



Reading practices implemented in children's schools in Latin American countries: a portrait through scientific papers published during the covid-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT. Education is an international human right and a condition for the free development of peoples and individualities. Therefore, reading should also be recognized as a human right, as it is a structural element in the process of humanizing individuals and a condition for appropriating humanity's cultural, theoretical, and scientific heritage. During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools in Brazil and worldwide had to adopt new pedagogical strategies and restructure those previously used, including reading practices. Thus, a question arises: what reading practices were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic by Children's School teachers to form readers? This study is based on scientific papers in the Education field published between 2020 and 2022 and aims to identify the reading practices implemented by Children's School (0 to 10 years old) teachers in Latin American countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a bibliographical research with a qualitative data analysis, using a critical-dialectical approach. Although the results are still incipient, the following practices were identified: the use of diverse literary genres, pleasure reading, reading of literary texts, discussions via WhatsApp, storytelling via Google Meet, and broadcasting on Facebook. Furthermore, given the lack of scientific works on this subject, new research is essential to understand the reading practices employed during this period, in an attempt to understand the challenges faced and develop strategies for the post-pandemic context.

Keywords: reading practices; children's school; Latin America; literature review. covid-19.

Práticas de leitura implementadas nas escolas infantis dos países da América Latina: um retrato por meio de trabalhos científicos publicados durante a pandemia da covid-19

RESUMO. A educação é um direito humano internacional e uma condição para o livre desenvolvimento dos povos e das individualidades. Portanto, a leitura também deve ser reconhecida como um direito humano, pois é elemento estrutural no processo de humanização dos indivíduos e condição de apropriação do patrimônio cultural, teórico e científico da humanidade. Durante a pandemia da COVID-19, as escolas do Brasil e do mundo tiveram que adotar novas estratégias pedagógicas e reestruturar aquelas utilizadas anteriormente, incluindo as práticas de leitura. Assim, surge uma questão: quais práticas de leitura foram implementadas durante a pandemia da COVID-19 pelos professores das Escolas Infantis para formar leitores? Este estudo baseia-se em artigos científicos da área de Educação publicados entre 2020 e 2022 e tem como objetivo identificar as práticas de leitura implementadas por professores de escolas infantis (0 a 10 anos) em países latino-americanos durante a pandemia da COVID-19. Trata-se de uma pesquisa bibliográfica com análise qualitativa de dados, utilizando abordagem crítico-dialética. Embora os resultados ainda sejam incipientes, foram identificadas as seguintes práticas: utilização de gêneros literários diversos, leitura prazerosa, leitura de textos literários, discussões via WhatsApp, contação de histórias via Google Meet e transmissão no Facebook. Além disso, dada a escassez de trabalhos científicos sobre o tema, novas pesquisas são essenciais para compreender as práticas de leitura empregadas nesse período, na tentativa de compreender os desafios enfrentados e desenvolver estratégias para o contexto pós-pandemia.

Palavras-chave: práticas de leitura; escola infantil; América latina; revisão da literatura; covid-19.

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Introduction

This theoretical essay is an offshoot of studies carried out in the research project 'Reading and pedagogical practices in Children's School during the pandemic: teachers' activity for online and face-to-face teaching and learning', approved by CAPES Call for Proposals n. 12/2021. This work aims to identify the reading practices implemented by Children's School¹ (0 to 10 years old) teachers in Latin American countries during the COVID-19 pandemic through the analysis of scientific papers in the Education field published between 2020 and 2022 in order to understand their implications in the children's learning process and teaching process.

This study is justified by the importance of recognizing and affirming education as a human right. In this sense, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that everyone has the right to free and compulsory education in the elementary stage, aiming to expand human personality and reinforce human rights. Therefore, reading, as a constitutive part of the educational process, is also a human right, as it grants access to literate culture, stimulates autonomy and critical thinking, and humanizes individuals as they appropriate the knowledge historically elaborated by other human beings, thus becoming human.

In line with the proposed objective, bibliographical research was adopted as the methodology, with qualitative data analysis and a critical-dialectical approach. The analysis is based on scientific papers addressing reading practices in Children's School in Latin American countries from 2020 to 2022.

Thus, this study is structured in two sections. First, the methodological procedures used for data collection and analysis are outlined, including the selection criteria for the analyzed papers. The second section discusses the reading practices identified in the analyzed papers.

Methodological procedures

As methodological procedures, this study used bibliographical research, with qualitative treatment of data and a critical-dialectical approach. The theoretical assumptions of Historical-Dialectical Materialism were adopted due to its great contribution to this research analysis as it conceives humans as historical and social subjects (Gamboa, 1998).

The bibliographic research covered scientific papers addressing reading practices implemented in Children's School (0 to 10 years old) in Latin American countries, from 2020 to 2022. During this period, Brazil was in a state of public calamity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to the adoption of coping measures, such as social isolation and, consequently, remote teaching.

The bibliographic research was carried out in the '*La Referencia*' repository (*Red de repositorios de acceso abierto a la ciencia* [Network of open-access repositories for science])², encompassing publications from 2020 to 2022. The following terms were used to identify academic papers dealing with reading practices implemented in Children's School: '*práticas de leitura*' in Portuguese and '*prácticas de lectura*' in Spanish. The countries Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay were selected for having scientific papers indexed in the chosen database and for being Latin American countries. Publications from Spain are also indexed in the repository, but were excluded from this research.

Initially, when using the term '*práticas de leitura*' in Portuguese, 183 works were found. Using the terms 'Early Childhood Education' ('*Educação Infantil*' in Portuguese) and 'Elementary School' ('*Anos Iniciais do Ensino Fundamental*' in Portuguese) generated 1,375 and 461 results, respectively, totaling 1,836 papers. In order to deepen the investigation, combining the terms '*práticas de leitura*' with '*Educação Infantil*' resulted in seven papers, and searching for the terms '*práticas de leitura*' with '*Anos Iniciais do Ensino Fundamental*' generated three results, totaling 10 papers.

Then, 88 works were identified when using the term '*prácticas de lectura*' in Spanish. The Spanish terms for 'Elementary School' alone generated 298 papers for '*Educación Inicial*' and 1,023 papers for '*Educación Primaria*'. The term '*Educación Parvularia*' (Early Childhood Education) identified 30 papers, '*Preescolar*' (Preschool) resulted in 552 papers, '*Básica elemental*' (first years of Elementary School) generated six scientific papers, and '*Básica Media*' identified 23 papers. The terms '*Preparatoria*' and '*Educación Preparatoria*' did not produce any results related to the research objective.

¹ In Brazil, the term Children's School refers to children who are enrolled in Early Childhood Education or in the first years of Elementary School, comprising children between 0 and 10 years old.

² It is a Latin American network of open access repositories. Freely translated from the repository's website: "*La Referencia* originates from the Cooperation Agreement, signed in Buenos Aires in 2012, which reflects the political will to offer open access to Latin American scientific productions as a regional public good with emphasis on the results financed by public funds" (La Referencia, 2017, s.p.). Currently, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Ecuador, Spain, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay are active members of this network.

In order to achieve the objective of this research, the term '*prácticas de lectura*' and the specific terms corresponding to the concept of Children's School were applied. The terms '*prácticas de lectura*' and '*Educación Inicial*' together identified two works and applying the term '*prácticas de lectura*' with '*Educación Primaria*' resulted in four papers. No studies were found using the central term '*prácticas de lectura*' in conjunction with the other terms. Therefore, a total of six scientific papers were found when using the Spanish terms.

Combining the results in Portuguese and Spanish, based on the explained criteria, 16 scientific papers addressing reading practices in the context of Children's School during the pandemic in Latin America were found. In a qualitative analysis, we observed that 12 of these papers did not address reading practices or focused on practices developed in the context of face-to-face teaching. Therefore, they were excluded from the analysis.

Finally, considering these criteria, the corpus of analysis consisted of four scientific papers presenting reading practices carried out remotely that fit the objectives of this research. The analysis was based on the works of the following authors: Vygotsky (1993), Candido (2011), Leontiev (1978), Mello (2007), Bajard (1999), and Saviani (2012), among others. The analysis was conducted based on a literature review, problematizing the collected data according to the research objectives.

Reading practices in Children's School during the pandemic: a bibliographical view on the Latin American context

The COVID-19 pandemic led to several necessary changes in various aspects of everyday life, especially in the school environment, which needed to adapt to remote teaching due to social isolation and the consequent suspension of face-to-face classes. This situation required teachers to adopt strategies to ensure teaching and learning processes, minimizing the impact on the school's formative process despite the adversities imposed by the pandemic situation.

However, according to 'The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update' report, the global learning poverty rate has increased from 57% to approximately 70% during the pandemic in low- and middle-income countries, especially in the South Asian and Latin American regions. This index reflects the proportion of children up to 10 years old who have difficulties reading a simple text. In other words, many children who went through schooling during the pandemic may have severe difficulties in reading comprehension (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - UNESCO), (World Bank Group, 2022). Therefore, it is essential to investigate the reading practices adopted in the pandemic context to understand the strategies used and plan new approaches for the future.

Based on the criteria described in the previous section, only four papers specifically addressing reading practices in Children's School during the pandemic in Latin America were identified. Thus, this theoretical essay highlights these studies dedicated to analyzing and understanding the impact of remote teaching in this specific context.

The first analyzed paper is titled '*Leitura deleite: reflexões para a expansão das práticas de leitura na alfabetização com os multiletramentos*' (Pleasure reading: reflections on expanding reading practices in literacy with multiliteracies), by Iranara Saraiva Alves Feitoza (2022). The objective of this study was to investigate reading practices in Elementary Schools in Brazil. The data were collected using an online questionnaire developed by the authors using the Google Forms platform, with the participation of 18 literacy teachers. This research revealed various reading practices implemented during the pandemic, including storytelling, moments of silence during reading and/or storytelling, opportunities for speaking and listening before and after reading, the use of multiliteracies, establishing of connections with personal experiences and the world we live in, promoting of pleasure reading, among others.

In this paper, it is important to note that pleasure reading was the main practice adopted in remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, the author does not specify how this practice was implemented in this context, which would be highly relevant information for the discussion. As for pleasure reading, it should be noted that the enjoyment of literature is recognized by Antonio Candido (2011, p. 188) as a human right, and "[...] to deny the enjoyment of literature is to mutilate our humanity".

Similarly, Anjos (2019, p. 17) states that "[...] through a work of art, the individual can relive human plots lived in a very distant time and space as if it were part of their own history". Therefore, the pleasure of reading, and the development of imagination, creativity, and feelings are fundamental to the process of forming readers, especially for literary reading.

However, the process of humanizing individuals presupposes the appropriation of the knowledge historically produced by human beings. Allowing children to read only what they find pleasurable or affects them is tantamount to limiting their humanization process because children will hardly have contact with some literary classics without the teacher's intentional intervention, thus impacting their human formation. Therefore, pleasure reading can be a significant initial strategy, but it should advance to other forms, genres, experiences, and works so that children have access to humanity's heritage.

According to Feitoza (2022), the second most common reading practice proposed by teachers was individual reading aloud. This approach can help children improve their pronunciation, intonation, and punctuation practice. However, when used by itself, it can be limited to a simple mechanical act of decoding words and ignore the various social functions that reading can perform. These functions include attributing meaning to the text, understanding what is being read, finding pleasure in reading, reflecting, forming critical thinking, and developing the humanization process. Contributing to this discussion, Bajard (1999) states that individual reading is a reading for oneself that enables the reader to have an individual encounter with the work being read and, for this reason, should be encouraged and promoted from an early age.

The second analyzed paper is titled '*Leitura e escrita na Educação Infantil: as histórias como estratégia de inserção no universo escrito*' (Reading and writing in Early Childhood Education: stories as a strategy for entering the written world), by Carolina dos Santos Espíndola and Gabriela Medeiros Nogueira (2022). This study aimed to understand the reading and writing practices implemented in a Nursery School in Rio Grande, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, in 2020. The analysis was based on three pedagogical projects applied in classes ranging from nursery II (3-year-olds) to level II (5-year-olds) at the same school.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two teachers from the classes participating in the research and the school's pedagogical coordinator. Based on an analysis of the employed practices, Espíndola and Nogueira (2022) observed that the schools used a variety of textual genres, storytelling, and projects in which the students played leading roles. These projects aimed to promote a dialogue with the school community and were promoted through live broadcasts on Facebook, storytelling videos, and photographic records of the activities carried out by parents or teachers, posted almost daily on the school's Facebook page.

At this point, it is important to emphasize the importance of digital tools in the context of remote teaching and in working with reading. Although there were many connectivity difficulties, mainly due to structural issues related to the vulnerable population's access to technology, social media were fundamental to mediating storytelling, for example. According to Mello (2007, p. 94): "Every livingness, every new experience for the child demands a coordinated effort of all psychophysiological mechanisms — attention, perceptions, feelings, thinking, imagination, memory, speech — which transform the child's perceptions of their surroundings into new levels of relationship with the world".

Thus, the experience of storytelling in the virtual environment was a challenge for teachers, students, and guardians. For the children, this scenario required greater attention to participate in reading practices, which involved psychological functions such as speech, thinking, memory, feelings, and perceptions in a coordinated manner. Depending on family involvement, this experience may have contributed to children establishing new relationships with the world through their psychological functions.

According to Espíndola and Nogueira (2022), during the live broadcasts, the teacher encouraged parents to comment on the children's reactions during storytelling. This approach aimed to create a bond between the school, the children, and their families, aiming to promote an interactive and participatory education. The comments made by parents during the live broadcasts and video posts were a way for teachers to minimize the challenges imposed by remote teaching, especially for maintaining interactions between teacher-student, student-student, and teacher-student-family.

According to Vygotsky (1993, p. 242), "[...] what a child is able to do in cooperation today, he will be able to do independently tomorrow". In other words, the activities that children currently perform with the help of parents, teachers, other children, or any other more experienced individuals will be carried out independently in the future. Therefore, the experience of family involvement may have been significant in promoting the children's learning and development, as they had the opportunity to see adults interacting through writing and recognize language as a means of social interaction.

The third paper, titled '*Pandemia covid-19 y los rezagos en la lectura y la escritura en la educación primaria costarricense: algunas propuestas para optimizar la recuperación de aprendizajes en los nuevos espacios de trabajo*' (COVID-19 pandemic and the deficiencies in reading and writing in Costa Rican Elementary School: proposals to optimize the recovery of learning in new work environments), by Marielos Murillo Rojas (2022,

p. 73), aimed to answer the following question: "What are the traces of the pandemic on the reading and writing competences of Costa Rican children and youth?"³. For this purpose, a literature review focused on the learning of reading and writing was carried out between 2020 and 2021, reporting the experience of interventional training coordinated by the author of the study.

In the paper, Rojas (2022) points out that the COVID-19 pandemic has strengthened ties between school and family, and that family involvement was higher for reading than for writing activities. Therefore, she emphasizes the need for schools to focus on educational strategies promoted in the family environment, suggesting the use of short informative videos, text messages, podcasts, and virtual conversation circles mediated by digital platforms, among other methods. Another interesting point is the need for schools to focus on differences and to enrich access to written culture, especially for students who did not have the opportunity to engage in this context due to their family background.

This is a vital concern since educational work is "[...] the act of directly and intentionally producing, in each individual, the humanity historically and collectively produced by all men" (Saviani, 2012, p. 13). Thus, the school is the place for the most advanced knowledge and should provide students with access to humanity's heritage, which has been objectified and should be available for appropriation (Mello & Farias, 2010). Although the family has made a greater contribution to the formative process of children and young people due to remote teaching resulting from social isolation, the school's relevance as a scientific, theoretical, and deeply cultural space cannot be ignored.

Rojas carried out a formative experience in the subject named 'Reading and writing processes in early childhood' with third-year students in the Preschool Education course at the College of Education of the University of Costa Rica between 2020 and 2021. Reporting on this experience, the author highlights that, as a curricular component of the subject, students had to offer intensive didactic tutoring to a child experiencing reading and writing difficulties. This interventional work was guided by didactic sequences organized as workshops with a maximum duration of three hours per week, distributed over three distinct meetings, with at least one of them conducted online through WhatsApp, Zoom, and Teams, involving the university students, the family, and the child.

As reading practices, Rojas (2022) highlights the reading of literary texts and discussion about the works. As reported by the author, whether the meeting was synchronous or asynchronous, for at least one of the read texts there were pre-established questions to facilitate dialog and interaction. Parents assisted the children and were responsible for ensuring Internet connection since the meetings were usually conducted via WhatsApp. This data indicates that educational work based on literary reading is essential to humanize children and should not be limited to schematic activities or didactic strategies, with its breadth and depth in the formation of readers being recognized.

Rojas (2022) also highlights the difficulties experienced during this period, whether due to the lack of commitment from some family members, which directly affected reading and writing activities, strategies, and practices, or due to connectivity challenges, which worsened in 2020 and only partially improved in 2021. At this point, Saviani and Galvão (2021) emphasize that the challenge of remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic was twofold: on one hand, the need to access suitable equipment, not just cell phones, and on the other hand, the requirement of specific teacher training to manage these devices with a pedagogical focus, not just an instrumental one.

Finally, the fourth paper identified, titled '*La enseñanza de la lectura y la escritura en tiempos de pandemia: distintas perspectivas en la mirada docente*' (The teaching of reading and writing in pandemic times: different perspectives from teachers), by Argentine researchers Andrea Brito et al. (2022), aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions of the suspension of face-to-face teaching and its implications for reading and writing teaching practices. Based on interviews with teachers from different educational levels in various Latin American countries, the study sought to understand the impact of the pandemic on the teaching and learning of reading and writing.

From the teachers' reports, the authors were able to identify the historical nature of reading and writing practices, as well as the central role of individuals in the appropriation of these practices. Furthermore, in the remote context, these practices have moved away from their social and collective nature and have become increasingly individual. At this point, the authors' concern about the individualization of the reading experience should be considered, given that it is a primarily social practice. According to Corrêa et al. (2019, p. 13), reading allows readers to realize

³ "¿Cuáles son las huellas de la pandemia en las competencias de lectura y escritura de los niños y jóvenes costarricenses?"

[...] that their individual destiny is linked to the social destiny of all humans; that society is not an abstract entity, separate and opposed to them, but that, on the contrary, they are part of it, and it is from the relationships between human beings acting in the world that social life is composed and historically built.

Another aspect highlighted by Brito et al. (2022) is the importance of mediation through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Learning and Knowledge Technologies (LKT) for the development of reading practices during the pandemic, such as Word, WhatsApp, Zoom, among others. In addition, they emphasize that the teacher's role in the development of reading practices is more important than the technologies, because, both in the pandemic and post-pandemic contexts, the teacher's work is essential and needs to occur through intentional reading practices that assist in the development of children's higher psychological functions so that they understand what they are reading and can expand their human and social development through this interaction with the text (Souza et al., 2012). Therefore, teachers have to:

[...] understand the relationships between teaching and learning to read, in the dynamics of the signification of the act of reading, as human production of signs and meanings, is essential for teachers so that they can rethink practices, discussing the pedagogical implications of this dynamic in the formation of young readers. Therefore, explaining the (inter)constitutive elements — material conditions, psychological and ideological dimensions — that help us understand the complexity of these relationships, is also a task for all of us, researchers and teachers. To this end, talking about old and new reading technologies is necessary for the current debate about challenges and possibilities for the formation of young readers (Giroto, 2013, p. 344).

Therefore, teachers have a major challenge regarding the formation of readers. Although the family has become responsible for a constituent part of the educational process, the school remains the significant environment for learning to read. It is up to the school and its professionals, in the post-pandemic period, to develop strategies to recover the educational gaps generated by the limitations imposed by the pandemic. It is necessary to recognize, in concrete materiality, that reading is a human right itself, necessary for the human formation of the individual, and an instrument of socialization, appropriation, and internalization of eminently human qualities.

All the analyzed papers state that the practice of reading in the formative space of Children's School contributes to the process of humanizing individuals. According to Leontiev (1978, p. 282-283), individuals are not born with the historical qualities of humanity in themselves. "[...] They need to appropriate them in the course of their lives, thus acquiring truly human properties and faculties. This process places them, so to speak, on the shoulders of previous generations and elevates them far above the animal world".

The analyzed works also present some difficulties and possibilities experienced during the pandemic period and unanimously state that, among the pedagogical practices redeveloped in remote teaching, digitally mediated reading practices were the main challenge. This happened because it is necessary to consider the precarious conditions of Latin American schools and the impact of social inequality in these countries, since, according to the report '*La educación en tiempos de la pandemia de COVID-19*' (2020) (Education in the time of COVID-19), prepared by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), between 70% and 80% of students with a higher socioeconomic and cultural profile have access to a laptop, compared to 10% to 20% of those with lower socioeconomic conditions. Furthermore, the report points out that only 79% of students have access to the Internet, and 30% have educational software.

These data reveal the fragility of the objective conditions for remote teaching since digital tools were the main strategies adopted by Children's School teachers to promote reading learning. Considering the published works, it was possible to perceive teachers' attempt to promote reading practices focused on the formation of readers, although limited by Internet access issues, difficulties in handling technologies, and school community involvement. However, these are preliminary results, since only four papers were identified. Therefore, further qualitative and quantitative research is necessary to understand the impact of the pandemic on learning to read.

Final considerations

The pandemic has profoundly modified the school experience. Remote teaching had to be adopted due to the necessary measures established to control the virus' spread and to continue the educational work despite the difficulties experienced during this period.

Research into the reading practices adopted during pandemic times in Children's School is essential to identify the challenges faced and the strategies required in the post-pandemic context. In this sense, the literature review revealed 16 articles. However, only four of those papers discussed reading practices in Children's School in the context of remote teaching. The other papers addressed reading practices developed in face-to-face teaching.

These results point to two important conclusions. Firstly, there is a lack of studies addressing and analyzing reading practices adopted in this exceptional context of remote teaching. Secondly, it is important to consider that the publication of papers in journals usually requires a long period of elaboration, review, and dissemination. Therefore, the time criterion chosen, corresponding to the period of social isolation, may not have allowed the inclusion of works on this subject, since new research may still be in the process of being published.

Thus, the identified reading practices are restricted to the parameters established in the methodological procedures, containing limitations inherent to an analysis based on a literature review. To obtain a more complete and up-to-date view, it will be necessary to await the publication of new research in the coming years, considering that even the already published works often do not present implemented reading practices, as observed in the last analyzed paper.

Based on these considerations, the literature review identified the adoption of the following reading practices in the pandemic and remote teaching context: use of different literary genres, pleasure reading, reading of literary texts followed by discussions via WhatsApp, storytelling via Google Meet, and broadcasts on Facebook, in which the teacher started a live stream with the children and encouraged their families to write the children's reactions, aiming to establish an interaction with the story and other children in order to stimulate imagination and playfulness in the Children's School environment.

Through qualitative data analysis, it was possible to understand that the identified practices may have contributed to the formation of readers within the limitations imposed by remote teaching, such as unequal access to the Internet and digital equipment, teacher training for handling these instruments, and support from the family and the school community. However, the results are incipient for fully understanding this phenomenon during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, this essay encourages the development of new research on reading practices implemented in Children's School during the exceptional period in which remote teaching was implemented, aiming to consolidate critical analyses and develop new formative strategies for readers in Latin American countries. This will enable addressing reading and literature as human rights and indispensable assets for humanization.

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