
Opinión de los representantes del primer grado sobre las estrategias a distancia debido al COVID-19. Santa Elena, Ecuador

Opinion of first grade representatives about distance strategies due to COVID-19. Santa Elena, Ecuador

Sara Ginger Sandoval Almeida

Escuela de Educación Básica “Veinticuatro de Julio”, Santa Elena, Ecuador.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7196-9973>

Correo(s) electrónico(s):

saragsandovalmeida@gmail.com

Recibido: 08/12/2020

Aceptado: 12/04/2021

Resumen: Con el objetivo de conocer la opinión de los representantes del primer grado ante la implementación de estrategias a distancia en la Escuela Básica “Veinticuatro de Julio”, Santa Elena, Ecuador debido al COVID-19, se desarrolló un estudio no experimental, descriptivo y exploratorio, aplicando un cuestionario tipo Likert enviado a través de correo electrónico y aplicaciones telefónicas. Se obtuvo que los representantes consideran que la educación a distancia no es la mejor estrategia porque los estudiantes no están aprendiendo adecuadamente aunque se ha dado cumplimiento a la realización de las tareas, además existen limitantes económicas para acceder a medios tecnológicos.

Palabras claves: Covid-19; Educación a distancia; Estrategias a distancia; Aprendizaje en línea.

Abstract: In order to know the opinion of the first grade representatives before the implementation of distance strategies at Escuela Básica “Veinticuatro de Julio”, Santa Elena, Ecuador due to the COVID-19, a non-experimental, descriptive and exploratory study was developed, applying a Likert type questionnaire sent via email and smartphone applications. It was obtained that the representatives consider that distance education is not the best strategy because students are not adequately learning although they have complied with homework, there are also economic limitations to access technological resources.

Keywords: Covid 19; Distance learning; long-distance strategies; On-line learning.

Introduction

The coronavirus disease pandemic initiated in 2019 (COVID-19) is currently the focus of multiple studies, and although there are still no definitive conclusions, the change it has caused in society cannot fail to be appreciated, bringing significant affectations to common life in all countries. Due to the health risk it represents because of its speed of transmission and fatal consequences, all nations have implemented actions to prevent the spread of coronavirus in populations.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), the most feasible prevention strategy while a vaccine or specific treatment is being developed is social isolation. Generally, most nations have agreed that the implementation of quarantines and physical distancing are necessary to stop the accelerated spread of the virus and save lives. These measures have resulted in the interruption of activities in places where large numbers of people tend to be concentrated; therefore, in several countries, attendance at schools and other educational institutions has been banned.

By April 2020, 35 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean had already decided to suspend classes at all educational levels, affecting more than 115 million students from preschool to tertiary level (UNESCO, 2020). This scenario has meant that formal education systems have had to adjust their activities in order to continue to carry out educational work at home. Therefore, emergency distance education initiatives have been proposed to provide short-term solutions and maintain continuity in the teaching-learning processes.

However, these actions used to stop the chain of transmission of the disease could also become limitations to the normal course of schooling in the context of learning and the expected academic achievements. Many of the students have had changes in teaching patterns, for example, the physical absence and daily guidance of teachers and professors, the need to access and use technological tools, and the accompaniment of parents or representatives who are not necessarily familiar with the subjects to be studied.

According to the Report of the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI, 2020), the prolonged closure of educational centers will have negative repercussions on learning achievement, on-time schooling, dropout and promotion. It is possible that up to now, the temporary closure is already having a significant impact on learning processes, since each child has a mental scheme of the routines to be fulfilled academically, being the school the epicenter of educational scenarios, especially in the initial stages.

On the other hand, ideally, all countries should have modern educational systems that are more flexible, so as to ensure effective interaction between teachers, parents and students, creating teaching and learning scenarios through virtual educational platforms, but unfortunately this is not possible in many regions. Areas with fewer economic

resources have been the most limited in accessing technological resources to meet the requirements of distance education.

In addition, if the suspension period is prolonged, the risk of school dropout will increase, particularly due to the drastic drop in family income, as well as the increased risk to the mental health of children and adolescents as a result of confinement and family stress. It is likely that the children of the poorest and most rural families will be forced to enter the labor market, which will increase child labor and school dropout rates.

In the midst of this context, the regions farther away from the big cities have been even more exposed, and more reliably show the need for assistance and updating of alternative teaching mechanisms to the traditional one in the classroom. In this sense, Veliz and Zambrano (2018) point out that in Ecuador there are 1,149 parishes of which 359 are urban and 790 rural, this represents almost 70% of the population, where poverty is estimated at 43.35% and extreme poverty at 19.74%.

According to the Center for Water and Sustainable Development of Ecuador (CADS-SPOL, 2013) in the province of Santa Elena, Ecuador, the distribution of the population is mainly rural (72.5%). Due to the social and environmental conditions of the area, it could be thought that a significant number of children do not have the technological means to fully carry out the formative process from the virtuality, in addition, it is necessary to consider what preparation parents have to guide them from the bosom of the homes in the fulfillment of the study plan and the completion of the tasks that must be consigned in the framework of the measures of mandatory social distancing.

The Basic School "Veinticuatro de Julio" of Santa Elena, located in a rural area, serves local children enrolled. It is currently complying with the national guidelines for the suspension of face-to-face classes, so all activities take place at a distance, although the institution does not have technological resources or a virtual educational platform. The children in the first grade of this school do not escape from this reality, receiving reference materials and the guidelines of the assigned tasks through email and social networks.

For these reasons, the objective of this study is to know the opinion of parents and representatives about the strategies used by the school to continue the educational process in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, as well as their possibilities of access to the technological resources necessary for the fulfillment of the academic tasks to be performed as part of the distance study plan due to the mandatory social isolation decreed by the National Executive.

Development

In view of the importance of knowing the opinion of the representatives, a non-experimental, descriptive and exploratory quantitative study was carried out, since it deals with a reality related to the recent conditions of the topic addressed. For data collection, the survey technique was applied through the implementation of a self-directed questionnaire with a Likert-type scale, with five response alternatives (from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree"), with six (6) propositions, sent through telephone applications and e-mail to parents and representatives of children in the first grade of elementary school at the "Veinticuatro de Julio" elementary school in the canton of Santa Elena in Ecuador.

The total population consisted of thirty (30) representatives of the students in the initial enrollment of the grade, however, after applying a purposive sampling, a sample of eleven (11) representatives was obtained who met the following inclusion criteria: having a son or daughter attending the aforementioned level (since dropout was observed in varying degrees due to the health situation), living in rural regions of the area, who openly agreed to collaborate as study participants (informed consent by telephone) and filled out the questionnaire. Details of the activities carried out are given below.

Procedure

1. Initially, the author communicated with the parents and representatives of the children indicating that a survey would be administered to them virtually, to be answered objectively, based on the experience they have had during the time of quarantine and social isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

...

2. The questionnaire was sent by telephone and by mail in the case of parents who did not have the resources to receive it via Whatsapp Messenger.

3. The responses obtained from the data collection were counted.

4. The data were processed in Microsoft Office Excel software, calculating percentages and 95% Confidence Intervals (95%CI). A descriptive statistical analysis was applied, presenting the results in tables with absolute frequencies and percentages for each response alternative.

Results and discussion

After applying the instrument and collecting the information, when the representatives were asked their opinion about online school activities as the most appropriate measure for children to complete and continue their studies in first grade, 46% of the interviewed expressed disagreement, while only 18% expressed "Strongly agree" with this modality (see Table 1).

Opinion	f	%	IC (95%)
Strongly agree	2	18,18	2,28-51,78
Agreed	0	0	-
Neither agree nor disagree	4	36,36	10,93-69,21
Disagree	5	45,45	16,75-76,62
Strongly disagree	0	0	-
Total	11	100,00	-

Table 1: Acceptance of online school activities for the first grade of primary school and the normal continuation of children's studies.

Source: Self elaboration

Inquiring into the perception of the representatives regarding the continuity of the learning consolidation process during this preventive isolation stage, it was found that more than 80% of the parents consider that this has not been achieved, with more than half (54%) and almost a third (27%) "Disagreeing" and "Strongly disagreeing", respectively (Table 2).

Opinion	f	%	IC (95%)
Strongly agree	0	0	-
Agreed	1	9,09	0,23-41,28
Neither agree nor disagree	1	9,09	0,23-41,28
Disagree	6	54,55	23,38-83,25
Strongly disagree	3	27,27	6,02-60,97
Total	11	100,00	-

Table 2: Continuity of the process of consolidation of children's learning at the academic level.

Source: Self elaboration

Now, when asked if the children's fulfillment of assignments was being negatively influenced by the distance modality, the majority of the interviewed (91%) responded that the completion of assignments has not been affected, obtaining 45% for the scales "Disagree" and "Strongly disagree", respectively (see Table 3).

Opinion	f	%	IC (95%)
Strongly agree	0	0	-
Agreed	0	0	-
Neither agree nor disagree	1	9,09	0,23-41,28
Disagree	5	45,45	16,75-76,62
Strongly disagree	5	45,45	16,75-76,62
Total	11	100,00	-

Table 3: Representatives' opinion on the impact of distance learning on the fulfillment of academic assignments.

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the criterion of virtual activities as an obstacle to the achievement of the individual objectives of each child because they are considered difficult, only 9% stated that they are, while 27% were neutral in their opinion, neither agreeing nor disagreeing in this respect. Thirty-six percent indicated that they "disagreed" with the proposition (see Table 4).

Opinion	f	%	IC (95%)
----------------	----------	----------	-----------------

Strongly agree	1	9,09	0,23-41,28
Agreed	2	18,18	2,28-51,78
Neither agree nor disagree	3	27,27	6,02-60,97
Disagree	4	36,36	10,93-69,21
Strongly disagree	1	9,09	0,23-41,28
Total	11	100,00	-

Table 4: Perception of virtual activities as an obstacle because they are difficult, for the achievement of the child's individual goals.

Source: Self elaboration

From the information presented in these four tables, it is clear that there is ambivalence in the general opinion that parents and representatives have about the distance education strategies used as a response to the current situation of social isolation. On the one hand, it is observed that the fulfillment of academic assignments using this modality has not been negatively influenced and even that the tasks are not an obstacle due to their difficulty, but at the same time, they consider that the children have not been able to continue in a normal way with the scope of the cognitive and learning aspects expected for the first grade level, this perhaps obeys to elements that are inherent to the teaching-learning process.

According to Zamorano et al. (2017), the learning process is favored by motivational aspects for the learner, such as interest, intellectual satisfaction, sense of achievement, curiosity and amazement, together with the incorporation of learning environments of trust and play, pleasant, meaningful, fun, attractive and inclusive where both the cognitive and affective development of the student is attended, both considered equally important. For this reason, one of the difficulties that could be generated with this health situation is the adaptation of the children to the social reality that implies the fact that the educational systems were not prepared for this contingency.

It should be noted that it is not only the levels of academic achievement that can be pondered in a student, but also the teaching models that promote the experience from the construction of knowledge, many of these established from the concept that the child acquires it based on daily experience in the classroom, through social interaction with

other peers (other classmates), taking references in which the figure of the teacher or guide has an important value for many of them (Ausubel, 2000).

It was found that almost half of the interviewed persons stated that they did not agree that online school activities are the most adequate measure for children to fulfill and continue with their first grade studies. It is considered that from the context of the academic activities planned by the organizations belonging to the official educational system of the Ministry of Education, it should be reviewed whether the minimum necessary conditions are in place and which have not been considered so that the academic activities in a virtual way are fully accepted by the parents, since less than 20% stated that they "strongly agree" with this modality.

It is alarming to note that not all educational institutions have the appropriate conditions to work under a distance scheme, starting because they do not even have a digitalized record of students by level, nor do they have the mechanisms for sending and receiving homework and activities, and in some schools, especially in rural areas, they do not even have computers.

For Quinn et al. (2016), this situation is even more aggravated in educational systems that do not have effective distance education mechanisms, where teachers and professors do not have the appropriate technological devices at their disposal and in many cases, not even the training to work virtually. Thus, just as teaching patterns have changed, so have evaluation models, forcing teachers to adapt to the guidelines of distance education, who probably were not accustomed to the use of technological elements for the fulfillment of instructional schemes.

When observing the results obtained in the criterion of parents' perception that rural regions may have greater difficulty in accessing technological resources, a large proportion of the interviewed (81.82%) indicated that this is not the case, indicating that 45.45% disagreed and 36.36% strongly disagreed (see Table 5).

Opinion	f	%	IC (95%)
Strongly agree	0	0	-
Agreed	0	0	-
Neither agree nor disagree	2	18,18	2,28-51,78
Disagree	5	45,45	16,75-76,62

Strongly disagree	4	36,36	10,93-69,21
Total	11	100,00	-

Table 5: Perception that rural regions have greater difficulty in accessing technological resources.

Source: Self elaboration

Regarding the availability at home of the relevant technological elements for the virtual assignments and digital deliveries of the homework corresponding to each child in the first grade of elementary school, more than half (54%) of the parents of the students indicated that they do not have in their homes equipment such as tablets, PCs, laptops, among others, which are required for the fulfillment of such assignments; overall, only 27% said they "Agree" and "Strongly agree" with having the devices (Table 6).

Opinion	f	%	IC (95%)
Strongly agree	1	9,09	0,23-41,28
Agreed	2	18,18	2,28-51,78
Neither agree nor disagree	1	9,09	0,23-41,28
Disagree	6	54,55	23,38-83,25
Strongly disagree	1	9,09	0,23-41,28
Total	11	100,00	-

Table 6: Home availability of technological devices for the fulfillment of the child's academic homework submissions.

Source: self elaboration

In this regard, the premises of specialized organizations in the educational context, such as UNESCO (2020), point out that there are limitations for many parents to continue in the long term with distance learning plans at home, aspects that could be linked to the lack of mechanisms that adapt the educational systems of the countries to comply with a virtual teaching scheme from home in an equitable manner. In the particular case of this research, this could be related to the fact that 54% of those interviewed stated that they do not have the necessary technological equipment for communication with teachers.

Even so, 81% of the parents stated that the rural condition has not been an impediment for children in first grade to hand in their mandatory assignments to the teacher of the course, although more than half of those interviewed indicated that virtual and distance activities are not the best way for children in the initial basic stage to continue with their studies. Thus, it can be inferred that even though the economic limitations of many representatives for the fulfillment of the children's academic activities are verifiable, it is also the fact that these could be overcome by using mechanisms of device lending assistance among friends and relatives.

As access to an open and flexible educational system other than the traditional classroom is increasingly necessary, it is presumed that the governments of the world will have to reorganize the investment of resources, the preparation of teachers and representatives in adequacy plans, and improve teaching schemes as a whole. It is unfortunate that many times the economic elements that should be invested for historical moments such as this pandemic by COVID-19, are diverted to other purposes that do not benefit the entire population.

Based on this experience with the spread of this virus, the Ecuadorian education system will have to update the educational model in the basic stages of compulsory education, with the aim of avoiding in the future that events that merit total or partial preventive isolation will again have an impact on the training processes. In fact, according to the Inter-American Development Bank (2020), with the horizon of the reopening of schools, the pandemic will impose greater pressures on ministries in terms of the quality of infrastructure and school transportation.

Conclusions

According to parents and representatives, first grade students are not developing the learning processes adequately, and although they have complied with the tasks assigned by the teacher, they consider that distance education is not the best strategy; this represents an ambivalence that requires further study of the causes that determine this opinion.

There are limitations to access resources and technological equipment for the development of activities, however, these do not depend directly on the rural area, and

...

it has been tried to solve from home but it is necessary to create options that allow the adaptation of children to the reality that society is currently going through derived from the pandemic by COVID-19. For future research, it is necessary to address the opinion of students as protagonists of the educational process about the implementation of these strategies, as well as to listen to the voice of the teacher who has also had to adapt to this new reality, seeking the generation of appropriate alternatives to achieve academic goals together.

Bibliographic references

Ausubel, D. (2000). *Adquisición y retención del conocimiento: Una perspectiva cognitiva*. Barcelona: Paidós.

Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo. (2020). *La educación en tiempos del coronavirus*. P.1-28. <https://url2.cl/C6atA>

Centro de Agua y Desarrollo Sustentable de Ecuador. (2013). *Proyecto de Evaluación de Vulnerabilidad y Reducción de Riesgo de Desastres a Nivel Municipal en el Ecuador*. Secretaria Nacional de Gestión de Riesgos. Ecuador. <https://biblio.flacsoandes.edu.ec/libros/digital/56813.pdf>

Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos. (2020). *Efectos de la crisis del coronavirus en la educación*. Informes (OEI), Organización Estados Iberoamericanos. <https://www.oei.es/uploads/files/news/Science-Science-and-University/1747/informe-covid-19d.pdf>

Organización Mundial de la Salud. (2020). *Rational use of personal protective equipment for coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and considerations during severe shortages: interim guidance*. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331695>

Quinn, D. M.; Cooc, N.; McIntyre, J.; Gomez, C. J. (2016). "Seasonal Dynamics of Academic Achievement Inequality by Socioeconomic Status and Race/Ethnicity: Updating and Extending Past Research With New National Data." *Educational Researcher*, 45(8), 443–53. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0013189x16677965>

-
- Unesco. (2020). *Consecuencias negativas del cierre de las escuelas*.
<https://es.unesco.org/themes/educacion-situaciones-crisis/coronavirus-cierres-escuelas/consecuencias>
- Veliz, V.; Zambrano, E. (2018). Zona rural y su nueva visión de la Educación Superior en Ecuador, *Revista Espacios*, 40(8), p.10.
<https://revistaespacios.com/a19v40n08/a19v40n08p10.pdf>
- Zamorano, T.; García Y.; Reyes, D. (2018). Educación para el sujeto del siglo XXI principales características del enfoque STEAM desde la mirada educacional. *Contextos: estudios de humanidades y ciencias sociales*, 41.
<http://revistas.umce.cl/index.php/contextos/article/view/1395>