

The roles of beginner English teachers at the English BA in times of Covid- 19

Los roles de los profesores principiantes de inglés en la Licenciatura en inglés en tiempos de Covid-19

Verónica Rodríguez-Luna ^a, Brenda Rico-González ^b, Isaí A. Guevara-Bazán ^c,
Jorge Martínez-Cortés ^d

Abstract:

The intent of the proposed research offers an overview of the roles that teachers have taken during the pandemic and the possible changes teachers could play nowadays, as well. Based on the current context in the world, teachers face a different and complicated position rather than they used to do. Moreover, this research tries to identify the current roles of teachers as well as to show the impact of teachers' roles on students and find out, which is the relation between teacher-student and student-student when facing this pandemic.

Keywords:

Roles, pandemic, teaching methods

Resumen:

La investigación propuesta ofrece una visión general de los roles que los maestros asumieron durante la pandemia y los posibles cambios que podrían adoptar en la actualidad. Basándonos en el contexto actual en el mundo, los profesores enfrentan una posición diferente y complicada en comparación con la que solían tener. Por otro lado, esta investigación intenta identificar los roles actuales de los maestros, así como mostrar el impacto de los roles de los académicos en los estudiantes y descubrir cuál es la relación entre maestro-estudiante y estudiante-estudiante al enfrentar la pandemia.

Palabras Clave:

Roles, pandemia, métodos de enseñanza

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^a Autor de correspondencia, Verónica Rodríguez Luna, Universidad Veracruzana, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2599-3697>, Email: verorodriguez@uv.mx

^b Brenda Rico-González, Universidad Veracruzana, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6286-5008>, Email: gs17023718@uv.mx

^c Isaí A. Guevara-Bazán, Universidad Veracruzana, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1500-291X>, Email: iguevara@uv.mx

^d Jorge Martínez-Cortés, Universidad Veracruzana, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8696-2088>, Email: jomartinez@uv.mx

1. Introduction

Despite the overwhelming situation and collateral effects, this pandemic has brought, this global crisis has also been an extraordinary time for learning. We are learning how adaptable and resilient systems, families, students, and teachers can be. It is worth recognizing and mentioning that the role of teachers is rapidly evolving, becoming in many ways more difficult than when learning took place only in person.

Teachers and students have adapted their lives to a new virtual environment. It also means that both teachers and students play a new role in the teaching-learning process. In addition, the use of traditional language teaching is not used the same way it used to be.

The present research aimed at discovering the roles that teachers have taken during the pandemic, the strategies they have used in online lessons, students' attitudes as well as the learning strategies that students have used in response to the new teachers' roles. Data shows different perspectives regarding students' responses and perceptions.

1. Literature review

Nowadays and due to the current situation (universal pandemic- COVID-19), the whole world has changed. As mentioned before many areas became affected (e.g., educational, social, economic, etc.)

This is a real problem, something that both teachers and students are facing. None of them sees this as simple work. Adaptation is a word that fits very well. Why does it? Well, teachers and students had to adapt their environment to a more 'virtual' time. If we as students and as teachers used technology very often, now it is more frequent to take our computer or any smart device.

Smart devices interrupted face-to-face interaction. It is worth recognizing that it was not our choice but a necessity. However, does it affect the teaching methods or the traditional language teaching?

2.1 Teaching methods

There is the traditional methodology as well as the modern methodology, or traditional teaching and modern teaching as their synonyms. First, we will define the term 'method' to be clear and make this work understandable. According to E. Anthony 1963 (cited in J. Richards and T. S Rodgers, 1986, p. 49): "Method is the level at which theory is put into practice and at which choices are made about the particular skills to be taught, the content to be taught, and the order in which the content will be presented."

Foreign languages are taught with different principles, methods, and skills. Some authors say that the learning methods could be chosen based on the educational objectives or interests of the person. It is said that in recent years, individual approaches results showed equal knowledge in all four sections: listening, speaking,

reading, and writing, according to Kizi et al. (2020).

The important task is to improve students' skills and not test memory. According to Jim Scrivener 2005 (cited in Baumová, 2008) with receptive skills it is always better to assign one task, let the students accomplish it, have feedback, and then assign another task, let the students read or listen to the text again, have feedback, etc.

2.2 Teachers' roles

The teacher's role here is to encourage and help students to explore and make learning interesting. This and some others are the roles that a teacher can play during a lesson. There is not a specific role that a teacher can play; a teacher can perform two, three, or more roles in a session, this will depend on students' needs.

Teachers should be able to represent the best in front of the students, as Harmer 1998 (cited in Naibaho, 2019) says, "a good teacher is a teacher who is able to absorb unexpected things and use them for the good of the students" (p.207). Therefore, the roles of the teacher according to Harmer (2007) can be the following: *Teacher as a controller*: here the teacher is responsible in the class and for all the activities that occur in the classroom.

Teacher as an organizer: the teacher has the duty to organize students to make diverse activities.

Teacher as an assessor: Teachers have to offer feedback to their students as they speak and correct mistakes

Teacher as a resource: Teachers as a resource will help students how to express themselves when they do not know something.

Teacher as a tutor: The teacher must have an intimate relationship with the student to gain confidence.

According to Beltrán (2019), a good teacher is a good teacher who guides his/her students to be able to feel her/his own thoughts.

2.3 Learning strategies

Teachers use different learning strategies, depending on the student's needs, in order to help them comprehend better. Scarcella & Oxford 1992 (cited in Oxford, 2003) define learning strategies as "specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques- such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task- used by students to enhance their own learning"

Oxford 1990 (cited in Oxford, 2003) states that a strategy is useful if the following conditions are present:

The strategy relates well to the L2 task, b) the strategy fits the particular student's learning styles preferences to one degree or another, and c) the student employs the strategy effectively and links it with other relevant strategies.

(P.8).

2.4 Teaching strategies

In the same way, as students use different strategies to keep learning well, teachers use strategies to offer great teaching to students. Strategies such as: vocabulary duty to accomplish the goal that she/he set at the start of the course and use the appropriate strategy or strategies.

2.5 Online learning strategies

Online learning is not an easy task; students should know that it requires a high degree of autonomy, like self-directed learning practices and homework to manage one's time. Barbour and Reeves (2009) indicated that students with high motivation and good self-regulation skills were more likely to succeed in virtual schools.

Some strategies are: self-regulation, language-learning motivation and online-learning satisfaction. While the University of Illinois Springfield updated some others like: contract learning, lecture, discussion, role plays, and etcetera.

2.6 Effects of the COVID- 19 on students and teachers

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, teachers, and the whole world prepared a survey that addressed stress level, learning, and teaching was interrupted. Teachers reported a wide range of challenges related to engaging students to learn within this situation, there is balance in the professional and personal responsibilities. The new normality does not allow both teachers and students to feel comfortable, teachers often work in isolation learning from experience and trying to reinforce their pedagogical practices in their traditional environment.

Kraft & Simon (2020) suggest in their findings that mid-career teachers struggled to balance professional responsibilities with obligations at home. Veteran teachers were much likely to report being uncomfortable using the technological tools required for teaching remotely.

Researchers at the Center on Reinventing Public Education found that just some teachers provide instruction, track student engagement, or monitor students. Furthermore, the RAND reported that both students and teachers lacked internet access, and the access to technology and/ or intent was a barrier. This provoked a much lower level of engagement from both parties.

Thus, I can conclude that the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic has really shocked both students and teachers at all levels, and at the same time, they are trying to find solutions to work better.

checks, eliciting, modeling of target language, think aloud, etcetera.

These strategies have the purpose to help students to convey information to students. There is a chance that all strategies can work for all the students, it is the teacher's

2. Methods and Results

The findings presented here are part of a study investigating the roles of beginner English teachers at the English BA in times of COVID-19. The study reported hereused a mixed- method approach to gather data. According to Moss (2012), the existence of the mixed methods approach stemmed from its potential to help researchers view social relations and their intricacies clearer by fusingthe quantitative and qualitative methods while recognizingthe limitations of both.

The study was conducted at the English Language Degree from the Universidad Veracruzana. All the participants are students from 17 to 18 years old. Participants were selected from the English Language Degree, which studies the beginner level.

I choose these students' levels because they are the ones that helped me to investigate and show to the lecturers if beginner English teachers have taken new roles towards the pandemic or if students and teachers use new learning and teaching strategies. Beginner learners have started the course in a new environment (online) and it enables them to expose the challenges when learning a second language in an online mode.

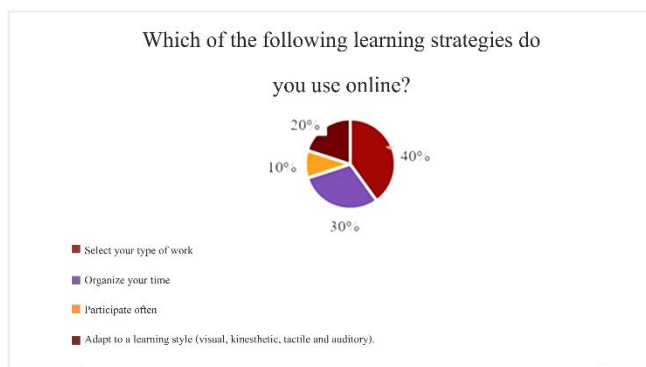
Thus, participants who answered with complex responses in the questionnaire were the ones selected to be interviewed.

Therefore, the aim was to identify the different roles that teachers have taken during COVID-19, the teaching strategies that teachers have applied, students' attitudes, and learning strategies towards new teachers' roles. Hence, students' responses will be useful to obtain the results.

Indirect participation from students at English Language Degree was the main resource. Moreover, surveys, questionnaires, and interviews (hosted in Google forms and via Zoom meetings) were used to obtain qualitative and quantitative data.

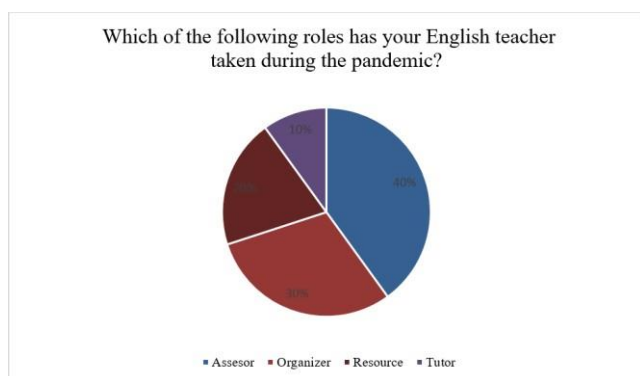
All the data instruments were structured and well organized in order to obtain great results from students' responses and arguments.

It was important to take into consideration students' attitudes towards teachers' roles, online learning strategies that students have used in response to the new teachers' roles and strategies that English teachers used in their new roles.



Graphic 1. Students' learning strategies in the online environment

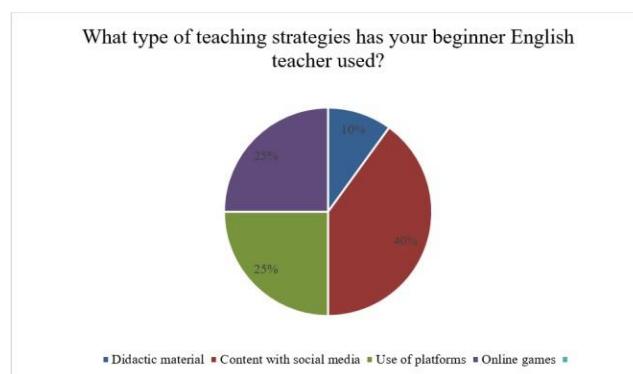
A relative majority (40%) answered that they always select their type of work. Due to the pandemic, students feel that it is better for them to find an accurate strategy that helps them to evolve perfectly. 30% of the students say that organizing their time allows them to have an impressive performance when learning. 20% of the participants already adapt to a learning style. Finally, only a few students (10%) consider participation relevant as a learning strategy since by participating they express all their knowledge. As Oxford (cited in Oxford, 2003) says, a strategy is useful if the following conditions are present: "The strategy relates well to the L2 task; b) the strategy fits the particular student's learning styles preferences to one degree or another, and c) the student employs the strategy effectively and links it with other relevant strategies" (p.8).



Graphic 2. Teacher's roles towards the covid-19

According to the students' responses in the questionnaire and in the interview a relative majority (40%) thinks that teachers have played a role as an assessor; students perceive that due to the pandemic things turned difficult for them and sometimes they need help with technology

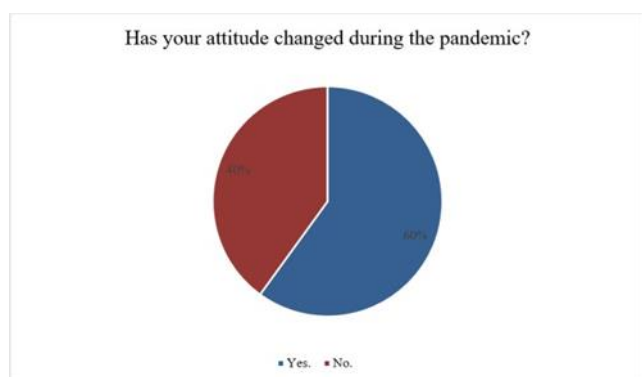
and with their understanding. 30% of the participants consider their teacher's role as an organizer, teachers need to schedule their time and their duties to provide a good lesson. While (20%) see their teacher as a resource because they do not know how to express themselves when participating. Finally, only a few students (10%) consider their teachers as a tutor, they added that because of the pandemic and the conditions, not all teachers had the time to ask and be concerned about students' feelings. Just as Beltran (2019) claims, a good teacher is someone who guides his/her students to be able to feel his/ her own thoughts.



Graphic 3. Teachers' strategies during the pandemic

The graphic contains data collected from students' opinions. Students' responses were all different as you perceive in the chart. A relative majority (40%) mentions that very often teachers use social media to create educational content which will allow students to practice. While the other (25%) use online games as a way of teaching and learning. Students mention that online games are fun and are excellent strategies to learn. The rest of the participants (25%) answer that the use of platforms is mainly used for meetings, where teachers and students get reunited to attend classes. Finally, a few participants (10%) say that their professor uses didactic material (pdf, worksheets, videos, etc.) to reinforce what they have learned.

The need to rapidly adapt to new contexts of teaching and learning online has revealed how teachers encountered and experienced the challenges and opportunities to carry on their job in such unexpected circumstances (Flores & Swennen, 2020).



Graphic 4. Students' attitudes

The graph shows the percentage of students that considered their attitudes changed. The majority of the participants (60%) indicate to have different attitudes towards online classes. The reason for a change in attitudes is due to poor academic performance, constant confinement at home, and intolerable emotions. Instead, (40%) argue that they do not perceive changes at all, they feel the same way as in face-to-face lessons because they are in a comfort zone hence, they do like it. Boca (2021) claims that students' attitudes and behaviors were influenced by the pandemic isolation and also the communication.

3. Conclusions

The overall data lead to the conclusion that remote learning in a virtual environment demands a different kind of employment in terms of the teacher's role in a technological environment. It is important to mention the difference between the role of the teacher in traditional learning and the role of the teacher as a mediator in a computer-mediated environment. The research pointed out that despite the technology constituting an important part of remote learning in order to carry out effective teaching-learning in virtual learning, it is worth it to take into account other learning needs of students in online lessons. For example, face-to-face meetings, personal- emotional needs, and not last but least the importance of useful strategies that help students to have a great development during virtual courses. Distance education requires a more autonomous and individualized process where the learners and teachers have the opportunity to constantly develop and dominate. Thus, in this case, distance education may act as an alternative to traditional learning or mixed if it is necessary. Furthermore, teachers' roles have seemed to play and perform differently during online courses. Teachers need to be effective when teaching, skillful, and

aware of students' needs. Besides, professors need to feel responsible for students' learning process and take into consideration attitudes and emotions. For this reason, it is important to create an appropriate and interactive environment that will lead students to follow a good education whether in an online or face-to-face environment.

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