

Educational Management in Times of Pandemic: A Panoramic View in Latin America

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As a result of a systematic review obtained, eight levels of constructs: educational inequalities, online education, Covid's impact, educational management, and Covid's effects, innovator leadership, resilience, home as an adaptation source, and, finally, sustainable actions. The results showed that the pandemic put in evidence a big social gap between educational communities in Latin America where access to the obtention of technological resources to teach-learn process and handle digital competencies in teachers. In addition, it showed many inequalities in people to energy and connectivity access as minimal conditions to do educational activities, meanwhile health restrictions during Covid-19.

Keywords. educational management, digital divide, teaching method innovations, Covid-19

INTRODUCTION

During 18 months, it is estimated that 77 million schoolchildren have lost more than three-quarters of the scheduled educational process in the world due to Covid-19 (Unicef, 2021). Indeed, the restrictive measures had a cause and fulfilled their mission. However, it is undeniable the negative collateral effect on the educational training process of students due to the untimely decision to close schools (Sverdlick et al., 2020). This situation forced academic managers to act quickly to continue to meet the demands in an educational scenario that was not yet implemented both in schools and in the homes of the actors of this educational process (Dias-Trindade et al., 2021; Vértiz et al., 2020).

In Latin America, the effectiveness of the response process in the remote education scenario was variable, being by the prioritization of the budgets allocated for the attention of the health emergency itself and the monitoring of the maintenance of the families that were prevented from having the means to subsist during the confinement (Alkan & Kahraman, 2021; Chaudhry et al., 2020). In addition, within each country,

the reality was nondifferent not only to the digital divide but also to the access to energy sources that would allow the operation of equipment for remote connectivity (Manco-Chavez et al., 2020). Thus, in many cases, pedagogical activities were reduced to the delivery of periodic assignments complemented by virtual classes (Hernández-Ortega & Álvarez-Herrero, 2021), thus reducing the process of verification of compliance with the competencies and skills needed as an essential requirement for students' academic progress (Azman et al., 2020). Given this, the challenges presented were new and, unfortunately, there were no effective and immediate responses from the governmental entities that displaced the educational component to attend to it after six months - up to a year - depending on the time it took to reach the interior of the country (Cardini et al., 2020).

PROBLEM STATUS

In specific terms, the complexity of the problem involves a redefinition of educational management processes contextualized in the socio-temporal moment oriented towards the desired educational inclusion of all students under the perspective of a new normality that demands different competencies and skills in the labor niches that are emerging in the environment (Tejedor et al., 2020). In this context, educational management must be based on organized processes aimed at optimizing pedagogical, administrative, and community sub-processes, with flexibility in adapting to virtual and mixed environments and providing strategies that allow the acquisition of competencies, skills, and abilities by educational actors (Rico, 2016). However, analyzing these new requirements requires a detailed disaggregation of aspects that, although concatenated, have distinguishable peculiarities to address them. Thus, from a technological perspective, we have technological access, Internet connectivity, technical sources, and digital competencies. From a pedagogical perspective: school planning, diagnosis, evaluation and pedagogical action of teachers in virtual environments (Unesco, 2020).

It is precisely in this gap where we intend to contribute by raising the objective of elucidating the main problems of educational management in times of pandemic with emphasis on vision in Latin America, exploring the measures adopted to address this academic problem in the countries of the region and the relevance they have had in the process. The deepening of these aspects constitutes the first part of the diagnosis that will allow a better understanding of the perspectives implemented and their levels of effectiveness in the context of a health emergency, generating information for managers and academics on the subject, who could have better prospects for strategic guidelines that help to improve the pedagogical process in a scenario where virtuality is here to stay as another mode of educational interaction.

METHODOLOGY

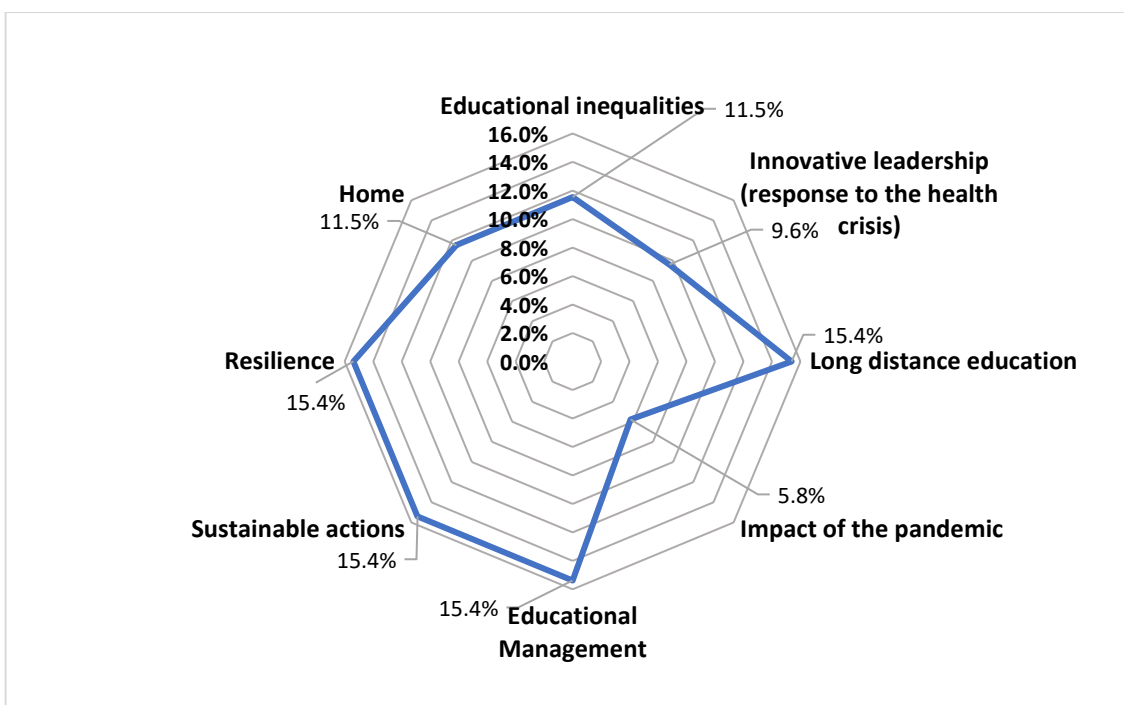
A description focused on essential aspects that affect educational management in the pandemic context. A bibliographic-type documentary design was applied. This systematic review design was based on the collection of primary and secondary sources of information that allowed filling out the registration forms prioritizing journal articles published in Latin America and indexed in Dialnet, JURN and, Redalyc between 2020 and 2021 following four phases: identification of publications; screening or filtering, suitability and, inclusion [14]. The search was performed using Boolean operators according to the criteria of: “pandemic OR Covid-19” AND “educational management” AND “technical-technological aspects” OR “technical-pedagogical” OR “technical-administrative.” Then, the quality study of each of the selected sources was carried out based on the criteria of content analysis according to the proposed topic. They were systematized using the PRISMA guide (Urrútia & Bonfill, 2010).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Eight (08) outstanding categories linked to the object of the proposed study were identified (Figure 1). Within each of them, sub-categories were observed, making it possible to distinguish specific topics. An important detail is that, in some of the sub-categories, issues were identified that coincided with others

found in different categories. Although they caused initial bewilderment in the researchers, later, the decision was made to include them and report them separately because the contexts where they were found were different, so the configuration in the realities seen in the manuscripts reviewed provided those peculiarities that gave them relevance. On the other hand, the repetition of those topics found allowed us to visualize their transversality, which cemented their general importance in the documentary analysis. Thus, the first: ‘educational inequalities,’ had three subcategories: gaps in access to digital resources, educational opportunities, and family support. The second: ‘distance education,’ also had three subcategories: educational modality, educational competencies, and technological resources. The third: ‘impact of the pandemic on education,’ also had three subcategories: capacity reduction, vulnerable populations, and educational inequalities. The fourth: ‘educational management and the effects of the pandemic,’ also showed three subcategories: intellectual leadership with responsibility, rigor in educational management, and new principles of educational administration. The fifth was ‘innovative leadership,’ which viewed also subdivided into three: responsiveness, technical operations process, and innovation. The next category was ‘resilience,’ which showed three categories as well: coping capacity, resolution capacity, and coping styles. The seventh category was ‘sustainable actions,’ subdivided into innovation and transformation, ICT strategy management, and speaker competencies. Finally, the eighth category, ‘home’ as a source of adaptation to the educational process, also had three subcategories: Difficulties, sustainable activities, and resilience, and finally, online education (Figure 2).

FIGURE 1
THEMATIC CATEGORIES IDENTIFIED AND ANALYZED



Source: the authors.

Although some of them may seem similar, they are not, due to the internal approaches they presented and the purpose behind the treatment of the information associated with them, within the study reports. The detailed breakdown of each category is shown in Figure 2. The first category was “educational inequalities,” which linked the difficulties of regional educational systems, which were framed in a deep educational segmentation associated with a previous existence of gaps related to the reduction in access to digital resources, causing problems in the process of educational praxis (Álvarez et al., 2020). The literature also

reported that the health crisis significantly affected students' performance, associating it to poor family support due to multiple causes, highlighting the inequality of educational opportunities in households (Expósito & Marsollier, 2020) and also the severe difficulties of many teachers who did not have good digital competencies (Britez, 2020). In this area, (Baptista et al., 2020) reported that the greater the distance from the republic's capital, the fewer tools are available in the villages to effectively address virtual/remote education. They also emphasized the need for a program to strengthen learning and ICT management as a strategy to improve the educational process (Rambay & De La Cruz, 2021), because although remote education is a challenge, it is also an opportunity to be flexible and adapt to the context and improve it as it goes along. However, depends on the socioeconomic context (Pequeño et al., 2020), with the simplification of technology for its use in professional teaching practice, which, although it could mark some inequalities, in this route, it can be adapted (Karakose, 2021).

The second category, "distance education," is linked to the first in the reflection on how populations with inequalities could have access to education if they do not have ICTs, a situation that, in practice, has increased the educational gap, both in teachers and students, in marginalized sectors (Bormann, 2021). However, some hypotheses (Díaz-Ronceros et al., 2021; Holguin-Alvarez et al., 2020) pointed out the solution to the problem by promoting an intensive program to improve teachers' digital competencies, it was also indicated that the keys are gradual (Stamatis, 2021) because they should go through a process of adaptation in the educational actors and that, in any case, they will be adapted soon, but that the pandemic was a triggering factor for its accelerated use (Mory et al., 2020). Another aspect analyzed in this category was the relevance of the principles of digital educational management, which involves aspects of prior planning that demand time from teachers (Sanoto, 2021) and, with it, the reduction of effective class hours for students, requiring a distance educational management model that foresees the moments and strategies to be applied (Martinic, 2015).

The "impact of the pandemic" on the educational sector was the third category identified. This was incredibly intense for teachers, who had to adapt to the new context in record time (García, 2021) since they would be the class leaders and, consequently, the guides of the students' companions at home (Munastiwi & Puryono, 2021). This condition left them little time to continue their training in essential pedagogical topics, opting for technical courses that only had the objective of using tools (Mizetska et al., 2021). However, this did not cease to be relevant because, in a future vision, new teachers will not have to be trained in the use of tools but will have to use them to investigate fundamental issues, such as, for example, the improvement of learning problems and as an agent for the remodeling of society (Kang, 2021).

The fourth category was "educational management and the effects of the pandemic," which revealed essential details related to pedagogical leadership that was not seen to be cohesive or coordinated from the governing bodies in education and much less between managers and teachers (Guevara et al., 2021), attributing the main cause of this absence to the precarious planning that the actors involved have as praxis, revealing a factor of management culture as the main issue (Hernández-Hernández & Huerta-Quintanilla, 2021). Because of this, Cevallos et al. (2021) also reached the same conclusion, although they added the need for establishing a new educational model for teaching-learning processes in virtual environments, which unfortunately could not be put together during the two years of remote education by Covid-19. Although it is undeniable the recursive capacity of teachers in classes, who innovated techniques, processes, dynamics, and even evaluation strategies (Vértiz et al., 2020), it is considered that the absenteeism of students in the class was a factor not controlled by teachers (García, 2021), which would condition heterogeneous academic levels in the same classroom. This event would lead to the need to apply leveling strategies in return to classes (Muñoz, 2020), needing to have the support of managers and the administrative team to condition the scenario in which these processes can occur as part of the evolution of educational management (Sverdlick, Del Valle, et al., 2020; Vivas et al., 2020).

In fifth place, the category "Innovative leadership" in the education sector as a response to the health crisis was linked to the level of systematic intervention within the institutions, observing innovation in the new classroom system, framing the demands in the relevance of directing the pedagogical activity according to the competencies observed in the students and the fulfillment of the program (Caballero-Rodríguez et al., 2021). In the same perspective, Reimers (2021) indicated that in these activities, the leadership of the

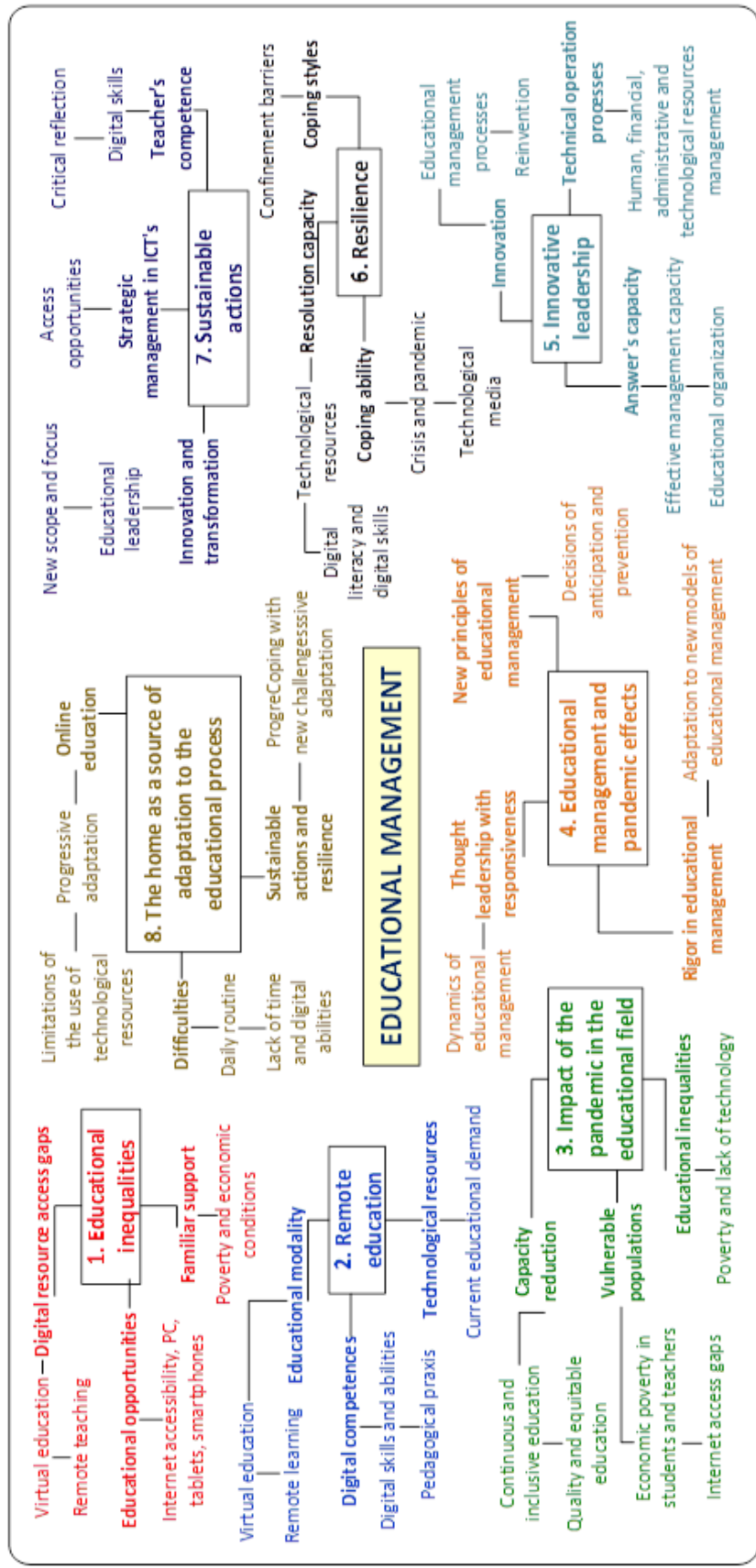
educational manager is fundamental since it allows the integration of internal and external processes to optimally lead the development of the academic task. Thus, the leadership of the educational manager is manifested through strategic actions in financial resources, human capital, and technological tools that contribute synergistically to the operationalization of educational efforts (Meza et al., 2021). To dynamize these strategies, Benavente (2020) highlighted communication as the main characteristic that the leader should have, which should facilitate alliances and networks that better support the development of educational actions.

“Resilience” was the sixth category, understood as the capacity to progress during adverse conditions (García, 2021). In this perspective, this author highlighted the importance of having resilient educational systems that demonstrate the ability to reduce the levels of inequality in the most vulnerable student populations, generating disruptive digital didactic innovations to achieve better interactions among students, strengthening motivation permanently in these virtual spaces (Argandoña-Mendoza et al., 2020), to promote academic self-efficacy, which should start from the teacher’s commitment to overcoming his or her limitations and obstacles (Acevedo-Duque et al., 2020; Koob et al., 2021). It should be noted that many tools and training programs were provided to teachers so that they could become involved in the remote education system; however, the development of competencies and skills was individual and was associated with the teacher’s resilience (Inciarte González et al., 2020), which was not promoted by the governmental spheres, which prioritized only training instead of a comprehensive training process (Karakose, 2021). From the students’ perspective, less disruptive interventions in social distancing were recommended (Viner et al., 2020), being able to adapt them according to the activities to be developed, guaranteeing a better teaching-learning development, being a critical complementary factor against the barriers imposed as sanitation measures (Hordatt & Haynes, 2021).

The seventh category was the “sustainable actions” used as educational management measures in times of health restrictions in the face of Covid-19. In this regard, Stoica (2020) discussed the prioritization of actions that should be taken in the education sector in the front of events similar to the one experienced in the face of Sars-CoV-2, highlighting the need to use technical assistance as a mediator of pedagogical action. In this perspective, emphasis was placed on the effort made by teachers in the process of providing the educational service during the pandemic (Tejedor et al., 2020), which recommends that continuous training in ICTs is a sustainable strategy to face the new post-Covid educational models, taking into account that the characteristics of democracy, autonomy, integration, and quality of educational management provide the perfect framework for action to face the future sustainably (Rico, 2016). However, to achieve this, it is essential to integrate learning with technological resources, which is a challenge that must be taken up gradually to be implemented in a sustainable manner (Munastiwi & Puryono, 2021).

Finally, the eighth category, “home as a source of adaptation to the educational process,” was considered because there is a consensus in highlighting the vital role of spaces within each home and the role of the family in the educational process. However, it is also pointed out that not all houses have the conditions and means to provide pedagogical network interactions (Gómez-Arteta & Escobar-Mamani, 2021). Where these conditions existed, the daily routine of the educational process became a problem for the students and many accompanying people due to the overlapping of the daily patterns of the home and the parallel educational process (Scavarda et al., 2021), in addition to the case of parents or accompanying persons with severe deficiencies in the use of the technology that allowed the teaching-learning interaction (Huamán et al., 2021). These adaptive aspects were not foreseen by the educational authorities, nor by many parents or guardians, who had to adapt as they went along, seeking to improve the quality of the education received and training in the use of technological tools in the process (Munastiwi & Puryono, 2021).

FIGURE 2
DETAIL OF THE BREAKDOWN OF THE CATEGORIES IDENTIFIED FOR EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC



It can be seen that each of them has three subcategories, although not all of them have the same number of components, which ranged from one to two. Source: the authors.

In the process of identification and selection of the literature, there was a debate about the inclusion and exclusion of publications that could coincide in the topics they addressed, however, in the process some that coincided were observed, but, due to the peculiarity of the contexts in which they made their interventions, it was necessary to consider their inclusion. This decision was made due to the social fragmentation of reality that manifests itself differently in the face of the same phenomenon and configures sociocultural complexity (Martinez-Brawley & Brawley, 2008; Thompson & Troester, 2002). On the other hand, when the eight selected categories were considered, a complementarity among them was noticed. However, it could be highlighted that most of them are linked to traditional educational management, such as innovative leadership, resilience, educational inequalities, and sustainable actions. Some others emerged as a result of the pandemic as the impact of the pandemic both on educational management and the academic field itself, remote education, and the home as a new educational scenario, which could configure two macro-areas that should be analyzed in detail later on. Likewise, within these categories, recurring subcategories such as remote/virtual education (in 4 of 8), inequalities/barriers/technological gaps (4 of 8), technological resources (3 of 8), online technical processes/operations (2 of 8), could be considered as cross-cutting themes in each of them that would complement subsequent analyses of this systematization, as indeed some authors have considered (Demeshkant et al., 2022; Garcia & Revano, 2022; Lakomski & Evers, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The pandemic revealed different social and educational inequalities, especially in the access to technological resources throughout the academic community. Likewise, it generated a lot of tension among the majority of teachers who lacked digital competence and had to learn in the educational process to apply it with their students and also to teach how to use it to their assistants. It was also highlighted that it is crucial to evaluate the educational results produced by this pandemic to mitigate the adverse effects and promote actions that integrate the most vulnerable populations; in which it was identified that the health crisis significantly affected the performance of students, and although significant family support was reported, the educational systems of the region are not prepared to address remote and/or virtual education in an effective manner. The evaluated bibliography said that autonomy and responsibility for self-learning are heterogeneous among students. This is strongly associated with the level of ICT management and innovation teachers show in the educational interaction process.

However, it was also related to the availability of online resources implemented by educational institutions. Finally, it is necessary to note that, within this health crisis, it was possible to promote sustainable actions that helped to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and the educational collapse, showing that the adaptation process led to establishing a method of resilient improvement in the education sector, visualizing an exciting process of joining efforts and emergence of new proposals towards the goal of reducing the effects of the pandemic in the teaching-learning process.

Finally, some recommendations emerging from the review are noted, pointing out that managing from a context with this level of health restrictions is not an easy task. However, in difficulty, it was possible to bring the educational process afloat, with its shortcomings and weaknesses, proving that the determining factor is that, from the educational management, it is projected towards a post-pandemic scenario, helping to level the learning processes and to mediate with strategies to improve the academic performance of the students. At the same time, it was suggested to reform the skills related to digital tools in teachers to meet the educational demand. Likewise, curricula should be adapted to propose a new paradigm of knowledge management promoting less disruptive social distancing interventions in schools for extended periods.

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