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Original article

Experiences of Distance Education in the Bachelor of Primary Education in time of COVID-19

Experiencias de la Educación a Distancia en la Licenciatura en Educación Primaria en tiempo de COVID-19

Experiências da Educação a Distância no Bacharelado do Ensino Fundamental em tempos de COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Given the presence of the pandemic in Cuba, the Ministry of Higher Education outlines strategies that are renewed, to support the training of students in the midst of such measures and turn adversity into a new opportunity. To achieve this challenge, it is necessary to implement new policies such as: face the pandemic, manage continuity of study, improve and accelerate learning. To address this problem, the authors in this article propose the objective of socializing experiences carried out with students and teachers of the Bachelor of Primary Education career at the Mantua Municipal University Center. As a starting point, an assessment of the different positions in the study of the implementation of Distance Education is made, inquiring through the review of documents, survey and interview to students and teachers that was applied to know the level of preparation and satisfaction. The main results were based on developing the Educational Teaching Process at a distance with quality, the appropriation of the independent work method was achieved based on the quality of learning and greater knowledge management by teachers and students.

Keywords: COVID-19; student; Distance Education; teachers.

RESUMEN

Ante la presencia de la pandemia en Cuba, el Ministerio de Educación Superior traza estrategias que se renuevan, para apoyar la formación del estudiantado en medio de tales medidas y convertir la adversidad en una nueva oportunidad. Para lograr este reto se impone implementar nuevas políticas como: enfrentar la pandemia, gestionar la continuidad de estudio, mejorar y acelerar el

aprendizaje. Para atender esta problemática los autores del presente artículo se proponen como objetivo socializar experiencias llevadas a cabo con estudiantes y profesores de la carrera Licenciatura en Educación Primaria en el Centro Universitario Municipal Mantua. Como punto de partida se efectúa una valoración de las distintas posiciones en el estudio de la implementación de la Educación a Distancia, indagando a través de la revisión de documentos, encuestas y entrevistas a estudiantes y profesores, que se les aplicaron para conocer el nivel de preparación y satisfacción. Los principales resultados se basaron en desarrollar el Proceso Docente Educativo a distancia con calidad y se logró la apropiación del método de trabajo independiente en función de la calidad del aprendizaje y mayor gestión del conocimiento por parte de profesores y estudiantes.

Palabras clave: COVID-19; estudiante; Educación a Distancia; profesores.

RESUMO

Diante da pandemia em Cuba, o Ministério do Ensino Superior traça estratégias que se renovam, para apoiar a formação dos estudantes em meio a tais medidas e transformar a adversidade em uma nova oportunidade. Para atingir esse desafio, é necessário implementar novas políticas como: enfrentar a pandemia, gerenciar a continuidade dos estudos, aprimorar e acelerar o aprendizado. Para enfrentar esse problema, os autores deste artigo pretendem socializar experiências realizadas com alunos e professores do curso de Bacharelado em Educação Primária do Centro Universitário Municipal de Mântua. Como ponto de partida, é feita uma avaliação dos diferentes posicionamentos no estudo da implementação da Educação a Distância, indagando através da revisão de documentos, pesquisas e entrevistas com alunos e professores, que foram aplicados para conhecer o nível de preparação e

satisfação. Os principais resultados basearam-se no desenvolvimento do Processo de Ensino Educacional a Distância com qualidade e a apropriação do método de trabalho independente foi alcançada com base na qualidade do aprendizado e maior gestão do conhecimento por professores e alunos.

Palavras-chave: COVID-19; aluna; Educação a Distância; professores.

INTRODUCTION

Face-to-face education and distance education are not the same. If it is thought that they are the same because it is about education, it is a mistake. It is a question of how the educational event is constructed in each one. The elements of Distance Education, which make it different from face-to-face education, have an impact on teaching, student learning and the achievement of programmatic and institutional objectives. An obvious difference is the use of technology as a mediator of Distance Education. In general, the presence of technology has pushed society towards a paradigm shift in everyday life, from the devices we have at home to the ways we communicate. Education is not left out of the scenarios in which these technologies have effects. The well-known Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), understood as the set of tools, supports and channels for accessing and processing information, permeate educational processes in different parts of the world.

Distance Education has replaced face-to-face classes. According to Murillo and Duk (2020), online learning is an alternative for those who have computers of a certain quality with internet access at home. But, although it has been an alternative to mitigate the deficit of the process, there are new situations and

inconveniences to be solved, such as: the lack of resources and material, environmental and space conditions to be able to benefit from this option by a large number of students. .

Authors such as Langer (2018) show in their research that there are teachers and students who, in addition, have hopes, wishes and dreams, despite the fears, uncertainties and disorientation that often seem to prevail at school in times of crisis. Projects are also developed even in conditions that do not leave room for it.

Dissemination through digitized and computerized means to impart distance teaching was a strategy of strict compliance and acceptance, as an alternative solution in contingency situations; Likewise, solidarity and humanistic values were shown by the faculty and students.

In Cuba, education constitutes a well-structured system, which by its nature is free, inclusive, equitable and of quality for all. It is a process that is conditioned and mediated by the influences of different educational agents that interact with children, adolescents and young people.

Therefore, under any circumstance, the Cuban State has ensured the continuity of the educational system. At present, in the face of COVID-19, the Ministry of Higher Education has adopted alternatives that guarantee the development of the educational process to continue contributing to the comprehensive training of students, as well as the methodological preparation of teachers and management personnel.

For Cuba it is a daily challenge to maintain a universal and free educational system. The progressive challenge of ICT in the school environment is transcendental and requires guaranteeing an inclusive, equitable and

quality education and, in this way, promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The educational challenges are enormous. This scenario allows us to take advantage of the learning obtained to continue advancing, from the curriculum, in the preparation of our teachers, in order to face situations like this, to the promotion of the production of media and resources for the digital transformation of the teaching-learning process and share experiences, lessons learned, research in the area of education, educational technologies, school health and disaster management, including epidemiological ones.

The educational system in times of pandemic has urgently and unexpectedly had to transform to a virtual modality (Fardoun , Yousef , González, & Collazos, 2020), as a consequence of the closure of educational centers. It is necessary to carry out alternative forms of learning through the use of technology to mitigate the current situation, in order to preserve non-face-to-face spaces for exchange and containment for students, who are also going through this crisis.

With the use of ICT, the uncertainty generated in the system regarding the theoretical progress of the curriculum could be solved, ensuring the achievement of learning results associated with all those competencies that could be related to these technologies, but it must be remembered that it is required certain amount of practical hours for the development of abilities; For this reason, despite the fact that academics could ensure theoretical progress, without a doubt the progression of practical activities should be postponed and wait until the quarantine state is interrupted and education can return to face-to-face learning.

These actions, implemented to give continuity to the school year in times of COVID-19, have guaranteed the

development of the educational process and the work links between the school, the family, the community, the agencies and the organizations. The preparation of all and compliance with hygienic-sanitary measures laid the foundations for undertaking educational services, without sacrificing quality.

In this study, the objective was identified to socialize experiences in the procedure of Distance Education, carried out with students and teachers of the Bachelor of Primary Education degree at the Mantua Municipal University Center.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to carry out Distance Education successfully in the career, it was necessary to carry out an exploratory study on the digital media available to students and teachers, in addition to their knowledge of use. For that it was carried out:

- The document review: it was used to review the enrollment lists per year and the records of the 23 students to graduate, to determine which one(s) had the conditions to be exempted from the study culmination exercise and be selected as a gold title. .
- The survey of students and teachers: had a spectrum of six questions, carried out individually, which add up to 78 surveys, for 100%, with the aim of verifying the level of preparation to use the different ICTs they have and successfully carry out Distance Education.
- The interview with students and teachers: it was carried out individually with the objective of knowing the level of satisfaction that they have in the use of the different ICTs for the successful use in

Distance Education, after the orientations received.

RESULTS

Main results of Distance Education during COVID-19 , taking into account the instruments applied in the initial diagnosis

The career in the 2019-2020 academic year had an enrollment of 61 students distributed from 1st to 5th year of the course per meeting, in addition to having a faculty of 15 professors: 9 part-time and the rest full-time; of them, 13 have a master's degree and two have a degree, in addition, one is an assistant, 12 assistants and two are instructors (table 1).

Of a total of 23 students to graduate in this course, all graduated, where 14 were exempted from the final exercise for their satisfactory results throughout the career. In addition, of them, four were gold titles with an average of more than 4.75 (table 2).

One student was presented to the culmination exercise, to diploma work, and eight to professional exercises; all obtained satisfactory results and presented themselves to three tribunals for subjects where they were: Mathematics, Spanish and History, composed of three professors with vast experience with the work of the career, with teaching category of Assistant and scientific category of Master. In the course there was a retention and promotion of 100%.

In the 2021 academic year, there is an enrollment of 39 students in both study modalities, distributed from 2nd to 5th years, served by 11 professors who make up the faculty; Of these, 35 students and 11 teachers, who represent 92%, have ICTs, be

they mobile phones, laptops, computers or electronic tablets (table 3).

Table 1- Number of media owned by students

	Enrollment	Of them with means
2nd. V.5	5	5
3rd. V.4	13	12
4th. V.4	18	15
5th. V.5	3	3
Total	39	35

Table 2- Result of graduate students

	Enrollment	Passed	exempted	gold titles
4th, V. 4 years			14	4

Table 3 - Number of communication media owned by teachers

Number of teachers	Of them with means
11	11

After having made this diagnosis, we met with our students and teachers in different work sessions to avoid crowding, taking into account the existing epidemiological situation in the municipality, to inform them that we will continue the course with Distance Education through the WhatsApp group of the career, to send and collect study guides and support materials for the different subjects, prepared by the teachers. In addition, we advise the four students who do not have digital means that they will attend the laboratories of the schools in their area of residence to consult bibliographies, answer guides and send their answers through the email accounts that are in the institutions.

Examples of activities developed at CUM Mantua to carry out Distance Education:

1. Orientation of study guides: these constitute a main means of learning the programs of subjects included in the curriculum. Even when it does not replace the guiding activity of the teacher, it presents the elements developed in the program and the instructions in the form of tasks for the proper conduct of the student in his learning. From the very presentation of the guide, students are asked to reflect on each proposal, solve the problems that arise, in order to see the relationship between what is stated in theory and what they can execute in practice. It is about encouraging them not to be afraid to disagree, which will help them assume an attitude of change and develop intelligence, creativity and talent. The processes of permanent self-assessment and evaluation of the same are favored, in order to achieve improvement.

2. Interaction in the WhatsApp group of the course: facilitates contact between students and teachers. It is used as an alternative to inform students and professors about the methodological guidelines of the different oriented guides, about the delivery and defense of course work, midterm and final exams, completion of study exercises, dissemination of final grades, update on measures adopted by the University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saiz Montes de Oca" (UPR) and the Municipal University Center (CUM) to develop the educational teaching process, among other functions. Audio recordings are sent to clarify doubts to students who request it.

3. Coordination with teachers who have technologies and live in silent zones to support the educational teaching process.

4. Creation of study teams by zones, for those students who did not have

technologies or mobiles could access the solution of the activities of the study guides.

For students it is easier to ask questions at the moment they arise, share ideas, exchange resources, debate, they become active agents of information exchange; creativity is organically enhanced, they facilitate group work, cooperation and the development of social attitudes in general.

5. For a more individual exchange, e-mail is used: it makes it easier for teachers to contact other colleagues, experiences are shared, teaching materials are produced together. This was the main way to be able to communicate with the Department of Primary Education at the UPR, specifically with the coordinator and the head of the provincial career, to receive first-hand guidance and be able to raise concerns from students and teachers.

6. Other sources of information include the Facebook pages of the University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saiz Montes de Oca", and the Mantua Municipal University Center, the university intranet, the official channel of the Ministry of Public Health of the Republic of Cuba, Instagram and Telegram to stay updated on COVID-19, the Moodle platform, and the facilities provided by Etecsa to access university pages. In addition, university students have access to a wide variety of bibliography in the municipality's Documentation Center. For student access to these sites, the CUM maintains employment contracts with the Municipal Directorate of Education, the Youth Computer Club and, consequently, with the computer laboratories inserted in the different educational institutions.

Applying all these experiences, the distance teaching-educational process was developed, with quality, where the work of the teachers has contributed to the comprehensive training of the students. The

appropriation of the independent work method was achieved, based on the quality of learning and greater knowledge management by teachers and students.

We were able to verify, through the interview, that both students and teachers feel satisfaction with Distance Education and the support of the Municipal Directorate of Education has been significant in facilitating the development of the process.

DISCUSSION

Distance Education for students and teachers in situations of COVID-19 was a challenge. Despite the adversities, the sense of belonging was consolidated, which once again demonstrated the unity and trust in the Revolution.

The COVID-19 pandemic adds another degree of complexity to Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean; comes from facing unsolved challenges, now from a perspective that does not admit postponements, despite the fact that the necessary pedagogical and didactic modifications are not yet available to carry out the curricular transformation that is demanded, which would imply a change in the pedagogical model and the preparation of teachers to mediate in the process.

Distance Education in the current context of COVID-19 takes on special relevance, as it should serve to mitigate the disruption caused by the pandemic. At present, it uses modern communication procedures, mediated by the intensive use of the multiple possibilities offered by ICT (Ruiz, 2016).

Although many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have tried to adopt Distance Education for academic continuity during the pandemic, several authors (Alcántara, 2020;

Murillo, Duck, 2020) suggest that very few in the region are prepared to make this change so fast.

In the works studied on the situation of the pandemic in HEIs in Latin America, the development of innovative and effective solutions in educational systems with the use of ICT is supported. These will not be able to continue with the same operation that they had until now. It is highlighted that the design processes of the post-pandemic scenarios must have some elements that could serve for a strategy of academic continuity, through Distance Education, that takes into account the most vulnerable students and teachers; although, according to Lloyd (2020, p. 115-121), these actions only favor a small group.

HEIs must prepare for a new normal, where changes are made in training processes. In several countries, at a global level, the Higher Education systems in times of COVID-19 have presented limitations that allowed proposing a series of actions from various approaches: technological, pedagogical, organizational, psychosocial, psycho-emotional and social inclusion.

A greater virtuality requires a greater pedagogical foundation in the teaching-learning process and, therefore, to reinforce the pedagogical dimension of the development of digital skills. In this regard, there are more and more authors who, in just one year, warn of the need to emphasize the methodology for the application of Distance Education in pandemic conditions, taking into account that it has marked a gap among new teachers. virtual, greater than that given by access to technologies (Abella García, Grande de Prado, García-Peñalvo & Corell, 2020).

The measures to confront COVID-19, although necessary, are, as Lorenzo, Días and Zaldívar (2020) put it, one of the most

controversial issues in relation to the possible associated psychological impact. The results achieved in this article, based on interviews with students and teachers, demonstrate the validity of this approach. In this sense, there is evidence of understanding on the part of the student body and the faculty of the need for the measures adopted.

The study that is presented in this article, although it uses a small sample, shows that in the segment of the population studied, teachers feel prepared to face this new type of study, since they have sufficient teaching materials, manuals or other guiding resources to this end.

The article is aimed at mitigating the problem, since it contributes to the development of the emotional autonomy that students require to better adapt to educational and life conditions in times of pandemics or crises in general. This proposal is a guide that university teachers will have to meet the needs of their students, while increasing their professional preparation.

Unlike other proposals such as Torres, Medina and Ramírez (2019), for the formation of the professional identity of their students, and Rodríguez, Torres and Leyva (2020), in order to favor the process of teaching-learning of the Psychology subject, this article is aimed at socializing the experiences obtained through Distance Education in the student body.

From this experience, teachers will be able to ensure that their students develop the ability not to be seriously emotionally affected by the negative stimuli of the environment that surrounds them, while remaining empathic. This promotes a healthy self-esteem, self-confidence, perception of self-efficacy, self-motivation and responsibility, essential aspects for the training of future professionals.

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Conflict of interest:

Authors declare not to have any conflicts of interest.

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The authors have participated in the writing of the work and analysis of the documents.



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