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Examining university students' satisfaction regarding remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Article Info

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine students' opinions regarding English courses taken via remote learning at a private university in the city of Pasto, Colombia during the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, the authors mentioned some important studies related to students' satisfaction after taking remote learning lessons because these studies allow researchers, institutions, and decision-makers to propose alternative strategies to refine the teaching-learning process. Thus, an online questionnaire was applied to 127 undergraduates who studied in the different academic programs offered by the university. The method applied was mixed since the questionnaire used both closed and open-ended questions in order to collect more relevant and detailed information coming from students. After analyzing the results, the students expressed that remote learning fulfilled their expectations because it helped them to be more autonomous and develop self-efficacy.

Introduction

According to the International Organization for Migration (2020) the World Health Organization (WHO) stated that the respiratory disease which was detected in December in the city of Wuhan, China was deemed as an international health emergency. Later on, the disease was called COVID-19 by the international consensus. After this event, once the WHO declared the outbreak in China to be a pandemic, the national government in Colombia and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MSPS) established a contingency plan to prevent from the virus spreading among people. Thus, there were measures for isolation, health services, economic issues, and education in order to avoid people to infect with the virus.

In the field of education, Martinez and Garces (2020) stated that the president of Colombia asked the schools and universities in Colombia to develop online learning strategies to mitigate the problems caused by the pandemic. Thus, Garcia Aretio (2021) [3] explained that professors and teachers at different universities and schools in Colombia started to make use of IT for teaching; therefore, some of the platforms used for the synchronous lessons were Google meet, and Zoom. Besides, some institutions opted by complementing the synchronous lessons with asynchronous tools such as Moodle, Google Classroom, Schoology, among others so that students could work on their assignments.

In addition, Garcia Aretio (2021) [3] argued that one advantage is that universities already had online platforms as complementary work to face-to-face lessons. Additionally, students' age makes the teaching-learning process more suitable for online learning because they know how to use computers and smartphones. Another advantage is that students could access synchronic classes or recorded sessions in which students can watch any topic. Likewise, teachers who were more proficient in the use of digital resources could use a variety of applications, websites, platforms even social networks to create more creative lessons.

For two years (2020-2021), university students were not ready to go back to face-to-face classes because teachers and students had to be vaccinated against COVID-19 according to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (2021), therefore; they continued taking online classes throughout the year. Finally, in 2022, the university opened its doors again to receive students in face-to-face classes following the biosecurity protocols, starting a new phase in the field of education in Colombia. In this phase, some institutions considered asking their students their opinions regarding remote learning and how they felt during this process. A process that showed both positive and negative views since not everybody was ready to face the challenges that remote learning had among students due to the lack of technological resources, motivation, and social issues. Thus, in the next section, some studies related to students' perception or satisfaction during remote learning are presented in order to know the results.

Review of studies related to students' perception or satisfaction

Several studies have been carried out to measure students' satisfaction with online learning, thus; some studies will be included in this article in order to review the results both in Colombia and around the world. The first study was that of Keržič et al. (2021) [5] in which participated 10902 university students coming from 10 different countries (Chile, Ecuador, India, Italy, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Turkey). The students answered an online survey in 2020, this survey intended to know the factors that influence students' performance during the abrupt change to e-learning once the pandemic and lockdown started. Surprisingly, the results of this study showed that e-learning proved to be successful in terms of service quality, teachers' role in online education, and IT structure. Moreover, students felt that their performance improved thanks to the impact of e-learning despite the abrupt academic changes that students had to undergo, however; the authors invite the experts and decision-makers to delve into the factors that influenced students' performance and the quick adaptation to e-learning. Then, a second study carried out in China by She et al. (2021) [11] was implemented to know about the relationship between interaction and online learning satisfaction. In this study, a number of 1504 university students from different provinces in China, Xinjiang, Gansu, Henan, Shandong, and Hebei participated in this study by answering an online questionnaire. At the end of the research, the results demonstrated that students had a positive view regarding online learning because they developed higher levels of satisfaction. Moreover, students gained content knowledge, enhanced their creativity, and responsibility, and improve their performance, of course; student interaction is essential to increase students' engagement and self-efficacy. Finally, this study suggested institutions or the Ministry of Education to improve the principles of e-learning around the world.

In Colombia, exploring students' perceptions during the COVID-19 pandemic was one of the main concerns. The following study called "Perception of Colombian undergraduates in the effect of the COVID-19 confinement on their academic performance" sought to explore the perception of 85 Colombian undergraduates on the effect of the COVID-19 and the confinement in relation to their academic achievement. To start, students perceived that their moods during the confinement were an important aspect that impacted negatively the acquisition of new knowledge related to their program subjects; they also mentioned that family coexistence before the pandemic affected positively their moods, but it affected them negatively during the pandemic, which in turn impacted their academic achievement negatively; considering emotions, women demonstrated to feel more anxious, sad, and depressed than men. Thus, this study might contribute to students' academic improvements in order to avoid desertion during or after the pandemic in their university life (Valdivieso et al., 2020) [12]. Likewise, other Colombian research attempted at describing undergraduates' perceptions in relation to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. This perception was favorable, especially considering the role that teachers played in their courses demonstrating pertinence and coherence in relation to their students' needs as well as the skills to use the available technological resources that facilitated communication, dialogue, reflection, and autonomous work (Avendaño et al., 2021) [2]. The previous studies revealed negative and to a higher extent positive students' insights associated with the online education implemented during the COVID-19 confinement. Similarly, the present study attempts at examining students' perspectives and their satisfaction with the courses taught at a private university in Pasto, during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research might be beneficial for the academic community since they can get informed and reflect on the positive aspects that resulted from the teaching and learning experiences during the pandemic and adapt them in the current realities continuing with IT implementation as a significant tool in order to improve the teaching and learning processes.

Method
Type of Study
According to Saunders et al. (2019) [10] exploratory research attempts at discovering new insights related to a particular subject of interest so as to gain some understanding or assess a phenomenon. So, this is mainly qualitative exploratory research that gathered data about the participants' voices (Patton, 2014) [8]; based on a non-randomized selection. Nonetheless, a mixed method was used to collect the data. This research attempts to analyze the students' satisfaction in relation to the EFL courses taught during the COVID-19 pandemic in the second semester of 2020 and the year 2021 at a private university in the city of Pasto.

Context of the Study
The English courses are offered by the languages department as a requirement to graduate from the different programs offered by this university. The courses are face-to-face, however; because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the teaching methodology changed. Both teachers and students had to teach and take classes through remote learning making use of the Moodle platform called "TAU" and Google Meet synchronous sessions including asynchronous activities to accomplish the learning objectives.

Participants

The satisfaction survey was implemented with a group of undergraduate students who took English levels two, three, and four at a private university in Pasto, Colombia. The participants of this survey were 127 students who study in different programs such as Accounting, Law, Physical Education, Electronic Engineering, Systems Engineering, and Psychology, 70 males and 57 females. The respondents' ages ranged from 16 to 30 years old. Finally, they took the English courses during the second semester of 2020 and the two semesters of 2021. All the participants provided detailed and enough information. Hence, none was excluded and 127 surveys were approved to support the mentioned research.

Data Collection

In this study, a Google Forms survey was implemented to collect both qualitative and quantitative data through 12 questions. Taking into account the purpose of the research, this instrument was previously validated since it was implemented by Prodanović and Gavranović in 2021 [9]. The survey was divided in three sections: first, it is the socio-demographic information, second; nine questions related to students' satisfaction using a Likert scale ranging from 1= muy insatisfecho [very unsatisfied] to 5= muy satisfecho [very satisfied]. Besides, two open-ended questions were added by the authors in order to know students' opinions. Finally, the survey was sent via email to have accurate and prompt results.

Analysis of the Results and Discussion

Fig 1: Students' satisfaction regarding the availability of learning materials
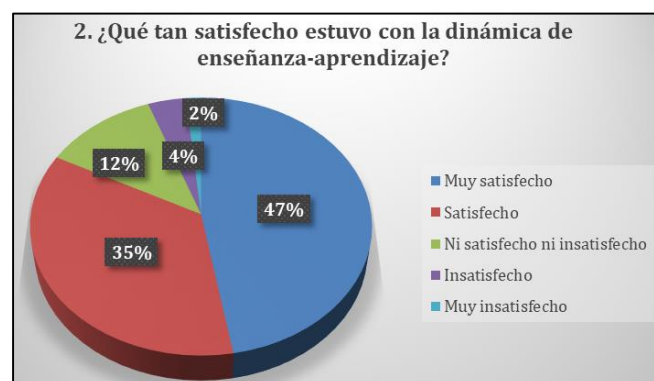
Fig 2: Students' opinions regarding the teaching-learning dynamics

Fig 3: Students' satisfaction with teacher-student communication

Fig 4: Students' satisfaction regarding the availability of the needed information (schedules, announcements, etc.)

Fig 5: Students' satisfaction regarding the teaching methods used (principles and practices teachers apply to teach)

Fig 6: Students' opinions regarding the teachers' feedback (in-class and test-related)

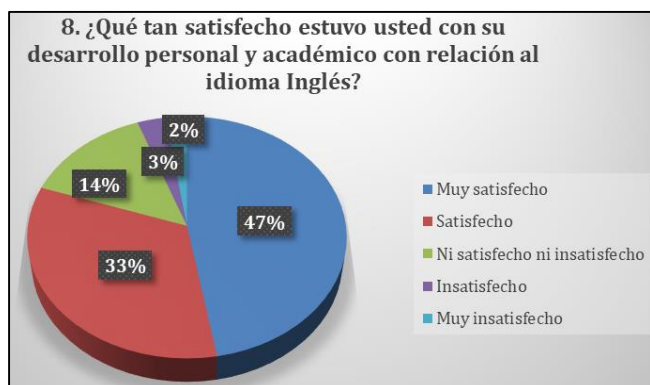**Fig 7:** Students' satisfaction with the organization and delivery of tests

Fig 8: Students' satisfaction regarding their personal (academic and language-related) development
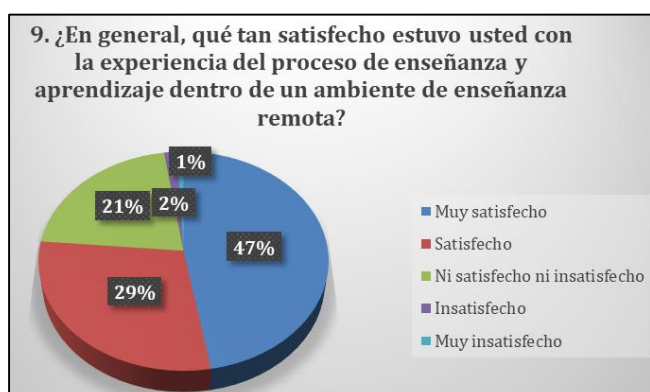

Fig 9: Students' general opinion regarding the overall experience related to teaching and learning in the online environment

After analyzing the results, it can be seen that students have positive views of the English courses given by the university during the COVID-19 pandemic because they increased their autonomy and teachers also provided the necessary materials to accomplish the objective of ensuring appropriate instruction. Besides, the majority of students had suitable learning conditions such as internet connection, a computer, and a good learning environment. Nevertheless, a few students expressed their discomfort because they felt that online learning did not fulfill their expectations, some of the causes are related to teachers' methodology and technical problems. Thus, students' opinions are expressed below.

Positive View of Language and Learning Materials
The majority of students [almost 80 percent of them] felt "very satisfied" and "satisfied" during the courses. Thus, it

indicates that great satisfaction with the courses was evident in all the items presented in the survey, especially on the availability of learning materials, the communication between teachers and students; teaching and learning dynamics; the availability of information provided such as schedules, announcements, tasks, and study materials; methods implemented to teach [strategies, activities, and pedagogical dynamics]; and the organization and application of the tests. Some of the students' opinions in the open-ended questions were:

> "*La enseñanza fue oportuna, excelentes docentes, un aprendizaje que atrae y logra entretener y motivar al estudiante*"o
> [The learning was timely, excellent teachers, an attractive learning that entertains and motivates the students]
> "*Muy buena enseñanza por parte de mi docente la metodología y todo!*"
> [My teacher's methodology was good!]

> "*Dar gracias aquellos docentes que tuvieron paciencia y vocación para educar.*"
> [I thank those teachers who had the vocation of teaching and their patience.]

> "*La docente utilizaba herramientas óptimas para el aprendizaje de cada estudiante, estoy muy contento por eso porque aprendí mucho, es gratificante saber que la universidad cuenta con personal altamente capacitado para el desarrollo de cada materia, felicitaciones a la docente y al programa.*"
> [The teacher used assertive tools to use in class, I am very happy because I learned a lot, it is gratifying to know that the university has a well-prepared staff for every subject, thanks to the teacher and the program.]

> "*Fue de continuo crecimiento y aplicación nuevas tecnologías de la información*"
> [It was a continuous process of academic growth and the application of the Information Technology (IT)]

Challenges during Online Learning
In the item that measured satisfaction related to the experience in a remote teaching and learning environment, the highest percentage was 21% in which students were "Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied". Besides, just a few students expressed their non-satisfaction being 6% the highest percentage in two questions that related satisfaction to the feedback given by teachers after in both tests and workshops, and the teaching and learning dynamics. Some of the challenges that students had during the classes were:

> "*Problemas de conexión a internet*"
> [Issues with internet connection]

> "*Creo que aprender otro idioma requiere de grupos más limitados en cuanto a cantidad de estudiantes, ya que eso me facilita participación y entendimiento. Muchas veces por querer participar todos hablaban encima de los demás y eso me hace perder motivación.*"
> [I think that learning a language requires small groups because it makes easier my participation in class. In some occasions, I tried to participate but all my classmates started to talk so it makes me feel discouraged.]

"*ruidos del exterior como los medios de transporte*"
[Noises coming from the streets such as buses]

"*Falta de interés de algunos profesores*"
[Teachers' lack of interest]

"*Problemas de atención*"
[Students' lack of attention]

Conclusion

Even when there had been some research related to Colombian undergraduates' perception on their courses taken during the COVID-19 confinement, there had not been studies which examine both undergraduates' perception and satisfaction. Hence, this study provided Colombian undergraduates insights which reflected their perception of the different components of the courses they took to measure their satisfaction. In this regard, they expressed a high satisfaction as well as some challenges they underwent during the pandemic in the remote learning. Some of the most significant findings were their satisfaction with the accessibility of learning materials; the communication among teachers and students; and the methods used to teach [strategies, activities, and pedagogical dynamics]. Additionally, it was evident that this experience helped them be more autonomous and develop self-efficacy. Considering some of the challenges undergraduates faced, they had some issues with their connectivity, propitious interaction, noises coming from the streets, teachers' lack of interest, and students' lack of attention. Thus, this research might allow academic communities to get informed and reflect on the positive aspects that resulted from the teaching and learning experiences during the pandemic and adapt them in the current realities, for instance, by continuing with IT implementation in the best possible way in order to improve the teaching and learning processes.

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