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Socioeconomic and psychological factors and the teaching-learning process in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in El Salvador*

Socioeconomic and psychological factors and the teaching-learning process in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in El Salvador

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José Adán Vaquerano-Amaya**

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7795-5273>

Ana Lorena-Mártir***

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-3757-6452>

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Abstract

The study of the problematic teaching-learning process experienced by higher education institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic has to be seriously investigated because of its significant relevance in forming future professionals in El Salvador. Therefore, it is necessary to know which socioeconomic and psychological factors affect the learning of higher-level students in the economic and business areas because they are realities that affect the development process of future Salvadoran professionals. This work aims to analyze the experience of the teaching-learning process in higher education students in the area of economic and business sciences in El Salvador during the COVID-19 pandemic from the student's perspective. This research is of mixed type because the research effort is qualitative and quantitative. Among the findings, it is determined that the most significant problem faced by the Salvadoran student population is the inequality of access to resources since some need the necessary tools, causing an interruption in their academic development.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, Higher Education Institutions, Teaching-Learning Process, Socioeconomic Factors, Psychological Factors

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** PhD. in Economics and Business Sciences by the Universidad de Córdoba, Spain. Specialist in local or territorial development management and Master in Latin American Theology by the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas de El Salvador. Email: avaquerano@uca.edu.sv

*** Graduate in Business Administration by the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, El Salvador. Email: lorenamartir@gmail.com

Resumen

El estudio de la problemática del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje experimentado en el contexto de la pandemia Covid-19, por las Instituciones de Educación Superior, se tiene que investigar seriamente, por la significativa relevancia que produce en la formación de los futuros profesionales de El Salvador. Por ello, es necesario conocer qué factores socioeconómicos y psicológicos que afectan el aprendizaje de los alumnos de nivel superior de las áreas económicas y empresariales, porque es una realidad que incide en el proceso de desarrollo de los futuros profesionales salvadoreños. El trabajo tiene por objetivo analizar la experiencia del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje en los estudiantes de educación superior del área de ciencias económicas y empresariales de El Salvador durante la pandemia del COVID-19, desde la perspectiva de los estudiantes. Esta investigación es de tipo mixta, porque el esfuerzo investigativo es cualitativo y cuantitativo. Dentro de los hallazgos se determina que el mayor problema al que se enfrenta la población estudiantil salvadoreña es la desigualdad de acceso a recursos, dado que algunos no cuentan con las herramientas necesarias, provocando una interrupción en su desarrollo académico.

Palabras Clave: Pandemia Covid-19, Instituciones de Educación Superior, Proceso Enseñanza-Aprendizaje, Factores Socioeconómicos, Factores psicológicos

SUMMARY

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Introduction

Following the government declaration of closure as of March 11, 2020, as an action to counteract the proliferation of COVID-19 infections, Salvadoran Higher Education Institutions had to redesign their traditional teaching-learning methodologies to a virtual or online modality; a situation that, given the emergency that was being experienced, led them to sacrifice elements of planning and academic methodology that were fundamental to guarantee a transition to a quality online teaching-learning process.

Indeed, this sudden change was responsible for generating a series of factors that negatively impacted students' learning process in the sense that it meant that they had to dedicate more effort and time to fulfill their academic obligations. The health and economic emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been unprecedented for humanity in the present century. Undoubtedly, the effects suffered by the population around the world have been painful in every sense of the word (Vaquerano, 2020).

In this sense, today, it is of special interest to be able to identify the main socioeconomic and psychological factors that influenced the teaching-learning process of university students in the most critical period experienced due to the Covid-19 pandemic in El Salvador; the work aimed to analyze the experience of the teaching-learning process in higher education students in the area of economic and business sciences in El Salvador during the COVID-19 pandemic, from the perspective of the students. This research was of a mixed type because the research effort is qualitative and quantitative.

Resolution scheme

1. Research problem

From the students' perspective, how has the teaching-learning process been for higher education students in the area of economic and business sciences in El Salvador during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. Methodology

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 190 countries worldwide have decreed forced closures due to the rapid spread of the deadly disease in March 2020 (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020). For this reason, productive sectors, educational institutions, and government offices had to adapt much of their work to do it online. It has been a crisis without precedents in this century; in the educational field, it is said that in the American continent, more than 1.2 billion students of different educational levels did not receive their classes in the traditional way; of which, around 160 million were from Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020).

In line with the above, approximately 23.4 million higher education students were affected by closures as a preventive measure against Covid-19. Added to this are 1.4 million teachers who also had to adapt their teaching methodology so that it could work with online classes, which make up more than 98% of the universe of students and teachers of higher education in the region who have suffered socioeconomic and psychological problems due to this deadly disease (UNESCO, 2020).

Regarding the delimitation of the study, it should be noted that it sought to analyze, from the perspective of higher education students in the area of economic and business sciences in El Salvador during the Covid-19 pandemic, how their experience of the teaching-learning process has been, because as human beings they experienced complex and dynamic situations during the height of the Pandemic that must be studied; focusing on identifying the main socioeconomic and psychological factors that affected the teaching-learning process (García Solarte, 2009).

The geographic coverage of the study covered the entire territory of the country, handling a sample of 119 higher education students in the area of economic and business sciences in El Salvador. The statistical parameters used to determine the sample were:

- 2.50% Confidence Level (Z).
- 95.00% probability of acceptance of the desired attribute in the population (p).
- 5.00% probability of rejection of the desired attribute in the population (q).
- 0.05 estimated error for the research (e).

Regarding the type of research, it was a mixed approach since it involved qualitative and quantitative research work. It is qualitative in that the results were interpreted as a product of the actions of young university students as students and as individuals who live in society (Barrantes, 2013). However, it is also quantitative because it has an epistemological value when obtained rigorously (Abarca et al., 2013). Furthermore, according to Hernández (2014), any research whose results can be generalized to the entire population under study makes it quantitative and qualitative at the same time.

3. Writing plan

3.1 Contextual framework of the teaching-learning process

Certainly, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were involved in the difficult task of migrating their traditional face-to-face teaching-learning methodology to one whose main means of support is the use of digital platforms and thus being able to continue the professional training of their students. This situation involved adopting new tools or Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) that would support this new teaching-learning modality, as well as developing rapid and flexible training processes for academic staff and students, thus ensuring the proper functioning of HEIs.

The measures implemented in March 2020 at the national level to counteract COVID-19 infections caused a destabilization of economic and social activities. In this regard, educational activity underwent radical changes to continue its normal operations, to the point that it was involved in a rapid and mandatory process of adopting ICTs as the basis of operation. Without a doubt, this situation must have initially contrasted with the culture present in most Salvadoran HEIs, which is resistant to incorporating ICTs in day-to-day operations.

Although it was not until the adoption of these ICT tools by HEIs was implemented and assimilated, with the feedback received from both students and teachers, it was possible to identify those pedagogical and didactic practices that have had a positive or negative impact on the teaching-learning process. We must be aware that, regarding educational activity, COVID-19 not only limited the day-to-day activities of HEIs but also those of students and their respective families since they were the ones who had to comply with the mandatory confinement measures in their homes. This situation involved experiencing socioeconomic and psychological events, which in one way or another affected, if true in a differentiated way, both their teaching-learning process and their personal life.

In this sense, due to the recentness of this world event, this research seeks to learn first-hand about the experience lived by students of Salvadoran HEIs in that phase of humanity just passed, to know more in-depth how their teaching-learning process was at that stage and, thus, to be able to highlight those positive and negative aspects so that they are taken into account by HEIs when implementing virtual and online education services in El Salvador.

3.2 Higher education and its elements

In El Salvador, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are governed by the provisions of the Education Law in everything related to their creation and operation, regardless of whether they are public or private; in addition, according to Flores-Pérez (2020), their main purpose is the following objectives:

- To prepare competent people with a vocation to serve and ethics.
- To promote investigative work.
- To do community service.
- To help preserve, propagate, and improve culture in all its areas.

According to GCN (2016), the educational process elements are the teacher, the student, the content, and the environmental variables. These four elements, according to Bou-Sospedra et al. (2021), shape the teacher's teaching style and the student's learning style, thus giving rise to

the teaching-learning process. In this sense, it can be stated that the teaching-learning style carried out by the teacher and the student are those that give rise to the teaching-learning models used in common learning spaces, which for GNC (2016) aims to create an intellectual culture that supports the student to improve their teamwork skills, intelligence for the development of social skills and design solutions with creative and proactive thinking using the available information appropriately.

In this regard, in the context of the health and economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, to give continuity to the educational process of students, it was undoubtedly necessary to redesign the teaching-learning model to the serious situation that was being experienced. In effect, using ICTs, it had to be adapted to a virtual synchronous and asynchronous modality. Thus, as in the words of Hodges et al. (2020), Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) was born as an immediate response to the urgent need to adapt to the health emergency conditions experienced worldwide. It is a model that combines factors of both online and face-to-face education.

However, it must be clear that because there is a digital platform, the student-teacher interaction is not given by technology per se. However, rather, it is given by the methodology used by the teacher and the students and, according to GCN (2016), the four characteristics that define this new teaching-learning model are the fact that it is focused on virtual classes, that it uses virtual learning platforms, that it uses a synchronous or asynchronous communication and makes use of online resources. Another teaching-learning model widely used in the context of COVID-19 was and continues to be virtual or distance learning, which, according to Rivera (2020), has become fundamental in the educational process since it uses strategies and methods that encourage the educational process to have the objective of students developing skills, competencies, and aptitudes that allow them to solve the problems that arise in their personal and professional future.

Along the same lines, Hodges et al. (2020) argue that for online education to be effective, a planned teaching-learning process is required that takes into account the modality, the pace of the course, the role of the online teacher or instructor, the role of the online student, the student-teacher ratio, pedagogy, the role of activities, the synchronicity of communication and the source of feedback. Therefore, it should also be remembered that the concept of online education is not something that was born with the Covid-19 pandemic because, according to UNESCO (2020), with the implementation of new technologies in the educational sector, this modality is inclined to work with new pedagogical techniques and effective evaluation tools to measure learning and the development of relevant competencies, skills, and knowledge.

3.3 The Covid-19 pandemic and education

The COVID-19 pandemic has been defined as an infectious disease caused by the coronavirus that began in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019. The main symptoms are fever, dry cough, and fatigue. However, it can also cause malaise, migraines, conjunctivitis, sore throat, and loss of taste and smell (WHO, 2020). COVID-19 is a disease that has demonstrated the ability to be very contagious and deadly, which has caused many countries around the world to implement measures such as the suspension of face-to-face classes, which gave way to the deployment of virtual learning modalities through the use of platforms; in support of educational personnel, prioritizing the comprehensive well-being and health of all students (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020).

In this sense, according to preliminary data from UNESCO (2020), it is estimated that in El Salvador, around 200,000 high school students were affected. Therefore, in line with Bárcena & Cimoli (2020), it can be stated that digital resources applied to health, education, commerce, and work have played an important role in combating COVID-19 because they help maintain physical distancing and enable the functioning of socioeconomic activity. That is why, on March 11, 2020, the president of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele, decreed the temporary closure of different business sectors due to the health crisis caused by COVID-19, including educational centers nationwide.

Salvadoran HEIs, the emergency that was being experienced, had to develop online education modalities that, without a doubt, generated unfavorable consequences in the teaching-learning process for both the teacher and the student. Therefore, those HEIs who made an effort to keep their educational processes active soon learned and understood the significant difference between the previous educational model and the online teaching model planned for the emergency (Santiago, 2020).

Due to the haste with which this emergency online educational model was adopted, complaints quickly arose from teachers and students. For example, students complained that the content offered had yet to be worked on in the context of a non-face-to-face higher education subject since what was sought was to make up for the lack of face-to-face classes with online classes without adequate planning (IESALC, 2020).

This situation implies that some of the Salvadoran HEIs fell into the error of assuming that a virtual educational modality design is the almost automatic transfer of the face-to-face educational model. In the virtual world, the materials and activities are different, and the role of the teacher is different (Morales, 2020). Another problem related to this emergency educational modality had to do with the fact that there was no similarity in connectivity between urban and rural areas, which was noticeable. For example, in Latin America, 67.00% of urban family groups have access to an Internet connection, while for families living in the countryside, only 23.00% have access. In addition, it should be noted that, in Bolivia, El Salvador, Paraguay, and Peru, a little more than 90.00% of rural family groups need access to the Internet. However, it should be noted that although the situation is better in countries such as Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay, only 50.00% of rural families are connected (Bárcena & Cimoli, 2020).

Linked to the problem mentioned above is the issue of family economic problems, in the sense that many family groups of students from HEIs in El Salvador found themselves in an economic situation that led them not to have the means to pay for their children's studies and thus be able to continue their education. In this regard, Lizama-Gaitán & Dueñas (2020) explain that, about the level of poverty, the low level of development in rural areas is much more marked than in urban areas. For 2019, it was 24.80% in rural areas and 21.70% in urban areas, respectively. For this reason, it can be said that COVID-19 hurt the family economy and, therefore, the continuity of the studies of HEI students, thus giving rise to major psychological problems, both for parents and children.

Certainly, the psychological repercussions of confinement undoubtedly hurt students' learning levels. Many live in conditions that do not favor adaptation to virtuality, considering the circumstances of the family group, access to the Internet, and the required technologies. The psychological effects of not having face-to-face contact with teachers and classmates on students generate stress, which causes them not to concentrate on their studies (IDB, 2020).

In conclusion, it is important to indicate that the new reality students face has complicated their normal way of living life, where studies represent an important part. Therefore, HEIs must

ensure that digital tools and platforms are available to the educational system to guarantee the continuous training of professionals, taking into account the economic, social, and psychological limitations they may have, in such a way that they do not represent, as far as possible, an obstacle to the proper adaptation of students and thus train professionals with the capacities and skills that the labor market demands (UCA, 2020).

4. Research results

It is no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic presented an unprecedented scenario for all economic sectors in El Salvador and the world; undoubtedly, education has been one of the most affected. In this regard, it is important to indicate that this study aims to delve into the socioeconomic and psychological factors that affected the student during the Pandemic and impacted their teaching-learning process.

Socioeconomic and psychological factors have positively or negatively affected students' academic performance. In this sense, they are studying under a face-to-face educational modality, whose environment is designed to focus attention on the student and their professional training process. Ultimately, it is an educational process designed to satisfy the need to interact and socialize with other people, as it promotes relationships with teachers, colleagues, and friends to attend the different activities of the enrolled courses. Therefore, it is a series of activities that seek to make the student focus on their studies and leave aside those socioeconomic and psychological situations that they may be going through in their personal life.

However, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is no surprise to anyone that classes have been developed in virtual online mode. In this sense, students have had to face these types of socioeconomic and psychological factors without having an escape from them since the conditions themselves have made them have to face them more directly, neglecting other important aspects along the way, such as studying.

4.1 Socioeconomic factors that influence the teaching-learning process of university students during the COVID-19 pandemic

The fragility of the Salvadoran economy and that of many countries around the world became evident with the Covid-19 pandemic, as many productive sectors were forced to suspend employment contracts and even make use of layoffs, a situation that left many family groups in El Salvador economically exposed, to the point of not being able to meet their responsibilities. Most families had to prioritize subsistence and necessities, such as paying for housing, food, or health. Now, it is true that studying is an important investment for the future of the person who studies; however, in the context of the Pandemic, it was relegated to the background, relying only on some aid that the HEIs implemented concerning financial support, as well as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Economy and the Mortgage Bank, which have joined forces to make loan lines available for Higher Education students to meet the need to finance their studies (MINED, 2020). In this regard, according to the results obtained in Table 1, of the three geographical areas into which the country is divided, approximately 46.50% of the students surveyed needed help paying for their studies.

Table 1. Students who experienced financial difficulties at any time during the COVID-19 pandemic

Economic difficulties	Western Zone%	Central Zone%	Eastern Zone%
Yes	40,60	42,50	55,60
No	59,40	57,50	44,40

Source: taken from Renderos et al. (2021, p. 80).

Regarding the need to have an electronic device, it is known that this is a problem that has worsened due to the health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19, in the sense that those students who did not have one could access them in the same educational institutions or outside of them, such as in an Internet café, at work, with a family member or with an acquaintance; in case of not having one.

Table 2 shows that 95.00% of those surveyed have an electronic device to receive online classes at the beginning and during the pandemic. Personal or desktop computers and cell phones were the most commonly used (Table 3). The findings reveal the cruel Salvadoran reality of those university students who had to make an extra effort to be able to continue with their studies. As shown in Table 2, 5.00% of students did not need a device to attend their online classes. Of this total, 25.00% were men, and 75.00% were women.

Table 2. Students who had their electronic devices to receive their online classes

Electronic devices	f	%
Yes	152	95,00%
No	8	5,00%

Source: taken from Renderos et al. (2021, p. 80).

Table 3. Electronic devices used by students to receive their classes

Electronic devices	f	%
Laptop or desktop computer	140	92,10
Cell phone	22	81,50
Tablet	28	18,40

Source: taken from Renderos et al. (2021, p. 80).

A fact that raises alarm bells is the one presented in Table 4, where 44.40% of those surveyed mentioned not having an electronic device and not having attended classes until they were able to get their own; this means that these students could not have access to the study material for some time or acquired it through other means. This fact shows again that the sudden change in methodology only affected some students equally.

Table 4. Students who did not have an electronic device at the beginning of the Pandemic

Answers	f	%
I did not attend until I could get my device	4	44,40
With a borrowed device (in the same household)	3	33,30
I attended someone else's house	2	22,20

Source: taken from Renderos et al. (2021, p. 27).

However, it must be clear that more than having an electronic device was needed to work effectively under this new methodology of virtual classes since it also became a priority to have a stable Internet connection. The results presented in Table 5 show that at that time, 93.80% of the students had an Internet connection to receive their classes normally, which means that 6.20% did not have this service, among whom 80.00% said that they found it necessary to acquire a mobile data package.

Table 5. Students who had access to the Internet to receive their classes normally

Internet access	f	%
Yes	150	93.8%
No	10	6.2%

Source: taken from Renderos et al. (2021, p. 81).

However, the problems were not limited to whether the Internet service was available but also to the degree of stability of the connection. In this regard, 40.7% said they did not have many problems, while 34% said they suffered from them frequently (Table 6).

Table 6. Internet connection problems

Internet connection problems	f	%
Uncommon	61	40.70
Frequent	51	34,00
Very common	35	23,30
No problem	3	2,00

Source: taken from Renderos et al. (2021, p. 81).

In addition to the problems mentioned above, there are also socioeconomic factors, that is, those that become a responsibility and demand more attention. Thus, for example, to overcome the income deficit, many family groups had to resort to subsistence ventures to cope with the economic situation they were experiencing. For some, this was temporary; for others, it became their new means of income. Table 7 indicates the main socioeconomic factors that affected students, where the interruption or decrease of family income represented 63.10%, followed by the need to attend to other activities or emergencies at 53.80% and the total loss of work at 26.90%.

Table 7. Socioeconomic factors that influenced students during the COVID-19 pandemic

Socioeconomic factors	f	%
Interruption or decrease in family income	101	63,10
The need to attend to other activities or emergencies	86	53,80
Loss of your job or that of a family member	43	26,90
Lack of resources to pay for internet	13	8,10
Lack of resources to acquire an adequate electronic device	12	7,50
Other	7	4,40

Source: taken from Renderos et al. (2021, p. 81).

4.2 Psychological factors that influence the teaching-learning process of university students during the COVID-19 pandemic

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, students also experienced psychological complications when attending their studies. In this regard, according to the IDB (2020), the psychological effects hurt the teaching-learning process of students due to the lack of interaction and coexistence with other people, mandatory confinement, concern about contagion by the new virus, and the environment of uncertainty that was created around the deadly virus.

The findings obtained confirm the above, as illustrated in Table 8, where it can be observed that the main psychological factors that have affected students are stress at 80.60%, anxiety at 67.50%, emotional exhaustion at 64.40%, low mood at 61.9% and insomnia with 60.00%.

Table 8. Psychological factors that influenced students during the COVID-19 pandemic

Psychological factors	f	%
Stress	129	80,60
Anxiety	108	67,50
Emotional exhaustion	103	64,40
Low mood	99	61,90
Insomnia	96	60,00
Depression	52	32,50
Emotional disorders	49	30,60
Irritability	48	30,00
Anger	24	15,00
Post-traumatic stress symptoms	15	9,40
None of the above was a positive experience	3	1,90

Source: taken from Renderos et al. (2021, p. 82).

Conclusions

The health and economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic generated a series of difficulties in assimilating the new reality that we have had to live. Moreover, like everything in life, some people can adapt more easily, but others cannot. In education, these difficulties were not exclusive to students but to teachers, whose performance has also been an important factor in teaching-learning.

In this regard, it is important to highlight the work carried out by HEIs so that teachers and students can adapt through the promotion of good management during the transition to the emergency educational model. Without a doubt, the biggest problem that the Salvadoran student population has faced has been the inequality of access to resources since some needed the necessary tools, causing an interruption in their academic development.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been responsible for highlighting a reality that should have been addressed proactively, in the sense of having developed and adopted educational models focused on the use of ICT tools to promote more equitable training processes, at least in the promotion of academic-professional training opportunities.

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