

A preview of the study - Face to face and blended learning modality in university teacher training: quality as perceived by students

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Abstract

In the last decades Spanish higher education has been confronted with two key challenges: adapting to a globalized society with diverse student needs and ensuring quality teaching across different modalities. This study examines student satisfaction, a crucial quality indicator, comparing face-to-face and blended learning approaches. The analysis focuses on annual satisfaction surveys from Primary Education students between 2020 and 2024. Key academic variables, such as teaching methods and resources, were assessed.

Keywords: quality of education, university, distance learning, undergraduate student, resource assessment.

*The researchers thanks The UCAM Catholic University of Murcia for contributing material to the study. This research is a contribution within the European+ IQAinAR (Internal Quality Assurance in Azerbaijan & Russia)

Introduction

Quality assurance in university education, especially in Europe through the Bologna Process, has gained considerable importance. In Spanish higher education, the Internal Quality Assurance system is vital for constant enhancement, fostering academic excellence as well as meeting the expectations of stakeholders such as students, employers, and society (ANECA, 2021). Student satisfaction surveys are commonly used to evaluate the quality of academic programs, measuring aspects such as academic performance, learning environment, and teaching staff. To offer academic excellence, university programs and teaching modalities change and expand, therefore these instruments become essential. The increasing use of new technologies has broadened access to education, but questions remain about whether these methods meet the required quality standards.

Teaching modalities

Due to the upcoming challenges universities must adapt their teaching methods to the digital era and evolving social and technological demands. In response to increasing student preference, many institutions have expanded their programs to include hybrid and online learning modalities. Blended and online learning offers flexibility, allowing students to access content anytime and anywhere, which improves learning autonomy and satisfaction. Studies by García Aretio (2001), Sun et al (2008), and Zambrano (2016) confirm that course flexibility positively impacts student satisfaction by enabling them to balance education with personal and professional responsibilities.

In comparison, face-to-face courses mainly cater to first-time university students around age 20, while hybrid and online courses attract older students, often working or facing personal constraints. The hybrid model is particularly beneficial as it combines online flexibility with direct interaction with lecturers (Martyn, 2003).

Shifting from face-to-face to hybrid or online teaching requires lecturers to adjust their pedagogical approach and students to adapt to new instructional methods and assessments. While virtual learning environments offer attractive opportunities, their adoption in HE has been rather slow.

Additionally, distance and hybrid education demand greater student autonomy, requiring effective time management, task organization, and self-regulation. Unlike traditional classrooms with direct supervision, virtual and hybrid settings require students to take a more active role in their learning process.

Quality Assessment in Higher Education – Satisfaction surveys

When discussing the achievement of excellence in higher education, Zineldin et al. (2011) highlight several key challenges, including academic structure, student profile, and support. Student feedback is crucial for quality assessment, with satisfaction surveys serving as key tools in Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) systems (Ardi et al., 2012). These surveys assess educational quality and teaching effectiveness, helping improve learning experiences.

Navarro Atúnez (2011) distinguishes two perspectives: students as customers, focusing on satisfaction and loyalty, and students as a product, measuring graduate employability. Therefore, we can say that positive or negative responses from students in terms of meeting their overall expectations go hand in hand with good customer management at universities. In Spain, satisfaction surveys evaluate academic expectations, resources, and institutional support. Marsh (2007) notes their reliability in assessing teaching effectiveness and program improvement.

Although we can also find critical voices about the usefulness of these questionnaires for students and other stakeholders, the number of authors who show their support is considerably higher.

At Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia (UCAM), satisfaction surveys align with ANECA's quality standards, systematically tracking educational quality. This study analyzes differences in survey results between face-to-face and blended learning students in Primary Education at UCAM.

Methodology

The sample includes 1,064 university students who participated in satisfaction surveys for the Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education. The number of students enrolled in face to face or hybrid learning modalities during the academic years 2020 to 2024 is nearly balanced, with a slightly higher percentage in the face-to-face modality.

Sample characteristics:

Students in face-to-face modality.

Students who have chosen face-to-face modality are mostly without professional responsibilities (98%) and reside in Murcia or nearby areas. The average age in this group is 23. Classes take place on campus in morning (9:00-14:30) or evening (15:00-20:30) sessions, following a theoretical-practical approach with lectures, in-class activities, and debates.

Course materials are primarily accessed through CANVAS, where students submit assignments and contact lecturers. However, most queries are resolved in person during classes or tutoring sessions. Lecturers may expand on provided materials during class while following the established syllabus.

Assessment consists of two main parts: theoretical exams taken on-site and practical assignments demonstrating content application. Some practical tasks are completed in class and later submitted via CANVAS for record-keeping.

Students of blended learning modality

Students who have chosen the blended learning modality have an average age of 33, with 80% employed and residing across Spain. Classes are held weekly via videoconference, where lecturers clarify complex topics. Students primarily study autonomously, using CANVAS for accessing materials, recorded sessions, and lecturer interactions. It is important to mention that to adapt to students' necessities in this modality the classes count with only 25% of the lecture hours in the face-to-face modality, which means content is presented in a much more condensed and direct way.

The Virtual Campus serves as the main communication and content hub, ensuring consistency across courses. Students submit assignments through CANVAS, participate in discussion forums, and engage in critical debates. CANVAS also provides discussion forums and instant messaging for queries.

Assessment includes three parts: theoretical exams taken in person, practical assignments submitted online, and participation in forums and reflection exercises to foster interaction and debate.

Instruments

To evaluate student satisfaction, a survey with 15 Likert-scale questions (ranging from "Very dissatisfied" to "Very satisfied") was conducted. Only questions relevant to differentiating teaching modalities and assessing academic quality were selected, excluding those about general university operations.

The chosen items include coordination of courses, teaching materials, methodologies, assessment systems, Virtual Campus functionality, overall satisfaction with teaching staff, available resources, and general satisfaction with the bachelor's degree.

Methodology

The procedure at UCAM for collecting and analysing information from satisfaction surveys is organized as follows. The UCAM Vice-Rector's Office for Quality and Academic Planning oversees the drafting and annual review of satisfaction surveys. Once approved, surveys are distributed via the Laurea virtual platform. Faculty managers inform students through Virtual Campus, email, and a mobile app about the process and deadlines to fill in the questionnaires. It is important to mention that surveys are conducted at the end of the academic year when students can evaluate their entire program. After the submission deadline, the university's statistics unit analyses the results, which are then shared with the Vice-Rector's Office and faculty heads to implement necessary improvements.

Preview of the results

To state a hypothesis and in line with the ever-growing demand for study places in both modalities in the mentioned degree, it is to believe that the satisfaction surveys should give a deeper insight into the present teaching and learning settings and lead the way to a constant improvement in academic achievement.

As a preview of the final study we can confirm that the results obtained show a slightly higher satisfaction level in the face-to-face modality than in the hybrid modality. Following the findings of Castle and Mcguire (2010), this confirms the importance of interaction between student and lecturer and the social interaction

between students. Moreover, students in the face-to-face modality showed not only the highest degree of satisfaction with the role of the lecturer but also with the resources they had at hand.

Whereas the highest degree of satisfaction in the blended learning mode received the assessment system and the effectiveness of the virtual campus, the main tool for a successful hybrid learning environment.

Summarizing, one can say that student satisfaction surveys provide an important tool for the constant improvement of teaching and learning settings in the two presented modalities and allow a deeper understanding of students' needs and the effectiveness of the actual academic offer.

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