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Scientific articles

¿Qué no te gustaría que sucediera en un aula virtual?

What would not you like to happen in a virtual classroom?

O que você não gostaria que acontecesse em uma sala de aula virtual?

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Resumen

El objetivo de este documento fue reflexionar sobre la experiencia en las aulas virtuales durante el periodo de confinamiento debido al covid-19 (marzo de 2020 hasta finales de 2021) con el fin de intentar proyectar el futuro de la educación universitaria frente a los desafíos del siglo actual. Esta reflexión surgió de un ejercicio llevado a cabo con más de 350 estudiantes de una universidad pública en México. Utilizando la metodología de análisis temático, se exploraron las expectativas de los alumnos hacia los profesores y se evaluó si estas concordaban con los estándares de organismos internacionales. En tal sentido, se identificaron tendencias en cuanto a dichas expectativas relacionadas con actitudes pedagógicas, situaciones académicas y temas de equidad.

Palabras clave: docencia, expectativa estudiantil, análisis temático.

Abstract

The objective of this document was to reflect on the activities conducted in virtual classrooms during the period of social distancing from March 2020 to the end of 2021. Additionally, a prospective view of university education in the context of the challenges of the 21st century was presented. This reflection was the result of an exercise conducted with more than 350 students from a public university in Mexico. Through the thematic analysis methodology, it was possible to approximate the expectations of the students towards the professors and to analyse whether these expectations were in line with the guidelines of international organisations. Thus, propensities were found about what is expected and not expected from teachers, linked to teaching attitudes, academic situations and topics of justice.

Keywords: teaching, student expectation, thematic analysis.

Resumo

O objetivo deste documento foi refletir sobre a experiência em salas de aula virtuais durante o período de confinamento devido à covid-19 (março de 2020 até final de 2021) de forma a tentar projetar o futuro do ensino universitário face aos desafios do século atual. Esta reflexão surgiu de um exercício realizado com mais de 350 estudantes de uma universidade pública do México. Utilizando a metodologia de análise temática, foram exploradas as expectativas dos alunos em relação aos professores e avaliado se estas estavam de acordo com os padrões das organizações internacionais. Nesse sentido, foram identificadas tendências em relação a essas expectativas relacionadas a atitudes pedagógicas, situações acadêmicas e questões de equidade.

Palavras-chave: ensino, expectativa do aluno, análise temática.

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Introduction

“To be treated fairly we must express our preferences, needs, opinions, complaints and other feelings clearly, simply and effectively. No one should do it in our name” (Carnegie, 2004, p. 14). This phrase captivated me from the first time I read it, since I consider myself a person committed to continuous improvement. In fact, I thought that carrying out an exercise of this type, where feelings, opinions and needs were expressed with my students from the beginning of the course, could provide me with guidance to turn virtual classes into a stimulating and useful learning space. This idea emerged after August 2020, when many students from a public higher education institution (HEI) in Mexico City, where I worked until the end of 2021, expressed areas of improvement for both my Classical Mechanics course and others (a kind of wailing wall, but in virtual format).

Although I felt a certain helplessness just being able to listen to and read their comments, I reflected and realized that I could make my class an enjoyable and relevant experience. Consequently, I decided to ask students in the virtual classrooms through a virtual forum (in Google Classroom) visible to each assigned group each semester, and encouraged students to share their expectations. Previously, I communicated the following to you:

I would like to encourage originality and critical thinking, so I would not like to see identical tasks with simple variations in font or superficial changes in formatting. I would also not expect investigations to be limited to copying and pasting content from the internet; Therefore, to guarantee academic integrity, they can use tools such as <http://plagiarisma.net/es/> to verify the originality of their work. Additionally, I would like to avoid repeating the same calculation memories in evaluations, and would expect honesty in difficult situations, rather than lying to avoid responsibility. Therefore, I want to assure you that those who carry out all their activities in a meticulous and orderly manner will learn and receive the grade they deserve for their efforts. Likewise, I want to open a space for you to also give me feedback on what you would like to prevent me from doing as a teacher. They can mention attitudes, situations, among other aspects. This is a space for emotional release.

Having noted the above, in this document I reflect on the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on university education. To do this, I explore the warnings issued by international organizations about the need to innovate in the way of teaching the next generation of work, as well as my motivations for writing this text. Additionally, I analyze students' expectations

towards their teachers, among which dimensions such as attitudes, academic situations and justice stand out through a thematic analysis. In the end, I conclude with some reflections.

What did the covid-19 pandemic make visible?

It is true that the challenge we faced due to covid-19, both in terms of working and learning, was completely new and had a significant impact on all aspects of life, including economic, political and, of course, educational. However, from my perspective, this situation should not be seen as an excuse, but rather as an opportunity for creativity, innovation and exploration.

Today more than ever, I am convinced that destiny has reached us in the educational field. Many institutions, including the IES where the events I describe occurred, were not prepared to reinvent themselves in such a short period of time. This had already been anticipated by Robinson, who warned (2012): “ Current educational systems were not designed to face the challenges that we face today. They were developed to meet the needs of an earlier era. It is not enough to reform them: they must be transformed ” (p. 81).

In this sense, many teachers still do not understand that monologues or keynote lectures have lost relevance, especially with students who have short attention spans, tend to procrastinate in learning activities and whose communication and coexistence environment is mainly digital. In other words, 21st century students need constant feedback, motivation, and continuous supervision.

Likewise, it is worrying to see that the warnings of organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2015) are not being taken into account, which call for a “ critical review of education.” traditional and determine whether the school lives up to current expectations and provides sufficient preparation to compete in the international economy ” (p. 10). Furthermore, the International Labor Organization (ILO) (2022) highlights the presence of economic crises and complex global challenges, which can only be addressed by those who are digitally literate and cognitively competent.

Therefore, listening to the voices of the students was crucial, and carrying out this exercise was not simply about being the recipients of complaints, but about taking action within our sphere of competence. For me, as a teacher, a criticism, an observation or even a question represents an opportunity to improve in the future, as it helps me try to correct any damage that may have been caused by ignorance, intentionality or negligence.

I carried out this exercise because I believe that students, as users and recipients of the educational services provided by the IES, deserve to be heard and, above all, cared for. During the confinement period, due to the circumstances that we all know, more than 350 students participated in this exercise, sharing their concerns, suggestions, as well as what caused them discomfort, frustration and anxiety. There were a variety of requests, but I would like us to look at the most common ones.

What do students expect from their teachers?

The present analysis was not carried out in an appreciative manner, but was systematized through thematic analysis in order to identify and classify the aspects mentioned above: attitudes, situations and justice. This process involved reading and assimilating the relevant literature to establish and identify these aspects, since only through thematic analysis is it possible to identify patterns in the qualitative data, which in this case were written expressions of the students.

In order to reduce subjectivity, these texts were analyzed through categories, since these allow data-based processing (Fereday and Muir, 2006). The aforementioned expressions were examined in accordance with the definitions proposed by the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) (2023). For example, regarding the word *attitude* It is defined as “the disposition of mind manifested in some way” (RAE, 2023); For its part, the word *situation* appears as the “set of factors or circumstances that affect someone or something at a certain moment,” while *justice* —according to the *Pan-Hispanic Dictionary of Legal Spanish* (DPEJ) (2023)—is conceived as the “principle constitutionally enshrined as the highest value of the legal system in which those of reasonableness, equality, equity, proportionality, respect for legality and prohibition of arbitrariness come together.” These definitions served as the basis for establishing the categories described below.

In this regard, it is highlighted that the students expressed reasonable and achievable expectations in relation to the attitudes and situations they expected from the teacher and the class. First, they expected understanding and patience in the face of circumstances beyond their control, such as electrical failures, lack of internet or electronic devices, and even illness. Secondly, they requested more adequate planning of tasks in order to avoid the pressure of scheduling them from one day to the next, and they wanted a fair and equitable evaluation. Thirdly, they asked not to be treated with bad answers or sarcasm when raising questions, and they wanted the evaluation to be impartial, without favoritism, and for them

to receive feedback to correct their errors. Finally, they wanted dynamic and participatory classes, instead of monologues, comments about my staff or unnecessary jokes, and they emphasized the importance of feeling accompanied.

Based on the previous approaches, it was essential to reflect on the students' demands, since they are reasonable and understandable. We all need empathy and understanding, since no one is exempt from facing difficulties, such as technical or health problems. Furthermore, it is fair to recognize the noble and considerate attitude of the IES during the pandemic, by safeguarding the health and integrity of teachers and students, and by maintaining payments and benefits without fail. They also provided guidelines to do our work flexibly and freely.

Likewise, it is worth mentioning that the IES provided teachers with a wide range of training actions focused on disciplinary, technological and pedagogical aspects, with the aim of equipping them with the necessary tools to support the students' learning processes in the context of classes. remote. However, it is important to note that participation in continuous improvement activities at the IES, such as constant training, is not mandatory, but a decision that is at the discretion of each teacher.

Now, regarding learning activities, Escobar Moreno and Luna Acevedo (2021) address the topic of stories in the classroom. During the first period of confinement, from March to August 2020, 65 students were surveyed, who expressed feeling overwhelmed and lost when carrying out tasks that they considered meaningless, such as research, summaries, and watching numerous YouTube videos made by third parties, rather than by their teachers. Likewise, they stated that they perceived improvisation on the part of the teachers, since some activities, even at the university level, were controversial, such as the replacement of laboratory practices with the preparation of models or summaries.

Situations like those mentioned, where students received grades in the form of “likes” on Facebook from a professor for their laboratory practices (Escobar Moreno and Luna Acevedo, 2020), led me to reflect. First of all, this prompted me to think about how to address these issues, which helped me to collaborate with colleagues in the design of learning experiences and evaluation methods more appropriate for higher education, according to the proposals of Escobar-Moreno *et al.* (2022), since it is evident that students expect university professors to provide them with the necessary tools to face a work future that is anticipated to be complex and uncertain.

In relation to the request for dignified and respectful treatment by teachers, I remember a personal experience during my time as a student that I will never forget. In fifth

grade, a classmate named Ezequiel did not have his right arm, and the teacher often referred to him in a derogatory way, as “Ezekiel the broken one.” Also, on one occasion, he directed hurtful comments towards me for wearing glasses, which affected my self-esteem and my health (frequent headaches). Fortunately, my mother intervened and I was provided with contact lenses at age 11. In Ezequiel's case, he dropped out of school in the middle of the school year after being the subject of derogatory comments from the teacher. These two experiences demonstrate the power of words to influence people's lives and decisions.

Another important request, related to the evaluation of learning, is the need for congruence between what was learned and what was evaluated, as well as clarity and transparency in the evaluation criteria from the first day of classes to avoid misunderstandings and rework. This concern is shared by both teachers and students, and is essential to ensure a fair and equitable evaluation process.

Another reasonable request is to hold class sessions in a space for the exchange of ideas and stimulating activities. In this regard, I remember my own experiences as a student and how some classes were monotonous and improvised, which generated disinterest and frustration. Furthermore, I questioned the strategy that students had to prepare the class without prior supervision from the teacher, which replicated the traditional teaching model and was even less effective due to the lack of experience and in-depth knowledge of those of us who explained the topics assigned by the teacher. the teacher.

Regarding this last idea, it is evident that assigning the responsibility of preparing the class to the students may be convenient for some teachers, and some may be satisfied with simply completing the assigned hours in front of the group without really committing to the teaching-learning process. However, the question arises of how university professors materialize training actions and how the educational model focused on learning is reflected and executed.

Does the principle of free teaching protect total freedom for the professor to do what he wants, as he can and when he can? Neuroscience supports the importance of emotions in learning, and points out that monotony bores the brain, as mentioned by the renowned neuroscientist Francisco Mora (cited by Torres, February 20, 2017).

Regarding the last request, which highlights the importance of the presence and support of the teacher in the students' learning process, it is crucial to reflect on the impact of the teacher's absence. Although student complaints may go unnoticed and are unlikely to affect the teacher's salary, what is certain is the impact on students. The Organization for

Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) noted in its 2016 report that schools with higher teacher absenteeism are 50 % more likely to have low performance in mathematics, and this could extend to all grades (OECD , 2016).

It is true that all the actors involved are co-responsible for the comprehensive training of our students, and our main task is to teach them how to learn. Perhaps we do not worry enough about the future of work of these next generations and the possible repercussions they may face (such as unemployment or informal work) due to the lack of development of essential skills for the century of knowledge (such as creativity, critical thinking and complex problem solving).

However, what we should really worry about is fully carrying out our work. I'm not just talking about connecting via video conferencing and pretending to be working, but rather meeting the learning needs of our students in a genuine way. I think this is a concrete way to contribute to our country. Although it may seem insignificant, when we carry out our work with passion and dedication, we are making a difference and contributing to the improvement of our country through solid academic quality.

Conclusions

The discursive rhetoric of teachers and educational authorities, at least in the IES to which I referred throughout this document, about being innovative and promoting self-learning could be considered a false utopia. That is, will we really achieve this by sending content in PDF format, giving virtual master classes or simply reading slides? Can we develop the skills necessary for the 21st century if we continue with an educational system based on verbiage and content from the last century?

What I have shared in this document are the voices of the 350 students of this HEI, who request and need quality training that is up to the current circumstances. If we also consider the current health and environmental conditions, future graduates face a high degree of uncertainty in economic and labor terms, as indicated by the ILO (2022).

These reflections, of course, represent the vision of a professor about the reasonable and fair expectations of the recipients of the educational services of an institution whose motto and ultimate objective is to be the scientific and technological engine of Mexico.

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