

Article

Taking Care of Students Before, During, and After the Pandemic: The Case of an Ecuadorian University

Jhonny Villafuerte-Holguín*

University Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí, Ecuador

Éder Intriago-Palacios

Kansas State University, USA

Antonieta Morales-Jaramillo

University of Guayaquil, Ecuador

Received: 6 October 2022; Accepted: 31 March 2023; Published: 10 June 2023

Abstract

COVID-19 evidenced the need for emotional support and care by a generation of students widely exposed to information and communication technologies. This study aimed to explore professors' practices of caring for students to help them cope with their difficulties before, during, and after the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The participants were thirty English preservice teachers and ten professors at an Ecuadorian national university. The BarOn model, adjusted by García et al. (2018), was used to collect information regarding the pandemic's impacts on the students' emotional well-being. The research team adjusted the instrument to the formats of in-depth interviews, observation checklist, and focus groups. The categories and subcategories selected were students' care, health and well-being, resilience, and perseverance before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The results confirmed that the participants, even with their developed autonomy and maturity levels, required the guidance of professors to cope with stress, anxiety, and depression caused by social distancing, economic impacts, and loss of loved ones during the pandemic. The study concluded that literature group reading, open dialogues promoted by professors, and mentoring could generate supportive environments to improve students' capacity to deal with dramatic events.

Keywords

Affectivity, care in higher education, dialogue reading, learners' orientation, BarOn model, Covid-19

1 Introduction

Being a university student is one of the most challenging moments and defining undertakings in the life

*Corresponding author. Email: jhonny.villafuerte@uleam.edu.ec

of a professional. The transition from a high school student to a university undergraduate may expose students to new academic and personal challenges, inducing stress and poor mental well-being. Whether they succeed or fail at it is a determining factor for the future of these students professionally and socially (Brewer et al., 2019; Phair, 2014). Without a doubt, a nice or painful experience may be determined by the quality of professors and the experience during university life. In such a context, it is important for professors to play a key role in supporting students (Anderson et al., 2020; Noddings, 1999).

The university can offer a supportive environment where the students feel that their professors care about them. This can be manifested through the study plan, tutoring, professional guidance, and support for conflict resolution even outside the university. Each of them can be a factor that contributes to improving the resilience capacities of students since resilience is the desired component that can help them face stressful work or family crisis (Grant & Kinman, 2012; Turner et al., 2017).

In this study, care is seen as a determining factor to help students going through a traumatic situation acquire resilience. This paper begins with a literature review on care: (1) Care as Relational Teaching, (2) Listening as Care, and (3) Caring teaching. Subsequently, the paper presents a hermeneutical analysis of the participants' voices as evidence of the care that an Ecuadorian university and faculties have implemented before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic for students.

This study aimed to determine the practice used by a group of Ecuadorian professors to care for students. It explored how preservice teachers dealt with the difficulties of navigating the pandemic restrictions while studying online and also their return to face-to-face classes two years later.

2 Literature Review

This literary review addresses relevant concepts so readers can better understand the context of university education in Ecuador and the authors' positions related to care in higher education. It includes findings regarding care and relational teaching in the university context, implications of listening as a care practice, and the concepts of longitudinal and lateral competence. Finally, it provides information to contrast the participants' opinions and perceptions regarding Ecuadorian public policies related to the student's well-being and their experiences before, during, and after the pandemic.

Care plays a key role in the preparation of students in higher education. In this context, Freire (2005) studies the links between instructors and learners in their daily educational interactions, indicating that teaching is an action of the mind, body, and soul. Tronto (1993, p. 104) presents care as "a practice and disposition that is essential to what people do". She posited that professors who care respond to unbalanced relations of power, get involved in powerful ways, take concrete actions, and are aware that their involvement may be painful, costly and time consuming.

One key goal of education, Noddings (2012, p. 777) argues, is to create "a climate of care", for it is "in such a climate that professors can best meet their students' needs, deliver their lessons, and encourage learning and application of its contents". Professors seek to prepare learners for real life situations as professionals and in other important adult roles (Contreras León & Chapetón Castro, 2017).

In this study, we used three instruments to collect data from professors and students about their perceptions on their professors' practices of care: disposition to listen to students, implementing schedules, group work dialogue, and tutoring and mentoring.

2.1 Care as relational teaching

Successful learning requires students' attention, and when they receive it, they are more willing to pay

attention because they feel valued. Noddings (2005) and Aveyard (2014) argue that care lies at the heart of a successful education. Caring professors listen to their students, and this causes them to listen back, creating a powerful connection among educators and learners (Noddings, 2005). At the heart of care lies a sincere desire from professors to share knowledge with their students, which requires hard work and commitment. Beyond the expertise and the criticality necessary to bring rigor into the classroom, they are careful in integrating contextual factors. Considering context means attending to the specific needs expressed by students, instead of acting based on assumptions (Anderson et al., 2020).

Papadopoulos, cited in Anderson et al. (2020, p. 3), indicates that relational teaching is closely connected with intercultural competence. According to him, interculturally competent educators are described as individuals that value learner's identities, and who make an effort to avoid discrimination, and to raise awareness about the relations of power and their effect in the professor-student interactions. These educators understand the difficulty of learning a second language and, because of that, incorporate strategies that allow learners to have more opportunities to communicate in their own ways.

A feeling associated with care in relational teaching is sympathy. Caring educators feel sympathy when they hear students describe a painful situation they are going through. The capacity to be moved by the affective condition of the student is a characteristic of a caring professor, one that prospective professors should try to develop as part of their moral education.

2.2 Listening as care

One of the most powerful ways of showing care is listening. An educator who really cares, listens and observes attentively. For students, opening and expressing their feelings may be intimidating at the beginning, but as the students feel that what they say is respected and valued, they begin to feel comfortable and open themselves to dialogue (Senge, 2000). When an atmosphere of dialogue is present, the professors detect misconceptions in the group and can address these misconceptions, giving students opportunities to seek clarification. The practice of listening attentively on the part of the professor encourages the students to do so as well, and in the end, the students not only learn about the subject matter, but get to know each other better (Senge, 2000).

However, professors who listen may be confronted with tough decisions (Anderson et al., 2020; Aveyard, 2014). For example, a professor may learn that one of his students is being abused at home or being mistreated by another colleague from the same department. How should the professor react? The professor may need to prioritize his roles as the person in charge of the class and as a human being that should do what is right before a situation that evidently is putting another human at risk. The situation demands that the professor puts aside his institutional role and adopt a caring role and would require building a relationship with the student that is beyond the scope of his specific subject matter.

When professors show genuine interest in a student by listening attentively, and acting accordingly, they win their students' trust, opening opportunities to get to know their students better. Buber (1993) posited that a student's belief in the professor "is the most inward achievement of the relationship in education" (Buber, 1993, p. 98). Once the professor and their students have established a relationship of dialogue and trust, the students may feel encouraged to cooperate with the expectations of the school and pursue a path that will benefit their lifelong learning and growth.

Students at all educational levels want to establish a frank and meaningful dialogue with their teachers. However, dialogue with their teacher typically is limited to the review of academic and logistical aspects necessary for the delivery and completion of the curriculum. Nevertheless, the construction of a frank dialogue can be achieved from participation, dedication, and willingness to listen (García-Carrión et al., 2016; Mercer et al., 1999; Villafuerte-Holguín & Ramírez-Rodríguez, 2022).

2.3 Caring teaching as longitudinal and lateral competence

The idea of continuity was introduced by Dewey (1971) and it refers to connecting current educational experiences to past and future educational experiences (longitudinal competence) and to current life experiences (lateral competence). In other words, professors must be willing and prepared to teach their students, connecting real life experiences with academic ones. And to create these connections, we need to use our students' background knowledge. The lateral aspect tends to be more difficult for educators, especially at the higher education level since they need to connect the various courses the students are taking and have a holistic approach, that is, not just a professor of their own subject matter. Noddings (1999, p. 215) referred to competent professors as carers who want to respond to the voiced and unvoiced needs of their students and must have what might be called lateral knowledge. The professors should be able to draw on literature, history, politics, religion, philosophy, and the arts in ways that enrich their students' daily teaching and offer multiple possibilities for students to make connections with the great existential questions as well as questions of current social life (Wilson, 1999). In addition, Wilson (1999) argued that professors should be knowledgeable beyond their area of specialization; professors should seek to make longitudinal connections as well as lateral ones. Flecha & Álvarez (2016) and Berniz & Miller (2017) argued that constructing connections between students and professors requires time, especially because it involves a wealth of knowledge about personal and family matters combined with academic ones.

2.4 Research questions

To contribute to the study of the professors' practice for caring students, the authors organized the data collected according to the logic of the following research questions:

1. How did COVID-19 impact the students emotionally?
2. What were the institutional policy and professors' initiative practices to care for students before, during, and after the pandemic?
3. What were the students' perceptions about professors' practice for strengthening students' resilience and coping during and after the pandemic?
4. What suggestions do students have for professors to improve their practice for care students in the university context?

3 Methods

This paper presents a study which uses a qualitative research approach to analyze the participants' perceptions about their professors' acts of care. It additionally presents an analysis of scientific articles published in relevant journals, to identify the most common teaching practices of university professors in the care of their students.

The research team chose the BarOn Emotional Intelligence Scale (I-CE), adjusted by García et al. (2018), to collect information regarding the pandemic's impacts on the students' emotional well-being. The main category considered in the BarOm model is Emotional Intelligence (EI). The model consists of five main dimensions: intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, stress management and general mood. Each of the dimensions involves several subcomponents that are presented in Table 1.

The data collected was organized in three periods: before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of a public university in Ecuador, South America.

Table 1

Dimensions of the BarOn Model (García, 2018)

| Dimensions | Definition |
|-------------------|--|
| Intrapersonal | It refers to the recurrent or non-recurrent thoughts that the person has regarding a particular problem. The subcategories used are: Self-understanding, assertiveness, visualization. |
| Interpersonal | It refers to the relationships and situations between the subject of study and the people who make up his or her close relationship. The subcategories are: Regulation and empathy, social responsibility, maintaining satisfactory interpersonal relationships, knowing how to listen, being able to understand, appreciating the feelings of others. |
| Adaptability | It is a person's capacity to create a flexible balance between an excessively changing situation (which becomes a chaotic system) and an excessively stable situation (rigid systems) (Salazar Samillán, 2020). Its subcategories are: Problem solving, flexibility, realistic and effective in dealing with change, daily problem solving. |
| Stress management | Normal and healthy reaction of the body to face small daily challenges and exceptional or difficult situations in life. The body "speeds up" to have, instantly, if necessary, the energy and strength to react to the situation (Pérez Jarauta et al., 2002). |
| General mood | This refers to the position that the person assumes with respect to difficulties and his or her perception of happiness and optimism. The negative or positive interpretation of daily events. |

3.1 Participants

Thirty preservice teachers and ten professors affiliated to the Ecuadorian public university Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabi participated in this study. They are part of the English teacher education program in the College of Education. The preservice teachers were between the ages of 19 and 25 years, with 70% being female and 30% male. The professors were between the ages of 40 and 55 years, with 60% being male and 40% female. All the participants are Ecuadorians. As for their ethnicity, two (6%) preservice teachers self-identified as afro-Ecuadorians, while twenty-eight (94%), mixed-race. The sample selection criteria were (1) being a preservice teacher or a professor in an Ecuadorian national university before, during and after the period of confinement of the pandemic, (2) voluntarily accepting an invitation to participate in this study, and (3) signing a letter of informed consent.

3.2 Data collection methods

The research team used an in-depth interview guide, focus groups, and an observation checklist to collect data related to acts of care executed by professors.

3.2.1 In-depth interview guide

This interviews aimed to collect information from ten students concerning the impacts of COVID-19 on university students. To help formulate the interview questions, the researchers referred to the Emotional

Intelligence Scale proposed by BarOn (1988) as published by García et al. (2018), which analyzes five categories: Intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, stress management, and general mood. A panel of educators in education leadership, educational psychology, and curriculum development affiliated with the University Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí located in Ecuador, reviewed the categories and recommended remarking the items to the impacts of COVID-19 in three categories: (1) personal emotions, (2) family economy, and (3) academic demands.

The interview included an essential question per category. In addition, it also asked participants about resilience measures taken to overcome the effects of the pandemic. The interviews took place online via ZOOM. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes.

3.2.2 Observation checklist

The research team prepared an observation checklist to collect data concerning (1) affective issues from the participants' relatives, friends and classmates that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, (2) socio-economic impacts that affected the participants' relatives, (3) related academic difficulties, and (4) care strategies implemented by professors during their practice.

The observation checklist and template were reviewed by the same panel of educators that reviewed the interview guide. The observations were carried out by the research team over three periods: (1) a monthly observation of students and professors from September to December 2019 before the declaration of health emergency in Ecuador; (2) observing students and professors via ZOOM, from June 2020 to October 2021, and (3) a monthly observation of students and professors from April to August 2022, after the health emergency.

3.2.3 Focus group meetings

The research team organized focus group meetings to collect data on the professors' instructional practices that showed care for their students during the pandemic. For this purpose, they wrote a question guide. The guide in the original version consisted of 12 open questions. The questions were reviewed by a panel of experts in the fields of leadership, communication, and psychology affiliated to ULEAM. They suggested reducing the number of questions to 8, focusing on the relevance and contribution of students' resilience and coping behavior during and after the pandemic.

There were two focus group meetings. The information collected through the focus group meetings allowed us to analyze the professors' opinions about three instructional practices for students' care: (1) literature dialogic discussion teams, (2) students' teaching experiences, and (3) students' forums and mentoring.

3.3 Procedure

The research was carried out in five phases:

Phase 1. It began in January 2020 before an official declaration of a state of health emergency due to the pandemic in Ecuador. The student and professor's enrollment process started. They accepted the volunteer participation and signed the consent letter. The research team prepared the instruments and the educators' panels revised the instruments.

Phase 2. The in-depth interviews with the students were carried out using ZOOM, to collect the impacts of COVID-19 on them.

Phase 3. The research team filled out the observations checklist to collect information concerning the professors' practice for care of university students. The first focus group meeting was carried out in February 2020 using ZOOM. The meeting lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Phase 4. The second focus group meeting took place in July 2022, when students returned to face-to-face instruction and served to collect the students' perceptions about professors' practices that helped them cope and gave them resilience. Students also recommended routes to improve the professors' practices. The focus group meeting lasted approximately 50 minutes.

Phase 5. The research team collected and analyzed all the information. The analysis was conducted in August 2022 using the software ATLAS.ti, version 8.

4 Findings & Discussion

The analysis of the data from the interviews showed that when there is a genuine and equitable dialogue between students and professors, a safe learning environment is created that allows students to express their differences in identity and maturity with confidence.

The results also indicated that students could manage their emotions more successfully when a genuine dialogue is maintained between students and professors, but also between students and their friends, partners, and relatives. Thus, the authors argue that professors need to strengthen their role as counselors and mentors to achieve a strong collaboration with all members of the class.

However, the genuine dialogue must emerge from reflection and meditation to avoid the progressive emotional overload on the part of students and professors.

4.1 Students' emotional impacts caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic

The students' voices collected reflected (1) emotions, (2) their family's financial concerns, and (3) online education demands. More specifically, the impacts of COVID-19 on the students during the first wave of infections affected them emotionally (with varying degrees of severity), mainly because the future was uncertain in the face of a pandemic caused by a virus unknown to science. During the second semester of 2022 and the first semester of 2023, when there was a new wave of COVID-19 contagions in Ecuador, students started virtual education. During this period, recurrent impacts on students' emotions tended to be related to the logistical difficulties in terms of access to devices, and connection to the Internet.

The analysis of the data collected from focus group 1 firstly reflected, in all students, a high sense of social responsibility, especially in the year 2020 during the beginning of the global health emergency by COVID-19.

"It has not been a good time and I had to prioritize the more important things in order to move forward in my life."

"I had to assist many customers at my job at a drugstore - some were infected with COVID-19. It is always a risk, but somebody should do it."

"What affected us the most on a family level was the death of my grandmother on my mother's side. That happened in May/2020. I think we are still affected."

The data also reflected health concerns, be it physical or mental health:

"My dad got COVID-19. Everyone in the family feared being infected, and there were no vaccines. I can feel how afraid people are. They do not want to die."

“I am very sad. Many people died, and we were afraid and anxious. COVID-19 left physical health sequelae and depression in my parents.”

“Emotionally, the pandemic affected me because I had been diagnosed with anxiety and depression before the pandemic. All that COVID-19 stuff made my health worse. I feel very bad and I can see people suffering very hard.”

Regarding the students’ adaptability to social distance and online education, the data showed that the participants had moderate and high levels of flexibility before complex situations, but a high level of stress arising from the fear of getting infected with the virus. Consequently, the participants had difficulties keeping calm and in a good mood when they learned that friends and relatives were COVID-19- positive. They were pessimistic about their friends and relatives’ health. In addition, the students reported multiple negative impacts on their academic activities and achievements. They also reported other challenges, in terms of work and social relations:

“My online class schedule coincided with my two brothers’ classes, and we had only one computer with internet. I had the computer only for a short time. I would do homework at night or early in the morning.”

“Being locked up in my house for a long time stressed me out. I could not get together with my friends, and things at home were complicated.”

“I was laid off from my job at a coffee shop as the clientele dropped to zero, and the owners opted to close the shop. It stressed me out, and I became desperate.”

The new ways of working (education online), the evaluation processes, and above all, the safe distancing measures impacted the participants. Students identified excessive exposure to news broadcasts as a source of fear, stress, and anxiety in the face of academic and home burdens and responsibilities.

Financially, the pandemic impacted most strongly on students whose families did not have a permanent income (30% of the participants). Some families experienced the bankruptcy of the family business. Students and their families started ventures or transformed their businesses to cope with the impact of the pandemic on economic sustainability.

4.2 Institutional policy and professors’ initiatives for students’ care

Data concerning institutional policy and professors’ initiatives for the care of students before, during and after the pandemic are presented below:

4.2.1 Institutional policy

The institutional policy for student care before the COVID-19 pandemic included:

1. Affirmative policies to support students with disabilities,
2. Attention to vulnerable (for reasons of ethnicity, migration, gender identity, among others) students,
3. Economic support in the form of partial scholarships for outstanding and economically disadvantaged students,
4. Execution of student health and welfare services,
5. Free legal advice services,
6. Student tutorials and academic counseling.

During the pandemic, the policy included:

1. Execution of campaigns for the collection and distribution of medicines and food for university students,
2. Online medical service,
3. Online mental wellness support,
4. Intensive student tutorials and academic counseling online,
5. Vaccination campaigns.

In this post-pandemic period, the policy includes:

1. Affirmative policies to support disabled and vulnerable (for reasons of poverty, ethnicity, migration, gender identity, among others) students,
2. Economic support in the form of partial scholarships for outstanding and economically disadvantaged students,
3. Execution of student health and welfare services,
4. Free legal advice services,
5. Student tutorials and academic counseling,
6. Mental wellness support,
7. Vaccination campaigns against COVID-19.

4.2.2 Professors' initiatives for care

Professors' initiatives for students' care before the COVID-19 pandemic included:

1. Academic tutoring according to the opening hours established by the programs,
2. Accompaniment for students in face-to-face academic events: congresses or seminars,
3. Support for the professional growth of students,
4. Accompaniment for students in major curricular, social, sports, and recreational activities,
5. Creation of safe spaces for student reflection on learning about pre-professional practices and disagreement between students and professors,
6. Counseling and support to improve opportunities for access to the job market.

During the pandemic, they included:

1. A move to online teaching,
2. Creation of safe virtual spaces to help students cope with the effects of confinement and regain hope for the future,
3. Counselling and emotional support for students in the face of contagion and loss of loved ones,
4. Online tutorials available at times according to the needs of the students,
5. Participatory decision-making between professors and students regarding deadlines for delivery of tasks, projects, among others,
6. Accompaniment for students in online academic events: Congresses, conferences, seminars,
7. Advice on student enterprises.

Post Covid-19 initiatives are now:

1. A move back to face-to-face teaching,
2. Counselling and emotional support for students,
3. Both face-to-face and online academic tutorials,
4. Return to academic activities not allowed during confinement (e.g., internship)
5. Accompaniment for students in academic events (e.g., conferences) in online and face-to-face modes,
6. Advice on student ventures that emerged during the pandemic.

According to students, something important to them is the professors' disposition to listen to students speak about their academic challenges and also affective issues related to their families and friendships. In this sense, democracy is one of the main characteristics required to establish trust among the participants of a dialogue (García-Carrión et al., 2016), because it strengthens participatory work (Flecha & Álvarez, 2016) and contributes to the creation of safe spaces for learning (Mercer et al., 1999). Additionally, Berniz & Miller (2017) argue that dialogue as a teaching practice contributes diversity and to the construction of long-lasting cooperative ties, which is consistent with the findings of this present study. It is therefore important for professors and students to engage in dialogue, so that they can understand each other's ways of thinking.

4.3 Students' feedback on their professors' care

During the pandemic, the students experienced stress and bad moods. Supporting students required the professors to be good at assertive communication, relaxation techniques, and mentoring. The attention to students' emotions must follow routes that facilitate the approach to problems of interest to students, the construction of learning and listening environments in face-to-face or virtual spaces that are equitable, collaborative, and supportive. The strategies used by the professors to help students to manage their emotions more successfully were teaching experience groups and discussion forums. These strategies helped eliminate barriers, exclusion, reproach, and discrimination among the people who took part in the project. The most common practices according to students that their professors used to dispense care for students included interpersonal regulation, empathy, visualization, and assertiveness.

Concerning the professors' practice for care students in the category of interpersonal relationships, one important factor was listening, as reflected by some of the students' comments extracted from focus groups 1 and 2:

"I like the dialogues that arise from reading the novel -La emancipada- because we, the students, can freely express our opinions without fear that someone will criticize us."

"In this activity, everyone respects each other's opinions, which helps me calm down emotionally and look for solutions to my problems related to the university."

"In the experience clinic, we discussed the problems arising during the education field experience. There we are listened to and can exchange ideas to solve the problems that affect us and that worsened during the pandemic. The professors listen to us patiently. He asks us to analyze our possible alternative solutions to the problems that affect us. We know that the future is uncertain."

"It is a relief to have one-on-one tutoring. I feel good because no one pays attention to my needs at home. Everyone is stressed out because of the coronavirus issue. I like that my professor listens to me, and I can talk to him about my problems with complete confidence. It helps me to look for solutions to my problems."

The students experienced challenges during and after the pandemic. Even after the vaccination of 70% of the Ecuadorian population and the reduction of COVID-19 infection in 2022, participants had to adapt to a new reality. However, the students noted that, during these periods, their professors and their activities helped them manage stress and bad moods:

"We all need time to assimilate the facts. Talking to my classmates and professor helped me accept my grandmother's death. It helped me to accept the changes that come after the death of a loved one and to recognize that they always wanted us to live happily."

"Reading that book helped me to accept that it is necessary to continue living my life."

“We had to return to my grandparents’ house because, during the pandemic, my father’s business went bankrupt. These months have been terrible for my father. He is under too much stress. At least, I have these conversations and I can expulse all bad feelings I have inside of me.”

“I could not concentrate on my studies. I am very upset with myself. I thought I could manage all these problems by myself. I see that my professors helped me by extending the deadlines for handing in my homework.”

The professors’ care gave students the support to adapt to the new reality and manage negative emotions and thus the transition from online to onsite classes.

4.4 Students’ suggestions to improve professors’ practice of care

Even during this post-pandemic period, the fear of COVID-19 reinfection persists. Students suggest ways to improve the professors’ practice for care, such as these:

1. Remember that not all students have the same learning pace.
2. Identify what is needed to reach the lesson goals (routes followed by learners)
3. Present more explanations and examples when the topics are complex.
4. Give more feedback to student work.
5. Dedicate more time to academic mentoring.
6. Give students time to attend important events in the students’ lives: birthdays, marriages, baptisms, wakes, and graduation.

Furthermore, the evidence found in this study indicates that professors should implement practices that contribute to the strengthening of students in terms of the ability to adapt to changes, strategies to motivate students to learn, and the management of emotions during classes.

5 Conclusion

Based on the literature review and the results of this research, the authors concluded that the professors’ practices of caring for students helped them cope with their difficulties before, during, and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Undergraduate students undergo a complex process when they start their undergraduate program. From the moment they arrive at the university classrooms, they must adapt to university life and assume responsibilities related to their academic performance, physiological and mental health, and finance. Therefore, students require continuous care support from professors and peers.

During the pandemic, attending classes online for almost two years in Ecuador revealed that students faced challenges academically, socioeconomically, and emotionally but they benefitted from the support of their professors.

This study was limited to only one of the 38 universities in Ecuador. The main contribution of this study lies in the determination of best caring practices that teachers can put into effect to support students. The results of this study may be seen as a call for attention for universities to implement care practices as an institutional policy. These best practices were:

1. the creation of safe spaces for frank and open dialogue between professors and students,
2. the availability of tutors for academic follow-up and the flexibility of schedules,
3. support for students in academic and personal matters.

These care practices can contribute to a holistic educational experience for university students.

References

- Alvarez, P., García-Carrión, R., Puigvert, L., Pulido, C., & Schubert, T. (2018). Beyond the walls: The social reintegration of prisoners through the dialogic reading of classic universal literature in prison. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 62(4), 1043–1061. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X16672864>
- Anderson, V., Rabello, R., Wass, R., Golding, C., Rangi, A., Eteuati, E., Bristowe, Z., & Waller, A. (2020). Good teaching as care in higher education. *Higher Education*, 79(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00392-6>
- Aveyard, H. (2014). *Doing a literature review in health and social care: A practical guide* (3. ed). Open University Press McGraw-Hill.
- Bar-On, R. (1988). *The development of a concept of psychological well-being* [Dissertation, Rhodes University]. <https://commons.ru.ac.za/vital/access/services/Download/vital:2928/SOURCEPDF?view=true>
- Berniz, K., & Miller, A. (2017). English language support: A dialogical multi-literacies approach to teaching students from CALD backgrounds. *Journal of Pedagogy*, 8(2), 101–120. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jped-2017-0011>
- Brewer, Margo L., van Kessel, G., Sanderson, B., Naumann, F., Lane, M., Reubenson, A., & Carter, A. (2019). Resilience in higher education students: A scoping review. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 38(6), 1105–1120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1626810>
- Buber, M. (1993). *Nachlese* (3rd ed.). Schneider.
- Contreras León, J. J., & Chapetón Castro, C. M. (2017). Transforming EFL classroom practices and promoting students' empowerment: Collaborative learning from a dialogical approach. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 19(2), 135–149. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v19n2.57811>
- Dewey, J. (1971). *Experience and education*. Collier Books.
- Flecha-García, R., & Alvarez, P. (2016). Fostering learning and solidarity among students through the reading of universal classics of literature: The case of dialogic literary gatherings. *Educación, Lenguaje y Sociedad*, 13(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.19137/els-2016-131302>
- Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach* (Expanded ed). Westview Press.
- García, M., Hurtado, P., Quintero, D., Rivera, D., & Ureña, Y. (2018). La gestión de las emociones, una necesidad en el contexto educativo y en la formación profesional. *Espacios*, 39(49), 8. <https://www.revistaespacios.com/a18v39n49/18394908.html#tres>
- García-Carrión, R., Martínez de la Hidalga, Z., & Villardón, L. (2016). Tertulias literarias dialógicas: Herramienta para una educación de éxito. *Padres y Maestros. Publicación de La Facultad de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales*, 0(367), 42. <https://doi.org/10.14422/pym.i367.y2016.008>
- Grant, L., & Kinman, G. (2012). Enhancing wellbeing in social work students: Building resilience in the next generation. *Social Work Education*, 31(5), 605–621. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2011.590931>
- Guzmán-Ramírez, S. M. (2019). *La tertulia literaria dialógica una estrategia didáctica para disminuir el nivel de ansiedad en un grupo de estudiantes del P.E.U.L al expresarse oralmente en inglés* [Thesis, Universidad Libre]. <https://repository.unilibre.edu.co/bitstream/handle/10901/17770/La%20tertulia%20literaria%20dial%3%b3gica%2c%20una%20estrategia%20did%3%a1ctica%20para%20disminuir%20el%20nivel%20de%20ansiedad%20de%20un%20grupo%20de%20estudiantes%20del%20P.E.U.L%2c%20al%20expresarse%20oralmente%20en%20ingl%3%a9s..pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

- Henry, A. (2019). A drama of selves: Investigating teacher identity development from dialogical and complexity perspectives. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 9(2), 263–285. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssl.2019.9.2.2>
- Lawrence, P. (2019). Dialogical agency: Children’s interactions with human and more-than-human. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 27(3), 318–333. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2019.1600802>
- Llongueras-Aparicio, A., & Casas-Pardo, J. A. (2019). Teachers in retreat: The teacher as a dialogical self and the risks of an excessive formalization of its role. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 51(10), 1042–1050. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2018.1519700>
- Mercer, N., Wegerif, R., & Dawes, L. (1999). Children’s talk and the development of reasoning in the classroom. *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(1), 95–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141192990250107>
- Nageotte, N., & Buck, G. (2020). Transitioning to teaching science in higher education: Exploring informal dialogical approaches to teaching in a formal educational setting. *Studying Teacher Education*, 16(1), 105–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17425964.2019.1690443>
- Noddings, N. (1999). Caring and competence. In G. A. Griffin (Ed.), *The education of teachers* (1. print). National Soc. for the Study of Education.
- Noddings, N. (2005). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education* (2nd ed). Teachers College Press.
- Noddings, N. (2012). The caring relation in teaching. *Oxford Review of Education*, 38(6), 771–781. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2012.745047>
- Phair, J. (2014). *Motivation and academic resilience in university students: The moderating role of age* [Masters Coursework]. <http://ecite.utas.edu.au/97001>
- Ruhalahiti, S., Korhonen, A.-M., & Rasi, P. (2017). Authentic, dialogical knowledge construction: A blended and mobile teacher education programme. *Educational Research*, 59(4), 373–390. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2017.1369858>
- Senge, P. M. (Ed.). (2000). *Schools that learn: A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education* (1st ed.). Doubleday.
- Tacca, D. R., Cuarez, R., & Quispe, R. (2020). Habilidades sociales, autoconcepto y autoestima en adolescentes peruanos de educación secundaria. *International Journal of Sociology of Education*, 9(3), 293–324. <https://doi.org/10.17583/rise.2020.5186>
- Tronto, J. C. (1993). *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care*. Routledge.
- Turner, M., Holdsworth, S., & Scott-Young, C. M. (2017). Resilience at university: The development and testing of a new measure. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 36(2), 386–400. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2016.1185398>
- Villafuerte-Holguín, J. S., & Ramírez-Rodríguez, W. (2022). Tertulia literaria dialógica en ambientes híbridos: Pedagogía y contención emocional de adolescentes en tiempos de pandemia. *Sinéctica*, 58. [https://doi.org/10.31391/S2007-7033\(2022\)0058-012](https://doi.org/10.31391/S2007-7033(2022)0058-012)
- Wilson, E. O. (1999). *Consilience: The unity of knowledge* (1st ed.). Vintage Books.
- Woo, J.-G. (2019). Revisiting the Analects for a modern reading of the Confucian dialogical spirit in education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 51(11), 1091–1105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2018.1501678>

Jhonny Villafuerte (PhD) is an associate professor at University of Laica Eloy Alfaro of Manabi in Ecuador. He is the leader of the research project “Reading Comprehension and Academic Writing”

which investigates the promotion of reading competence of preservice and in-service teachers in Ecuador. His research interests are educational issues in minorities, inclusion and diversity, and sustainable development.

Éder Intriago-Palacios (PhD) is a teaching assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Kansas State University. He serves as a reviewer for *Mextesol Journal*. His research interests include English medium-instruction, extensive reading, and English language teachers' professional development.

Antonieta Morales-Jaramillo (PhD) is an associate professor in the English Teacher Education Program at University of Guayaquil, Ecuador where she serves as the coordinator of educational field experiences. Her research interests include self-generated drawing to improve reading comprehension, EFL extensive reading, and English language teachers' professional development.