

## Higher Education: COVID-19 Pandemic

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**T**he health emergency situation led universities providing face-to-face education to adapt to virtuality. During this period, their actions have been crucial to safeguard educational progress (Wang *et al.*, 2020). To the extent possible, they have made an effort to do so in an agile and rapid, unplanned manner. They have used the technological resources at hand and have coordinated an intense work of reprogramming, learning, and adaptation both by faculty and students (Crawford, 2020). All this, along with reconciling these new learning scenarios at home and their family life.

Before confinement, there were already demands for change in the university, such as the need for the development of digital competencies in the faculty (Instefjord & Munthe, 2015; Redecker, 2017; Reisoğlu & Çebi, 2020). During this period we have been able to see an accelerated forced process of technology adoption and adaptation. The faculty have had to assume the digital possibilities existing for some time. Among them we can highlight as benefits the distributed and ubiquitous learning, i.e., flexibility of time and place, ease of organization and management of study tasks, the ability to reproduce and review teaching materials and learn in more visual ways (Henderson *et al.*, 2015).

The digital gap prior to the confinement has shown that it was not only on the part of students and faculty, but also on the part of universities. For Bao (2020), during Covid-19, the challenges for universities focused on having a reliable technological network and educational infrastructure to migrate and adapt courses, align curriculum competencies, rethink assessment, expand faculty training. and have a contingency plan for unexpected incidents.

Well-being and social-emotional competencies have been another challenge for universities (Hadar *et al.*, 2020), related to offering instant support services to their

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faculty and students, informing about their learning proposals, and the implementation of health policies. Crawford (2020) adds including support for international students separated from friends and family.

During this period, ethical issues have also gained relevance (Noguera *et al.*, 2020), such as videoconferencing privacy, image and intellectual property rights, evaluations with biometric systems, and anti-plagiarism software.

How will this global crisis in education be overcome? What can the university contribute? Will the techno-pedagogical enthusiasm be maintained when the crisis stops? What is changing in this learning design? Are we prepared to ensure university teaching in a new confinement scenario? Will continued training for faculty be sustainable? How to achieve balance between teaching quality, resources, and technological appropriation? After Covid, is a new paradigm being proposed?

It is necessary to devote time to reflection based on action and to prepare global and local proposals to these questions (Rapanta *et al.*, 2020). For this reason, we consider that the results of this monograph's research provide an international perspective on several of the challenges mentioned. Each of them is detailed below, grouped by the topics they address.

In analyzing higher education in the quarantine, Franklin Américo Canaza-Choque from Peru emphasizes educational inequality, poverty, social, racial, and gender exclusion.

Celio Luis Acosta Álvarez, Diosvany Ortega González, and Yosefint Díaz Cruz detail the model implemented at Universidad de San Pedro Sula in Honduras, of face-to-face education with virtual mediation, which was organized in clearly defined phases, as well as the evaluation of faculty and student satisfaction.

It highlights the need for an educational shift towards more flexible models and practices that can respond to the complexity and unpredictability of today's fast and interconnected systems in a still fragile society. In this regard, Lorena Elizabeth Araujo Silva, Juan Felipe Ochoa Mogrovejo, and Catalina Vélez Verdugo analyze the challenges of the Ecuadorian university prior to the pandemic and its transition to the current situation of emergency remote teaching.

Online technologies can serve as catalysts for professors to experience new things, explore creative alternatives, and reflect on their own practices (Rapanta *et al.*, 2020). This is demonstrated by Marisa S. Castro, Mariela L. Paz, and Eliana M. Cela, in their article. They share teaching experiences at an Argentinian university, highlighting close contact with the student body, the methodological strategies, their commitment, and predisposition.

In addition to the methodological adaptation during this emergency period, evaluation was a great challenge. Not only because of the change of scenario, but also because of the reliability of learning. On this subject, Laura Cañadas summarizes the proposals and opportunities for formative evaluation. Pilar Rodríguez Morales and Mario Luzardo Verde

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analyze how to ensure valid evaluations and detect falsification of synchronous distance testing.

Internationalization and student mobility has grown and will grow in the coming years according to the report *Doctoral education in Europe today: approaches and institutional structures* (Hasgall et al., 2019). Pamela Gómez López develops the following question, what will happen to the internationalization of higher education and student mobility after COVID-19? During this period of uncertainty, the student body declined to enroll in courses designed to be virtual face-to-face.

Several universities took advantage of this situation to increase their continuous learning offerings, using resources such as MOOCs and virtual seminars on their video channels. In these and other ways, they diversified their non-formal or informal learning possibilities. These new and broad possibilities pose new challenges to the recognition of these studies. Among the new options for learning certification or accreditation, Ismael Canales-Negrón analyzes 20 research works on digital badges in professional continuing education programs, an interesting proposal that has been used as an alternative for some years, but its use has not yet become widespread.

Another issue, which has increased during this period, is the concern about the proliferation of misleading information, rumors, and myths about Covid19. This has led governments around the world to institute various measures to stop them (Rodrigues & Xu, 2020). Wendy Villafranqui Cabanillas evidences the validity given to fake news and proposes a working method for teacher training institutions focused on interaction with scientific research texts.

As part of the university's concern for the well-being and social-emotional competencies, Ricardo Jorquera Gutiérrez and Fernando Herrera Gallardo analyze the mental health of officials at a Chilean university in terms of stress, depression, and anxiety together with the challenges they have faced in the context of COVID-19. From a predictive analysis, Rony Prada-Chapoñan, Jhonatan S. Navarro-Loli, and Sergio Dominguez-Lara show the factors that significantly predict emotional exhaustion in Peruvian students.

Finally, university decisions will continue to change significantly in the coming months, with governments issuing various directives and the society as a whole assuming new life models.

In this context, universities must lead this transition, on the one hand, to support a society that needs to remain at home intermittently, and on the other, to maintain their level of quality, productivity, and research in the short and potentially medium term.

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