Educational policies in response to the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus in Latin America: An integrative documentary review

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Educational policies in the face of the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus took an unexpected turn in Latin America. Virtuality constituted a key opportunity for the continuity of basic fundamental services in the citizen's right to education. The objective of this research was to analyze the educational public policies adopted by governments in Latin America in the face of the pandemic. The methodology was an integrative documentary review of the main international organizations whose documents provided relevant information on the actions to be implemented in fourteen Latin American countries. The results obtained show that the priority was to reestablish the continuity of educational services using mass communication resources, such as radio, television, digital platforms, making visible the inequity in the access to the Internet at home. It was also identified a deficiency in the competencies and digital resources of the educational community, dis-crimination and inclusion of people with some type of disability or different languages, especially in urban or rural areas because they do not have technological means. It was concluded that the educational policies in Latin America proposed during the COVID-19 period were designed with-out a real situational diagnosis in each country, to meet the demands of urban and rural areas in an equitable manner with the will of governments, providing budgets and resources that benefit the educational community, as an achievement of state policies.

KEYWORDS

educational policies, virtual education, Latin America, response to the COVID-19, education

Introduction

Educational policies are intentional decisions taken in advance, based on an existing problem that become significant strategic actions, with the purpose of obtaining results, for the resolution of conflicts in the presence of limitation of a resource that affects the majority of the population and that require evaluation in a plausibly deter-mined time (Shi et al., 2022). It is public because of the size of the social aggregate on which they affect, but above all because of its imperative character, being this coated by the legitimate and sovereign authority of the public power.

The documentary analysis responded to the following questions: What were the names of the programs undertaken by the governments of Latin America during the pandemic originated by COVID-19? What were the goals and strategies adopted by Latin American governments? And what where the goals and strategies suggested by Organization of American States (OAS) in order to provide continuity to educational services?

Thus, the objective of this research is to analyze the educational public policies in Latin America according to the circumstances developed since the beginning of the pandemic originated by COVID-19.

UNESCO, through a report at the beginning of the year 2020, indicates that Mongolia and China were the first to implement the interruption of the education system. In the northern hemisphere some countries with certain restrictions had face-to-face classes, however, in the countries of Germany, Italy, Holland and Sweden there were certain restrictions for the return to classes (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2020). In Latin America the pattern of behavior was different since the interruption to classes was total except for Nicaragua and the first to return to face-to-face classes was Cuba. In the cases of Chile, Peru and Uruguay the return was partial, but Mexico and Costa Rica, among others, did not return to face-to-face classes (Tiramonti et al., 2021).

COVID-19 interrupted the learning processes of thousands of students who suspended face-to-face classes for more than a year. While it is true that strategies for distance classes were implemented (Centro de estudios Mineduc, 2020), a large part of the schoolchildren did not have the necessary tools for virtual classes. Having schools closed for more than 13 months implies increasing the minimum level of performance, both in reading comprehension and mathematical reasoning. One policy applied was the vaccination of teachers in rural schools at the beginning and later a massive vaccination of the school population (Instituto Peruano de Economía, 2021). The pandemic has affected three main fields: (a) the deployment of distance learning modalities (b) support and mobilization of educational staff and communities, (c) the health and integral wellbeing of the student body (Centro de estudios Mineduc, 2020).

In Latin America, the quality of the Internet determines the services and applications, and there is a lag in terms of broadband connection speed in relation to advanced countries, limiting tele-health, tele-education and teleworking (Reimers, 2021). This generates the need to continue promoting policies for universal connectivity and investment in digital infrastructure (Agudelo et al., 2020). Governments assumed different strategies to guarantee the continuity of educational services in response to the contingency (Renna Gallano, 2020).

Following the social isolation, relevant investments in digital infrastructure and connectivity were recommended (Garcia Alonso et al., 2020). Likewise, the use of digital or online, synchronous and asynchronous learning strategies, the inclusion of playful-educational content, the use of television and radio programs or podcasts with academic and playful educational content, the development and facilitation of pedagogical and methodological tools so that teachers and professionals can periodically monitor the activities carried out by students at home (Rojas et al., 2021). The creation of financing programs or technological subsidies that facilitate access to indigenous, Afro-descendant and rural communities with internet connection, as well as access and training in information and communication technologies necessary to ensure connectivity (Cardini et al., 2020).

On the other hand, the challenges faced when returning to face-to-face education establish at least four pillars (1) sanitary conditions for social distancing (2) hybrid teaching models (3) permanent support for students at higher academic risk (4) in-creasing educational financing and budget efficiency (Cardini et al., 2020).

In Latin America, the arrival of the end of the world was foreseen before the pandemic, being poverty the major social determinant of diseases in the region, a situation that governments ignore, also these weaken other systems such as education, health, science and technology. On the other hand, educational policies require collaborative intersectoral work, sustainability, empowerment, commitment to public health and equity, and a life course perspective. In this way, the public policies of Argentina, Brazil and Chile were analyzed, in which poverty was made explicit as the major social determinant of diseases in the region, weakening the health, education, science and technology systems, favoring the increase of inequality (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2020; Nogueira et al., 2021; da Scaff et al., 2021).

In Peru, the dynamics of COVID-19 behavior was analyzed to estimate and evaluate the impact of the public policy of suppression or quarantine, which consisted of 2 months of confinement, restricted all social and economic activities, to protect the health of citizens remaining at the expense of virtuality in the first instance. However, these actions had socioeconomic repercussions in the country (Gonzales-Castillo et al., 2020).

In Chile, public policies were analyzed in the context of COVID-19, implementing preventive measures to reduce contagion, which were different from other countries. The responsible authorities built situational maps to identify the focal points with the highest number of COVID-19 infections, providing information to the authorities and the community for prevention purposes. It was concluded that the priority in health and education policies was the suppression to flatten the contagion curve, to ensure the return to classes in person (Ramírez-Pereira et al., 2021). In addition, the use of existing virtual tools was promoted, given the juncture, being socialized internationally, such as messaging platforms, WeChat, Telegram, WhatsApp, Slack, including the use of digital reading materials, learning applications, learning platforms in various languages (Delgado-García et al., 2017; Mercado Borja et al., 2019; United Nations Children's Fund, 2020; Jiménez Guerra and de los Ruiz González, 2021; Suyo-Vega et al., 2021).

School closures and the global recession will have negative effects on education if governments do not react quickly to counteract those (Centro de estudios Mineduc, 2020).

Therefore, leaders adopted proactive strategies to reduce the impact of the pandemic and learning while students were not attending educational institutions. Like-wise, permanent coordination with public health authorities was established in order to reduce the contagion curve (Reimers and Schleicher, 2020). On the other hand, the generation of innovative strategies of the actors committed to teaching is observed, in such a way that continuity was given to academic training (UNESCO, 2020). However, these actions led to shared responsibility between parents and teachers at all levels. Likewise, homes became educational spaces often shared and reduced by their members (Reimers and Schleicher, 2020).

Finally, in 2018, according to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report, it indicated that the world was not ready for digital learning. However, the pandemic forced to take on the challenges of virtuality despite the fact that teachers, students, parents and authorities did not have the experience or skills in the use of digital resources. The efforts made by the educational community to support the achievement of learning in the face of adversity, which turned into an opportunity and became a precedent for future innovative educational actions and inclusion of the population (UNESCO, 2020).

Materials and methods

This study is an integrative review with a historical approach. Documents on the policies implemented in each Latin American country were analyzed for the years 2020, 2021, and 2022. During this period of time, the countries analyzed were immersed in the global pandemic, and had to adapt their policies in order to ensure the education of their young citizens.

The web pages of each Latin American country were analyzed in order to systematize the scientific evidence on the various programs and their respective nominations that governments have proposed to address the educational population. Likewise, to identify the levels that have been addressed as a result of the pandemic.

The remote education programs applied were extracted directly from government sources in Peru, Colombia, Cuba, Venezuela, Mexico, Ecuador, Chile, Brazil, Guatemala, Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Uruguay, and Paraguay.

For the documentary analysis, the researchers established a work schedule, in which the functions were divided according to the criteria for verifying the quality of the information. The data obtained was categorized into three groups:

(a) Name of the programs undertaken by the governments of Latin America.
(b) Goals and strategies adopted by Latin American governments.
(c) Goals and strategies suggested by OAS.

Results

Table 1 shows the names of the programs undertaken by the governments of Latin America. Fourteen (14) programs conducted for the assurance of educational services can be identified, most of which are in Spanish, followed by the native languages of each country. It is interesting how the names of most of the virtual platforms use words such as "*familia*" (family), "*aprende*" (learn) and "*casa*" (home), in order to provide a student-friendly environment.

Table 2 shows the goals and strategies adopted by Latin American governments, such as ensuring Internet access for students and bridging the digital divide, and the ones related to safe reopening of schools.

Table 3 shows the goals and strategies suggested by OAS in order to provide continuity to educational services. The goals include general ones, ensuring Internet access for students and closing the digital divide, support for families and those responsible for education, safe reopening of schools and food security.

Final conclusion

The present integrative review showed that in times of pandemic, at the Latin American level, governments quickly gave concrete responses in order to reestablish essential education services.

TABLE 1   Name of the programs undertaken by the governments of Latin America.

Code	Organization, year or launching	Country	Name of virtual platform	Levels	Language
1	Ministerio de Educación de Perú, 2020	Peru	Aprendo en Casa	Pre-school education Elementary education Secondary education Special and basic alternative	Spanish, Aimara, Ashanninka, Awajún, Central Quechua, Central Quechua, Quechua Chanka, Quechua Collao, Shawl, Shipibo, and Yenesha
2	Ministerio de Educación de Colombia, 2020	Colombia	Profe en Tu Casa. Colombia Aprende	Initial education Basic education Secondary education	Spanish
3	Ministerio de Educación de Cuba, 2020	Cuba	Teleclases. Aprendiendo Cuba. Cubaeduca	Primary education Secondary high school (pre-university) Technical and professional education	Spanish
4	Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Educación de Venezuela, 2020	Venezuela	Cada Familia una Escuela	Special education Initial education Primary education General secondary education Technical secondary education Adult education	Spanish and native languages
5	Secretaría de Educación Pública de México, 2020	Mexico	Aprende en casa	Parenting education Preschool education Primary education Secondary education High school	Native language
6	Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2020	Ecuador	Aprendemos juntos en casa. Educa contigo	Formative leveling Secondary education Higher education High school	Mother tongue
7	Ministerio de Educación de Chile, 2020	Chile	Aprendo en línea. Aprendo TV	Basic education Secondary education Technical education	Spanish
8	Ministério da Educação Brasil, 2020	Brazil	Aprendo en casa	Primary education Basic education Secondary education Secondary education Technical education Youth and adult education	Portuguese
9	Ministerio de Educación de Guatemala, 2020	Guatemala	Aprendo en casa. Conéctate con la estrella	Initial education Pre-primary education Primary education Secondary education	Spanish and Mayan languages
10	Ministerio de Educación de Argentina, 2020	Argentina	Estudiá y aprendé desde tu casa. Seguimos educando	Initial education Primary education Secondary education	Spanish
11	Ministerio de Educación del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 2020	Bolivia	Educa Bolivia	Initial education Primary education Secondary education Higher education	Spanish
12	Ministerio de Educación de Costa Rica, 2020	Costa Rica	Aprendo en casa. Educación a distancia	Preschool education Basic general education Diversified education Higher education	Spanish
13	Ministerio de Educación y Cultura de Uruguay, 2020	Uruguay	Plan Ceibal	Preschool education Basic general education Diversified education Higher education	Spanish
14	Ministerio de Educación de Paraguay, 2020	Paraguay	Tu Escuela en Casa	Preescolar Educación general básica Educación diversificada Educación superior	Spanish

TABLE 2   Goals and strategies adopted by Latin American governments.

Goals	Strategies
Ensuring internet access for students and bridging the digital divide	Educational materials and technological resources were delivered for student accessibility.
	Nationwide mobilization of the educational community.
	Access to technological resources and connectivity was guaranteed through public investment.
	The relationship between the private and public sectors was strengthened to meet the needs for access to information and communication technologies (ICT).
Safe reopening of schools	Protective measures were implemented to contain and prevent the spread of the COVID 19 virus for the return to the classroom. Preventive actions include: (a) temperature monitoring and assessment of febrile status (b) hand washing (c) disinfection of shoes with alcohol (d) use of face masks (e) temporary classroom closure for 14 days if a person with COVID 19 is identified.
	Individual tables, six feet apart (182 cm), are suggested.
	Attendance in public primary and secondary schools in rural areas where access to communication media and connectivity is limited and contagion is not recorded.
	Ongoing training for school administrators and teachers in the application of preventive protocols that provide greater security for the progressive return to face-to-face attendance.

With regard to the educational programs implemented by the countries of the region, most of them were presented in Spanish, both on platforms and in television programs. Initially, language was an obstacle to learning for the native-speaking population, as only two countries considered presenting versions adapted to this need.

In some cases, these programs were evaluated subjectively, causing controversy in the educational community. On the one hand, some reports indicate the satisfaction of the authorities for achieving the goal of attention and continuing in the educational process; however, the conditions of each family environment were not taken into account (not all students have computers, cell phones or tablets with internet access). These conditions resulted in parents assuming the responsibility of the educational service, in addition to their daily activities, which produced dissatisfaction and stress due to the lack of technological skills and technological physical resources.

On the other hand, other reports highlight that the students lived a creative dynamic experience, which achieved family cohesion, the opportunity to learn through virtuality, the reduction of time and costs. However, despite the efforts made by governments to serve the student population, there are still a number of gaps in the care of citizens who have some type of (a) disability (b) discrimination and (c) inequality to the fundamental right to receive education.

Faced with this situation, the strategies adopted by Latin American governments have resulted in positive and negative experiences. The positive ones lie in the introduction and implementation of the virtual system, in all its variables. Likewise, it is necessary to update educational policies consistent with the existing reality and the demands of the student population. During the years 2020 and 2021, in times of social isolation, according to international reports, some measures have been adopted by governments for the delivery of synchronous and asynchronous classes with the sup-port of various institutions. One of them was the implementation of educational programs, managed by the governments of each country, disseminated through television, radio, digital resources, and platforms, to maintain the continuity of educational re-sources. The language most used in the platforms was Spanish.

These programs were evaluated, causing controversy among the educational community. On the one hand, the satisfaction of the authorities for achieving the goal of attention and continuing in the educational process, without taking into account the conditions of each family environment. These actions resulted in parents assuming the responsibility of the educational service in addition to their daily activities, which produced dissatisfaction, stress due to the lack of technological competences in learning and not having the necessary broadband for the continuity of the service (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2020). On the other hand, the students lived a creative dynamic experience, which achieved family cohesion, opportunity to learn through virtuality, reduced time and costs. However, despite the efforts made by the government to serve the student population, there are still a number of gaps in the care of citizens who have some kind of (a) disability (b) discrimination and (c) inequality to the fundamental right to receive education.

In this sense, the ubiquity and globalization of learning, falls on the student body who, being digital natives, still lacks skills in the use of digital tools, leading to reflection and analysis to assume strategies and improvement plans, such as the adequacy of curriculum design, the inclusion of tools in the teaching and learning processes, generating the updating of all those involved, to meet and continue with the teaching services.

TABLE 3   Goals and strategies suggested by Organization of American States (OAS).

Goals	Strategies
General	Implement mechanisms that allow access to education with the stimuli and virtual methodologies offered by the system.
	Ensure an educational system with a sufficient budget to guarantee the physical, mental, and psychosocial protection of children and adolescents in the educational sphere.
	Ensure mechanisms for the regulation, oversight and accountability of the entire educational system, including public, and private educational institutions.
	Guarantee the inclusion of indigenous, Afro-descendant, tribal and/or peasant-rural children, in poverty or extreme poverty, maintaining the principles of interculturality, embodied in the curricular experiences.
	Guarantee educational materials in accordance with the realities of the context, which are culturally appropriate.
	Implement special educational measures and plans that adapt to situations of vulnerability and context of discrimination, including children and adolescents with disabilities, migrants in the face of the pandemic situation.
	Promote massive participation in the student population to disseminate information related to the COVID-19 situation.
	Adopt relevant digital connectivity measures to provide continuity to sexual and reproductive education for adolescents.
Ensuring internet access for students and bridging the digital divide	Ensure that children and adolescents have access to online education without exclusion.
	Establish programs and allocate the necessary resources for children and adolescents living in poverty to participate in distance education programs.
	(a) Make relevant investments in digital infrastructure and connectivity. (b) Use digital or online, synchronous and asynchronous learning strategies. (c) Include playful-educational content. (d) Use television and radio programs or podcasts with academic and educational content. (e) Develop and facilitate pedagogical and methodological tools so that teachers and professionals can periodically monitor the activities carried out by students at home. (f) Create financing programs or technological subsidies to facilitate access to indigenous communities, afro-descendant and rural communities, as well as access to and training in the information and communication technologies necessary to guarantee connectivity.
	Adaptation of the curriculum for the adaptation of virtual education methodologies, ensuring a comprehensive approach.
Accompaniment of families and persons responsible in education	Educational services should incorporate the educational community to accompany children and adolescents.
	Design activities aimed at families and responsible persons to promote the prevention and detection of violence against children and adolescents through dissemination campaigns.
Safe reopening of schools	Ensure that educational establishments are in conditions to prevent contagion in accordance with regulations and scientific evidence.
	Guarantee transportation and mobility systems to educational centers and the availability of basic services.
	Ensure hygiene and disinfection conditions, as well as the availability of first aid and wastewater treatment systems.
	Ensure potable water service in educational facilities.
	Provide the training system and training to the entire educational community on hygiene protocols, as well as their use and circulation within the facilities.
	Adapt the physical space and consider the number of students in each classroom or center according to the indications of the health authorities with scientific basis.
	Plan attendance schedules by shifts, to avoid crowds, particularly at the time of entry and exit of students.
	Develop and communicate the measures and policies adopted in the educational institution.
	Recommend the opening of educational institutions located in rural areas, and in accordance with health situations reported by local regulations.
	To have enough human resources to provide educational services.
Food safety	Implement programs, based on available resources, to ensure food distribution considering the food and nutritional needs of the student body.
	Implement subsidy programs by integrating existing food safety net structures.

Finally, the will of governments and the coherent policies implemented in each country will have an impact on the learning development of this and future generations, creating a pedagogical vacuum that subsequently influences labor market insertion and the development of professional competencies, highlighting soft skills, socialization and emotional skills. The positive lesson in the face of this pandemic is the use of digital tools, opening the way to

innovation and creativity, generating new knowledge shared worldwide, breaking barriers of distance and improving time management.

The pandemic has made visible the lack of contingency actions by governments in the face of an emergency or disaster situation, in basic health and education services; this was observed in the gradual response for the continuity of services. An obstacle identified was the partial or total lack of knowledge of the use of technological tools by the educational community.

The effort developed by the education professional was self-training, for the challenges that virtuality implied, and the management to achieve effective interaction with their students, through the various means of communication.

The positive lesson in the face of this pandemic is that the education professionals have potentiated their competencies, soft skills, socialization and emotion management. The use of digital tools opens the way to innovation and creativity, generating new knowledge shared worldwide, breaking distance barriers and improving time management.

The limitations of the present study were mainly two: the low scientific production on the experiences in the thematic for Latin American Countries, and the lack of documentation about the policies implemented in each of the countries analyzed.

For future research, we propose to analyze the differences between the indicators of each of the results obtained in the Latin American countries.

Author contributions

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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