



REVISTA KRONOS

Online learning-teaching processes and the role of ecuadorian ESL teachers as facilitators during the pandemic: students' reflections and analysis (Quito, March 2020-November 2021)

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ABSTRACT In 2019, the world was mercilessly attacked by covid-19 and its variants, showing no signs of recession thus far. The pandemic transformed people's lives in many ways, with education being one of the most shaken areas. Since then, virtual education has taken a central place in most countries, reaching thousands of students either synchronously or asynchronously. In vulnerable countries like Ecuador, however, it struggled to take off due to socioeconomic challenges. Despite the difficulties encountered, nevertheless, some educational institutions were able to cope better than others by implementing creative responses while transitioning from face-to-face to virtual education. A time of educational discovery and exchange was inaugurated in some public institutions in Ecuador, opening up renewed learning experiences throughout the transition. This qualitative research explores and analyzes the reflections and perceptions of ESL students at a public university in Quito regarding their online language learning experience, evaluating course-content, learning-process, and teacher-performance between march 2020 and November 2021.

KEY WORDS Covid-19, esl education, reflections, virtuality, language, teaching, learning.

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Procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje en línea y el papel de los profesores ecuatorianos de ESL como facilitadores durante la pandemia: reflexiones y análisis (Quito, marzo 2020-noviembre 2021)

RESUMEN En 2019, el mundo fue atacado sin piedad por el covid-19 y sus variantes, sin mostrar signos de recesión hasta ahora. La pandemia transformó la vida de las personas en muchos aspectos, siendo la educación una de las áreas más sacudidas. Desde entonces, la educación virtual ha ocupado un lugar central en la mayoría de los países, la que ha llegado a miles de estudiantes de forma sincrónica o asincrónica. En países vulnerables como Ecuador, sin embargo, le costó despegar debido a los problemas socioeconómicos. No obstante, a pesar de las dificultades encontradas, algunas instituciones educativas fueron capaces de afrontarlo mejor que otras aplicando respuestas creativas en la transición de la educación presencial a la virtual. Se inauguró un tiempo de descubrimiento e intercambio educativo en algunas instituciones públicas de Ecuador, abriendo experiencias de aprendizaje renovadas a lo largo de la transición. Esta investigación cualitativa explora y analiza las reflexiones y percepciones de los estudiantes de ESL de una universidad pública de Quito sobre su experiencia de aprendizaje de idiomas en línea, evaluando el contenido del curso, el proceso de aprendizaje y el desempeño del profesor, entre marzo de 2020 y noviembre de 2021.

PALABRAS CLAVE Covid-19, educación de esl, virtualidad, reflexiones, virtualidad, idioma, enseñanza, aprendizaje.

INTRODUCTION

In late december 2019, a new coronavirus (coronavirus 2-SARS-CoV-2) was identified in China, causing severe respiratory illnesses. The disease caused as a result of infection is called coronavirus disease (covid-19), and has been categorized as a high consequence airborne infection disease (Jong and Stevens, 2022). SARS-CoV-2 spread among people worldwide in a rapid and uncontrolled manner that gradually took on pandemic magnitude, causing worldwide fear and encirclement.

In february 2020, Ecuador's health authorities reported the first case of covid-19. In april of the same year, Ecuador was described as a possible «epicenter» of the pandemic in Latin America. In the following months, the situation became increasingly dramatic. The government and local authorities had to build emergency cemeteries for the disposal of the bodies left in the streets. The pandemic was greatly (Vaca, 2020), with a fall in oil prices, the closing of borders, the isolation of citizens, and the paralysis of daily activities, causing serious economic repercussions for the country.

A new scenario emerged in the reality of Ecuador, where municipalities acquired an important and challenging role, both in terms of control over the population and in terms of proposing and implementing new development plans for their inhabitants in the context of the coronavirus (Chase, 2021). They assumed more competencies and had to apply innovative strategies to achieve greater self-management of the territories.

The situation caused by the coronavirus in Ecuador reached unbearable levels, despite the efforts made by the authorities in charge. The epidemic overwhelmed the central government and local/decentralized authorities with overwhelming levels of contagion that, over the months, have changed just a bit.

As of November 2021, official figures show that the pandemic does not seem to be receding, as the following figures demonstrate (see Table 1).

With some provinces being particularly affected (see Table 2).

EDUCATION IN OUR COUNTRY DURING THE PANDEMIC

During this health pandemic in Ecuador, significant efforts have been made to preserve and continue educational activities at various levels of schooling. Despite this, the impact has been immense, leading to the dropout of thousands of children, adolescents, young adults, and even mature adults across the country. MINEDUC devised the «Let's learn together at home» concept to deal with this new reality. Radio and television shows were established in collaboration with UNESCO, UNICEF, and other organizations with the primary objective of giving educational opportunities (UNICEF-Ecuador, 2021).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Thousands of students nationwide missed classes during the pandemic, and a high percentage of students had difficulty accessing online learning. Lack of smart phones, online devices or the Internet failing, decreasing incomes, and lack of training prevented the normal education of millions of children during the pandemic. The need for teacher training to effectively deliver distance and online education was particularly scarce in low-income countries. Faced with this new reality, the terms «distance education, virtual education, and online education» came into use, but little was known about these activities.

Distance education emphasizes mainly on the delivery of physical materials that the educational institution delivers to its students to carry out their academic activities that can be delivered via e-mail. Therefore, the benefit of which is that it allows the student to

Table 1.

Cases confirmed with PCR tests	457.489
Cases discharged from hospital	48.442
Deaths due to covid-19	21.545
Samples for RT-PCR	1.540.122
Recovered	423.688
Cases discarded	1.029.414

Source: Portal con información oficial sobre la pandemia que afecta a Ecuador.

Table 2.

Province	Confirmed	Deceased	Probable deceased
Pichincha	174.118	4901	1849
Guayas	67.416	3904	2091
Manabi	32.671	2817	958
Azuay	26.413	1095	205
El Oro	22.517	1326	909

Source: Portal con información oficial sobre la pandemia que afecta a Ecuador.

study in any circumstance without having to rely on technology or internet connection and have little interaction with their classmates and teachers.

Virtual education has been significantly strengthened by the Internet's technological tools and teachers' training resulting in an exchange of information between the teacher and the student via virtual classrooms created for this purpose. It took place asynchronously, where students could download the materials and upload the work, or even work collaboratively with their classmates and review their work. It is not necessary for this activity to coincide in time or virtual space with the teacher or classmates for the development of academic activities.

Online education is based on virtual education, but it coincides with real time in virtual spaces, both for the teacher and the student. Attendance was, in some cases, mandatory in virtual classrooms with live synchronous classes. Institutions had to create some technological platforms that allowed them to conduct online classes.

The pandemic came to show the real need, in terms of connectivity and digitization, that the Ecuadorian society has. It was really hard to make a change because families had no access to the internet, the school had no technological equipment, and the teachers had no training in digital skills.

Located in the field of formal education and with preventive social isolation, teleworking was and remains the strategy for pedagogical continuity. In university education, training in virtual environments or technological environments was prior to this contingency, which was recognized as e-learning. This is how the question arose in a public university about teachers' prior knowledge of the use of digital tools (Baskaran, Anant, Hamzea & Li, 2020), better known as ICT, in individual education and the development of classes during the pandemic time. From face-to-face education, we migrated to distance and virtual education, where at the beginning, some were able to cope, and others unfortunately could not, causing an even greater crisis. However, the role of the teacher as guide, facilitator, moderator, accompaniment, and permanent motivator during the formative and academic processes of the students did not change (Chrisjames1, 2019).

CHANGES AND MEASURES DURING THE PANDEMIC AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN QUITO.

Covid-19 will be remembered by all of us who have lived through it and thankfully survived, because it disturbed our everyday lives, took away our relatives and friends, and had a significant impact on the global economy, health, and education (Holey & Dhole, 2021), particularly in underdeveloped countries.

Faced with this reality, this public university discontinued on-site sessions on Monday, March 16, 2020, and encouraged students to continue their studies in all academic settings, including the Language Institute, by organizing synchronous and asynchronous activities. They were allocated to students on the university's platform, which would have been used for academic purposes such as uploading and downloading supporting material, conducting informal and formal assessments, academic follow-up, feedback, and teacher-student interaction.

In a solemn session on May 12, 2020, the hcu-uce agreed that attendance would not be considered for all university students as a prerequisite to approving a semester or an English level.

VIRTUALITY AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS IN THE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

Teachers began to face digital training with synchronous and asynchronous classes based entirely on video conferencing (Sistek, 2019), which was maintained and progressed with English language teaching. All of this was carried out together with the accompaniment of virtual platforms, which had already been part of the institutional method to enhance the learning process through the learning of content (Vermeer, 1992) and the evolution of its skills (Enríquez, 2019).

As in most cases, the inconveniences with connectivity and access to electronic devices did not wait any longer, even being a public university. Nevertheless, the recorded classes and materials have backed learners up to motivate, facilitate the acquisition of new content and provide support for future evaluations (Bautista, Hiracheta & Raudel, 2014).

Additionally, the first platform was strongly promoted at the beginning of the pandemic to interact and enhance college students' expertise and capabilities through forums, games, surveys, videos, audios, tests, exams, and more.

Following this, the Institute of Languages had to make some changes to the schedule of activities due to the health emergency we were experiencing at the time and encouraged teachers to care for their students (Graves, 1996) by keeping in touch and motivating them to continue learning. In the following days, the first virtual training was held for the proper handling of virtual classrooms and their tools to run effective sessions with learners as well as upload material, evaluations, encourage active participation, move from theory to practice, and enhance learning (Sue & Bannister, 2021).

At the beginning of July 2020, the next academic period began with the efficient equipment of virtual classrooms and training on their use and the following indications:

Since the beginning and up to the present time, the time load for each level has been 70 hours, 100 percent virtual. In January 2021, class schedules were already regulated for all days, including Saturday morning and afternoon, as well as the time with the students, which was changed to 90 minutes of class and 30 minutes to address students' concerns, for a total of 120 minutes of virtual class with the students.

Since it was an online course at the beginning, it was decided that the academic achievement would be about 60%. All the online courses must be carried out within the established academic calendar.

The assessment system has been maintained through the academic resources of the platforms, as well as two formal assessments every two units; the final written exam at 50% and the final oral exam at 50% by video conferencing.

Convinced that the virtual age has arrived and will be part of our lives forever, the principal of this public university acquired high-tech servers to give life to the online modality and the careers that are virtually available. Consequently, the virtual platform will be active 365 days a year without collapsing. In this way, this university became the pioneer in acquiring the latest technology in system server performance (Metro, 2021).

In addition, plans are being made to implement virtual care centers and a physical classroom for training activities and teaching assistance to enable the normal performance of the online modality.

GENERAL VIEW OF STUDENTS' SATISFACTION WITH VIRTUAL CLASSES AT THIS PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

According to the study carried out by Cecilia del Carmen Marcillo on 200 students from this public university, she pointed out that 4,5% of students thought this type of class was very satisfactory and 36,5% of the students thought it was only satisfactory. On the other hand, 48% of students said it was not satisfactory, and 9,0% said the class was not satisfactory at all because they learned less than being in face-to-face classes. In addition, they mentioned that the classes' duration was long and the homework was tripled since the assignments were very extensive, although they contributed to their learning. Another unfortunate point is that a minority of 3% out of 100% of meaningful ones reported that they had been harassed or abused. In this context, disrespect and abuse on the part of any teacher should not be tolerated, and students as the center of education must be appreciated.

There is much to improve, create, and prioritize in the arduous task of being a virtual teacher. If anything positive has emerged from covid-19, it is that students and teachers have received training on ICTs and we have awakened to virtuality and its benefits. As for students, it is a great opportunity to build their own knowledge and master it, with the advantage that most of them are digital natives (Marcillo, 2021).

Staff training is crucial and must be continuous and practical with the purpose of acquiring enough expertise through the use of new specialized educational software to make the virtual classroom more dynamic. In this way, the content will be strengthened, creativity will be supported, and the interactivity between students and teachers will be enhanced, as well as the corresponding virtual backup for students. The students' interest will grow as we add as many virtual resources as we can handle in video conferencing. With as much virtual assistance as students can easily access, they will feel more comfortable. Students and teachers will become more familiar with the teaching-learning process as they engage in more virtual interactions, and as teachers acquire more virtual competencies, student satisfaction will increase (González, 2021).

To analyze the students' opinions of a public English institute in Quito on the online learning-teaching process and the role of ecuadorian ESL teachers as facilitators during the pandemic from March 2020 to November 2021.

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative since it is based on the learners' opinions. Consequently, its approach is phenomenological since it is focused on the study of experiences from the perspective of each participant. This research was conducted based on the

application of a measurement questionnaire maintaining a Likert scale (Allen, 2017) and proceeded with the result analysis of the different focus groups using a qualitative research approach.

STATISTICAL DATA

This is qualitative research that examines the opinions expressed by students of levels A1.1, A1.2, A2.1 and A2.2 at the Academic Institute of Languages at a public university, in reference to the teaching-learning process of the English language and the implementation of certain technological tools. For this purpose, a post-test using a Likert scale was used.

The groups of students selected were those assigned to two teachers from March 2020 to November 2021. Class times were from 7:00 am to 1:00 pm. The students who participated in the present research voluntarily accepted to do so, and those who did not accept did not participate in this research. It is worth mentioning that the participating students are part of the Language Institute of this public university.

POPULATION

The sample size was not calculated, and the accepted population was used since it is a finite population, accessible in its entirety. The students who agreed to participate voluntarily in this research were taking levels A1.1, A1.1, A2.1, and A2.2 at the Academic Institute of Languages —at a public university— during the period from March 2020 to November 2021.

The particular information is shown in the following table (see Table 3).

Considering this information, the informants were distributed in (see Table 4).

In reference to gender, the population was distributed as follows (see Table 5).

TECHNIQUES AND INSTRUMENTS FOR DATA COLLECTION

The information used in the present research work was obtained from a measurement questionnaire administered at the end of the study cycle. This questionnaire consisted of 24 questions organized into three areas:

- about the course,
- about learning,
- about the teacher.

The first area was aimed at collecting information about the course. This section consisted of seven questions, which had «YES, NO, and MAYBE» as alternatives.

The second area was aimed at collecting information related to the learning process carried out during the study cycle. This section consisted of 9 questions, which had «POOR, FAIR, GOOD, VERY GOOD, EXCELLENT» as alternatives.

The third area was aimed at collecting information referring to the class teacher. This section consisted of 8 questions, which had «POOR, FAIR, GOOD, VERY GOOD, EXCELLENT» as alternatives.

The reliability of the instruments in the present research was determined by the performers who were the students of the different levels and cycles. This information was validated since, prior to the application of a measurement questionnaire, the students were informed about the areas to be evaluated. The students participating in this research were and are part of a Language Institute at a public university who study English at the differ-

Table 3.

Period	Level	N.º students	Teacher	Schedule
March-April 2020	A1.1	25	Teacher A	7h00-10h00
June-July 2020	A1.1	23	Teacher A	9h00-11h00
October-November 2020	A1.1	27	Teacher A	7h00-9h00
January-February 2021	A2.1	22	Teacher A	9h00-11h00
May-June 2021	A1.2	21	Teacher A	9h00-11h00
June-July 2021	A2.2	24	Teacher A	7h00-9h00
August- September 2021	A2.1	59	Teacher B	7h00-9h00/9h00-11h00
August- September 2021	A1.1	29	Teacher A	7h00-9h00
October-November 2021	A1.1	28	Teacher A	7h00-10h00
Total		258		

Sample Source: Secretariat of the Academic Institute of Languages at the public university.

Table 4.

Level	N.º students
A1.1	147
A1.2	28
A2.1	59
A2.2	24
Total	258

Sample Source: Secretariat of the Academic Institute of Languages at the public university

Table 5.

Female	Male	Total
157	101	258
60,9 %	39,1%	100%

Sample Source: Secretariat of the Academic Institute of Languages at the public university.

ent levels offered, which are A1.1, A1.2, A2.1, and A2.2, with the sole purpose of knowing how challenging it was to teach English in times of the covid-19 pandemic.

RESULT ANALYSIS

Once the students were informed about the application of the measurement questionnaire, they were asked if they wanted to participate in this procedure, obtaining a very high acceptance rate. The only question asked was:

Would you like to express your opinion through the following survey? (see Table 6).

It can be seen that 91% of students (258) agreed to participate in the research, and only 9% (25) did not agree to participate in this research.

The the measurement questionnaire applied covered three areas:

- about the course,
- about learning,
- about the teacher.

Table 6

Students surveyed		%
Agreed	258	91
Didn't agree	25	9
Total	283	100

Sample Source: Secretariat of the Academic Institute of Languages at the public university.

COMPARATIVE BY AREAS

About the course (see Table 7)

In this section, it can be seen that 258 students participated and answered seven questions related to the course with three alternative answers: «YES, NO and MAYBE» (see Graph 1).

This graph shows that students responded «Yes» with high percentages in questions 2 and 3, obtaining 100% and 99%, respectively. In all other questions, «Yes answers» were obtained with a percentage greater than 80%, with the exception of question 6, where 62% of students answered «Yes» (see Graph 2).

This graph shows the average of the three responses and also shows the “Yes answers” reaching 85,6%, the «No answers» reaching 5,7%, and the «Maybe» answer reaching 3,7%. From the above, 94,3% of the students express positive aspects about the organization of the course.

About learning (see Table 8)

In this section, it can be seen that 258 students participated and answered nine questions related to learning, having «EXCELLENT, VERY GOOD, GOOD, FAIR and POOR» as alternatives (see Graph 3).

This graph shows that the highest percentages for the «EXCELLENT» response are in questions 3 and 7, with 35,7% and 31,4%, respectively. The highest percentages for the «VERY GOOD» response are in questions 4 and 9 with 41,1% and in question 8 with 38,0%. The highest percentages for the «GOOD» response are in questions 1 and 2, with 45% and 43,8%, respectively. The highest percentages for the «REGULAR» response are in questions 5 with 12,0% and question 1 with 8,5%. Finally, the highest percentages for the «BAD» response are in questions 5, 7 and 8 (see Graph 4).

This graph shows the average of the five responses and shows that the «VERY GOOD» response reaches 37,9%, the «GOOD» response reaches 33,0%, the «EXCELLENT» response reaches 22,9%, the «FAIR» response reaches 5,5%, and the «POOR» response reaches only 0,7%. From the above, 93,8% of the students express positive aspects of the learning process in their English course

About the teacher (see Table 9)

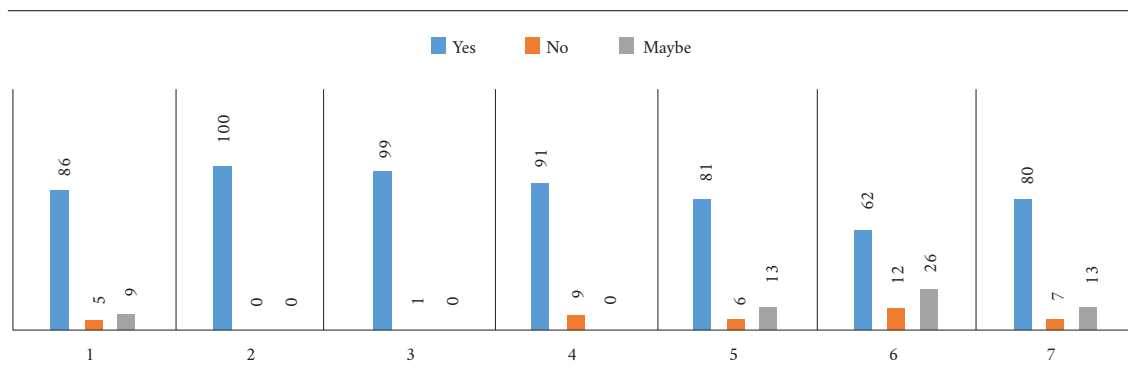
In this section, it can be seen that 258 students participated and answered seven questions referring to the teacher with five alternative answers «EXCELLENT, VERY GOOD, GOOD, FAIR and POOR» (see Graph 5).

This graph shows that the highest percentages for the EXCELLENT response are in question 4 with 58,1% and question with 93,0% which refers to the information if the students would recommend their teachers. The highest percentages for the VERY GOOD response are in question 5 with 36,4% and questions 2 and 3 with 32,9%. The highest percentages for the GOOD response are in question 1 and 6, with 20,1%. The highest percentage for the FAIR

Table 7

	YES	NO	MAYBE	TOTAL
1 Do you have internet access to receive your lessons online?	221	14	23	258
2 Did you use an English study platform?	258	0	0	258
3 Did you use your university's platform?	256	2	0	258
4 Did you have classes every day?	236	22	0	258
5 Are you satisfied with the type of online classes you received in this emergency?	209	15	34	258
6 Would you recommend this online mode of study to a friend of yours?	160	32	66	258
7 Was the duration of the course adequate?	206	18	34	258

Graph 1. About the class



Graph 2. About the class

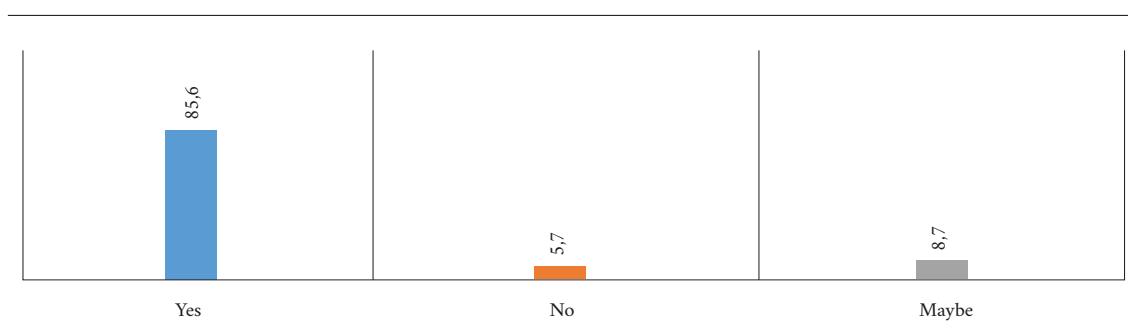
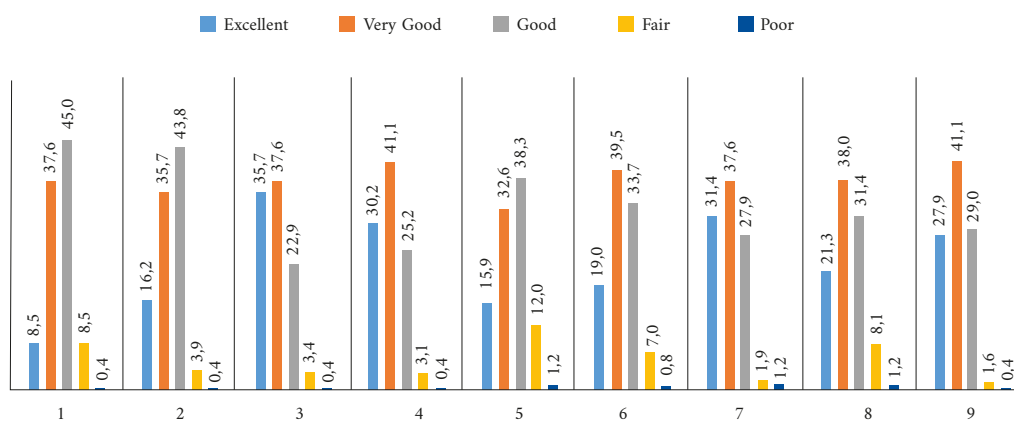


Table 8.

	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	TOTAL
1 Your English language learning was	21	97	116	23	1	258
2 The amount of time spent in the English class was	42	92	113	10	1	258
3 The explanations, practices and exercises proposed in the English class were	92	97	59	9	1	258
4 The quality of your classes was	78	106	65	8	1	258
5 The access to my grades after an evaluated activity was	41	84	99	31	3	258
6 The expectation of the course in this emergency was	49	102	87	18	2	258
7 The material delivered was	81	97	72	5	3	258
8 The evaluation system was	55	98	81	21	3	258
9 You found the course to be	72	106	75	4	1	258

Graph 3. About learning



Graph 4. About learning

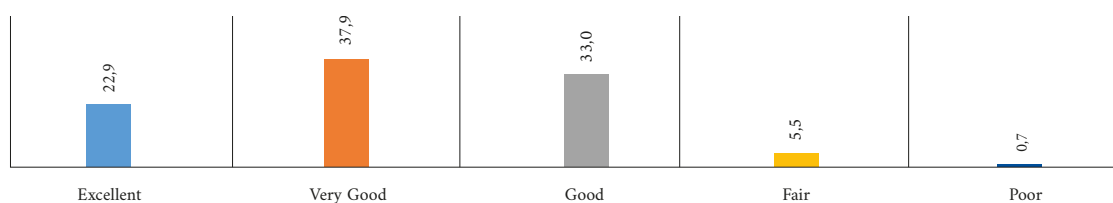
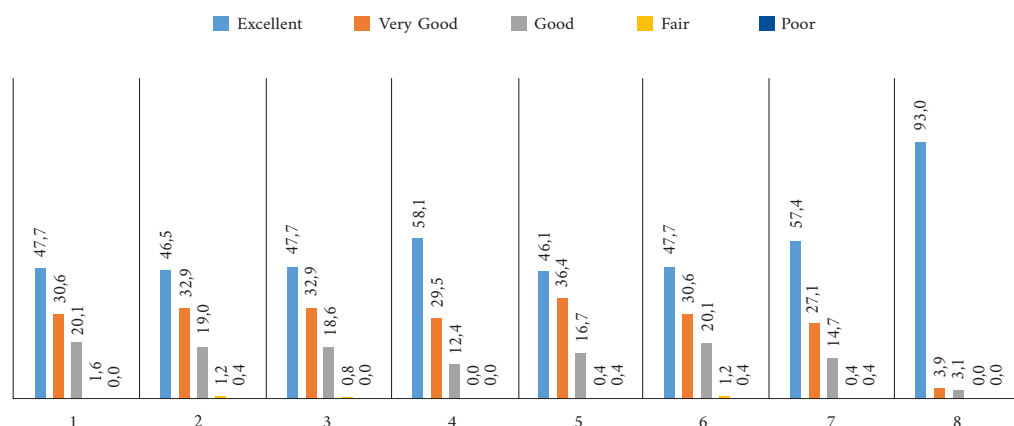


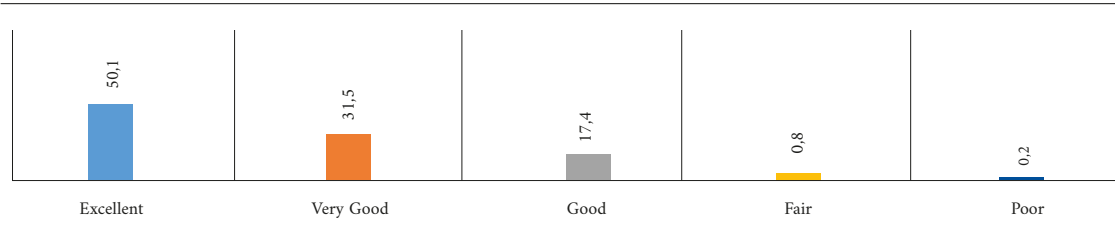
Table 9.

		EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	TOTAL
1	Their teacher's relationship with the students was	123	79	52	4	0	258
2	The explanation received by your teacher was	120	85	49	3	1	258
3	The class environment created by your teacher was	123	85	48	2	0	258
4	The knowledge shown by your teacher was	150	76	32	0	0	258
5	Motivation during class was	119	94	43	1	1	258
6	The use of practical examples during classes was	123	79	52	3	1	258
7	The enthusiasm for his subject shown by the teacher was	148	70	38	1	1	258
8	If you have to give your opinion about your teacher, you would say your teacher was	240	10	8	0	0	258

Graph 5. About your teacher



Graph 6. About your teacher



response is in question 1 with 1,6%. Finally, the highest percentage for the POOR response is in questions 2, 5, 6, and 7 with 0,4% (see Graph 6).

This graph shows the average of the five responses and remarks that the «EXCELLENT» response is 55,5%, the «VERY GOOD» response is 28,0%, the «GOOD» response is 15,6%, the «FAIR» response is 0,7%, and the «POOR» response is only 0,2%. From the above, it can be seen that 99,1% of the students express positive aspects about the English course teacher.

CONCLUSIONS

This article analyzes the students' opinions in a public English institute at one of the most recognized universities in Quito, Ecuador regarding the online learning-teaching process and the role of ecuadorian ESL teachers as facilitators during the pandemic from March 2020 to November 2021.

In reference to the organization of the course, most of them expressed satisfaction with what was proposed and planned in class, highlighting that the use of technology was a challenge for the teacher that must be strengthened or improved. Technology certainly is and will be a means that allows the diversification of activities and that will be validly used both in virtual and face-to-face classes in the future. The virtual classes held during this pandemic have gone from something limitedly known to be the main teaching action in the last 20 months. The use of communication tools and the support of repositories have become commonplace in teaching practice.

As for the course, the vast majority of students had online classes every day with a duration of 2 hours in general, which constitutes a synchronous education, and they also state that the duration of the course was relevant. Fortunately, almost all of the students, except 2 out of 258 used the learning platforms to strengthen their learning, which constitutes asynchronous learning. At the end of the course, 209 students expressed satisfaction with the type of online classes they received, and 160 of them would recommend it to a classmate. The virtual synchronous and asynchronous modes would not have been possible if most respondents had not had access to the Internet.

According to access to learning, they generally rated it as good, as well as the time spent in classes and access to grades after the assessments. However, in the parameters of the practical explanations and exercises, they rate learning as very good with the material delivered, the quality of the tutorials and the evaluation system, which is based on the parameters of their appreciation of the course.

To end with reference to the teachers, these are the criteria that were evaluated: the relationship between teachers and students, the quality of their explanations, the atmosphere created, the knowledge imparted, the motivation provided, the quality of the examples, the enthusiasm shown and the opinion about their teachers. All these benchmarks were rated as excellent. That satisfaction was overwhelmingly expressed when they indicated that their teachers' performance was excellent. Consequently, we can conclude that the teachers accomplished their role as facilitators by demonstrating not only knowledge and skills but also enthusiasm for their subject, interest for students to learn as well as respect and responsibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Certainly, after the analysis of the results, virtual education is more challenging and demanding for teachers than for learners because they are the center of the virtual class.

As a result, in order to successfully lead this new type of education, teachers must first receive professional training in the use of platforms and technological tools. The more frequently and skillfully these tools are applied, the better the students' achievement will be.

Second, time must be used effectively in the different stages of the class, not only for content but also to create a friendly, warm but strict atmosphere to achieve content and affective goals.

Third, materials must be advantageous for students to make it less problematic to get to the knowledge and dexterities as well as the explanations, which necessarily must be precise, concise, and brief. These must be combined with practical and real examples for a satisfactory and quicker understanding to encourage learners to maintain active participation as listeners and producers of their own knowledge.

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