

Exploring Students' Experiences with Virtual Language Learning in Higher Education

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The global COVID-19 pandemic forced to unprecedented changes in higher education, prompting universities to swiftly transition from traditional classroom settings to virtual and hybrid modes of instruction. This unforeseen shift compelled educational institutions, educators, and students to adapt to new technological learning platforms rapidly. In this context, the present study addresses the critical need for adaptability and innovation within the realm of remote language learning faced by higher education institutions over the last few years. The focus extends beyond the immediate challenges faced by institutions and instructors to encompass the experiences and viewpoints of university students themselves. While institutions and educators worked diligently to ensure the continuity of education, students' perspectives – the primary beneficiaries of the learning process – have occasionally been overshadowed. This research seeks to bridge this gap by shedding light on student experiences with virtual and hybrid learning methodologies employed during the 2020/2021 academic year. Specifically, the study centers on foreign language instruction and aims to capture the sentiments of university students toward these modes of learning. The investigation was conducted using a survey sample of over 140 undergraduate students at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. The inquiry delves into various dimensions of remote language learning, including the availability and effectiveness of pedagogical resources, patterns of participation in virtual instructional sessions, assessment strategies employed, and the outcomes of the virtual learning experience. The study shows a comprehensive picture of student engagement with virtual language education by gathering responses to a spectrum of inquiries. The main objective of analyzing the collected data is to inform and guide the enhancement of methodological paradigms for remote language instruction. By understanding students' perspectives, educational institutions and instructors can gain a more holistic understanding of the challenges and successes of virtual learning, facilitating the refinement of existing strategies and the development of novel approaches. Furthermore, this research endeavors to foster a collaborative dialogue between students, educators, and institutions by identifying areas that require improvement and spotlighting the aspects of virtual language learning that have resonated positively with students. By engaging in this constructive discourse, we aim to cultivate an educational landscape that harnesses the strengths of remote instruction while addressing its limitations. Ultimately, the insights garnered from this study will inform pedagogical decisions and contribute to a more inclusive and student-centric approach to virtual language instruction, ensuring that the learning experience remains adaptive, engaging, and ultimately beneficial to all stakeholders involved. This study serves as a timely and valuable contribution to the discourse on remote education. It acknowledges the rapid and complex changes that have occurred within higher education while highlighting the significance of incorporating student viewpoints into the broader conversation. The insights garnered from this research can guide educators and institutions in making informed decisions about the design and delivery of virtual language instruction, ensuring that the student experience remains at the forefront of pedagogical considerations. In addition to addressing the critical need for adaptability and innovation in remote language learning, this study recognizes the resilience and determination displayed by students during these challenging times. As universities and educators adapted to the virtual landscape, students became the unsung heroes of this transformative journey, navigating the digital terrain with determination and resilience. By amplifying their voices and experiences, this research enriches our understanding of remote education and celebrates the students who have been instrumental in its evolution.

