

Life stories during the pandemic

Diagnosis of online education by the participantes: Case of the Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas

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INTRODUCTION

After two years of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), which caused to a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, we reflect on the impact of this pandemic on the most vital aspect of the population: health, and undoubtedly on education, where the Health Sector implemented major actions to contain the spread of infections in Mexico. It is noteworthy that on January 14, 2022, the record for COVID-19 infections was broken: 44,293 cases in 24 hours. (El Sol de Tampico Newspaper, National Section, p. 5).

As is generally known, our alma mater, the Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas (UAT), in order to prevent the spread-transmission of this scourge, “adhered to social confinement for both general services, administrative, and academic staff, as well as students in their respective homes” (From In-Person to Virtual, 'Stories of an Experience 2020-2021,' Rosalino Amador, p. 74).

We mentioned about these experiences, “education was forced to leave the classrooms and move to the digital context; however, we continue writing, and the educational process at its various levels has not yet fully adapted to the new modality” (Olea, 2020). The experience was not simple; students and teachers, at the request of our school, and in record time, attended training courses on the use of various digital platforms.

The reality and its traditional in-person format resisted the new digital models. We were witnessing an historical change: “From the blackboard and chalk to digital platforms within the framework of the pandemic” (p. 73).

The training offered by the UAT called: Pedagogical-Virtual Scenarios (UAT, 2020), to attend students online, revealed that most of our teachers belong to a generation shaped under different socio-political-educational conditions, facing new ways of thinking, generating, transmitting, and applying knowledge in a rapidly changing global society" (Chehaibar, 2020).

This is how we start the spring 2022 period, and the conditions for the return to in-person classes were still not optimal.

The proposals from our university authorities were presented through a Hybrid Model with physical presence in the classrooms.

Teaching styles were adapted to the new times of education; new communication practices were established, not only between teachers and students but also across the institution (UAT) with students and parents.

The training courses continued on schedule, but it is worth emphasizing that our teaching work, in most cases, is more about teaching than about learning approach; more about remote education than virtual or hybrid. Hence, both professors and students were attentive to the academic programs issued by the H. Rector of our institution. Thus, in this context, we continued carrying out the academic functions outlined in the Academic and Student Staff Regulations, respectively.

However, once the pandemic was declared over, it was imperative to understand what had happened during that period. It was urgent to take stock of the damages and the strengths. News arrived about the death of some students and teachers, as well as those in recovery; in addition to the strategies of our university's top authorities to carry out the school terms. This effort from UAT teachers and administrators, who hurried, after the contingency, to determine the most suitable options for resuming the course we needed to take.

In this context, and at the invitation of Dr. Wilberto Sánchez Márquez, the members of the Disciplinary Group: Education, Health, and Community, GD-UAT-128, from the School of Medicine of Tampico, 'Dr. Alberto Romo Caballero,' gathered to conduct a situational diagnosis among the teaching and student community of the southern region of the university's main campus. The results were later shared with the community through the literary work *Life Stories during the Pandemic: Diagnosis of Online Education by the Stakeholders. Case of the Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas*.

This book, published by Porrúa Hermanos and Company, S.A. de C.V., from Mexico City, First Edition, 2022, was delivered to our dean, Dr. Raúl de León Escobedo, and to the H. Rector of our university for the relevant academic purposes, with the effort and resources of the Disciplinary Group.

The coordination of the work was led by the following full-time faculty members of UAT:

Wilberto Sánchez Márquez, Gabriela Clemente Sánchez, Rosalino Amador Alonso, Leticia Caloca Carrasco, Jorge Pérez Ramírez, Brian González Pérez, Ricardo Salas Flores, Verónica Olvera Mendoza, and Sergio Reyes Cruz (+).

As of today, as we approach the 75th anniversary, which will be in September 2025, feeling an immeasurable debt to our alma mater for the academic and life formation it provided us, we want to pay tribute to it on this anniversary by telling a story that should never be repeated. Authoritative sources indicate that more than 800,000 people should not have died due to the lack of care from those who were entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding our health; that there was significant and hardly recoverable loss in education levels, among other aspects of national life, and the lack of commitment from our government system.

Today, we are no better. This day, I open the pages of a morning newspaper with local and national news, and in the face of the pain, sorrow, and helplessness due to the actions of the majority blocks in the Congress of the Union, parliamentary groups turned into skilled political strategists, I read: 'In Tamaulipas and Veracruz, Alarm as dengue cases increase; More than 10,000 cases of pharyngitis and tonsillitis recorded in the area; Specialty Hospital in service; Call to the federation, etc., etc.....'. El Sol de Tampico, Sunday, September 8, 2024. God willing, we will not have to experience another pandemic. However, we find ourselves in a secular institution, Presentation (Work cited).

"The school, conceived as a physical space, closed and moved to homes due to COVID-19; as a result, educational systems had to develop, overnight, a massive offer of distance learning and emergency remote teaching. The reality is that there are few comparable experiences in the last ten years to the complete closure of educational institutions caused by a health emergency" (Jara, 2020)."

Teachers have been forced to flexibilize their way of teaching and communicating with students. The university in the southern campus was no exception.

"On a macro level, a new dynamic was created, in which parents and other family members had to take on the role of supporting the students' learning." Technology became the central instrument".

“Students who had the support of their families and a digital foundation, at least during the period in which they interacted with them, made better use of the resources available to them”

“In this sense, life history, as qualitative research, seeks to uncover the relationship between reasoning, the daily negotiation between fantasy and reality, between creation and acceptance, common sense, and the explanations and reconstructions that each individual makes in order to live and survive daily" (Ruiz Olabuénaga, 2012).

In our book: “The descriptions presented were obtained from the information collected based on what occurred and was observed in the interactions with university students from the schools in the southern campus, during the period from October to December 2020.' From the number of students enrolled in the various schools who met the requirements, a sample of six hundred seventy-two students was collected, regardless of gender, age, and who wished to participate in the study with prior informed consent, prior interaction, and a survey determined by the researchers.

CHAPTER I. SOCIAL INTERACTION

Dr. Wilberto Sánchez Márquez.

Dra. Gabriela Clemente Martínez.

“Being in contact with the students during the period of distance learning due to health circumstances, the conversations with them were the support to learn more about how they managed their academic life during this forced confinement, in a context where the dividing line between school duties and their personal life was, undoubtedly, very thin as they were at home, not in the classrooms, a situation that has impacted their development. This last point is one of the assumptions of the present chapter”

“The significant responses that almost unanimously revealed the students were that they experienced both positive and negative aspects from their family members, which will be detailed below; that is, their relatives were empathetic and kind”.

“Finally, a definition of social interaction was provided by a student and was crucial to closing the positive experiences lived during the confinement. Here it is shared: 'Social interaction is enjoying and making the most of your family, but that's not always an option, because at least in my case, I didn't even have time to be with them during meal hours due to classes and the excess of work”.

“In the words of the students, some of their most relevant evaluations highlight that “sometimes you need more space at home to concentrate; the environment is not like the library, which was a good place to study”.

“The authors have considered as significant those neutral expressions in which the thoughts and feelings of the students remained in a middle point”.

CHAPTER II. PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

Rosalino Amador Alonso.

Leticia Caloca Carrasco.

“The situation of confinement and isolation in which we found ourselves, which has persisted since the declaration of the global state of emergency caused by COVID-19, forced everyone to take appropriate actions to continue with active life. In the education sector, the teaching process was shifted to a distance context”.

“There were some significant modifications in the lives of the actors: administrators, teachers, students, among others”

“Changes from a psychological point of view that, in this chapter, we believe are important to discuss, specifically in the case of students from the Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, southern campus”.

“Part of our expectations for finding insights by observing and interacting with the students were that anxiety, worry, or fear were the most common emotions they presented in a scenario like the one they are experiencing, and these are products of a defense mechanism against unknown and potentially dangerous circumstances”.

However, at some point in the introduction to the aforementioned chapter of collaboration, it was revealed that other effects of confinement they presented were: anger, loneliness, boredom, frustration, anger, sadness, hopelessness, among others.

Now, it was not only the negative aspects that prevailed, but positive emotions were also identified in the young students, such as gratitude, joy, solidarity, and empathy. In addition, students continuously expressed affection for their family members and peers, as well as staying motivated and spreading that spirit to others from a distance.

A deep knowledge remains for us from what we concluded based on the opinions of our students, to whom we expressed with much responsibility and appreciation that, moving forward, we should focus on the most positive versions of what happens in our environment, especially in situations of public health emergencies.

CHAPTER III. HEALTH

Jorge Pérez Ramírez.

Brian González Pérez.

Ricardo Salas Flores.

“On December 31, 2019, the Health Commission and the Municipal Health Commission of Wuhan reported a group of cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology, whose common source of exposure was the seafood market in the city of Wuhan, Hubei province, China. Subsequent investigations identified a new coronavirus as the causative agent of the respiratory symptoms in these cases. The now-recognized virus is called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).”

“The Government of Mexico, in coordination with the Ministry of Health, has implemented measures to prevent and control the epidemic”.

“Starting March 23, The “Jornada Nacional” announced about the extension of the student vacation period and the healthy distance, which included social distancing, frequent handwashing, respiratory etiquette for distance greetings, the 'Stay at Home' campaign, and isolation at home for suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases”.

These measures affected the university population.

Confinement at home and the closure of sports facilities may have affected physical activity and contributed to sedentary behavior in university students, as recreational interests in screen-based activities increased, which worsened with the implementation of online classes' (WHO, 2021).

“Few studies in Mexico have analyzed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on university students' physical activity in this specific population. Therefore, the objective of this study is to understand the narratives and opinions regarding changes in physical activity and barriers to engaging in it among university students at the

School of Medicine 'Dr. Alberto Romo Caballero,' in the city of Tampico, Tamaulipas, during the health contingency”.

“The results of the observations showed that more than half of the students who were part of the sample dedicated some time to various physical activities and exercise; however, others denied doing so. Among the various reasons they provided for being unable to engage in physical exercise, they stated:

“The time spent in online classes and the poor quality of their phone’s internet forced them to search for a place to connect”.

“Time availability is something that needs to be organized," "I did some exercise on some days, but not consistently”.

The students responded to the survey and showed that 57% (n=384) did not improve their physical condition, due to various opinions they expressed, such as the following: 'Sitting for so long led to lower back pain”.

“Well, this affected me. Because most of the day is filled with assignments, and sometimes I don't have time to review and consolidate my knowledge”.

For the students, adhering to these preventive measures meant experiencing many changes, such as distance learning, confinement at home, reduced mobility both on foot and by vehicle, interruption of access to recreational and physical activity facilities, and interruptions in their access to places where they used to eat.

CONCLUSIONS:

“Neglecting the mental health of university students would lead to harmful long-term effects, which will not only affect their quality of life but also their overall performance”.

CHAPTER IV. ECONOMIC FACTORS

Verónica Olvera Mendoza.

“COVID-19 had a wide spread and caused a pandemic in 2020, with profound social, psychological, and economic impacts on the population and institutions”.

“The population is the primary focus of this study, as due to the recent acquisition of knowledge about the disease, isolation of suspected patients is required; this forces the granting of sick leave to workers showing symptoms, awaiting confirmation test results, which causes economic losses both personally and within the family”

“By this time, as far as we know, there have been no published analyses on the financial impact of COVID-19 on affected families, particularly how it affects university students and their education.” Thus, the objective of this study was to understand the narratives and opinions of university students at the School of Medicine 'Dr. Alberto Romo Caballero,' in the city of Tampico, Tamaulipas, during the health contingency”

“Due to the forced isolation from the health emergency, thousands of real classrooms and educational spaces were replaced by places in homes that were once zones for rest or social interaction. This disruption has caused confusion, work is done wherever is possible or where there is space, depending on the dimensions and structure of the housing. This is further compounded by asynchrony, which has been overused because work, rest, eating, and family interaction schedules were lost. We can also add that distractions from work or academic tasks are now easily accessible (Jesús, 2020)”.

“The economy is an important aspect within family dynamics, as it affects all members; it allows or prevents many activities from taking place (Álvarez, 2020).”

Professor Olvera highlights the areas impacted by the pandemic on the economy and provides a detailed explanation of the cases.

- Economic impact on studies.
- COVID-19 scholarship request to continue studying.
- Need to work to finance studies.
- Family economic provider stopped working, affecting economic development.
- Economic factor impacting regular access to the educational platform due to lack of internet, among others.

Conclusions.

“In addition, the economic consequences of the pandemic exacerbated disparities in medical education”

“Without proper intervention, barriers to online learning would not only affect the education and training of future doctors”, “but even the provision of healthcare services in the country could be disrupted”.

CHAPTER V. INFRASTRUCTURE.

Sergio Reyes Cruz. (+).

“Currently, technological advancements have permeated all spheres of society, and education has not been the exception. This scenario is reflected in the adoption of new teaching models, the redefinition of roles in education, and the way technology is implemented to effectively support student learning at various educational levels”.

The world benefits from technology every day, which brings with it a series of advantages, especially in the school environment, where it has revolutionized the way of teaching and learning. Today, more than ever, we need it to access education during the pandemic, as students are unable to attend educational institutions due to quarantine. This causes both students and teachers to seek ways to overcome the digital divide to access quality and meaningful education; the teacher is recognized for, despite being a technological immigrant, training to turn technology into a real tool for teaching.

“The way of teaching has positively changed due to the new coronavirus”.

“Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have entered classrooms at a rapid pace and now demand to be used, as the digital era has undergone many transformations, both technologically and educationally. Pedagogical models have changed, prompting teachers to modify their working methodologies and use technology to improve educational processes with innovative resources”.

“For students, the use of digital technologies is more than just a technological resource, because through the implementation of ICT, it promotes the development of competencies and skills, such as the construction and appropriation of knowledge and optimal academic development”.

“Classes from home, combined with the problems caused by quarantine, meant stress for all the actors in the educational system (Gagliardi, 2020)”.

“In a student population with difficulties accessing the internet or with few personal devices to connect to the web, the option of working synchronously can become a problem (Gagliardi, 2020)”.

“Then, the questions arise: Can all our students meet this requirement? What happens if someone else in the household needs to use that device to work?”.

“E-learning is a pipe dream, an alternative for those who have quality devices with internet access at home. Unfortunately, too many students do not have this resource, nor the material, environmental, and spatial conditions to benefit from this option (Murillo, 2020)”. “Another important aspect is to know whether the student had the appropriate physical space that allowed them to be focused and enhance their academic work”.

“The following factors are relevant to achieving a good study environment”:

- Set a study space.
- Appropriate furniture and organization.
- Good ventilation and correct temperature.
- Adequate lighting.
- Free from noise and distractions.

“Based on the technological infrastructure available at the educational institution, it is necessary to develop a strategic plan for Technology and Information Systems to implement a policy for the progressive use of ICT in the classroom, with rules, access guidelines, and scientific information sources”.

The coordination of the Disciplinary Group: Education, Health, and Community from the Faculty of Medicine of Tampico 'Dr. Alberto Romo Caballero' has decided to reissue, in a synthetic form, this work. We take this opportunity to inform you that there is a cultural collection of more works from our researchers available for your access.

“In Mexico, no studies have been conducted to understand the life stories of university students that analyze the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on their academic progress and their day-to-day experiences in this specific population. Therefore, the objective set from the beginning by the researchers as the trigger for this study—i.e., to learn the stories and opinions expressed by university students during the health emergency—has been addressed in the context of the six hundred seventy-two students, to whom we take this opportunity to express our gratitude. Without their testimony, it would not have been possible to have a snapshot of what was happening on the other side of the screens of their computers or mobile devices through the various platforms offered by the Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas”.