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Scientific review

Online Teaching at the Universidad Veracruzana: Emerging Strategies and Challenges

Extended summary

This study aims to describe the effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on higher education and especially language, translation, and research teaching, as well as the challenges that have been faced with shifting from face-to-face lessons to online learning with help from information technologies. In Mexico, unlike in more developed countries, there are noticeable shortcomings in the equipment and technological culture of the community that attends basic and higher education, but the hardships are more accentuated in rural and indigenous areas.

The advantages and disadvantages of virtual teaching in a postgraduate context are reviewed, as well as the solutions that could be implemented to offer a quality education and avoid negative consequences for student learning. The strategies used by the authorities, professors and students of the Universidad Veracruzana are also explained. The study was carried out during the February-June 2021 semester at a research institute of a Mexican public university in the state of Veracruz.

The theoretical basis of online learning is similar to that of in-person education. It includes concepts from learning theories such as behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism. However, previous research on the advantages and disadvantages of online learning, the strategies teachers use, the most significant challenges, and how constant online feedback could improve students' writing skills are reviewed. The research uses a qualitative, interpretive approach and the data was collected through semi-structured interviews; The choice of this data collection technique responded to our interest in understanding the perceptions of the partici-

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pants and their point of view about the reality they live in. All the necessary ethical considerations were respected, such as an informed consent for the participants and transparency in the interpretation of the findings. The informants of the study were 11 professors and 10 students from different programs of the Educational Research Institute of the Universidad Veracruzana.

Among the most interesting findings, professors consider that the change to online teaching allows them to work with students who are in distant places through virtual courses. They believe that students achieve greater autonomy in their work, since they have a feeling of independence and manage to be more responsible in their training process. Moreover, professors think that it is positive for students to have constant support from their thesis supervisors. They mention that the emergence of various tools and platforms cuts additional costs at university and everyone can work at their own pace.

However, professors are concerned about the digital divide and Internet availability in the Latin American context. The lack of this service prevents students from rural and even urban areas from being connected all the time. On the other hand, exposure to various distractors at home alters the students' attention span. Furthermore, some schools rely on improvisation and some teachers lack digital culture because they had not received prior training. Professors and students are concerned about the lack of interaction in distance education and the difficulties of doing collaborative work. This issue hinders the creation of bonds among all of them. Students are worried about their tendency to procrastinate and believe that their physical and mental health is affected because they must remain in front of the computer for long periods without being able to socialize with friends and family. Some other students have also been affected because they can no longer do face-to-face field work, and neither can they participate in exchange programs at universities in other countries.

Students' progress in writing and oral communication was observed, given the exhaustive review of professors and classmates, as well as their presentations in class. In addition, they learned to construct their knowledge and seek solutions to their problems during confinement. At the same time, the professors learned to operate multiple e-learning platforms to work with the students. In conclusion, everyone involved learned to be more resilient and to look at life in a positive way, despite the obstacles.

Keywords: distance education, teaching, electronic learning, postgraduate courses, higher education

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