

## Students' perceptions of online education during Covid pandemic

Percepciones de los estudiantes sobre la educación en línea durante la pandemia de Covid

Gabriela Geovanna Guevara Enríquez\*

### ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research study is to describe the perceptions of an undergraduate group of students regarding virtual education in times of COVID-19. Taking into consideration the factors that were evaluated in this study, a quantitative approach was carried out by applying a Likert-type questionnaire with items divided into four categories: Resources and conditions for online education, experience between face-to-face and virtual lessons, relationships with partners and teachers, and teachers' digital abilities. The result shows that virtual education due to Covid-19 has gotten a generally favorable perception from undergraduate students since they considered their teachers to have assumed their roles in order to fulfill their educational needs.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; perceptions; virtual education; higher; undergraduate

### RESUMEN

El presente estudio tiene como objetivo principal describir las percepciones de un grupo de estudiantes de pregrado respecto a la educación virtual en tiempos de COVID-19. Considerando los factores que se evaluaron en este estudio, se realizó un enfoque cuantitativo aplicando un cuestionario tipo Likert con ítems divididos en cuatro categorías: Recursos y condiciones para la educación en línea, experiencia entre clases presenciales y virtuales, relaciones con compañeros de clase y docentes, y las habilidades digitales de los docentes. El resultado muestra que la educación virtual debido al Covid-19 tiene una percepción favorable por parte de los estudiantes de

\* Magister in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Docente, Universidad de Guayaquil, gabriela.guevaraen@ug.edu.ec, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6527-262X>

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pregrado, ya que consideran que sus docentes han asumido sus roles para satisfacer sus necesidades educativas.

**Palabras clave:** COVID-19; percepciones; educación virtual; más alto; de licenciatura

## INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge that COVID-19 has caused a substantial modification in the organizational and pedagogical methods of the educational systems. Schools, institutes, and universities were obliged to close their doors as a preventive action to contain the pandemic. And all these decisions have forced educational institutions to improvise and look for solutions in order not to stop their activities.

It has been two years since the pandemic crisis started and teachers were forced to learn to develop their digital skills. However, we cannot take for granted that all teachers are actually well-prepared to work virtually nowadays. Even though, many people may think that teaching online is similar to teaching face-to-face lessons, they are far from reality. Thus, teachers need more than just basic knowledge of handling a computer or a mobile app in order to effectively teach online.

Teachers must be capable of exploiting, using, and applying digital technologies in all educational activities (Perifanou, 2021). For that reason, most institutions started training their teachers. Courses varied from digital training skills for teachers, how to manage an LMS classroom, the use of Zoom/Teams/Google Meets in the teaching process, among others.

There is no doubt that virtual education has forced us to encounter many challenges not only from teachers' side but also from students'.

One crucial fact to consider is that teaching may vary its difficulty depending on the subject areas. For instance, it is much easier to teach subjects that do not involve any kind of symbols since not all digital whiteboards have incorporated those special characters on their software. So those teachers need to acquire more specific tools or programs in order to succeed in their classes.

The environment is a second important fact to bear in mind. It does not matter how much the teacher may know his subject, but if the class is not given in an appropriate place, it won't have good results. Inappropriate physical conditions can disconnect the learners from their teachers. Noise, darkness, wrong tone of voice and disheveled appearance are bad habits that teachers must try to avoid (Bambaeeroo F, Shokrpour N., 2017).

The third fact regarding digital teaching issues in virtual learning is lack of time management, resources, and external factors. During this pandemic situation, most institutions' classes were split into synchronous and asynchronous hours. It causes a

reduction of teaching hours, but the content was the same. Thus, it gave teachers fewer hours to explain and students fewer hours to practice.

On the other hand, resources were also a great big deal since teachers must prepare PowerPoint presentations for each lesson. Fortunately, Internet has a wide number of useful resources many teachers could use for free. In fact, there exist a variety of sources such as

Mentimeter, Quizlet, Quizzes, Padlet, and Jamboard. They have been very helpful to make classes more enjoyable. However, not all teachers are familiar with them.

Instability in the Internet connection is not only a problem for teachers but also for students. Yet, it is something we cannot control at all.

When we refer to online education, it is not possible to consider only the teachers' abilities or environmental issues, but there are many other factors such as the technological barriers on the part of students that may also affect the learning process.

It would be very important first to mention that according to Schroer (2018) Generation Z includes children or adolescents born between 1995 and 2012, as opposed to Generation Y (1977-94), also known as 2nd generation "Baby Boomer", and Generation X (1966 -76), or generation lost. It is said that these generations are more familiar with technology. In other words, they are born with digital skills. Yet, that is far from the truth in every single context.

Technological limitations have caused some delays in the functions of university institutes where lack of resources has caused a negative impact on education. There are still institutions that do not have enough equipment to fulfill students' needs. For instance, lack of computers in ICTs classrooms, no maintenance at all on PCs, and even enough trained teachers. (Dory Araujo de Cendros, José Bermudes, 2009).

Another important fact to pay attention to is students' lack of resources at home. This study is focusing on public students in Higher Education. In most cases, they live in rural areas where Internet connection is not good enough. Some others have only one computer that needs to be shared with all members of their families. And there is the last group who receive classes from their cellphones where they are not able to accomplish different activities the teacher may require.

But not everything is negative when referring to virtual lessons, of course, there are positive factors to point out.

To begin with, remote learning has been considered as one of the most voted options since students feel they can learn anywhere (Mukhtar K, 2020). This is a great advantage since they can easily move from one place to another and still continue learning.

Interaction facilities are a second advantage that virtual learning has. Wagner (2008) claims that online learning helps to overcome barriers from learners since they feel

more comfortable discussing with their peers. In fact, the use of forums motivates students to give their viewpoints to the whole class.

Besides, it is certain that virtual learning allows students to access easily a range of didactic material, recorded classes, workshops, and other educational activities. In fact, according to Almaraz (2020), today's classes are more dynamic, unlike traditional ones.

Online learning also has a cost-effective benefit because learners do not need to spend money traveling in order to study (Mukhtar K, 2020).

The use of virtual learning allows self-pacing. For example, the asynchronous classes allow each student to learn at their own pace, whether slow or fast. As a consequence, it increases satisfaction and reduces stress. (Codone, 2001; Amer, 2007; Urdan and Weggen, 2000; Algahtani, 2011; Marc, 2002; Klein and Ware, 2003)

There is no doubt that online education has its benefits as well as its drawbacks. That is why the importance of carrying out this study where students could let us know their perceptions about virtual learning bearing in mind four main factors that have been explained throughout this research paper.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is based on a quantitative methodological framework and aims to investigate the perception of a group of undergraduate students from a higher education public institution regarding the new modality of virtual teaching implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to carry out this study, an instrument, the student's perception of virtual learning survey, has been developed and applied to a constituted group and, therefore, not selected randomly.

The survey was applied to 79 students through Google forms using a Likert-like scale. It was composed of 23 items which have been divided into four main sections:

- Resources and conditions for online education.
- Students' experience between face-to-face and virtual lessons.
- Relationships with partners and teachers.
- Teachers' digital abilities

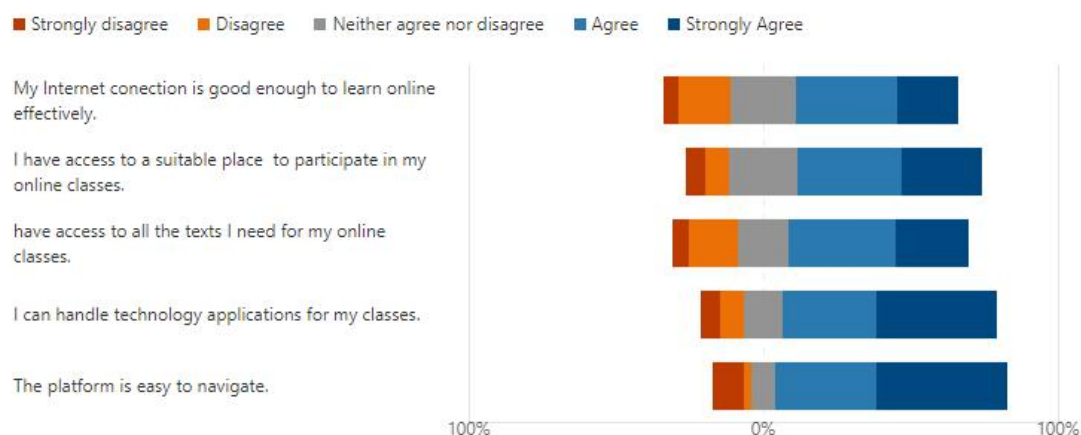
It is important to mention that were considered students from the fourth semester onwards since they have both experiences: face-to-face and virtual learning.

## RESULTS

In chart 1, we can observe that most students have a positive perception regarding the resources they have to use as well as the conditions they need to participate actively in their online classes. A 62.4% of students agreed with the idea that their Internet connection is good enough to attend their lessons. Only 5.1% suggested some failing in their connections. On the other hand, about 70% of students reported having enough

knowledge to handle the platform and the use of technology in general.

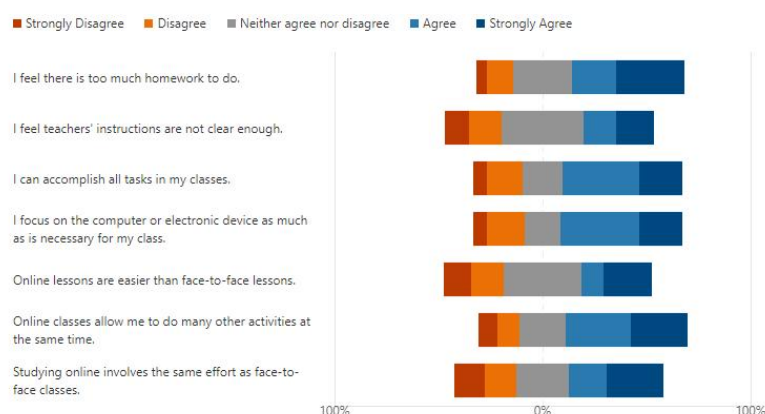
**Table 1.** *Students' perceptions about resources and conditions for online education*



We can see in chart 2 that 53,4% of students consider that virtual lessons have carried out a great amount of homework to do. Besides, more than 50% of students consider that teaching instructions have been in some way affected since classroom directions are not always clear in the online sessions. These results have a correlation with the results of completing all the tasks required since 55% of students do not complete all that the teacher requires.

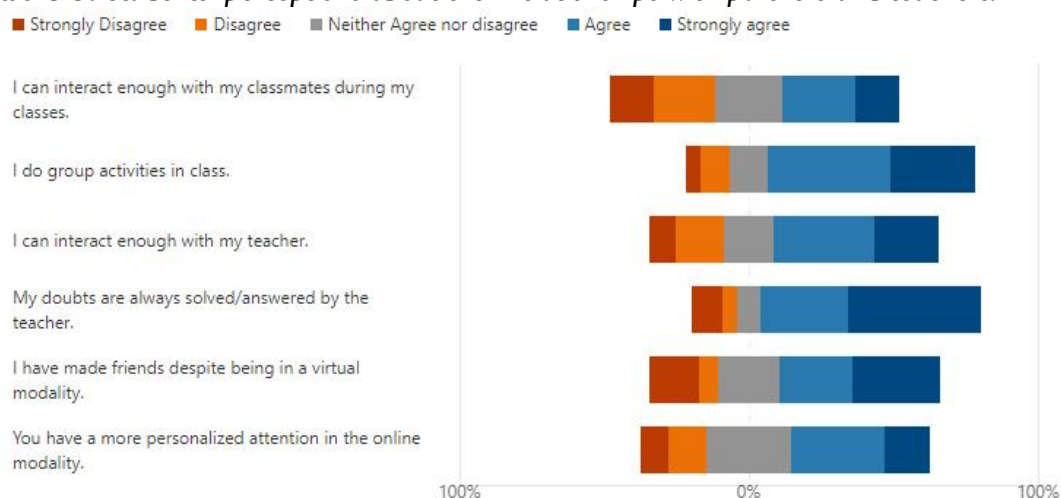
Besides, it is vital to stand out that through the analysis of the answers from the inquired students, we can conclude that concentration has also been affected since a number of 41,6% claimed that they do not focus on their online lessons. Moreover, the same number of students recognized that they can do many other activities at the same time they are studying.

**Table 2.** *Students' perceptions about their experiences between face-to-face and virtual lessons.*



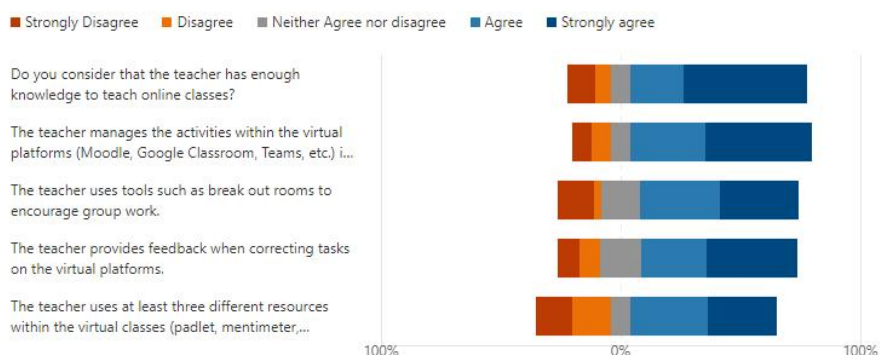
In terms of communication, it has been a positive point of view from the part of the students. A number of 40,5% of students reported that they can interact with other students during their online lessons. Besides, there is 71,8% of students who have had the opportunity to work in groups, 57,2% who have interacted with their teachers, 76,4% who claimed their problems have been solved by their tutors, and 55,3% who have made some new friends.

**Table 3.** *Students' perceptions about their relationships with partners and teachers.*



In this last chart, we can notice that students have a positive conception of their teachers' digital abilities. A number of 73,7% agreed with the idea that teachers have enough digital knowledge to deal with online classes. In fact, 75,7% thought that online classrooms were well-organized due to their teachers' skills. In addition, 65.1% reported that teachers use external tools to promote better learning results in the classroom. And finally, 54,8% said they have received feedback from their teachers.

**Table 4.** *Students' perceptions about their teachers' digital abilities.*



## DISCUSSION

The general perception of the undergraduate students is positive towards virtual education, particularly regarding the role of their teachers. Consequently, it can be affirmed that university teachers are showing flexibility in adapting to the demands of Covid-19 to guarantee the educational needs of students.

On the other hand, despite the emergency situation regarding COVID-19 is coming to the end, ITCs have come to stay, which means that education from now on will be drastically affected by technological advances.

For this reason, it is crucial to take into account all those comments from dissatisfied students regarding virtual lessons. There is no point in denying that there are a lot of weaknesses we still need to overcome.

So far, these results might be of great help to make changes where necessary. It would be also recommendable to apply a new survey at the beginning of future semesters and at the end in order to see how far the institution has reached students' expectations from an educational viewpoint.

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