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Autonomy Challenges Facing Hybrid Education Model

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Abstract

The following Case Study shows the experience a pre-service teacher had in his academic practicum at a public school. The school is located in the urban area of Marinilla. In this institution the pre-service teacher found through class observations, a questionnaire and an interview that students' autonomy decreased with the implementation of Hybrid Education modality of education during the Covid-19 sanitary emergency. In particular, the data revealed the students' had autonomy challenges mainly in three different competences: Technical, Social, and Psycho-emotional Aspects.

Keywords: Hybrid Education, “trabajo en casa”, face-to-face classes, autonomy, autonomy competences.

Degree Requirement

This Case Study research project is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia.

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Table of Contents

Preface	6
Introduction	7
Context Description	7
Relevance	10
Theoretical Framework	13
Hybrid Education	13
Autonomy	16
Technical.	17
Informational.	17
Methodological.	17
Social.	18
Cognitive.	18
Metacognitive.	19
Psycho-emotional.	19
Research Question	20
General Objective	20
Specific Objectives	21
Methodology	21
Research Plan	21
Findings and Interpretations	23
Autonomy Challenges Regarding Technical Aspects	24
Autonomy Challenges Regarding Social Competences	28
Autonomy Challenges Regarding Psycho-emotional Competences	30
Conclusions and Implications	32
Reflection	34
References	35

Preface

Studying a degree in foreign languages allowed me to exercise my teaching practices at a public school. It showed me something that is implicit in the teaching and learning of English in public institutions, it was the importance of autonomy. Autonomy plays a crucial role in learning English, and even more, in public institutions since the weekly hours are very few, in addition to the fact that students receive poor input from the target language. Moreover, the Covid-19 health emergency required a change in the teaching modality, which further affected the autonomy of the students. This being the case, it seemed to me an opportune moment to observe how the autonomy of the students was affected in order to make more informed decisions in the future.

Introduction

This study contributes to the body of knowledge about Hybrid Education, specifically in the context of the sanitary emergency Covid 19 where different modalities of education were adopted. Joined, this text includes the following information. First, the description of the context where the investigation took place, including the participants and the Cooperating Teacher. Second, the characterization of the educational modality that was used in the institution. And finally, the justification of the study regarding the use of the Hybrid Education modality in times of Covid 19 sanitary emergency.

Context Description

This research was carried out at the “Institucion Educativa Tecnico Industrial Simona Duque”. The institution is a public school located in Marinilla, Antioquia, in the urban area. Simona Duque has two venues, both in the same sector, one for primary education and another one for secondary education. This study was carried out only at the secondary school campus.

It should be noted here that the institutional PEI (Proyecto Educativo Institucional) was under construction at the time the investigation was conducted. The information related to the vision and the mission of the school that I present in this section made part of the already outdated PEI. Having said this, the institution’s vision, by the year 2020, was that the “Institucion Educativa Técnico Industrial Simona Duque” was recognized for its leadership in training of excellent technical high school graduates capable of responding to the demands of a society in permanent change. Furthermore, students were in the capacity of interacting ethically in the different fields of society. In respect to the school mission, Simona Duque was perceived

as an inclusive Technical Educational Institution that committed to the training of upright, competitive and innovative people, capable of researching and responsibly integrating ICTs in all fields.

Concerning the English classes, at the beginning of the study (February, 2020) these were taught in the afternoon. Each class, face-to-face or virtual, had a duration of 55 minutes. Three months later, the classes became totally face-to-face, and with the same duration. Virtuality continued to be used but more as a means of support in terms of academic work: “trabajo en casa”. The specific class where I conducted the study had 2 face-to-face classes weekly. Regarding the syllabus and the curriculum of English classes, these followed the Basic Learning Rights. The curriculum was divided into: problematic questions, standard, competition by standard, conceptual scope, achievements, achievement indicators, teaching-learning strategies, and evaluation strategies; all these for each grade and period. Both, the curriculum and the syllabus, were organized in a supporting guide that had been used during the Covid 19 sanitary emergency. This supporting guide did not follow specific standards or methodologies. However, each English unit had competencies, performance indicators, work proposals, and explanations on how to develop the guide.

The English group I observed was composed of 46 ninth-graders, aged between 13 and 16 years old. Concerning the classroom, this had four large windows in the back and three large lamps which gave excellent lighting to the class. In addition, the classroom had a board, a television, a desk and enough chairs for all the students. The walls were painted, the class was clean, and it had different decorations such as drawings, English posters and phrases.

The Cooperating Teacher had a degree in Foreign Languages from the University of Antioquia and a Master's degree in Foreign Languages Teaching and Learning from the same university. Regarding her work experience, she has taught for a year in a preschool and 7 years at the University of Antioquia. At the time of the study, she had been teaching English at that public school for two years.

Lastly, the school was offering classes in “alternancia” (Hybrid Education) to certain groups, which means that each group in alternation was divided into 2, each half of the group took class alternating weeks. That is, the class was repeated twice in two weeks. This type of “alternation” followed the “Circulares” (directives and resolutions) issued by the Ministry of Education and the Secretary of Education of Antioquia. In detail, and taking into account the directives; No. 011 of May 29, 2020, No. 012 of June 2, 2020, No. 016 of October 9, 2020, and the resolution No. 2021060002782 of February 11, 2021; it was established that public institutions could return to classes under a progressive and gradual “alternancia” model. The alternation model involved a gradual process that complemented the academic work at home “trabajo en casa” and combined different options to develop interactions between teachers and students. In short, the concept of alternation highlights the need to combine different variables and circumstances that will be present in the provision of the educational service, within the framework of the health emergency and in accordance with the needs of each territory (Directiva No. 011, 2020).

Relevance

The covid 19 sanitary emergency broad different challenges to teachers and students. Both had to adopt a modality of education never experienced before: “alternancia” or Hybrid Education without prior preparation. As a result, students’ autonomy was affected, that is to say, the motivation, the commitment, and the attitude of the students changed in comparison to face-to-face classes. Given the special situation that I just described, I was particularly interested in understanding in detail how the modality adopted had challenged students’ autonomy. With that intention in mind, I expose the three facts that justify the study.

Firstly, the search of information related to “alternancia” model revealed that there are few studies, if not nonexistent, on alternation education modality in the Colombian context, and even fewer studies in relation to the current Covid-19 sanitary emergency. There is similar information but in other contexts and with similar terms to alternation, such as virtuality and Hybrid Education. For instance, in relation to “virtual”, “distance” and “Hybrid Education”, there are 3 studies that serve as reference for this study.

One of them is the case of a research done in Indonesia by Atmojo and Nugroho (2020). The study presents the teaching activities and challenges that teachers, parents and students faced during the implementation of “virtual education” because of the pandemic. Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) concluded that some of the challenges parents and students faced during the adoption of “virtual education” were that several students did not have their own cell phone to attend virtual classes, there was low digital literacy in a large number of students, the internet signal was unstable in rural areas, and there was an inability to afford sufficient internet quota for online

learning. All the challenges just mentioned above translated into low motivation on the part of the students, homework submissions after the final date, lack of commitment, and misunderstandings when doing homework.

The second study was carried out in Georgia by Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020). It analyzed the capacities of the country and those of its population to continue the educational process in schools in online distance learning modality. This study reviewed the different platforms available and indicated those that were offered by the government. The study concluded that the transition from the traditional to the online education system at the school was successful. In addition, it affirmed that by getting new skills, the students would work more independently. Finally, the authors concluded that “the pandemic of 2020 will force a generation of new laws, regulations, platforms and solutions for future cases, when the countries, government and population will be more prepared than today” (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020, p.7).

And the third study, from Indiana State University, by Mansour and Mupinga (2007), described the characteristics of online and hybrid courses, the negative and positive experiences, and the existent ways to improve online and hybrid courses. The participants of the study were 41 students who registered in an online course and 12 in a hybrid course. This study concluded that the hybrid classes met the expectations of the students. In contrast, online classes had a higher percentage of negative experiences. For instance, students found “unreliable Internet connections from work schedule”, “too many technical problems with computer access”, “problems with the course management platform”, and “instructor feedback tended to be slow”. Although the studies serve as reference, these are contexts different from the Colombian one and it cannot be taken for granted that we have similar results. That is why it was important to

analyze what happened in Colombia, what students were experiencing, and particularly, what were the autonomy challenges students were facing.

Secondly, besides the need of taking a closer look at the situation students were facing in terms of autonomy in the “alternation” context, I had a personal concern from my experience as a preservice teacher. I found that there was a great contrast between face-to-face and virtual classes. A change in the modality of education implied a change in students’ role. In other words, even if the content of the class remained the same, the way in which this content was delivered and what students were asked to do with it was not the same. Indeed, during the class observations, I could clearly notice that the students showed greater autonomy and interest in face-to-face classes (Teacher Journal, March 1st, 2021) than in virtual classes. Conversely, students showed less autonomy and interest in virtual classes. For instance, they often did not activate the microphone when the teacher requested their participation (Teacher Journal, April 5th, 2021).

And thirdly, this study had the intention of working as baseline data in order to better understand the situation students were facing. The study provided contextualized information about students in relation to this new alternation model (Hybrid Education). This information may serve for future research and reference for new contingencies such as the Covid-19 sanitary emergency in the country. Taking into account all the above, I did a Case Study at the school where I developed my academic practice. The main objective of my research was to understand how Hybrid Education was challenging students’ autonomy in English classes. In the following section I define the main concepts that guided this research.

Theoretical Framework

In this theoretical framework I present the different concepts and definitions that support the study. To begin, the existing theory about the two main concepts of the research, and the existing connection between them. Since there are no preceding frameworks on “alternation”, I decided to adopt the concept of Hybrid Education and its types. Then, I expose the connection between Hybrid Education and autonomy. And finally, I define the notion of autonomy and the domains of it.

Hybrid Education

The concept of Hybrid Education is approached from different names such as, Hybrid Model, Hybrid Instruction, Hybrid Learning, Hybridity, or as it is called in the Colombian context “alternancia educativa”. Although the names differ, the definitions share similarities even from the perspective of distinct authors and institutions. For instance, the College of DuPage (n.d) states that “Hybrid learning combines face-to-face and online teaching into one cohesive experience” (p.3) . Likewise, different authors (Ahmed et al., 2020; Trentin, 2016; Shams, 2013; Martyn, 2003) agree that Hybrid Education is the process whereby it is combined face-to-face classroom activities with online activities. Furthermore, Waddoups and Howell (2002, p. 2) affirm, “hybridization occurs when on-campus educators adopt distance education technologies and practices, and when distance education organizations adopt/adapt campus-based educational practices”, similar to what is happening in the Colombian context with the “alternancia” model. According to the National Ministry of Education (MEN) and the Secretary of Education of

Antioquia (SEDUCA), this model involves a gradual process through which students go from virtual classes to face-to-face and vice versa. Moreover, there is the possibility that virtuality and presentiality occur at the same time. In sum, we can affirm that Hybrid Education arises when the face-to-face factor and the virtual factor get going to relate in an educational context.

As for the types of Hybrid Education, not much information is found in the literature, however there are two articles that can add depth to the concept. The first article from the College of DuPage (n.d) divides the concepts of “hybrid” and “blended”. It asserts that Hybrid Education “refers to teaching that is roughly balanced between its two formats (think 50/50), blended refers to a mostly traditional face-to-face course that also incorporates a few class sessions worth of online instruction (think 25/75)”. The second article by Alina (2019) addresses the concepts of hybrid and blended as a single term, and she distinguishes it in six models, below I define just the two models that represent what was described in the context of the present study.

The Flex Model. Flex model can be implemented by secondary schools. Online instruction delivery is a vital part of this model. Teachers deliver instructions online and students can access the online content in the sanctity of their home. This model appeals to out-of-school students who get involved in work-study programs, students who find it difficult to attend traditional schools and students who need a part-time schooling program. (para. 11)

The Rotation Model. Students move from face-to-face instruction to online instruction following a schedule prepared by the teachers. Elementary schools benefit from the

rotation model where learning is divided between literacy skills and mathematical skills.
(para. 12)

It should be noted that Hybrid Education within the Colombian context used a different term to refer to the virtual education. The Ministry of Education (2020) defined two key terms that fit the particular situation of this study.

“Trabajo en Casa”: which consisted of maintaining the continuity of the educational service with flexible strategies to be developed at home, in accordance with the learning processes of children and young people with the accompaniment of teachers.

“Transición Progresiva Casa-Institución Educativa”: which consisted of the preparation and implementation of concrete biosafety and school management actions by the members of the educational community. With the intention of resuming gradually and with the consent of families and students, the provision of the service in a face-to-face mode, during the measure of flexibility of preventive isolation in times of health emergency.

This study paid special attention to the relationship between Hybrid Education and autonomy. According to Bouachraoui and Lehiany (2020), in Hybrid Education, the students' autonomy required is higher than in virtual classes, since “neither the teacher nor the peers are always physically present to stimulate the learning situation, it is the learner who must determine the time, place and use of media resources” (p. 59). In addition, Waddoups and Howell (2002) found that the hybridization experience brought distance education to campus. Nevertheless, campus practices did not lead to distance education. In short, the relation between Hybrid

Education and autonomy is perceived when students' autonomy varies in face-to-face classes and virtual classes.

Autonomy

Regarding the concept of autonomy, there are numerous authors who address it from varied points of views. For instance (Holec, 1981; Dickinson, 1987; and Little, 1994, as cited in Shams, 2013) address the concept from education, they agree that autonomy is the aptitude to take responsibility for individual learning. Moreover, Kerr (2002) tackles the concept of autonomy from an intrinsic point of view, that is, as something that is inside the human being and therefore is part of it. Kerr (2002) states that, autonomy is the ability to reason about the own decisions made in the past. It should be noted that for this last author, the autonomous being is the one who consciously makes meaningful life decisions. In that order of ideas, autonomy for this author is reflected when the student makes a decision in relation to something that is vital. In essence, autonomy is the ability to consciously take responsibility for one's learning and life decisions. These definitions helped me to delimit the attitudes I needed to observe from students and analyze whether these attitudes presented a variation between face-to-face and "trabajo en casa". In order to have a more detailed description of the attitudes I needed to observe, I followed Albergo's (2000) domains of autonomy. This study allowed me to identify the main competences in terms of autonomy. The author divides these autonomy competences into seven.

Technical.

Skills required are: control the technologies used, especially digital; Update know-how;

Adapt to the diversity of tools and support; Have a network of resource people.

Expected behaviors from students are: using software, CD Rom or a collaborative work platform; Find help when facing a technical difficulty. (p.60)

Informational.

Skills required are: control the tools of documentary research (libraries and files,

database, search engines, portals and sites); Search and find relevant information (query modes, indexing systems, limits of tools); Update knowledge and know-how in the field of literature search; Gather, store, manage the information obtained.

Expected behaviors from students are: complete the documentation proposed as part of the training; Make a presentation, a dossier, a dissertation; Share information as part of collaborative work. (p. 60-61)

Methodological.

Skills required are: organize the work according to various objectives, deadlines and

constraints (family, professional, institutional); Differentiate personal goals and

institutional goals, (self) formative assessment and validation; Be aware of the time and effort required to complete a task; Plan and regulate its activity; Give criteria for

identifying performance acceptability thresholds and compare them with the objectives set.

Expected behaviors are: respect the institutional calendar; Respect the working times of various groups and teachers; Provide the means to achieve the objectives set (personal and institutional). (p.61)

Social.

Skills required are: communicating to learn; Make situations of exchange for learning opportunities, if imitation and comparison with others is experienced as a positive source of learning; Cooperate, exchange, share information; Build a network of resource people; Request and get help; Negotiate to stay in step with your personal project; Develop an attitude of openness, tolerance, empathy towards its interlocutors.

Expected behaviors from students are: work in collaboration with peers; Negotiate the terms of the work to be done to make the individual, collective and institutional objectives compatible; Interview human resources relevant for help; Reform the answers to verify the adequacy of representations. (p.61)

Cognitive.

Skills required are: analyze the elements observed (spot clues, create links, categories, compare, discriminate, synthesize); Recourse to diversified mental operations (induction, deduction, abduction), extended to intuition, association by analogy; Create links between new items and items stabilized in representations; Anticipate by formulating hypotheses; Regulate by various verification processes.

Expected behaviors from students are: understand the content offered in part of the training; Detect areas of misunderstanding or lack of control; Identify the elements sufficiently mastered; Perform prescribed tasks. (p. 61)

Metacognitive.

Skills required are: performance monitoring and awareness steps; Reflexive activity on the action undertaken (interrelations between objective, means implemented and results); Reflexive activity on the efficiency of the chosen learning methods (memorization, revisions, training, simulations) and regulation of learning strategies; Critical examination of the approaches adopted (efficiency of individual and group work, interactions with resource people); Regulations based on the analysis of the situations encountered.

Expected behaviors from students are: situate previous acquisitions in relation to a work program; Clarify what is acquired and what's not; Self-assess performance by reporting to peers and to institutional expectations, particularly in terms of validation.; Adapt learning strategies according to the conditions and objectives of this learning. (p. 61-62)

Psycho-emotional.

Skills required are: being able to distance; Regulate emotions during discussions and tasks; Be capable of mobilization, initiative; Be aware of its (bio) rhythms and preferences(profile) in terms of learning to combine efficiency and pleasure; Take responsibility for training; Update a positive self-image and self-efficacy; Tolerate

relative uncertainty and loss of benchmarks; Analyze the error and make it a source of learning.

Expected behaviors from students are: overcome discouragement, fear of not succeeding, anxiety about judgment and feelings of regression; Demonstrate efficient persistence; Act positively on the dynamics of a group. (p. 62)

This theoretical framework addressed the main concepts of the research from different studies. First, the conception of Hybrid Education from certain authors and institutions, and the two models that are closely related to the type of education of the institution where this study was conducted. Then, the existing relation between Hybrid Education and autonomy from the perspective of virtual and face-to-face classes. After that, the theory about autonomy as the ability to take responsibility for individual learning. And finally, the seven autonomy domains, each one with its students' expected skills and behaviors.

Research Question

What autonomy challenges were 9th grade English students at a public institution from Marinilla facing in Hybrid Education?

General Objective

To understand how Hybrid Education was affecting students' autonomy in English classes.

Specific Objectives

- ❖ To collect information about the type of Hybrid Education being implemented at the institution and information about students' "autonomy competences".
- ❖ To analyze students' autonomy in this type of education.
- ❖ To contrast students' autonomy challenges in the different scenarios: Face-to-face and "trabajo en casa".

Methodology

Taking into account that the study sought to understand the autonomy challenges faced by students in Hybrid Education modality, I decided to do a Case Study instead of an Action Research for two main reasons: One, a Case Study intends to illustrate an unusual case that needs to be described and detailed, Creswell (2016). Two, the feasibility of doing a Case Study in my particular context and the moment we were living in at this moment (classes could change from virtual to "trabajo en casa" to face-to-face and vice versa due to COVID-19 health emergency) in which the class modality of the students was uncertain.

Research Plan

The present research plan contains the actions that were conducted over the course of 8 weeks at a public institution in Marinilla. This study sought to understand the autonomy challenges that 9th grade English students were facing in Hybrid Education. Therefore, the data

gathering and analysis process was based on the seven autonomy competences proposed by Albero's (2000).

Among the different data collection methods, this inquiry made special emphasis on four: Checklist, journals, questionnaire, and an interview. The first instrument allowed me to gather general information about the seven observed competences. In addition, [checklists](#) enabled me to collect data quickly during the classes. Regarding the journals, they helped me obtain detailed and in-depth information on each of the competencies. Concerning the [questionnaire](#), it facilitated the obtaining of statistical information about each autonomy competence from the students point of view. The questionnaire was directed to the students because it was an effective manner to gather information from a large group of learners like mine. Finally, the interview helped me to obtain detailed information about the students. The interview was aimed at the Cooperating Teacher since she had spent more time with the students, and she knew them better. With this interview, it was expected to collect information about the autonomy and autonomy challenges of students in face-to-face and "trabajo en casa" modalities of education.

Development of Actions

Throughout the second semester of the school year, and based on the different research instruments, I developed four research actions. The first one was the use of checklists during classes. It was possible to collect seven checklists which provided data on the students' autonomy, mostly information about face-to-face classes. The second research action was the writing of journals during the class weeks. During the class period, four journals were collected, each journal equivalent to a period of approximately 2 weeks. The third action research was the

implementation of an interview via Google Meets. The [interview](#) was carried out with the Cooperating Teacher, and it was recorded using the Google Meets platform. It was a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions lasting approximately 45 minutes, and was selectively transcribed, that is, only the relevant information for the study was extracted. The last research action was the implementation of questionnaires using Google Forms. The questionnaire was submitted on November the third, and it was carried out with the students, of which nine learners decided to participate. The questionnaire was done with closed multiple-choice questions, it was divided into two sections, the first focused on "trabajo en casa" modality and the second one on face-to-face classes.

Findings and Interpretations

From the analysis and codification of information collected out of different sources of data such as checklists, journals, a questionnaire and an interview; I could find out the autonomy challenges ninth grade English students from a public institution were facing in Hybrid Education. I decided to use checklists and journals, since these aid in observation, reflection and documentation of present and past situations. Moreover, it contributed to a better understanding of the social and educational situation (Altricher, Feldman, Posch & Somekh, 2005). Concerning the questionnaire and the interview, I chose these because both gave me detailed information on autonomy challenges from the Cooperating Teacher's point of view and from the student's perspective. The questionnaire provided me with information about students' opinions. Besides, it allowed me to ask specific (open/close) questions about autonomy. Finally, interviews "give

access to other people's perceptions, including crucially the thoughts, attitudes and opinions” (Altricher, et al, 2005, p.100).

Then, it was essential to scrutinize the content of the journals and checklists, make a selective transcription of the interview, and transcribe a google forms questionnaire. Then, the data was codified in order to organize and to find patterns in data, according to Saldana (2008, p.8), “Coding is [...] a method that enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or families”. Once all the information was codified using an Excel file and patterns started to appear, I selected the three most relevant autonomy competences of the seven proposed by Albero's (2000): Technical is the first one, it is related with the use and the update know-how of the different technologies with academic purposes. Social is the second one, it is related to the way in which students connect with their peers and teachers. Psycho-emotional is the last one, it focuses on how students behave within an academic class environment.

Autonomy Challenges Regarding Technical Aspects

Data revealed that students had autonomy challenges when controlling the necessary technologies for the development of the classes in Hybrid Education. These difficulties were mostly present in the “trabajo en casa” modality since students were required to use technological tools to send homework and to access online classes. Specifically, data evidenced students challenges in terms of connectivity within online classes, keeping the focus on academic activities and properly using virtual tools. I will offer further explanation in the following paragraphs.

Challenges to find and keep the connection when using Google Meets and the institutional platform. Learners evidenced frequent issues with the internet connection, in particular, internet crashes and low data connection which ended up affecting the online classes. This situation was registered in one of my journals: “students claimed the [Institutional] platform falls all the time, and more if the homework is sent at night” (Teacher Journal, August 30th, 2021). Even the “Supporting Classrooms” designed for students to maintain their academic level were strongly affected by “trabajo en casa”. According to the Cooperating Teacher:

Mientras muchos estudiantes trataban de conseguir algún computador alguna tablet, mientras el colegio les prestaba equipos y mientras también algún vecino, alguna buena persona les podía compartir la señal de wifi muchos estudiantes se perdieron esta oportunidad [to enter the supporting classrooms]¹. (Cooperating Teacher Interview, October 29th, 2021)

This result confirmed what Mansour and Mupinga (2007) found about online classes. They stated that online classes offer “unreliable Internet connections from work schedule”, “too many technical problems with computer access”, and “problems with the course management platform” (Table 1, p. 247) which necessarily affect the academic performance of students.

Challenges to keep the focus within “trabajo en casa”. Data collection demonstrated that studying at home affected their learning process due to the many distractions that studying from home implied. This result thoroughly contrasts face-to-face classes where distractions were

¹ [while many students tried to get a computer, a tablet. While the school lent them equipment, and while a neighbor, or a good person could share the Wi-Fi signal with them, many students missed this opportunity [to enter the supporting classrooms], my translation]

not as many and the need to focus on classes was more compulsive. According to certain students, home distractions were very common; “mi madre pidiéndome que haga oficio” “el perro o el gato molestando”² (Teacher Journal, August 30th, 2021). As a consequence, students diverted their attention from the class and got lost in the topics of the class. Moreover, in some cases even coexistence with relatives was complex and interfered with class duties, as the Cooperating Teacher stated:

El estar en un ambiente académico fuera del entorno del aula, que a veces en familia es violento, maltrato intrafamiliar, problemas que afectan la emotividad de los estudiantes, y para ellos estar allí es difícil y concentrarse en lo académico muchísimo más.³

(Cooperating Teacher Interview, October 29th, 2021)

One explanation for the many distractions students experienced at home may be that students and relatives did not feel that home was an academic environment, as Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) found out in their research. They thought that “trabajo en casa” was informal learning, it was not like school, but a relaxing place. They did not take the precautions to prepare a class environment at home: Study place, far from noise and distractions. Also, many families could not afford adapting their homes as a study place.

Challenges to properly use virtual tools. In “trabajo en casa” modality there were not many ways to monitor all students; for instance, if they were the ones doing homework or if they correctly used the digital tools at their disposal to finish homework and get a good grade. In the

² [My mother asking me to do the household cleaning], [the dog or the cat bothering].

³ [Being in an academic environment outside the classroom, which is sometimes violent in the family, intra-family abuse, problems that affect the students emotionally. And for them being there is difficult and concentrating on academics much more]

context I observed, it was evident that some students were not using the virtual tools properly. In other words, students took advantage of not having the supervision of the teacher at home to cheat using computer-assisted translation tools or copying and pasting someone else's homework. In other cases, students were even getting help from people in order to finish their assignments or complete evaluative tasks. This situation was described in one conversation with my Cooperating Teacher: "Students use WhatsApp to exchange information related to homework. It became an opportunity to cheat and plagiarize homework." (Informal conversation with the Cooperating Teacher, August 30th, 2021).

Particularly, it was the case of an evaluative test of the 20% in "trabajo en casa" modality, where the teachers of the institution realized that the students were cheating. In words of the Cooperative Teacher:

En la prueba virtual del 20%, confiando ahí en el estudiante; ellos contratan profesores que les hacían los exámenes, se reunían todos en la misma casa y se ayudaban, se decían las respuestas, era bastante complejo, uno terminaba ¿evaluando qué?, ¿evaluando a quién?. ⁴(Cooperating Teacher Interview, October 29th, 2021)

In sum, keeping the connection to the meetings and platforms, keeping the focus and properly using virtual tools were some of the most recurrent autonomy challenges students faced in relation to technical competence in Hybrid Education. On the whole, the particular context of the participants of the study and their struggle to properly use tools manifested, up to a point,

⁴ [In the virtual test of 20%, [The teachers] trusting the students there; They hired teachers who did the exams for them, they all met in the same house and helped each other, they told each other the answers. It was quite complex, [The teachers] we ended up evaluating what? Evaluating who?]

difficulties to take responsibility for their own learning (Holec, 1981; Dickinson, 1987; and Little, 1994, as cited in Shams, 2013).

Autonomy Challenges Regarding Social Competences

Data showed students' autonomy challenges regarding social aspects in Hybrid Education ("trabajo en casa" and face-to-face classes). Among the main social challenges, two competence groups stood out: the difficulties to cooperate, exchange, and share information, and difficulties to request and get help.

Challenges to cooperate, exchange, and share information with teachers and peers.

Data analysis indicated that students had more difficulties to cooperate, exchange, and share information with teachers and peers in "trabajo en casa" than in face-to-face classes. These difficulties arose mainly because data exchange is slower through the internet than face-to-face. In addition, teachers' feedback was delayed due to different factors. On the one hand, students asked for help or questions outside teachers' working hours. And on the other hand, the feedback through platforms such as *Gmail* and *Whatsapp* took longer. As manifested in the questionnaire I applied to students: In "trabajo en casa", "4 of each 9 students had difficulties to cooperate, exchange, and share information". Whereas in face-to-face classes "2 of each 9 students had difficulties to cooperate, exchange, and share information". (Questionnaire, November 5th, 2021, See Figure [1](#) and [2](#)).

Challenges to request and get help from teachers and peers. Similar to the previous sub-category, data revealed that the slow internet connection, and the slow feedback made students prefer not to ask for help. Moreover, the answering of questions regarding activities and

evaluative tasks was very complex, since the teacher's cell phone ended up collapsing due to the number of files from WhatsApp they needed to save. Data from the questionnaires showed that in “trabajo en casa” “5 of each 9 students had difficulties to request and get help”. In contrast, in face-to-face classes, “1 of each 9 students showed difficulties to request and get help”. (Questionnaire, November 5th, 2021, See figure [3](#) and [4](#)).

Similarly, the Cooperating Teacher affirmed, “en trabajo en casa no veía yo tanto eso, la verdad no recuerdo ningún caso en el que los estudiantes se acercaran con esas dudas [Sobre temas de la clase]”⁵ (Cooperating Teacher Interview, October 29th, 2021) .

In sum, social competences like cooperating, exchanging and sharing information, and requesting and getting help were significantly challenging for students in Hybrid Education, especially in “trabajo en casa” modality. The fact that students’ challenges concerning social competences were doubled in “trabajo en casa” compared to face-to-face classes may suggest that students were not somehow aware of their own learning process, nor their needs. Under those circumstances, they felt lost and, in many cases, did not comply with the required homework and activities in “trabajo en casa” modality. This finding can be compared with Mansour and Mupinga’s (2007) study in which they could establish that “Instructor feedback tended to be slow” in online courses (Table 1, p. 247).

⁵ [In the virtual [classes] I did not see that, the truth is that I do not remember any case in which the students approached with those doubts [About class topics]]

Autonomy Challenges Regarding Psycho-emotional Competences

Data exposed students' psycho-emotional challenges when facing hybrid classes in relation to the regulation of emotions during discussions and tasks. As presented in the previous findings, psycho-emotional issues were equally higher in “trabajo en casa”.

According to the Cooperating Teacher in “trabajo en casa” certain students showed inappropriate behaviours “En las clases virtuales, ingresan se conectan y empiezan a hacerlo a través de insultos”⁶ (Personal interview with the Cooperating Teacher, October 29th, 2021). As a consequence, the teacher had to remind the students of some Netiquette rules. In other cases, students were affected by a heavy family environment and household chores, thus students felt overwhelmed and in the end, decided not to do class work. The situation was evidenced in the following excerpt: “[The students] deben hacerse cargo de las tareas del hogar entonces no administran bien el tiempo, se desesperan y finalmente dicen ‘no, voy a desistir, no voy a entregar lo de Inglés’”⁷ (Cooperating Teacher Interview, October 29th, 2021).

Moreover, certain students felt lonely or frustrated in their homes which caused a decrease in their motivation. As the Cooperating Teacher stated,

Entonces se dejan llevar por la frustración y no entregaban nada, absolutamente ningún trabajo y cuando te acercabas y les preguntabas ¿ven que pasó? “ah no profe yo no entendía nada”, “en mi casa no me dejaban concentrar”, “yo no tenía a quién más preguntarle” “mucho problema con el internet”. [Yo les decía] ven, pero ¿porque no

⁶ [In virtual classes, they enter, connect and begin to do so through insults]

⁷ [The students have to take care of household chores so they don't manage their time well, they despair and finally say 'no, I'm going to give up, I'm not going to hand over the English]

simplemente sacaste la fotocopia de la guía en la papelería? [Y ellos respondían] “no profe es que yo allá sólo... no, no me concentro, no me motivo.”⁸ (Cooperating Teacher Interview, October 29th, 2021)

All in all, inappropriate behaviors and troubles when managing emotions during “trabajo en casa” were the most frequent challenges that students faced in relation to Psycho-emotional Competences. Students felt overwhelmed with class activities and the context that surrounded their houses somehow made them quit. Mansour and Mupinga (2007) found that some students revealed challenges when managing their emotions, for instance, certain students felt that they were not part of the class. This situation may, in a way, reflect what students in this research experienced in “trabajo en casa”. They were literally “outside the classroom” and their needs were not met as in face-to-face classes.

Conclusions and Implications

The present inquiry had the purpose of observing what autonomy challenges were English students at a public institution facing in Hybrid Education. It was possible to perceive that students had autonomy challenges mainly in three aspects. Technical competences such as the use of electronic devices with academic purposes, social competences regarding students abilities to cooperate, exchange, and share information in “trabajo en casa”, and psycho-emotional domains like learners skills to regulate their emotions.

⁸ [They let themselves be carried away by frustration and they did not deliver anything, absolutely any task and when you approached them and asked them, *come*, what happened? [students] "no teacher, I didn't understand anything", "at home they didn't let me concentrate [the parents, the dog, the cat etc].", "I didn't have anyone else to ask" "a lot of problems with the internet" [cooperating teacher] *come*, but why did you just take the photocopy of the guide in the stationery? [student] "no teacher is that I just there, alone ... no, I don't concentrate, I don't motivate myself]

Regarding the implications of this study, teachers working in Hybrid Education should acknowledge how this type of education negatively impacts students' autonomy and make small changes in the structure of the classes, such as slowing down the class rhythm and checking on students' understanding of topics and instructions constantly. Equally important, teachers should keep constant communication with students in order to help them cope with social and psycho-emotional difficulties.

Furthermore, if teachers want to maintain the level of commitment in hybrid classes, new teaching strategies must be implemented. For instance, teachers can record classes, and incorporate platforms such as Microsoft Teams, WebEX, or Zoom. These platforms have particular functions that are better suited depending on the type of classes. They have elements such as virtual notebooks, boards, sub-rooms, among many other functions. In addition, considering that attending virtual classes/advisorics was negatively affected by varied technical issues, teachers can recommend students to test their equipment and programs before classes, so they will have time to solve what is resolvable. Teachers can also be more flexible with students, that is, teachers can create small virtual spaces at different times or days to provide feedback, tutorials to answer questions about virtual classes and activities. Last, acknowledging that students' emotions are affected by the different factors that surround them outside of an academic environment, my recommendation is to create communication spaces that help them cope with emotion management.

Future research could perform similar case studies in different contexts in order to have a better understanding of the consequences that the implementation that Hybrid Education has on the students' autonomy. A selective investigation of each competence in different contexts

(private vs public, school vs university) could enlighten new challenges and therefore new questions for improving the students autonomy in this modality of education. In similar contexts, an action research would be pertinent to address possible solutions to improve and mitigate the autonomy challenges students in this study were facing.

Reflection

This study enlightened different ideas and preconceptions I had, in particular, about the importance of autonomy when learning a second/foreign language. I understood that the particular context of each institution has an effect on students' autonomy. Notably, in public institutions just like the one I did this research at, where access to technology and digital devices is limited and the quality of the internet is deficient, it results in undeniable technical challenges. In other cases, the platforms used by the institution as the means of communication between teachers and students are deficient, it necessarily represents a challenge in relation to social competences. I understood that it is not about blaming the particular context, but about understanding that each context has particular needs and challenges that should be carefully studied.

Certainly, this study helped me understand that English teaching is complex; on the one hand, I understood that teaching is not limited to standing in front of a board and addressing topics, since it is useless to give your best if the students do not pay attention to you. And on the other hand, you have to deal with the students personality, motivation, interest, and autonomy to make learning as meaningful as possible.

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