

Teaching Bilingual Education During COVID-19: A Case study in an English School Center in Ecuador

Educación bilingüe durante la covid-19: estudio de caso en un centro escolar de inglés en Ecuador

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted in a private school of Cuenca (Ecuador). The participant school is based on bilingual education, employing CLIL in the teaching and learning process. This study was conducted with the participation of ten teachers and two principals, they collaborated voluntarily by sharing their perceptions and experiences about COVID-19. In this sense, the main aim of this study is to understand the challenges and difficulties that teachers experienced about bilingual education during the pandemic. In order to fulfill this goal, the research is framed within a qualitative approach and centered on a case study owing to a specific place and conditions. It has employed research techniques such as interviews and field diaries to comprehend the reality studied. The collected information was then triangulated, resulting in more robust and solid data. The main findings informed about teacher's problems with wellbeing, pedagogical changes, and the lack of collaboration of parents during lockdown. These teachers are still concerned about learning losses in their students and conclude that the pandemic represents a real problem for them to face.

Keywords: COVID-19, wellbeing, CLIL, challenges, experiences

RESUMEN

Esta investigación se realizó en una institución educativa de la ciudad de Cuenca (Ecuador) que se fundamenta en la educación bilingüe, empleando AICLE en los procesos educativos. Se contó con la participación de diez docentes y dos personas que integran la dirección de este centro. Estas personas han compartido sus vivencias como profesionales durante la pandemia de covid-19. Por ende, el objetivo central se ha centrado en profundizar y comprender los desafíos y dificultades enfrentados por estos docentes de la educación bilingüe durante la pandemia. Para cumplir con este cometido, este estudio se enmarca dentro del enfoque cualitativo a partir del estudio de caso. Se han empleado técnicas de investigación como la entrevista y diarios de campo para comprender y obtener información. Todos los datos recolectados fueron triangulados, obteniendo de esta manera información con mayor solidez y confiabilidad. Los hallazgos alcanzados tienen que ver con los problemas de bienestar del profesorado y la falta de apoyo por parte de los representantes de los estudiantes. Además, muestran que estos docentes están aún preocupados por las pérdidas de aprendizaje de sus estudiantes y que, al final, concluyen que la covid-19 ha representado un duro reto.

Palabras clave: covid-19, bienestar, AICLE, dificultades, experiencias

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 represented an unprecedented event for the entire of society, all social spheres suffered the onslaughts provoked by the pandemic. Education has been affected too, figures demonstrate that 1.6 billion students around the world experimented difficulties in their training programs (Unesco, 2021). This global event stresses a sudden change of education to virtual learning, which demands in this way new types of responsibilities and professional skills for teachers and students (Barry & Kanematsu, 2020; Daniel, 2020).

One prominent effect in Latin America is the increase in inequalities among students. At least 51.2% of learners' population in this region lacks adequate living conditions (CEPAL & Unesco, 2020). Besides, health problems in young people, such as socioemotional, and psychological illness increased considerably as a consequence of the pandemic (Yan-Rong *et al.*, 2020). The scientific data and research reveal this panorama and, as a result, it is possible to assert problematics and sub-impacts that are carry out by the pandemic, such as inequalities, poor living conditions, and other long-term negative effects on education.

The pandemic has affected educators as well. According to Gallardo *et al.* (2020) contributions, teachers suffered from health issues and limitations to access electronic devices, internet, and connection stability. Despite the limitations mentioned above, they played an essential role in maintaining teaching process and educational programs.

Jara-Baca *et al.* (2021) support the relevant position attributed to teachers, because students received assistance in terms of knowledge and emotional dimensions from them. Nevertheless, national figures in Ecuador demonstrate that students increase gaps in knowledge. Ecuadorian learners suffered from a lack of access to technological devices, school dropouts, learning losses, and health and emotional problems (Unicef & Ministerio de Educación, 2022). At the end of the pandemic, 29.2% of teachers

in Ecuador perceived considerable losses in student learning.

Education and student development are closely related; hence, society in general loses the possibility to create new horizons for students' lives. Toapanta (2021) makes an overview of current conditions and concludes that gaps and inequalities have increased considerably in the last two years of the pandemic. Therefore, teacher role must be relevant to counteract the current situation.

In the middle of difficult situations, teachers assumed a challenge against COVID-19 and, as a result, teachers' performance in different contexts became a relevant topic to be researched. In this vein, bilingual contexts where content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is used necessitate the application of an appropriate scientific approach. Setyaningrum *et al.* (2020) assert the need to create knowledge about CLIL, due to its recent presence and dissemination in Latin America.

Previous authors stand out the relatively new presence of CLIL on the mainland, motivating the scientific community to create and discover new data to help other teachers in similar situations. The main point of discussion that guides this experience attempts to cover a gap of knowledge and comprehend the perspectives of bilingual teachers. The pandemic led researchers to put their efforts into a wide part of mainstream education; however, bilingual education lacks scientific literature related to the pandemic period, at least in Ecuador.

Sarmiento *et al.* (2021) assert that knowledge production about CLIL education in Ecuador have been raising recently, but the information body is insufficient yet. Information development requires new studies about the experience of bilingual teachers who apply CLIL methodology every day in their practice. Hence, the current work compiles these experiences from a bilingual school in Cuenca, which is a city of Ecuador.

The problem leads to raise the following question: How have the teachers at an Ecuadorian bilingual school maintained bilingual education, facing the difficulties stated by

COVID-19? To resolve that, this research aims to understand the perspectives and challenges that CLIL teachers, at a private center school in Cuenca (Ecuador), have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bilingual Education in Ecuador (English as a Second Language)

All the different levels and categories of education in Ecuador are ruled by Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural, LOEI (Dirección Nacional de Normativa Jurídico Educativa del Ministerio de Educación, 2017). This framework aims to determine the specific requirements for schools, colleges, and universities, whether they are public or private, regarding quality of education. Hence, it contains requirements needed for a school that wants to provide bilingual education employing English as a second language in its curricular planning. As follows, these requirements will be summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. LOEI Requirements

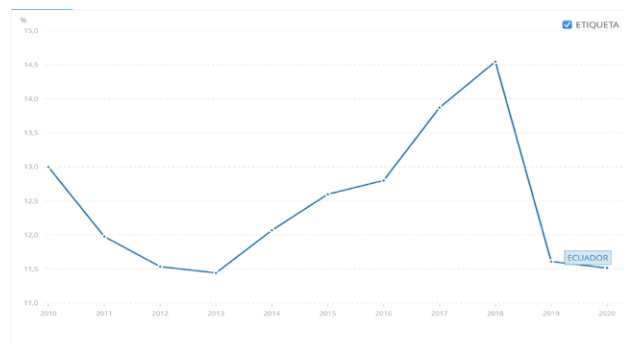
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan Educativo Institucional (PEI) of any of these training centers includes a bilingual training project, according to pre-established hourly load for this specific type of schools.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hourly load of a school with this denomination must include, at least, a 40% of total hour classes taught in English.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers in these schools must certify at least on B2 level of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CERF).

Source: adapted from Dirección Nacional de Normativa Jurídico Educativa del Ministerio de Educación (2017)

Ecuador and COVID-19

Ecuador, as any other country affected by the pandemic, has unique characteristics that make it necessary to understand educational quality, school dropout rates, internet access, learning losses, and public investment in education during the pandemic. In first instance, government investment level in education must be shown to understand the multidimensional impact and the efforts put against COVID-19.

Figure 1. Total Public Investment in Education in Ecuador

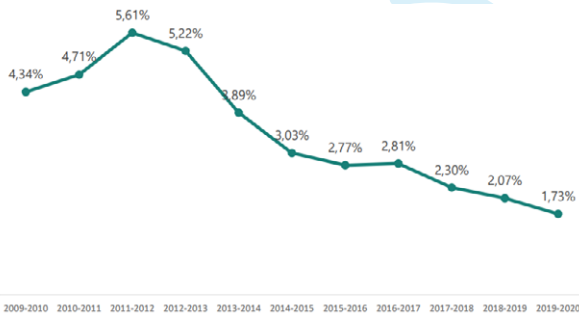


Source: retrieved from Grupo Banco Mundial (2020)

As seen in Figure 1, compared to 2010, investments made in subsequent years have been decreasing. When paying attention to 2019 and 2020, it is possible to observe that the budget has decreased from 11.62% to a little less than 11.50%. In Ecuador, there is a mismatch in terms of public investment, which could stymie education system's efforts to recover after the closure of schools for more than two years.

In this sense, Unicef & IESALC (2020) highlights the urgent need to safeguard children and young people's education through investment policies, since COVID-19 has affected many sectors of daily life. For this reason, it is necessary to maintain and increase the amount of money allocated to this sector.

Figure 2. School Dropout Levels in Ecuador

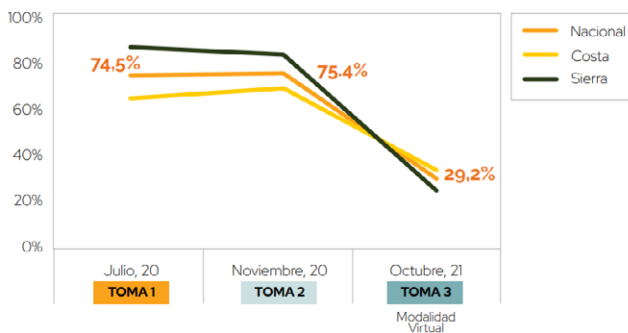


Source: retrieved from Quituisaca (2021)

Figure 2 shows a government report on education in Ecuador, where there has been a reduction of more than 0.34% in the latest measurements made. However, if a comparison is made between 2019 and 2020, according to Primicias (2021), until mid-2020, students who dropped out number exceeded 2019 number by more than 60.000.

According to CEPAL (2020), until 2019, Ecuadorian households that had internet services represented 45% of households. Most of the territory remained without internet until that year. Unicef & Ministerio de Educación (2022) remark that the percentage of households with an internet connection increased progressively, but with clear differences between rural and urban sectors.

Figure 3. Learning Losses from Teacher's perspectives



Source: retrived from Unicef & Ministerio de Educación (2022)

The rhythm and learning levels of students have also been affected during this time. Due to such circumstances, as shown in Figure 3, teachers have argued that their students learning levels have not been as expected, so they have not been able to develop the essential learning they require. According to Unicef & Ministerio de Educación (2022), 29.2% of teachers, even after de lockdown, believe that learners require more time to develop their knowledge.

Education and COVID-19

COVID-19 has hit the educational field provoking a readjustment of all systems in a short and quick period of time. Concerning impacts are visible, especially on topics related to learning loss, social progress, and equity among student population. United Nations (2020) affirms that society's most threatened sector is represented by those in risky conditions of poverty and disease. COVID-19 has multidimensional impacts on people and education, because of school closures, and economic and health crises.

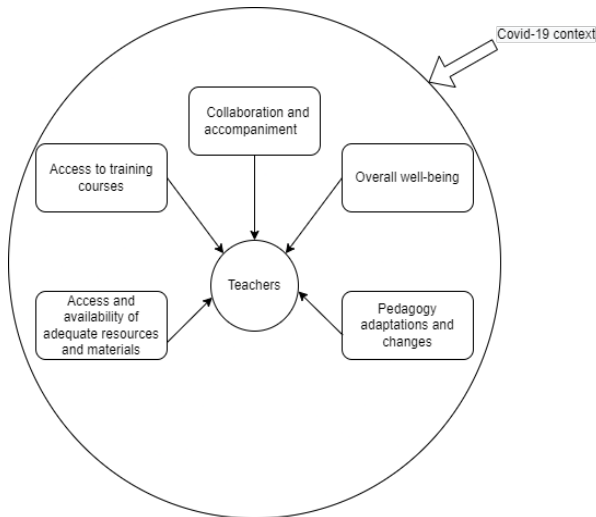
The effects caused inconvenience for millions of students in South America; approximately 3.1 million primary and secondary education students were unable to return to face-to-face classes. According to Organización Internacional del Trabajo (2021), the pandemic has increased the number of poor families in 142 million more. The pandemic will increase by 25% the number of students around the world who do not learn enough skills to act effectively in the future society (United Nations, 2020).

Teacher Role and the COVID-19 Challenges

Teachers have been the primary architects in achieving student training processes during the pandemic. COVID-19 context exposes the continuous need to deepen and create new knowledge about problems that educators experienced. For this reason, this article entails to approximate to this object of research, focusing on bilingual education mediated by the

CLIL approach. In this sense, theory is centered on six specific dimensions of study, such as overall wellbeing, pedagogical adaptations and changes, collaboration and accompaniment, access to resources and materials, and training courses. This study addresses five specific dimensions, as it is displayed in Figure 4.

Figure 4. COVID-19 and Teacher's Challenges



Source: self-made

Collaboration and Accompaniment During COVID-19

Integration and continuous participation between parents, teachers, and principals allow the development of a coordinated quality education (Denny, 2006). This affirmation emphasizes the importance of a work team in which all parties involved work toward a common goal. However, during the pandemic, the major concern was the difficulty to contact parents and students. According to Naslund-Hadley (2020), 3.246 teachers assure that 71% of parents lack adequate technological devices to communicate, and 68% do not have time to guide and communicate with their children.

In a nutshell, teachers are among principals, parents, and students, and, in this sense, their function is to integrate them into a creative learning process and mutual support. Collaboration in the middle of a pandemic could sound like a really

difficult thing to carry out. However, ease access to devices for connection has made lockdown and social distance bearable.

Access and Availability to Adequate Resources

The economic possibilities limit students' involvement in their education because they lack essential resources to access virtual learning. Al Abiky (2021) mentions that not all teachers and students have had access to cell phones, computers, and stable internet connection. On one hand, teachers must deal with connection problems of their own, and on the other, they experienced how some of their students could not be an active part of their classes, because of their connection conditions.

Álvarez *et al.* (2020) assert that South America is the world's most unequal region in terms of digital devices. No matter how hard they try, students cannot get a fair education if they don't have the needed resources. According to CEPAL (2020), in the region, at least 48% of households lack internet connections. Besides, Álvarez *et al.* (2020) affirm that 67% of urban households possess an internet connection. Hence, the difference between urban and rural sectors in internet availability is more than double.

From these previous considerations, a new way of approaching virtual learning emerges. The proposed model is *connectivism*. As stated by Zapata-Ros (2015), this framework uses new information and communication technologies for education. Furthermore, as established by Apolo *et al.* (2022), connectivism has been implicit in the teaching action against virtual learning.

Pedagogy Adaptations and Changes

Sudden changes in education, as consequence of COVID-19, demand teachers to adapt to conditions, in some cases, without training or experience (Unesco & IESALC, 2020). Concern about participation fall, students' engagement in their education during virtual learning, and teacher's limited possibilities to control attention in learners require the implementation of pedagogies that motivate them (Mosquera,

2020). These pedagogies must address disinterest and lack of participation through the development of students' self-regulatory skills (Almazova *et al.*, 2020).

Access to Training Courses

As Unesco & IESALC (2020) state: teachers all over the world had to develop new skills and re-adjust their methods and materials. Man & Medwell (2021) and Herrero *et al.* (2020) said that support provided by principals and school authorities through implementation of training courses serves to strengthen students' learning by providing new techniques and instruments for teachers.

There are two main concerns on which teacher training should be focused: innovation on professional skills, and emotional support and regulation for learners (CEPAL & Unesco, 2020). Abilities that teachers currently require are expanding more and more. Pedagogy is not only understood solely as knowledge transfer, but instead, as implementation of strategic technology use, playful resources, motivational classes, and emotional support for learners.

Overall Wellbeing

Research notes that teachers' physical and psychological wellbeing constitute the main components hit by the pandemic. It is possible that many of them got sick due to COVID-19, but it is not feasible to generalize that all teacher populations have suffered from physical or psychological diseases. In the middle, there are specific conditions that indicate whether a teacher is suffering or not from disease.

Online spaces, for some professionals of education, are not the ideal place to carry out the learning process. This conclusion is supported by Mosquera (2020) and Almazova *et al.* (2020), who interviewed teachers who assert that during online instruction, it was not possible to advance the amount of content and learning objectives set. Besides, the lack of materials and resources, as Herrero *et al.* (2020) said, require creation of new electronic materials, which was time-consuming, according an Almazova *et al.* (2020) study.

METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on understanding challenges faced by bilingual teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, from their perspectives and experiences. Therefore, a qualitative approach is an adequate way to explore these experiences, stories, and reflections, in an attempt to comprehend reality from a naturalistic perspective. According to Sandín (2003), qualitative approach refers to an orderly manner of discovering knowledge inside educational landscape, leading to comprehending and transforming reality.

Under qualitative approach, the research type is a case study. This is, according to Simons (2011), research that focuses on particularity, exclusivity, and uniqueness. In this case, the study is limited to a bilingual school in Cuenca, Ecuador. Also, this investigation was conducted with researcher active participation, and school's staff collaboration. The institution name is not employed to maintain principles of confidentiality, and respect for participants.

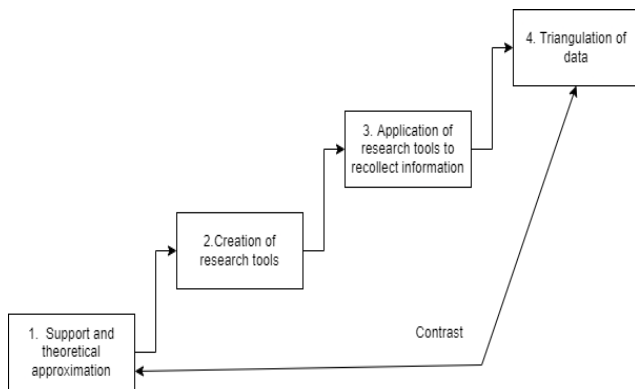
Participants

These are teachers from a bilingual school of Cuenca, Ecuador. In total, 10 people have actively collaborated on this work, as CLIL Science teachers and, also, 2 principals. They prefer to participate anonymously. Therefore, as was already said, names have been kept secret in order to protect everyone's privacy and identity. Teachers experience also varies greatly depending on the person, but participants share some common concerns, challenges, and pedagogical transformations implanted because of COVID-19 impact.

Research Stages

There are four main stages stated in this study; these are shown as follows:

Figure 5. Research Stages



Source: self-made

In stage 1, theoretical information was gathered from diverse studies related to this research topic. This step is vital, because it recollects previous experiences and scientific literature.

In stage 2, research tools were developed considering the main contributions of theoretical framework different authors. Semi-structured interviews, which entails a smooth dialogue with a specific scientific purpose, were employed. There are two types of interviews, the first was designed to be implemented by teachers, and the second recollects information provided by principals.

Interview questions focus on five dimensions established previously, according to a theoretical framework and similar studies contributions. These dimensions are: pedagogical adaptations and changes; access to resources and materials to teach; teachers overall wellbeing; collaboration

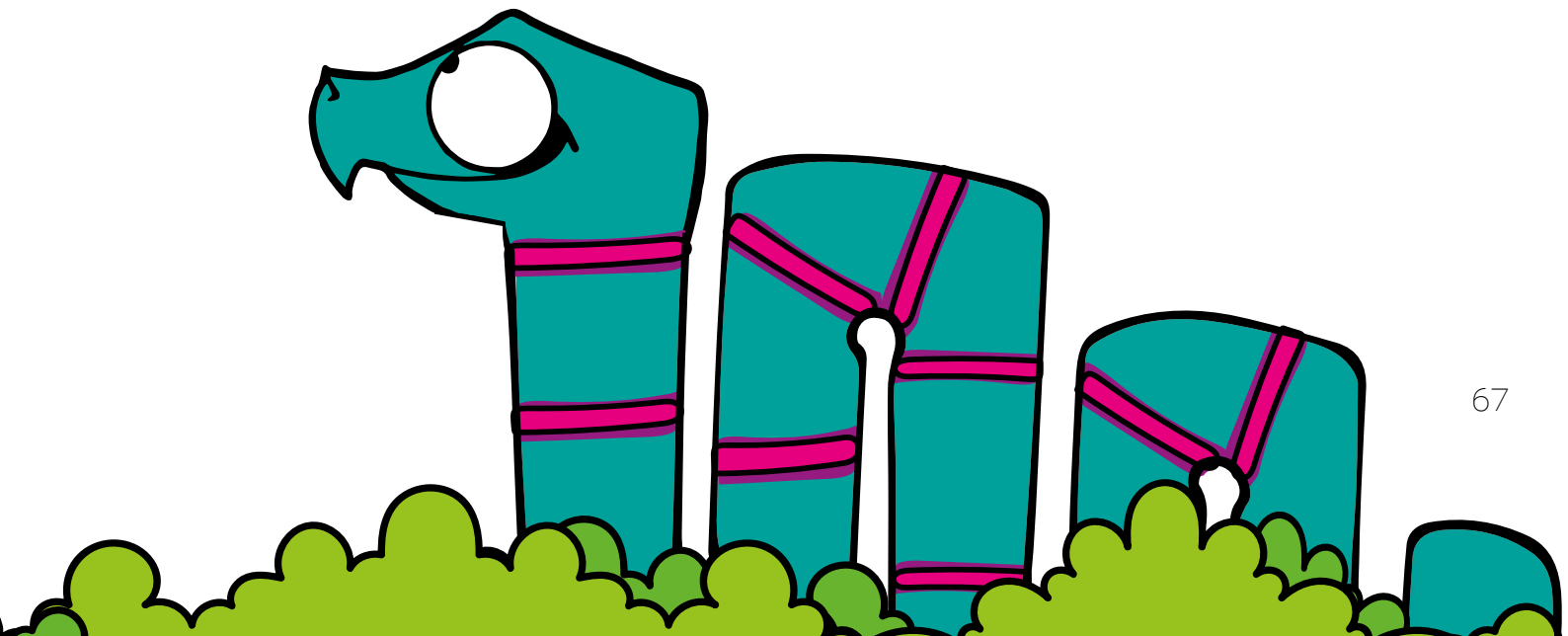
and accompaniment between teachers and principals; and teachers continuous training by means of courses.

Stage 3 is an application and implementation of research instruments in order to obtain valuable information and data from participants. Stage 4 encompasses triangulation of information. This is an indispensable step because triangulation grants research validation by integrating individual contributions into a whole complex interpretation of reality (Montaño, 2010). At this moment, triangulation was carried out in a qualitative data software (MAXQDA with a license to use). The second part of this stage requires a comparison between previous bibliography with collected data.

Analyses

Analysis process focuses on data triangulation, which examines and contrast acquired knowledge through different techniques used in an investigation. Then, considering the aforementioned five principal dimensions of this study (addressed in Vaca *et al.*'s, 2021, "Rol del docente para la educación virtual en tiempos de pandemia: Retos y oportunidades"), data interacts to obtain detailed information and a clear interpretation of challenges and difficulties experimented by bilingual teachers of CLIL during COVID-19.

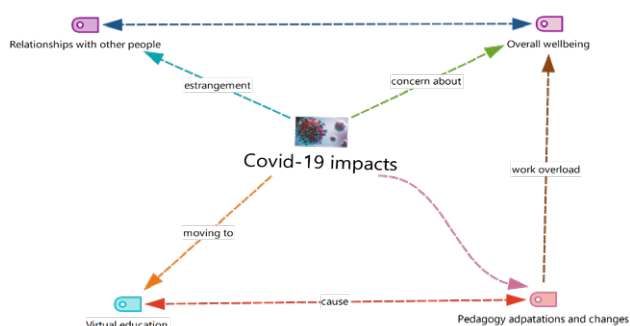
Triangulation uses intersection of teachers and principals' different ideas exposed in interviews and, from this, a more complete picture of what they all think is made, a picture that resemble reality.



RESULTS

According to information recollected and triangulation performed, this study remarks four specific areas that have undergone changes or have been affected by pandemic issues. These areas are: relationships with others (especially with students), virtual learning, professional lives adaptations, and wellbeing. Figure 4 summarizes the main changes that studied bilingual teachers experimented.

Figure 4. Effect of COVID-19 on bilingual teacher's lives



Source: self-made

Regarding relationships with others, Teacher 3 expressed: *“Ha cambiado la forma en la que vivimos y la forma en la que nos relacionamos con las demás personas. Creo que ha sido básicamente eso, como un cambio de vida a nivel global”* (Personal communication,). From this quote, it can be interpreted that teacher’s social role and how they relate to people have changed drastically.

Teacher 5 said: *“Antes, nosotros nos podíamos acercar o los estudiantes venían a nosotros. Aquí, no entiendo; aquí hay que corregir. Ahora hay ese distanciamiento”* (Personal communication). This demonstrates that there has indeed been a change in the way educators relate to

their students. In this sense, COVID-19, specially at the beginning of its spread, caused deaths and considerable damages in people health. Therefore, as Teacher 6 thought:

Nos ha tocado vivir el covid-19 desde el confinamiento. Las medidas sanitarias y protegerse, cuidarse a uno mismo y cuidar su familia y [...] a los demás, yo creo que eso ha alterado todos los ámbitos de nuestra vida, incluyendo el ámbito educativo y también personal. (Personal communication)

The pandemic has awakened teachers’ concern about their health and their families’ health. To protect and conserve educational agents and students’ integrity and wellbeing, Ecuador’s Ministerio de Educación decided to close institutions. In this context, Teacher 6 said: *“Se cerraron las escuelas, se cerraron las aulas de clase; ya no podíamos interactuar con los estudiantes; nos tocaba buscar maneras diferentes de ponernos en contacto con ellos”* (Personal communication). This opinion reaffirms changes in the way in which teachers relate to students.

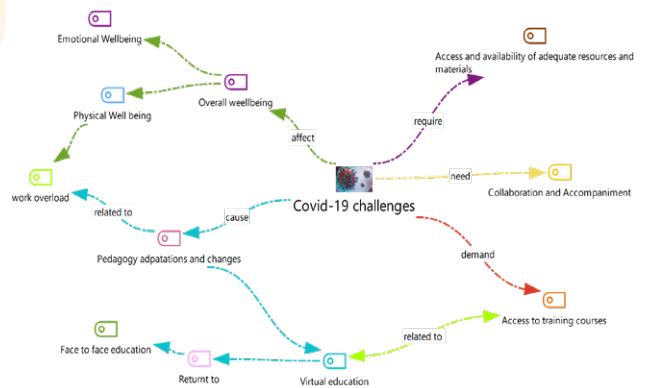
Most educational systems have maintained education through virtual learning. In this sense, Teacher 4 expressed: *“Nos cambió bastante desde nuestro punto de educación, nos mandó a todos en la casa, nos volvimos educadores virtuales”* (Personal communication). Virtual learning became the quintessential mean of education during COVID-19, and this, in turn, brought profound changes to pedagogical aspects. Teacher 7 said about it:

En particular, las planificaciones han cambiado, ya que el tiempo en clases presenciales es mucho más medible. Sin embargo, el tiempo en clases [...] online se pierde, ya sea por distintos factores como

internet, problemas de internet, a veces, por la capacidad, ya sea del maestro o del estudiante, en el área de informática o incluso por cualquier factor externo que puede estar ocurriendo alrededor del contexto del estudiante o del profesor. (Personal communication)

Regarding virtual learning, unexpected change generates not only problems related to adaptations, but also work overload, and less control and monitoring of students' performance and learning. For example, Teacher 5 said: "Lastimosamente, uno se da cuenta en la presencialidad de la falta de [estudiantes. Antes] no pasa nada, porque viene [sic], pero [cuando] faltaban en virtualidad era más complejo" (Personal communication). This story reflects teacher's difficulty to control attendance. However, real impact is not limited to assistance, it extends to participation, learning losses, honesty, and technical connection problems during lockdown. In sum, one of the external problems that teachers faced during the pandemic was learners' difficulties, which has become an extra problem for them.

Figure 5. COVID-19 and five study dimensions



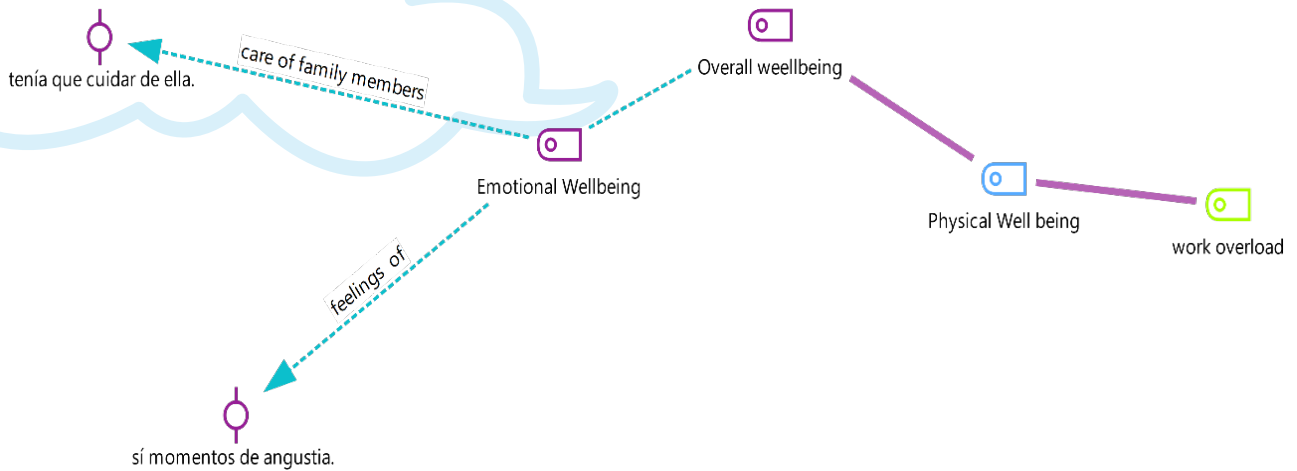
Source: self-made

Figure 5 shows the five main areas this study is focused on. These are teacher's wellbeing (talked about briefly above), pedagogy changes and adaptations, access to teaching materials and resources, working with other teachers and principals, and helping teachers get into training courses. This map projects relationships and interactions that occur between different dimensions. Therefore, the next paragraphs will explain the interrelation and principal aspects related to each dimension.

In brief, COVID-19 arose several challenges that bilingual the teachers of a private institution in Cuenca (Ecuador) have faced to maintain the learning process. One of the principal difficulties has been their physical and emotional health. Some of them suffered damage to their wellbeing, hindering their capacity to teach, to concentrate, and to design materials and planning lessons.



Figure 6. COVID-19 Emotional Impacts on Bilingual Teachers

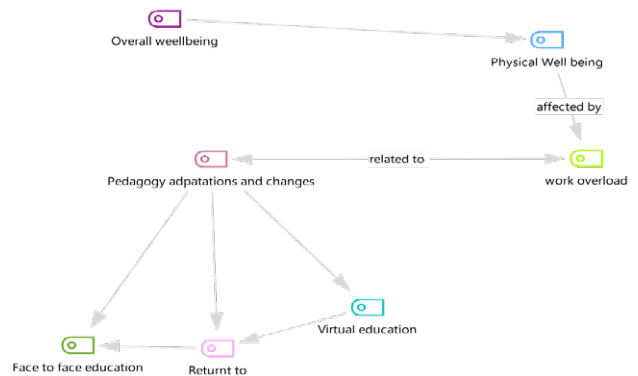


Source: self-made

Regarding emotional wellbeing, for example, interviewed teachers show, for the most part, feelings of anguish and fear due to COVID-19 issues. They fear for their health and their families and friends' health. Even though COVID-19's effects on this country have been lessening over time, teachers are still experimenting these feelings. Because of this, even interactions between teachers and students during face-to-face learning are limited.

Teachers show that pandemic effects altered their emotional dimension. The anguish and fear presented during this period lasted until the moment of this research. They are honest when they say that their interaction with students is limited because there is the possibility of still getting the virus.

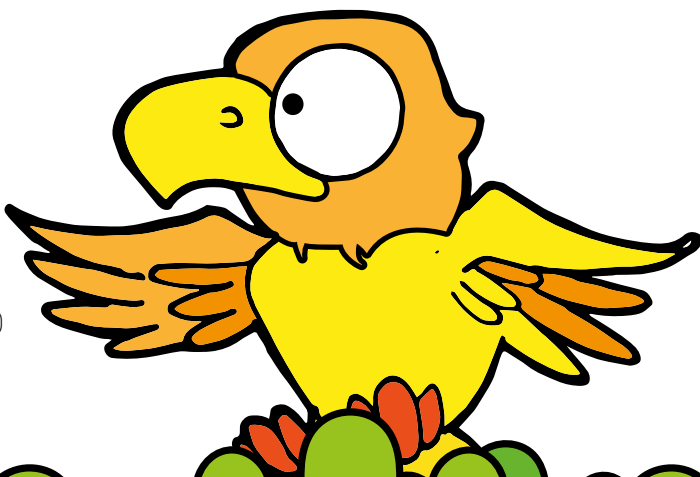
Figure 7. COVID-19's Physical Impacts on Bilingual Teachers



Source: self-made

In general, it is possible to say that teachers admit having been infected in some cases, but in spite of that, they say that the physical or health impacts of COVID-19 were mild without long-term damage. On the other hand, other educators express their concern because they got problems with their health as a consequence of the pandemic.

Another aspect that affects the physical health of teachers has been the increase in work overload. One part of the teachers think virtual work is less than presential labor, because they



have to level up students, but, on the other, another part of teachers says that presential work is less because they don't have to use virtual platforms and resources.

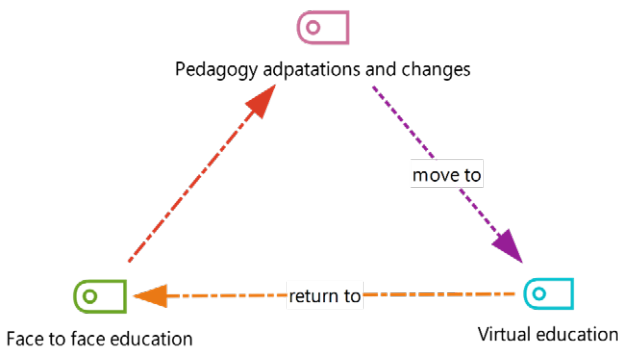
After information triangulating, it is possible to say that teachers often consider that virtual environments represent less workload due to facilities and time savings it provides. However, lack of control over student performance can be a double-edged sword, which ends up increasing workload, and this, undoubtedly, affects teachers' health, causing stress and fatigue.

Figure 8 summarizes the changes that these teachers have had to make, all under a continuous transfer from a virtual to a face-to-face learning. Actually, the coming and going of virtual and presential education implies a curriculum content and teaching strategies continuum of changes and re-adaptations. In sum, pedagogy and professional labor must make efforts to meet COVID-19's constant demands on education. There are two specific spots in time that have defined all these changes. The first is the abrupt transition from face-to-face education to virtual learning, and the second is the transition back to face-to-face education from virtual learning.

Thereby, after analyzing collected information, it can be said that students of school and college age are not yet prepared to carry out a more independent process of education, and that their parents don't support their education for various reasons; instead, they carry out their children's homework.

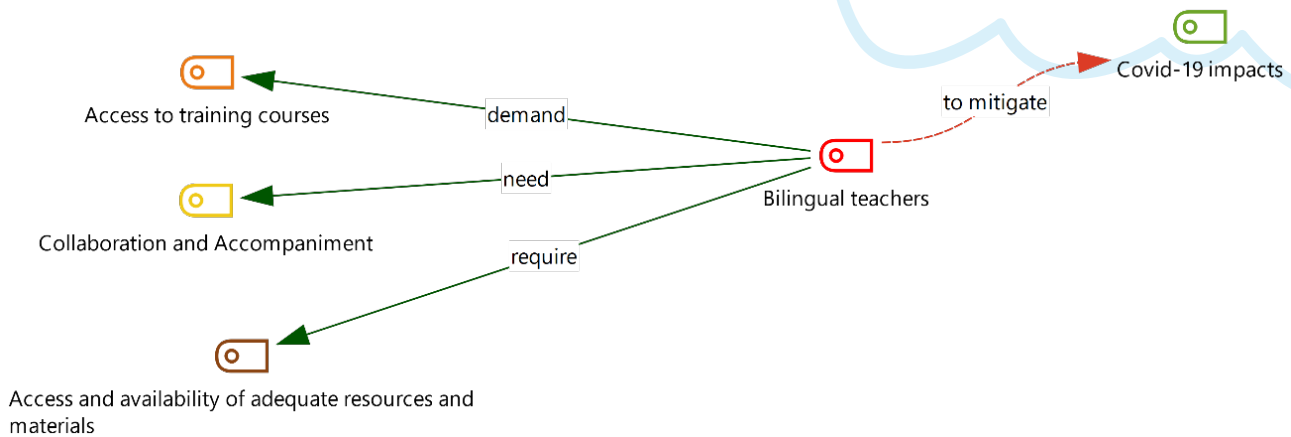
Due to this lack of control over the performance of students, it is necessary to take advantage of the benefits of virtual education and complement face-to-face education.

Figure 8. Teaching Pedagogy Main Challenges and Adaptations



Source: self-made

Figure 9. Support for Bilingual Teachers



Source: self-made

This graphic represents three indispensable dimensions that have served as a support for teachers during COVID-19. The first dimension is access to training courses; the second is collaboration and accompaniment between colleagues or principals; and finally, access and availability of adequate CLIL resources and materials. According to the theoretical framework section, these elements have been beneficial when opportunities are accessible for teachers, but in turn, their lack can represent a deeper and more acute problem for educators.

Beforehand, it was mentioned that teachers belong to a well-known private institution, so these people have received important support from principals and authorities.

The institution and its authorities provide training courses where their employees (bilingual teachers) acquire extra knowledge in order to perform better in their professional labor. Teachers have opportunities provided by this school to continue their education and training, with special attention given to digital skills. Training and continuous learning of these teachers are not limited exclusively to the institution's support, but also their own.

Access to materials and CLIL resources is another aspect to consider. Remembering that CLIL is just starting in Latin America, thanks to the internet and teacher collaboration groups, it is possible to find CLIL resources that can be adapted; regarding resources and materials for classes using CLIL, educators find useful material.

Also, the institution provided internet connections for teachers' houses during lockdown; hence, they relied on connections and devices to maintain their class through pedagogical strategies.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that teachers have had access to professional training (from the institution or on their own); they have counted on the support of principals and co-workers; and they have found CLIL resources online through the internet the school gave them.

DISCUSSION

Herrero *et al.* (2020), CEPAL & Unesco (2020), Naslund-Hadley (2020), and Gunzenhauser *et al.* (2021) affirm the transcendence of participation and collaboration among teachers, principals, and parents in students' education. It is possible to confirm active engagement and support provided by teachers and principals; however, the implication of parents was one of the major problems.

Some parents did not have contact with teachers during lockdown and also did not help their children positively. Gunzenhauser *et al.* (2021) note parents role in performance supervision of students. Nevertheless, parents provide help negatively. Hence, teachers have had a wrong idea of the learning gains of students, since parents carried out duties and tasks that corresponded to their children.

With regard to access and availability to adequate resources, Álvarez *et al.* (2020) say that Latin America is a continent where inequality gaps affect teachers and students depriving them of necessary inputs, such as internet connection and technological resources. As said before, the place studied in this research corresponds to a private institution, where teachers and students have resources required to maintain the educational process. For example, an interviewed teacher said:

Algunos de ellos han tenido problemas de conectividad, pero la mayoría ha tenido acceso; [esto] será por el hecho de que estamos hablando de instituciones privadas. Los estudiantes han tenido acceso ya sea a una computadora, a un teléfono o una tablet, lo que les ha permitido, realmente, poder estar pendientes de las clases. (Personal communication)

Teachers themselves admit that due to the fact of them working on a private institution,

students have the availability of resources. All this confirms what was proposed by CEPAL & Unesco (2020): private schools have better conditions than public ones. Nevertheless, this fact does not compensate for the lack of motivation, engagement, and willingness of learners; and despite the conditions, they have had losses and gaps in learning, according to the stories of these teachers.

As stated for various teachers previously, they struggled with learning losses in students due to the difficulty of carrying out a more exhaustive control over students' performance. According to Mosquera (2020), virtual learning hinders teachers' management over students learning. Also, Almazova *et al.* (2020) stated that students require to develop self-regulatory skills for learning, in this sense and according to the information provided in interviews, children learners do not have enough mental maturity and, on the other hand, middle-school apprentices lack of engagement. Finally, honesty has been another aspect of concern, because teachers believed that contents were understood by students, however during face-to face classes they verified that this was not true, in accordance with Treve (2021).

On the other hand, these teachers have the opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge through training provided by the institution where they work. According to Man & Medwell (2021) and Herrero *et al.* (2020), principals support can mitigate students' learning losses. Teachers considered for this research had important help and support from their authorities.

As regards to overall wellbeing, teachers have experienced problems with their physical and emotional health (Kwon *et al.*, 2022). Physically, they contract COVID-19 disease, which resulted in a deterioration of their health, with mild to severe symptoms in some cases. Another concern related to physical health is the increase in workload, this was the case of interviewed teachers. However, opinion is divided: some consider virtual education more demanding, and others say that face-to-face education is. Most of who consider virtual learning is less demanding

agree with Kwon (2022), because virtual education saves time and effort for educators. The truth is that teachers experienced work overload due to changes in their pedagogic strategies, as a result of moving from one environment (virtual) to another (face-to-face).

CONCLUSIONS

Considering the arguments raised above, this research attempts to understand how teachers of a specific institution in Cuenca (Ecuador) maintained their teaching process during the pandemic, facing different difficulties. In this research, 10 bilingual teachers and 2 principals of the same institution participated. They shared their experiences and reflections, and from them and the researcher's own experience, a body of knowledge and conclusions were built.

It is possible to conclude that the general objective has been fulfilled, because this research shows a deep understanding of the challenges and difficulties faced by bilingual teachers in this institution.

From a theoretical approximation, there are five main dimensions associated with challenges and difficulties experienced by teachers during the pandemic, such as: overall wellbeing, pedagogical adaptations and changes, collaboration and accompaniment, access to training courses, and access to resources and materials. Based on the theory that was looked at, these are the main things that teachers in general had to deal with during COVID-19. They are, also, the starting point for comparing and contrasting necessary data to understand teachers' reality.

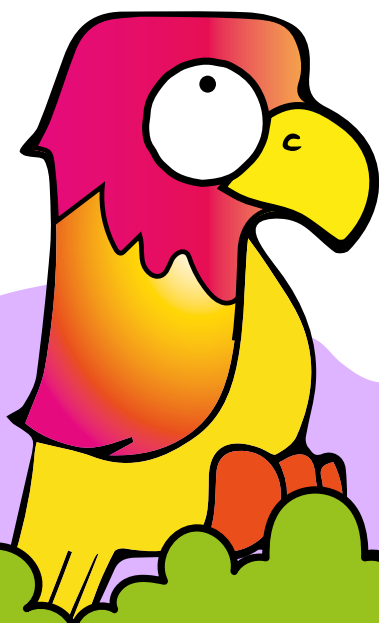
Teachers experience problems in their physical and emotional dimensions. On the other hand, they had to adapt their pedagogy according to virtual demands. Then, they had to return and re-adapt their planning and resources for face-to-face education. One of the main concerns was the limited and reduced support of parents during lockdown. As a result, students

showed that they learned, apparently, but when the return to face-to-face education occurs, teachers note that students did not learn.

Regarding collaboration and accompaniment between colleagues and principals, teachers receive important support. They help each other and receive support from principals through training courses and resources, including internet connection in their houses. In sum, teachers face difficulties in their own health (physical and emotional), in the pedagogical process (adaptations to virtual and face-to-face education), and in the lack of involvement of parents (some parents make teachers believe that their children were learning, but during face-to-face classes they realized that they were not).

Hence, it can be said that these bilingual teachers suffered problems in several aspects presented in theory, but they differed in the lack of training courses, resources, materials, and collaboration. They had positive support and active participation and help from principals, but, despite this fact, the lack of involvement of parents during the pandemic affected their planning progress with learners. Currently, they feel that the return is positive, principally because they can control and support learners in their learning.

Finally, one of the most important limitations was the impossibility to integrate parents and students of this institution. For further research, it is recommended to integrate all educative agents.



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