

Hispanic Student Perceptions of Distance Education in Agriculture

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study sought to measure students' perceptions of distance education learning environment within online Agriculture courses at Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

This study was guided by Cultural Transactional Theory of Stress Coping (Chun et al., 2006). Social interactions among participants are highly dependent on cultural differences, and as a result, can influence their perceptions and satisfaction related to their education. We were able to examine perceptions of Hispanic college agriculture students regarding their distance education experiences.

OBJECTIVES

- Objective 1: To measure students' perceptions of their distance education learning environment within the Agriculture courses.
- Objective 2: To determine if there were any differences between the students' perception of their distance learning environment based upon their biological sex, ethnicity, or major.

METHODS

The online survey instrument was developed from the Distance Education Learning Environments Survey (DELES; Walker & Fraser, 2005). The DELES was developed to help educators examine psychosocial learning environments in post-secondary distance education (Walker, 2020). The survey consisted of seven constructs that included: Instructor Support, Student Interaction and Collaboration, Personal Relevance, Authentic Learning, Active Learning, Student Autonomy, and Enjoyment of Distance Education. The population for this study included undergraduate students in the Department of Agriculture, Agribusiness and Environmental Science from the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Texas A&M University-Kingsville during the Fall 2020 semester (approximate N = 300). A total of 121 usable surveys were obtained.

FINDINGS

The highest mean scores were found related to Instructor Support ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.62$) and Authentic Learning ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.62$). The lowest mean scores were found related to Student Interaction and Collaboration ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.96$) and Enjoyment of Distance Education ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.09$). In the Enjoyment of Distance Education construct the lowest scores were found in the questions related to: "I prefer distance courses compared to Face to Face courses" ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.27$) and "I would enjoy my education more if all my courses were by a distance" ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.29$).

Table 1

<i>Construct Mean Scores</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Instructor Support	4.49	0.62
Authentic Learning	4.16	0.62
Personal Relevance	4.14	0.69
Student Autonomy	4.11	0.74
Active Learning	3.43	0.92
Student Interaction and Collaboration	3.40	0.96
Enjoyment of Distance Education	2.59	1.09



CONCLUSIONS

We found the highest student scores related to Instructor Support. This suggests that students prefer a higher level of instructor support in their online courses.

We found that students had the lowest means scores related to their enjoyment of distance education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for teaching include incorporating different learning strategies in the online course that engages students in their studies. Based on our findings, the researchers suggest that incorporating a higher level of instructor support and authentic learning can increase the student's enjoyment of distance courses.