

Negative Emotions Present in the Classroom After Pandemic Covid-19

Sergio Zepeda¹, Alba Nuñez²
Metropolitan Autonomous University, Mexico

Abstract

The mandatory worldwide lockdown imposed by COVID-19 had a significant emotional impact on people. In this situation, students were among the most affected due to the abrupt change to online classes in adverse learning environments, and the disruption of their social interaction. Among these and other factors, various negative emotions arose in students during the pandemic. Currently, the pandemic has been declared over, but various negative emotions still persist in students. In this paper, we show a qualitative research study to determine which negative emotions students perceived during the pandemic and which of them still persist currently. As a method of qualitative research, we used the focus group technique to collect the data, each session consisted of eight students, and we conducted five sessions. The collected information was transcribed, categorized, and analyzed. The obtained result is the top ten negative emotions experienced by students during the pandemic. After, we searched for the three most mentioned during the pandemic, and consequently, the three most experienced by students currently. Finally, we provide a discussion to reflect on our role as educators to attend students who were profoundly affected worldwide by the lockdown. We show an approach how emotions in the classroom should be a top priority subject for reflection in the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: Student-Teacher Relationship, Teacher Role in Learning Process, Emotions in Students, Research Education, Education

1. Introduction

Students often experience various emotions in the classroom, these emotions can either help them achieve their goals or lead to failure in their studies. Emotions can influence motivation in learning, on the positive side, they can generate interest in wanting to learn new things, but on the negative side, they can lead to frustration, boredom, failure, and even cognitive problems. (Reinhard, 2014; Romana, 2018).

Although emotions are a fundamental part of learning, they are often not taken into account by teachers when they conduct their classes. Currently, there are various learning approaches aimed at improving didactics and creating a better context in the teaching-learning process. An example of this is Gamification seeks to enhance student performance by allowing students to solve problems, collaborate, and communicate through game mechanics applied to learning (Dicheva, et al., 2015). Until 2019, there was significant progress in these types of dynamics in face-to-face classes. However, in March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic was declared worldwide, and both students and teachers had to stay confined in their homes causing confusion and a wide range of negative emotions (Saeed, 2022).

Given this context, online education was swiftly adopted by many educational institutions as a means of continuity, even though neither teachers nor students were prepared for such a radical change in the teaching and learning process. A recent study shows how online classes generated boredom, increased cognitive load, stress, and depression in students affecting academic performance (Tzaflkou, et al., 2021).

Many of these negative emotions generated during the confinement still persist, but there are few studies on which ones currently remain very persistent in students almost a year after returning to in-person classes and with very little time since removing the face mask as a social interaction precautionary measure.

The main objective of this paper is to hear directly from the students about the negative emotions that still persist in them. Because as teachers, we might think that we are returning to normalcy, but in reality, this so-called normalcy isn't quite the same. Many of our students carry post-traumatic emotions from Covid-19, and it's essential for educators to be aware that our current students are unlike previous generations, due to this global event that has significantly impacted them. Teachers are aware that this is a unique situation, one that we had never experienced throughout our academic lives. This is important because now, more than ever, we can influence students' emotions in the classroom, and we should be conscious of this (Hui, 2023). Now, we present the methods, results, discussion, and conclusions of our research.

2. Methods

To obtain the results, the research was conducted using the focus group as a qualitative research technique. A focus group prioritizes creating a context for participants to speak freely, in order to capture by the researchers their feelings and thoughts through generating a setting that allows participants to feel heard and valued in their opinions . Consequently, it is a highly effective means to inquire about a very specific topic, situation, process, service, event, or object of study (Krueger, 2020).

The objective of the focus group is to confirm, discover relevant or unknown data that can assist in consolidating research, and where through other methods or techniques this type of information cannot be found, Although the results are not generalizable, they do provide us with in-depth information about the specific research context (Morgan, 2018).

The objective questions in the focus group were as follows:

- To identify the four negative emotions experienced during the pandemic.
- To identify the four negative emotions still experienced today, even with face to face classes.
- To determine these emotions in order of importance, from highest to lowest.

For the implementation of the focus group, the following steps were carried out:

- *Defining the Research Topic:* The objective of the study is to understand the emotions that students experience upon returning to face to face classes.
- *Session Protocol Design:* Description of roles and responsibilities during the sessions, five sessions were established, each consisting of eight participants.
- *Participant Profile:* 40 participants entered university during the pandemic and were unfamiliar with the university facilities, professors, or fellow students. Additionally, the start of their studies was entirely through online classes, with an age range between 19 and 22 years old.
- *Establishing a Controlled Environment:* With an empathetic moderator and observers for note-taking.
- *Preparation for Audio Documentation:* In this case, recording sessions in audio format.
- *Transcription of Sessions:* All sessions were transcribed using the Whisper software, after we conducted a review and correction to obtain a final version ready for filtering and analysis.
- *Data Filtering:* Selection of all information related to negative emotions, removal of previous questions unrelated to negative emotions.
- *Categorization:* We used the Atlas software to obtain a categorization of all emotions expressed by the students. In this categorization, we obtained the 10 negative emotions expressed by all participants in all sessions.
- *Analysis:* With the Atlas software, we obtained three main negative emotions mentioned by order of importance by students during the pandemic and the three main

negative emotions that students are currently experiencing. The percentage was obtained based on the number of mentions in order of importance and the number of participants in the focus group sessions.

- *Generating a Report on Relevant Findings:* With the results obtained, tables and graphs were created to visualize the findings.

After completing this process, the following results were obtained.

3. Results

The results found in this qualitative research are of great interest, each of the participants in the sessions was asked to name four negative emotions in order of importance, that is, the emotion that affected them the most followed by the next two that affected them. The information obtained during the focus group sessions, after it being filtered and analyzed, allowed us to identify ten negative emotions described during all the sessions. The ten negative emotions were anxiety, sadness, stress, frustration, despair, loneliness, fatigue, anger, depression, and fear. All of these negative emotions found are consistent with findings from other research studies, such as in (Ahmet & Ayşe, 2020; Onyeaka, 2021; Zhang, 2022).

Anxiety was identified as the primary emotion experienced during the pandemic, this is also consistent with other research, such as in (Tzaflkou, et al., 2021; Onyeaka, 2021; Zhang, 2022; Saeed, 2022). Sadness, stress and fear are the other negative emotions mostly reported as part of the global pandemic process.

In our analysis, all the negative emotions mentioned in the focus groups were counted and established as a percentage of mention in the total of the sessions. In another section of the focus group, we requested that they mention four negative emotions they were still experiencing in the present, and these were to be mentioned in order of importance based on their personal feelings. Table 1 shows the results obtained regarding the percentage of mentions of negative emotions. We can observe that column1 (c1) and column2 (c2) display the percentage of mentions in all sessions. In these columns, we do not differentiate based on the order of mention, but only on the mention of the negative emotion.

Table 1 shows in columns3 (c3) and column4 (c4) the percentages obtained based on the order of mention, meaning that only the emotion identified by the students as their primary negative emotion that still affects them in the present was selected.

Table 1: Percentages obtained regarding negative emotions felt during the confinement and the emotions currently experienced.

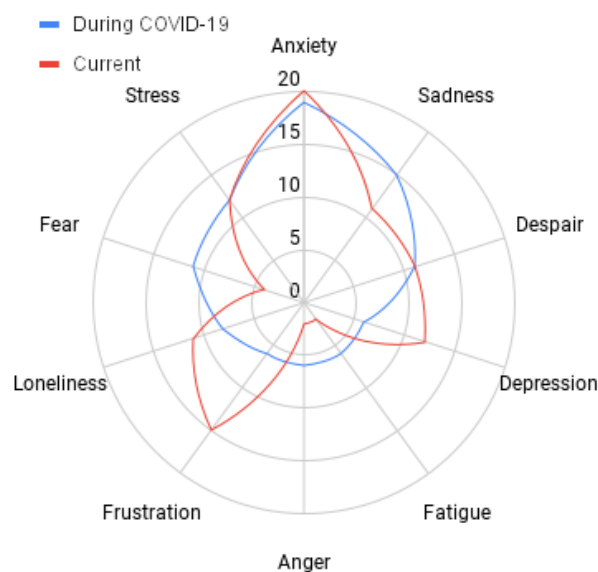
Emotions	C1 Covid-19	C2 Current	C3 Covid-19	C4 Current
Anxiety	19%	20%	36%	43%
Sadness	15%	11%	11%	4%
Despair	11%	11%	4%	4%
Depression	6%	12%	7%	10%

Fatigue	6%	2%	4%	0%
Anger	6%	2%	4%	0%
Frustration	6%	15%	10%	21%
Loneliness	8%	11%	7%	7%
Fear	11%	4%	4%	0%
Stress	12%	12%	13%	11%

Source: own creation

To help us gain a clearer understanding of these findings, we generated the following graph shown in Figure 1. In this graph, we can observe the primary negative emotions mentioned during the pandemic represented by the blue line. Figure 1 shows the top five primary negative emotions. Firstly, we can observe that anxiety is the predominant negative emotion experienced by the students, followed by sadness, stress, despair, and fear.

Figure 1: The graph shows the variation in negative emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the present.



Source: own creation

If we examine the graph with the red line, we can observe the variation in negative emotions still experienced by the students when they are back in the classroom. In this way, we can see that anxiety still ranks first, but now, frustration and depression have increased as negative emotions experienced when students are attending face to face classes. However, we can observe that stress and despair remain at similar percentages, while sadness decreases slightly. Meanwhile, fear and fatigue show significant decreases.

In Figure 2, shows the most significant emotion felt during the confinement and the current negative emotion. This provides us with valuable data, because we can observe the prevailing negative emotion at present, which teachers often have to deal with without being aware of it.

In this way, we can observe that during the confinement, the main emotion felt was anxiety at 36%, followed by stress, sadness, frustration, and depression. However, there are significant variations observed in the present. Figure 2 shows that anxiety has increased significantly by 7%, but frustration has increased by 11%, and depression by 3%. On the other hand, we can see that fear, sadness, and fatigue have decreased significantly as they are not considered the primary affected emotions in terms of importance currently. If we compare with the previous results, we can observe that currently, in our case study, we are dealing with students experiencing negative emotions of anxiety, frustration, and depression.

Perhaps not in a majority percentage, but it is significant enough to consider important changes in the teaching and learning process. As time and social interaction gradually allow for a decrease in these negative emotions, they can impact the interaction between students and teachers in the classroom.

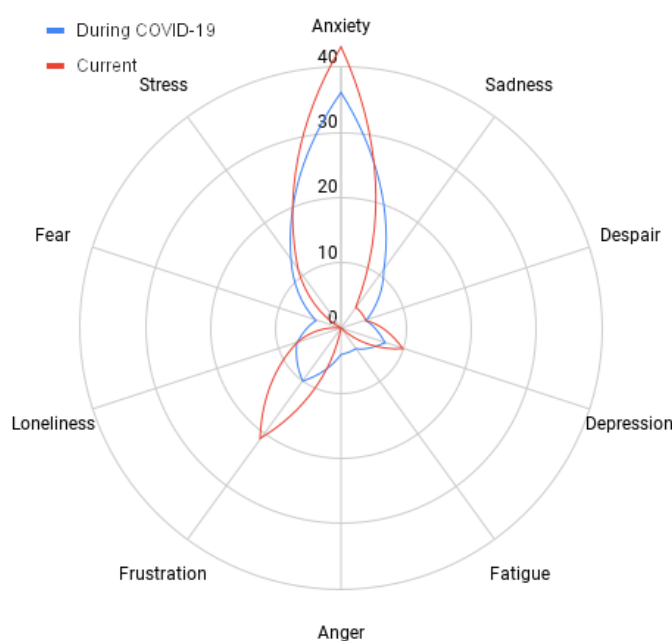


Figure 2: The graph displays the primary negative emotion felt during the confinement and currently.

Directly asking the students in the sessions why they felt that negative emotion was the most important currently, the most commonly heard description, very similar to the following, was about anxiety:

- *Anxiety because during the pandemic, I didn't socialize or see people, and now, even if I don't want to, I have to interact with others. It's now difficult for me to connect with people my age.*
- *My classmates and I used to send messages, but I didn't know them. Now that I've met them in person, I realize they're not as I thought, and that intimidates me and makes it hard for me to socialize, which gives me anxiety.*

It is important to mention that the students in this research were transitioning from high school to university during the pandemic. They took their exams and entered university during this period. As a result, they did not experience the university environment in person. They only met their professors online, and they interacted with some of their peers through social media without meeting them physically. Only recently have they been able to get to know some of them in person. However, they now express that they find it challenging to socialize in person. Part of the problem is that the participants describe that their classmates behaved and expressed themselves differently online compared to in person, to the extent that they don't understand the duality of personality that's why they find it difficult to socialize, so they prefer to isolate themselves or be in very small groups. These results are of great interest, because we are detecting a trend towards isolation even when they have many classmates to socialize with. Xiapeng describes this situation as a lack of belonging to the school in the post-pandemic era, in which students find themselves trapped in situations of unpleasant emotional activation (Xianpeng, et al., 2023).

On the topic of frustration and depression, we found very similar comments like the following:

- *“Personally, I feel that I didn't acquire enough knowledge in online classes, because I had many negative emotions, and now I'm left with the feeling of not knowing what will happen in the future if I don't learn enough.”*
- *I feel like I didn't learn enough, and now I need that knowledge. It's frustrating not being able to progress in my studies as I would have liked.*

Online classes generated in students a feeling that they didn't learn enough, some of them because they experienced many negative emotions, others due to health issues, and others because of discouragement and fatigue. This feeling of not having learned enough has significantly increased their frustration now that they are in in-person courses. This indicates that there is now a classroom of students with predominant negative emotions of anxiety and frustration. Tzaflkou describes how online classes generated negative emotions of boredom, cognitive load, and a strong perception of a decrease in learning, this perception generates anxiety in students, significantly impacting their cognition in a negative way (Tzaflkou, et al., 2021).

4. Discussion

The pandemic was an unprecedented global event that caused negative impacts on the emotions of students. Anxiety, depression, stress, and fear are among the most documented negative emotions in various research studies, additionally, these studies also report mental health issues, psychological problems, a feeling of not belonging to the school, this has caused severe academic procrastination among students (Wang, 2022; (Xianpeng, et al., 2023). Steel defines procrastination as the voluntary delay of a planned course of action, despite expecting to be worse off due to the delay (Steel, 2007).

This academic procrastination is causing negative effects on the terminal efficiency of universities and a delay in the academic careers of students. If we visualize the intersection of negative emotions, lack of school belonging, and academic procrastination, we can observe that we have a complex problem to solve in the classrooms.

In our case, we can observe that the participating students in these focus groups are still adapting to the university environment, which, under this context, presents significant socialization challenges because they were abruptly removed from a high school environment,

and this causes a lack of belonging to the university, because they entered amid the pandemic, and they did not have socialization among peers and professors, part of this is described by Xianpeng in (Xianpeng, et al., 2023).

After the lockdown and the return to in-person classes, negative emotions in the students are more prevalent. Reinhard describes how negative emotions can lead to cognitive and learning problems in students and how the same activity can evoke a positive emotion in one student and a negative one in another, depending on each student's individual context (Reinhard, 2014; Mustafina, 2020). This is important because if we, as teachers, are not aware of the increased negative emotions of anxiety and frustration in students in the classroom, a misstep on the part of the teacher can significantly increase negative emotions in some of their students unknowingly. Zang mentions that universities should pay close attention to the emotional health of their students, seek alternatives for emotional release, and reduce negative emotions to improve the mental health of their students (Zhang, 2022).

On the other hand, the student-teacher interaction is of vital importance to collectively create positive learning contexts in the classroom. Therefore, it is necessary to explore new methodologies and contexts that enable the generation of positive emotions to foster motivation and learning in students (Debra, 2006). It's also essential for the teacher to be motivated and able to generate positive emotions in their students (Pekrun, 2021). Perhaps the teachers may not currently have the necessary skills and motivation, but they should consider making significant changes in their teaching approach due to the prevailing post-Covid-19 pandemic emotions.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we show how the negative emotions generated during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown continue to affect students. Anxiety, frustration, and depression are the three primary negative emotions that students are bringing into the classrooms, and we still don't know how much longer they may persist. The main causes of these emotions are the fear of socializing and the feeling of not having learned enough in online classes, leading to frustration and depression. Further follow-up research on these emotions is required to understand how they increase or decrease over time. At this moment, it is necessary to make didactic changes to improve the classroom environment as much as possible.

Acknowledgment

We are grateful for the support of the Digital Interaction Laboratory.

References

- Ahmet K. Ayşe G. (2020). "Positive and Negative Affect during a Pandemic: Mediating Role of Emotional Regulation Strategies," *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, Volume 4, Issue 4, pp. 484-497.
- Debra K. Julianne C. (2006). "Re-conceptualizing Emotion and Motivation to Learn in Classroom Contexts," *Educational Psychology Review*, 18, pp. 377-390.
- Dicheva, D., Dichev C., Agre G., & Angelova G. (2015). "Gamification in Education: A Systematic Mapping Study," *Educational Technology & Society*, 18 (3), pp. 75-88.
- Hui W., Irena B. (2023). "A Diary Investigation of Teachers' Emotional Labor for Negative Emotions: Its Associations with Perceived Student Disengagement and Emotional Exhaustion," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Volume 127, 104117.
- Krueger R., Casey, M. (2020). *Focus Group: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, 3rd. Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications.
- Morgan D., (2019). *Basic and Advanced Focus Groups*, Sage Publications, Portland State University.
- Mustafina, R., y Ilina, M., y Shchebakova, I. (2020). "Emotions and their Effect on Learning," *Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana*, Redalyc, Vol. 25, No. 7, pp. 318-324.
- Onyeaka H, Anumudu CK, Al-Sharify ZT, Egele-Godswill E, Mbaegbu P. (2021). "Covid-19 Pandemic: A Review of the Global Lockdown and its Far-reaching Effects." *Science Progress*, Vol. 104, Issue 2, April-June.
- Pekrun, R. (2021). "Teachers Need More than Knowledge: Why Motivation, Emotion, and Self-regulation are Indispensable," *Educational Psychologist*, Vol. 56, No. 4, pp. 312-322.
- Reinhard P. (2014). "Emotions and Learning," *International Bureau of Education (IBE), UNESCO, Educational Practices Series*, pp. 1-32.
- Romana P., (2018). *Negative Emotions in the Classroom. The Role of the Teacher*, Grin Verlag, University of Innsbruck, pp. 1-10.
- Saeed H, Eslami A, Nassif N., Simpson A., Lal S. (2022). "Anxiety Linked to Covid-19: A Systematic Review Comparing Anxiety Rates in Different Populations," *Int. J. Environ Res Public Health*, Feb 15, 19(4), 2189.
- Steel, P. (2007). "The Nature of Procrastination: a Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review of Quintessential Self-Regulatory Failure," *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 133, No.1, pp. 65-94.

Tzaflkou, K., Perifanou, M., Economides, A. (2021). “Negative Emotions, Cognitive Load, Acceptance, and Self-perceived Learning Outcome in Emergency Remote Education during COVID-19,” *Education and Information Technologies*, Vol. 26, pp. 7497–7521.

Wang, Q, Kou Z., Du, Y., Wang, K., Xu, Y. (2022). “Academic Procrastination and Negative Emotions Among Adolescents During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Mediating and Buffering Effects of Online-Shopping Addiction ,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, Volume 12, 789505.

Xianpeng, T., Xiangwei, L., Zhiqi, X. (2023). “Undergraduates’ Negative Emotion and Academic Procrastination During COVID-19: Life Autonomy as a Mediator and Sense of School Belonging as a Moderator,” *Journal Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, Aug 10, No. 16, pp. 3151-3169.

Zhang, W. (2022). “Intelligent Recognition and Analysis of Negative Emotions of Undergraduates Under COVID-19,” *Frontiers in Public Health*, Vol. 10, 913255.