

Learning experiences of English Language Teaching students during COVID-19 in El Salvador

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Abstract

In El Salvador, in March 2020, students of all levels were sent to mandatory home quarantine and distance learning. Virtual education programs were subsequently launched nationwide. This qualitative study intended to capture the personal experiences of students at Universidad Gerardo Barrios, by answering the question: How were the learning experiences of English Language Teaching students during the COVID-19 pandemic in El Salvador? Methodologically, under the guidance of the Inductive Hypothetical method and the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the experiences were explored under COVID-19 preventive protocols. As the analysis with IPA takes time, sample sizes tend to be small, and to meet this requirement, five students participated in in-depth interviews conducted through Microsoft Teams. There was integration of two methods for IPA, one by using Atlas.ti and the other by the use of paper clippings that facilitated theme and sub-theme coding. Among the significant experiential themes obtained from the interviews, the following were more convergent: English language learning experience, life during quarantine, teacher strategies and methods, adaptation to virtuality, availability of resources, support from the university, economic impact, and support from friends and peers. Concluding that the rapid transition from traditional to distance learning provides students with a different perspective on the teaching and learning process, especially in times of crisis. It is necessary to immediately consider the need to redefine learning objectives, new methodological strategies that include both physical and digital resources; also, the strengthening of student autonomy.

Keywords: Central America, higher education, instruction, phenomenology, quarantine.