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Rural schools: gaps in education that intensify in a pandemic (COVID -19) and proposals for improvement in Metropolitan Lima, Peru

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Abstract

This article shows the results of a study that seeks to know the state of Rural Public Educational Institutions in Metropolitan Lima. The study was developed according to the Constructivist paradigm, taking the qualitative approach of phenomenological design. The sample consisted of eight rural school principals with a Director's Resolution assigning their functions, in which a survey technique was applied through a questionnaire and an interview, with the help of a semi-structured interview guide. This study meets the criteria of auditability, credibility, data confirmability and transferability, which determines the scientificity of this article. It addresses rural basic education, the gaps before and during the pandemic, and the factors that accentuate school dropout. The results determine that the rural populations in Metropolitan Lima do not meet the standards of infrastructure in the IIEE, and access to services, especially considering the modification of their primary activities and the inequalities of access to education, as well as the distancing of access to better opportunities in the context of the COVID -19 context. This way, the selected sample details the high levels of unsatisfied basic needs. MINEDU and other private entities in the country have been involved with strategies and programs that seek to improve learning and the development of higher education and reduce rural school dropout rates. However, the national crisis caused by COVID-19 has paralyzed many support measures and the level of access of these populations to the improvement of services, from the various government agencies, mainly at the local level;

municipal management shows a lack of initiative in prioritizing better management of services. A crucial factor is the level of education of the rural population, which becomes a challenge to lower the poverty line; it is an effective priority to ensure essential services, guarantee economic opportunities and education coverage. It is concluded that there is a particular distance between the urban and the rural areas within the same territory of Metropolitan Lima.

Keywords: Digital divide, Rural education, Aprendo en Casa strategy.

Introduction

The main task of scientific research is to contribute to the development of society since it contributes to scientific knowledge, identifying the search for truth, contrasting facts with assumptions, building knowledge that contributes to the development of science and the closing of gaps in society from its various aspects.

Education in Peru assumes an enormous challenge in which all citizens assume the challenge through the National Education Project to 2036; that is, that all people, without distinction of any kind, can fully exercise all their rights, especially education (PEN, 2020).

Vega (2017) highlights that to allow a full development, it is necessary to address the inequalities expressed in society through inequitable access to different opportunities, given the new context, it is necessary to know the state of educational institutions during these two years in which the educational service has not been attended physically, to identify the strengths and weaknesses, especially in rural areas of Metropolitan Lima: diversity, the emotional state of the educational community, the gaps in the environment, citizenship and children and adolescents, need to adapt to new processes, and for this, it is necessary to identify the challenges that the pandemic of COVID-19 has increased.

The State has the role of guarantor of the right to education and its responsibility to provide follow-up, supervision and monitoring, which is of utmost importance since the decentralized units such as the UGEL assume such process; for this, there must be constant communication and support from state agencies (Ministries, Municipalities, NGOs, among others) assume responsibilities for it with the fundamental purpose of providing creativity, initiative, innovation capacity and response to latent needs in education, which are always diverse, concrete and particular to each person. Municipalities and NGOs assume responsibility for this with the fundamental purpose of providing creativity, initiative, capacity for innovation and response to the latent needs in education, which are always diverse, concrete and particular to each person and community, given that it is a large and diverse country.

Flores et al. (2020) address multiple aspects and accentuate the differences between rural and urban gaps or more or less developed regions, which is fully related to the combination of socioeconomic and technological variables. Throughout their lives, citizens have been socialized with a school and have been able to identify some deficient factor. Now, a new role is assumed to add improvement strategies from a multidisciplinary perspective: to face and shorten the gaps in the rural educational service, taking as the center of educational action the child and adolescent, since they are the present and future of the country, and considering that learning must be interconnected with the social practices of each culture and real-life situations. All children must have the same opportunities.

Throughout people's lives, it is planned to ensure and provide diverse and flexible trajectories, which is why it sounds utopian to say that by 2036 no child should be left without

attending school, that everyone should be without anemia, and that the learning achieved by each child and adolescent, in or out of school, should be promoted and certified.

All of the above can be achieved, as long as the autonomy and efficiency of educational institutions is achieved with multisectoral support. This management support is imperative to ensure quality public education. For this, the transformational look must prevail, and the dynamism of assuming educational roles and processes must be given promptly and effectively. Likewise, MINEDU, through the National Curriculum seeks to face the challenges without exclusion detailing a transversal approach for the development of the student's graduation profile, with a view to every student interpreting reality and responsibly managing decision-making (CNEB, 2017).

Within this stage of their lives, students have participated in schools, receiving learning from the initial, primary and secondary levels. According to the socioeconomic level and the opportunities provided, they have spent much of their childhood and adolescence in an Educational Institution, sometimes in public or private educational institutions. In this regard, Muelle (2016) states that social and economic factors determine academic risk or success.

In both spaces, citizens are not oblivious to recognizing educational footprints since this is part of life. However, a critical and reflective look is to recognize that Peruvian environmental education shows deep injustices, especially in rural areas. For example, not only population groups without access to educational services but also students living in poverty or extreme poverty with disabilities, indigenous or Afro-Peruvian populations, who live in rural areas or show more than one of these circumstances achieve lower educational results and attend schools that are not only weaker, but the composition of the classrooms is socially homogeneous, which negatively affects their learning experiences. And it is in these spaces and dimensions that it is possible to recognize the issues affecting them to innovate with better education (Castro & Manzanares, 2016).

As Carlos Monge (2007) points out, the primary activities characteristic of rural areas are altered by climatic factors, and this population's primary income is altered. These changes are a threat due to the impact and result of global warming, which generates within this context an alteration of the water cycles and changes in land and sea temperatures, which for the rural world results in aggravating their conditions since it directly affects the poorest.

This latent social fact will generate greater migration, increased poverty, and difficulties adapting. This is one of the problems to be faced and constitutes, today, one of the most significant challenges for the State.

In Peru, there are 12,095 multi-grade and single-teacher educational institutions registered, which provide educational services at the pre-school, primary and secondary levels with the registration of 50,116 modular codes, and in Metropolitan Lima there are nine educational institutions located in rural areas, eight of them in the jurisdiction of UGEL 04 and one educational institution in UGEL 01 (ESCALE - 2021). Likewise, in the case of people with disabilities, only eight out of 500 particular primary education institutions in the country are located in rural areas, with only 65 enrolled. This shows that there are many challenges to be taken on.

The Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo, hereinafter GRADE in 2018, indicated that Peru has 20.8% of the population living in rural areas; although progress has been made in coverage and access, the academic performance of students has not improved. It can even be

said that it is a battle to achieve sustainability at the secondary level against school dropouts, and large gender gaps hinder sustainable educational achievements. It has been recorded that the UN - UNESCO - FAO - IDB, among other public and private instances, have added their valuable participation in assuming challenges in improving education in rural areas. Therefore, it is necessary to highlight the importance of this research since 43.8% of the population lives in rural areas and is categorized as poor.

It also shows that 3,315,666 adults in rural areas have not started or completed basic education. Similarly, 24% of secondary school students are behind in school compared to 7.4% in urban areas, which shows the challenge faced throughout Peru. Furthermore, rural areas have poor access to basic services such as drinking water (68.9%), electricity (78.9%) and sanitation (44.7%); only 28.2% have access to all three services compared to 82.6% in urban areas (INEI: ENAHO 2016).

In rural areas, 73.1% of households had at least one member with a cell phone, and access to cable telephony is also limited, reaching only 8.6%. At the same time, it is not easy to access the Internet since it reaches only 1% versus 30.2% in urban areas. It is a digital crisis. Therefore, regional, municipal or local management must focus on and provide more resounding support in Peruvian education.

The INEI specifies that rural areas or rural population centers do not have more than 100 dwellings grouped contiguously, nor are they district capitals; or that, having more than 100 dwellings, they are dispersed or scattered without forming blocks or nuclei (INEI, 1993). This definition presents the urban and rural within a dichotomy without considering the constant changes and interrelationships that converge in both spaces. This figure is fully true for Metropolitan Lima, where it can be seen that educational institutions located in rural areas are two hours away from rural population centers and that the migration process is growing every year. Rural families searching for better opportunities for work, education and health choose to migrate, determining new types of interrelationships based on changes in the production chain, market structure and economic, social and political interdependence within and between rural and urban areas.

This changing context, overcoming traditional notions, implies developing a new conceptualization of the rural, understanding it as multiple interrelationships between urban and rural spaces, considering the generated changes and situating the analysis in their relationship.

In 2014, the United Nations resident coordinator in Peru, Rebeca Arias, stated that there had been significant progress in reducing poverty in Peru, but many inequalities remain. Therefore, it is necessary to implement development policies to universalize and improve the quality of essential services, such as education and health, in favor of vulnerable populations. Diez (2014) details that in rural sectors, the circulation of agents and the presence of non-agricultural activities in the countryside, among others. This implies new approaches to understanding diversity in its complexity and from a territorial and intercultural perspective, which today is called the “new rurality.”

On the other hand, the dropout rate in rural areas, excluding information from IIEEs located in rural areas 1, is 1.7% for the initial level, 5.2% for PRONOEI, 3.0% for the primary level and 5.2% for the secondary level (MINEDU: SIAGIE 2017). Similarly, the adult population that has not completed regular basic education and should be able to be served by alternative essential education services is estimated at approximately 9 million people

nationwide, which shows a high demand for education for the unmet adult population (ENAHO 2016).

According to the details, during the last few years, school dropout rates in Peru showed a downward trend at all levels. In addition, progress was made to close the gender gaps. However, Ricardo Cuenca, head of the Ministry of Education (MINEDU), said that with the health crisis unleashed by the new coronavirus, the trend changed for pre-school and primary school children for whom it was more challenging to continue with their studies, while the situation worsened for those living in rural areas.

Scientific research has shown that rural education must continue to take on challenges. Meanwhile, the Canadian anthropologist Wade Davis (2007) said that our first response to ignorance is classification, which usually leads to hierarchy. This classification requires study, concepts, divisions, distinctions and the imputation of norms of structure and function as the growth of human sciences taking Foucault as a basis.

In view of this, it is necessary to support some standard criteria in the short term that will narrow the gaps in the medium and long term. There is an urgent need to promote proposals for this rural context in Lima. The reality is that scientific research should be directed toward improving the quality of life and a fair world for all sectors.

Material And Methods

The research was developed according to the Constructivist paradigm, taking the qualitative approach of phenomenological design. The qualitative approach was assumed, centered on symbolic interactionism; it seeks to understand phenomena in their natural environment. As Cuenya and Ruetti (2010) point out, this approach allows the development of information based on the description and interpretation of certain situations, in this case, the position of the units of analysis concerning social responsibility in scientific research.

The design that guided the research is hermeneutic, which consists of the interpretation of reality in the researcher-researched interaction, in this case seeking the meaning of the responses of the units of analysis. The term “hermeneutics”, which comes from the Greek hermeneuein, means “to interpret,” is in the search for understanding the other through conversations and interpreting what is found in what is said (Aguilar, 2004).

The population of principals of educational institutions located within the districts of Metropolitan Lima considered those corresponding to educational institutions in rural areas; given this segmentation, there are nine principals, and the sample consisted of eight of them, all with a Director's Resolution of assignment of their functions, that is, 88.89% of the total population, considering this a representative sample of this specific population. The technique used was the survey, and the instrument was the questionnaire and the interview, and its instrument was a semi-structured interview guide developed using telephone calls given the context in which we find ourselves and the means by which the directors of these IIEE can have access. Finally, the conclusions reflect how the gaps in education intensified during the pandemic (COVID -19) and state proposals for improvement for educational institutions in Metropolitan Lima.

From this perspective, the study was directed in the following itinerary of objectives:

a) Analysis and organization of data from the SIAGIE- ESCALE- SIMON platforms of the

UGELES as tools for collecting information from the IIEEs and analysis in the field of the functions performed by the director.

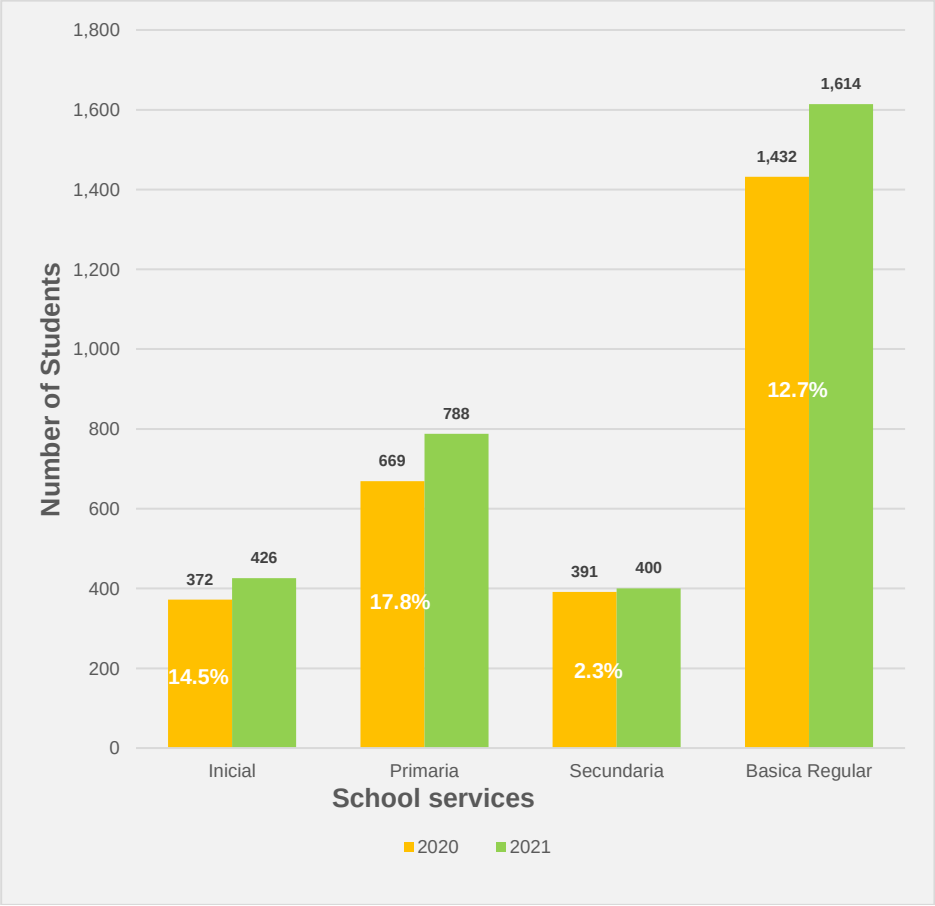
b) Objectification of informants' perceptions and evaluations of the rural educational service in scientific research.
c) Deepening and reflecting on the understanding of the meaning of researcher-units of analysis interactions.
d) Understanding the emerging subjectivities of educational gaps.

It should be noted that the data shown were obtained from the application of a survey on factors relevant to the level of student performance. The questionnaire was administered to eight directors of rural IIEEs in Metropolitan Lima.

Results

From the questionnaire, which consisted of a sample of 8 rural public IIEEs, the following was determined:

Figure 1. *Number of students in the different educational services in the rural IIEEs of UGEL 04 Comas between 2020 and 2021.*



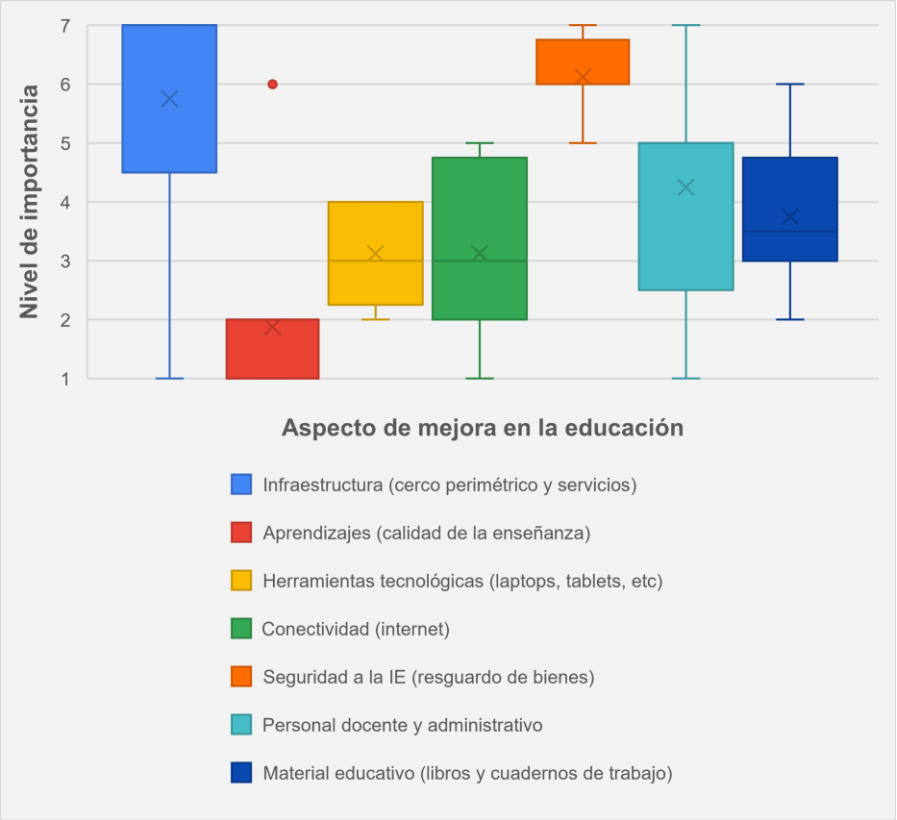
Source: *Ministry Of Education - Educational Census - ESCALE*

Own elaboration

The increase in student enrollment was reported by 100% of rural IIEE directors, with an increase of 12.71% between 2020 and 2021. Of which, in the initial level, the increase of students was 14.52%; in the primary level, 17.79%; and in the secondary level, 2.3% (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION - Educational Census - ESCALE), which indicates the increase

in demand for school service in rural areas.

Figure 2. *Most important aspects for the improvement of the educational service in the rural IIEEs of UGEL 04 Comas*



Source: *Own survey*

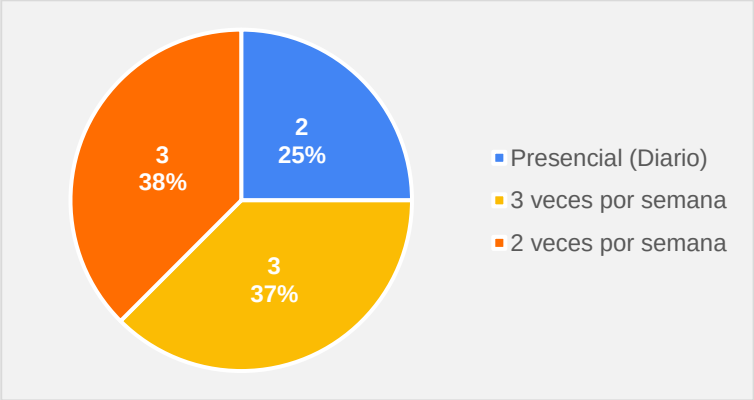
Own elaboration

The improvement of educational services is essential in rural IIEEs to meet students' needs; therefore, the survey revealed the different levels of importance that certain factors have for the 8 directors of rural IIEEs for the improvement of student performance. Of the 7 factors considered, a score from 1 to 7 was assigned, with 1 being the most important and 7 the least important; therefore, the following was determined:

1. Learning and teaching quality is the most relevant factor for improving student performance, with the median being 1 and the mean of 1.875.
2. In second place, we have technological tools and connectivity as relevant factors for improving student performance, with the median being 3 and the mean 3.125. This is due to the context in which we currently find ourselves.
3. In third place is educational materials as a relevant factor, with a median of 3.5 and a mean of 3.75.
4. In fourth place, we have the administrative and teaching staff, with a median of 5 and a mean of 4.25.
5. In fifth place, we have the infrastructure of the IE, which involves the perimeter fence, services and furniture, as a relevant factor for improving student performance, with the median being 7 and the mean 5.75.
6. The least important factor for improving student performance is EI security, which involves safeguarding assets, with the median being 6 and the mean 6.125.

Comparing the years 2020 and 2021, 100% of directors reported an improvement in their student's learning and performance. However, the return to face-to-face or blended learning for students is a topic of discussion for improving student learning and performance in rural IIEEs.

Figure 3. *Appropriate attendance of students in the rural IIEE of UGEL 04*

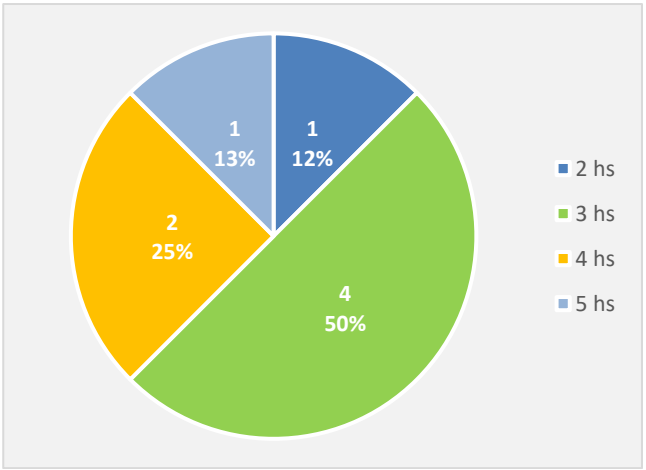


Source: *Own survey*

Own elaboration

Therefore, for 25% of directors, students should return in person, i.e., have daily attendance in rural IIEEs; while 75% indicate that students should have daily attendance in rural IIEEs, which could vary between 2 or 3 times per week.

Figure 4. *Number of hours that the student should remain in class if attendance is face-to-face or blended learning.*



Source: *Own survey*

Own elaboration

Regardless of the form of attendance, whether face-to-face or blended, 50% of rural IIEE directors suggest that student attendance should be 3 hours per day, 25% indicate that attendance should be 4 hours, 12.5% recommend that attendance should be 2 hours, and another 12.5% indicate that attendance should be 5 hours.

In addition to the survey conducted with the directors of rural IIEE of UGEL 04, the "Return Plan" strategy database conducted in July and October in the IIEE of UGEL 04 Comas was used as an instrument to obtain information. As a result, the following information was obtained from this strategy:

Table 1. *Number of students who did not manage to be served in rural IIEEs.*

Month	Rural IIEE	Students not served	%
July	5	32	1.98%
October	3	46	2.85%

Source: *IE World - Return Plan*

Own elaboration

Taking into account that for 2021 there were a total of 1,614 students in rural IIEEs, for July, 5 IIEEs reported 32 cases of students that were not attended in rural IIEEs, representing 1.98%; however, for October, the number of IIEEs that reported cases was reduced to 3, which reported 46 cases of students, representing 2.85% of the total number of students. This shows that, despite the decrease in the number of institutions reporting cases of unattended students, the number of students is increasing.

Discussion

Teaching in regular basic education has always posed challenges for both teachers and students. Considering that not everyone has the necessary physical and mental tools to face changes, distance education imposed in April 2020 brought new challenges and a process of adaptation that had to be faced with greater dedication, both by parents and students and at the level of educational institutions by managers, teachers, who became the new mediators of education.

The research assumes the interpretative research paradigm (Popkewitz, 1988), which is the basis of the study because it seeks to interpret social phenomena from the perspective of symbolic interactionism. From this perspective, the study was directed in the following itinerary of objectives:

e) Capture, analysis and organization of the data emerging from the responses of the units of analysis in the fieldwork.

From the results, principals indicate a preeminence of the *learning* variable over the others consulted, and it is considered a key element in improving students' performance in rural areas. This reinforces studies such as those of León and Youn (2016) that show that several variables of school processes, such as the disciplinary climate in class, have a positive and significant effect on the average performance of students and school climate. Similarly, the sense of belonging of students in the school has an effect on performance gaps. Therefore, the role of the principal is important mainly in these institutions, as Freire and Miranda (2014) in their research highlight the role of the principal in student performance and how this contributes to this factor becoming a key element in the bid to provide better quality education; and how this leads to it becoming a priority in the agenda of educational policies at the national level. Furthermore, as indicated by the same authors, during the last decade, the role of the school principal has become more visible thanks to the process of educational decentralization that has been implemented. This process has contemplated the transfer of management within the four levels of management, whether sectoral, regional, local and of the schools themselves, in the search for greater autonomy (Ugarte, Arguedas and Ángeles 2012). This is important given that they are the ones who mediate with the corresponding Local Educational Management Units for the improvement of conditions both at the pedagogical level and at the level of educational infrastructure and services that require demand in the educational institutions of

these rural areas.

Similarly, given the diagnosis detailed by the directors about the students and their parents or guardians, the notion of wellbeing is incorporated to the research, which allows us to make a diagnosis of the population entering the educational system considering their risk factors as well as their protective factors, such as the economic work they develop and that allow the support of their families, many dedicated to the extraction of raw materials such as mining, agriculture, in the same way evaluating the quality of life allowed to recognize these conditions of entry to the educational system. Evaluating the social capital of the students and their families, everything they bring with them: health and socioeconomic background. Another element required to improve the learning process and the school climate is contextualizing the contents, given the constructivist paradigm where we have the concept of meaningful learning that requires relating the new learning with the previously learned. As detailed before, another key element in improving student performance is to challenge the factors that increase absenteeism and desertion; therefore, the institutional management of schools must evaluate to what extent they are facilitators and motivators of new pedagogical practices.

On the other hand, analyzing the learning improvement process requires contextualizing it to the challenges and difficulties posed by the virtuality of distance education. Given the current context, distance education resulted in a means to continue learning during the period of the health emergency; however, what could not be foreseen, for authors such as Borges (2005) was an analysis of the frustration of the online student that would be causing havoc in the continuity of students, which added to the risk factors would lead to absenteeism and consequent school dropout. A key element is the focus of the learning process, and the student becomes the center of training, the teacher and parent a guide and facilitator of learning, acting as transmitters of knowledge. Then, what can cause frustration on the part of the student: low access to virtual educational material, only 1% of the rural population has access to internet, there were great challenges during these two years on the part of the students and educational institution to continue with their learning, on the part of the teacher it was detailed that their education and training was not oriented to the use of virtual resources or tools to provide their classes, to respond to students in a virtual environment, interaction and collaboration, on the part of the educational institution: technical assistance (providing a learning environment specific to the educational institution, virtual learning material), online teacher training (providing accompaniment or advice for their teachers), guidance and support to the student since they can no longer simply approach the physical space of the address, they should communicate in a timely manner the means and channels for communication with the direction of the institution, not taking into account the situation of the student that given the context could go through a situation of increased economic or even family precariousness had a greater impact on the intermittency of students to their virtual classes.

Conclusions

Article 66 of the General Law of Education, Law 28044: "The Educational Institution, as a learning community, is the first and main instance of management of the decentralized educational system," and the director's function is to mediate between the different educational actors. de Belaunde (2011), in the search for understanding of the educational variable in the reduction of the situation of vulnerability of the populations served by social programs:

"(...) education plays a fundamental role in the State's social programs. The food, health

and nutrition of the vulnerable school-age population, as well as the infrastructure of their schools, are considered fundamental variables for improving student learning (...) little progress can be made in the formation of human capital if these measures are not accompanied by quality education" (p. 300).

Another study that emphasizes the managerial role in the good development of school management is the study by Sempé (2015), which indicates how pedagogical support generates significant differences among those that have not received it. Finally, from what was reviewed, there was a case study of educational management (Educational Quality Measurement Unit, 2006) where the strengths and weaknesses of teachers' work are detailed:

“While teachers' planning work is praised, they are often criticized for the lack of teacher participation in educational activities, deficiencies in annual curricular programming, division among teachers, lack of strategies for evaluating students, poor training, etc.” (p. 109).

Faced with this reality, the role and performance of the principal becomes strategic, to the extent that it allows the establishment of an internal policy that gives him/her greater autonomy and, with it, new functions for institutional and pedagogical management (Uribe, 2007).

Finally, the study proposes the necessary implementation of an evidence-based policy for educational institutions located in rural areas, taking as a reference what is cited by Flores Crespo (2013)

“After extracting the information from the selected studies, a “synthesis” is made. This, as mentioned by Torgerson (2003), can be done qualitatively if the data do not allow a numerical synthesis. Now, suppose the numerical data present sufficient homogeneity. In that case, they can be combined and presented in a meta-analysis, which - within the evidence-based policy approach - is a statistical technique for concentrating data from two or more randomized control trials and its value lies in the fact that it reduces the error derived from the random exercise of a study (random error). (p. 277).

As detailed by the author in the same quote, meta-analysis is intended to estimate more precisely the overall effect of an educational program or intervention, being that this meta-analysis constitutes high-quality evidence, but finally, a constant situation is described by managers, do decision makers use it to do so in an informed manner? As described by several authors, political and policy decisions are intrinsically complex. Therefore, it cannot necessarily be assumed that the high quality of a study or the information gathered by the monitoring developed by the various decentralized bodies is sufficient to modify certain patterns of political behavior. Therefore, it is evident from this article that the development of systematic reviews or meta-analyses has not ensured their use.

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