

How did Undergraduate Public University Students Perceive the covid-19 Pandemic?*

Como os alunos de graduação de universidades públicas percebem a pandemia de covid-19?

¿Cómo perciben los estudiantes de pregrado de las universidades públicas la pandemia de la covid-19?

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Abstract

The aim of this research article is focused on presenting what outcomes emerged when a group of undergraduate public university students from an elementary English course, interacted with local news in a pedagogical intervention accomplished in the classroom for three months. The data was gathered through unstructured questionnaires, focus groups, and a journal diary which was carried out during the different critical reading workshops. Based on the findings, students pointed out a huge negative vision about the pandemic that increased harmful socio-economic effects especially on voiceless actors who make part of this society. Besides, students proposed to invest in education and in small and medium enterprises to keep jobs and in this way help the most vulnerable workers. Finally, these findings were examined through the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model proposed by Norman Fairclough and Lilie Chouliaraki.

Keywords

critical reading; critical thinking; social local news; critical discourse analysis; pedagogical intervention

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo de pesquisa concentra-se em apresentar os resultados que surgiram quando um grupo de alunos de graduação, da carreira de inglês no nível básico, interagiu com notícias locais em uma intervenção pedagógica realizada em sala de aula durante três meses. Os dados foram coletados por meio de questionários não estruturados, grupos focais e um diário que se realizou durante as diferentes oficinas de leitura crítica. Com base nos achados, os alunos apontaram os efeitos socioeconômicos negativos que a pandemia deixou, principalmente nos atores sem voz que fazem parte dessa sociedade. Além disso, os alunos propuseram investir em educação e em pequenas e médias empresas para manter os empregos e, assim, ajudar os trabalhadores mais vulneráveis. Por fim, esses achados foram examinados por meio do modelo de Análise Crítica do Discurso (ADC) proposto por Norman Fairclough e Lilie Chouliaraki.

Palavras-chave

leitura crítica; pensamento crítico; notícias sociais locais; análise crítica do discurso; intervenção pedagógica

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo de investigación se centra en presentar los resultados que surgieron cuando un grupo de estudiantes de pregrado, de una carrera de inglés de nivel básico, interactuó con noticias locales en una intervención pedagógica realizada en el aula durante tres meses. Los datos se recopilaron a través de cuestionarios no estructurados, grupos focales y un diario que se llevó a cabo durante los diferentes talleres de lectura crítica. Con base en los hallazgos, los estudiantes señalaron los efectos socioeconómicos negativos que dejó la pandemia, especialmente en los actores sin voz que hacen parte de esta sociedad. Además, los estudiantes propusieron invertir en educación y en pequeñas y medianas empresas para mantener los empleos y así ayudar a los trabajadores más vulnerables. Finalmente, estos hallazgos fueron examinados a través del modelo de Análisis Crítico del Discurso (CDA) propuesto por Norman Fairclough y Lilie Chouliaraki.

Palabras clave

lectura crítica; pensamiento crítico; noticias locales sociales; análisis crítico del discurso; intervención pedagógica

Introduction

This qualitative research study attempts to critically analyze undergraduate students' discourses when interacting with local social news related to covid-19 pandemic, which has affected the whole world. Such impacts have been much more devastating in developing countries than in developed ones. Colombia, as a developing country, did not count on a strong economic model which could support all citizens before the pandemic. Therefore, in order to think critically about our nation's situation, students were asked to read news critically.

For authors, such Wodak and Meyer (2003), Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a qualitative analytical approach for critically describing, interpreting, and explaining the ways in which discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities. Besides, CDA deals primarily with discourses of power abuse, injustice, and inequality and attempts to uncover implicit or concealed power relations (Van Dijk, 1993; Wodak & Meyer, 2003). It operates under the assumption that institutions act as gatekeepers to discursive resources; in this way, power and resource imbalances between "speakers" and "listeners" are linked to their unequal access to those resources. Pressing social issues motivate the CDA analyst, and the analyst's goal is to bring about change through critical understanding (Van Dijk, 1993).

Critical Discourse Analysis is focused on developing critical analysis based on the consequences that different discourses give; thus, it has the social responsibility to make power abuse visible and find ways to recognize and give voice to the other. Moreover, CDA focuses its attention not only on discourse, but also on the context where the interaction is produced. Context is understood as the structured set of all properties of a social situation that are possibly relevant for the production, structures, interpretation and functions of text and talk (Van Dijk, 1998). In this sense, context is based on the subjective experience of the speaker, and it is what allows us to organize discourse. It is here presented as "the accomplished or ongoing 'product'

of the communicative act" (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 194), but it is seen as a multidisciplinary approach, due to the fact that it is analyzed from the linguistic, cognitive, social and cultural perspectives. The relevant interest is not only in the linguistic structures, but also in the cultural and social use of language, that is what makes discourse critical.

Theoretical Framework

What is criticism?

According to Kant (1783), criticism from the modernity scope, is the capability to reason with respect to all knowledge which reason aspires independently of experience; in other words, he understands Criticism of Pure Reason, as the decision about the possibility or impossibility of metaphysics as it is, and the determination of its sources and its limits, starting from the beginning. Metaphysics is understood as the science containing the first grounds or the principal truths of all human knowledge. This can be called the nominal definition of metaphysics, as put forth by Meier and the school he belonged to (Rotenstreich, 1954). Also, it can be considered as a science dealing with God, world, and the human soul, or with things in general.

Additionally, "criticism" permits us to evaluate the proposed claims by other philosophical methods, tradition, or authority, and it allows us to distinguish between valid and non-valid different types of knowledge.

What is criticism from Marx's stance?

Criticism continued changing after Kant conceived it as the power that men have to use their own reason without any subject's guidance. For instance, the concept of praxis proposed by Marx was developed considering three significant objectives: 1) to know the structural logic of the capitalist mode of production; 2) to criticize the dehumanizing effects of it; and 3) to propose from its knowledge and criticism, a radical project which can be overcome from its own roots (Gonzalez, 1991). In order to achieve these aims, Kant did not only introduce a critical theory model, which

was in charge of analyzing and studying the class struggle due to social inequality between bourgeoisie and proletariat; besides, he proposed revolution as a transformative weapon to abolish inequality caused by capitalist and economic systems.

Capitalism, as the mechanism of the bourgeoisie class, looked for its own wealth and self-satisfaction through maximum exploitation of the working class, controlling them and getting their *surplus value*, where the laborer overworked and was underpaid. *Surplus value* is equal to the new value created by workers in excess of their own labor-cost, which is appropriated by the capitalist as profit when products are sold (Engels & Marx, 1970).

What is Critical Discourse Analysis?

According to Van Dijk (1998), discourse is presented as “the accomplished or ongoing ‘product’ of the communicative act” (p. 194), but this communicative act is seen as a multidisciplinary approach, due to the fact that it is analyzed from linguistic, cognitive, social and cultural perspectives. The relevant interest is not only in the linguistic structures, but also in the cultural and social use of language, that is what makes discourse critical.

For authors, such Wodak and Meyer (2003), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a qualitative analytical approach for critically describing, interpreting, and explaining the ways in which discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities. Besides, CDA deals primarily with discourses of power abuse, injustice, and inequality and attempts to uncover implicit or concealed power relations. It operates under the assumption that institutions act as gatekeepers to discursive resources, where power and resource imbalances between “speakers” and “listeners” are linked to their unequal access to those resources.

Critical Discourse Analysis is focused on developing critical analysis based on the consequences that different discourses bring. For instance, some discourses keep racism, inequality, and invisibility, in different cultures; as a consequence, CDA has the social responsibility to make power abuse visible, and find ways recognize and give voice to the other.

Critical Reading from A Social Perspective.

According to McDonald (2004), “critical reading stems from the poststructuralist perspective which claims that the subjectivity of the reader is combined with the text when the personal experiences of the reader are integrated with the experiences of the characters” (p. 17). Bearing in mind the poststructuralist standpoint, critical reading has deep roots in Halliday studies such as *Systemic Functional Grammar and Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA), which see language as a system for expressing meanings, with three main functions such as ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Additionally, Halliday who is cited by Okuma (2007), also sees text as an interactive process and a social exchange of meanings, which are consequences of these functions.

Following this line, Wallace (2003) considers critical reading, as a particular quality and depth of noticing. What the language in texts is doing, especially, when ideological effects are relatively disguised. For this author, critical reading means a dialogue between reader and writer, mediated by text and context, and guided by the reader purpose (Wallace, 1992; Widdowson, 1992). This account of reading, as an opposed to those studies which take a cognitive psychology orientation, offers us a more sociocultural based view of the process, in a way that it acknowledges contextual factors in the reading event, such as the role of reader identity.

Another relevant author is the father of popular education: Paulo Freire, whose lecture *The importance of the act of reading* poses the opposition between “word-world” to “word-school”. According to him, the world happens outside the school and precedes the word, and these two concepts *word-world* work together. For Freire (2012), literacy is a political act where schools empower learners toward participation and action by teaching them how to listen, how to identify alternatives, how to consider possibilities, and how to search for multiple possible answers. From this perspective, reading is a libertarian activity and not an action of conformity (Naiditch, 2010).

Critical Thinking from A Social Perspective.

The point of view of Critical thinking from social sciences is shaped under a Marxist glance, where human beings' values, conditions and knowledge of their social world are some of the most relevant aspects in an unfair world plagued with socioeconomic and political systems, which lead to oppression and power abuse. Under that background, critical thinking with roots in critical theory proposes to know the world and the need to build better and futures alternative (Cebotarev, 2001). Additionally, critical thinking is an instrument which teaches us to appreciate reality and observe the unequal conditions that emerge from capitalist society. In that way, critical thinking will be connected to media production and education as a transformation vehicle (Martin and Barrientos, 2009).

In the same line, Freire considers education as the practice of freedom, understood as the capacity for the learner to “deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Freire, 2012). To achieve such transformation, Freire proposed an innovative pedagogy contrary to the traditional one, where students were silently domesticated, and where the “uneducated” were allowed to speak, because without freedom they could not exist authentically. In this view, he focused his attention on three main aspects: 1) the basis of his philosophy as the availability of education opportunities to the broad mass of people; 2) the social and psychological processes that reinforce acts of educational inclusion/exclusion, both within and outside formal educational institutions; and 3) the pedagogical strategies deployed by teachers. Therefore, to make education an act of liberation, Freire advocated for a critical pedagogy where students have a voice

and could be heard through a dialogical approach that enables them to problematize, “the problems of human beings in their relations with the world [which] consists of acts of cognition, not transfers of information.” (Freire, 2012, pp. 60-61).

Methodology

This study belongs to the qualitative paradigm since the students are seen as social actors who observe the world according to their context and knowledge. In this way, the subjects and their productions are the basis of the project. Also, keeping in mind the importance of interpretation and reflection, as qualitative research proposes, students were asked to read a variety of local social news in English, in the EFL class and answer two reading workshops proposed in a didactic sequence to answer the main research question: What outcomes emerge from students when interacting with social problems readings news?

Considering AR as “an interactive research process involving both the researcher and the social actors” (Vasilachis, 2005), it is important to mention that, as an English teacher-researcher, I interacted with the participants while developing the reading workshops, because in this type of research, communication “can be affected due to the characteristics, the terms, the sense of the interaction which the researcher has motivated and for whom he is responsible.” (p. 37).

Thus, qualitative research not only allows me to know the subjective perspectives of students in each context, but it also let me understand how and why they interpreted the social situations of our country, in the way that they did it. The following table presents the didactic sequence developed by the students during the intervention:

Table 1. Didactic Sequence

Session	Topic	Objectives	Activities
1.	News Literacy	Students will know the parts of a piece of news.	Warm-up questions to get what students know: Why is news important? - The teacher introduces the parts of a piece of news using a "Coronavirus text related to Colombia": https://agorapublicaffairs.com/how-was-COVID-19s-economic-impact-perceived-in-colombia/ . - Students identify the pieces of news.
2.	Reading pictures	Student will get some basic information to learn how to read an image that compliments the pieces of news.	- Warm-up: Students will describe what they see in the news' picture. - The teacher will explain how to read a picture keeping in mind: color, position of people, objects or numbers, plans, etc. - Students will propose a different picture according to the piece of news.
3-4	Workshop 1	Students will read the piece of news and they will use some critical thinking strategies to identify power entities and social inequality in the Colombian context during the pandemic.	- The teacher will explain the questions to students, and she will give them some tips to understand the different activities the need to do. - Students will answer the workshop in groups and the teacher will go to each group to solve doubts and answer possible questions. - Students and the teacher will discuss the answers.
5.	Writing my opinion	Students will describe their perceptions about virtual education.	- Each student writes a paragraph about their opinion related to virtual education.
6	Workshop 2	Students will talk about the impact of COVID-19 on university students. - Students will analyze the students' accounts seen in the piece of news. - Students will identify and analyze topics related to social representations and identity in the news reading.	Pre-reading activities: - Students will observe the title and the picture to find relationships between them: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/04/world/americas/latinamerica-education.html . - Students will use some strategies to read the news. - Students will do individual and group activities during this workshop.
7-8	Creation time: My story		- Students will write a narrative about their own stories during the pandemic.

Source: Author's own elaboration (2020).

Participants

The data analysis process chosen in this study was non-probability quota sampling which, according to Cohen (2012), strives to represent significant characteristics (strata) of the wider population; it sets out to represent these in the proportions in which they can be found in the wider population. The fifteen participants who belonged to the experimental group were between 17 to 31 years old and they were taking the second level of an Elementary

English course. Some of them were born and raised in Bogota, Colombia; and others came from Cundinamarca and different regions of the country such as Putumayo, Boyacá, Pamplona, Cauca, Meta, Caquetá, Yopal, Arauca, and Nariño. After they were admitted to Universidad Nacional in Bogota, they came to the capital to pursue their undergraduate career. However, due to the pandemic, they were forced to return home, and studied the second semester of 2020 through virtual learning.

Instruments

In this research, unstructured questionnaires took the form of question sheets, which were administered during the social local reading workshops in order to gather data about how the participants read and interacted with local news. Then, students worked in groups of four participants, each one for the focus-group, who answered the questionnaires that aimed to visualize critical thinking that students arose when reading news about Colombia. Finally, the answers obtained from the questionnaires or workshops were complemented with the daily journal that helped to keep valuable information whereas the students were taking part in the pedagogical intervention.

Data Analysis Procedures

In order to apply the CDA model, the data was gathered for twelve weeks, based on reflections and perceptions that were elicited during the class when students interacted with the newspaper's readings. Besides, the questionnaires that students answered individually and in focus-groups were powerful instruments because they were designed based on two pieces of news related to the economic impact, and unequal education in Colombia due to covid-19 pandemic. The formulated questions facilitated categorizing, codifying, and interpreting the information which was analyzed in the light of the five stages proposed by the Fairclough model. For Fairclough (2001), this approach is transdisciplinary because it deals with other disciplines and theories which are addressing contemporary processes of social change.

Stage one. Focus on a social problem (activity and reflexivity)

In this first stage, the objective is to identify a discourse-related problem in some part of social life. Problems may be in the activities of a social practice, in the social practice per se, or in the reflexive construction of a social practice (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Some problems (in terms of SFL) are related to ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions of discourse, whereas ideational

problems may involve problems of representations and miscognition (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Keeping in mind that the pieces of news mention the impact of COVID-19 on Colombian economy and higher education, it analyzed the neoliberal roots which caused the socioeconomic problems that were sharpened in Latin America.

Neoliberalism term was created by Alexander Rustow in 1938, but it was popularized by Margaret Thatcher from England and Milton Friedman from the United States who announced it in their discourses and practices. It is a political and economic system whose base is capitalism, and it is associated with unrestrained free market global capitalism (University of Harvard, 2018). This term proposes that the big and powerful markets should act freely without State intervention, it must be governed by free trade, be deregulated, and privatized. It estimates that the own markets with its own policies can optimize the production and commercialization of a country.

Colombian scenario to face the pandemic

Colombia did not count on mechanisms to face economic and social impact in covid-19 pandemic. On the contrary, the measures that the government took in April 2019 unveiled and deepened more sociocultural inequalities, unemployment, and poverty. Linked to the health emergency pandemic, for Colombia and the other Latin American countries, covid-19 unleashed a hunger pandemic for vulnerable population such as informal workers, small business laborers, farmers, mothers head of family, young workers, among other members who have suffered devastating consequences, due to their low incomes, restriction to go out to work, and inability to do their job through teleworking.

As Sánchez and García (2021) points out, the pandemic is having a strong economic and social impact in Latin America. Unemployment has risen and businesses have been closed, public accounts have deteriorated, and poverty and inequality have increased. Recovery will depend on the evolution of the world economy and the dynamism of international flows in trade and finance to the region.

On the other hand, education has suffered a terrible impact during the pandemic for several reasons. First, with the closure of companies and the government measures, a significant number of parents and young workers were unemployed; thus, without incomes it was not possible to continue studying or enroll in university. Amid lockdowns, youth unemployment has spiked, and many students cannot pay tuition, which even at public schools can cost anywhere from one to eight times the monthly minimum wage (Turkewitz, 2020).

As it can be seen, virtual education model unveiled inequality as well. During the pandemic, it was observed that in the cities, few citizens had electronic devices and good internet connection. Only workers, students or consumers with proper infrastructure and skills are benefiting from the advantages of technological tools. Although access to ICTs has significantly improved, gaps persist and new ones may emerge (OECD, 2020).

Stage two. Function of the problem in the social practice

In this section, *analysis of the discourse* is developed keeping in mind the gathered data from the pedagogical intervention which involved the two pieces of news presented in the table 1. Besides, the data enabled to establish five categories which were analyzed considering the criteria proposed by analysis of discourse Fairclough's model. According to Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), in the structural perspective examination, the first concern is to locate the discourse in its relation to the network of orders of discourse. Then, from the interactional perspective the aim is to identify how genres, voices, and orders of discourse work together and how they are articulated in the text. Thus, the table 2 presents the five categories that emerged from the pedagogical intervention intending to answer the main research question that is: What outcomes emerge from students when interacting with social problems readings news?

Table 2. Research question and emerging categories

Categories	Subcategories
covid-19 consequences	Economic consequences Consequences on students
Actors	Powerful actors Voiceless actors
Belief about government actions	Insufficient measures
Providing solutions	Economic aid Distributions of vaccines
My story during the pandemic	Negative feelings Family issues Connectivity problems with the internet Wishing to come back

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2020.

Category 1. covid-19 Consequences

This category answers the main research question because students got information about economic and university students' impact in Colombia, not only keeping in mind the information shown in the pieces of news, but also giving their worthy opinions bearing in mind the social, political, and cultural Colombian context in covid-19 pandemic times. From the first piece of news given by Agora, students focused their attention on the first and second paragraph, and besides, they provided their opinion on one of the consequences which called for more attention.

Subcategory. Economic consequences

Agora's piece of news was written in present tenses to provide the research findings of the perception about covid-19's economic impact in Colombia. From the information presented by Agora, the predominant vocabulary is negative; therefore, students used the proposed vocabulary to complete this exercise. In the first cause, economic slowdown has the negative effects that the piece of news mentioned: unemployment, poverty, etc. The other three causes and their consequences were complemented with students'

opinions. For instance, in unemployment, the two proposed effects are: little acquisition of basic elements, and zero budget of people towards recreation activities, fragments that students answered based on their priorities and experiences as citizens who make part of Colombian society. In the same way, on the section of violence the effects shown opinions based on their own practices, and how they perceive harsh Colombian reality.

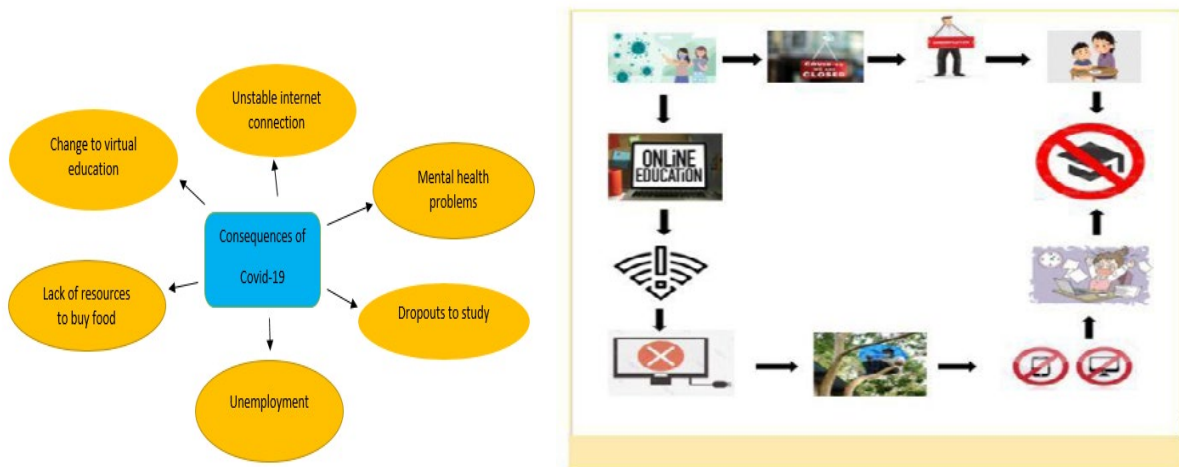
Subcategory. Consequences on students

This subcategory describes perceptions about covid-19 consequences on university students based on the piece of news published by *The New York Times*. From this piece of news, it was possible

to observe a myriad of discourses. First, there are five narratives or stories of Colombian students from different profiles who have been rudely affected by the pandemic. Then, the discourse of the journalist who uses an expositive discourse to describe the economic context during the pandemic, as well as the efforts that institutions such as the government, the Ministry of Education, and the InterAmerican bank have done for more than twenty years for helping vulnerable communities to study and go to college.

In this subcategory, students choose the most meaningful words from the piece of news to create a web of covid-19 consequences. Hence, in the next excerpt, it is possible to observe two students' webs:

Figure 1. Web of covid-19 consequences made by the students



Source: Author's own elaboration (2020).

First, a group of students inferred from the news negative adjectives and nouns to create the first diagram on the left, it is related to the impact on educational, economical, and social spheres. On the right, the same group of students exemplified the web with a series of icons which emphasize how with the arrival of the pandemic, online education released catastrophic consequences such as frustration, dropouts, hunger, and unemployment. In this section, these students made use of visual semiotic

aspects to make visible such effects which represent their reality.

Category 2. Actors in the news

Based on the readings of both pieces of news, students identified powerful and powerless actors. To illustrate these subcategories, students consider that there are two institutions which have the power to decide what to do and provide financial aid in our society: National Government and Banco de

la República. Students, based on the first piece of news reading, recognize the power and influence that these institutions have. Furthermore, media and newspapers contribute to maintaining the power and hegemonic discourse in unequal societies.

Talking about powerless actors, a student selected citizens and low-income families as members, who are scared of unemployment and who do not have a voice. In the previous chart, citizens are represented as the group of people who provide their workforce to maintain the economy and capital of Colombia. By contrast, low income-families are considered as the ones who do not have a voice in a society because they live in precarious conditions, they cannot earn enough money to survive with a “low-income”, and some of them are beneficiaries of social aid.

Category 3. Beliefs about government's actions

In this category, students were asked to evaluate the government's action during the pandemic. All the students who participated in the development of this question considered that the government has not done enough to help people to overcome this social crisis. The following excerpt presents one of the student's opinions:

According to the Minister of Education María Victoria Angulo, Duque government has made an unprecedented effort investing 260 million dollars in education, but certainly no time during the pandemic have this money been reflected. Many students could not afford tuition during the pandemic and the government did not help at all. The National University, with its own money, cost the enrollment of only 20% of the total of its students. Nor has it intervened to help students who do not have the equipment or who have difficulties accessing an internet network. Other students who come from remote areas of the country are suffering for food and supplies, these students have subsisted thanks to their families since the subsidies from the government program called "solidarity income" never came.

Overall, this paragraph shows a negative view of the government's actions to face the pandemic. The student uses different negative adverbs (certainly no, never), verbs and nouns such as: suffering for food and supplies, have difficulties accessing, that support his way of thinking. Finally, the student only mentions one positive present simple statement to explain that families have supported the students who never got solidarity income.

Category 4. Providing solutions

In this category, students were asked to provide a solution as citizens and students; Therefore, based on their responses, two subcategories are presented:

Subcategory. Economic aid

This category is labeled as it appears, because some students considered that due to the harsh impact of the pandemic, the government must take measures and help vulnerable people. In the excerpt below, it is presented one of the students' proposals:

The solution for me is to redirect public resources to sustain small and medium-sized companies that are the ones that provide jobs, also subsidize those who live from day to day since they are the people most prone to contagion and change the economic structure of the country.

This student presented an economic strategy which involves the use of the verb *redirect* or *direct*, to restructure the public resources that Colombian citizens and public industries pay to help maintain the country's economy. From this student's stance, the harmful economic impact that covid-19 has brought to Colombia, has its roots in the economic structure that needs to be changed. This student provides this solution because he is part of a Colombian society, and as a citizen he has seen that small and medium companies must be supported by the government, not only the multinationals and big companies need its support. The student also sees that many people are unemployed, so it has caused informal workers who are completely unprotected, that is why the student suggests: *subsidize those who*

live from day to day since they are the people most prone to contagion.

Subcategory. Distribution of vaccines

In the second subcategory, students consider that accelerating vaccination would allow people to return to jobs and improve their economic situation. To exemplify this idea, the following excerpts are presented:

Firstly, invest in the massive purchase of vaccines and campaigns of vaccination.

The first statement is interesting because it starts with the connector *firstly* which means that, it is the most relevant step to take before other actions. Then, the student continues with a command *invest in massive purchase of vaccines*. The full statement highlights the importance to vaccinate and promote vaccination in Colombia. Then, the next excerpt is:

We should have several strategies like more vaccines mainly in the working class.

This extract is introduced by the modal *should* and the verb *have* that can be understood as a suggestion, or as an important obligation. Then, the student mentions the sector of the population who most need the vaccines using the adverb *mainly*. From that extract, it can be inferred that vaccination is a priority in the groups of society which impulse Colombian economy and maintain employment.

Category 5. My story in pandemic times

The last category came out from the didactic sequence, where students wrote in a short paragraph how their lives were during the pandemic, and based on their narratives, it was possible to select the following subcategories.

The first subcategory is called *negative feelings*, since all the research students manifested how they were feeling from the beginning of the pandemic. All of them used a variety of feelings vocabulary to

describe their inner state. The following fragment exemplifies this explanation:

My name is... I study dentistry at National University, in the beginning of the pandemic I started feeling loneliness, don't have much friends and my family always is busy, in the last months that feeling increases causing poor performance, problems socializing and eating disorders...

The word that the student mentions is *loneliness*, he used it to describe how he feels and how this feeling has been digging deeper to the point to cause academic and health problems. Moreover, the second fragment shows how a different student has felt during the quarantine:

The pandemic has affected me increasing my anxiety caused by the confinement since the quarantine began, sometimes I get depressed since I feel that life is not the same as I am not enjoying this stage of my life to the fullest...

Like the first example, the student who wrote this narrative, starts explaining how he feels using specific words related to mental disorders such as anxiety, depression due to a radical change in his way of life.

Subcategory. Family issues

The second subcategory is named *family issues* because many students talked about different problems that members of their families have lived. The next excerpt presents an example:

I'm an outsider, my mom is a housewife, and my father works in the field and the informal economy, my dad lost several crops and now is recovering his losses...

She describes how hard has been for her father this pandemic since he is a farmer, works in the informal economy, and due to these problems, he has lost crops. Obviously, her dad's situation has affected her emotionally and economically. Also, her discourse is knitted based on inequality and the lack of protection for peasants in the countryside.

Subcategory. Connectivity problems with the internet

The third subcategory is *connectivity* since all students mentioned the different negative issues that they have had with the internet. In the following extract, a student describes the bad quality of the internet in the region where she lives, and all the difficulties the student has had so far.

In my home there wasn't good internet with luck the meter would read 1 or 2 Mbps and I ended up buying a data plan, due to the return of class I have to return to Bogotá as no company provided a better service and to go to a cibercafe I had to walk 1 hour and the data plan is expensive, it's not cost-effective because of the big amount of data I have to download and we have to save in my house.

In the extract, it is possible to see how a student who lives out of Bogota does not have a broadband access to the internet, so this student must find other ways to have access to virtual classes; even though, those alternatives are expensive and increase expenses at home. Certainly, this student's voice reflects the governments' neglect in the countryside, and the lack of development in there.

Subcategory. Wishing to come back

The last subcategory emerged since all students mentioned in their narratives that they want to return to university to have in person classes. The following fragments support this idea:

Virtual classes are really exhausting, because I can't enjoy my university life, my friends, and my university in general. There is a lot of hard homework, and it takes many time. I would love to come back to Bogotá, to my university... Now, pandemic is still horrible, I feel that my life is stagnant, I only wait for the day I can return.

This excerpt is relevant because the student gives her opinion about how difficult virtual education is, the way she feels, and expresses reiteratively her desire to come back to Bogota. The student's discourse is strongly marked with a gloomy feeling of what virtual education is for her, and her desire

for coming back to university, but also for reestablishing her social life. Therefore, it can be observed that this student's discourse is made of different social, academic, and emotional elements which let us think that the university for her is, not only the place where she is studying a career, but also a positive place for socializing.

Stage three. Function of the problem in the social practice

In this stage, the objective is to problematize the social practice which has been described previously through understanding how the social problem is, and how it ought to be. "According to Bhaskar's account of explanatory critique, this stage marks the shift from is to "ought" the shift from explanation of what it is about a practice that leads to a problem, to evaluation of the practice in terms of its problematic result" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 65). In a few words, to overcome the problem, it is necessary to change the practice, identify who can get any type of benefit in the way social life is organized, and who is not interested in solving the social problem (Sanchez, 2004).

As was previously discussed, neoliberalism not only affected economy, but also all the sociopolitical spheres in Latin America and other developing countries around the world because oligarchies have the power to exercise their own financial regulations and decisions, minimizing State's intervention, bringing as a consequence deregulated markets, labor force precariousness, and thereby social inequality.

Additionally, Chomsky (cited by García, 2018) points out that inequality exists because there is a huge wealth concentration in hands of 1 % of population: financial institution and transnational corporations. Inequality affects democracy, and in each democracy, people interfere in government's decisions, thus, big institutions preserve their power in a society through certain principles. For instance, In Latin American those power principles are seen through the reduction of democracy and unprotection of the poor. Also, the restructuration

of economy favoring big companies, reducing workers' salaries, and weakening their labor conditions, maintaining them insecure and vulnerable, ignoring people's voice to promote division and individualism.

Bearing in mind those unsustainable effects, it is necessary to rethink the real role of the State, and how a real implementation of its functions in a Latin American country like Colombia can be possible and achievable.

Stage four. Possible ways past the obstacles

This stage complements the information provided in the point number three, in this way, the objective here is to discern possible resources for changing things in the way they currently are (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999); for this reason, it is important to consider possible alternatives to overcome the social problems presented in this chapter.

If neoliberalism has affected the economy and other spheres of all societies of developing countries bringing inequality and poverty, then, it is necessary to take measures against them. According to the United Nation Development Program (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), poverty must be recognized as a type of social deprivation which must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon that goes further from earning an income. Moreover, Sen (2000) defines poverty as deprivation of basic capabilities is not just like low income. Such deprivation can be expressed "...in premature mortality, a significant degree of malnutrition [...], a high level of literacy and other failures". Therefore, poverty represents an obstacle for people to be or achieve what they have reason to value.

Taking into consideration the previous concept, poverty forces the poor to lead a constricted life. Higher constriction means reduced capabilities which lead to higher levels of misery (Sen, 2000). But what do basic capabilities mean? The most basic capabilities for human development are to lead long a healthy life, to be knowledgeable (be educated), to have access to the resources and social services

needed for a decent standard of living, and to be able to participate in the life of the community.

For the purpose of reaching those basic capabilities that each person should have, Sen (2000) has proposed a capabilities approach that has been taking seriously around the world because it has two uses; on the one hand, it allows us to evaluate a situation, and on the other hand, it makes a call to suggest policies to expand capabilities. For instance, to design and implement public interventions to make basic capabilities real; second, to evaluate and improve policy results; third, favoring conditions to reduce inequality; and finally, foster deliberation (Gimenez & Valente, 2016).

According to Sen (2000):

Political freedoms (in the form of free speech and free elections) help foster economic security. Social opportunities (in the form of educational and health services) facilitate economic participation. Economic services (in the form of opportunities to participate in trade and production) can contribute to generating personal and general wealth, as well as public resources to finance social services (Sen:1999b). The fact that political freedoms and rights exist, including freedom of expression, makes it easier to avoid economic disasters such as famines.

Even though, the capabilities approach which Sen proposes look utopic in the most unequal continent: Latin America, it could permit solving basic needs, and linked to it, provide freedom to each subject, causing a sociopolitical improvement in the regions.

Stage five. Reflection on the analysis

This research study was designed to know how students understood and analyzed two real pieces of news about social Colombian problems in the English class. The proposal to read news about the economic impact and the impact on university students due to the pandemic came up the first day of virtual class where students talked about how covid-19 had affected themselves and their families in different ways.

Once students finished reading and answered the reading workshops, it was remarkable that students built their discourses as Colombian citizens and students who have been living the consequences of the pandemic in a developing country where an obligatory lockdown exacerbated the economic and social effects.

To sum up, the critical discourse analysis process gains importance when social problems are studied considering all discursive and non-discursive aspects, and when it studies language as a social practice. It means that social problems which are immersed into social field networks are examined, and, in the same way, orders of discourse which are more exactly the linguistic/semiotic facet, of such networks are also explored because both aspects support the essence of this analysis (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

Conclusions

This qualitative research study intended to analyze the discourses that emerged when students read Colombian social news related to covid-19 economics and its impact on education. These readings were carried out through a pedagogical intervention in the ESL classroom, and its main question was accomplished by selecting news related to students' realities, where they could identify social problems that they were facing as Colombian citizens. This meaningful action helped students understand the content of the news, and subsequently analyze and provide their answers and opinions. In addition, the pedagogical intervention was developed through a didactic sequence which proposed a myriad of critical reading and thinking activities.

Students' reflections appeared on five categories previously presented, where it was evident to identify a huge negative vision about the pandemic impact which was not only described by the pieces of news, but also, such information promoted in students more negative consequences that they realized as members of Colombian society. Also, stu-

dents recognized in the news, powerful institutions and voiceless actors who make part of this society. From their stances, a powerful institution such as the Colombian government has not taken enough measures to counterattack inequality, poverty, low education investment, and lack of population opportunities which have been seen since the pandemic. On the other hand, students identified in citizens, workers, unemployed ones, and low-income families' voiceless actors who are not listened to, and due to their vulnerable conditions, need a job, financial aids, and education to live, survive and make a difference in students' regions.

The information gathered in this research study was rigorously analyzed following the Critical Discourse Analysis model proposed by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), which is concerned with recent and contemporary processes of social transformation which are variously identified by such terms as: '*neo-liberalism*', '*globalization*', '*transition*', '*information society*', '*knowledge-based economy*' and '*learning society*' (Fairclough, 2001).

Overall, this critical discourse analysis model proposed by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) demands an examination of different social studies disciplines to analyze the social problem, not only through the students' discourse, but also finding the roots of the social problems, asking who is involved, why it is happening, and how this issue can be solved. Thus, all these characteristics make the CDA, transdisciplinary approach, a real proposal which needs to be urgently applied with students in any classroom where we as teachers want to promote a social change.

Finally, considering that students' critical discourse analysis is not a topic which has been arduously worked in Colombia, and much less in the ESL classroom, it could be beneficial to continue analyzing students discourse when a social practice is identified in our society, and it affects students identity, integrity, and voices as Colombian citizens and students.

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