EDICIONES
COMPLUTENSE

"And though our dreams may be shattered to pieces, I will resist": digital storytelling to analyse emotional impact of the pandemic on university students[1]

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Abstract. Covid-19 generated an important impact on the mental health of university students. In this context, a double need arises: to analyse the effects of this impact and to work on emotional education with this educational sector. This study is part of a broader educational innovation project focused on working on the emotional education of university students. In this case, our purpose was to analyse the experiences of university students (N=6) during the pandemic through Digital Storytellings. The results showed revealing aspects regarding the influence that the pandemic had on students: the shortcomings of virtuality in teaching, the development of coping strategies, the lessons learned from the pandemic, etc. Finally, it was set out a number of implications for higher education, like the promotion of emotional education plans, the optimisation of online educational resources, and increased teacher training in digital issues and emotional support.
Keywords: digital storytelling; higher education; covid-19; emotional adjustment; university.

[en] "Y aunque los sueños se nos rompan en pedazos, resistiré": narraciones digitales para analizar el impacto emocional de la pandemia en los estudiantes universitarios

Resumen. La Covid-19 generó un importante impacto en la salud mental de los estudiantes universitarios. En este contexto, surge una doble necesidad: analizar los efectos de este impacto y trabajar la educación emocional con este sector educativo. Este estudio forma parte de un proyecto más amplio de innovación educativa centrado en trabajar la educación emocional de los estudiantes universitarios. En este caso, el principal objetivo del presente estudio fue analizar las experiencias de los estudiantes universitarios (N=6) durante la pandemia a través de Digital Storytellings. Los resultados muestran aspectos reveladores sobre la influencia que tuvo la pandemia en los estudiantes: las carencias de la virtualidad en la enseñanza, el desarrollo de estrategias para afrontar, las lecciones aprendidas de la pandemia, etc. Por último, se exponen una serie de implicaciones para la educación superior, como la promoción de planes de educación emocional, la optimización de los recursos educativos en línea y el aumento de la formación del profesorado en temas digitales y de apoyo emocional.
Palabras Clave: digital storytelling, Educación Superior, COVId-19, impacto emocional, universidad.

Sumario. 1. Introduction. 2. Method. 3. Results. 4. Discussion. 5. Conclusions and educational implications. 6. References.

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1. Introduction

Over the past year, the new virus called covid-19, coronavirus or SARS-CoV-2 generated a significant health crisis with enormous economic and social consequences. From its first detection in China at the end of 2019 to the present, the disease has spread to more than 200 different countries (Shen et al., 2020), causing a total of 123,216,178 confirmed cases and more than 2,714,517 deaths (WHO, 23-March-2021). The high mortality rate together with the high transmissibility associated with this new virus led the World Health Organization to declare a global pandemic.

Faced with this global health crisis, the different countries of the world applied measures based on the principles of distancing and social isolation (Murphy, 2020). The main objective of these measures was to curb the spread of the virus by minimising the number of infections in order to protect the health of the population and prevent the collapse of health services. In the particular case of the Spanish context, the government was forced to order the confinement of the entire population. This situation came into force on 14th March and was extended until 21st June 2020.

During this period, both domestic and international travel was restricted and the Spanish population was forced to remain permanently at home, except for minor exceptions such as for the purchase of basic necessities (food or medicines), for commuting to work, or for visiting health centres (RD 463/2020). Likewise, all services considered non-essential (places of leisure, second necessity businesses, etc.) were closed, as well as those with a large capacity, including educational centres. This situation began to have significant economic and financial consequences (Pak et al., 2020).

In the latter regard, numerous studies highlight how the health measures adopted led to a decline in production and to the disruption of certain economic sectors such as tourism, the service sector and mining, among others (Pak et al., 2020). Moreover, many businesses were closed (Sheresheva, 2020), leading to increased levels of unemployment (Béland et al., 2020). This situation caused significant job and financial uncertainty among the population, which, together with other aspects such as the fear of being infected, the fear of losing loved ones or the social isolation caused by confinement, had a great psychological impact (Ahmar et al., 2020; Hernández, 2020).

This impact has been evidenced in increased levels of stress, anxiety, depression, nervousness, restlessness, feelings of hopelessness, sleep problems and even irritability and anger among the adult population (Lozano-Vargas, 2020; Sandín et al., 2020). Furthermore, the results of different studies coincide in pointing to the youngest (between 19-30 years) as one of those most affected psychologically by this pandemic (Hernández, 2020; Lozano-Vargas, 2020; Sandín et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be established that Covid-19 has not only posed a danger to those infected, but to public health in general, including the mental health of the rest of the population.

In the particular case of the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the population, there are numerous studies concerned with the university population (Cao et al., 2020; Covarrubias, 2021; Husky et al., 2020; Sundarasen et al., 2021; Vigourouz et al., 2021). The rapid transition that universities made from a face-to-face to a fully virtual education scenario significantly affected this sector of the population (Araújo et al., 2020).

According to numerous authors, this situation generated high levels of stress and anxiety (Akdeniz et al. 2020; Husky et al., 2020; Vigourouz et al., 2021); as well as the emergence of various emotions and feelings such as anguish, sadness, loneliness, uncertainty or fear, among others (Covarrubias, 2021; Hasan & Bao, 2020). For Hasan and Bao (2020) and Sundarasen et al. (2021), the main reason for this impact lies in a misapplication of the online learning approach, which led to a lack of motivation or enjoyment, to a feeling of a deficit in the quality of their training, or to a fear of losing the academic year.

On the other hand, other studies highlight how different situations caused by the pandemic (fear of infection, fear of death of family members, economic situation or family coexistence) also had an emotional impact on students that indirectly affected their learning (Cao et al, 2020; Sahu, 2020).

In this context, the need arose to work on emotional education in university students, in order to improve their current psychological situation generated by the pandemic. According Bisquerra and García (2018), emotional education should be considered an essential and permanent element throughout all educational stages, since it involves socially training people for the 21st century challenges.

To this end, an educational innovative project was developed based on the Digital Storytelling technique. This consists of a narrative technique characterised by the presentation of ideas through the use of different digital and technological tools (Villalustre & Moral, 2013). This form of expression is not only characterised by its ability to transmit information, but also by its expressive (Robin, 2015) and reflective potential (Kirk & Pitches, 2013).

Due to its technological nature, this project was applied to young university students of Education at the University of Granada, specifically to those students taking the subject "Technological Resources". This project not only addressed the contents of the subject in an innovative way, but also made it possible to work in the field of emotional education in an educational sector (the university) where the need is evident and at a time of extreme necessity. In this sense, it is worth recalling the importance of emotional education for future teachers. It is difficult to promote students' emotional development if teachers do not previously acquire enough emotional competences (Bisquerra and García 2018).

Digital Storytelling is also an important research tool with a critical approach. In this sense, this research technique allows for a greater understanding of the lived experiences of subjects (Rice, 2014). This is mainly due to the fact that the experiences become the central core of creation and reflection of participants (LaMarre & Rice, 2016).

Therefore, the study presented below is part of this broader innovation project. However, on this occasion, the main objective is to analyse the emotional impact that the pandemic has had on young university students of Education at the University of Granada using the Digital Storytelling technique. To this end, a total of six different cases were selected in which both common elements and distinctive nuances stand out. These stories not only describe the emotional impact that the different scenarios of the pandemic generated in the students, but also relate experiences, highlight survival strategies, underline milestones, name key characters, and highlight learnings generated by this situation

2. Method

2.1. Research design

For this exploratory study, a multi-case approach was used (Hancock & Algozzine, 2012). This type of study focuses on collecting individual information from different cases to investigate a particular phenomenon and compare the information to reach conclusions and convergences as well as differences. This collective case study collected six Digital Storytelling from university students of Education (Table 1). Through these cases, we explored the experiences and feelings provoked by COVID 19 during the confinement and explored the possibilities and the use that the participants made of digital storytelling. Digital storytelling is a participatory approach for telling and sharing personal stories created by the participants themselves by using different digital media (Cunsolo et al., 2012). This medium allows us in a qualitative way to go deeper into the person, so it assumes a biographical and narrative approach (Bolivar & Sunday, 2020).

Table 1. Selected cases

Name	Marta	Adrián	Juan	Marina	Raquel	Vanesa
Age	19	19	23	19	19	20
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female
Educational level	Second University course in Education	Second University course in Education	Educational cycle and Second University course in Education	Second University course in Education	Second University course in Education	Second University course in Education
Containment location	Family home	Student flat and Family home	Student flat and Family home	Student flat	Family home	Family home
Town or city	Town	Town (Jaen)	Town (Cádiz)	City (Granada)	Town (Jaén)	Town (Almería)
Company during confinement	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

2.1.1. Research context

The present study was carried out at the University of Granada (Spain), during the first term of the academic year 2020-2021. It is part of a larger research project in which the Digital Storytellings of a total of 156 university students from two different groups of the second year of Education. Students were asked to write personal digital stories during the "Technological Resources" subject as a way of expressing feelings induced by the confinement caused by COVID-19.

The students were instructed to tell what they had experienced during the confinement. All students followed the same process, which consisted of creating a digital story, being free to choose the format and tools to be used. In all cases, this learning activity was a task that students had to complete as a compulsory part of the assessment to work on emotional education and digital competence.

Specifically for the development of this study, six cases were purposively selected for an exhaustive qualitative analysis. It was the information obtained itself that guided the purposive sampling, in addition to taking into account the wealth of information on the objective of the study and the clear willingness to cooperate with the researcher (Izcara, 2014). We also followed two sample selection criteria following Tójar (2006), relevance as the best-informed subjects and adequacy with the presence of sufficient data to understand the object of study. In addition to establishing the criterion of originality of the Digital Storytellings.

2.1.2. Data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations.

The data was mainly obtained from the students' Digital Storytellings, but also from contacts before and after the creation of the digital artefacts. All files were uploaded by the students to the university digital platform or to the

teachers' own email. The data analysis was qualitative, based on the foundations of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), as the data emerged from the digital discourse exposed in the practices developed by the informants. All the information was entered into the qualitative analysis software *Nvivo 12* to facilitate its analysis and coding.

Our research protocol ensured maximum respect and support for the stories told by participants. We carefully monitored participants' reactions and ensured consent to the use, display and handling of the Digital Storytellings. For that aim, a consent form with the information about what was going to be done with their stories was developed. All six participants gave us their consent to share their storytelling as part of the study.

2.1.4. Limitations

The case study through Digital Stotytellings is a qualitative research methodology whose main weakness is the results' lack of reliability, its subjective nature and the inability to generalise its conclusions. Secondly, we are aware that the number of participants is small and, although we have tried to select a heterogeneous and representative group, the data from another group of participants could be different. In spite of all this, we defend the use of this methodology for certain complex phenomena like this. Besides, if it is used rigorously, seriously and through processes that contribute to its reliability and validity, it also allows to obtain valuable conclusions.

3. Results

In this section we will analyse the stories of the six selected participants. To this end, we will analyse both the format used and highlight the emotional impact that the different pandemic scenarios generated in the students. We will also highlight the personal experiences, the strategies employed, the key milestones, the key characters and the learning generated by this situation.

3.1. Marta's story: When did it all start?

The first case consists of a short film entitled "*When did it all start?*" This film consists of a narration accompanied by images and a faint musical accompaniment. The duration of the video is of 2 minutes and 38 seconds. In this period of time, Marta answers the question that titles the short film by reflecting on different aspects of what happened during the pandemic. As for the organisation of the content, we can divide the short film into three parts.

The first part describes the normal routine of the last day before the declaration of pandemic status. This is followed by a series of images of everyday activities of a normal day, along with the arrival of news and rumours about the possible existence of a new virus. The student reflects on how quickly these rumours became reality and how the news began to change her life. At this point, the people in the video begin to stand out by wearing face masks.

In the second part, as in the first part, there is a series of images describing the routine of a normal day, but this time during the confinement. Alongside the images, the author describes a series of strategies that helped her during this period, such as writing a diary, following a routine, or even getting dressed, regardless of not being able to go out. The student also mentions a number of key milestones during this period, such as the video calls and the applause that people gave every evening to health professionals. Finally, she reflects on the changes that the pandemic is generating in her, such as the change in her priorities in life, the need to take care of nature, or the importance of knowing how to value the small aspects of life.

The third part is characterised by a double message. Firstly, a message of hope and longing. Marta describes a number of activities that she did not use to value but which she hopes to enjoy again soon. In this sense, for example, she mentions cuddling, contemplating nature, the company of friends, etc. Secondly, there is a message of support for the fight against the virus. To this end, the student gives as the main reason to protect the elderly and health workers.

3.2. Adrian`s Story: The essence of the vignette to capture a pandemic

In the initiative to express how the confinement impacted on the academic and personal dimension of the students, Adrian created a comic. Throughout the different panels, the student tells his story with the emergence of the health crisis, pointing out the different novelties, feelings, and key characters that shaped his life in quarantine. The return home with the announcement of the state of alarm, the virtuality of university classes, the phases of de-escalation and the first advances in the vaccine were episodes highlighted in this plot.

The lockdown on 13 March was for many pupils' positive news (Figure 1). This was because no one initially expected the final severity of the events and they took this 15-day confinement as a kind of holiday. Returning home and seeing their relatives were elements captured throughout the visual plot. Through this digital account, we can appreciate the plurality of emotional expressions that the author experienced. In this particular case, the initial stage of quarantine had a positive connotation for the student.
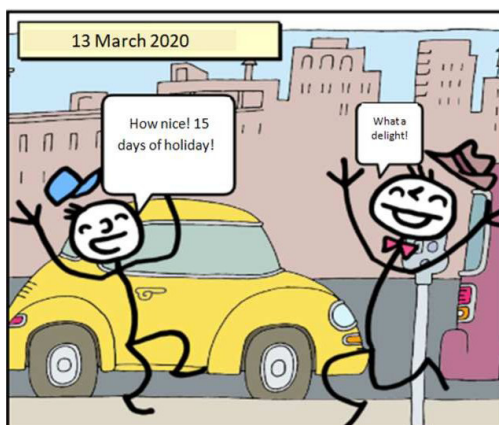
Figure 1. Comic's piece.

It should also be noted that the student highlights throughout his comic those events at a political and social level, and a direct implication in day-to-day life. In fact, he expresses these implications through images such as that of the President of the Government announcing the mobility and timetable measures or the de-escalation phases. Throughout the panels, he also shows how these political measures redirected his academic and personal style towards previously unknown scenarios: online classes, virtual exam stress or the need to be socialised with his colleagues. The student captures the essence of this through connotations of sadness and negativity in his vignettes (Figure 2).
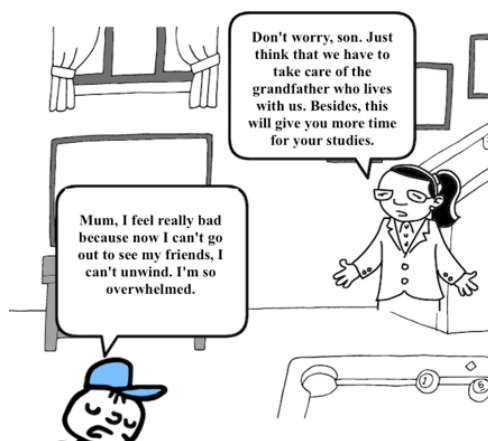

Figure 2. Comic's fragment

The course of the summer and even the start of the new university course in September were encouraging news for Adrián. This is what he expresses in his vignettes, which depict scenes of reunions with friends and family. However, these beautiful moments were accompanied by other alarming news, new restrictions and the suspension of on-site university classes.

The overall reading of this piece alerts of two main issues: the confinement was seen as a threat to his mental health, and the online mode of teaching as an approach that did not respect or encourage that social aspect that should comprise the learning process. However, family, friends and the illusion of a new normality accompanied by the achievement of an effective vaccine were hopeful elements in this digital story.

3.3. Juan's story: "The little birds and the monster"

Juan's story was a virtual audio-story tale created by the interactive content tool called. The story is made up of illustrations that are accompanied by a short-written text. Moreover, the text has also been recorded in voice, so it can be read, visualised and listened to at the same time. Figure 3 shows the cover and first page.
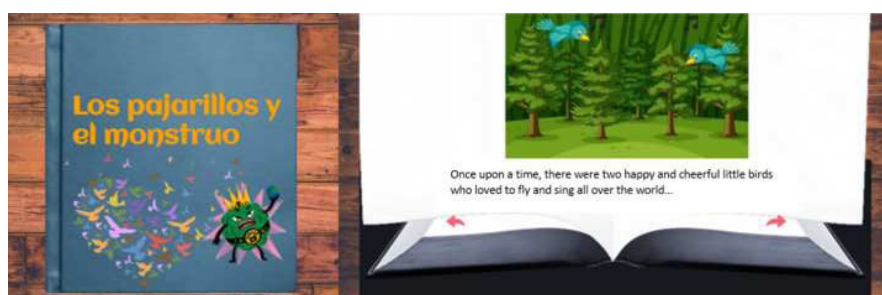

Figure 3. Story's cover and first page.

The tale is about two happy and joyful little birds flying free all over the world until a monster arrives who changes everything and they are forced to be locked up in individual cages, preventing them from flying. Juan decided to express his experience of quarantine and COVID-19 through this metaphor in the form of a tale of two caged birds blaming COVID-19 (monster). The student narrates how the passage of time, since March 2020 (first confinement), weighs on his mood and how it is sadness that invades all his thoughts at this time. He explains how the disease seems to be increasingly aggravated and accentuated, but that despite this, society has the strength and resources to overcome it. The pupil uses the rhetorical figure of birdsong as a social means to overcome loneliness, and also explains in the fable how virtual resources, such as video calls, appear to overcome these adversities. But in spite of these social acts (birdsong can remind us of social contacts between balconies and terraces), the anguish and sadness that accompany the passing of the months increases, as the story relates. However, there is hope, as he mentions warriors (health workers), who watch over the good of all and who are getting stronger and stronger (they have greater knowledge of the disease). He again mentions how the people sang and thanked the health workers for their work: "The little birds sang to thank them for chasing the monster away". This fact shows the importance and the personal and social impact that the applause at 20:00 had on health workers. He then narrates the end of the summer confinement and the concern that accompanies it (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Metaphorical image of applause for health workers.

In short, this digital story shows the sadness felt by the pupils when they have to separate from family and friends in order to isolate themselves and how, despite the means and resources available, they do not prevent the desperation of the situation that has occurred. However, social contact through challenges and expressions of living culture (applause, songs, banners…) helps them to overcome moments of difficulty. Furthermore, he argues that despite the happiness that arose with the end of the confinement, it does not mean a definitive calm and a return to normality.

3.4. Marina's story: Loneliness as an opportunity for self-discovery

Marina's quarantine story is materialised through a video that depicts routine scenes that shaped her three months of confinement. The indecision of whether to spend the quarantine with her family or in solitude, the search for her inner self and the confrontation with previously unconsidered thoughts were key elements in this unexpected and unusual experience. The student points out that the quarantine was a means to pause her rhythm of life and to be able to find a person she did not know before, herself. This process of self-discovery was characterised by different lights and shadows on a path of voluntary solitude. The lights of this quarantine were attributed to small things that she enjoyed doing and that gave meaning to her day to day: routines such as getting up early and watching the sunrise, drawing or photography. The scenography was accompanied by a song that was closely linked to what the student wanted to transmit, and which was characterised by a challenging and persuasive tone. Throughout the recording, the author of the video told a story in which she was the protagonist and which highlighted the feeling of loneliness in its different shades. She used analogies to mention moods and emotions experienced. The looping sequentiality of the day to day through the running of her fingers (analogy of routine and how to escape from it) or the care of the rose (analogy of love and the lessons when someone loses it).

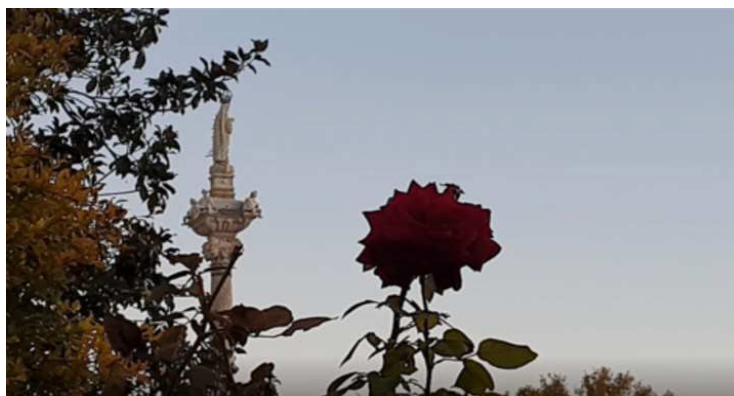Figure 5. Analogy of routine and how to escape from it.

Figure 6. Analogy of love and the lessons when someone loses love.

She displayed hand-drawn artwork, revealing artistic concerns that she was able to develop during those months of compulsory break. Her narrated account shows how an experience she had never had before offered her the opportunity to voluntarily choose solitude as an option. This choice made her get to know herself better, achieve a state of peace and tranquillity and enjoy a true introspection into her own being. The need for routines to give meaning to her days and the empowerment of herself through drawing or photography were two key elements in her digital story.

3.5. Raquel's Story: A quarantine *inside out*

This contribution comes from a student who has created her digital storytelling based on a video with audio and photographs. The video lasts two minutes and eleven seconds and in it, Raquel shows the different feelings and emotions that have emerged during her experience of confinement. For this, she bases herself on the film "Inside Out", a film directed by Pete Docter in 2015 and winner of numerous awards. The film shows how five emotions live inside a little girl and how they continuously fight for control of her. The author has based on this film and shows herself disguised as different emotions in the video. With the representation of the different emotions, the author explains why and how this feeling has arisen in certain moments of the confinement provoked by COVID-19. The whole process of interpretation and narration of the video is accompanied by sad music.

At first, after presenting her digital storytelling, the student appears disguised as "sadness", the second emotion to which she devotes the most time. She explains how sadness invaded her at many moments when she saw how the time of confinement was getting longer and longer. She also explains how not being able to see her family and friends aggravated the situation. Another important point that she represents with the feeling of sadness is not being able to go to university in person and having to do it virtually. Next, she appears disguised as "fear". The student explains how she has felt fear, thinking that she could infect her family and, to a lesser extent, herself, and also narrates how she feels afraid that the situation will never return to what she knew until now. In third place, "disgust" is the feeling she devotes the least amount of time to, explaining how she felt disgusted at having to wear a mask and disinfect all the time. This feeling is followed by anger, the protagonist tells how seeing that other people do not comply with the rules, putting others at risk, provokes this feeling in her. Finally, she shows joy and this is the feeling to which she devotes the most time (30 seconds). The student explains how, despite all the bad things, she sees a positive side. She explains how confinement has given her the opportunity to spend more time with her family and to value the small details, such as contact with people and face-to-face teaching. In this final intervention, we can see the protagonist's hope and joy in the thought that everything will work out.

3.6. Vanessa's Story: I Will Resist Version

The sixth and final case is a version of the famous Spanish song *Resistiré*. Although this song became widespread in the late 1980s, during the pandemic it was once again popularised and became an anthem of struggle. On this occasion, we find a personal version by Vanesa in which using the musical base and some mythical phrases of the song, the student sings the most significant moments since the arrival of confinement in March and the sensations and emotions associated with them. In the following, we will highlight the most relevant milestones together with their emotional impact.

Firstly, the student mentions the closure of the universities and the return home due to the beginning of the confinement. At this time, a sense of happiness is described as a temporary "break". However, as the days passed, a series of negative emotions began to surface. The inability to go out, together with the routine and the start of online classes, create a feeling of apathy and boredom. Among these aspects, the start of distance learning stands out in particular. According to the student, the teachers' lack of empathy, their lack of technological training and problems with the internet begin to cause her to feel overwhelmed and stressed. In fact, according to the student herself, this situation was "real torture". In spite of all this, this period of negativity was followed by a short period of time in which the

pupil emphasised that she had achieved a certain emotional tranquillity thanks to the development of strategies such as getting dressed every day or going out to clap her hands on the balcony.

However, the succession of negative news about the state of the pandemic has a significant impact on her. This news, together with the family problems that began to arise, led to feelings of helplessness in the face of the situation she was experiencing. In the words of the student herself, "I couldn't stand it anymore, I couldn't stop crying, I couldn't even get out of bed, I couldn't stand it anymore, I wanted to go out, I thought I needed a psychologist". The last minutes of the song are characterised by a hymn to hope, mentioning phrases such as "everything has an end" or "I don't lose hope". And, above all, this ending stands out for the use of one of the original verses of the song from the 80s: "And even if our dreams break in pieces, I will resist".

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore through the technique of Digital Storytelling the emotional impact that the pandemic generated in university students of Education at the University of Granada. For this purpose, we decided to delve into six unique stories that captured different experiences, lessons learned and coping strategies to respond to this new and shocking situation that shook the entire planet globally. The results showed revealing aspects and issues in terms of the emotional sphere and the influence that the pandemic had on our students. It also highlights the need for emotional and affective training in times of health crisis among university students.

Firstly, it is important to highlight that throughout the different pieces of digital narrative of our participants, some elements were common and very predominant. For example, feelings such as fear or sadness derived from the pandemic were extremely frequent in the six stories analysed (Figure 7). For example, in Raquel's story, the main fear is "that nothing would ever be the same again". Studies such as Sandín et al. (2021) concur with this finding, reporting that in this time of confinement fear was a notorious and pronounced element in all the participants of their study. Furthermore, Rogowska et al. (2020) argue that sadness became a common factor in almost the entire sample of their study of Polish university students during the period of COVID-19 confinement.
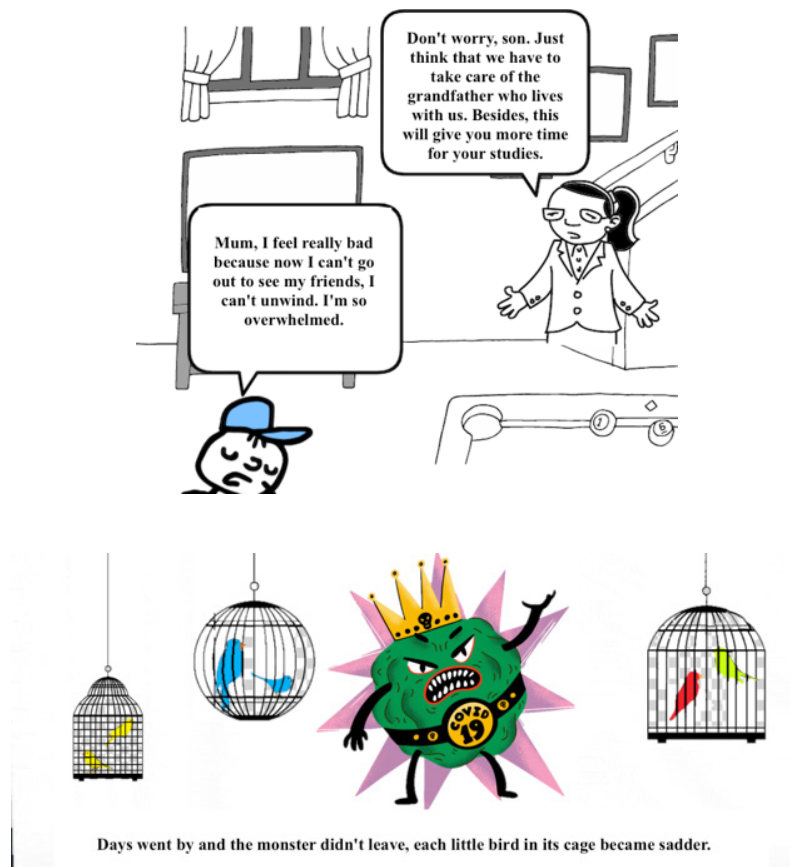

Figure 7. Examples of feelings such as sadness derived from the pandemic from Juan and Adrian's story.

However, such alarming feelings were crystallised from diverse nuances: confusion (Braunack-Mayer, 2013), boredom/monotony (Pan et al., 2005), anxiety (Desclaux et al. 2017) or anger (Caleo et al. 2018). Stories such as John and the caged bird directly express this feeling of helplessness and unease. Akdeniz et al. (2020) share this same result in their research on the emotional state and anxiety among Turkish students during the pandemic, exposing

those negative emotions were the most common in these students, in addition to the fear of infecting family members, which further heightened this fear.

Many of the digital stories presented pointed to the shortcomings and limitations of the virtual mode of university education. Even pieces such as Adrian's comic expressed it as a threat to students' mental health. This aspect has also been explored in research such as Ali's (2020) which revealed emerging vulnerabilities in university systems around the world, and indicated a clear need for flexible educational systems adapted to future unpredictable realities that will again require virtuality. However, there are also studies that pointed to good adaptation and emotional management of students in virtual universities (Rahiem, 2021).

Delving deeper into the emotional/affective strategies developed to cope with the confinement imposed by COVID-19, our study exposes several. Routine, that is, the establishment of patterns of activities, hygiene and daily tasks, was a key axis in almost all of our digital storytelling pieces. Padrón et al. (2021) define them as one of the most effective coping strategies. In fact, the WHO (2020) advised having a structured daily routine (adequate sleep hours, personal hygiene, healthy eating, structuring work and rest hours, adjusting adapted leisure hours, among others) to cope in a healthier way with this difficult situation.

In Spain in particular, distanced socialisation routines such as clapping on balconies also characterised the stories of our participants. Moreover, studies in the Spanish context that investigated the effects of the pandemic on early learners found that for school children, clapping was a positive moment in their daily lives (Idoiaga et al. 2020). Another of the socialisation patterns for coping with the pandemic in our student participants were video calls to family and friends (Figure 8). Due to the impossibility of direct face-to-face contact, this was a widely used resource to alleviate loneliness at many times (Hacker et al. 2020; WHO, 2020; Wiederhold, 2021).
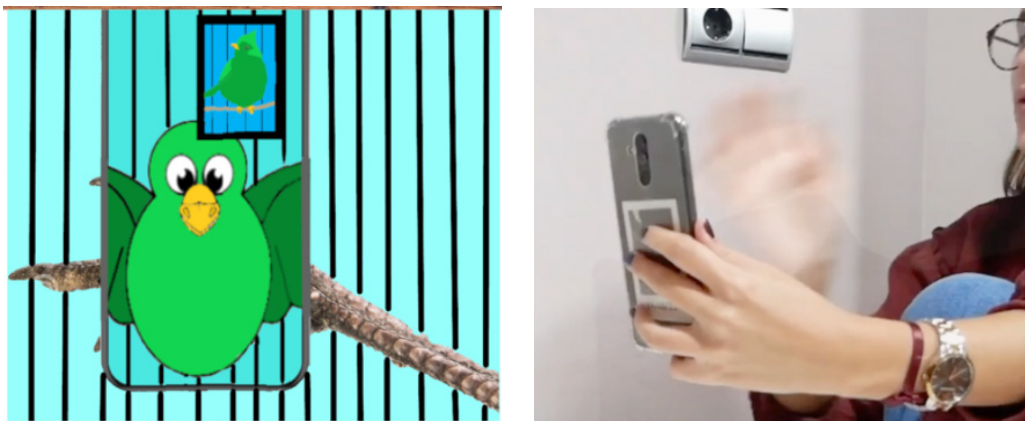

Figure 8. Examples of video calls represented in the different stories.

However, not everything in these six stories had a negative connotation. In fact, our participants remarked that living through this experience provided them with several lessons that are now highly valued. The need to take care of nature (Khanna et al. 2020), to value the small details of everyday life (Sandín et al., 2020), to appreciate family support and friendship even more (Evans et al. 2020) or the need to protect and care for the elderly and health care (Chen & Huang, 2020; Fischer et al, 2020) were central to the digital narrative discourses analysed. In terms of the format of expression of the digital stories, this study presents a remarkable plurality. Video was used by three of our participants, although resources such as comics, audio stories and songs were also used to give visibility to the stories of these students. With regard to the use of video as an approach to expressing DST, it is considered one of the most popular and widely used options. Its methodological nature allows for capturing aspects that go beyond the textual (Pera & Viglia, 2016). The videos analysed through this methodology can provide thematic clues through their narrative discourse, but also elements such as sound, auditory tonality, staging, among other aspects. For example, Marta's story relates positive aspects generated by this period such as appreciating the beauty of small details that previously went unnoticed, like a sunset or a hug.

On the other hand, comics and graphic stories have been used in different research studies to give visibility to significant experiences in students' lives (Rutta et al., 2019). Its sequential nature allows the narration of the different events and episodes that make up the plot of an event through graphic images accompanied by text (Sklar, 2012). Due to the artistic properties of this resource, it is a striking and original element of visual storytelling. A robust body of research has indicated that this type of tool is a useful element in facilitating the emotional and educational expression of learners (Packalen et al., 2007). One of its great potentialities is that the author objectifies his or her own sense of self, thus creating a sense of intimacy, but at the same time placing him or herself at a critical distance (Gray, 1994).

As for the song as a resource of expression in Digital Storytelling, it should be noted that different studies have focused their digital narratives through this medium (Alcantud-Díaz et al., 2014; Robin, 2015; Hull & Katz, 2006), which is considered a motivating, personalised (use of lyrics and different tonalities adapted to the situation/scenario to be narrated) and attractive tool in this methodological field.

5. Conclusions and educational implications

Finally, we consider it necessary to highlight that the findings presented here have a series of educational implications that we set out below. Emotional education should be a primary objective to be addressed in the university setting. In situations of health crisis and confinement, emotions and feelings emerge that university students are sometimes unable to cope with autonomously and that seriously affect their mental health and academic performance. In this sense, digital storytelling methodology aims to delve into these more human domains, recognising the value of ordinary people's stories as valuable for research (Aguilera & López, 2020). On the other hand, there is an urgent need to optimise digital educational resources that motivate and engage students in times of virtuality. Monotony, depersonalisation of teaching and inflexibility in virtual learning has been issues found in our students' digital pieces and should be considered. Furthermore, digital narratives make it possible to break the univocal relationship between researcher and researched, or in this case teacher-student, establishing a dialogical relationship between the two that can be extremely beneficial (Douglas et al., 2019). Moreover, the improvement of resources, platforms and pedagogies of virtual teaching should be accompanied by university teacher training in line with these needs and new demands. It should be pointed out that this teacher training should not only cover technical issues of digital resources, but also the emotional support and accompaniment of students in times when they are not in attendance. In fact, according to Preez et al. (2018) digital narratives are an extremely powerful tool that has not yet been sufficiently explored in the field of educational inclusion, standing out for their ability to provoke empathy in the viewer. We conclude by recommending that future researchers who wish to delve into the identity and human dimension of students opt for the Digital Storytelling methodology, due to its potential and suitability for giving voice and creativity to groups and individuals who need to be heard.

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