The student in higher education: a new perspective on learning experience in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic

O aluno no ensino superior: uma nova perspectiva sobre a experiência de aprendizagem após a pandemia da COVID-19

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ABSTRACT
This article briefly discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the perception of higher education students in Brazil. It initiates a new discussion on the theme following the work of Santos and Lopes (2022), with a post-pandemic perspective. The article delves into the challenges and possibilities that emerged during and after the pandemic, particularly with the shift from in-person to remote learning in higher education and how ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) were utilized in the teaching and learning process. It highlights the limitations and challenges faced by institutions and educators, as well as the identification of opportunities for the incorporation of Digital Culture at this educational level. The paper addresses the term "experience" and the concept of "student experience," with a focus on learning. It discusses and analyzes a segment of the research conducted by the Interdisciplinary Study and Research Group on Curriculum and Society (GEICS) at Mackenzie Presbyterian University (UPM), regarding students' perceptions of their learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and outlines paths for change and renewal of teaching practices.

Keywords: student experience, higher education, COVID-19 pandemic, teaching practice, digital technologies.

RESUMO
Este artigo discute brevemente o impacto da pandemia da COVID-19 na percepção dos alunos do ensino superior no Brasil. Ele inicia uma nova discussão sobre o tema seguindo o trabalho de Santos e Lopes (2022), com uma perspectiva pós-pandêmica. O artigo investiga os desafios e as possibilidades que surgiram durante e após a pandemia, especialmente com a mudança do ensino presencial para o ensino remoto no ensino superior e como as TICs (Tecnologias de Informação
INTRODUCTION

The relentless human curiosity and the ability to interact and adapt to the surrounding environment have been the driving forces behind the progress of our society. This exploratory nature of human beings has led to advances and innovations that shape our present. Knowledge, experience, information, and perspectives are pillars that, when integrated, can open doors to innovations and challenges, propelling society to higher levels.

Within this landscape of advancement and discovery, universities stand as true bastions. Together with their educators and students, they are responsible for a continuous flow of knowledge and research. In an era marked by globalization, the agility in information dissemination and the exchange of experiences and insights become essential.

Faced with this dynamic scenario, the adaptability of pedagogical practices and the effective integration of digital tools in education are questioned. MORAN (2003) points out that, despite the availability of technological resources, they are often not applied optimally in the educational environment.

In this context, students, who entrust their academic and professional future to educational institutions, seek educational experiences that align with contemporary demands. But how do students' expectations relate to current pedagogical theories and practices?

This work aims to explore and analyze aspects of the study conducted by the Interdisciplinary Study and Research Group on Curriculum and Society (GEICS) at Mackenzie Presbyterian University (UPM) regarding higher education students' perceptions of their teaching-learning process in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The proposed analysis
highlights the urgency of rethinking pedagogical practices and considering new educational paradigms aligned with current demands.

2 EDUCATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS: THE SHIFT TO REMOTE LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN BRAZIL

In March 2020, the Brazilian educational landscape faced an unprecedented challenge. The emergence of COVID-19 enforced a hasty migration from traditional classrooms to digital platforms. Educational institutions, from schools to universities, in the midst of a full academic calendar rhythm, found themselves needing to rapidly adapt to a completely different model from the traditional one.

In this context, the words of Paulo Freire (1979), who argued that "Education does not transform the world. Education changes people. People transform the world." (FREIRE 1979, p.84), have never been more relevant. Freire, a proponent of critical pedagogy, believed in the transformative potential of education. His thought prompts a reflection: how can education continue to be transformative amidst such disruptive changes? How can educators keep the flame of learning alive when traditional teaching spaces are altered?

Digital tools, like Zoom and Google Classroom, which previously played auxiliary roles in education, became central pillars of the educational process. However, this transition was not without challenges. Ivan Illich (1971), in his critique of the institutionalization of education in "Deschooling Society," argued that established educational systems are often unprepared for rapid adaptation to changes. This lack of preparedness was evident in the tumultuous transition to online teaching.

In this context, the adversity of access also came to the forefront. Research by Undime2 (2021) revealed that a significant portion of Brazilian students were on the margins of digital education, mainly due to a lack of infrastructure and internet access. Sir Ken Robinson (2006), a renowned educator and advocate for creativity in education, always emphasized the need for equitable education. In times of remote teaching, equity is not just about access to quality education but also about the availability of technological resources and connectivity.

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Educators also faced particular challenges. John Dewey (1916), philosopher and educator, emphasized the importance of adaptation and evolution in teaching. His thought resonates with the current situation: remote teaching required teachers to reconsider and reinvent their pedagogical practices. Historical resistance to technology in education was put to the test, and many educators found themselves compelled to embrace tools and methods that were previously viewed with skepticism.

In conclusion, the abrupt shift to digital teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil exposed several gaps in the educational system. However, it also demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of many educators and institutions. As the country moves towards a post-pandemic future, it is essential that the lessons learned during this turbulent period be incorporated to strengthen and enhance the educational system.

3 THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN REMOTE LEARNING: REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The relentless pursuit of understanding the term “experience” is central to comprehending the student’s journey in an academic environment, especially amidst the reality imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The philosophical concept of experience, as pointed out by BONDÍA (2002, p. 21), emerges from the Latin “experiri”, a provocation to test or to experiment. He emphasizes that "experience is what happens to us, what occurs, what affects us," distinguishing it from the mere passive observation of events.

In this landscape, higher education during the pandemic became fertile ground for investigating these concepts. The abrupt transition from in-person to remote learning brought to light questions about how students' experiences were being shaped and, more importantly, how they felt about these experiences. Indeed, as Vygotsky (1978) highlighted, learning is a social process. Interactions with the environment and others are essential for knowledge construction. However, remote learning challenged this established norm, leading many to feel isolated in their educational journeys.

Additionally, Bondía (2002) underscores the clear distinction between information and experience. In the modern academic context, although students are submerged in an ocean of information, thanks to the proliferation of technologies and communication media, this does not always translate into meaningful experiences. He asserts that "information is not experience,"
and our contemporary focus on information may limit our capacity to have genuine experiences. In an educational setting, this raises the question of whether students are merely storing information or truly engaging in a way that transforms information into experience.

A parallel can be drawn with the example of skydiving. One can have all the theoretical knowledge about skydiving, but without the actual experience, this knowledge remains superficial. Similarly, remote education presented similar challenges: How to ensure that students are not just consuming information but are also actively engaging, experiencing, and interacting with the content in a meaningful way?

This reflection leads us to an essential inquiry: How does students’ learning experience occur? Are they merely absorbing concepts? Or are they being encouraged to seek and share their own experiences, enriching the teaching-learning process? More deeply, is there reciprocity in the educational relationship? Is the student’s voice heard and valued?

Thus, “the student experience” is not merely about assimilating information, but reflects a complex interaction of learning, active participation, and introspection. Listening to and integrating students' experiences not only enriches the educational environment but also prepares reflective and engaged citizens for the contemporary and technological society in which we live.

### 4 REMOTE LEARNING: THE CHALLENGES AND ACTIVE LISTENING

The learning experience in remote education is, undeniably, different from that experienced in a face-to-face environment. This change extends beyond the mode of delivery of classes to the nature of interaction, the dynamics of classroom discussions, assessment, and the student's self-perception in relation to their learning.

One of the major challenges faced in remote learning is the feeling of isolation. Without the physical presence in a classroom, the bustling corridors, and casual moments of interaction, many students feel disconnected from the academic environment. In this context, the lack of rich interactions can compromise the educational process, turning it into a one-way system where the student becomes merely a receiver.

Beyond isolation, self-discipline and time management have become critical in remote education. Without the rigid structure of face-to-face classes and with numerous distractions at home, many students struggle to maintain focus and consistency in their studies. Howard Gardner (1993), in his theory of multiple intelligences, suggests that each individual has different ways
of learning. In remote education, without the immediate support of teachers and peers, adapting to these learning styles can be challenging.

However, there is a solution that can mitigate these challenges: active listening. The importance of listening to students has never been so critical. By understanding their concerns, anxieties, expectations, and suggestions, educators can adapt and innovate, creating a more inclusive and engaging remote learning experience. John Dewey (1938), a philosopher and educator, stressed the importance of practical experience in learning. By integrating the student's voice, we create a more meaningful educational experience based on real practices.

In conclusion, while remote teaching presents its inherent challenges, it also offers opportunities to rethink and reshape education. By adopting a student-centered approach, actively listening to their voices, and adapting to their needs, we can create an educational experience that not only informs but also engages, inspires, and transforms.

5 REMOTE LEARNING AND THE COHESION OF EDUCATIONAL THINKERS

The learning experience in remote education is markedly distinct from that experienced in a face-to-face environment. This transition is not merely a change in the mode of delivering classes but permeates the nature of interaction, the dynamics of discussions, and the student's self-assessment. Paulo Freire, in his critical pedagogy, emphasized the necessity of dialogue in education. He stated that "no one educates anyone, no one educates themselves, people educate each other, mediated by the world" (FREIRE, 1970, p. 81). In parallel, Lev Vygotsky, in developing his social constructivism theory, highlighted the importance of social interactions in knowledge construction (VYGOTSKY, 1978). Thus, the lack of face-to-face interaction can make the educational process tend to be more unilateral, with the student reduced to a passive receiver.

The feeling of isolation is amplified in remote education. Without the tangibility of the academic environment, many students feel disconnected. This distance, coupled with demands for self-discipline and time management, makes remote learning challenging. Howard Gardner, in postulating his theory of multiple intelligences, demonstrated that individuals have distinct modes of learning (GARDNER, 1983). On the other hand, Jean Piaget, in his theories of cognitive development, emphasized the stages individuals go through and how they influence
Given these differences and stages, transitioning to remote education without constant support from teachers and peers can be intricate.

However, active listening emerges as a powerful solution. Listening to students has become crucial, even more so in the current scenario. John Dewey, by emphasizing the importance of practical experience in learning, reminds us that education needs to be lively and meaningful (DEWEY, 1938). Simultaneously, Carl Rogers, in advocating student-centered learning, shows us that recognizing and valuing the individuality of the student is essential for an effective educational process (ROGERS, 1983). Thus, by integrating these thoughts, the necessity of placing the student at the center, respecting their experiences and feedback, is reinforced.

In summary, remote education, despite its challenges, offers us the chance to rethink pedagogy. By congregating insights from renowned educational thinkers and positioning the student as the protagonist, it is possible to shape a learning experience that is truly transformative.

6 PERCEPTIONS OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN REMOTE LEARNING: A NATIONAL SURVEY

We will use as a basis for understanding the perceptions of higher education students about their learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the research conducted by the Interdisciplinary Study and Research Group on Curriculum and Society (GEICS) at Mackenzie Presbyterian University (UPM). The survey was conducted using a questionnaire with 60 questions, through the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire was open from April to June 2020. The research includes the participation of 726 respondents from students in Brazil, with the majority from the Southeast region. To understand the profile of the students in this research, we will relate to the data presented. The first impactful finding of the research reveals that 54% of the students had never had contact with online classes and/or distance education before the quarantine.
This reveals the non-utilization of ICT resources by educational institutions, the lack of encouragement to use them, and the absence of adherence by educators. In a highly technological and globalized society where the job market increasingly demands experiences in using these resources, there still exists a gap and a paradigm that needs to be reinvented in pedagogical practices.

This data reflects on the initial approach of this article, confirming the impact of the non-use and lack of adherence to ICTs in the teaching-learning process. The pandemic itself clearly and directly revealed the lack of utilization of this technological resource and its implications. Another interesting finding from the research shows that 78% of teachers, when migrating to the online environment, use as teaching tools miscellaneous texts (PDF, Word, etc.) and 75% use PowerPoint presentations or slide shows. That is, the work environment changed (online classes), but the posture of the educators and the tools they use remain the same as in the face-to-face classroom. Therefore, even though the environment changed, teaching practices did not evolve towards the use of ICTs.
One of the digital tools that could have been used in online environments, such as collaborative activities, had a low percentage of use, such as wikis at 2.20% or collaborative murals at 6.30%. Gamification through games was only 3.20%. The item for research or databases (Scielo, IBGE, Scientific Societies, etc.) was used by 20% of students, according to their feedback. In this scenario, how is the student's learning experience affected? Is the environment conducive to this practice? The interaction between teachers and students is also hindered by the lack of practice in using these technological tools.

This environment became unfavorable for the students' learning experience. Between 47% to 62% of students reported experiencing some negative feeling: insecurity, disorientation, and/or overload. 65.3% of the students said that their performance decreased, and of these, 28% attributed it to the lack of dialogue with teachers.
By revisiting the concepts of affective and cognitive domains, we can relate to the impact of affectivity on the teaching-learning process. Among these concepts, the one highlighted by Bloom et al. (1974, p. 23) stands out, which states:

"When one domain varies positively or negatively, the other varies in the same direction. Thus, when there are favorable interests and attitudes on the part of the student to carry out some cognitive learning, it occurs more easily, quickly, and effectively, with the reverse also being true."
Thus, the impact caused to students by the change from a physical classroom environment to a remote one, using this new tool without pedagogical didactics, and the fear of the pandemic negatively interfered with their performance as students and in their teaching-learning process.

However, the research also revealed important points about students' perceptions when some teachers used technological resources different from face-to-face classes, as well as some opinions about what attitudes they expected from their teachers. Some survey questions allowed for manual inclusion of responses by participants, and we list a few of them below:

| “Teachers who do not master content nor technology and many students who either do not know or are not interested in learning about technologies.” | “Significantly less developed debates, lower quality, difficulty in understanding everyone due to network issues or even difficulty in using the resources.” |
| “I wish the teachers / coordination / college were as understanding in normal life as they are now.” | “I wish the teaching process had fewer teachers with rigid didactics, but rather with better didactics and preparation.” |
| “Outdated and tedious pedagogical practices.” | “More empathy from people, even with the use of technology.” |
| “That students were listened to more.” | “More empathy and tolerance from both students and teachers.” |
| “That teachers have a more humane perspective towards their students, trying to understand their limitations and help in some way! I think human development is extremely necessary.” | “I would like teachers to be more understanding after the pandemic, not just during it. I'm not talking about making assessments easier, but about being understanding regarding issues of anxiety and panic, which are often treated as trivial rather than as a serious condition.” |
| “I would like teachers to focus on using more resources, making the classes more dynamic.” | “Greater empathy from teachers, as has been happening in the online mode.” |

Source: GEICS - Mackenzie (UPM), Students' Perceptions of Their Learning. (2020)

From the students' accounts in the survey, certain indicators emerge that they miss or are not sufficiently provided with, which include empathy, the need for greater use of technological resources, and more dynamic classes. These are important points for reflection on teaching practices and how students perceive their learning experience, presenting paths for better practice in the teaching-learning process. The students' experiences of feeling a lack of empathy, stress, fear, and insecurity reflect on the acquisition and renewal of their knowledge. Beyond pedagogical points, better adherence to digital resources, and affectivity, we can consider analyzing the student's experience in their learning.
Teacher preparation and training are important in this process. According to Cunha (2012) on teacher training:

"Training that provides, beyond the development of so-called technical competencies, a set of cross-curricular and social competencies, which promote: capabilities, personal qualities, a sense of responsibility, flexibility, creativity, the integral development of the trainee and that make them open to change, in other words, that make them aware of the fundamental elements of their field of work so that they can embark on their professional journey with a minimum of security" (CUNHA, 2009, p. 1051).

Educating for contemporaneity requires an effort to innovate and adopt new practices, and this process of change can cause resistance among participants. Incorporating new routines is a process that demands time and effort; however, when well planned and executed, it has great potential for success.

As Libâneo points out:

"The new teacher would need, at a minimum, a more expanded general culture, the capacity to learn how to learn, competence to know how to act in the classroom, communicative skills, mastery of informational language, knowledge of how to use media, and the ability to integrate classes with media and multimedia" (LIBÂNEO, 2012, p. 4).

The author's assertion about the profile of the new teacher aligns with the observations made by the students in their expectations of what constitutes a good teacher. Such data serve as a reflection on the practices adopted, which can lead to discussions on better methods and paths for how to innovate and adapt to the demands of contemporary society.

7 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this article was to present the gaps that exist in the higher education sector from the students' perspective, who are the main actors in this teaching-learning process. It demonstrated the negative impact on their learning in an affective manner, as well as exposing the structural problems of the sector and the country, such as the low penetration of digital resources, connectivity issues, and lack of access to or quality of internet.

The research conducted by the Interdisciplinary Study and Research Group on Curriculum and Society (GEICS) at Mackenzie Presbyterian University (UPM) revealed through the students' accounts what attitudes they expect from their teachers and how they see a better offering in the quality of education.
The concept of the word "experience" and its relation to the "student experience" was presented. The importance of the student exercising experience as a way to integrate knowledge, information, and opinion in their teaching-learning process was emphasized.

The opinions presented by the students in the research stand out as a form of reflection on teaching practices and the demands that contemporary society impacts on their activities. The evolution of digital technology and communication presses for new teaching methods and their active and effective use by teachers, as the students themselves will use these resources in their future professional activities.

Thus, it becomes clear the need for a new discussion on higher education teaching practices, while it is necessary to reflect on how the impact of the pandemic can accelerate the integration of digital culture in pedagogical practices in search of a quick and concrete response for the continuation of the evolution of the teaching-learning process, in a way that is in tune with the times of the society in which it educates and lives.
REFERENCES


