



Challenges in English teaching at Antônio Tozetti School during the pandemic period

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic imposed changes in several segments in Brazil and around the world. With social isolation, one of the most affected areas was Education. Blended Learning has provoked teachers to adopt new teaching strategies in order to keep students motivated. The objective of this paper is to discuss the challenges in English teaching at *Antônio Tozetti* Municipal School, located in *Pacajá, Pará*, during the pandemic period, connecting these issues with aspects related to Blended Learning and Motivation. To this end, qualitative research was carried out with bibliographic approach and a questionnaire was answered by the teacher responsible for the school subject in the seventh year of Middle School, constituted, at the time, of 28 students. When it comes to the students, it was verified from the survey carried out that the absence of technological devices and training for their use hindered the teaching-learning process. Also, despite the teacher's attempt to include games and maintain contact with students, answering students' doubts collectively and individually, their lack of technological structure and mastery of the tools necessary for the implementation and efficiency of Remote Teaching contributed to the lack of motivation and little participation of the class in the activities.

Keywords:

Motivation; Remote classes; Blended learning.

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INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2019, the first announcements about Covid-19 still did not give a real dimension of what was to come. A few months later, when the pandemic was announced, several aspects of the population's lifestyle had to be adapted and institutions already consolidated in their way of acting were modified. An example is school. Faced with social isolation as a public health measure, remote and blended learning emerged as an alternative for teaching continuity. After all, in-person classes were prevented for longer than anticipated, causing a significant delay in the school calendar.

Another factor to be considered is the lack of motivation and the various distractions that arose as a result of the presence of the family and the new routine imposed by the lockdown. When it comes to language teaching, there are other important considerations to be made, such as the many questions that already exist about school subjects such as English Language, raised, for instance, in some official Brazilian educational documents. These issues will be discussed in the following sections.

All these challenges were evident in the Antônio Tozetti Municipal School of Elementary, Secondary, and High School, analyzed here. With physical distancing and interaction through screens, students had less motivation to learn the foreign language, interacted less with each other and with the teacher, and had to adapt to a new routine where the use of cell phones and internet access was crucial to maintain the minimum quality in the teaching-learning relationship. All this happened in the context of a rural community in the north of Brazil.

This research has as its objective to discuss the challenges in English teaching in this period in the Elementary, Middle and High Municipal School called *Antônio Tozetti*, located in Pacajá, in the southwest of the State of Pará. This study focused on the class of the seventh grade of Middle School, which has 28 students and whose teacher is Marineide. The choice was made based on the experience of a mandatory internship, carried out during my undergraduate course in English Language at the Federal University of Pará. At the time, it was possible to identify that the students had a beginner's level of proficiency, with little or no command of the English language. The school had first adopted, during the pandemic period, the hybrid system, considered one of the biggest trends in education in the twenty-first century. This new approach proposes the combination of online and face-to-face learning methods, with the mobile phone being the most used tool by students, assuming the role of complementary technological resource. Through this study, we seek to answer the following questions: What are the strategies used by the teacher to teach English during the pandemic? Do all students participate in the class? Do they do the activities? How did the teacher see the school-family relationship of students during this period?

It is intended, with the answers found, to seek ways to provide a greater incentive for students to continue studying and doing the activities, even in the face of varied challenges. The results can contribute to future educational practices through the understanding of effective strategies in language teaching which can be used during pandemics or other similar contexts. It also makes us aware of the need to train educators and other teaching professionals, as well as students, parents and guardians, so that they can use technologies in favor of the quality of education.

IMPORTANT TOPICS

Teaching the English Language in Brazil

According to the National Curriculum Parameters (*PCNs*) the learning of a Foreign Language has the social function of creating critical citizens. (BRASIL,1998). The National Common Curricular Base (*BNCC*) goes further, emphasizing the formative character of English learning:

[...] the study of the English language can enable everyone to access the linguistic knowledge necessary for engagement and participation, contributing to the critical agency of students and to the exercise of active citizenship, in addition to expanding the possibilities of interaction and mobility, opening new paths of knowledge construction and continuity in studies (BRASIL, 1998, p. 241, my translation¹).

Still, English is not considered important in the training process, since "often, this school subject has no privileged place in the curriculum, being taught, in some regions, in only one or two grades of Middle School" (BRASIL, 1998, p. 24). That is the unfortunate reality of English teaching in several Brazilian schools.

The teaching of a language also includes a culture or several. Eventually, language is one of the main forms of expression, constituting the identity of people and serving as an intermediary between the subject and the world. For Bakhtin (1988), language is a historical and cultural construction that is constantly transformed. When approaching the teaching of the English Language, it is essential to understand the important role that North American culture occupies today in the world and that mastery over the language in question opens several doors not only to this continent's studies and labor market but also to the commercial and economical center of the planet.

By learning a foreign language, the individual is broadening their perspectives about the world, thus being able to establish contact with other people. The exchange of information generated reflects advances in several

¹ Whenever we have the expression "my translation" in this paper, it means that the related quotation was translated by the author of this work.

aspects, including in the scope of researches. Language, however, goes beyond the issue of social integration; it also encompasses political and ideological functions, and determines how the connection between man and the environment takes place.

According to the PCNs (BRASIL, 1998), language learning also includes the use of knowledge. That is, how the language will be applied in society. Thus, the student must be able to construct meanings in the new language, projecting their voices worldwide. This gains even more meaning in the context of the globalization in which we live, where English occupies the central space, being the most used language in the world.

This process of teaching the English Language in Brazil, however, encounters several challenges, especially when the focus is the Basic Education offered in public schools. In addition to students' having reduced contact with natives, the school subject is taught with a reduced workload. Leffa (2007) points out that there is a process of self-exclusion experienced by students about the school subject in the country, marked primarily by three factors. The first of these is the reproduction of values of the ruling social class by the school, generating a scenario where "the son of the mason or the maid may have access to the classroom, but will not obtain the same knowledge that is given to the son of the doctor or the engineer" (LEFFA, 2007, p. 52, my translation).

The second factor is the universalization of education, a legacy of the military regime. Those who had a better socioeconomic condition were sent to private schools and had access to a more qualified education, while the poorest ones had to stay in public school, scrapped and unqualified.

The third point is the unqualification which also reached the teacher. With the demand for a greater number of professionals, the requirements for teachers who held teaching degrees decreased, bringing to the classroom many educators who did not even master the languages that they taught.

It is understood, then, that the teaching of the English language requires precise strategies that dialogue with the student to keep them motivated. Nevertheless, in addition to the challenges already identified, the pandemic period and the adaptation of in-person classes to remote classes or Hybrid Learning have brought to light an inevitable reality: the country was not prepared for this drastic change. This issue became even more evident in locations with limited access to the internet and the possibilities it offers. Castells (1999) already warned that networks are selective, communicating and not communicating at the same time and thus excluding many:

Undoubtedly, the ability or inability of societies to master technology, and in particular those technologies that are strategically decisive in each historical period, traces their destiny to the point that we say that, although it does not determine historical evolution and social transformation, technology (or the lack of it) incorporates the capacity of transformation of societies, as well as the uses

that societies, always in a conflictual process, decide to give to their technological potential (CASTELLS 1999, p. 44-45).

There was, with the isolation imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the urgent need for teachers to reinvent themselves, align themselves with technological tools, and use them to their advantage to reach the students, who also had access to a new way of learning. In this sense, so we can better understand the challenges in the teaching of the English Language in *Antônio Tozetti* School, located in *Pacajá*, State of *Pará*, in the pandemic period, it is necessary to contextualize the institution and bring fundamental concepts to the development of this research.

Motivation

Motivation is an important point in the context of learning and should be present for both the student and the teacher. For Dörnyei (2001), it represents a stimulus that leads to action. Therefore, it is related to the goals and objectives that are intended to be achieved (Perine, 2011). In the case of the classroom, staying motivated presents itself as a challenge for the teacher, even greater than that of keeping students motivated. About the teaching of a foreign language, for example, the distance between the ideal and the feasible goal can often act as an unmotivated agent. After all, it is understood that the greater purpose should be the mastery of writing, reading, listening comprehension, and speaking of that language. That is, the mastery of the language taught.

The tendency is that the lack of motivation leads the educator to give up the goal above mentioned. Hence, we have the widespread commonplace in Brazil that one does not learn English in school and that only content taught is reduced to the verb to be. Therefore, it is fundamental to address, in this paper, the strategies used by a specific teacher so that the content is shared in the most fruitful way possible, so that students and educators remain motivated throughout the school year. The resources used by this teacher can serve as examples for other educators, in other contexts. For Perine (2011):

A good teacher should keep in mind what he intends to teach and seek to enable the best way to teach such content to his students, which involves making it relevant to them, attractive, and well-enlightened. In addition, it should also be the teacher's goal that each class be a pleasant and conducive environment for learning. You should also aim to be prepared to face any situation that may occur in the classroom and give a good lesson. Above all, it is the teacher's goal that the student learns (Perine, 2011, p. 3).

Viana (1990) reinforces the following, in the school environment, motivation has usually been pointed out as a synonym of stimulus, since it is represented by the student who acts and shows interest. It can also be classified from the dichotomies Intrinsic X Extrinsic (Dörnyei, 2001). In this way, "intrinsic

motivation is the interest to invest effort in learning by itself; extrinsic motivation is that derived from some kind of external incentive" (Costa, 2006, p. 24, my translation). Other authors complement this explanation:

The intrinsically motivated child in a particular domain of human behavior demonstrates an effort to demonstrate competence in that domain. A child extrinsically motivated for a task may not strive to accomplish the task and consequently have lower feelings of competence (Pansera; Valentini; Souza; Berleze, 2016, p. 314, my translation).

There would also be a subdivision of these motivations. In the case of intrinsic, for example, three subtypes are pointed out: the motivation to learn, when there is pleasure in acquiring new knowledge; the motivation for achievement, when there is an engagement for personal satisfaction; and the motivation for stimulation or experience, when the goal is to experience new pleasant sensations (Dörnyei, 2001).

In the case of extrinsic motivation, there are four types: external regulation, which comes entirely from external sources (threats or rewards); introjected regulation, related to externally imposed goals; the identified regulation, when there is an engagement resulting from the appreciation or identification of the individual with a certain behavior; integrated regulation, where there is a choice of behaviors that are related "with other individuals' values, needs and identities (e.g., learning English because its proficiency is part of an educated cosmopolitan culture that adopted it)" (Costa, 2006, p. 25, my translation). Furthermore:

We often find students who give the impression that they have no interest in learning. When this occurs, we use several strategies: we praise or punish, we try to make students participate more in the class, and we try to make our English classes more attractive. However, we do not know what occurs in the immediate or remote context of school activity and what makes the class motivating for some students and demotivating for others (Costa, 2006, p. 33, my translation).

Therefore, it is necessary to understand what are the variables that influence students' motivation. This study addresses, primarily, the strategies of English teaching focused on the motivation of the student. This includes reflections, decision-making, and the exploration of new sources of research, especially the technologies available today and that can represent great allies in the teaching process. Naturally, the teaching method of the educator is in constant construction, as well as their strategies, which are shaped according to the school's reality. In this sense, the foreign language teacher can seek the resources that enable the maintenance of the interest and even the curiosity of the student, thus avoiding the boredom to take over.

Blended learning

Due to the pandemic, there was the implementation of “emergency remote teaching – a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate remote delivery mode due to crisis circumstances” (IGLESIAS – PRADAS *et al*, 2021, p.1). Therefore, *blended learning*, which had been debated for more than thirty years, gained strength. However, in the pandemic context, some challenges that already arise in face-to-face teaching are evidenced in Remote Learning:

It is a recurring point, however, that the field of Education has always presented a certain slowness or resistance in relation to the possibilities brought about by technological advances: while many sectors of society have undergone structural changes in recent years, the steps of Education, in the eyes of many, seemed too slow (SILVEIRA, 2021, p. 2, my translation).

Education has always been hybrid, combining "various spaces, times, activities, methodologies, audiences. This process, now, with mobility and connectivity, is much more noticeable, broad and deep: it is a more open and creative ecosystem" (Moran, 2015, p.27, my translation). In addition, this author points out a complexity when defining what is important to learn in this mixed process and how it should happen. He also reinforces that, in this hybrid context, there are several applications and portals that make it possible for anyone to become a teacher:

We all teach and learn all the time, much more freely, in more or less informal, open, or monitored groups. In education, there are several types of mixing, blended, or hybrid education: of knowledge and values, when we integrate several areas of knowledge (in the disciplinary model or not); of methodologies, with challenges, activities, projects, games, group and individual, collaborative and personalized. We also talk about hybrid technologies, which integrate classroom activities with digital ones, face-to-face with virtual ones (Moran, 2015, p.28, my translation).

It is understood, with this, that the concept of blended learning goes beyond the issue of active methodologies and the alternation between face-to-face and online meetings. It brings a series of opportunities and, at the same time, difficulties inherent in this model. Given the Brazilian educational context, some institutions chose to implement the model gradually, which ended up causing great impact anyway, as in the case of the adoption of this model imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Adding digital technologies in education requires criticality and creativity, so that students actively participate in the teaching-learning process (Bacich; Grandson; Trevisani, 2015). It involves changes in the entire educational structure, including the Pedagogical Political Project and didactic proposals

consistent with a formation that aims at developing the autonomy of the student. By the way, this more collaborative, participatory profile is already part of contemporary social practices (Lankshear, 2007), and ends up influencing the way knowledge is constructed.

Although blended learning originally emerged to blend the traditional method with distance learning, it now involves "a much richer set of learning strategies or dimensions" (Bacich; Grandson; Trevisani, 2015, p. 43), making these spaces – the real and the virtual – complementary, and directly impacting the actions of teachers and students.

This impact often implies some discomfort for teachers. This is what Pires (2015, p. 66, my translation) emphasizes when he states that "these, in most cases, are accustomed to their satisfactory routine, which meets the needs of good part of the students". It should be noted that, although some recent-graduate educators are "digital natives", they "were graduated by an experimental academy in terms of new technologies" (Lima; Moura, 2015, p. 75). The consequences include the fact that online teaching and technological tools are not yet part of the curricular matrix of many degrees, emphasizing a gap that urgently needs to be filled since the pandemic showed that many teachers still did not have the mastery of these technologies for the promotion of the content to be taught. We can state that:

The school, today, needs to be redesigned, and the teacher needs to change along with it. The modern world requires a teacher who promotes discussions in classes, who stimulates the protagonism of students, and is the mediator of children and young people, who teach themselves and each other. If there is something that needs to be said, it is that teachers should invest in their training and broaden their horizons. We cannot keep doing more of the same. We need to innovate. Motivate. Enchant. Inspire. One of the ways for this change to happen is to seek practices of pedagogical differentiation. It is no longer appropriate to teach all students as if we were teaching only one (Lima; Moura, 2015, p. 76, my translation).

Education needs to accompany the changes that are imposed and that contemplate everyone, especially the young who, from an early age, tends to have access to technologies. Therefore, based on three pillars - personalize, individualize, and differentiate - blended learning causes an inevitable rupture and gives other meanings to the use of new technologies in the classroom (Pires, 2015, my translation). Through this new model, we move towards a fundamental point for the guarantee of quality teaching-learning: the autonomy of the student. It aims, ideally, at the students' construction of knowledge and, even, the personalization of teaching or its individualization (Lima; Moura, 2015).

When planning the lessons, the teacher should already choose the tools that dialogue with what they intend to achieve at that moment, and the way they will use them. In addition, teachers should provide a time to assist students who have some difficulty with the use of these resources. Increasingly accessible, the tendency is for these tools to become easier to use and the students can help each other and facilitate their handling since some have more mastery over them. Blended learning requires knowledge and validation of the instruments to be used so that complications are avoided. The pandemic did not give time for this maturation and forced the creation of a series of urgent measures and rapid adaptation strategies for students to stay motivated.

The Elementary, Middle and High School *Antônio Tozetti*

The *EMEF ANTÔNIO TOZETTI* is located in *Boa Jardim* Village, KM 325 (direction Marabá-Altamira), in the municipality of *Pacajá*, interior of the State of Pará. The village is 45 kilometers from the administrative seat of the municipality. Originally, it was created in 1976, as the State Middle School *Humberto de Campos*, located at KM 175 of the Transamazonica Highway. It began serving grades 5-8 in 1989, responding to a demand from the community.

With a built area of 2364m², the educational institution welcomes "mostly students from the uneducated low and middle economic classes" (Pacajá, 2023, p. 11, my translation). Some parents have autonomous services since there are not many sources of employment in the public sector and there are not many job opportunities in the private sector" (Pacajá, 2023, p. 11, my translation). Moreover, other parents work on plots of land near the village. Thus, it is understood that children of farmers, ranchers, among others, are served at EMEF, as the Pedagogical Political Project points out. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, there were a total of 468 students enrolled in the middle school. In that year, a failure rate of 25% and a dropout rate of 35% were achieved (Pacajá, 2023).

The administrative-technical staff is constituted by the director, vice-director, two pedagogical coordinators, a secretary, an administrative agent, and an administrative assistant. As for the premises, the school undergoes renovation and expansion, having the following improvised structures: a secretary's office, a teachers' room, a Cleaning Material Deposit, a Room for High School; and two Material Deposits. Furthermore, it has a kitchen, a food storage; eleven classrooms; a Specialized Educational Service room, three bathrooms, a drinking fountain, a library, a sports court, and two walkways. It is important to note that the school does not have a Computer Lab.

The teaching staff is constituted by 20 teachers and the school works in three shifts, contemplating the Elementary School, Middle School, High School, and Youth and Adult Education (*EJA*). As for technological resources, there are three

computers; two projectors; a camcorder; a microsystem; a computer scanner; an amplified box; a microphone; a screen for projection; and a television. It can be stated that the school is in development regarding the use of technologies, but there is still a gap in this sense, since it needs to require more materials and offer more materials and training for professionals.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted after the critical pandemic period, in 2023, and is classified, in nature, as applied, aiming to "generate knowledge for practical application, directed to the solution of specific problems" (Silva; Menezes, 2001, p. 20, my translation), since the strategies used by the specific teacher studied in this paper can help other educators. Based on its objectives, it is an exploratory research, which provides a greater familiarity with the problem, making it more explicit (Gil, 2002). In this paper, this is done, for instance, through discussions on Motivation and Blended Learning. This study can also be considered a qualitative research, when it comes to the approach to the problem, since it describes social phenomena and attributes meanings to them. (Silva; Menezes, 2001). In this study, it is intended to construct knowledge through a specific teacher's experience and its dialog with some issues raised in section two.

As for the technical procedures, it is possible to cite the bibliographic research, because "it is developed based on material already elaborated, consisting mainly of books and scientific articles" (Gil, 2002, p. 44). A significant part of the material used was located on platforms specialized in scientific papers, especially the ones related to Motivation and Blended Learning. Moreover, this research studies the seventh grade class of Middle School of *Antônio Tozetti* School, constituted by 28 students, whose teacher was Marineide. In this class, the skills developed were mainly related to textual comprehension and production (BNCC, 2017). The teacher's strategies in English teaching were analyzed, taking into consideration the documents, studies and issues discussed in the section *Important topics* and the pandemic context.

It is worth mentioning the application of a questionnaire to the teacher responsible for teaching the school subject in the class. The questionnaire was prepared by the author of this paper, so it could provide answers that helped to achieve the objectives proposed here. Seen as a fast and efficient data generation tool, it can effectively contribute to the understanding of important aspects of language teaching and learning (Richards, Lockhart, 1996). The chosen model contained open-ended questions and, therefore, was more flexible, allowing new questions to arise and the answerer to feel comfortable adding information that she considered pertinent or important. The questionnaire was conducted online, and its questions were aimed at answering the ones presented in the first section of this paper.

It is important to note that this study, like all the others, has limitations. Some of them are related to the subjectivity typical of qualitative research, and it is up to the researcher to interpret the facts raised according to the bibliographic material analyzed, the social context of the subjects and the educational institution involved, the teacher's answers to the questionnaire applied, among other factors.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS: English language teaching at EMEF ANTÔNIO TOZETTI during the pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the schools adopted blended learning as an alternative for students to complete the school year. Thus, the traditional method was left aside so that technology could be used in favor of all those involved in the teaching-learning process. Theoretically, it contributed with the teachers, who worked with the resources available in the schools, in accordance with the demands of an increasingly digital world in which technologies are key tools in the development of students. However, we know that reality is not that simple.

In order to discuss some difficulties that education faced during the pandemic, the school *EMEF ANTÔNIO TOZETTI* assumes the role of laboratory, where the strategy of hybrid teaching of the English language during this period is analyzed. At the time, face-to-face classes were not mandatory, serving only 50% of the class in each meeting. Online activities were carried out via WhatsApp, Instagram, and the Meet app, having virtual meetings once a week. In this way, synchronous meetings assumed an important role in the performance of a satisfactory class.

By bringing a more in-depth discussion about the theme addressed, it is appropriate to draw a profile of the academic background of the main source of the research: Teacher Marineide Pereira da Silva, who taught English Language at *EMEF Antônio Tozetti* in 2020 and 2021, has degrees in Pedagogy, Physics, and Languages – Portuguese/English. In addition, she has a basic/intermediate English course certificate. Currently, she works in two English language teaching franchises in the municipalities of Anapu and Pacajá. Therefore, it is no longer part of the teaching staff of the school in question.

The questionnaire presented questions about the challenges faced by the educator with the seventh grade class of Middle School in the school subject of English Language in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to the way students and their families responded to these difficulties. The students, whose ages range from 12 to 14 years old, had a low level of proficiency in the English language, mainly because their first contact with the subject took place only one year earlier, in the 6th grade of Middle School. According to the educator, during

the 2020 school year, communication between teacher and students took place through the WhatsApp application, a tool used to pass on content to ask questions, and clear up the class' doubts:

[...] There was little content that we worked on, we taught how to do the activities and explained the content through WhatsApp. When it wasn't audio, it was a short video, and we couldn't send too many long things because it made it difficult to learn (SILVA, 2023).

One of the biggest difficulties identified was the lack of cell phones, not only on the part of the students but also on the part of those responsible for them. Thus, there was a significant communication gap. Therefore, if "digital technologies provide rapid access to a large amount of information, modifying the ways of thinking and constructing knowledge" (Bacich; Grandson; Trevisani, 2015, p. 41), these changes were not yet effectively present in the community in question.

Twice a month, students had to answer the activities available in the activity booklet. Once printed, they were collected and returned to the school for correction. In this context, according to the teacher, only about "around fifty percent of the families helped and followed their children in the activities." (SILVA, 2023).

While teachers are expected to promote "learning experiences that enhance Active Learning" (Silveira, 2021, p. 18), putting this into practice is very hard in certain contexts. It was evident, from the data generated, the challenges faced by this teacher and students during the pandemic. Especially in the initial phase, which implied the adaptation of students, teachers, and parents, among others. This beginning was marked by the students' loss of interest, which reinforced an already present problem, the lack of workload and commitment to this school subject:

The teaching of English in public schools in our region is introduced from the sixth grade of Middle School. The student has no contact with English from the first to the fifth grade of Elementary School. And when they reach the sixth grade, the teacher has to make a plan focused on the students' knowledge. The content itself, which was supposed to be worked on in the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth grade, is reduced a lot, because we have to make a feasible plan to cover the content in a way students learn something. And so it is done. And at the time of the pandemic, it was even more difficult. (SILVA, 2023).

This neglect and lack of pedagogical structure regarding English teaching directly influence the motivational aspect. Furthermore, according to Viana (1990), an affective basis is necessary for motivation. This base is compromised by the screen, which widens the distance and hinders interactions. There were, for example, some attempts to develop games with the class. Students were supposed to prepare the material and use it at home, interacting with their

classmates through videos. However, many have not adapted to this new reality.

Whenever students had doubts, they received individual assistance by phone; an activity that was described by the teacher as "tiring". For her, learning was compromised by several factors, such as the fact that Blended Learning was adopted on an emergency basis.

It is clear that the teacher made incredible efforts to keep students stimulated, using games, for instance, so that they could be extrinsically and intrinsically motivated. Concerning the latter, Marineide used the fun activities to enhance students' motivation for achievement (Dörnyei, 2001), getting students involved in the concept of accomplishing the goal of winning a game. Also, regarding the former, she used the game rewards (Costa, 2006): the good feeling one can get when having a good result in an activity. When it comes to her strategies on Blended Learning, she tried to use technology aiming at promoting students' autonomy (Lima; Moura, 2015), whenever she asked them to do some exercises based on a previous audio or video she had sent. This way, learners had to construct knowledge almost exclusively by themselves, with little help from the teacher, so they could do the proposed activities.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, it was aimed to discuss the challenges in the teaching of English in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic at the *Antônio Tozetti* Municipal Middle School, located in *Pacajá*, in the southwest of the State of *Pará*. A questionnaire carried out in 2021 with the 7th-grade class of Middle School, which is part of this research, was guided by questions such as: What are the strategies used by the teacher to teach English during the pandemic? Do all students participate in the class? Do they do the activities? How did the teacher see the school-family relationship during this period?

It was brought to the discussion the fact that Blended Learning was implemented in Brazilian educational institutions on an emergency basis and, therefore, required a series of adaptations. To better understand this context, a brief explanation was made about the teaching of the English language in the country. Despite the relevant space that North American culture occupies worldwide and the guidelines of several documents such as the PCNs, English is a subject that is often neglected, with a reduced workload and the scrapping of public schools. In this way, English teaching, which is already challenging, becomes even more without access to the necessary tools, training, and structure, especially when it comes to technology.

Other issues also contributed to the challenge of teaching English in the pandemic; this is the case of teachers' and students' lack of motivation. The distance between the ideal goal and the feasible goal when it comes to English teaching and learning can be seen as demotivating. In the context in question, it was added social distancing and classes taught through a screen, aspects that

interfered greatly with the maintenance of the will to teach and learn this school subject.

It was in this apocalyptic scenario that the educator was supposed to plan strategies that can keep, at least, most of the class motivated. The changes brought about by Blended Learning, therefore, led to reflection on the best way to teach the content that should be passed on, since there are already several applications and portals available. Nevertheless, to make use of them, it is necessary to master them. In the reality analyzed, in which there was no training for either the educator or the students to handle these technologies, the alternative found was the WhatsApp, through which doubts were resolved. This alternative, however, proved to be insufficient and, many times, the students sought the teacher's help individually. The lack of internet or cell phones made the process very difficult, causing the school to make the material available in printed form, passing it on to the students only twice a month.

Based on the questionnaire answered by the English language teacher, it was identified that there was an attempt to create efficient teaching strategies, such as games, but they were not successful. The high illiteracy rate of the students' parents and family members was also pointed out as a determinant of the low performance, as only an average of 50% of this support network was seen as active in this period of Blended Learning. What was found was a great resistance to online teaching, including on the part of young people. Despite the teacher's efforts to stimulate students' autonomy using technology and keep them motivated through games, we can say that English teaching and learning was amazingly harmed during the pandemic.

In an ideal world, the use of technological devices in English teaching can enhance students' language development. Regarding this topic, Denardi, Marcos, and Stankoski (2021) reinforce that in English language classes, a matter as important as *what* to teach is *how* to teach: the teacher must also be concerned with the means to be used to challenge, motivate and guide their learners in the construction of new knowledge. Following this line of thought, it is up to the teacher to use some facts, such as English being the predominant language in the World Wide Web, to their advantage. When it comes to the use of technological resources, we can mention the video classes themselves, the texts and images that dialogue with students' realities, the use of PowerPoint presentations, attractive audios and videos, the digital whiteboard and online textbooks, among others (Denardi; Mark; Stankoski, 2021). Concerning this research, it was identified that although new technologies were already part of the routine of a significant part of the population, there was still not enough preparation to use them in the field of education. As a result, the experience of teaching the English language at *EMEF Antônio Tozetti* in the pandemic period presented several flaws, resulting in the loss of or little construction of knowledge. It should be noted that the moment forced all the school's community and students' families to undergo immediate adaptations, whose consequences to education can be further analyzed in

subsequent studies, carried out from other perspectives.

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ATTACHMENTS

A = Author of this paper

M = Marineide

Questionnaire:

A. 1- What strategies did you use to motivate students towards English learning during the pandemic period?

M. 1- We created a WhatsApp group for our communication and to answer questions. The content was explained, but there was little content that we worked on, I taught students how to do the activities and explained the content by WhatsApp. When there wasn't an audio, there was a short video, and we couldn't send too long ones because it made it difficult for them to learn. Then, after explaining that little content like, for example, the English articles ... I explained briefly that content, using some examples from the activity booklet too, and answered students' questions. Those students who had more difficulty would call me and I would talk to them, answering their questions, and explaining.

The activities were handed over to the parents. Every fifteen days, we collected the notebooks. In this activity booklet, there was the content and the activity below to answer. We told the parents that one day there would be an explanation by video, and the student who could not understand the video or the audio, would call me and I would explain it individually. I assisted a lot of students individually over the phone, I made videos with them, and I answered questions. It was a very tiring job, but we could do it. Not 100%, but we did it.

Regarding games, such as interactive ones for the student to play at home (Example: Tic-tac-toe), I asked them to prepare the games and work with their colleagues. The colleague was far away, but they could work on their cell phones. Through video, they interacted. For some students it worked, for others, it didn't.²

A.2- How did students deal with online teaching?

M.2 - In general, they accepted it with great difficulty...

² Teacher Marineide answered the questions in Portuguese, and the author of this work translated the answers to English.

A.3- Were all students engaged in the activities in general?

M.3 - No, many students didn't have assistance at home, their parents didn't have cell phones. Thus, it made learning difficult.

A.4- How was the relation between school and family? Did the family help the students go through this period?

M.4- Around fifty percent of the families helped and followed their children in the activities. Many mothers and fathers are illiterate, which made the whole process even more difficult.

A.5- Did you manage to cover all the contents you were supposed to?

M.5- At the time, there was a lot of loss of interest in the first year. In the second year, we had better results.

The teaching of English in public schools in our region is introduced from the sixth grade of Middle School. The student has no contact with English from the first to the fifth grade of Elementary School. And when they reach the sixth grade, the teacher has to make a plan focused on the students' knowledge. The content itself, which was supposed to be worked on in the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth grade, is reduced a lot, because we have to make a feasible plan to cover the content in a way students learn something. And so it is done. And at the time of the pandemic, it was even more difficult.

Desafios no ensino do inglês na Escola Antônio Tozetti durante o período pandêmico

Gleuciane Figueira Alves
Juliana Cunha Menezes

Resumo

A Pandemia da Covid-19 impôs mudanças em diversos segmentos no Brasil e no mundo. Com o isolamento social, uma das áreas mais afetadas foi a Educação. O Ensino Remoto provocou os professores a adotar novas estratégias de ensino, a fim de manterem os alunos motivados. O objetivo deste trabalho é discutir os desafios no ensino do inglês na *Escola Municipal de Ensino Fundamental Antônio Tozetti*, localizada em Pacajá, Pará, no período pandêmico, conectando tais questões com aspectos referentes à Motivação e ao Ensino Híbrido. Para tanto, foi realizada uma pesquisa qualitativa com abordagem bibliográfica e aplicado um questionário, respondido pela professora responsável por ministrar a disciplina para o sétimo ano do Ensino Fundamental, composto, na época, por 28 estudantes. Verificou-se, a partir do levantamento feito que, em relação aos alunos, a ausência de aparatos tecnológicos e de capacitação para seu uso prejudicou o processo de ensino-aprendizagem. Além disso, apesar da tentativa de incluir jogos e manter o contato com os estudantes, tirando suas dúvidas de forma coletiva e individual, a falta de estrutura tecnológica e de domínio dos alunos quanto às ferramentas necessárias para a implantação e eficiência do Ensino Remoto refletiram em falta de motivação e pouca participação da turma nas atividades.

Palavras-chave:

Motivação; Aulas remotas; Ensino híbrido.
