

Good Teaching Practices in Education and Support to Learning in Middle School

Jackeline Daysi Chiqui Llangari¹, Ximena Patricia Curay Correa², Christian Rafael Quimbiulco Simbaña³, Edison Bladimir Charro Porras⁴

Abstract

Contemporary education faces the challenge of innovating to improve the quality of learning, requiring teachers to adopt effective methodological strategies. This study examines teaching strategies and good practices in middle school education in Cuenca, Ecuador, with the objective of identifying effective approaches and areas for improvement. The methodology employed was mixed, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. A prospective and non-experimental design was used, which allowed observing educational phenomena without intervening in their development. The research included semi-structured interviews, focus groups and life stories to capture in-depth educational experiences. In addition, surveys were applied to a representative sample of teachers and students to obtain quantitative data on the perception and effectiveness of teaching practices. The main result of the study highlights that solid teacher training and the use of innovative technologies are crucial to improve educational quality and promote an inclusive and equitable environment.

Keywords: *Teaching, Teacher Effectiveness, Educational Efficiency, Pedagogical Practice.*

Introduction

Changes in contemporary education demand innovations in teaching and learning to improve their quality. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to be leaders of change, using innovative methodological techniques, so that students actively participate in experiences that promote meaningful learning. Teaching strategies must consider the content, its purpose and the way in which it is learned, therefore, teacher training is essential for teachers to adapt and meet current social and cultural needs. Thus, good teaching practices, based on successful experiences, improve educational processes and must be shared to have a positive influence.

In this sense, teaching practices comprise the set of strategies and actions that educators carry out based on specialized knowledge to facilitate learning and adapt knowledge to the needs of students. These practices integrate social skills, academic teacher training, curricular policies and pedagogical perspectives (Fierro et al., 1999). In their execution, three types of knowledge are distinguished: disciplinary, which encompasses the mastery of the specific content that the teacher possesses; pedagogical, which implies the ability to transmit that content to students, overcoming possible resistance (Borges, 2012); and academic, which is related to the ability to transform teaching practices through a reflective engagement with knowledge (Zambrano, 2006).

Good teaching practices are designed to efficiently execute educational activities, achieve the proposed objectives and promote cultural changes in school contexts (Vidal and Morales, 2009). They may vary according to the educational level and the particular context, and are divided into institutional good practices and those that are more focused, affecting specific sectors or individuals. They are characterized by their capacity for innovation, continuous improvement, scientific basis and positive evaluation (Zabalza, 2012).

¹ Universidad Nacional de Rosario, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4108-5752>, Email: daima161923@hotmail.com.

² Universidad Nacional de Educación, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0364-5977>, Email: ximena.curay@unae.edu.ec

³ Instituto Superior Tecnológico Rumiñahui, <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-3491-1830>, Email: christian.quimbiulco@ister.edu.ec.

⁴ Policía Nacional del Ecuador <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8565-7501>, Email: edisoncharroporras@gmail.com.

Consequently, good teaching practices should address both the teaching and learning process, ensuring that the strategies employed are intentional and adapted to the specific characteristics of the students and the educational context (Ortega, 2017). In contexts of increasing cultural diversity, many teachers face challenges due to a lack of preparation for intercultural competencies, which can negatively affect educational effectiveness. In this sense, it is important that methodological strategies promote inclusion and overcome discrimination, supporting teachers' comprehensive professional development to improve classroom effectiveness (Romijn and Leseman, 2021; Bottiani et al., 2018). Thus, the interaction between teacher values and attitudes and the educational context influences the learning process, with approaches varying from teacher-centered to student-centered teaching (Renes and Martínez, 2016; Laudadio and Mazzitelli, 2019).

In order to adapt to educational diversity, it is important that teaching and learning styles adjust to the individual differences of students, as indicated by Del Barrio and Gutiérrez (2000). Indeed, inclusive education considers diversity as a norm and not as an exception, demanding a deep understanding of students' abilities and differences in order to apply effective methodological strategies (Pastor et al., 2014). Thus, good practices must overcome obstacles and be flexible to avoid exclusion, promoting integration and respect towards diversity (Guerrero et al., 2013). These practices should also focus on training students in "learning to learn" skills, using methods that facilitate deep information processing and foster meaningful learning (Mendoza and Mamani, 2012). Structured planning, the use of technologies, and continuous assessment are fundamental to achieve effective teaching (Medina, 2019).

In order to achieve an effective improvement in teaching practices, it is essential that continuing education programs focus on the comprehensive training of professionals. In this sense, the education centers of the National Police of Ecuador stand out as models to follow in the field of continuing education. Rueda (2014) argues that for these programs to be truly effective, they must encompass not only the development of technical knowledge and specific competencies, but also integrate values as a transversal axis. These values are crucial for the formation of leaders who are not only competent in their area, but also act with integrity and ethics. The incorporation of values in training seeks to develop leaders who can guide their teams and communities with confidence and responsibility, ensuring that their actions are aligned with solid ethical principles.

In reference to the above, life stories allow capturing successful educational experiences and deep insights into the school environment. According to Guzmán and Saucedo (2015), these narratives reflect the subjective perceptions of students and provide a cultural understanding of the educational context. Zurita and Moreno (2010) use school life narratives to identify important problems and issues from personal testimonies. Correa and Aberasturi (2014) emphasize that life narratives, by providing a detailed view of aspects that are not always visible, enrich the teaching process by incorporating students' direct experiences.

Several researchers analyze this issue such as Rojas and Rodríguez (2018) who examined teaching practices in the Cuban educational system, highlighting student participation and the role of creative teachers in the formation of values through dialogue. The findings indicated significant problems, such as lack of control over content and motivation, arbitrariness in teaching, and curricula that encourage student submission. Authority dynamics and hierarchical work styles that restrict authentic student participation were also observed.

In Ecuador, several studies have examined teaching practices in different institutions and educational levels. In the area of the National Police, academic preparation is fundamental to guarantee both the professionalization and ethical performance of police officers. This training must combine theoretical knowledge with practical skills to ensure compliance with human rights and legal regulations. A study by Guerrero (2023) used a qualitative methodology focused on a literature review of books, academic articles and other relevant sources. The non-experimental, quantitative, exploratory-descriptive research documented experiences of active police officers and highlighted the need to demilitarize and modernize police training, underlining the importance of a solid education and the integration of technology to face educational challenges in their teaching practices.

Similarly (Santos, 2024) conducted a study to analyze how innovations affect the quality of teaching. To this end, he conducted a literature review using Cooper's method, with searches in Google Scholar to identify relevant literature in both English and Spanish. The results revealed that the impact of educational innovations is conditioned by various factors and contexts, and also highlighted the influence of public policies on the development of educational technology. Among the main challenges identified were resistance to change on the part of educators, lack of adequate training and lack of technological resources in the classroom.

Despite the importance of good teaching practices, there is a lack of relevant and updated literature that explores the strategies used in teaching and learning in secondary education in Ecuador. This gap in educational research prevents a complete understanding of which methodologies are most effective and how they are applied in the local context. Thus, the lack of specific studies on this topic limits the ability of teachers to improve their practices.

Thus, as a contribution to secondary education research, it is essential to identify effective strategies derived from good teaching practices and to evaluate how they are implemented in daily practice. This process should include understanding the relationship between these strategies and good practices. Likewise, it is essential to analyze how good and bad practices are reflected in students' life stories, since these experiences significantly influence their learning. It is also necessary to distinguish and characterize positive and negative teaching strategies in the teaching and learning support processes, and to examine the knowledge derived from teachers' experiences and accounts of their practices and the application of their strategies.

Indeed, from a pedagogical and social perspective, it is essential to study educational innovations in order to optimize teaching practices. This analysis allows a better understanding of the current demands and diversity of the student body. By integrating innovative methodological techniques, active student participation is facilitated and meaningful learning is encouraged. Thus, effective teaching practices, based on solid training and the use of new technologies, not only improve educational quality, but also promote inclusive and equitable education, fostering respect for diversity and overcoming barriers that limit learning. In addition, the collection of successful experiences contributes to identifying effective approaches and overcoming the challenges facing contemporary education.

Therefore, the main objective of the study is to identify and understand good teaching and student learning strategies related to the good practices of middle school teachers.

Materials and Methods

The research was focused on the Cuenca canton and used a mixed methodology that combined qualitative and quantitative approaches to evaluate educational strategies in middle school education. The study was prospective and non-experimental which according to (Hernández, 2018) a prospective study observes phenomena as they develop, collecting data on future events from a starting point. On the other hand, a non-experimental study does not manipulate variables or control the environment, focusing on the observation of phenomena in their natural state without intervening in their evolution. which allowed observing current educational phenomena without intervening in their development.

According to (Rodriguez and Mendivelso, 2018) the transectional design is a type of research that collects data at a single point in time to provide a snapshot view of the situation or phenomenon studied. This design makes it possible to obtain a "transectional" or "snapshot" image of the variables at a specific moment, without considering their evolution or changes over time. Its use facilitated the collection of data at a specific moment in time, observing teaching practices and student perception without deliberately manipulating variables. The research was conducted in 2022 and was structured in phases that included the identification of criteria for evaluating educational strategies, fieldwork for data collection, and the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data.

The study population included middle school teachers and students in the urban area of Cuenca. Non-probabilistic convenience sampling techniques were applied to select the teachers, resulting in a sample of

34 participants. For the students, probability sampling was used with a statistical formula to obtain a representative sample of 376, although 467 students finally participated. The qualitative approach included semi-structured interviews, focus groups and life stories, following the methods proposed by Hernández (2018).

Data processing and analysis was performed using specialized tools. Qualitative data were analyzed with Atlas Ti software, which facilitated the coding and analysis of patterns in the information collected (Muñoz and Sahagún, 2017). Quantitative data were processed with SPSS software, which allowed the tabulation and statistical analysis of the applied surveys (Manterola and Otzen, 2014). This approach allowed a complete interpretation of the results, integrating qualitative and quantitative information to comprehensively evaluate the educational strategies and teaching practices in the context studied.

Results and Discussion

The survey of students in the northern district of Cuenca shows a slight male majority in secondary education, with 51.39% male students compared to 48.61% female students.

This imbalance suggests the need to promote gender equality in education. The majority of students, 95.93%, are in the 9 to 12 years stage, a crucial phase between childhood and pre- adolescence that requires specialized support. Regarding teacher performance evaluation, 49.46% of the students consider the teachers' work to be excellent, although a small percentage perceives it as deficient. Although the spaces for resolving doubts and class discussions are positively valued, there is a need to improve overall satisfaction and adjust methodological strategies for greater educational effectiveness. The usefulness of the contents taught is appreciated by 97% of the students, and 90.36% consider that the teachers are effective motivators. However, problems are identified in the comprehension of subjects such as foreign languages and mathematics. The use of educational materials and virtual resources shows that, although expositions and presentations are common, playful activities and technological resources are not yet fully integrated into the educational process. In addition, 70.24% of the educational community supports teacher evaluation, while 26.12% suggest that the number of students per classroom should be reviewed to avoid overcrowding.

In the survey of teachers, 73.53% of the respondents were female and 23.47% were male, confirming the female predominance in the teaching staff. This finding coincides with the study by Fernandez et al. (2020), which attributes the low male representation to gender stereotypes and negative perceptions about male teachers, who are often erroneously associated with risks of abuse. The majority of teachers are between 35 and 49 years old, reflecting a stable stage in their professional career. In terms of perception of student learning, 52.94% rate learning as good, while only 2.94% rate it as excellent, suggesting areas for improvement in educational strategies. Teachers believe in the applicability of the knowledge imparted in daily life, with 79.41% in agreement, and 97.06% make error corrections in a positive manner. 52.94% believe that group work is key to collaborative learning, and lesson planning is a common practice among 97% of teachers. However, there are challenges, such as problems in specific subjects and the need to adapt teaching methods to different learning styles. Continuous assessment and the integration of virtual tools, such as videoconferencing, are seen as essential to improve educational quality. Most teachers (55.88%) consider that the high number of students per classroom negatively affects teaching, suggesting the need to review the capacity of classrooms to optimize the educational process. The material resources used include lectures (58.88%), presentations (29.41%), group activities (32.35%) and games or dynamics (41.18%), while the most common virtual resources are presentations (50%), workshops (50%) and games (38.24%).

From the life histories collected in the North Education district, it has been identified that many students experience feelings of exclusion, manifesting episodes of isolation by teachers and peers. Students value brief explanations, the use of examples, and conversations about controversial topics and respect. According to students, Good Pedagogical Practices are closely linked to the teaching of values such as honesty and loyalty, employing strategies such as stories and videos to promote ethical values and prevent

school exclusion. The integration of online games and audiovisual content makes the subjects more dynamic, with fun being considered a key factor in motivating learning, although challenges persist when students do not consult teachers.

The interviews conducted with middle school teachers, analyzed with Atlas.ti, reveal various teaching and learning strategies, such as cooperative learning, playful activities and the use of ICT. Teachers emphasize the relevance of group work and continuous feedback, adapting their methods according to students' needs. Good teaching practices include the use of technology and traditional methods such as lectures and concept maps. In teaching values, teachers believe that example is the most effective tool. Daily classroom experience influences good practices more than formal training, underlining the importance of adapting strategies to the characteristics and context of the students.

The research identified teaching practices that contribute to meaningful learning and highlight the need for innovation in the educational system. New technologies motivate students, revaluing the role of the teacher and the importance of an adequate methodology. The perception and organization of the individual's reality influence learning supported by the constructivist theory (Keengwe et al., 2014). Granados (2015) highlights the integration of teaching, research and social linkage, while Torres and Ramos (2020) point out limitations in the traditional methodology.

The characterization of teaching strategies in secondary education shows that the educational process is constantly evolving. Graham et al. (2015) state that actions for knowledge assimilation are related to sustainable learning, strengthening teaching with inclusive practices and continuous development of skills. According to Pérez et al. (2021), effective strategies address individual needs, promoting enduring learning through academic initiatives, both individual and collective. Montoya et al. (2018) highlight the importance of establishing assessments and strategies to minimize shortcomings, encouraging responsibility in the construction of knowledge and the search for additional information.

In Ecuador, there are different successful pedagogical practices that need to be disseminated as motivational experiences, among which those of the National Police of Ecuador stand out. According to researchers Barragán and Silva (2023), the National Police conceives continuing education as a fundamental tool for the professional development of its officers. Through courses and seminars, both mandatory and optional, various areas of knowledge and specific skills are addressed. In this way, both teachers and trainers undergo this continuing education process in face-to-face, virtual and hybrid modalities that are a complement to improve their teaching practices, in full compliance with their work.

These continuing education practices should be extrapolated to all levels of the educational and professional system in the country. The implementation of continuing education programs, tailored to the specific needs of each sector, can foster a culture of lifelong learning and continuous improvement. Inter-institutional collaboration and the use of flexible modalities are key elements to ensure that all professionals have access to growth and development opportunities, without interfering with their job responsibilities. Following the example of the National Police can promote a more skilled and efficient workforce capable of responding effectively to contemporary challenges.

Durán and Miquel (2018) argue that effective learning requires a collaborative approach in classrooms, with programs that promote equality and the elimination of discrimination. Good strategies value individual abilities and promote inclusion and equal participation. Martínez et al. (2019) underscore the challenge of addressing exclusion and improving educational quality. Students' accounts reflect the need for flexible methodologies that address their needs and promote spaces for harmonious coexistence. This translates into adequate educational environments free of discrimination, essential to foster good teaching practices.

Conclusions

Teacher preparation and training play a crucial role in classroom performance. When teachers are well-prepared, enthusiastic and possess in-depth knowledge of their subject area, the learning environment

benefits greatly. Ongoing training and adequate preparation are critical to implementing effective teaching strategies, ensuring that educators can meet educational challenges with competence and confidence.

Regarding the use of innovative resources, the incorporation of tools such as videos, games and technologies is essential for the development of critical and reflective thinking in students. These resources not only enrich the curriculum, but also facilitate the creation of more dynamic and effective lessons, which contributes to deeper and more meaningful learning.

Collaborative strategies are equally important to strengthen the learning process. Both individual and group strategies play a crucial role in improving teaching practice. By fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment, these strategies facilitate the development of students' skills and knowledge more effectively.

Adapting to the individual needs of students is fundamental to effective teaching. It is necessary to combine traditional approaches with non-formal methods and technologies, while respecting the diversity and learning preferences of each student. This adaptation ensures that each student receives the support needed to reach his or her full potential.

Creating inclusive classroom environments is crucial to educational success. An environment that values individual differences and promotes equitable participation contributes to more meaningful and effective learning. This inclusive approach ensures that all students feel respected and valued, facilitating their active participation and engagement in learning.

In education, continuous training and leadership are fundamental pillars for the development of effective teaching practices. One example is the institutions of the National Police of Ecuador, which stand out for their commitment to continuous training, integrating ethics as a transversal axis in their training programs. This work in their educational centers seeks to form teaching practices that contribute to a better social practice. Commitment to continuous training and leadership is essential for teachers. Continuous training allows educators to update their knowledge and teaching strategies, while leadership in the planning and execution of educational strategies is essential to meet the changing needs of students.

Finally, constant evaluation and monitoring of learning is necessary to adjust teaching and optimize results. Formative assessment makes it possible to identify and support students who require additional help, thus improving overall performance. These processes are essential to provide constructive feedback and to ensure that all students receive the necessary support to achieve their educational goals.

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