University Students' Perspectives of Face-to-face and Online Education: A Language Learning Comparison Prior and During Covid-19

Walter Miguel Fernandez Malpartida
Prof., Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas, Peru, *pctrwfer@upc.edu.pe*

On the onset of Covid-19 most higher education institutions worldwide responded rapidly by changing and adapting their academic programs to online scenarios, language courses were not immune to these changes. It has been noted that when it comes to evaluating the construct online education most studies analyze it considering a group of courses instead of focusing on one only. What is more, little research has tried to compare both the traditional and online language learning. Consequently, this study has the purpose to understand university students´ perception from both face-to-face language education prior to covid-19, and online language education during the covid-19 lockdown in Peru which is reported as a developing economy. The population of the study belongs to a private university, the sample group consisted of 22 undergraduate students participating in an online English course. The study followed a qualitative approach. Essays were chosen as the main instrument to collect information which was analyzed using both the thematic and content analysis as to identify and organize common patterns. The findings revealed that students reported a variety of advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face education before the covid-19 lockdown. Learners also highlighted the most common advantages and drawbacks from online education during the Covid-19 lockdown. Half of participants reported a preference for face-to-face instruction, while the remaining participants were in favor of online education and merging both learning environments. Although the study results are not generalizable, they can be compared with the study findings from other higher education institutions located in developed economies.

Keywords: higher education, face-to-face, in-person, language learning, synchronous, online education, covid-19

INTRODUCTION

Online education has been growing rapidly in the last years and has become a panacea for the predominately face-to-face educational sector since the emergence of covid-19 around the world (Kamble et al., 2021; Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2020). In mid-March 2020 the Peruvian government declared an estate of emergency involving mandatory lockdowns. The restrictions heavily affected the delivery of traditional face-to-face education in kindergartens, schools, institutes, and universities. Therefore, every

educational institution implemented online programs. Most of the private institutions had already some experience, prior to the pandemic, adopting online and blended modules in comparison to the public sector. Dhawan (2020) notes that in times of crisis and disruption, adopting technology is an innovative solution to allow people to do both communicating and working without depending on face-to-face contact. Even though online instruction principles have never been generally established, covid-19 has promoted the global exchange of expertise and resources to allow students access to higher education. Online pedagogy is currently the focus of online education (Crawford et al., 2020). It is reported that e-learning success depends on the course content design, the professor and student interaction, and access to learning materials (Demuyakor, 2020). Furthermore, Tao et al. (2020) argue that students are expected to monitor their learning and participate as much as possible in online learning. According to Baber (2020) research has been conducted to see if e-learning is more effective than traditional learning when it comes to students' academic performance. Both learning environments offer advantages and present some limitations. Naik et al. (2021) point out that some faculties and students may not be fully prepared for the online learning transition which can affect the learning quality. Chaturvedi et al. (2021) state that online education is not only an alternative but also similar to conventional education, and that online instruction can also be perceived as better than nothing. Notwithstanding, it is reported that students´ learning can be easier if the online courses are well-structured; learners achieve the same or slightly higher grades in an online scenario (Idrizi et al., 2021).

Recent research has reported language students´ positive reviews, but also negative comments from their online learning experience during the Covid-19 pandemic (Fernandez-Malpartida, 2021; Rofiah et al., 2022). Additionally, Lin et al. (2017) point out that language courses taught online are the most challenging in comparison to other courses. Little research has explored specifically students' perception of online language courses when compared to face-to-face language modules. Most studies tend to analyze a variety of subjects or disciplines which do not entirely focus on language courses only, for instance: a meta-analysis study from the USA explored the characteristics of asynchronous and synchronous online education and face-to-face learning (Martin et al. 2021). Comparison of a variety of online courses taught at universities in South Korea and India (Baber, 2020). School and university students' perception of online courses in India (Chaturvedi et al., 2021). University students views of online courses in North Macedonia (Idrizi et al., 2021). Students' opinion of online learning and teaching in India (Naik et al., 2021). Undergraduate students from Ireland express their views of a sociology online course (Farrell & Brunton, 2020). University students from three countries (Portugal, Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates) provided their opinions of distance learning courses (Fidalgo et al., 2020). University students from the USA (from freshmen to graduate) reported their impressions of a variety of online courses (Van Wart et al., 2020). It is observed that most of those studies have been conducted in developed economies (Wang et al. 2019). Therefore, this study has included elements such as higher education, the comparison of face-to-face and online language education (in contrast to previous research) as well as the analysis of those constructs in a developing country as Peru (Pawlak & Kołodziejczak, 2020). Having stated this, this

study has the purpose to understand university students´ perception from both face-to-face English language education prior to covid-19, and online English language education during the covid-19 lockdown in 2020. These are the research questions:

1. Which are the most common advantages of a face-to-face English class before covid-19 lockdown?

2. Which are the most common disadvantages of a face-to-face English class before covid-19 lockdown?

3. Which are the most reported advantages of an online English class during covid-19 lockdown?

4. Which are the most reported disadvantages of an online English class during covid-19 lockdown?

5. Which learning experience is mostly preferred by undergraduate language students?

Literature Review

Online education

It has been reported that online learning is currently growing rapidly due to the internet technologies development, it allows a flexible access to higher education for learners who come from a variety of regions, backgrounds and remote locations (Farrell & Brunton, 2020). A new approach in pedagogy and specific skills have been used for online learning environments in contrast to traditional education (Kamble et al., 2021). It is reported that distance learning is applied similarly around the world in terms of organization and approach. It also allows learners and teachers to overcome geographical limitations, health issues and special needs. Furthermore, it requires to have appropriate computer efficiency and a legal framework (Burdina et al., 2019). Moreover, some of the most common examples of online learning are massive online open courses, blended, asynchronous as well as synchronous (Fidalgo et al., 2020).

The role of the digital educator

In online learning, both the course design and teacher´s class experience contribute to teacher´s presence perception. Teacher´s presence is also based on some factors such as class delivery, instructions, feedback and communication quality (Van Wart et al., 2020). Additionally, Burdina et al. (2019) state that since the face-to-face communication still generates a higher level of understanding and trust between the teacher and students, establishing communication through videoconferences can be motivating for students as they feel their teacher presence. Santoveña-Casal and Bernal-Bravo (2019) report that the interaction between the teacher, students and course content is essential in online courses so students achieve both positive academic performance and sense of belonging. On the other hand, Baber (2020) points out that the characteristics of online learning can lead to students feeling a lack of motivation and interest resulting in dropping out classes. In response to this issue, Dhawan (2020) claims that online educators are expected to be tech competent and create a variety of

appealing tasks which support both teaching and learning. While online education is imparted, teachers must consider five factors such as the course instruction and content, class interaction as well as students' motivation and mental health.

Synchronous and asynchronous online education

Fidalgo et al. (2020) note that the course content of an asynchronous environment is always available thanks to the internet. The course instructor facilitates communication between participants mainly through forums and e-mails. Lowenthal and Moore (2020) report that asynchronous text-based discussions are limited in terms of providing students nonlinguistic resources to communicate more precisely. It also seems to hinder social interaction and learning appropriately. However, including video-based activities may have the opposite effect. Additionally, Farrell and Brunton (2020) argue that using both online asynchronous activities such as forums and synchronous online lessons can enhance students' interaction and communication. On the other hand, Martin et al. (2021) notes that when it comes to synchronous online discussions, students increase their socio-emotional interactions, communication with peers, cooperation, sense of belonging and cognitive presence. Students 'academic performance in an online module does not significantly vary when compared to traditional face-to-face instruction, despite the latter being regarded as more effective than the former. Both synchronous and asynchronous modules can support students to successfully achieve their expected learning outcomes.

Opportunities and challenges

Among the strengths of online education, Dhawan (2020) points outs is its time and location flexibility, access to immediate feedback and interaction between students and the educator, and its capacity to offer education in case of natural disasters. However, there can be some drawbacks such as unexpected technical problems, confidence to participate, distraction, confusion, anxiety and frustration; these psychological factors have to be considered as part of the online learning experience. Naik et al. (2021) also suggest that online higher education comes with advantages and disadvantages for both professors and learners. Online lectures can be broadcasted lively to a wider audience which can be also recorded allowing revision and further analysis. On the other hand, the face-to-face and personalized conversations and mentoring are no longer possible. There can be tech issues which affect the internet connectivity, and it can take time to familiarize with online learning and assessment. Similarly, Crawford et al. (2020) claim that a fully online class can be challenging if home office space is not available. Academics depend on internet bandwidth, recording tools and their online skillsets to design virtual material. Remote locations and government surveillance policies can also affect students' access to virtual class content.

METHOD

A qualitative approach was chosen to analyze students´ perception of their face-to-face and online education. According to previous studies, qualitative techniques are useful when it comes to reporting students´ perception of traditional and online learning environments (Kamble et al. 2021; Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2020). The following sections

indicate the characteristics from the participants, data collection procedure and data analysis.

Participants

The population belongs to a Peruvian private university, Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas (UPC), which most popular majors are Management, Engineering and Humanities. Despite the pandemic, most students decided to enroll in the online courses both the first and second semester of 2020, most of them had already started studying their chosen majors before the pandemic. To graduate at UPC, students are expected to demonstrate being competent in English. Therefore, considering these aspects and previous studies with similar sample groups (Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Lee & Heinz, 2016), the non-probability, convenience sampling method was selected. The sample participants were part of an online intermediate English course called "Applied English I" which focuses on tourism and accommodation content; it was confirmed that all participants from this group had studied other English courses face-to-face at university since 2016, thus, they were suitable to respond the study instrument. Before the pandemic, Applied English I used to be taught in two in-person sessions, 2 and 3 hours per week. On the onset of the pandemic the course design and materials did not drastically change; however, two synchronous sessions were implemented for teaching lessons, Blackboard videoconferences, and there were asynchronous activities such as exams, Google Jamboard exercises and forums for evaluation purposes during the whole semester, 14 weeks. To register on this course, students are expected to present an intermediate English certificate or take a placement test offered at the university. Overall, there were 22 participants, 5 male and 17 female students; the study from Farrell & Brunton (2020) used a similar sample group as well. The participants studied either a major in Hospitality Management, Tourism Management or Gastronomy and Culinary Management; most of them reported being from 19 to 25 years old; they were enrolled in different academic years and some of them were about to graduate. It is assumed the participants belong to middle class families because of the average university' fees.

Data collection

Regarding instruments to collect data in qualitative studies, it is reported that open questions included in surveys have been used to describe students´ perceptions about online education (Lowenthal & Moore, 2020). Portfolio entries have been used to have written reports of students´ online learning experience (Farrell & Brunton, 2020). Moreover, the current study has taken into consideration the essay instrument, primarily used to analyze the two research questions of another study, one of them on language learners´ perception of a construct (Kashiha, 2018). Similarly, the study essay instructions were adapted from the essay format proposed by Lee & Heinz (2016): "Please reflect on your second language learning experiences. Describe what you have done to improve your English language skills. Why do you think some of the strategies or approaches were effective and why some of them were not very successful?" (p. 70). The former requested 250 words as minimum while the latter 300 words. Based on these examples, using an essay was chosen to report students ´perception from face-to-face

and online education. The data collection process was done the last week of November in 2020, by the end of the second semester. Students´ data was used anonymously and for academic purposes only. Learners had 8 hours to submit an online written task asynchronously. This task required students to write an essay with specific instructions: "Compare your current experience studying in an online English course versus a face-to-face English course before the pandemic. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of them? Which one would you recommend? Write from 280 to 350 words". Students were also instructed to submit their answers using a word document including their full names. After finishing, learners´ answers were automatically saved in the university platform. Each piece of writing was checked using the Blackboard "SafeAssign" tool to detect any percentage of coincidence with other sources and avoid plagiarism; all answers proved to be original since the level of coincidence was less than 8%, because of the instructions part. All essays were downloaded and labelled as M1, M2, M3, M4 & M5 (for male students) and F1, F2, F2…F17 (for female participants).

Data analysis

This study used the thematic analysis so as to examine and identify key patterns similar to other studies (Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Kamble et al. 2021; Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2020) as well as the content analysis to organize and present the information in tables (Nacak et al., 2020). The researcher read thoroughly each essay to identify and highlight key phrases and insights so as to establish some common patterns which were organized into five main themes or sections.

FINDINGS

Figure 1 summarizes the five main themes: (a) the most common advantages of face-to-face English class before Covid-19 (b) the most common disadvantages of face-to-face English class before Covid-19 (c) the most reported advantages of online English class after Covid-19 (d) the most reported disadvantages of online English class after Covid-19 (e) students' preference for online or face-to-face classes.
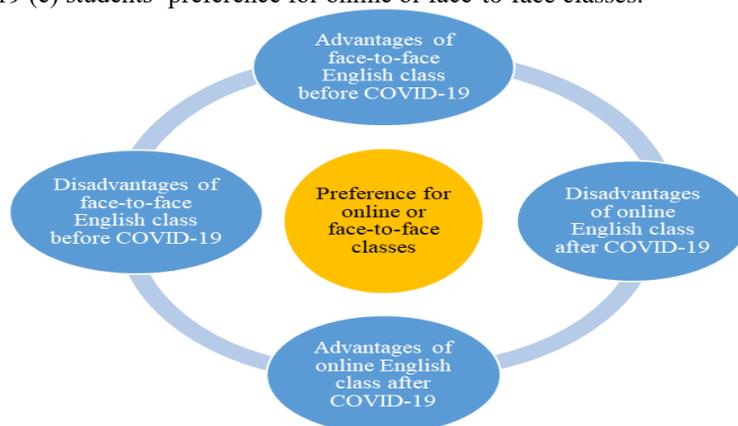

Figure 1
Thematic map

The thematic and content analysis was presented in tables and quotes. Each table summarized all of the participants´ reported key patterns; it was also supported by two participants´ quotes, both female and male, as to see evidence of the summarized views and observe some key descriptions.

The most common advantages of face-to-face English class before Covid-19

When it comes to the positive aspects of face-to-face language education in the English lessons, Table 1 shows that the vast majority of students feel that this type of instruction allows them to communicate better not only with their teacher but also their peers. Five views suggest that the target language is more effectively practiced, and class activities are more meaningful. Aspects such as better concentration, participation, class supervision and cell phone usage are important. Some specific views claim that this teaching scenario does not depend on technology, is healthier for our vision, prevents plagiarism, offers better emotional environment for learning, and networking opportunities.

Table 1
Advantages of face-to-face English class

Views	Participants
Better communication between teacher and classmates	F1, F3, F4, F5, F7, F9, F11, F12, F14, F15, F17, M2, M3, M4 & M5
Speaking in English all the time	F2, F14, F17, M1 & M5
Class activities can be more practical and real	F13, M3, M4 & M5
Concentration is better	F2, F3 & F12
Classes are more dynamic and entertaining	F3, F4 & F12
Cell phones are not allowed	F2 & F7
Student active participation	F5 & F9
Teacher active supervision of class activities	F17 & M1
It´s healthier, not being connected all day to a computer or cell phone	F7
No exams plagiarism	F2
Adequate infrastructure (lighting, use of projectors and ventilation)	F3
Classes are more efficient (without depending on video and audio)	F13
Greater emotional involvement in students	F13
Increasing your networking in the future	M3

Participant F17 highlights the importance of teacher presence for the language learning process: *"In a face-to-face class, we feel kind of pressure to speak in English, since we are being supervised by the professor in all moments. We are "forced" to do every activity the way the teacher tells us and with he decides, too. Talking and meeting your classmates is also easier than in an online course. Other advantage is that the teacher can see if the students are or are not participating or doing the group activities"* (participant F17).

Participant M3 points out that some of the positive aspects of in-person lessons are having dynamic and meaningful interaction with their peers, and teacher behavior is more spontaneous: *"You can interact with friends and share ideas, compare answers or argue about any topic related with the class. Furthermore, you have the opportunity not only to meet new friends who will increase your networking in the future but also experienced practical task that will help you to improve your professional skills. In face-to-face classes teachers shared their experience in real life and where they are working in a more genuine manner" (participant M3).*

The most common disadvantages of face-to-face English class before Covid-19

Regarding the drawbacks of face-to-face language education, Table 2 shows a great deal of students do not like spending their income and time on transportation as well as traffic congestion. They acknowledge the disadvantage of being absent since lessons are not recorded. Other isolated comments point out the necessity for an extra budget for food and printed materials. Also, getting exposed to robberies, and having to deal with shyness to talk to others in-person.

Table 2
Disadvantages of face-to-face English class

Views	Participants
Investment of time and money on transportation	F3, F4, F5, F7, F9, F12, F13, F15, F17, M1
Dealing with traffic congestion	F3, F9, F14, F15 & M4
Missing lessons because of absences	F1, F2, F3, F14 & F15
Missing key information from lessons	F11, F12, M5
Lessons are not recorded	F12, M5
Food extra budget	F7
Reliance on printed material (book)	F7
Less use of technology	F7
Stress and anxiety due to citizen insecurity	F15
Street robberies	M4
Feeling shy to talk to new people in class.	F17

Participants F12 and M4 reveal some of the key patterns form Table 2. The first quote highlights the lack of recorded lessons to review content. The second quote point out the traffic congestion and social insecurity that most students experience when travelling from home to their seats of learning: *"On the other hand, one of the disadvantages is the investment of time since you must travel to go to your study center. Another disadvantage is that in face-to-face classes, the class is taught only once, you do not have the classes recorded to review them again" (participant F12). "I consider that the negative part of the face-to-face classes is having to face the traffic of Lima, face the dangers of the streets, possible robberies, delays when agreeing to meetings with members of your study group, among other situations" (participant M4).*

The most reported advantages of online English class during Covid-19

Among the most striking advantages of online language education are time management, lesson recordings and avoidance of transportation according to Table 3. This is followed

by effective teaching structure, studying at home comfortably, audio material availability, using alternative ways to communicate such as the chat box, and using online resources and videos. Some students also point out the variety of online teaching platforms, the flexibility to connect from anywhere, and sense of responsibility for their learning. Some isolated views remind the advantage of having an online library, the opportunity to do both work and study at the same time, and registration to international lectures.

Table 3
Advantages of online English class

Views	Participants
Allowing to organize time better	F1, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F12, F16 & M1
Access to class recordings to review content	F1, F2, F3, F4, F11, F12, F15, M2 & M5
Avoiding the use of transportation	F1, F2, F8, F9, F10, F13, F16, M2 & M5
The teaching processes become more organized, quickly and effective.	F14, F15, M1 & M2
The comfort of staying at home	F10, F16 & F17
Access to listening tracks for unlimited practice	F4, F11 & M2
Facilitation of collaborative work and participation by using the chat box, debates and the raise your hand button.	F4, F13 & M2
Using extra resources such as YouTube, websites, apps and virtual dictionaries to practice during class	F6, F14 & M2
Lessons can be programed using a variety of platforms.	F14 & F15
Being able to study regardless of geographical distance and location differences.	F5 & F11
Becoming more self- disciplined and responsible	F6 & F7
Access to the university online library to review books and journals	F15
Possibility to work and study at the same time	F5
Possibility to be taught by international teachers	F5

This quote reveals some the themes indicated in Table 3. It remarks the feasibility to register for multiple online courses; therefore, working while studying is also possible: *"Some advantages when studying online is that it makes it easier for us to follow other courses or more courses in a university semester. If we organize our time according to our needs, we can take several courses and if it is possible to work at the same time, since it is not necessary to mobilize to get to our study center. Another advantage is not important where you are, it is possible to continue with your studies. Many of us do not live in the capital, where our study center is located. In addition, the advantage is not only for the students, since there is the possibility that you can study with very good teachers who are in other parts of the world"* (participant F5).

The following quote highlight the fact that online education guarantees lessons to be recorded helping both students and teachers. It is not necessary to spend time on transportation. It is possible to use extra online resources while studying. And new tools

to communicate are available: *"If you did not understand some points during the class, you can re-watch it later. And I believe this save some time for the teachers as well because they do not have to explain everything again if there is not enough time… We evade bunch of hours in traffic. All we have to do most of the times is just to walk to our computer is and turn it on. The past year we had to wake up earlier so we can get to the university on time. We can review other online materials during our classes to complement what we are studying. There is a more personalized learning experience since we can "raise our hands" virtually in a proper order. If you are a person that prefers not to speak in public, online classes could be a great advantage since you can just type your doubts in the chat box"* (participant M2).

The most reported disadvantages of online English class during Covid-19

In Table 4 it is seen most students agree that there are some negative aspects of online instruction. The most frequent problem is poor interaction and communication among peers. The second mostly reported difficulty is internet connection issues. Procrastination, unsuitable tech equipment and poor communication with the teacher are major issues as well. This is followed by not having a suitable environment for studying and dealing with noise at home. A few comments point out the lighting for studying, time management, learning experience, plagiarism, and homework overload.

Table 4
Disadvantages of online English class

Views	Participants
Limited interaction and communication with peers	F1, F6, F7, F9, F10, F11, F12, F13, F14, F15, F16, F17, M1 & M4
Unstable or lack of internet connection	F3, F4, F5, F7, F8, F10, F11, F13, F16, M2, M4 & M5
Getting distracted (procrastination)	F2, F4, F5, F7, F10, M2, M4 & M5
Lack of proper equipment such as microphones	F2, F5, F8, F10, F13, M2 & M4
Limited interaction and communication with the teacher	F6, F8, F11, F15 & M1
Inappropriate environment for studying	F3 & F9
Noise caused by family members	F3 & F9
Inappropriate lighting for studying	F3
Feeling of time shortage	F4
Leaving class without fully knowing the topics taught.	F4
Test plagiarism	F14
Excessive tasks (homework)	M4

Participant 10 reports that getting distracted is a problem, speaking opportunities with peers is difficult, the equipment and internet connectivity does not work sometimes: *"The main difference of studying English online and no longer in person is the ease with which one can be distracted. Despite I make an effort to pay full attention, the distractions of being in the comfort of your home are quite strong. Therefore, you need*

to establish certain rules to be able to work better; like having a specific space to work other than the bed. Also, another big difference is the ease of practicing speaking with classmates, it is something that is not so dynamic in virtual classes… In addition, many have equipment with some technical problems such as the microphone does not work or the connection goes away. Which further limits the flow of the class" (participant F10). Similarly, participant M5 asserts that students getting distracted and poor connectivity can hinder the online learning experience: *"Studying English online can be a bit more complicated due to the distractions that arise at home. Connection problems also affect your learning in class because you can miss certain important points when connection problems occur"* (participant M5).

Students' learning experience preference

It is revealed that 50% of the participants prefer face-to-face education (See Table 5). 7 students (32%) prefer online education; 3 participants (14%) are in favor of mixing both; and 1 participant, F7 (5%) did not state a clear preference for any learning environment. Students favoring in person education believe that its main advantages allow them to be taught with a better and convenient methodology, to have more interactive and enjoyable activities such as dialogs and pronunciation tasks, to meet more people, to have a dynamic interaction with peers and the instructor, to practice better and learn the target language, to improve students' skills in the target language, and to improve their soft skills. Other reported advantages are avoiding distraction and not spending too much time in front of a computer. On the other hand, the participants who reported preferring online instruction justified their choice by claiming that it improves time management to study, work and become more responsible, it allows people to adapt to the new normal, it allows students to review class recordings and useful content regarding their major. Additionally, it can be cheaper than traditional face-to-face courses and people can find online courses for free. Students favoring both learning environments pointed out that interacting in person and having access to lecture recordings is beneficial for their language learning. Although the pedagogical course design is crucial, whether face-to-face or online, so is students´ commitment with it.

Table 5
Students' learning experience preference

In favor of face-to-face education	In favor of online education	In favor of both
"I consider that an English course should be carried out in person, as I believe that it is the best alternative to learn and have a more fluent and good-to-understand English, since in online there are means of distraction that hinder that objective" (F2). "I recommend face-to-face classes, since they are more dynamic and entertaining. Also, it is very tiring to be in front of a computer for several hours every day" (F3). "I would recommend the face-to-face English course because has a better learning method and is more interactive when practicing dialogues and pronunciation" (F8). "I would recommend face-to-face classes, since I had the opportunity to meet more people, practice my English both with my classmates and with the teacher at any time." (F13). "What I would recommend would be to study face-to-face because it gives you more advantages" (F14). "I consider that studying in person is the option that, for me, has more positive factors than negative ones." (F15). "I prefer face to face classes because they are more enjoyable, convenient and I feel like I learn better in that way" (F16). "For me, face-to-face courses are the best way to learn a language since you feel that you need to use English all the time and try to participate even more" (F17). "I recommend the face-to-face English course class because it is way more interactive and dynamic with the professor and classmates and this is important to learn and practice better this language" (M1). "I miss face-to-face classes, I feel that learning is much more dynamic and directive" (M3). "I consider that having a face-to-face class is better since it potentially improves the students' skills, the interaction between classmates and teachers improves the soft skills of each student and the situations that are experienced during a face-to-face class" (M4).	"I really liked the online classes because I was able to take advantage of my time... In fact, face-to-face classes help us to have a relationship with teachers and classmates, but due to the circumstances we can only adapt to this new reality and get the most out of it" (participant F1). "I recommend talking the English online lessons. First of all, it´s cheaper than face to face classes. Secondly, there are many free English courses on the internet" (F6). "I would recommend that the classes be in the virtual mode because they facilitate study time not only for university students but also for people who work and want to continue studying a language" (F9). "Full time virtual classes were a new topic but towards the end of this year I have realized that it is convenient for the flexibility of my working hours" (F10). "I would recommend online classes because if you work and study at the same time, this type of class will help you save time but you must be responsible, practice a lot more and ask when you have any questions" (F12). "I would rather to take online English lessons because I have some previous knowledge of the language. Furthermore, I love the fact that I can arrange my time base in my availability and that if I miss a class, I can watch it later" (M2). "I consider that it is better to study English now and take advantage of our time at home to learn something new and useful for our professional future" (M5).	"I would recommend 50% of both modalities because you have the opportunity to see the classes again and in person to learn English better by speaking in a group". (F4). "Online and face-to-face education depend on many factors for a person to choose how they will study. Likewise, it not only depends on the pedagogical structure of the course, but also on the student's commitment to follow up on their course" (F5). "I would recommend the Online English Course and with some face-to-face classes, because having the teacher's explanation recorded is vital for the student" (F11).

DISCUSSION

The study has focused on reporting university students´ perceptions from both face-to-face and online language education. This section discusses aspects such as the most common advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face English language education before the emergence of Covid-19. On the other hand, it is also discussed the most reported advantages and disadvantages of online English language education during the Covid-19 lockdown. Furthermore, it is analyzed the learning experience mostly preferred by the study participants.

Advantages of traditional face-to-face English instruction before Covid-19.

The study participants predominantly reported that communication with their peers and the teacher is more effective in a face-to-face language course. This is followed by other aspects such as using the target language in class, having a better learning experience because of the class activities and active participation, and avoiding distractions. Kamble et al. (2021) argue that students´ participation in class is greatly affected by their teacher´s physical presence. Furthermore, teachers' presence is usually represented by their level of communication skills when it comes to lecturing, giving feedback and instructions (Van Wart et al., 2020). It has also been acknowledged as advantages that language teachers supervise the class activities, cellphones are restricted, there is no plagiarism, adequate infrastructure and equipment for studying, lesson delivery efficiency, emotional engagement, and networking opportunities.

Disadvantages of traditional face-to-face English instruction before Covid-19.

Even though conventional face-to-face education is still perceived as more effective than online education (Martin et al., 2021), it certainly has some striking limitations when compared to the latter. The study results show that the main problem with in-person language learning is that it depends mainly on transport to the seat of learning which can be time-consuming, stressful, and dangerous because of street robberies. This can also lead to learners arriving late or being absent. In this learning scenario, most lessons are not recorded, so students must be concentrated to avoid missing important information. Other reported issues are the extra budget needed for food and materials, scarce use of technology in class as well as language students' shyness to interact in person with new people. Overall, as reported by Idrizi et al. (2021) time and space play a major role when it comes to face-to-face education.

Positive aspects of online English education during Covid-19.

According to the study results some of the most positive aspects of being part of an online language class are time management, class recordings and not depending on transport. These advantages are also reported in other similar studies (Dhawan, 2020; Demuyakor, 2020; Fernandez-Malpartida, 2021). Language learners also value the technological tools such as the chat box, emoticons, videocalls and debate activities to communicate in class. Other advantages are being at home while learning; using tech resources such as online dictionaries, Youtube, academic websites and platforms; avoiding geographical limitations to connect with peers and the language teacher;

becoming more autonomous and responsible for learning; it is feasible to work and study simultaneously; and participation in international lectures. Some of these findings are also reported in the literature, for example, self-regulation and self-discipline are associated to online learning (Fidalgo et al., 2020). People can work and study at the same time in a online scenario (Crawford et al., 2020). A similar study (Torres & Ortega-De la Cruz, 2022) also reported the benefits of remote learning such as avoiding diseases, viral infections and pollution, spending more time with family, having more time for resting, computer skills development, availability to online resources and class recordings, and learning independently.

Negative aspects of online English education during Covid-19.

The study findings reveal that the most noticeable drawback of online instruction is unsuccessful interaction between peers and their teacher. Chaturvedi et al. (2021) argue that interaction between students and teachers needs more attention and educators must have access to digital skills training. Moreover, the higher the level of interaction and collaboration in class, the higher the social presence among peers (Van Wart et al., 2020). Other reported negative aspects are the poor connectivity quality, lack of concentration, noisy environment and inadequate infrastructure, equipment and lighting have also been identified in other studies (Dhawan, 2020; Fernandez-Malpartida, 2021). What is more, overload of assignments and plagiarism cases can demotivate students from online language courses. Studying at home can trigger stress and dissatisfaction with distance education (Peker Ünal, 2021). Similary, Aqdas et al. (2023) have also highlighted that in the online scenario students do not interact much; they can become easily distracted and tend to deteriorate their mental well-being.

University students´ preferred learning environment.

It is crystal clear that half of the study participants prefer in-person classes. This outcome could be explained by the students' predominant background experience on face-to-face interaction which makes them biased towards it as suggested by Fidalgo et al. (2020). Moreover, students' perception of teacher´s stronger presence in a face-to-face environment in contrast to an online scenario may also incline them to favor the former (Kamble et al. (2021; Van Wart et al., 2020). It was also revealed that a third of the participants are in favor of fully online education, and the remaining participants believe in combining both ways of instruction. Furthermore, it has been reported that the main factors that affect students' satisfaction with online courses are the teacher role, course design, course evaluation, and types of learning activities. In the words of Lowenthal and Moore (2020) online educators tend to adapt face-to-face interactive activities for remote lessons; and learning as well as satisfaction depend on using engaging activities in class.

When comparing both the synchronous online and face-to-face learning, Martin et al. (2021) argue that students' performance and grades in both means of instructions report similar results. Thus, online learning can work as effectively as conventional instruction. Even though online education is still perceived as an emergency policy instead of a long-term approach (Kamble et al., 2021), it is worth considering Chaturvedi et al.

(2021) views who suggest that once COVID-19 is under control educational institutions should analyze more in depth the sudden transition experience to online instruction and keep on investing on it for both contribute to students´ learning experience and prepare for future scenarios. Similarly, Van Wart et al. (2020) point out that if institutions guarantee online course quality and instructors cater for interactive activities then students may be prone to register without hesitation. It is noted by Idrizi et al. (2021) that online learning is expected to grow even in a post-COVID-19 scenario.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This study not only confirmed the most common assumptions about face-to-face and online language education in a higher education institution in Peru, but also revealed language learners' reasons to choose one type of instruction over the other. Although the results are somewhat positive for both learning environments, they cannot be generalized since this is a qualitative study in nature. However, the study has contributed to the literature by evaluating both constructs online and face-to-face education focusing on a language course. The study findings can also be analyzed and compared with other similar studies from both developed and developing economies.

Language learners are still convinced that returning to a face-to-face scenario would be more beneficial for their academic experience contradicting some of their reported negative views of it. This can be the result of nostalgia, familiarization, and predominant previous experience with traditional in-person instruction. Online language courses can provide the necessary tools to promote students' interaction, effective communication, and guarantee teacher presence through videoconferences. Furthermore, this study is quite significant since it has been more than two years that Peruvian universities adopted or switched to online education, but students´ overall experience with it seems to have changed very little.

There are as expected some limitations to take into consideration; first, the study participants were young university students, studying a language course, thus, younger or older groups may report different views about in-person and online language learning. Second, the study participants were studying majors in Tourism, Accommodation and Gastronomy; students from other fields such as Law, Engineering or Medicine may report different views. Third, including a more balancing number of female and male participants may have a different effect on the constructs analysis. Finally, even though the chosen non-probability sample group shed more light from two teaching and learning contexts, perhaps a quantitative probability sample group could include new constructs to the study and identify other findings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Aqdas, S., Ahmed, A., & Soomro, M. A. (2023). Exploring the impact of online classes on students' performance during Covid-19: Voices from Pakistan. *International Journal of Instruction, 16*(1), 753-766. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2023.16142a

Baber, H. (2020). Determinants of students' perceived learning outcome and satisfaction in online learning during the pandemic of COVID-19. *Journal of Education and E-Learning Research, 7*(3), 285-292. doi: 10.20448/journal.509.2020.73.285.292

Burdina, M.G., Krapotkina, I. E., & Nasyrova, L. G. (2019). Distance Learning in Elementary School Classrooms: An Emerging Framework for Contemporary Practice. *International   Journal   of   Instruction,   12*(1),   1-16. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2019.1211a

Crawford, J., Butler-Henderson, K., Rudolph, J., Malkawi, B., Glowatz, M., Burton, R., Magni, P. & Lam, S. (2020). COVID-19: 20 countries' higher education intra-period digital pedagogy responses. *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching, 3*(1), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2020.3.1.7

Chaturvedi, K., Vishwakarma, D. K., & Singh, N. (2021). COVID-19 and its impact on education, social life and mental health of students: A survey. *Children and youth services review, 121*, 105866, 1-6. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105866

Demuyakor, J. (2020). Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Online Learning in Higher Institutions of Education: A Survey of the Perceptions of Ghanaian International Students in China. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies, 10*(3), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.29333/ojcmt/8286

Dhawan, S. (2020). Online learning: A panacea in the time of COVID-19 crisis. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems, 49*(1), 5-22. doi: 10.1177/0047239520934018

Farrell, O., & Brunton, J. (2020). A balancing act: a window into online student engagement experiences. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 17*(1), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-020-00199-x

Fernandez-Malpartida, W. M. (2021). Language learning strategies, English proficiency and Online English Instruction Perception during Covid-19 in Peru. *International Journal of Instruction*, 14(4), 155-172. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2021.14410a

Fidalgo, P., Thormann, J., Kulyk, O., & Lencastre, J. A. (2020). Students' perceptions on distance education: A multinational study. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 17*(1), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-020-00194-2

Kamble, A., Gauba, R., Desai, S., & Golhar, D. (2021). Learners' Perception of the Transition to Instructor-Led Online Learning Environments: Facilitators and Barriers During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 22*(1), 199-215. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v22i1.4971

Kashiha, H. (2018). Malaysian ESL Students' Metadiscourse in Essay Writing. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies, 8*(3), 193-201. https://doi.org/10.12973/ojcmt/2650

Kumi-Yeboah, A., Kim, Y., Sallar, A. M., & Kiramba, L. K. (2020). Exploring the Use of Digital Technologies from the Perspective of Diverse Learners in Online Learning Environments. *Online Learning, 24*(4), 42-63. https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v24i4.2323

Lee, J., & Heinz, M. (2016). English Language Learning Strategies Reported By Advanced Language Learners. *Journal of International Education Research (JIER), 12*(2), 67-76. https://doi.org/10.19030/jier.v12i2.9629

Lin, C. H., Zhang, Y., & Zheng, B. (2017). The roles of learning strategies and motivation in online language learning: A structural equation modeling analysis. *Computers & Education, 113*, 75-85. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2017.05.014

Lowenthal, P.R., & Moore., R.L. (2020). Exploring student perceptions of Flipgrid in online courses. *Online Learning, 24*(4), 28-41. https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v24i4.2335

Martin, F., Sun, T., Turk, M., & Ritzhaupt, A. D. (2021). A Meta-Analysis on the Effects of Synchronous Online Learning on Cognitive and Affective Educational Outcomes. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 22*(3), 205-242. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v22i3.5263

Nacak, A., Bağlama, B., & Demir, B. (2020). Teacher Candidate Views on the Use of YouTube for Educational Purposes. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies, 10*(2), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.29333/ojcmt/7827

Naik, G. L., Deshpande, M., Shivananda, D. C., Ajey, C. P., & Manjunath Patel, G. C. (2021). Online Teaching and Learning of Higher Education in India during COVID-19 Emergency Lockdown. *Pedagogical Research, 6*(1), 2-14. https://doi.org/10.29333/pr/9665

Pawlak, K., & Kołodziejczak, M. (2020). The role of agriculture in ensuring food security in developing countries: Considerations in the context of the problem of sustainable food production. *Sustainability, 12*(13), 1-20. doi:10.3390/su12135488

Peker Ünal, D. (2021). Factors affecting study habits in higher education during the covid-19 pandemic. *Anatolian Journal of Education, 6*(2), 109-124. https://doi.org/10.29333/aje.2021.629a

Rofiah, N. L., Aba Sha'ar, M. Y. M., & Waluyo, B. (2022). Digital divide and factors affecting English synchronous learning during covid-19 in Thailand. *International Journal of Instruction*, 15(1), 633-652. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2022.15136a

Santoveña-Casal, S., & Bernal-Bravo, C. (2019). Explorando la influencia del docente: Participación social en Twitter y percepción académica. *Comunicar: Revista Científica de Comunicación y Educación, 27*(58), 75-84. https://doi.org/10.3916/C58-2019-07

Tao, J., Zheng, C., Lu, Z., Liang, J. C., & Tsai, C. C. (2020). Cluster analysis on Chinese university students' conceptions of English language learning and their online self-regulation. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 36*(2), 105-119.

Torres, R. A. O., & Ortega-Dela Cruz, R. A. (2022). Remote learning: Challenges and opportunities for educators and students in the new normal. *Anatolian Journal of Education, 7*(1), 83-92. https://doi.org/10.29333/aje.2022.717a

Van Wart, M., Ni, A., Medina, P., Canelon, J., Kordrostami, M., Zhang, J., & Liu, Y. (2020). Integrating students' perspectives about online learning: a hierarchy of factors. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 17*(1), 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-020-00229-8

Wang, C., Ghadimi, P., Lim, M. K., & Tseng, M. L. (2019). A literature review of sustainable consumption and production: A comparative analysis in developed and developing economies. *Journal of cleaner production, 206*, 741-754. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.09.172.