

The Impact of Covid19 on Traditional Higher Education in Ecuador

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COVID19 forced the educational processes to a radical change. The face-to-face classes suddenly went virtual. This coup challenged teachers and their classroom methodologies to new forms of virtual / digital interaction. The jump generated a significant change that we have not yet managed to measure. For this reason, the present study focuses on analyzing and reflecting on how higher education teachers in Ecuador have assumed the educational changes from the face-to-face model to the virtual / digital mode in the current pandemic context, highlighting the level of familiarity with ICT. Methodologically, the study describes and compares, through the teachers' testimony, the difficulties, strategies and opportunities that they experienced with their students in virtual / digital learning environments. The results identify the most important problems and aspects when teaching distance classes in the face of virtual / digital learning environments. In conclusion, it reflects on the shortcomings and weaknesses of our preparation as teachers. It also points out how the current crisis visualizes the precariousness of the national educational system itself.

Keywords: virtual education, digital, learning, method

INTRODUCTION

COVID19 forced the world, especially educational processes, to radically change their methodologies. Face-to-face classes suddenly went to synchronous and asynchronous virtual/digital classes. This coup challenged teachers and their classroom methodologies to new forms of virtual / digital interaction. The

leap generated a significant change that we have not yet reached to size (Hodges, et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2020; Cucinotta and Vanelli, 2020; Srinivas, Gomersall and Fowler, 2020).

Before the pandemic, virtual/digital education and its methods had little recognition in the eyes of the state entities in charge of legitimizing their courses. Therefore, in order to legitimize any degree obtained through this study modality, it was necessary to present an extensive series of documents that demonstrated its validity and rigorousness. But, a virus that we only referenced in apocalyptic books, which subtly dealt with issues related to social anomie, forced us to change our contexts, modifying face-to-face teaching to virtual/digital teaching (Wu, 2020).

Like a work of apocalyptic fiction, the Coronavirus and its lethality forced us all to seek shelter, protect ourselves, clean ourselves compulsively and rethink our times in family, friendship, work and society. The time irony presents itself in a distressing way, before because we wanted free time, now because we have it and we don't know how to manage it.

Virtual/digital teaching was mixed with home spaces and times. The institutional bureaucracy, the questions, doubts and frustrations of our students echoed in the different corners that we owned and thought of as intimate. Also, the immediacy of contemporaneity has ended up exhausting us with so much information that we feel we are guided by blind people like the *"parable of the blind"* depicted in Pieter Brueghel's painting.

Every change has its part of anxiety. In education, in less time than we thought, we had to adapt our long explanatory rhetoric of face-to-face classes to the short times of virtual/digital immediacy. Moving from standing in front of the blackboard and students to sitting in front of a monitor with silent pictures projected on a video. COVID19 forced us to play a simultaneous synchronous and asynchronous chess game over time. That time, which we used to treasure as the gold of our contemporaneity determined by an "impatience syndrome" well defined by Bauman (Hodges, et al., 2020; Flack, et al., 2020; Fidalgo-Blanco, et al., 2020; Fidalgo-Blanco, 2020).

From this situational framework, the current study focuses on analyzing and reflecting on how higher education teachers in Ecuador have assumed the educational changes from the face-to-face model to the virtual/digital mode in the current pandemic context, highlighting the level of familiarity with ICTs. This objective was developed through a qualitative methodology that made it possible to describe and compare, through the teachers' testimonies, the principal difficulties or problems that arose when they began to teach their virtual classes. As well as, the opportunities and potentialities that they identified, as teachers, in the students, the teaching strategies types that they created and rethought when moving from face-to-face classes to virtual classes. In addition, it is reflected on the change that occurred academically from teacher to student and whether as teachers they felt prepared in ICT to take on the virtual educational challenge (Ferdig, et al., 2020).

The results and discussion identify the most important problems and aspects when teaching distance classes in the face of virtual / digital learning environments. In conclusion, it reflects on the shortcomings and weaknesses of our preparation as teachers. It also shows how the current crisis visualizes the precariousness of the educational system itself, representing a key contribution to the debates in the sociology of education. Concluding the reflection with ideas about the new limitations and trainings that we should assume in the immediate future to face the next semester in virtual modality (Fidalgo-Blanco, et al., 2019; Muñoz, 2020).

OBJECTIVES

The general objective of the study focuses on analyzing and reflecting on how higher education teachers in Ecuador have assumed the educational changes from the face-to-face to the virtual/digital modality in the current pandemic context, highlighting the level of familiarity with ICTs.

This objective is framed by how the health emergency has forced all educational institutions in Ecuador to move, without any planning, from face-to-face classroom methodologies to virtual/digital classrooms. Through Resolution RPC-SE-03-No. 046-2020, the Council of Higher Education issued the *"Transitory Regulations for the development of academic activities in Higher Education Institutions, due to the state of*

exception decreed by the health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic". The modification was presented in "Article 4.- Change of modality. - The HEIs, in order to give continuity to the planned academic activities, may carry out the approved degree courses or programs in face-to-face or distance learning modality through other study modalities" (CES, 2020, p. 3).

This adaptation to virtual learning environments, without planning, has demonstrated the great shortcomings and inequalities that we have as teachers in the management of online techno-educational tools (UNESCO, 2020). Therefore, educational institutions in Ecuador immediately began to train their teachers through virtual workshops and webinars on the use of multiple online teaching tools such as learning platforms: Moodle, Google Classroom. Video call communication tools: Zoom, Google Meet, Gmail Hangouts, Skype, WhatsApp Web, Microsoft Teams. File sharing apps: Google Drive, OneDrive, We transfer. Tools for creating graphic content: Canva, Genial, Potos, Prezi, Keynote, Lino-IT, EdPuzzle. Online assessment tools: Google Forms, Kahoot, **ClassFlow**, among other materials (Velasco, et al., 2020).

The multiple trainings overwhelmed the academic times. It took less than a month to learn how to handle various pedagogical apps. These would facilitate teaching, streamline communications and expand the frontiers of knowledge for students and teachers during online interaction. The adaptive virtual/digital experience between teacher and student has not been beneficial for all, as expected. Since the emergence of the virtual/digital mode of study, many teachers have presented resistance. This resistance influences the knowledge transmission to their students making the process frustrating, burdensome, demotivating and fruitless (Fardoun, et al., 2020; Hu, Arnesen, et al., 2019).

Digital literacy doubled the teaching work, reduced long reflections and discussions mediated by metaphors clarifying complex ideas. The different online tools reduced the explanatory times and the multiple examples to a minimum. It became impossible to escape from its challenged demonization. But in the end and being a bit more optimistic, they helped to keep pace with a virtual/digital situation that we are still experiencing. From the online possibilities, some of us as teachers, had to reinvent ourselves, be creative, flexible, innovative, reaffirm and expand our empathy in the face of unexpected situations with students and institutional bureaucracy, to maintain the human and interactive basis of the teacher-student relationship of the educational process (Lévano-Francia, et al., 2019).

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the study describes and compares, through the teachers' testimony, the difficulties, strategies and opportunities that they experienced with their students in virtual / digital learning environments. For this reason, it is addressed from a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical scope (Cohen and Piovani, 2008).

This approach presents to its credit a foundation that allows to address the study of teachers in a situation of isolation and telecommuting from different points of view: from the same academic circumstance, and another, from the vision of the subject mediated by technology, not as a computer expert, but to give voice to their frustrations, limitations and individual suffering. The virtue of this approach is that it allows us to treat and observe a certain number of teachers in order to capture closely and in depth their most significant contributions (Vasilachis, 2011).

The techniques used made it possible to describe and compare, through the teachers' testimonies, the principal difficulties or problems that arose when they began to teach their virtual classes. Semi-structured interviews allowed for a systematic analysis of practical information. Through the questions, interventions were coded and classified which then facilitated contextual understanding, situations, emotions and their new virtual/digital experiences.

The sample was not random but intentional, since the selection of teachers was made by public and private universities in Ecuador. Six teachers and five universities were selected, three of which are from the Ecuadorian highlands and two from the coast. The selection is based on the multiplicity of testimonies in order to verify their personal experiences. In order to analyze the interview data, the testimonies were organized by general topics in order to construct categories that shed light on the analysis of how higher

education teachers in Ecuador have assumed the educational changes from the face-to-face model to the virtual/digital mode in the current pandemic context.

RESULTS

Difficulties in Virtual Classes

The testimonies obtained in this research offer, from a particular point of view, a general overview of the beginning and development of virtual/digital dynamics in the teaching and learning processes. This phenomenon is not new, since it was already existing in long-distance education before the beginning of COVID-19. But, during this pandemic, we began to talk about situations called "Education in emergency", "Presentiality blackout", "*Corona teaching*" among other terms that are still emerging, which I will not go into in depth so as not to lose the focus of this research. (Francesc, 2020; Llorens-Largo, 2020).

The emergency highlighted the weaknesses that we teachers have regarding the virtual/digital transfer of subjects. The new scenario highlighted the urgent need to prepare for and invest resources in the virtual/digital context of teaching and learning. The results of this study modality are not yet known for certain. We have prepared express forecasts to reflect on what will happen after this situation with the online academic quality offered during the confinement. The reflections have focused on trying to mitigate and soften a negative effect of the non-presence imposed by the health emergency.

As teachers, it was initially thought that the virtual/digital classes would be developed with the same dynamics that were carried out face-to-face. We would display on the computer screen PowerPoint slides with topics related to the subject. That way, our displays would motivate the kids with funny comments that would make them laugh. We would develop all this thinking that the only difference would be through the Internet. But, all of this was a complete misunderstanding. Some of us teachers went overnight from anonymity to online disrepute. We didn't know what we were up against. Since we do not redesign, nor rethink classes for students to perform asynchronous activities. So the virtual/digital played us a good game defeating what we supposedly knew about teaching and learning online.

When we asked the teachers what were the biggest difficulties or problems that arose when we started teaching virtual classes? We obtained several responses that presented a realistic overview of this process. Hernán Reyes Aguinaga, professor at the University Andina Simón Bolívar, Ecuador and the Central University of Ecuador, holds a degree in Sociology and Political Science, a Master's degree in Development and Gender, and is a doctoral candidate in Latin American Cultural Studies, stated the following:

I believe that the main impact of the change, such a drastic and violent change, was that we did not have a series of tools that, for example, would help us to identify the priorities that had to be taken into account in this process of change in teaching and learning. Which is the most important thing when speaking in front of a screen. And we know we are talking to students, but we don't know if the student is even listening to us... What the universities, at least the two universities where I work, chose to do, especially one of them, is to focus more on the technological aspect. To enable the teacher to know how a platform or virtual classroom works, how the resources can be used or the best that can be used in that virtual classroom. And indeed the more pedagogical problem and the problem of a certain more precise didactics in terms of teaching was not addressed... In the case of the other University, a semester later, with a couple of conferences the subject was addressed. Then, everything was reduced to how fast the teacher learns certain technological competencies to teach his/her classes. (Interview 3, October 13, 2020)

The experience of changing to virtual/digital for teacher Hernán Reyes has been difficult. The poor teaching planning of its two universities, due to the sudden change, revealed the cracks in the unpreparedness of the institutional academic system. For this reason, "it is common to refer to this pedagogical continuity as emergency distance education, thus contrasting it with the capacities and resources that an optimal distance higher education would have demanded" (Francesc, 2020, p.3). For

Reyes, the COVID19 highlighted generational inequalities, the lack of teacher training in virtual didactics, as well as the deep weaknesses in the courses, conferences, workshops and express seminars offered by the institutions in which he works. As he explains: "everything was reduced to how fast the teacher learns certain technological competencies to teach his/her classes" (Interview 3, et al., 2020).

Eric Vinicio Plaza Pírela has a PhD in Physics and teaches at the Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral (Higher Polytechnic School of the Litoral), in the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador. From his experience he states that:

The experience without a blackboard, at first, was horrible, I have to say, honestly. Because, unlike teachers who do not use the blackboard, because they use video beam projections with PowerPoint slides, I do not like it. I like to write. I am one of those who likes to write on the blackboard. But well, I had to adapt initially to the slides. And of course, there is a downside associated with the slide, and that is that the time in which you solve things on the slide is not the same when you are actually doing it. Then, I bought this (shows a digitizer tablet) and my life changed. What I do is to turn on the PowerPoint and I write and the experience of blackboard or no blackboard for me is no longer far away. It is very similar, at least on that point. There are other things that we can say that are totally different, that is difficult and you will never replace it, that is seeing people, when you see people there are several types of languages, not only the vocal communication, but the physical communication of gesture, that one can perceive in the students, especially... There are body languages of which you do not have access by this way and naturally that is one thing against it. (Interview 6, October 19, 2020)

Teacher Plaza's numerical subjects require the blackboard to clear long mathematical formulas. That is why his transition to the virtual/digital classroom, as he describes it, "was horrible". However, his adaptation to the virtual world took place quickly and with practical technological solutions. His greatest frustration was focused on not having physical contact with his students. In the face of this situation, virtual/digital education has limited teacher-student interaction "the configuration through technological resources, significantly decreases the possibility of having gestural, body, oral language and real-time communication" (Fardoun, et al., 2020, p.7). Teacher Plaza confirms that physical interaction is essential for him, since it allows him to constantly activate the attention and motivation of his students in class.

Opportunities and Potentialities

During the teaching and learning process, teachers, challenged by this new modality, began to identify potentialities in their students at the time of virtual/digital interaction in classes. We asked them regarding what opportunities and potentialities they have identified. Cecilia del Carmen Costa Samaniego, PhD in Education Sciences and Master in Education for Educational Development, teacher of the Elementary Education Career at the University of Loja, Ecuador, tells us the following:

Potentialities were identified in the students, some of whom handled the resource very well (...). The opportunity was that it opened the space for the student, who likes technology, to worry a little more about trying to find these virtual spaces in order to be able to participate adequately in the classes... The other opportunity was the possibility of guiding education towards life. Why am I saying this? Because we had to analyze the educational system context, in which we work and in each of its particularities. Taking into account the emotions, the interaction of the student with his/her family. Because many times it became evident that something was happening because of the student's cultural situation and from there it was necessary to make adjustments to the curriculum and classes to make them appropriate. For example, there were fathers and mothers who watched the classes and that time they had to be with the children on their backs checking them, (*holding them*) to receive the class. And personally that was what alerted me to notice the emotions of the

student at the time. These experiences gave us the opportunity to look for ways, with the students, to improve the virtual classes. (Interview 7, October 20, 2020)

Teacher Costa's testimony places the opportunities on a positive scale, where the teacher-student relationship is in a closer and more empathetic correspondence. The teacher encouraged her students who had knowledge about virtual platforms to use them. While those who knew little and said they had limitations, due to their rural location far from optimal connectivity, she invited them to explore other options through electronic devices or formats, for example, pdf, Word, among others. The teacher's empathetic communication helped to solve some of the basic problems that arose in the students' families. Thus, as in the virtual/digital, "synchronous learning begins in an effort to rebuild learner-teacher connections and secure previously established relationships in a classroom, as well as to support students' emotional well-being" (Ferdig, et al. 2020, p. 585). She, identified many poor students and redirected her virtual/digital teaching and learning methods to "the possibility of orienting education towards life" (Interview 7, et al. 2020). This student-teacher interaction, in her classes, was the opportunity and potentiality she identified in her students during the pandemic.

The interview with Professor Pablo Andrés Escandón Montenegro, PhD in Communication and Contemporary Information, Master's degree in Information and Knowledge Society, Master's degree in Digital Journalism, Bachelor in Communication and full-time professor at the University Andina Simon Bolivar allowed us to expand from his expertise what he experienced with his students, in terms of opportunities and virtual/digital potentialities of this new modality.

Well, as in our case it is postgraduate teaching, it greatly enhanced the students' ability to read more. Since they had access to digital documents, reading was not so difficult or tedious. In addition, because they had the time to be at home, albeit shared with some domestic activities. But, there was greater benefit from the readings. Which, in the videoconference meetings, were no longer so much about teaching about reading, but about conversations based on the readings and the theories seen. This generated a more enriching dialogue in certain classes. In other classes, the reading was not taken advantage of. Many, for example, at the undergraduate level, where I also taught, at another university, what the students wanted was more tutorial type classes. Of course, we have the mismatch with undergraduate students and graduate students with the different interests. This is not true! Due to age issues. (Interview 2, October 13, 2020)

The generational difference in the students marked the potential rate of achievement in the new educational modality. The change in the way of seeing classes, of understanding from a teaching explanation, sometimes limited by the use of technological resources, other times enriched by the multiplicity of platforms. They allowed for slow and accelerated adaptations in teachers and students. From this perspective, "it is customary to say that in any crisis there is always an opportunity. Perhaps, in this case, it is that of the pedagogical review and the restructuring of the training offer in higher education" (Francesc, 2020, p. 13). Teacher Escandón describes this opportunity in his testimony. He, from his expertise, took full advantage of emerging education by adapting a virtual/digital classroom model such as encouraging "conversations based on the readings and theories seen" (Interview 2, et al., 2020). The teacher also wonders at the demands for a return to "tutorial-type classes" for undergraduate students.

This requirement or student phenomenon is occurring in contemporary times due to the accelerated, instantaneous and superficial dynamics of the use of time in online social media. For young people, spending time at the screen of their technological devices, before the pandemic, was more related to intercommunication, leisure and entertainment than to education. That is why, by transferring this teaching and learning function to their devices, they would begin to understand education as they conceived information from the tutorial, practical and summarized structure that their web-based social media provide.

So, what types of teaching strategies did teachers create or rethink to deal with the move from face-to-face to virtual classes? The sudden and violent shift to virtual/digital classrooms, besides revealing our

fallacies, proved how wrong we were to underestimate the technological world. Some of us teachers thought that we were prepared, that because we handled different devices, we would already know how to deal with the situation. The emergency forced us to rethink and reinvent our traditional class models.

The online teaching and learning strategies implemented by Professor Cristobal Mayorga Vivanco, Graphic Designer and Master in Educational Management and Leadership, professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Santo Domingo Campus, were the following:

In the case of strategies, I do not agree with doing theoretical evaluations. Since I have heard many teachers do the evaluation through Zoom. Therefore, I have decided to generate projects to assess student learning progress. Regardless of whether the student seeks or pays someone to do the work, although I don't think so. I think, it is the best way to show that he/she has learned the program. It is no good for the student to memorize how to do a job in only one way. Because, there are multiple ways on how to do it. For example, using keyboard shortcuts among other tools. Therefore, I do not teach the student to do a job in only one way, if there is the possibility of doing it in multiple ways. The idea is that a problem is given and the students seek to solve it from the multiple possibilities. Regarding the methodology, I have proceeded in the same way. First, explain the class, secondly, give them work to develop and then evaluate in a global way with a project that is developed and evaluated step by step. (Interview 4, October 15, 2020)

The development of virtual/digital teaching and learning strategies is not stipulated in universal recipes that apply to all. It is clear that everything can vary in terms of the interest of the disciplinary focus and the number of students. For Teacher Mayorga, what most influenced the development of these strategies are the ways of evaluating, following up and personally accompanying his students in the projects submitted. The teacher successfully transferred his face-to-face teaching methods to non-face-to-face teaching. That is why his evaluative methods have been favorable to him.

According to Fardoun, after his exploratory study in Ibero-America on teaching-learning processes and evaluation proposals in pandemic times, the recommendations focus on the fact that "in this time of confinement, only process evaluations should be developed, aimed at monitoring student learning, and no progress should be made towards evaluations aimed at grading and accrediting knowledge" (2020, p.7). The contents developed by Professor Mayorga are along the same lines, in which he has not yet found any critical points. The teacher states that: "I do not teach the student to do a task in only one way, if there is the possibility of doing it in multiple ways" (Interview 4 et al., 2020), this strategy has worked very well for him in this new modality.

The strategies of the new modality implemented by the professor of the Salesian Polytechnic University, Saúl Fernando Uribe Taborda, who has a PhD in Social Sciences, a master's degree in Socio-environmental Studies and is an anthropologist by profession, are based on the following:

I teach a one-hour class, then we watch a video, and then we discuss the topic. Then what we saw and read results in an engaged articulation with students. This strategy is very significant. In fact, even students from last semester write to me in the mail, because I always recommended movies to them in my Friday class. They ask me, "Teacher, what is the name of today's movie? And, this has generated, by their own information, a film viewing space where they meet via Zoom and screen films to discuss them. This led me, this semester, to create an elective, film and psychology. Where we will discuss eminently social science topics and animal or human behavior. This is what I have had to do, not to invent or reinvent myself, but rather, to take hold of something that is passion and incorporate it into the logic of the classes in order to teach based on this. (Interview 5, October 17, 2020)

When other communication channels outside the technological platforms (Zoom, Meet, Webex, Skype) or, for example, e-mail, are implemented, the teaching and learning process is not limited. Teacher Uribe was able to find alternative ways to encourage constructive critical thinking in his students. The use of film as a tool for academic reflection manages to didactically combine two contemporary elements of the virtual/digital world. These elements are the audiovisual language as entertainment and the possibility of questioning from the film product. His strategy generated the habit in students of "a film watching space where they meet them via Zoom and movies are screened to comment on them" (Interview 7, et al., 2020). Through this asynchronous activity of individual interest, teacher Uribe manages what an online education requires "the implementation of new services that do not exist in face-to-face teaching or that go unnoticed and are included in the responsibilities of some of the existing units" (García-Peñalvo, 2020, p. 47). For him, it is both meaningful and valuable to follow up on the learning, contact and guidance he establishes with his students. From this concern, we understand then, that the programs, platforms and other applications that we use in our virtual/digital education strategies, by themselves, do not guarantee the quality of the learning/teaching process, but they will always maintain a high relevance.

Analyzing the contexts of academic change that have occurred in students becomes necessary in the midst of this emergency. Teachers, managers, technical and physical resources personnel suffered a sudden cessation of activities that led them to rethink their daily lives. It is necessary to ask what changes have teachers seen, academically, in students in the transfer from face-to-face classes to virtual classes? When we interviewed Vladimir Stoitchkov, professor of the Private Technical University of Loja (UTPL), in the face-to-face, open and distance modalities, journalist, with a Master's degree in Journalism and Culture from the Kliment Ohridski University in Sofia, Bulgaria, he told us:

What has changed? I felt something, which has nothing to do with COVID, or anything like that. I compared my current students with my students of five years ago, who have already finished, who have already graduated. And, I see a difference in their thinking. But I don't know if this is a worldwide phenomenon, if it is a local situation or if it just happened to me, I don't know, I don't have an overview of this. But I tell you, five years ago my students had no ambitions, because they said, I'm here to avoid being somewhere else. That was more or less the way it was. Or, I'm here because I want to be a TV presenter, so far, and what are you going to present? Nothing, my own youth and what rhymes with beauty, if I am young, I am already beautiful! and that's enough. This was more or less the attitude they had. Now I see this new generation that is coming, because the generation has practically changed, now seventeen year old students want to change the world again. They want to change. All the students are here on their own free will and it wasn't like that before. This may be the change that COVID has generated, because someone who pays the price of a face-to-face class by taking it remotely must want this very much. The economic side says a lot sometimes, and worse in a crisis, because people have less money than before. Students began to value more what they are going to receive and what they want to receive. And that is why everyone is here now by their own will, by their own desire and this is a lot, on the one hand. And the other changed is that they want to do something with this and indeed thanks to technologies they can change the world. (Interview 1, October 12, 2020)

The educational dynamics of this emergency changed the perspective that students had towards the traditional university. The virtual/digital scenario of teaching and learning produced an important vertigo between risks and opportunities in students. They had to adjust their vision and adapt their interests to an immediate present that they had always thought of as a distant future. Teacher Stoitchkov reveals this interest in his testimony when he refers to the questioning of his students, when he wonders how they became interested in what they are studying for. He noted that his students want to "change the world again. They want to change. All the students are here on their own free will and it wasn't like that before" (Interview, 1 et al. 2020). COVID19 helped to awaken student awareness. Technology is playing a dual

role: frustrating with negative situations and providing opportunities for change from situations that can be redirected to enrich what is consumed in the same virtual/digital networks.

DISCUSSION

In general, higher education institutions in Ecuador, and perhaps in the world, were not prepared, nor had they previously prepared their teachers, students, managers, technicians, physical resources, to take on a drastic educational change all at once. Today, these institutions are trying to train their teachers in strategies that allow them to optimally develop their classes on the various virtual/digital platforms. That is why, in the training process it is necessary to consider the participation of the students as an active entity and not as a passive recipient. When training teachers, we are obliged to require students to develop their projects using the apps in which we were trained, ignoring the fact that they also do not know how they work. Training for teachers and students, then, should be a constant and well-designed activity to really support the teaching and learning process.

In the findings we found concerns about the limitations that we have as teachers and that are directly reflected in the online educational process. If in this time of confinement we have not learned to be aware of the difficulties we face in this new modality and the possibilities offered by the virtual/digital medium, we, the people who make up educational institutions, are doomed to disappear. It is necessary to change the students' learning monitoring, the ways of evaluating them and to stop grading and accrediting mechanical and memorized knowledge typical of traditional education. COVID19 not only challenged us from a physical, social, cultural, financial, family and educational point of view, and it is there, where the reflection of the teachers really focuses their testimonies, on the fact that we still need to grow, believe and understand ourselves as mankind.

In this sense, we should be interested in a virtual/digital didactic and pedagogical option that focuses on developing methodologies that offer flexible and open tools that favor both the teacher and the student. The immediate goal is to be able to propose, build and apply knowledge from the virtual/digital world where both are the main protagonists. The integration offered by technology would be one more means that allows for a concept of self-assessment and self-regulation of learning.

On the other hand, the negative aspect of the configuration governed by virtual/digital education is the impossibility of relying on the gestural, body and oral language transmitted by the teacher's presence. The teacher's face-to-face interaction in the classroom is of vital importance, since, through his/her comments, improvisations, sarcasm, postures, use of the blackboard and reflections, he/she can enhance the role models that the students observe. The other negative aspects that we found in the testimonies are unavoidable: the first is the limitations to the Internet connection that some students have. This aspect is also linked to the impossibility or lack of access to technological devices in their homes, such as computers and cell phones. As a second negative aspect, we found that many teachers were not trained in new technological apps for teaching and learning. Few of us knew how to teach a virtual/digital class, since we had always been the protagonists of the predominantly face-to-face classrooms.

So, both the negative and positive aspects lead us to keep in mind our deficiencies and opportunities, in having to train ourselves to face this new reality. It is therefore advisable that we anticipate and rethink the ways, forms and teaching guides to work with those students who have difficulties regarding their connectivity. To work with methods that allow the continuity of the projects sent and to optimize the online learning interaction times.

However, the confinement, the interactions, the same frustrations regarding the lack of knowledge of educational apps in the technological world have made us consider, reflect and question ourselves as teachers and as an academic institution. The current institutional and teaching situation must focus on how to involve students in the dynamics of virtual/digital teaching and learning, on how to manage their generational potential so that from the very act of education they are the ones who take full advantage of this new educational modality.

CONCLUSION

Virtual/digital education in higher education requires teachers who, beyond being trained in didactics, apps and management of technological platforms, are prepared to assume the significant changes of contemporary education. This is why we understand the emerging educational situation, derived from the pandemic, as a teaching effort of adaptation, improvisation and exhausting experience in trying to transfer traditional classroom lectures to virtual/digital lectures without a previous training process.

Today, as teachers, we cannot guarantee that the academic semester completed under this situation of social confinement has fulfilled the expectations set forth in the curricular programs. Because we are blindly facing a situation that will yield its results when we, as mankind, will have already overcome the state of emergency.

Thus, from the teaching experience of this pandemic, we conclude and recommend that we must design educational programs in a hybrid way, between face-to-face and virtual/digital. In order to modify, develop and apply new teaching and learning strategies. This is an issue that we should not only promote as teachers in virtual/digital classrooms commissioned by our institutions. Rather, they should be taken into account in the budgets programmed by the Ministry of Education as an emergency plan for public education policy. This governmental sphere should promote free postgraduate programs specialized in teacher training that truly help to combine, transform and configure traditional teaching and learning methods and their new online needs.

The educational dynamics in today's virtual/digital modality require more than a simple transfer of words from face-to-face to virtual/digital. They require a thought-out, planned organization capable of managing the duality educational habitat in the two modalities. In other words, the institutions and their personnel must fulfill didactic competencies that guarantee both the connectivity of both teachers and students. The state, and its educational policies, should invest more in free Internet and carry out a conscientious evaluation in each population that will allow them to provide free access devices to students who need them. In this way, the negative aspects can be reduced, to a lesser or greater extent, and the positive aspects, such as student commitment and learning autonomy, can be enhanced.

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