

Chapter 10

Distance Education in Times of COVID-19 in Mexico: The Case of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional at the Postgraduate Level

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the chapter is to assess distance education in times of COVID-19 through the implementation of the Virtual Plan for Academic Continuity of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN) in order to identify good educational practices at the postgraduate level. A quantitative methodology with an exploratory-descriptive scope was used. The participants of the study were students who were pursuing a graduate degree during confinement. The main results are a positive assessment of distance education in terms of the incorporation and continuous use of digital resources, the use of continuous evaluation, the usefulness of technological tools, as well as an interaction with the teaching staff to review the academic progress of the student.

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INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of the pandemic, the population has seen its family, professional and work stability altered, which has led to an environment of uncertainty about what happens and will happen when the confinement stage ends. In the same way, from one moment to another, in a disruptive way, the use of technology became present and necessary in society, as well as nationally and internationally because it went from being used as fun and a source of information and communication, to become a work tool and a means to deliver the educational service.

According to IESALC (2020a), 75% of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have the technological and pedagogical capacity to offer online education, as well as 76% of students has access to technological platforms and tools. In addition, as educational systems have entered distance education, the digital divide in connectivity, access to devices and levels of digital training of citizens are strategic elements that influence student learning. Additionally, the diversity of access to connectivity and the type of mobile device has been identified, which is why both the phenomenon of the digital and academic divide has increased (UNESCO, 2020; OECD, 2020a).

Particularly in Latin America, COVID-19 has generated a variety of immediate, medium and long-term impacts for the education system of each of the countries. For the teachers, they have had to integrate situations into the technological tools and platforms in their classes. However, there are other teachers with a lack or with a limited use and who have to attend the educational service. Also, the diversity of the teaching profiles in terms of the domain of digital skills has been manifested. In the same way, for educational centers it has implied a commitment to guarantee the continuity of academic training by providing both technological resources and open access to databases and bibliographic data and the adjustment of calendars to give continuity to the educational process (Martin & Furiv, 2020).

In the case of students, they have been forced to experience their classes at a distance, as well as to modify their non-academic activities, which have influenced their academic performance. Also, the variable of connectivity in their homes has been added, which influences both their availability and the time of use to continue with their academic training. The above situations have led not only to changes in the educational trajectory of the student body by not being able to continue attending distance courses, but also to dropping out of school due to not feeling safe, with the appropriate technological tools or the effectiveness of fulfilling the academic tasks (Wang , Cheng, Yue and McAleer, 2020).

In this way, the coronavirus has forced to reconvert and adapt face-to-face classes to distance sessions, showing various limitations in both students and teachers with respect to their digital training coupled with different conditions in which they live during confinement, which has impacted in attitudes, skills and disposition to carry out a transformation of the educational process with the main purpose of continuing with the academic training of students (Cabrera, 2020). To achieve this, educational television was implemented and a loan of laptops was carried out in various countries to continue educational care (Gewin, 2020; Boursicot, 2020). Also, it has been necessary to venture into the use of immediate communication tools such as WhatsApp as a usual way with the student body, especially in higher education (Zafra, 2020).

Faced with this educational transition process caused by COVID-19, IESALC (2020b) establishes the importance of introducing efficient mechanisms for evaluating and monitoring student learning; document pedagogical changes and their impacts; detect the areas of opportunity for distance education coupled with generating an analysis of results that enable the incorporation of a renewed teaching and learning model. Besides, Murillo and Duk (2020) indicate that the impact generated by the closure of

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