

New normality in the reopening of schools

¹Aracelli del Carmen Gonzales-Sánchez² Margoth Luliana Berrio-Quispe
³ Dina Emeteria Chávez-Bellido ⁴ Sarita Melisa Quispe-Llactahuaman

¹dgonzalessa@ucvvirtual.edu.pe

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0028-9177>

Universidad César Vallejo, Perú

²margoth.berrio@urp.edu.pe

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9676-5571>

Universidad Ricardo Palma, Perú

³dina.chavez@urp.edu.pe

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9482-6783>

Universidad Ricardo Palma, Perú

⁴squispell@une.edu.pe

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5972-4968>

Universidad Nacional de Educación Enrique Guzmán y Valle, Perú

Summary

The year 2020, due to the notable increase of the SARS-CoV-2 virus causing the disease COVID-19, determined that, in order to prevent the increase of contagions, several governments worldwide decided to close schools, institutes and universities, as well as to implement the distance, remote or virtual teaching modality; however, the closure of schools brought with it complications such as the delay of learning in students. The objective of this study was to determine the new normality in the reopening of schools within the context of the health emergency. Consultation of the academic literature led to the conclusion that the new normality implied adaptive processes in schools; during the reopening, the countries where classes were reopened faced three common aspects: emotional issues, fear of contagion and the implementation of precise and detailed health protocols.

Keywords: New normalcy, school reopening, remote classrooms

INTRODUCTION

The easy spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that caused the coronavirus disease in 2020 determined that the World Health Organization (WHO) will recommend to the different countries of the world to implement public health policies to protect the health of the population, as was the mandatory confinement or quarantine; this context determined that the normal development of the activities were interrupted, among them, education, because it was decided to close schools, institutes and

universities, as well as the implementation of distance, remote or virtual education modality.

The closure of schools was part of the confinement measures during the beginning of the health emergency, which was supported by the scarce information on the evolution of the disease and revealed limitations in scientific knowledge of how SARS-CoV-2 spread; however, it was certain that SARS-CoV-2 could be easily transmitted from person to person through the respiratory tract, causing

damage to the respiratory tract. (Cabezas, 2020) However, it was certain that it was easily transmitted from person to person through the respiratory tract, causing abnormal immune damage that rapidly affected the health of those infected. (Maguiña et al., 2020) For this reason, it was a risk to keep students in a classroom exposed to contagion, and the isolation measures recommended by the different governments had to be complied with. However, as the months progressed, questions arose as to whether schools could be a safe place, because several researchers argued that, in children and adolescents, the disease was not serious and they could be asymptomatic. (Sánchez-Solís, 2020).

As the not very encouraging news about the spread of Covid 19 progressed, it was decreed the paralyzation of classes first in Asian and European countries; in America, several countries coincided in the month of March 2020 as Peru, Mexico, Chile, Paraguay, Colombia, etc.; however, the only government whose political authorities decided to paralyze school activities was Nicaragua, due to the complications of the pandemic; therefore, 40% of parents decided not to send their children to school, this caused an educational tragedy because education was delayed. (Sancho, 2021).

According to figures regarding school closures provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), more than 1.2 billion students had been affected by the loss of face-to-face classes; of this total, 160 million were from Latin America and the Caribbean; the countries with the highest number of students affected by school closures in South America were: Brazil with 43156,329; Colombia with 43156,329; Brazil with 43156,329; and Brazil with 43156,329. (CEPAL-UNESCO, 2020) The countries with the highest number of students affected by

school closures in South America were: Brazil with 43156,329; Colombia with 11168,082; Argentina with 11062,902 and Peru with 8354,077 (Unesco, 2021); these data made it difficult to develop a democratic and inclusive education for all in the context of the health emergency; on the other hand, it was an obligation of the different states to guarantee continuity since education was a fundamental right. (Puetate et al., 2021).

Due to the uncertainty as to the most appropriate actions to be implemented for the continuity of the educational service, the Inter-American Development Bank recommended three fundamental axes to the different countries: "(i) maintaining the student-teacher and family-school link; (ii) delivering content aligned with the school curriculum; and (iii) accompanying and monitoring the learning process" (IDB, 2020, p. 1). (IDB, 2020, p. 19). From a more holistic perspective, ECLAC and UNESCO (2020) recommended the exchange of experiences among the different countries and concern for the dignity of the individual, despite the fact that the pandemic highlighted the inequalities in access to education.

Implementing the distance, remote or virtual modality to deal with health emergencies did not have satisfactory results as expected, because this context revealed severe difficulties which should have been a concern of the different states before the pandemic broke out, such as the digital gaps, as there was a lack of adequate connectivity, which mainly affected the most vulnerable areas, for example, this happened mostly in rural areas of Peru. (Cepal-Unesco, 2020) For example, this happened mostly in the rural areas of Peru. (Anaya et al., 2021) The IDB report (2020), which took secondary school students as a reference and showed that only 30% of those living in

vulnerable areas had access to the Internet. These difficulties determined the impoverishment of learning, affecting, above all, students in public schools, who lacked the minimum resources to continue with their classes. (Mateus et al., 2022).

Another difficulty that limited the distance classes was the lack of digital competencies in teachers; they managed to adapt which allowed them to provide better learning experiences (Hordatt y Haynes, 2021; Vértiz et al., 2020). However, their homes became schools, sharing professional activities with family activities, facing overloaded workloads. (Ruiz, 2020; Gonzales-Sánchez et al., 2021). But the lack of digital deficiencies was not exclusive to teachers, it also affected the students in such a way that parents questioned whether this modality could be of quality. (Gonzales-Sánchez et al., 2021). For example, in South Korea, because of the traditional thinking of some families used to face-to-face education of how education should be, there was resistance to accept the new modality (Byun and Slavin, 2020); in the East, ethical questions were described by parents who questioned whether this modality could be of quality, Misman et al. (2021) described ethical questions by parents about the use and indiscriminate access to digital content, which could cause negative moral effects on students. In addition, as the homes were schooled, parents were responsible for accompanying their children in the development of their classes; nevertheless, they demonstrated academic weaknesses. (Janampa et al., 2021).

Poor connectivity, lack of technological resources and lack of digital competencies were the main factors that caused thousands of students worldwide to drop out of school. (Mateus et al., 2022). For this reason, one solution to recover lost learning and attract students

again was the return to prespecialty, taking into consideration the reports from (UNICEF, 2021). The consequences will be disastrous if school closures persist, and it is quite possible that those who dropped out will no longer return to school.

The reopening of schools began in 2020, mainly in Asia and Europe; on the other hand, in South America, the first country to open its classrooms was Uruguay since only forty weeks were closed as opposed to the other countries in the Americas where the closure lasted between seventy-one and seventy-eight weeks; however, according to figures from the Global Coalition for Education, 2.4% of the world's student population is still affected by school closures and seven countries have not yet reopened their schools. (UNESCO, 2022).

According to the above, it was possible to infer that the closing of schools was a health measure that started the pandemic, but revealed limitations for all students to have access to quality education, affecting the most vulnerable, being a solution the return to face-to-face classes. In view of the above, the following questions arose: How did the schools adapt to the pandemic? What were the difficulties to coexist in the new normality? Were the schools able to be a safe place? What were the fears of directors, teachers and parents?

There is no doubt that the pandemic was a complicated context, the confinement measures changed the habits, returning to school would not be the same as before, the new normality implies an adaptive process (Rico et al., 2021) that is, respect for the new regulations (Sandoval-Díaz, 2021). For this reason, the objective of the study was to determine the new normality in the context of school reopening in the context of the health emergency by exploring the academic literature

published on the subject. This research was considered important because it was developed in the context of the pandemic; therefore, it has been necessary to adapt to the new normal and learn to live with the covid-19 disease.

METHOD

The qualitative approach of literature review was used, for which the following databases were consulted: Scopus (9 articles), Web of Science (WOS) (11), Google Scholar (4) and Scientific Electronic Library Online SciELO (2). Google Scholar (4) and Scientific Electronic Library Online SciELO (2), having as inclusion criteria to have been published in the year 2021, to be open access, in English or Spanish, in addition to the keywords: school reopening, return to school, pandemic and covid-19. In the exclusion criteria, those publications published up to 2020 were rejected, because given the nature of the topic, it was necessary to resort to more recent information. In addition, it was necessary to consult web pages of institutions responsible for education worldwide, such as UNESCO, UNICEF and IDB.

DEVELOPMENT AND DISCUSSION

According to the literature consulted, the authors agreed on the new normality for the reopening; in addition, the countries developed protocols with the recommendations issued by UNESCO and UNICEF for a voluntary and flexible return, with clear and precise guidelines that schools must comply with for the reopening; on the other hand, the IDB also provided recommendations regarding health care, distancing and hygiene in schools. (Bos, 2020)The IDB also provided recommendations regarding health care, distancing and hygiene in schools, since communication with parents is essential

for an adequate adaptation and implementation of the return to school. (Gavilánez-Morales et al., 2021)The IDB also provided recommendations regarding health care, distance and hygiene in schools, since communication with parents is essential for a proper adaptation and implementation of the back-to-school program, as they will be responsible for complying with biosecurity measures and contributing to the social bubble so that their children do not become infected.

The new normality addressed the emotional aspect, the confinement and uncertainty generated by the progress of the pandemic, caused emotional affections in the members of the community, it was normal for the entire population to feel fear of becoming infected (Ramirez et al., 2021) causing anguish, which was increased by the exposure of the not very encouraging news in the media (Schiff et al., 2021); in the case of children, not being able to go out and the adaptation to the new teaching modality caused them stress, panic crises, anxiety and sleep disorders, in addition, in several families, there was stress, panic crises, anxiety and sleep disorders. (Argandoña et al., 2020)In addition, in several families, grief was added to the loss of a loved one. For this reason, it was necessary to prioritize the issue of mental health and psychosocial support so that teachers, students and administrators would feel safe, socioemotional support plans had to be designed in order to provide peace of mind and confidence for their return. (Mineduc, 2020)However, it is important to involve the students, to listen to their opinions because, if the information is channeled correctly, they can become part of the solution. (Etchebehere et al., 2021)It is also the students' right to participate in the decision making process of their school.

(Barría-Herrera et al., 2021) On the other hand, in the return to classes, it was necessary to prioritize learning and competencies, the progress of the students had to be systematic, so that the way classes were developed could no longer be the same as before the pandemic. (Gómez, 2021). On the other hand, teachers, in the reopening, must feel autonomous and competent in order to strengthen them psychologically by having the ability to adapt to the new normality. (Kim et al., 2021).

The second aspect that several authors agreed on regarding the return to school was the fear of contagion in children and adolescents; the reassurance for a safe return could be vaccination. Massad et al.(2021) A study of the progress of infections in Sao Paulo (Brazil), for example, during the second wave, these increased among children, in this sense, it could be risky to attend classes in a rebound of the disease, in this line of progress of community infections was also addressed by Stage et al. (2021), who pointed out that those responsible for implementing the provisions for reopening schools should consider the evolution of the disease; they took as a reference Denmark or Norway with low levels of infections. From another experience, Keeling et al.(2021) Aiano et al. (2021), in a study carried out in England in 2020, showed an increase in the number of cases when schools were reopened, with the greatest transmission occurring among secondary school students, similar to what was stated by Aiano et al. (2021), in the same country, who affirmed that in large outbreaks, the incidence was higher in secondary schools than in primary schools. Mondschein et al.(2021) They also found a similar record of infection among middle school students compared to adults. From another perspective, Carrera et al.(2021) They noted that the initial scientific studies have had considerable changes in 2020 and 2021; for this

reason, it is important to further explore how necessary restrictive measures are for children; also, the conditions of capacity because, in a study conducted in the U.S., they showed a slight increase in positive cases, Tatapudi y Das(2021) showed a slight increase in covid -19 positive cases when the number of students was 100% reinstated.

A third aspect that has been demonstrated in the literature consulted was that the socialized protocols for reopening, although flexible, programmed and voluntary, should have taken into account the level of contagion according to geographical areas, as well as having responsible authorities for implementation. Anand et al. (2021) described that, in India, after seventeen months of school closures, it was necessary to implement a transition period, and they also pointed out that, in this country, there was little operability to recover the learning lost by students. Baccini et al. (2021) They identified the importance of safety as expressed in sanitary protocols with effective and efficient preventive measures to mitigate the impact of contagions. (Baloyi, 2021) A testing policy was essential to collect information from those schools that had been infected. (Mondschein et al., 2021) The promotion of hygiene measures such as hand disinfection, the correct use of masks and the use of open-air spaces will be important in the return to school. (Soares y Schoen, 2020) Idoiaga et al. (2021) They studied, in Spain, the process of reopening; they pointed out that, in this process, it was necessary to guarantee the health and welfare of teachers in the actions carried out, the States cannot act alone, but need those who have mastered the subject to make alliances. Van der Walt y Oosthuizen(2021) They pointed out that, in South Africa, it was difficult for the government to concentrate all the

responsibility for the reopening of schools.

Finally, one aspect that has provided peace of mind to the impact of contagion in schools has been the application of vaccines. (Kahambing, 2021) According to figures provided by the Coalition for Education, 72% of countries worldwide have prioritized the vaccination of teachers; however, there are parents who feel that vaccination is not a priority. (UNESCO, 2021) However, there are parents who are fearful and wish to continue with virtual vaccination according to the findings of Alvarado et al. (2021) in Colombia.

CONCLUSION

It was concluded that the new normality implied adaptive processes in schools during the reopening; however, it was necessary for the different countries worldwide to follow certain cross-cutting recommendations issued by UNESCO, UNICEF and the IDB; The first need was the emotional strengthening in the face of the complicated moments experienced at the height of the pandemic, facing the fears of parents in the face of possible contagion, for this reason, before the systematic, flexible and voluntary return, precise protocols had to be drawn up with all the sanitary measures required to mitigate contagion, in addition, a factor that provided some peace of mind for the return to the classroom was the appearance of the vaccine.

There is no doubt that the school to which one was accustomed before will not be the same, the use of masks, cleanliness, distance are fundamental recommendations to avoid contagions; however, avoiding the physical contact so appreciated by the students and not seeing their smiles are the new scenario of the schools.

The scientific community still has no certainty about the progress of the covid-19 disease that could shed light on a solution, but through a resilient and adaptive attitude; it was necessary to learn to live with a safe return to classes, since it is no longer feasible to continue losing more learning, because this pandemic resulted in the loss of learning, affecting the most vulnerable populations.

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