?
 2. What is your perspective on the return to normal education in Ecuador?
 3. What do you think of the virtual classroom management that is carried out according to academic standards and what is the teachers' perspective, at the COVID-19 pandemic time?
 4. What would be your support to translate into a theoretical scheme the
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virtual classroom management that guarantees quality learning from virtual classrooms in Ecuador?

Result Analysis

According to the results of the interviews, the teacher must promote permanent communication with the student and seek interaction with available resources. One of the roles that must be assumed is mediator, and this action must be systematic and reinforcing the student's behavior to achieve the fulfillment of the objectives, for this reason, the current teacher requires new strategies, perceptions, experiences and knowledge to try to answer the multiple questions that are presented every day.

This new modality of online education is here to stay, for this reason students must also continue with the use of technological tools in the teaching-learning process since this contributes to the development of skills and competences that today's society demands, but this work should go together with the Ministry of Education to continue with the permanent training of teachers in the update on the use and application of new technological tools; as well as seeking an urgent change in the plans and programs of study.

Conclusions

According to the interviewees and the results of the survey, this unexpected change, due to the covid-19 pandemic, helped to raise awareness about the reality of the Ecuadorian teacher, who did not have training and updating in technological tools, nor did they have technological means at home, however, unexpectedly they had to change from a face-to-face teaching modality to a virtual one. This required innovation in the ways of imparting learning supported by virtual technological tools to give immediate practical solutions to their students.

At the first time of the crisis, teachers had to make use of popular technologies, especially WhatsApp, which allowed most teachers and students, especially from disadvantaged contexts, to continue with the educational process.

It is noted that in some way they had support from the Ministry of Education for the implementation of the use of digital platforms such as zoom and teams, which offer the possibility of overcoming geographical, social and other barriers of a personal nature. This favored the creation of virtual classrooms, the same ones that with the teaching experience have improved to achieve greater learning.

Future Work

The significant contribution of this research expresses the importance of valuing management in virtual education since all academic learning must be lived, experienced and shared to achieve the true learning process, because without a doubt, it cannot be achieved through theoretical contexts. This reasoning motivates to continue with this idea of research aimed at teaching colleagues. This research lead to find new didactic and pedagogical resources within a virtual classroom; since this new online education modality must continue, despite

the return of face-to-face education, digital platforms and technological tools must be the instruments of this new educational era.

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