

## Impact of COVID-19 on education in Mexico



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### ABSTRACT

It must be recognized that we were not prepared to face this atypical situation caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which has caused a crisis that will have significant negative effects on all social sectors, particularly health and education. , as well as employment and the evolution of poverty. (CEPAL1, 2020)  
This disease put people of all ages at risk and traveled from the most privileged places to the most

modest; it lodged the same in those who are outside of letters, as in those who are distinguished by their knowledge, and indistinctly infected those who cultivate the highest values, as well as those who show off their detachment from them.

In the field of education, the confinement and closure of schools and universities as measures to contain the pandemic, led governments to design educational strategies such as distance education, to guarantee the continuity of learning.

Faced with this health emergency, emerging pedagogical practices arose where there was a unique transfer from the classroom and the recreation and rest spaces, to the living room and dining room of the house and, in the case of basic education, the participation of mothers and fathers to address academic problems.

There are many limitations that both teachers and students have had to deal with, from the low or null connectivity and the lack of training in the use and management of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), based on the assumption of that there would be a computer with internet access or a television, as well as the necessary human capacities to advise mothers and fathers or tutors of students on scientific, humanistic and artistic issues.

According to World Bank estimates, the pandemic caused a lag in Mexico equivalent to two years of schooling. Before the pandemic, Mexicans reached an average learning level corresponding to 3rd grade of secondary school. Today your knowledge will only reach the equivalent of 1st grade of high school. (IMCO, 2021)

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Education, Confinement, ICT, Lag.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The educational area has been one of the most affected by the changes generated by the Covid-19 pandemic, since education is regularly taught in person: that is, within a classroom and with the support of a teacher who shares his knowledge and seeks feedback with his students. (Hernández Suárez et al., 2022)



According to data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), by mid-May 2020 more than 1.2 billion students at all levels of education, in more than 190 countries, had stopped having face-to-face classes in school. Of these, more than 160 million were students from Latin America and the Caribbean.

In the Mexican case, more than 35 million students and 2 million teachers were affected by the closure of schools that will not only cause delays in learning and increase in school dropout, as well as inequality, but will also have a cost in the immediate and long-term well-being of girls, children and young people who saw their education interrupted as a result of the pandemic. Schooled education is fundamental, it is the engine of individual and social development, as well as the key to the empowerment of people and their improvement in the quality of life, so that educational lag is a social problem of the first level, since it represents an obstacle to the development of society as a whole.

The Mexican Educational System has undoubtedly been the most affected at all levels, both higher education institutions as well as basic education: Preschool, Primary, Secondary and Higher Secondary Education, after the economy and the productive and labor sectors, by the ravages and consequences of the pandemic.

As an initiative of the government of Mexico and the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) they began the production of the "Aprende en Casa" program, officially launched on April 20, 2020 so that students could continue their learning through the use of platforms or television channels, since the 2019-2020 cycle was one quarter away from ending.

One of the disadvantages suffered with the "Learn at Home" program is that it resulted in a high dropout rate at all educational levels, since many families do not have a computer, internet or television signal, due to inequalities in income distribution and job loss caused by the pandemic. One aspect noted as deficient is that distance education "could not replace the educational experience in the classroom." In addition, a large number of parents cannot accompany the efforts of their children, due to lack of time, knowledge or ability to transmit them.

While it is true that students are mostly familiar with ICT, there is a large number of teachers who do not master new technologies, which is exacerbated in rural areas, where the population must also get rid of the fear that still hinders them in the management of these tools. (Ortiz Herrera et al., 2022)

## **2 OBJECTIVES AND GOALS**

The main objective is to know the impact that the pandemic has had with the closure of schools and universities mainly in Mexico and what proposals have been made to combat it.

This work is justified because in the country there is a complex scenario that deserves an exhaustive and deep investigation, since the consequences are very serious, especially for the most



vulnerable groups, from an increase in the lag in education to the increase in inequalities that already existed before the health contingency.

### 3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research has as main sources of information documents such as ECLAC and UNESCO reports, executive summary of the WORLD BANK, books and magazines that talk about education and COVID-19, national and local newspapers, as well as official internet pages such as INEGI, the <sup>1</sup>Mexican Institute for Competitiveness, A.C. (IMCO), CONEVAL, <sup>2</sup>in addition to studies that experts have carried out on the subject.

Therefore, it is considered that this work is documentary and descriptive.

### 4 RESULTS

In Mexico, the order issued by the Federal Government in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) requesting the temporary closure of schools due to the health contingency was complied with in a staggered manner by the 32 states.

To continue with the training processes, the Aprende en Casa program was launched, which served to provide distance education, through ICT, radio and television (Castellanos-Pierra et al., 2022). This remote program was beneficial for some due to time constraints, but it showed a latent inequality in several areas of the country.

INEGI carried out the Survey for the Measurement of the Covid-19 Impact on Education (ECovid-Ed). The objective of the survey was to identify the repercussions of the momentary suspension of classes in the schools of each state, in the population of children, adolescents and young people from three to 29 years old, in the period 2019-2021 (two school cycles). (INEGI, 2020).

The results of the ECovid-Ed revealed that 1.8 million students between three and 29 years old did not finish the school year (2019-2020) because of the pandemic, 1.5 million were from public schools and 243,000 from private schools.

In the school year (2020-2021) 32.9 million students were enrolled, but the lack of resources and the Covid-19 pandemic aggravated school dropout: 5.2 million students between three and 29 years old were no longer enrolled.

Of that group, 2.3 million did not enroll for reasons directly associated with the Covid-19 disease, either because they consider distance education not very functional, because parents lost their jobs or because they do not have the electronic devices and internet to take virtual classes, and 2.9

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics.

<sup>2</sup> National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy.



million more did not enter due to lack of money or resources, that it is not a new barrier to school dropout.

The figures show that more than 16 million households in Mexico are offline, indicating the digital divide that prevents millions of students from accessing educational content online. Distance education was the main cause of school dropouts.

58.3% of households with someone of school age say that with studies from home "you do not learn or learn less than in person", while 27.1% say that there is a lack of follow-up to the learning of students and 23.9% believe that there is no technical or pedagogical capacity of parents or guardians to transmit knowledge.

School closures also represented an emerging expense for families. The study reveals that 28.6% of households with a population aged three to 29 years made an additional expense to buy smartphones for students to follow distance courses, 26.4% to hire some fixed internet service and 20.9% to acquire furniture "such as chairs, tables, desks or adapt spaces for study". (INEGI, 2021)

According to INEGI, it is estimated that in Mexico there are almost 900,000 children and young people from zero to 18 years old with a disability, only 46.5% attend school and only 5.2% have completed at least one year of higher education. 0.4% of women with disabilities in Mexico complete a bachelor's degree. In education, persons with disabilities have been excluded and marginalized. The pandemic came to highlight what already existed in society: barriers of exclusion rather than inclusion.

According to CONEVAL,<sup>3</sup> 48% of the population with disabilities is behind in education, as opposed to 15% of the population without disabilities.

According to the 2015 CONEVAL Intercensal Survey, the indigenous population amounts to 12 million 25 thousand 947 people and constitutes 10.1% of the total population. Historically, this population has lived in conditions of social and economic deprivation, since it is indicated that 69.5% of the indigenous population (8.4 million people) is in poverty and 27.9% in extreme poverty (3.4 million people).

During the closure of schools, some indigenous students did not receive the breakfast and lunch that was contemplated in the Full-Time Schools program (disappeared by the SEP on February 28, 2022), of which a high percentage of indigenous education schools were part. This greatly affected their development and nutrition.

Additionally, in indigenous communities there is less coverage and accessibility to both the internet and the open television signal, and the lack of equipment such as computers, tablets, and cell phones, which represented a challenge to participate in the "Learn at Home" program, implemented by the Ministry of Public Education of Mexico. (UNESCO, 2020a)

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<sup>3</sup> National Evaluation Council.



Among the various consequences that the Covid-19 pandemic had on children, adolescents and young people are:

- Socio-emotional problems such as fears, stress, anxieties, anxieties and fears.
- Rebound of violent acts, especially in indigenous, Afro-Mexican and low socioeconomic populations, which in turn has impacted on the mental health of youth and childhood and on cycles of violence such as gender inequality and discrimination.
- The excessive use of screens to follow classes on TV or online and confinement at home, limited physical activity and encouraged sedentary lifestyle, thus increasing the risk of overweight and obesity. This leads to irregular sleep and other physical and mental health consequences, such as irritability, anxiety and lack of concentration.
- With social distancing and distance learning, students had to drastically change their routines and social interactions.
- In many countries, school feeding services have been disrupted, and for children, adolescents and young people, this meal was the most important and nutritious meal of the day. (Kánter Coronel et al., 2022)

## 5 DISCUSSION

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the world was already facing a learning crisis, with 258 million school-age children and youth out of school. (UNESCO, 2020b)

And a low quality of education meant that many of the children who were in school learned too little. The learning poverty rate in low- and middle-income countries was 53%, meaning that more than half of 10-year-olds could not read and understand a simple story appropriate for their age. (World Bank, 2019)

Worse, the crisis was not evenly distributed: the most disadvantaged children and youth had the least access to school, with higher dropout rates and greater learning deficits. (World Bank, 2018)

All this implies that the world was already too far from being able to meet Sustainable Development Goal number four, which commits all nations to ensure that "all girls and boys complete primary and secondary education, which must be free, equitable and of quality", among 17 goals that make up the 2030 Agenda.

The impact that the pandemic has had with the closure of schools and universities represents the largest simultaneous crisis that all education systems in the world have suffered.

The closure of schools not only caused delays in learning and increased school dropouts, as well as inequality, but will also have a cost on the immediate and long-term well-being of children and young people who saw their education interrupted as a result of the pandemic. Schooled education is fundamental, it is the engine of individual and social development, as well as the key to the



empowerment of people and their improvement in the quality of life, so that educational lag is a social problem of the first level, since it represents an obstacle to the development of society as a whole.

"It is estimated that in a school year during the pandemic, 35% of learning was lost and this impacts the education, health and income of students throughout their lives.

If fundamental learning is not recovered and if abandonment is not reversed, the generations that are of school age today will accumulate disadvantages and problems that will last throughout their lives. This puts them at risk of being a generation of stigmatized adults with fewer educational opportunities, poorer health, and fewer resources.

Each educational level that is not completed is related to a loss of life expectancy of two years, because a lower educational level is related to poor health management." (Soto, 2023)

If the educational crisis is not reversed, students with less learning mean future workers with fewer skills, which can reduce their income by 8% per year, which is equivalent to one month's salary per year for the rest of their productive life. (IMCO, 2021)

With the health emergency, thousands of children and young people with one or more disabilities have lost all possibility of academic and social adaptability. Several special education institutions chose to leave these students at home, but for them training through a computer or a smart device is not an option. Many cannot use them because of the disabilities with which they live: visual, hearing, motor, autism spectrum disorder, among others and that require face-to-face interaction with a specialized teacher psychopedagogue or a classmate.

Online classes are incompatible with special education, the routines they had with these students were lost with the pandemic, children and young people who had already managed to be self-sufficient ceased to be so due to the impact of changes in their daily routine.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Mexico must build a recovery system that supports students as they recover from the academic and social-emotional impacts of the pandemic, starting with understanding the needs of each student.

The Mexican Education System must reinvent itself by committing to quality education for all, doubling the foundations of educational excellence and innovating to achieve an adequate adaptation to the new reality of the post-pandemic world.

The distance education system should not be discarded, but valued in all its dimensions and analyze in which cases it could subsist in an integral way and implement a Teaching Methodology that uses new technologies that help recover lost learning.

The educational authorities of Mexico must apply an effective strategy for the rapid recovery of learning in key areas and thus avoid dropping out and lagging so as not to repeat the failures that the Educational System had before the pandemic.



The consequences will be seen in the coming years, at least 30% of students of all levels, did not receive classes in any way, the younger and poorer, the more serious the problem.

Society and government must work together to urgently reduce this enormous backwardness, because failure to do so will create a generation of children and young people without a future, condemned to poverty or to enlist as "soldiers" in the ranks of organized crime.

For David Calderón Martín del Campo, executive president of Mexicanos Primero<sup>4</sup>, school recovery after the pandemic can take up to two or three years, so an effective strategy has to be designed that has as a priority to bring them up to date, because it will be a bit like in the economy, not because they open businesses it reaches the level it was before.

The main objective of the educational response to the pandemic must be to recover students' skills to prevent learning losses from condemning them to precarious jobs when they enter the labour market.

Special education institutions demand the construction of public policies that allow this vulnerable group to enjoy the options for their development and training, since there is an impressive educational lag that people with disabilities already faced before the pandemic.

Safeguarding financing for education is a key priority to protect the National Education System from exacerbating inequalities in access to education and the learning crisis.

It is essential to calculate the costs of the Education System and prioritize spending, as well as ensure the protection of education as a fundamental human right and harness the transformative potential of education, not only to build a resilient system but also to contribute to social recovery.

Measures should be implemented to project educational continuity, equity and inclusion, that is, focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized population groups, including indigenous peoples, the Afro-descendant population, refugees and migrants, the most socioeconomically disadvantaged populations and people with disabilities, as well as on sexual and gender diversity. (ECLAC/UNESCO, 2020)

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<sup>4</sup> Mexicanos Primero is an organization dedicated to the analysis of State policies to guarantee the right to education of children and young people.



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