

Students' Voices on the Educational Quality of a Bachelor Program in Times of Pandemic*

Voces de los estudiantes sobre la calidad educativa de un programa de licenciatura en tiempos de pandemia

* Original Research Article

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Abstract

During 2020, a series of quarantines were experienced that interrupted face-to-face education. This study aims to examine the aspects that impacted the quality of education of a group of five preservice teachers, who moved from face-to-face to virtual learning. We followed a qualitative narrative research design and collected participants' narratives and logs as data collection instruments. We concluded that methodology, strategies and levels of well-being and health influenced participants' educational quality during the onset of the pandemic and identified opportunities for the bachelor program to foster better learning-teaching processes.

Keywords: education quality, higher education, storytelling, virtual learning, methodology.

Resumen

Durante el 2020, el mundo vivió una serie de cuarentenas que interrumpieron el aprendizaje presencial. Este estudio buscó examinar aspectos que impactaron la calidad de la educación de un grupo de cinco futuros profesores, que pasaron del aprendizaje presencial al virtual. Se empleó un diseño de investigación narrativa-cualitativa y como instrumentos se recopilaron las narrativas y diarios de los participantes. Se concluyó que la metodología, las estrategias y los niveles de bienestar y salud impactaron la calidad educativa de los participantes durante el inicio de la pandemia, y se identificaron oportunidades para que el programa de licenciatura fomente mejores procesos de aprendizaje-enseñanza.

Palabras clave: calidad de la educación, enseñanza superior, narración de historias, enseñanza a distancia, metodología.

Introduction

Over time, education has faced different challenges in order to guarantee the quality necessary for the humankind to move towards its future, but no challenge compares to the one imposed by the pandemic in 2020. In Colombia, all educational institutions have had to adapt their processes and seek new strategies to continue to the educational processes they lead, which has led to the need to analyze educational quality. According to the above, quality in higher education must be complex, multidimensional, contextualized, capable of transforming models, and controlled through the necessary decision-making process for its improvement (Aguerrondo, 1993, as cited in Martin, 2018). Thus, to guarantee quality education, monitoring and action according to the circumstances are required.

Since the pandemic has forced education to find ways to fulfill its mission, the classroom practices have transformed into online spaces. Therefore, technology has become an educational means and tool that allows the improvement of the teaching-learning processes, in fact, virtual education is a strategy to improve educational coverage, relevance and quality at all levels and types of training, due to its multimedia, hypertext and interactive characteristics (Morales et al., 2016). Based on the aforementioned, the purpose of this study is to analyze the narratives of a group of students, who belonged to the fourth semester of a Bachelor program in bilingualism and identify the aspects that impacted the quality of their education since they had to move from face-to-face classes to virtual learning due to the biosecurity measures established in Bogotá in 2020.

This study had as its starting point the need to give students a voice to share their experiences in this historical moment and show their different points of view and reactions to the implementation of virtual education. First, there was a lack of knowledge of the social and educational reality that students faced in order to adapt to their context and learning practices. The need for proper conditions, such as technology, devices and services, made the students have their own point of views regarding the decisions that the educational institution had made. Second, it was

necessary to explore the learners' perceptions regarding the processes they had experienced along their classes, since approaches, methodologies and strategies had to be adapted to the new circumstances; thus, the collection of a group of students' narratives constituted a strategy to achieve it. Consequently, the question that guided this study is: What do the narratives of a group of students from a bachelor program in bilingualism inform us about the aspects that affected the quality of their education after the implementation of virtual learning, during the first academic semester in 2020, due to the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic? Therefore, our main goal was to identify the aspects that influenced the quality of education of this group of students based on their narratives.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, we have considered three main constructs that supported our research: quality of higher education, virtual education, and narratives. These were the main axes of our study due to the relationship and connection they exert during the assimilation of the changes caused in education by the arrival of COVID-19.

Quality of Higher Education

Quality of higher education involves different conditions. Education must be complex, totalizing, socially and historically contextualized and possible to be transformed, and controlled through the necessary decision-making process for its improvement (Aguerrondo, 1993, as cited in Martin, 2018). According to Law 30 of 1992 (Congreso de la República de Colombia, 1992) in Colombia, education is inherent to the social responsibility of the State; therefore, a constant and rigorous inspection and surveillance of higher education institutions must be carried out. Consejo Nacional de Acreditación (CNA) oversees the policies, strategies and processes aimed at ensuring that higher education institutions meet the highest quality standards at the national level. And this law relates educational quality to academic results, the means and processes used, the institutional infrastructure, the

qualitative and quantitative dimensions, and the conditions in which each institution operates.

Likewise, with the intention of strengthening the teaching-learning processes, certain roles have been granted to entities and individuals in order to maintain and control high quality in educational institutions. Considering the above, universities must create administrative departments to be responsible for the processes of accreditation, monitoring, and renewal of degrees; these units must act as true promoters of improvement actions (Cuevas López et al., 2019). Additionally, the whole educational community should be involved in the quality control process, since all members are responsible for seeking strategies and innovations that allow high education programs to meet the challenges that arise. Therefore, the perception of all members must be collected through their narratives to analyze the quality of the programs. All in all, the evaluation of quality in the field of accreditation, despite being based on quantitative and objective indicators, cannot renounce its qualitative and hermeneutical character (Mejía & Duque, 2013).

Moreover, the change to virtual modality and its adaptation have been considered fundamental factors when evaluating and supervising educational quality in the face of the pandemic. Due to the transition of teaching-learning processes from the physical to the virtual environments, the use of social networks and digital platforms increased to guarantee the flow of information and communication that, in one way or another, would replace human contact and provide a new opportunity for social presence. Taking into account the above, the academic processes and even those of accreditation have used virtual environments to guarantee the quality of education and promote the participation of the whole community. This favors the identification of the learners' levels of competence, and the recognition of weak points that the programs must enhance and correct to satisfy the needs of future education (Jiménez et al., 2010). In short, technology-mediated environments have become a meaningful strategy not only to provide education, but also to analyze the results of the teaching-learning processes and promote the improvement of the educational experience.

Virtual Education

Due to the pandemic that started in 2020, the world faced a very critical challenge in terms of education. The countries had to find ways to guarantee their citizens the access to the educational system, and with this, the quality of its service. In Colombia, the government made efforts to offer this access by means of virtual learning despite the different issues related to the internet network coverage.

This type of education has different characteristics that make it pertinent at this historical moment. Virtual learning is a high impact strategy that enhances the learning experience and guarantees the educational quality due to its characteristics. First, it is available for any type of learning, that means, it may be possible to implement in formal, non-formal and informal education. Besides, it breaks both spatial and temporal barriers, and allows students and teachers to configure their interests, rhythms, and places of study, among others (Morales et al., 2016). Likewise, it favors the learning goals achievement due to the resources that it offers. The use of new technologies and other resources from the web is paramount in the new educational models since a wide variety of management systems and web applications are key for learners to achieve their goals (Crisol et al., 2020).

Experience with this type of resources allows learners to work collaboratively with their peers, enhance their level of involvement and the quality of their contributions, take responsibility of their own learning while developing their problem-solving and self-regulated learning skills, have the freedom needed to advance at their own learning pace, and develop their creative thinking skills just as much as their analytic thinking in order to cope with the challenges presented by the rapid changes in technology (Aithal, 2015).

There are three training models in virtual higher education (Ruiz & Dávila, 2016). First, there is a self-training model without group interaction, which does not have active presence of the teacher and interaction between students is not promoted. Second, there is the self-training model in interaction with the instructional design

and a minimum of interpersonal communication between students; they work individually and have the possibility, if they wish, to interact with their peers to share difficulties and find solutions throughout forums or social networks; likewise, the teacher-tutor concentrates mainly on developing an adequate instructional design and his/her virtual presence only occurs if a student or group requires it. Third, there is the integral formation model with collaborative work among learners and the guidance of a tutor, who also performs an active role in the management of the course by monitoring students, providing feedback, and offering timely help to learners when needed. This third model is the one that students from the academic context of this study must experience due to its vision of education as a meaningful and participatory process.

Narratives

Narratives constitute a type of qualitative social research design, which focuses on life stories considering who constructed them, for whom they are narrated and the reasons to share them (Ntinda, 2018). Their purpose is to analyze the individual or group human experience, seeking to understand it and make sense of it. Therefore, they require a reflective exercise which involves remembering events, analyzing and presenting them (Salamanca, 2015).

When analyzing narratives, it is necessary to consider time, historical and geographical location and contextual events that have taken place as part of the whole experience being analyzed, since they are key factors in enabling the intersection between the micro and the macrosocial structures. Also, narratives are multidisciplinary and recognize the important role that participants' subjectivity and personal experiences may play for the meaning-making processes that this research approach promotes (Blanco, 2011).

Moreover, narratives can be analyzed at three levels. The textual level focuses on processes where a meaning is given to the reported events that account for the creation of realities; at the contextual level, there is a focus on verbal and non-verbal language to give meaning and moral value according to beliefs, sensations and

purposes of the narrator; and at a metatextual level, narratives allow the reconfiguration of the plot to account for the sociocultural elements of a moment in history (Arias & Alvarado, 2015).

Methodology

Research Approach and Design

This study followed the qualitative approach, which is conceived as “a research strategy that generally emphasizes words rather than quantification in data collection and analysis” (Bryman, 2012, p. 380). Likewise, a hermeneutical analysis was carried out, which “encompasses the critical interpretation of the meaning that each individual attributes to reality from their own existence, limitations and historical possibilities of the local and global context that make them develop as such” (Cerrón, 2019, p. 6), in order to carry out the process of data collection and its analysis based on the subjectivity from which each participant perceived the quality of education during the process of adaptation they faced due to the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, we followed the research design of narratives as our goal was to give voice to the students by collecting and analyzing their stories; this analysis was developed at a metatextual level (Arias & Alvarado, 2015), to reconstruct the participants' educational reality and identify the factors that impacted it.

Setting and Participants

The participants of this study were a group of five students, two women and three men, who were in an age range between 20 and 30 years, and who belonged to the fourth semester of a bachelor in bilingualism in Bogotá, Colombia. We sent out an email invitation to all students from the semester previously mentioned to be part of the study, and our five participants sent us their positive response. Therefore, following the ethical considerations, they filled in a consent online format to guarantee the confidentiality of the information they shared with us. They were active students throughout the first semester in 2020 and experienced the change from face-to-face to virtual classes due to the sudden arrival of the pandemic caused by

COVID-19. Two of the participants were teaching at the school level at that moment and had to face the challenges of virtual learning both from the teacher and the student's perspectives, while the other three lived it just through their roles as students.

Instruments and Procedures for Data Collection

For this study, there were two instruments to collect data, the participants' narratives, collected once in individual sessions that were video registered during August 2020, and an individual log they wrote after these encounters. According to Adler et al. (2017), narratives constitute subjective constructions based on personal experiences that serve to represent events with an objective purpose. Thus, the main purpose of their narratives was to allow them to tell us about their experiences during the first months of the pandemic, including the situations from their personal and academic life to examine the quality of education they received; once this data was analyzed, some important topics seemed to be unclear or not completely developed; therefore, a group of questions were suggested for the participants to write a log and expand their ideas. Logs are documents that contain reflective records of experiences, and their entries are written when meaningful events take place (Friesner & Hart, 2005); therefore, they were important to clarify the information. Both narratives and logs were codified to systematize the information.

Table 1. Codification of participants, narratives and logs

Participants	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5
Narratives	NP1, NP2, NP3, NP4, NP5
Logs	LP1, LP2, LP3, LP4, LP5

Data Analysis and Discussion

For this research, we implemented methodological triangulation among the information from the narratives, logs and theory. Likewise, we used the grounded theory-based analysis, which focuses on the identification of repeated themes by reviewing and reflecting upon the data collected. Once they emerge, these themes are coded, compared, and contrasted and grouped into categories based on their relationships in order to give answers to the research questions posed (Kolb, 2012; Chun Tie et al., 2019). Table 2 includes the research questions, objectives and categories identified.

Table 2. Question, objective, category and subcategories

Research question	General objective	Category	Subcategories
What do the narratives of a group of students from a bachelor program in bilingualism inform us about the aspects that impacted the quality of their education after the implementation of virtual learning, during the first academic semester of 2020, due to the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic?	To identify the aspects that impacted the quality of education of a group of students belonging to a bachelor's degree program in bilingualism, after the implementation of virtual learning due to declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, based on their narratives.	Aspects that had an impact on the education quality	Methodology Strategies that emerged from the difficulties Well-being and health

Aspects that Had an Impact on the Education Quality

Throughout the participants' narrations and their reflections, three aspects were identified as having affected the quality of education they received. These aspects are the teaching methodologies that were implemented, the strategies that emerged from the difficulties that were faced, and the learners' well-being and health condition. They will be described as follows.

Methodology

The methodology that was implemented after the migration to virtual learning was the result of a quick adaptation to the contextual needs. The participants mentioned a time of preparation that their teachers took to modify their virtual rooms in the institutional online platform during the week that followed the declaration of pandemic. According to the students, teachers used that time to explore online platforms, web tools and apps that could be implemented to carry out the synchronous sessions, support their learning and follow their syllabi. After this period of preparation to implement virtual learning, it was possible to identify two teaching methodologies, one participatory and another based on theory with few opportunities to reflect critically. They described the participatory methodology as one that fosters the learners' interaction and socialization of class topics, so that they not only focus on the presentation of the class contents, but also on clarifying doubts and analyzing situations that they may encounter in real scenarios.

When there is interactivity, I don't know if it is the wright word, like when you can interact with your classmates and with your teachers, when you are more involved in the class. (NP4)

They also mentioned the balance that should exist on the class products and the processes to develop them. Delivering documents or developing tasks should involve guidance and opportunities to deepen on the topics and use their critical thinking to understand their future realities; these seem to be relevant characteristics of a methodology for learning outcomes to be meaningful.

The teacher did not delve into the topics or clarified doubts... I mean, if as a teacher you are not going to explain, I think sometimes you can do it, but we, the students, are going to get just what we read and what our classmates explain, which may or may not be wright. (NP2)

Likewise, they identified teamwork as another key element for the participatory methodology that can be carried out in these sessions since it requires equal levels of involvement and responsibility from the participants and favors their interaction and motivation towards achieving a common goal. Therefore, the type of teamwork

that had a positive impact on the learners was the collaborative one; as Yate et al. (2013) explain, collaborative work implies equal participation of team members to reach a goal, getting a group product that is enriched with the all the participants' contributions according to their abilities, which also allows them to learn from each other.

We chose, let's say, two groups, we were working and it was a super nice process because we had to do a lot of work every week, let's say, in the sense that there were many things to create, but each of us was in dialogue with the other because the teacher also said: "talk to each other, look, I don't know what..." and she herself said: "I choose what each one is going to present", so we all had to know the whole topic, so in that way, it was cool. (NP2)

Yet, there is a change of perception when there is division of tasks, lack of assertive communication and difficulty in joining synchronous meetings, since these conditions generate delay and lack of commitment, and end in negative academic results.

There are classmates that work and say, "Let's do it." But there are also others that say, "Later, today I'm busy." We wait for them, but they do not show up. (NP1)

Regarding teamwork, it is difficult to agree and take time to meet because some classmates work, and it is difficult to find free time in common. (LP3)

Additionally, based on their experiences in the synchronous classes, there were activities that raised their interest and fostered their interaction. Games, contests, videos, forums, and the use of different ICT tools represented activities and resources that generated new learning experiences and promoted their active participation.

It was wonderful to see videos, forums, things that I even started using in my classes, I thought it was very cool to see games that increased vocabulary. (NP1)

This agrees with Duță and Martínez-Rivera (2015), who describe the ICT as new

ways of communication and motivation enhancers in the online environment while promoting learning communities. Likewise, the participants recognized how the online environment facilitates the access to materials necessary to deepen their knowledge, whether provided by teachers or sought by themselves, and the possibilities to share them.

The way of transmitting the material was easier, it was much better; for example, they wanted us to watch a video, or they gave us a reading, it was easier to transmit. (NP3)

As Duță and Martínez-Rivera (2015) explain, the widespread use of digital documentation systems is necessary for all members of the society as it allows to access, review and updating of information.

Another aspect related to the methodology was the role of the teacher. The participants emphasized the impact that teachers who favored the participatory approach had on their learning process. First, being creative and looking for innovation inside the classes and promoting active participation are key features that educators must have to engage students and increase their commitment. Moreover, student participation depended not only on the opportunities teachers provided for them to participate, but also on the chances they provided for learners to be active members of the class by sharing their points of view and making decisions about their learning process. This, in turn, implies the need for learners to be heard and appreciated since they consider that their commitment and engagement may be fostered once they feel they can contribute and that their ideas count.

I think what differentiates a boring class from an interesting one is when the teacher engages you and makes you part of the class, not only as a participant in the class, but as an active member of the class. (NP4)

Therefore, the participatory approach involves deepening on the class topics, analyzing real classroom contexts, using their critical thinking, working collaboratively, using innovative activities and resources, either provided by teachers or found by learners, and having chances to contribute to the classes by giving ideas and making decisions when needed. Collaborative and autonomous work with the

guidance and feedback of a tutor which follows a social constructivist worldview is closely related to the Integral Formation Model (Ruiz & Dávila, 2016).

On the other hand, the students described different factors typical of theory-based methodology, which negatively impacted the learning of some subjects. Based on their ideas, some classes seemed to replicate the face-to-face sessions they used to have before the pandemic, which caused low levels of interest due to the monotony these sessions produced. Some of them involved constant theoretical presentations by learners based on readings they had been assigned; they were asked to read, summarize and design slides presenting the topic individually or in groups.

These classes were the same as the face-to-face classes, teachers delivered work at the beginning of the session, and we had to submit it at the end. (NP3)

The classes were continually like group presentations, but the topic was not discussed. (NP2)

Thus, the focused-on-theory lessons tended to be less demanding than the face-to-face ones since they lacked feedback, there was no extra explanation from the teacher or critical reflection based on the topics, so students could not be sure about their level of understanding. In short, these classes tended to emphasize the need to work on all the topics in the syllabus, regardless of the level of knowledge that learners could obtain.

She just used theory; she did not explain what reality was like in the classrooms. (NP5)

A final aspect related to this approach was the evaluation process. Some participants explained that tests tended to replicate the summative evaluation that was frequently carried out in face-to-face lessons; questions tended to be closed and objective, which did not favor the learners' abstract and critical thinking skills, but their ability to memorize items or find information from the web or other sources. In addition, students explained that it promoted fraud and decreased learners' interest in

learning. However, according to Litwin (2009, as cited in Iturrioz & González, 2015), evaluations that implement the new technologies should promote transparent processes by fostering interaction and discussion; therefore, learners were not taking full advantage of these practices, as the following excerpt shows.

In English there was a quiz and that was the copy of the copy, because, of course, in English there are things that are very literal, or this is the answer, or this is the verb; there are things that are very exact. But English allows many things, I can select a theme ... I select this theme and, I don't know, a debate on such a thing, using what they learned during the semester. (NP5)

This type of evaluation also disagrees with the one proposed by the Integral Formation Model with collaborative work among students (Ruiz & Dávila, 2016), since one of the factors that it favors is the need to carry out formative and summative assessments with the use of rubrics, which, according to the participants, did not often seem to take place.

Therefore, the second methodology described by the participants may be connected to some from the higher education virtual learning models (Ruiz & Dávila, 2016): one that is the self-training model without group interaction, which follows a constructivist view, and a second one that is the self-training model in interaction with the instructional design and a minimum of interpersonal communication between students. Both models lack interaction, nevertheless, the first one involves an objective evaluation, while the second one promotes an evaluation based on the learners' performance.

All in all, the Integral Formation Model is more related to quality teaching practices than these two models since it is more student-centered; it promotes the learners' collaborative and autonomous work, which was evidenced by the participants while describing the participatory methodology. Therefore, although there were some subjects that needed to adopt different strategies so as not to focus on theoretical topics and objective tests, there were also classes that promoted the students' active participation and teamwork while enhancing their critical thinking and motivation.

Besides, the implementation of ICT played a very important role since they supported learners' communication and access to information while promoting new ways to learn.

Strategies that Emerged from the Difficulties

Due to the sudden implementation of technology and the process of adaptation to virtual learning, the participants had to face several difficulties, which promoted the development of new skills and strategies. They are explained as follows.

First, some of the participants stated that it was very difficult to adapt to the applications and platforms that teachers used to conduct synchronous classes; for example, having to turn the microphone on and off for every intervention was something totally new for them. The lack of knowledge and the multiple actions the use of different ICT involved made them feel frustrated and spend more time than expected. However, the participants mentioned that at the end of the semester they could master the use of different types of web tools and platforms, as it is shown in the next sample:

I was like...wait, what happened?... It was a shock! It was difficult at the beginning because, as I said before and keep saying, we were not used to a video call, turn on cameras, use a microphone, it was something terrifying, and, in general, it started to terrify me... Well, now I am an expert! Now I know how to turn off the camera, turn off the microphone, participate, check attendance, and everything else. (NP1)

Therefore, they used their previous knowledge and the opportunities to practice in their classes to improve their technical skills. This not only helped them as students, but also as teachers. Some of them explained that they used the ICT they had explored and the activities they had developed in their own classes, and it had supported them in that transition as teachers as well. Then, although they did not have a formal training in the use of ICT, they learned from the experience and also nurtured their pedagogical competence.

Likewise, another issue was the participants' high levels of distraction due to their

use of electronic devices, their surroundings, and the long lectures from some classes; they affected their concentration and participation and had a negative impact on their academic results.

For me, the virtual education was negative since my level of study and performance decreased a bit. I did not pay attention to the classes; besides, I have a lot of distractions with the computer and the cellphone. (NP3)

Consequently, these students realized the need to implement different strategies that favored their autonomous learning, which implies building knowledge from direct experience and not from the instruction of another person (Castaño & Londoño, 2012). The strategies they mentioned were note-taking in classes, designing graphic organizers to systematize information, and avoiding the use of social networks in the workplace. Besides, some of them mentioned the need to organize their schedules and plan their time to use it efficiently. Also, they explored videos and tutorials to know how to deal with the technological resources they were using and delve into the topics they were studying.

I had to start watching a lot of YouTube videos and I had the opportunity to ask other teachers and that helped me, and I said, "well, I also have to do my part because the university and the professors can't give me everything." So, I started to be a little more organized with my time, I began to balance my schedule, my things, as if I was going to university, so that helped me a lot. (NP2)

Finally, looking for support from their classmates seemed to be another relevant action they took for clarifying ideas and reflect upon the class contents.

It is important to be close with your friends because sometimes you need them, when sometimes you don't pay attention, or you don't take notes. (NP4)

These are learning strategies that students implement to plan, organize and self-manage their learning, among other actions that support their autonomy (Castaño & Londoño, 2012).

Another common problem the students faced at the beginning of the pandemic was

the lack of devices and network capacity. This situation was a constant difficulty since not only their economic resources, but also the quality of connection was not enough for them to guarantee their participation in the synchronous sessions and the development of their duties.

The transition from face-to-face to virtual education was hard because the use of technological tools was often unknown, and there were internet network problems. I had to buy a new computer, something that affected my finances since I had not budgeted for that investment. It was frustrating to use the Tablet, as some apps used to connect to classes were not compatible.
(LP1)

Then, they had to get new devices and decided to expand their Internet bandwidth that helped them to connect to their classes and access different materials, which favored the conditions of their learning process. This is proof of the critical digital gap that COVID-19 unveiled and the urgent need to guarantee access to technology to support the educational system and, in turn, increase competitiveness and productivity in Colombia (Flórez & Acevedo, 2020).

Well-being and Health

A final aspect that impacted the education quality was the physical health and emotional well-being the students experienced because of the change to online education. Critical emotional and physical issues affected the participants' attendance and class performance.

To begin with, all the participants reported high levels of fatigue and stress. Due to the pandemic, their mobility was reduced to the spaces at home, and they even maintained the same physical posture for longer periods of time causing chronic exhaustion, their levels of stress and anxiety also raised as a consequence of the confinement and the risks they took because of the pandemic, to the point they suffered panic attacks and depression, their sleeping habits were modified, and their social skills were affected. One of the participants explained that he avoided turning on his camera as a way of protection; he compared it to a way to find a shelter, but

it critically affected his active participation in class.

One takes refuge behind the screen, as if one was hiding, then it becomes easier since one does not pay much attention to it. (NP3)

One of the participants even narrated that due to her level of stress, she seemed to lose her consciousness resulting in an accident that sent her to the hospital.

I had a lot on my mind, and I remember it was going to be the final exams, I was cooking and I cut my finger terribly. I had to go to the hospital to get four stitches out, well, I had to take a lot of antibiotics, I felt a bit disconnected again and it was worse because I was already in final exams, it was like a lot of anxiety. (NP2)

Additionally, the students mentioned some other afflictions and illnesses that appeared after the pandemic. Their physical condition suffered a drastic change due to the lack of movement, while headaches and migraines were constant. Colds and sore throats also affected them, although they were not reported as symptoms produced by the COVID-19 virus. Besides, some of them suffered backaches and one of them considered using glasses due to the long periods in front of the screens.

I made the decision to go back to therapy because I could not wake up from the bed easily, I had a hard time starting the day and I cried all the time. I don't know the specific reason for my crying, but from my situation (of unemployment) to the situation of the country and the whole world, they distressed me a lot. I don't have very good memories of that transition since I got sicker than in recent years. And I feel like those situations affected my self-esteem. (LP2)

These situations clearly affected the participants' learning process. They explained they had to miss different classes, and in some moments their symptoms were so strong that their interest in their learning process diminished, affecting their performance. According to a study carried out by Unicef (2020), mental health problems in adolescents and young people have increased with the arrival of COVID-19, since the presence of this virus has caused economic problems and demotivation and pessimism about the future, among other issues. These problems

have led young people to suffer high degrees of depression and anxiety and they have been forced to ask family and friends for help.

One aspect that was relevant for the students was the role of some meaningful people during the process of adaptation to virtual learning. First, some teachers demonstrated their interest towards the situations they were facing and found moments to share and inquire about their academic and affective needs. Likewise, they acknowledged the support they received from partners while implementing teamwork; listening to each other strengthened their friendships, and it encouraged them to study and improve their academic performance. These meaningful people enhanced the learners' motivation and well-being.

Regarding the practicum teacher, I believe that he is an excellent teacher and an excellent person. Actually, he was very well informed about the situations, like his mental situation in this pandemic. (NP4)

This teacher tried to do very nice things with fun activities because many were facing depression and other issues due to the pandemic... My closest classmates had a great influence on my decisions since we wanted to continue together and even tried to register as many subjects together as possible. (NP5)

Conclusions and Implications

This study focused on the aspects that impacted the education quality of a group of preservice teachers from a bachelor in bilingualism during the first academic semester in 2020 due to the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic and the migration to virtual education. According to the participants' narratives, and the journals, there were three main aspects which highly impacted their education: *the methodology that was implemented, the strategies that emerged from the difficulties, and the issues related to their well-being and health.*

Regarding the *methodology*, students highlighted the quick adaptation to a participatory and student-centered methodology that generated motivation,

interaction, collaborative work and good results. The constant use of technological resources and ICT tools also had a positive effect on the learners' levels of involvement and interaction that helped them to grow as a community and to deepen their knowledge since it facilitated the access to materials provided by the teachers, sought by themselves or shared among partners. Likewise, the teacher's role in this participatory methodology was a meaningful one; the innovative and creative interests and genuine human rapport of their teachers were key to promoting active participation and commitment of the learners; the participants highly valued the opportunities they had to be heard and share their views, which nurtured the decisions made regarding their learning process. Additionally, they identified a balance between teachers' guidance and the quality of their outcomes, which implied the need to have opportunities to establish an active dialogue with the teacher to discuss and delve into the topics by using a critical view. Thus, the positive transformation that the bachelor program carried out at that crucial and historical moment by making decisions, such as the reorganization of the virtual platform and the teaching practices, show the ability to adapt teaching-learning practices according to the new circumstances.

However, it is important to mention that the participants also experienced a theory-focused methodology which caused disinterest, little concentration and low levels of learning. Similarly, evaluations represented a critical issue; on the one hand, they produced high levels of anxiety and stress in the students, and on the other hand, they favored memory processes, which would promote a lack of meaningful experiences and fraud. Thus, this type of practices must be analyzed in order to promote decision-making processes towards teachers' development.

With reference to the *strategies that emerged from the difficulties*, we could identify different challenges that the students faced and overcame throughout the semester. On the one hand, different technological tools were totally new for some of the students, so they did not know how to use them; however, as the semester progressed, they were able to gain experience in their management. In fact, being pre-service teachers, they took advantage of the different tools and resources

offered by their professors, to apply them in their own teaching contexts. On the other hand, some of the students presented connectivity problems and lack of adequate electronic devices, which directly affected the development of their classes and activities. Nonetheless, they looked for solutions, bought new devices and had access to more Internet capacity. In addition, the reflections made by the students allowed us to know the process they went through and, consequently, the changes and improvements they implemented in their lifestyles and habits by means of different strategies, thus enhancing their commitment and concentration while acquiring greater autonomy in their learning process. All in all, the implementation of technology constituted a quality education strategy that, along with others, involved different adaptation processes that were carried out by the whole community to favor the continuity of the academic activity.

As for *well-being and health*, the levels of these ones were seriously affected by the excessive screen time and the scarce movement; muscle and vision problems are the most representative physical issues. Likewise, the lack of interaction and isolation generated psychological conditions associated with chronic stress and depression. Aspects such as ignorance of the situation, excess information and fear caused by the media, greatly affected their levels of well-being. All these aspects had a negative impact on the learning process and the education quality; however, it should be noted that family, friends and teachers were part of the students' support network to the extent that they intervened in their emotional well-being, and in their learning and decision-making processes. Thus, it can be said that the quality of the education was multidimensional since it did not only focus on the academic support and guidance that the academic processes required, but also on the learners' emotional support, being this last one a task that some teachers decided to carry out for the good of their students.

Overall, according to the students' narratives, the class methodology, the strategies that emerged, and the levels of well-being and health of the learners constituted the main aspects that impacted the education quality during the 2020-1 academic period. Therefore, they allow us to conclude that education was multidimensional,

contextualized, open to transformation and controlled by means of decision-making, which are features of high-quality standards for higher education (Aguerrondo, 1993, as cited in Martin, 2018).

Regarding the implications, we highlight the importance of fostering teaching practices based on meaningful learning to allow students to explore scenarios close to their reality and teaching context, regardless the type of learning environment. Moreover, the need to generate interaction among classmates and teachers must prevail despite the contextual difficulties.

Likewise, teamwork must be supervised even more in virtual environments; it may guarantee the proper development of class activities and projects and the achievement of learning goals. Furthermore, it is considered necessary to create evaluations that require abstract and critical thinking, since for memory tests there is a high possibility of committing fraud and losing the purpose of the activity.

Besides, we consider it important to provide technological support and training to both teachers and students, since first, not all people have the same digital skills, and second, the new technological resources and tools will continue to be implemented once the global health situation has improved and will constitute a must for the quality of education at all levels. That said, one possible direction for future research is to explore teachers' narratives regarding their practice during the pandemic of COVID-19, in order to make sense of their experiences as well.

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