



Teaching Humanities in Chilean Post Pandemic Higher Education

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Abstract

Why didn't continue the offer of distance undergraduate programs in Humanities in Chilean Higher Education after the Pandemic?

The Pandemic forced the whole world to go to virtual education[1]. A growth in the offer of virtual programs was observed in Chile after the Pandemic. These offers are concentrated in postgraduate programs, certificates and some undergraduate courses but not in humanities program [2]. It is intended to analyze in detail why in the areas of Humanities, in undergraduate, this learning was not taken advantage of. The main hypothesis is that the humanities cannot be conveniently taught remotely. Is this a prejudice or a truth?

This research aims to contribute not only to research on the modality and management of higher education in Chile, but also to provide scientific criteria for decision-making on institutional policies regarding the modality of teaching-learning in higher education in the field of humanities in undergraduate programs.

Keywords: *Higher education, Digital Humanities, Distance Education, Pandemic Education, Virtual Education.*

Introduction

There are multiple arguments that the humanities cannot be taught properly if it is not face-to-face[3], or at least with serious problems[4]. This subject that has also been treated from psychology for some years (Verillon & Rabardel 1995)[5].

Our research concerns whether the humanities can be properly taught at a distance.

To achieve our objective, 1) a theoretical framework will be considered regarding the possibility of achieving a true education under the distance modality. 2) The data available from the government and from accrediting agencies to verify the pre- and post-pandemic offer in humanities majors in existing modalities. It will be complemented by the comparison of successful examples in similar linguistic-cultural spectrums, such as that of the Tecnológico de Monterrey, in Mexico, and the National University of Distance Education, in Spain. An finally 3) explain why only one Chilean university maintained this offer of humanities online according to official data, and get closer to solving our research question.

Theoretical framework

Teaching humanities is an communication act between two peoples[6]. This depends on how human the relationship between student and teacher is[7]. Its effectiveness will depend on how direct the encounter can be. In this sense, the theory behind these ideas is based on a theory of communication, when if this act is face-to-face, the communicative act is better than at a distance[8].

Distance education has increased significantly in the world over the years But not always exempt from criticism[9].

The root of the initial question can be found in Heidegger's metaphysics of *presence* [10]. For him "being" is not analogical as in the philosophy of Aristotle[11]. For Heidegger, being does not have a physical-linear structure, nor does time. You can be present at a distance[12]. According to this[13] we do not know exactly what "being present" is because what "is outside" my mind -what Aristotle called "reality"- depends on *perception*[14]. Therefore, it is possible to "be present" even at a distance: "Telematic performance describes the process of engagement with the long-distance transmission of digital, visual or kinetic information, and the interaction of the mind, the body and the senses, with the information received" [15].



For Heidegger, presence does not depend on the physical proximity. This idea can be found even in St. Paul who educated by letters, that is why is considered the first distance educator for some authors [16].

With this suggestive idea we can say that distance education cannot be considered a new phenomenon.

Pre and Post Pandemic situation in Higher Education: Between conviction and opportunity

That March 11, 2020 the whole world was forced to move towards the use of technology and distance learning during the pandemic[17]. Is not new to say how much affected the educational system[18].

The impact of this has been written about[19], in the schools[20] and universities[21]. At global and local level [22]. Even about the psychological repercussions on students[23].

Our focus is on the impact of the Pandemic in Higher Education in Chile. According to official data[24] Distance Learning programs represent 9.2% of the total of undergraduate enrollment in 2022, and that in the last decade the enrollment has increased by 1060.7%, and 216.0% in the last five years. In 2022, total enrollment reaches 1,301,925, considering Undergraduate, Postgraduate and Postgraduate programs, which implies an increase of 0.6% compared to 2021.

The greatest increase occurs in Postgraduate (2.5%), since in Undergraduate the increase is only 0.6% and in Postgraduate it falls -4.1%.

In relation to the modality of the programs offered by universities, the greatest increase in 2022 is in the enrollment of distance programs (41.2%) and is significantly lower in blended programs (14.9%). On the other hand, enrollment in face-to-face programs during the daytime working day fell -1.3% and in evening programs it fell -5.9%.[25]

Distance programs within the Undergraduate, Postgraduate and Postgraduate enrollment is increasingly relevant.

Figure 1 shows the variations in the data according to different programs and modalities:

Jornada	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	% Variación 2018 - 2022	% Variación 2021 - 2022	Distribución Matrícula 2022
Diurno	853.675	862.252	846.630	870.525	859.123	0,6%	-1,3%	70,9%
Vespertino	281.796	269.548	238.311	240.134	225.975	-19,8%	-5,9%	18,6%
Semipresencial	6.377	7.302	6.401	7.212	8.284	29,9%	14,9%	0,7%
A Distancia	35.459	45.448	52.506	79.367	112.062	216,0%	41,2%	9,2%
Otro	10.740	9.930	7.994	7.171	6.353	-40,8%	-11,4%	0,5%
Total general	1.188.047	1.194.480	1.151.842	1.204.409	1.211.797	2,0%	0,6%	100,0%

(Fig. 1)

Faced with this scenario, a change in the paradigms in which education is sustained, such as that of face-to-face, is imperative.

Assuming that virtuality is here to stay it is necessary to improve current educational processes, forms, and models; as well as the way in which they are implemented. This is relevant, but not only for universities, but for the country, since these new modalities of higher education represent opportunities for greater equity, expectations of social mobility, and a reduction in the distribution distances of the income[26]. Likewise, these educational modalities allow the factors of space and time, occupation or level of the participants not to condition the teaching-learning process, since they favor the access to the higher education system of new types of students and an opportunity for the universities diversify their academic offer; In addition, they promote issues such as flexibility, comfort, topicality, and personalization, thereby increasing their attractiveness to students and promoting the efficiency of learning systems, resulting in a quality academic process.

As a result, the health pandemic demonstrated that the ways of educating are varied and flexible, since it broke with the scheme that the meeting between a teacher and his students, in person in the same room, was the only way to learn. Given this, the offer of higher education institutions must respond to the challenges of the environment, and, therefore, provide programs that are supported by technology, meet quality standards and adjust to the needs of society and to the demands of the labor market[27].



If we think about how distance education was viewed globally, comparing regions similar to Chile, we will find big differences and some similarities. In Spain and Mexico, two cultures like the Chilean culture, not only in terms of language, but also in terms of development OECD[28].

Mexican higher education system was not prepared to face the challenge. Despite not being perfectly prepared, the success indicators that could be found in those places that represented less dropout, school failure, and allowed to take advantages in learning efficiency are mentioned: collaborative work, management, accompaniment, supervision, planning, efficient administration, good work by teachers, tutors and family support [29].

In Spain, something similar happened to Mexico and Chile. There is also no recognition of adequate preparation to face the situation of urgent transfer to online higher education. Basically, the same difficulties that are mentioned. As well as the same elements that helped to face the urgency are identified: strengthening of the teacher-student relationship and the way in which all the management revolved around this to reach levels of certain efficiency: "In a prospective way, future research lines can be considered those called to study actions that allow both educational institutions and governments the mere of telemic education and therefore the communication between teachers and students in the new virtual frameworks (...) We need new investigations that allow us to go deeper into each of these tools to find out the best use that can be made of them with a view to developing not only didactic communication, but also, and in a very special way, social communication that allows the agents of the process to be emotionally connected" [30].

Both in Mexico and in Spain there is a difference compared to Chile that is worth mentioning. In Mexico, the consolidated experience of the Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey, which is at the forefront of educational technology in higher education; and in Spain, the National University of Distance Education[31], which for years has provided unimodal distance education, both contributed background, information and knowledge management that allowed them to better face a global crisis in their respective countries.

In Chile, the experience in higher education, offering undergraduate programs cannot be compared to the reality of Mexico and Spain with the aforementioned institutions.

The emblematic case is that of the Gabriela Mistral University of Chile, which began a reformulation of its educational project shortly before the Pandemic and in which it defined a bimodal, face-to-face and virtual education, which has come to be synthesized in an unofficial motto "the best of both worlds". Until the closing of this article, it is the only Chilean university that offered, before the Pandemic, and maintained this offer out of conviction, of humanities programs: degrees in philosophy, history and literature 100% online.

It can probably due to a look to the future, having read what countries like Mexico and Spain have done, as we have mentioned before, but also looking at the cultural changes that have been taking place in Chile in recent decades. An innovative view of education, a commitment to overcome the difficulty imposed by the distance between that face to face that seems to be essential in the teaching of the humanities. A look in which challenges do not win but rather motivate, can explain the commitment of 100% remote undergraduate humanities offer in the midst of a conservative and reticent culture towards new paradigms such as teaching humanities at a distance trying to jump the barriers and using technology for exactly that.

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